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Positive behavioral interventions and supports: How does it work and why does it work according to students?

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**Positive behavioral interventions and supports: How does it work and why does it work
according to students?**

By

Codie Cox

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters in Education.

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Abstract

Previous research has found that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) positively impacts students' behavior and academic performance, while also contributing to the cultivation of a positive school climate. Prior research on PBIS has focused on the effectiveness of its implementation in high school and elementary school settings. There has been limited research on PBIS in middle school settings and few studies have explored why and how PBIS is effective. The purpose of this research project was to better understand the perceptions and perspectives of middle school aged students about the effectiveness of PBIS at their school in order to adjust and strengthen PBIS procedures to better serve this specific population. Through a qualitative approach, this thesis builds from two focus group interviews with twelve eighth grade students and six in-depth individual interviews with students from the focus group. The findings from this research demonstrate that the effectiveness of PBIS within this particular middle school is dependent on the students' perceptions of the teachers' behavior. Through analyzing data from the interviews, it was found that students were willing to participate and engage with PBIS procedures if they perceived a teacher's behavior to be contributing to a positive school climate.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	4
Behavior of Middle School Students	4
Positive School Climate	9
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	10
Chapter 3: Methods	20
Research Questions	20
Description and Rationale of Research	20
Research Design	22
Data Analysis	25
Validity and Reliability	26
Chapter 4: Findings	28
Significance of Intentional Implementation of PBIS into Classroom Settings	29
Student-Teacher Interactions	34
Consistent Implementation of PBIS Practices	37
Conclusion	41
Chapter 5: Discussion	44
Implications for Literature Review	44
Implications for Practice and Policy	46
Limitations of Study	48

Direction for Future Studies	49
References	51
Appendix A	56
Appendix B	58
Appendix C	60

Chapter 1: Introduction

Middle school often evokes agonizing memories: the peak of puberty, the awkward body changes, and the desperate desire for peer acceptance. Developmental changes experienced by early adolescents are at the root of these agonizing memories. Middle school aged students experience developmental changes that impact their behavior and academic achievement (Eccles, Lord, Roeser, Barber, & Josefowicz, 1997). During early adolescence, emotional states become less stable, bodies change due to puberty, mood disruptions become common, engagement in risky behavior increases, and a strong desire for social acceptance develops (Biglan, Brennan, Foster, Holder, Miller, & Cunningham, 2004; Arnett, 1999; Eccles et al., 1997). Middle schools are tasked with the challenge of managing these effects of early adolescent development and turning agonizing memories into learning experiences.

While the effects of early adolescent development have negative impacts on middle school aged students' behavior and academic performance, this stage in development does enhance cognitive abilities (Eccles et al., 1997). During early adolescent development, cognitive abilities are enhanced through abstract thinking, thinking in multiple dimensions, applying knowledge to new learning situations, and awareness of strengths and weaknesses (Eccles et al. 1997). Given the enhancement of cognitive abilities, middle school educators are part of a pivotal stage in development for early adolescents. Middle school educators have the potential to guide their students in transforming their behavior from being negatively self-inflicting to being productive and self-driven.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a framework of interventions and supports used as procedures and strategies for schools to integrate into their curriculum to manage and transform the behavior of students (Horner & Sugai, 2015). PBIS was created with

the intention of transforming student behavior into productive behavior that contributes to a positive school climate that elevates academic achievement and fosters responsible behavior (Horner and Sugai, 2015). While PBIS is student centered in its goal of transforming behavior for the students' benefit and for the cultivation of a positive school climate, its effectiveness is dependent on students' cooperation with the strategies and procedures. Previous research has found that implementing PBIS into schools' classrooms has had an overall positive influence through enhancing academic performance and increasing responsible behavior (Bradshaw, Bevens, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008).

While research has found that PBIS is effective through various qualitative and quantitative methods, there is limited research involving the perceptions of students. Additionally, there are few studies conducted in middle school settings. The purpose of this research is to develop an understanding of middle school aged students' perceptions of PBIS and its effectiveness. This study will further previous research by exploring students' perceptions in an underrepresented population in order to potentially adjust existing PBIS strategies and procedures.

This was a qualitative study through which focus group interviews and individual interviews were conducted with twelve eighth grade students at a Northern California middle school. There were two thirty-minute focus group interviews with twelve participants and fifteen-minute individual interviews with six of those twelve participants. The participants were Latino and White, eight being Latino and four being white. Being the participants' teacher, my relationship with them amplified their motivation to participate in the study and potentially influenced their responses. The study was conducted and completed within a timespan of 2

months and took place during lunchtime periods. The interviews consisted of discussions based on interview questions that correlated with the research questions for this study.

The most significant finding from this research was that students are more willing to behave productively and engage positively with PBIS practices when they perceive teachers' behavior as contributing to a positive school climate. When teachers were implementing PBIS strategies and procedures, students recognized their implementation of PBIS as behavior that contributes to a positive school environment. This was a significant finding because previous research had found that PBIS is generally effective, but in practice the effectiveness of PBIS is not consistent across all teachers. Exploring why students perceive PBIS to be effective is significant because it gives this particular school site evidence to potentially adjust their PBIS practices in order to be more effective. Teachers' behavior is perceived as contributing to a positive school climate if and when they are actively implementing PBIS practices through their teaching and management of the classroom. When students perceive their teachers' external behaviors as contributing to a positive school climate, they feel more willing and more motivated to cooperate with implemented PBIS strategies and procedures.

Students were asked about why they perceived PBIS to be effective and how their perception of school climate merged with their notion of and cooperation with PBIS implementation. In order for PBIS to be effective, students need to engage with it and cooperate with its implementation. These findings can be used to enhance PBIS practices at this particular middle school. These findings have the potential to prevent PBIS from being ineffective, enabling this school to adjust strategies and procedures that effectively transform behavior and contribute toward a more positive school climate.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In recent years, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) have been developed and integrated into many schools' standard set of procedures to transform student behavior. Integrating PBIS into school settings enables a school to create a whole-school culture that fosters responsible and productive behavior. PBIS's interventions and supports have proven to have an overall positive influence on schools and their students, increasing responsible behavior and enhancing academic performance (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008). Due to middle school being an underrepresented age group in PBIS research, this paper will focus specifically on middle school aged students' perceptions of PBIS and its abilities and inabilities to combat the developmental challenges of that particular age group.

This literature review provides background knowledge and context for researching the effects of implementing PBIS in a middle school setting. First, middle school behavior will be analyzed in order to strengthen understanding of this developmental stage of childhood. Then, school climate and its relation to middle school success will be examined. Finally, a thorough description and analysis of PBIS implementation will be provided.

Behavior of Middle School Students

Middle school students are at a pivotal stage in development in which they begin to experience emotional, social, physical, and cognitive changes that have long-term effects (Biglan, Crowley, Rusby, & Sprague, 2011). Emotional states often become less positive and less stable due to mood disruptions, risk behavior, and conflict with parents (Arnett, 1999; Biglan et al., 2004). Socially, middle school aged students experience changing peer relations and friendships, often encountering frequent peer harassment (Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002; Nansel et al., 2001). Physically, students in early adolescence experience puberty and

bodily changes (Eccles, Lord, Roeser, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999). Additionally, teacher support declines during the middle school years (Reddy, Rhodes, & Way, 2007). Educational policies and practices have the potential to manipulate an educational environment in order to provide students with the structure and support necessary to manage or develop productive behavior despite negative influences.

Developmental changes of early adolescence. Early adolescence is marked by emotional states that are less positive and increasingly unstable (Arnett, 1999; Biglan et al., 2004). Mood disruptions, risky behavior, and conflict with parents cause early adolescents to experience inconsistent emotions that are frequently negative (Arnett, 1999). Additionally, the physical changes that come with puberty and the transition from elementary school to secondary school append the already unstable emotional states of adolescents (Eccles et al., 1999). While an adolescent's emotional state is dependent on varying factors, the combination of multiple changes and transitions seem to negatively impact adolescents emotionally (Eccles et al., 1999). Eccles (1999) found that the unstable and negative emotional state of adolescents has an impact on their self-esteem, sexual activity, academic performance, and motivation.

Social acceptance is a significant component of early adolescence (Eccles et al., 1999). Participating in social activities with peers, peer acceptance, and appearance become adolescents' priority rather than success in academic achievement (Eccles et al., 1999). Because of this heightened focus on peer relations, adolescents experience social interactions and relationships in a magnified nature that can exacerbate relational changes and relational conflict. Self-assessment, social comparison, and competitiveness are all emphasized in middle school and contribute to peer relations. With heightened focus on the individual and their need for acceptance by others, middle school aged adolescents have the potential to develop low self-

esteem and inaccurate self worth. The pressure of peer acceptance is only heightened by the physical changes that alter appearance through the experience of puberty.

Physically, early adolescents experience a transitional stage marked by growing due to hormonal changes. Early adolescents experience a growth spurt that results in bodily changes and a development of an increased sexual libido (Eccles et al., 1999). Physical changes include an increase in body fat, height, development of breasts for girls, and the growth of pubic hair (Eccles et al., 1999; Boyne et al., 2010). While these changes in physicality add to a list of changes experienced by early adolescents, it is important to note that these changes are not uniformly experienced. Girls and boys experience the physical changes of puberty at different times, and those of the same sex experience the changes at different times and ages throughout adolescence (Eccles et al., 1999).

While many of the developmental changes experienced by early adolescents in middle school are negative and awkward, the cognitive changes of adolescent development are generally positive. Early adolescents in middle school develop an increased ability to think abstractly, to think hypothetically, to think about multiple dimensions of a problem at the same time, and to reflect on themselves and problems (Eccles et al., 1999). Additionally, students at this stage in development begin to apply their knowledge to new learning situations and become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (Eccles et al., 1999). While these are positive points in development that enable early adolescents to become better at accomplishing more complex tasks, these new cognitive abilities also impact adolescents' self concepts and understanding of others (Eccles et al., 1999). These new cognitive abilities could add further change to this stage in development as they have the potential to change adolescents' perceptions of themselves and

others. These changes in perceptions could affect one's self esteem as abstract cognition is applied to oneself and a level of comparison is created through the analysis of another.

Middle school behavior is a reflection of the change and instability experienced by adolescents during that particular stage in development (Eccles et al., 1997). Middle school age students' behavior at school is a reflection of the change they are experiencing physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Their behavior is more negative and disruptive, necessitating the implementation of transformative interventions and supports. Due to the rapid changes experienced during middle school, environmental supports must be implemented to combat negative and disruptive behaviors.

Middle school behavior. These factors of early adolescent development paired with the change in organization and structure of a middle school environment increase the challenge of successful development as students for middle school aged students (Alspaugh, 1998; Eccles et al., 1999; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998). Through implementing environmental manipulations at school, teachers are providing students with the environment necessary to develop skills that can help them to become productive and successful students. These careful manipulations should foster change in student behavior and provide an environment of stability. Studies have found that student perception of teacher support is associated with fewer behavior problems, meaning that a student will have less behavior problems if they feel supported at school (Reddy, Rhodes, & Way, 2007). Subsequently, a reduction in delinquency and peer victimization occurs at schools when rules are both clear and perceived by students to be fair (G. Gottfredson, D. Gottfredson, N. Gottfredson, and Payne, 2005).

Learning and behaving responsibly are causally related, with behaving responsibly contributing to a classroom environment that fosters learning and cognitive development

(Wentzel, 1991). Such findings indicate that middle school teachers and staff have to design procedures and strategies that have the sole purpose of adjusting behavior to be more productive and positive. Designing these procedures and strategies enable teachers to create an environment that fosters the opportunity to increase academic achievement for all students. Designing procedures and strategies involves a necessary level of support as well as the communication of clear rules and expectations for both teachers and students. With instability and change being a major theme of adolescence, student-teacher relationships paired with clearly communicated rules have the potential to provide middle school aged adolescents with a dose of much needed stability.

Student-teacher interpersonal relationships have been found to positively influence adolescents' academic performance and behavior at school (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Crosnoe et al., (2004) found that an increase in bonding between teachers and students is related to a decrease in disciplinary issues and an increase in academic achievement. This positive correlation between student-teacher interpersonal relationships and positive behavior and achievement at school indicates that a student-teacher connection could help moderate the instability of adolescence by providing adolescents with a stabilizing force at school. While creating such bonds with students could seem trivial and time consuming, it has proven to be an important factor in fostering an environment conducive to learning, in which students can enhance their academic achievement and manage their behavior (Crosnoe et al., 2004). Such an environment is not only beneficial for the individual, but for the class as a whole because students can focus on their academic progress due to less behavioral distractions.

Positive School Climate

School climate is the spirit of a school and represents the attitudes and perceptions of that given school (Gruenert, 2008). These perceptions are influenced by all aspects of a school environment: norms, values, relationships, teaching-learning practices, and organizational structures (National School Climate Council 2007). If all staff members are implementing procedures and strategies designed to encourage positive and responsible behavior, a school can create a positive school climate. A positive school climate can be implemented by providing students with positive norms, values, relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures that serve to influence their perceptions of their experiences and motivate their behavior positively.

Although similar to a school's climate, a school's culture consists of unwritten rules that are developed through a common set of expectations (Gruenert, 2008). Gruenert (2008) simplifies the comparison by referring to the school's climate as the attitude and the school's personality as the culture, with the culture being the more difficult component to change. To change or shape the culture, schools must change the school's climate. Through changing teachers' and staff members' attitudes and perceptions about the school and their work, the school can transform the school's culture and manipulate those unwritten rules and expectations.

A positive school climate needs to be sustainable in order to be truly effective. According to the National School Climate Council (2007), a positive school climate that is sustainable is defined as an environment that cultivates the development of norms, values, and expectations for productive behavior in society. These norms, values, and expectations are embedded into curriculum throughout the school so that students can learn how to behave in ways that help them be successful students who contribute to an environment that fosters learning and

eliminates distracting factors that hinder success. The norms, values, and expectations teach students how to behave in a way that promotes efficiency and productivity for their own learning and for the learning of others. Through learning how to behave productively and effectively, students are not only given the skills and strategies necessary to create a positive school climate and function successfully in society, but also help to transform the school's culture. However, a carefully created set of rules and expectations must be created to help students learn the skills to behave productively and effectively.

G. Gottfredson et al. (2005) found that the rules and expectations of a school must be considered fair by the students in order for students to cooperate with the rules. By involving the students in the creation of the rules and expectations, students have the opportunity to voice their needs and concerns in developing rules and expectations that are fair. The inclusion of students helps ensure the sustainability of a positive school climate because the students are part of creating the rules that they need to follow for their own success. Creating the rules helps students to understand the purpose of the rule and why adhering to rules is in their best interest. Including them in the process helps them to understand why there are certain rules, which ideally and potentially helps to better motivate them to respect the rules. Changing the attitudes of the students, teachers, and staff members by developing an inclusive process that involves everyone in the creation of the rules and expectations enables the school to transform its culture.

PBIS

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a framework for schools to use as a means to improving educational and social outcomes for all students (Horner and Sugai, 2015). PBIS has been used for the past 20 years in over 21,000 school settings, its foundation rooting from special education law and then applied to general education (Horner and Sugai,

2015; National Education Association, 2018). PBIS was integrated into general education as an initiative to improve social culture and behavioral climate in classrooms to elevate academic achievement (Horner and Sugai, 2015; National Education Association, 2018). By implementing PBIS, schools commit to a process of transforming student behavior by providing interventions and supports for students rather than simply reacting to behavior. PBIS provides staff with the skills and strategies to help students develop the aptitude to know how to behave productively and effectively in a way that positively contributes to the school and eventually to society.

PBIS started out in the realm of Special Education as a way of improving the documentation and implementation of effective behavioral interventions for students with behavioral disorders (Sugai and Horner, 1999). Improving the documentation and implementation of effective behavioral interventions for students with behavioral disorders enabled these students to receive public education with the accommodations and modifications necessary for them to succeed academically. After additional research and the development of evidence based supports and interventions, their findings indicated that there was a greater need for prevention and behavioral interventions to be integrated school-wide (Horner and Sugai, 2002). While PBIS has its roots in Special Education, it had also been found to improve the social culture and behavioral climate of schools, with the byproduct of elevating academic achievement (National Education Association, 2018)

PBIS grew from behavioral analysis, meaning that this framework's foundation lies on the belief that understanding human behavior will directly impact the improvement of social systems (Horner and Sugai, 2015). Applied behavioral analysis is the practice of applying psychological theories of learning to behavior in a way that systematically alters the behavior (AppliedBehaviorAnalysisEdu.org, 2018). Applied behavioral analysis involves understanding

the root of behavior in order to create a plan that adjusts the behavior as needed for that particular individual. PBIS consists of carefully designed interventions and supports, which are based on an analysis and understanding of behavior. A few examples of interventions and supports include reflection sheets, buddy rooms, behavior contracts, or verbal cues used throughout a school site. Using an analysis of student behavior to create interventions and supports helps enable such implementations to be both effective and sustainable for a student because an understanding of the behavior is created. Recognizing the root of the behavior enables the appropriate interventions and supports to be applied for the individual.

PBIS is unique in its framework because it involves and requires the participation of staff and students. In order for PBIS to be implemented effectively, teachers have to participate by being trained in the procedures and strategies in professional development days provided before the start of the school year. Using skills and knowledge learned from the professional development, teachers must manipulate their classroom environments and management to reflect PBIS as a way of implementing interventions and supports. Subsequently, students must participate in PBIS by being willing to understand what is expected of them and why it is expected of them, as well as cooperating with the interventions and supports given to them.

Horner and Sugai (2015) recognize two main themes that help support the framework of PBIS. These themes are whole-school culture and 3 tiers of behavior support (Horner and Sugai, 2015). By creating a whole-school culture, PBIS provides students and teachers with an environment that fosters and encourages positive and productive behavior. In order to ensure all students are engaged in this positive and productive behavior, the 3 tiers of behavior support are provided as a way of teaching students the skills to behave more effectively and identify the ways in which they can adjust their behavior.

Whole school culture. The first necessary requirement for an effective PBIS program involves creating a whole-school culture. Creating a whole-culture involves the creation of school-wide rules, expectations, norms, and values. The creation of a whole-school culture should be done at the beginning of the school year and includes collaborating as a class to create classroom rules and expectations, which would be manipulated by the teacher to align with the whole school's rules and expectations that have been developed ahead of time. These school-wide rules, expectations, norms, and values must be used consistently by all staff and teachers in order for a whole-school culture to be created. Rules and expectations should be clearly displayed in classrooms and throughout the school as visual reminders of what is expected of students. By clearly communicating and displaying rules and expectations across the school, students are then held responsible and accountable for their behavior. Creating a whole-school culture provides all students with behavioral support because each student is made aware of and has access to the rules and expectations of the school community.

Three tiers of supports. The second theme necessary for an effective PBIS program involves 3 tiers of behavior support. The 3 tiers of behavior support are designed to keep the whole-school culture intact while also providing each student with 3 levels of supports for varying degrees of behavior. Each tier intensifies with its support while the more problematic the behavior results in more intense supports.

The first tier involves all students and is focused on preventing error patterns of behavior from developing (Sugai and Horner, 2015). The first tier's interventions and supports provide teachers with strategies and procedures to redirect students' off task behavior through the use of verbal cues and reminders. The first tier is implemented at the very beginning of each school year and largely involves getting the whole-school culture started by integrating various

strategies and procedures into all environments as a way of reducing the likelihood of recurring problem behavior. Supports in the first tier include creating a classroom community through collaborating on the creation of classroom rules and providing visual representation of those rules and expectations. Reminders also serve as supports in tier 1 through scripted verbal cues and visual cues, such as asking a student what they are doing versus what they should be doing.

The second tier includes a smaller percent of students than tier 1. Students who receive Tier 2 supports have demonstrated consistent behavior problems. Tier 2 addresses those problems with moderate supports (Sugai and Horner, 2015). This tier could involve reiteration of behavioral expectations, re-teaching of self-regulation skills or checking in and out of classrooms to reflect on behavior through the completion of a behavioral reflection sheet after applied tier 1 interventions and supports have been applied and failed (Hawken, Pettersson, Mootz, & Anderson, 2006; Horner and Sugai, 2015). Reiteration of behavioral expectations involves a one-on-one conversation with the student and the teacher in order to identify the problematic behavior as well as its negative consequence. The negative consequence might be not completing work or lacking understanding of a concept. It is important the negative consequence is addressed as a way of ensuring the student is discouraged from acting in such way again.

There are several moderate interventions and supports that can be implemented for students. Re-teaching of self-regulation skills involves the teacher taking the time to create individual supports for a student to help them develop skills that will enable productive behavior in their class. Such supports might be as simple as post-it notes reminding them of what to do and how to do it. Another example of a moderate intervention and support is the "check-in-check-out" reflection sheet. Check-in and out of a classroom involves a student leaving the classroom with a reflection sheet and filling it out in another classroom. While checking into a buddy room and

completing a reflection sheet can be used for all students as a tier 1 support, it is implemented more frequently for students who consistently and continually behave unproductively. The reflection sheet in tier 2 is used as a precursor to a referral, as three reflection sheets results in one referral. The reflection sheet asks the student what they were doing, if they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, and what they are going to do about it. Once the student fills it out, they come back in to the classroom. Tier 2 supports are used regularly, but not with all students. The goal of tier 2 supports is to prevent students' behavior from becoming problematic enough to warrant individualized interventions in Tier 3.

The third tier requires the creation of an individualized plan after assessing a student with repetitive patterns of problematic behavior that Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports could not manage (Horner and Sugai, 2015). This third tier considers behavioral, academic, mental health, physical, social, and contextual variables when creating an individualized plan for the student (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010). These interventions are focused on enhancing the individual's quality of life and, ideally, in turn minimizing their problematic and unproductive behavior (Foxx, Green, Jacobson, Johnston, & Mulick, 2006). Tier 3 supports could involve the manipulation of a classroom environment through a seating chart designed around the particular individual. These supports might also include behavioral contracts where the student has to have each of his or her teachers sign off on his or her behavior each class period. This tier is for a very small population of the students and involves the management of support by the teacher to make sure the student's needs and preferences are met in order to enable them to alter their behavior positively (Horner and Sugai, 2015).

PBIS and behavior management. While behaving responsibly is socially relevant and important to for functioning in society, it has also been found to enhance academic achievement. PBIS has developed strategies and procedures that produce positive and responsible behavior. The goal of producing positive and responsible behavior that is productive is to reduce social problems and increase academic achievement. By reducing social problems and increasing academic achievement in a school setting, schools can work toward creating a more positive school climate that fosters successful learning and cognitive development.

Biglan et al. (2011) conducted a study in which they observed the behavior of middle schools students and staff, evaluating schools that tried to integrate PBIS strategies and behaviors. The study defined problematic behavior of students as being noncompliant, exhibiting potential dangerous action, and physical and/or verbal aggression toward peers (Biglan et al., 2011). Staff behavior was measured by evaluating connections made with students, use of praise and recognition, reinforcements used, and punitive consequences used (Biglan et al., 2011). Biglan et al., (2011) found that middle schools with staff implementing effective behavior management and positive attention to students had positive school environments with positive behavior. Effective behavior management included clear rules and expectations as well as other PBIS procedures such as positive reinforcements for responsible behavior. Positive attention included connections with students and recognition of accomplishments and positive behavior.

The creation of strategies and procedures to adjust student behavior not only influences behavior itself, but the school climate and academic achievement as well. It is not valid to directly link the implementation of PBIS programs to an increase in academic performance due to too many variables. However, an increase in academic achievement has been found to occur in the time that PBIS has been implemented at schools, and this is potentially due to an increase in

instruction time (LeBrun, Mann, Muscott, 2008). LeBrun et al. (2008) found that there was a reduction in office discipline referrals and suspensions when PBIS was implemented at 28 different schools grades K-12. With this reduction in disciplinary issues, the equivalent of 864 days of teaching were recovered among the 28 schools (LeBrun, Mann, Muscott, 2008). With days of teaching being recovered, students were able to be in class receiving instruction from their teachers as opposed to missing instruction while receiving discipline for their negative behavior. While there may be other factors contributing to an increase in academic achievement during the time PBIS was implemented, it is reasonable to consider that an increase in academic achievement is a reflection of a reduction in out-of-class time to deal with disciplinary issues. According to teachers involved in a study conducted by Lassen, Sailor, and Steele (2006), the increase in class time that students experience due to not being in the office for their negative behavior has enabled them to develop a more stable and stronger understanding of the content being learned.

PBIS and school climate. Previous findings have found there is an overall positive influence on schools when implementing PBIS. Specifically, studies have found that PBIS has an experimentally positive effect on school climate, behavior, and academic achievement at schools implementing PBIS procedures and strategies (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012). Because PBIS is a process involving the participation of staff and students, it requires a whole-school involvement, which may be crucial in its successful implementation. Staff members must complete a training to learn the strategies and procedures for implementing PBIS. Then, staff members must integrate the strategies and procedures into their classrooms and overall discipline tactics at school. Lastly, students must participate by cooperating with the implemented strategies and procedures integrated throughout

the school. The involvement of the entire school requires a commitment from the staff to the students, which may have a positive influence on the effectiveness of PBIS.

PBIS has been found to contribute to better classroom management for teachers, which helps to positively contribute to a school climate (Herman, Reinke, & Stormont, 2013). Through observations, Herman, Reinke, and Stormont (2013), found that teachers who implemented PBIS strategies in their classroom had more effective classroom management than those classrooms without active PBIS strategies. For example, classrooms that display clearly defined rules and expectations reflecting the whole-school culture experienced more responsible behavior (Wentzel, 1991). Displaying the rules and expectations in the classroom enables the class to have goals of how to behave, and allows the teacher to create incentives for following those rules, further inspiring the students to behave responsibly. PBIS strategies are designed to help teachers develop classroom management skills that help them create effective and supportive learning environments. Implementing such skills and strategies can reduce the number of disruptions in class and prevent the opportunity to bully or reject peers, in turn contributing to a positive school climate.

Bullying and peer rejection are two components of school climate that can lead to students having negative perceptions about a school climate. PBIS has been found to reduce school bullying and peer rejection when implemented school-wide (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Leaf, 2012). While it is difficult to determine if a reduction in bullying and peer rejection is due solely to students' motivation to disengage in such behavior due to PBIS, it is plausible to believe that effective classroom management helps with the reduction of such negative behavior.

Classroom management is the discipline and management of students' misbehavior through strategies that enable supportive learning environments while also fostering classroom

communities as a way of helping students develop effective and productive behavior (Allen, 2010). Part of a positive school climate involves effective classroom management because, as mentioned previously, the environment in a classroom can affect a student's experience at school. Through classroom management, teachers must integrate whole-school culture rules and expectations into the environment and manipulate the environment in a way that enables students to both perceive a positive climate and serve as motivation to behave positively.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature provides a clear explanation of how PBIS creates an overall positive influence on school settings through impacting school climate, academic performance, and student behavior. Moreover, defining positive school climate helps to strengthen the understanding of the goal of PBIS and explain why it is effective. PBIS's main goal is to adjust student behavior by shaping school climate to transform school culture.

At the same time, previous research lacks students' perceptions of PBIS, which could be helpful in understanding why PBIS is ineffective in some contexts. Student perceptions of PBIS could also help to make improvements to current interventions and supports. Additionally, there is an overall limited amount of research on the middle school age group and middle school aged students' perceptions on PBIS.

The purpose of this research is to find and analyze students' perceptions of PBIS in order to understand how students' perceptions of the program effect their participation and its overall effectiveness. Students' perceptions of the interventions and supports could be a catalyst for necessary adjustments to stimulate PBIS growth.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Questions

This research examines the effectiveness of PBIS at a middle school. The purpose of this research is to determine why PBIS is effective for some students and why it is not effective for others. With this information, the school site can determine if adjustments to their PBIS implementation need to be made. The central research questions include the following:

1. How and why is PBIS effective according to students' experiences with the program?
2. Does student perception of school climate impact their participation with PBIS procedures?
3. What could make PBIS more effective according to students?
4. What could make school climate more positive according to students?

Description and Rationale for Research

In generating my research on the evaluation of a PBIS program at a middle school, I conducted a qualitative study with a constructivist worldview. A constructivist worldview is centered on the belief that humans construct an understanding of the world around them through developing subjective meanings from their experiences (J.D. Creswell & J.W. Creswell, 2018). Taking a constructivist approach to research involves going beyond factual data and statistics, and instead analyzing the complexity of participants' views rather than narrowing findings down to a single data point or determinant. Previous research on PBIS programs has found that its implementation into schools is more effective than ineffective due to it decreasing negative behavior and being associated with an increase in standardized test scores. In using a constructivist approach for my research on the PBIS program at the school I teach at, I enabled my research to examine the students' perspectives on the effectiveness of PBIS. In addition, I

explored the meanings they constructed about PBIS practices and school climate based on their own experiences. Moreover, by conducting a qualitative study with a constructivist worldview, my goal was to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of PBIS at the school I teach at in order to determine the effectiveness of the PBIS program based on students' perceptions of it.

Effectively utilizing the perceptions of students about PBIS requires developing an understanding of their point of view. The goal of a constructivist approach to research is to rely on the participant's "point of view" of the phenomena being studied in the research (J.D. Creswell & J.W. Creswell, 2018). This is particularly valuable because it is important to understand how students feel about such a program since their participation is required for its success. Through asking open-ended questions to students through interviews, I was able to analyze their perceptions and understandings of the program itself as well as develop an understanding of why they might understand it and perceive it the way in which they do. Implementing a constructivist approach also enabled me to analyze their understanding of what is effective in the program and how that might shape their engagement with implemented PBIS strategies and procedures.

A constructivist approach also focuses on the context of the situation being studied (J.D. Creswell & J.W. Creswell, 2018). In examining a PBIS program at a particular school, it was beneficial to consider the context of the situation as it may reveal reasons behind students' understandings of PBIS. This is particularly relevant when analyzing behavior, especially amongst middle school aged children. Due to them being at a pivotal point in development paired with various other uncontrolled factors, such as puberty and peer relations, there are many reasons why they might interpret something uniquely, influencing the effectiveness of not only their behavior but their reception of a PBIS program.

In implementing a constructivist approach to my research on the effectiveness of a PBIS program at a particular middle school, I hoped to develop an understanding of how students' perceptions of PBIS impacts their participation with the program and its overall effectiveness. Ultimately, I aimed to create the opportunity for our school to determine if the program is effective according to each students' perspectives and consider if adjustments need to be made to our PBIS strategies and procedures.

Research Design

This research was designed to determine if PBIS is being effectively implemented at an individual middle school. All individuals at the school site being examined will be referred to with pseudonyms throughout this thesis to protect the identities of the participants. The middle school itself will be referred to as "Washington Middle School." In order to determine if PBIS is being effectively implemented at the given school site, four research questions were designed with the purpose of determining if PBIS is effective according to students. Interview questions and focus group discussion questions were created to develop answers for each research question with the intention of determining if students considered PBIS to be effective or ineffective.

Research Sites and Entry into the Field. The research site is at a middle school in Northern California where the researcher is currently an eighth grade history teacher. Consent was given by the Principal to conduct research, focus groups, and individual interviews with my students during lunch time periods. This school is located near the city downtown in an industrial area located near many businesses and manufacturing plants. There are 1,200 students attending the school; 530 are English Language Learners and 715 students qualify for free and reduced lunch (California Department of Education, 2019).

Participants. Eighth grade students at Washington Middle School were recruited for participation in the study. The researcher has been teaching 8th grade history at Washington Middle School since August 2018 and conducted interviews with a selected focus group of students during the Spring 2019 semester. The students in this study were in the 8th grade and of diverse ethnic origins. Eight of the participants were Latino and the remaining four were white.

Sampling Procedure. An invitation to participate in the focus group and interviews was announced during lunchtime tutoring. Lunchtime tutoring is offered once a week on Wednesdays for my students who sign up for it. The amount of students who attend lunchtime tutoring varies depending on the need for tutoring. At one of the lunchtime tutoring sessions the researcher announced that interested individuals should come to a lunchtime meeting when tutoring did not normally occur for more information on the study. At the informational meeting, they received consent forms and detailed information about the research itself. Out of the 13 students present during the informational meeting, 12 students agreed to participate in the study. Students who chose to participate were then part of a focus group that agreed to answer questions about PBIS and school climate at Washington Middle School. Additionally, students in the focus group were asked to participate in individual interviews in which they would be interviewed about their experience with PBIS. The finalized focus group of all interested students met during two lunch time periods, when tutoring did not occur, and discussed their perceptions of PBIS. All twelve students participated in the focus group interviews, while six of those twelve participated in the individual interviews.

Methods. Research questions were created with the objective of determining if PBIS is effective according to students' experiences with the program at Washington Middle School. Several interview questions and focus group questions were developed to generate findings for

the research questions. One individual interview question asks the students if PBIS strategies and interventions help make the school climate more positive. This question answered the fourth research question, which sought to find what could make school climate more positive. These intentionally created questions were designed with the purpose of generating responses that provide findings for each of the four research questions.

While this research was carefully designed through intentional planning, flexibility is required in the process due to certain features of the research site and its participants. Despite each interview question providing a clear and distinct purpose for the research, the findings for each question generated by interview and focus group discussions were dependent on the responses of middle school aged adolescents. For instance, during focus group interviews, students often agreed with one another's responses rather than challenge one another. This agreeableness prohibited the possibility of additional and original perceptions of students from manifesting themselves.

Participants were involved in two 30-minute focus groups that consisted of open-ended questions. The open-ended questions asked students what they considered to be a positive school climate and what a school could do to create a more positive school climate. Additionally, students were asked about how effective they thought particular interventions and supports were when teachers implemented PBIS into their classrooms. For example, one focus group discussion question asked, "Can you provide an example of something that contributes to a positive school climate at Washington Middle School?" Another question asked, "What kind of classroom environments contribute to a positive or negative school climate?" Individual interview questions were open-ended as well, but gave participants the opportunity to elaborate on details of PBIS. One individual interview question was, "Do you think PBIS strategies and interventions help

make the school climate more positive? Explain your thoughts." While focus group discussions enabled participants to share experiences in thirty-minute segments, the individual interviews enabled participants to elaborate on more specific experiences that were individual to them.

The focus group meetings and the interviews took place in my classroom during lunch time periods. Focus group meetings involved a thirty-minute group interview aimed at creating a group discussion through each question. Individual interviews involved a 15 minute personal interview during lunchtime when tutoring did not occur. Focus group discussions and individual interviews were recorded on my iPhone that is password protected. Notes were taken during the focus group discussions and interviews but did not include any names or identifying information (e.g., addresses, phone numbers, personal references).

Data Analysis

The data collected in this research was generated through individual interviews and focus group discussions. The individual interviews and focus group discussions enabled me to collect multiple sources of data. Interviews were conducted individually with a single participant at a time, while focus group discussions were conducted in a group setting. Comparing the responses from both of these methods provided me with an inside view of how students feel about PBIS from an individual standpoint and from a group standpoint. The group setting enabled students to share experiences with one another and collaborate in creating meanings of their experiences, while the individual interviews enabled participants to elaborate on specific points of PBIS.

Each focus group meeting and individual interview was recorded on an iPhone and documented through note taking in a designated notebook for this research. At the end of each focus group meeting and individual interview, each participant confirmed their given responses with the opportunity to make any changes if desired. After each focus group meeting and

individual interview was completed, I reviewed the recordings and notes, and then transcribed them onto a single document on the computer to be coded.

Following the transcription of responses, I began the coding process by reviewing each interview and focus group discussion on the computer. The coding process involved arranging responses into categories as a way of organizing the data. The text was segmented according to distinct ideas and codes that were assigned to each segment of text. I used predetermined codes that were determined through frequency in previous research. The predetermined codes included are: organization, clear rules, positivity, negativity, attention, bullying, caring, support, clear expectations. After initial coding of the responses from the interviews and focus group discussions were completed on a computer document, I was able to organize codes into categories on a concept map. Before organizing the codes on a concept map, I returned to my transcripts for focused coding by reviewing the interview responses and determining which codes were the most significant. The themes that were developed to answer the research questions were identified from the categories of codes.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are fundamental in producing effective research. In order to attain qualitative validity, multiple strategies were implemented to ensure that validity was achieved throughout the study. Mixed-methods of individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted to produce data from individual perspectives and group settings. Additionally, communication of findings and codes were shared with participants to ensure the accuracy of their responses. Through implementing multiple strategies in this research, the findings generated data that was reliable due to the use of varying sources, strategies, and assessments.

In ensuring qualitative validity, it is important to recognize the positionality. I have been teaching at the school site since the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, having not yet taught at this site for an entire school year. The students who participated in this study are students of mine in my eighth grade history course and who also participate in my lunchtime tutoring. Due to being the participants' teacher, I have a position of power over the participants due to the relationship dynamic between teacher and students. This relationship could have lead to data being biased as students could have responded to questions as they felt they were expected to due to being in a classroom environment with their teacher.

Additionally, my own opinions on PBIS had the potential to influence the research. Being a teacher who implements PBIS and an individual who recognizes the benefits of it in her own classroom, it is possible my own opinions could have impacted both my students' responses and my interpretation of students' responses. Students could have perceived my use of PBIS in the classroom as an indication that I support it, in turn altering their responses to validate my use of it. Subsequently, I could have interpreted the participants' responses as being more in favor of PBIS than the alternative due to my own bias toward PBIS. At the same time, recognizing these biases allowed me to avoid deviating from the truth and in turn develop accurate findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

While a large body of both quantitative and qualitative research has found that the implementation of PBIS is effective for the positive transformation of behavior and the enhancement of academic performance, few studies have explored the underlying reasons why its implementation is effective from the perspective of middle school aged students. The study included a diverse demographic of students who identified three major themes that contribute to the effectiveness of PBIS in the middle school setting with each theme revolving around practices and procedures that create a positive school climate.

The first theme is the significance of teachers consciously and intentionally using PBIS. When teachers systematically integrate PBIS procedures and strategies into classroom curriculum, students are more motivated to behave productively due to routines and structures that eliminate unpredictability. When teachers integrate PBIS into the curriculum, students have a better understanding of what is expected of them and why it is expected of them. Students were more willing to cooperate with PBIS when they understood why particular behavior was expected of them. The second theme pertains to the impact of student-teacher interactions on students' behavior and engagement with PBIS practices. When teachers interact with students, students perceive teachers' behavior as contributing to a positive school climate and are more inclined to behave productively. Moreover, when teachers intentionally interact with students outside of the content, students perceive their behavior as making the school's climate more positive and welcoming. In turn, students feel more willing to cooperate with teachers when teachers implement PBIS strategies. The final theme addresses the impact of a teacher's consistent use of PBIS procedures with all students.. When teachers and staff are consistent with

their use of PBIS, students are more willing to behave productively because they perceive their teachers as being fair and equitable.

Significance of Intentional Implementation of PBIS into Classroom Settings.

PBIS tier 1 supports and interventions establish rules, expectations, and routines in classrooms while also providing a structure for the class. Students are more motivated to behave productively when PBIS strategies and procedures are integrated into the classroom curriculum because of the routine and structure that eliminates unpredictability and lack of clarity. This particular middle school implements PBIS school-wide and ensures that all staff is provided training and resources to integrate the strategies and procedures in and out of the classroom. Through student perspectives shared during interviews, it was found that effective PBIS implementation involved teachers providing clear expectations, creating classroom norms, and following through with consequences. Students reported that when teachers implemented these procedures, it lead to students being more motivated to behave productively.

Providing clear expectations. Examples of tier 1 supports include verbal cues and reminders, the creation of a social contract, and clear expectations displayed around the classroom. Providing clear expectations through the implementation of various tier 1 supports is supposed to help students understand how they should behave and how that expected behavior will help them be successful. During focus group discussions and individual interviews, students reported that the creation of a social contract and the provision of a daily agenda on the whiteboard were both tier 1 supports that helped them to behave more productively. Students shared experiences demonstrated that these particular tier 1 supports were significant in enabling productive behavior and contributing to a positive school climate.

While each school may implement PBIS differently, this particular school setting starts the year off by having each class provide clear expectations for the individual class and classroom setting. The first PBIS support to be implemented is the social contract, which is created for students to understand what is expected of them. The social contract outlines classroom rules, norms for behavior, and expectations for behavior and academic performance. Through creating the social contract, the teacher is providing clear expectations for the class and setting a foundation for all students to behave productively. The social contract can be referred to throughout the year and violation of the contract results in a consequence. Violation of the social contract results in a tier 1 intervention, such as a verbal reminder asking the student to check their behavior by referring to the social contract. For example, if a rule is broken on the social contract, then that student is asked four questions by the teacher. The questions involve asking the student about what they are doing, what they should be doing, if they are doing what they are supposed to be doing, and what they are going to do to begin doing what they are supposed to be doing. These questions have also been put onto posters created by the school and are posted on classroom walls. Additionally, the four questions are explained in the beginning of the year when creating the social contract as a way of communicating to the students that the four questions are the first consequence for being off task. Students are made aware that these four questions are their verbal cues to get back on task, and if they fail to do so then a tier 2 support is implemented.

Students reported that having clear expectations for their behavior along with predetermined consequences helped them to behave more productively. Students shared how a lack of clear expectations and consequences often led to them misbehaving because they were not sure what was considered “good behavior.” During a focus group interview, Howard shared,

“When a teacher doesn’t have a set plan or doesn’t stick with the same punishment, then it makes it easier to ‘misbehave’ because you don’t know how you’re supposed to act to begin with.”

During an individual interview, Alyssa shared, “Teachers think we know what they mean right away, we don’t. It helps when they include us in making the rules. Spending time on that helps us understand them. It makes it easier to follow them.” Students discussed that being part of the process of creating the social contract helps them to better understand what is expected of them because they are part of the process and therefore are not being told to act a certain way for the sake of it. During focus group discussions and individual interviews, students’ reports echoed one another in communicating that having clear expectations through the collaborative creation of a social contract gave them the understanding necessary to behave productively.

In addition to behaving more productively when clear expectations for behavior are created and communicated, students reported that having a clear agenda displayed for each class period helps them to concentrate more and behave more productively. Amanda gave an example of an agenda, “Ms. Robinson writes each task we are going to do in class in order under the ‘Agenda’ section on the board. Right when I walk into class, I know what we’re going to do. It helps me get settled.” Students reported that they were able to behave better, as opposed to acting out and “talking a lot,” when the teacher provided students with a written agenda on the board. During a focus group discussion, students shared that an agenda listing each activity of the class period helped them to behave more productively because they could see what they needed to get done. During an individual interview, one student shared, “If I know I have to do a reading and answer questions and then talk with my table group, then I know I don’t have time to talk to my friend or zone out.” During focus group discussions and individual interviews, students agreed

that teachers providing clear expectations through the displaying of an agenda helped them to behave more productively because they knew they needed to allocate their time effectively.

Students shared that a lack of an agenda in a classroom made them feel more “confused” and that due to being confused they often talk with other students to try to find out if they “missed something” or “misunderstood” what was going on in the class. During individual interviews, one student shared that a lack of an agenda makes them less able to focus because they are “unsure” about what they are doing and do not have an “end goal” in sight. Alyssa shared, “It’s hard to get work done when there isn’t a clear path for the class. You’re kind of just working without an end point and then I don’t know what I’m really focusing on.” Students also shared that when there is not an agenda, they become unclear about the expectations for the class period. Matthew shared, “When there isn’t an agenda, I get confused. Then, I get in trouble for talking when I ask someone what we’re doing, which wouldn’t have happened if there was an agenda.” Students agreed that when they become unclear, they often talk amongst themselves for clarification and then get in “trouble” for talking with one another. Students reported that getting in “trouble” for trying to gain clarification from one another was “frustrating” and they identified this type of student-teacher interaction as detracting from a positive school climate.

Creating class norms. A foundational part of PBIS requires the teacher and students to establish classroom norms for behavior. In this particular school setting, teachers are expected to create a “Social Contract” in which the students and teachers collaborate in constructing classroom rules and expectations of behavior by which all are to follow. As mentioned before, the social contract outlines rules for the class and expectations for behavior and is a means to providing students with clear expectations. In addition to providing students with the expectations, the social contract gives the teacher the opportunity to integrate PBIS interventions

into the classroom through providing students with the tier 1 supports that serve as consequences for all students when they misbehave. Implementing PBIS through strategies such as creating a social contract enables the class to establish norms for behavior in class.

Students admitted that the social contract itself is often forgotten when they misbehave. However, students reported in both individual interviews and focus group interviews that the process of creating the social contract helped them to understand how they should behave and that there are consequences for misbehaving. In a focus group discussion, James explained, “If I get off task, I don’t immediately think ‘oops I violated the social contract’. But once the teacher uses the 4 questions, I get it and then I’m ready to get back on track.” Matthew replied to James’s response, sharing, “I agree. It’s not like I’m always thinking about the social contract. But once I get off task and I get in ‘trouble’, I get it and I know how I should act after that.” Students’ reports were in alignment when discussing how the social contract establishes how they should act and agreed that by creating the social contract they understand what is expected. Students also shared that through being given the opportunity to understand the rules and expectations, they are able to “cooperate” when the teacher gets “mad” or corrects their behavior because they remember what they agreed to in terms of behavioral expectations and norms.

Collaborating on the process of creating a social contract was reported to help students better understand the purpose of the consequences, which are interventions and supports. For instance, James reported, “When I get off task and get in a little trouble, I know it’s about me not doing what I was supposed to be doing and it’s hurting me. We made the social contract because it’s supposed to help us.” Furthermore, during focus group interviews, students reported that if they do not understand the expectations for the classroom behavior, then the consequences are not effective and did not teach them anything. Students explained how the lack of establishing

classroom expectations and norms for behavior does not necessarily enable students to act out, but it does not inform them how they should behave so they do not have an understanding what behavior the teacher would consider as acting out. The lack of clear guidelines prevents them from knowing how to act, therefore, students shared that this lack of expectations and norms causes them to “act out” without realizing it.

Student-teacher Interactions

Students reported feelings about the importance of student-teacher interactions.

Developing student-teacher connections and feeling a sense of community within the classroom was reported as a key component of effective PBIS implementation. Students identified teachers’ behavior as contributing to a positive school climate when teachers developed connections with students and created classroom communities. Perceiving teachers as contributing to a positive school climate through their interactions with students enabled the students to be more willing to cooperate with PBIS and in turn experience its purpose and goal. By consciously working to build classroom community, teachers have the opportunity to interact with students and make connections with students as they work together to create norms, expectations, and rules that define the classroom culture.

Creating connections. Creating connections with students was found to be an important component in ensuring the effectiveness of PBIS. Students shared that when teachers “talked” with them and got to know them, it was easier to behave well because they felt like the teacher “cared” and was interested in their overall success in school. As Alyssa expressed, "When Ms. Smith asks us to share ‘good things’ or plans for the weekend, I feel like she likes me, she cares. When she’s mad, I get she’s helping instead of just yelling because I know she cares." During focus group discussions, students shared how teachers making connections with their students

enabled those students to see the teachers as supportive rather than “too authoritative,” impacting their cooperation with implemented PBIS strategies and procedures.

While creating connections is not a scripted or explicit component of PBIS, it is ingrained in the process of creating classroom norms and expectations of behavior required for the implementation and use of tier 1 supports. In order to integrate PBIS procedures and strategies into the classroom, teachers have to engage with students in communicating those norms and expectations for behavior. This can be and should be accomplished through creating a social contract, by which teachers are given the opportunity to connect with students through collaboration. Students reported that when teachers take the time in the beginning of the year to include them in creating a social contract, they feel more inclined to behave well because they feel like the teacher sees them as “good enough” to help make those rules and “enjoyed” working with them to make those rules. Regarding the creation of the social contract, Megan shared, “Ms. Smith made the social contract with us. She liked working with us and didn’t just sit at her desk and make us do it. She was part of it and part of our class.”

Additionally, students reported that conversations with teachers and building connections with teachers through simple actions like the teacher saying “hi” outside of class or asking about any “good things” that had happened to them made them feel more comfortable with their teacher. For example, Ian stated:

My teacher always starts the class out with good things. She asks us to share ‘good things’ that have happened during the day. I love when she does this. It’s fun and we all get to learn more about each other. It makes us closer and then I’m excited to go to that class because I know everyone and I feel comfortable and I’m not afraid to like mess up.

Furthermore, students reported that when they feel comfortable with their teachers they are more willing to participate in class activities because they don't feel "nervous" and that participating more prevents them from "giving in" to the opportunity of misbehaving.

During a focus group discussion, students discussed that the willingness to participate more in class helps keep everyone from getting in trouble because they are engaged with the content and "focused and interested" in the material. As a group, the students came to a consensus that when a teacher is "positive", "friendly", "caring", "talkative", and "energetic" they feel more comfortable and "like" the class more. Through further deliberation, the students deciphered that cooperating and benefiting from the consequences and strategies in tier 1 is "easier" to do when a teacher's behavior is positive and "welcoming" toward them. Students identified these characteristics of teachers as behaviors that contribute toward a positive school climate. Through further deliberation, students agreed that when teachers' behavior exhibits these characteristics, they are contributing toward a positive school climate enabling students to engage with their PBIS practices more effectively.

Creating a sense of community. Through creating classroom rules and expectations together, teachers are implementing PBIS into their classroom and developing a classroom community through collaboration. Furthermore, teachers are reaching an explicit goal of PBIS, which is working toward creating a positive school climate. Students reported that when they feel a classroom has a "community" feel or a "close" feel to it, they are able to behave more productively for several reasons. One reason being reported as:

When the classroom feels like a community, everyone is comfortable with one another and we all know each other. Feeling like we all know each other helps us work together better. So, when the teacher gives us something to do, we can help

each other out instead of being confused. I think when we are confused we start to act out or make the teacher mad. But, when the classroom feels like a community, we don't really act out or make the teacher mad because we like them and they aren't giving us a reason to act badly.

Students' discussions indicated that being able to work with another helps them strengthen their understanding of content, helping them to stay productive. Additionally, students conferred that they feel more comfortable "talking out loud" during class discussions and participating in class activities when they feel a sense of "community" in their classroom.

Consistent Implementation of PBIS Practices

PBIS consists of three tiers of interventions and supports. The first tier serves the entire school population and consists of interventions and supports that are for mild and more common misbehaviors, while the second tier serves a smaller population with interventions and supports appropriate for that population, and the third tier serves an even smaller population of the school and includes interventions and supports that are specific and more punitive than the previous tiers'. Students' perspectives from interviews found that students are more willing to behave productively when teachers and staff are consistent with their use of PBIS because they perceive their teachers as being fair and equitable. Teachers using supports and interventions appropriately and consistently were perceived by students as being fair and equitable, both of which students felt helped them to behave productively and not "act out."

Consistency. PBIS requires teachers to implement rules, expectations, and consequences into their classrooms through tier 1 and tier 2 supports. This particular school site expects all teachers to construct and integrate a social contract into class curriculum as well as implementing the use of reflection forms when misbehavior occurs. Teachers are expected to follow through

with these strategies and consequences that they have embedded into their classroom culture by referring to the social contract when necessary and making use of reflection forms when behavior warrants so.

During focus group discussions, students shared that teachers can be inconsistent with their use of consequences. When this occurs, students discussed that the consequences are not as effective and, in turn, do not transform the negative behavior to productive behavior. As Bridget explained, "Some teachers will use the reflection sheet over and over again for one student and then another student does the same thing and never has to do a reflection sheet." During individual interviews, students also reported that overusing consequences such as "sending students out to buddy rooms to create a reflection sheet" takes away the value of this consequence. One student explained how students get sent out to do reflection sheets on a "daily basis" and the overuse of it causes students to not see the value or purpose in completing the reflection sheets when they do them so regularly. When reflection sheets are used too often or inconsistently among students, students reported that the reflection sheets become "a way to get the kid out of the classroom instead of a way to get them to change their behavior."

Students were dismayed that teachers will use a minor consequence for one instance and then use the same minor consequence for a more serious instance of misbehavior. Students explained that not only do these situations "annoy" them, it lessens the value and effectiveness of a consequence because it is providing a temporary "fix" for that student's behavior rather than actually changing it. Students explained that they "think" it is sometimes more important for the teacher to get a student out of the classroom because of the way they are behaving rather than spend time on helping that student transform their behavior. While the students discussed that they "understood" this strategy, Max shared:

It fixes the behavior for the day by getting that kid out of the classroom. When they come back they act the same and make it distracting for everyone. It might be better for the teacher to actually take the time to help that student so that they behave better for themselves and for the class a whole.

Students went on to explain how they felt like teachers overusing consequences, such as the reflection sheets, showed that they were not “following through” with consequences in the way that they should be. One student explained, “I don’t think we’re supposed to do a million reflection sheets, I feel like there’s a step to be taken after a few reflection sheets have been filled out that teachers aren’t doing.” Students’ responses echoed each other in communicating that consistency in the use of PBIS strategies and procedures is important in its effectiveness in transforming behavior and sustaining a positive climate within the classroom.

Uniform consequences for misbehavior. From focus group discussions, it was indicated that students notice when teachers are inconsistent with or misusing their consequences in incidents of misbehavior. Matthew complained that, “One of my teachers uses reflection sheets sometimes. One day someone might get sent out for a reflection sheet and the next day another person does the same thing and doesn’t have to do anything. I don’t understand that.” Students shared how they felt like teachers “sometimes” had different consequences depending on a situation or even the student. Through sharing experiences with one another, students agreed they perceived teachers as being “unfair” or “not making sense” when they used consequences inconsistently. Students explained that teachers acting fair and being consistent with PBIS consequences showed that they were trying to contribute toward a positive school climate.

In an individual interview, one student shared that a teacher often gives harsh and varying consequences to one student, while giving milder consequences to another student, both of

whom behave similarly. Harsh consequences include being sent to the office to do work or receiving a referral. Mild consequences were described as verbal reminders or even non-verbal reminders, such as the four questions or a simple “raised eyebrow.” The student shared that this seemed unfair and made her upset and made her perceive the teacher’s behavior as detracting from a positive school climate.

On the other hand, students reported that when teachers are consistent with the consequences they perceive them as fair and they are more willing to behave productively.

Shelly shared:

One of my teachers is good with reflection sheets and with handling bad behavior. In the beginning of the school year she outlined what was acceptable and what was unacceptable. If anyone goes against those things and breaks the social contract, they get sent out to fill out a reflection sheet. She’s also really good at keeping track of how many reflection sheets people have filled out, so then everyone else is also aware of how they’re behaving and if they need to get better because she told us if we get 3 then we get a referral. I think her letting us know the following consequence helps too.”

Avoiding reactive discipline. PBIS focuses on reflecting on behavior to transform it rather than reacting to it to create a temporary and immediate solution. Students shared that when teachers used reactive discipline that did not align with PBIS procedures and strategies they perceived the teachers’ behavior as detracting from a positive school climate. One example provided by a student involved a teacher yelling at students to stop misbehaving and making the entire class work quietly. Matthew explained:

One of my teachers yells at us if anyone talks. There's no talking at all and everyone is afraid to talk because they don't want to get yelled at. So then if we try to ask each other a question, we can't. And we're too afraid to ask him a question because we don't want to get in trouble. One kid always talks and he gets sent out a lot. He doesn't fill out a reflection sheet and then also misses a lot of what we're doing."

Students explained that when teachers "yell" or "send kids straight to the office" for an instance of misbehaving, it made them less likely to behave well because there was no sense of community being created in the classroom. One student described a classroom as feeling as if it was on "lockdown" because the teacher did not let them talk and if they talked they were yelled at or their grade was penalized. During both focus group interviews and individual interviews, students shared that perceiving teachers' behavior as being negative made them want to act negatively. In one instance Megan elaborated, "When I get yelled at then I don't want to do my work. I sort of just shut off. I just get too distracted from being yelled at."

Conclusion

Students' responses provided findings for each of the four research questions. The first research question was, "How and why is PBIS effective according to students' experiences with the program?" Students identified PBIS as being effective because they perceive teachers' behaviors as contributing to a positive school climate when teachers practice PBIS. Students recognized that perceiving teachers' behavior as contributing to a positive school climate motivated them to cooperate with PBIS practices and behave more productively. The second research question was, "Does student perception of school climate impact their participation with PBIS procedures?" Students reported that they perceived teachers' behavior as detracting from a

positive school climate when they were not implementing PBIS practices and instead using reactive discipline. When students perceived teachers as detracting from a positive school climate they were less willing to behave productively. The third research question was, “What could make PBIS more effective according to students?” Students identified three main actions that make PBIS more effective: intentional integration of PBIS into curriculum, student-teacher interactions to create connections and understanding, and consistent PBIS implementation that is fair. The final research question was, “What could make school climate more positive according to students?” Students shared that implementing PBIS consistently could make the school climate more positive because they perceive teachers as contributing to a positive school climate when they are implementing the program.

The findings from this study indicated that students’ behavior and cooperation with PBIS is dependent on how they perceive the teachers’ external behaviors. PBIS was considered to be effective when students were able to notice their teachers intentionally and consciously using PBIS, the presence of positive student-teacher interactions, and teachers’ consistent use of PBIS. These three factors were discussed amongst students as being different ways by which they perceived their teachers’ behavior as contributing to a positive school climate. The perception of teachers’ behavior as being contributors to a positive school climate helped students to cooperate with and benefit from the implementation of PBIS by those teachers. Furthermore, cooperation with PBIS was reported to be less likely when students perceived teachers’ behavior as detracting from the school climate.

Through discussions with students, it was evident that they do notice when teachers implement PBIS into their classrooms, whether they are always aware that those strategies and procedures are part of PBIS is not evident. However, when students noticed their teachers using

PBIS and using it consistently, they felt they were part of a positive school climate and they could be more productive with their behavior and their schoolwork. From these findings, PBIS research was enhanced through exploring why PBIS is effective according to the perceptions of middle school students.

Chapter 5: Discussion

My research focuses on exploring why PBIS is effective according to students. Previous research has found that PBIS has an overall positive effect on schools, increasing positive behavior and enhancing academic performance (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008). While PBIS implementation is effective according to prior research, this study explored how its implementation is effective and ineffective. These findings can contribute to PBIS adjustments that can make the program more effective. While PBIS has also been found to create a positive school climate, this study strengthened previous research by exploring how PBIS contributes to a positive school climate. This study found that PBIS has to be implemented consistently by teachers in order for the program to contribute to a positive school climate. Teachers' behaviors are perceived as contributing to a positive school climate when they are consistently implementing the program into their classroom settings and instruction.

My findings strengthen previous research because of its exploration of the independent variable, the students. This study explores why students participate with PBIS strategies and procedures and why PBIS is effective according to their perceptions of it. Through focus group and individual interviews, it was found that students' behavior is dependent on their perception of their teachers' behavior. Students reported behaving more productively and cooperatively with PBIS if and when they perceive their teachers' behavior as contributing toward a positive school climate.

Implications for Literature

My research was conducted in a middle school setting whereas previous research was conducted in elementary school settings and high school settings. Exploring students' perceptions of PBIS is significant for schools and teachers because it provides information

directly from the source of which its effectiveness is dependent on. Students' perceptions about PBIS give schools and teachers information that can help in adjusting PBIS practices to be more effective. While previous research had been predominantly conducted in settings outside of middle school, this research provides insight into how PBIS can effectively transform behavior during a time in child development where rational thinking and productive behavior are sometimes overpowered by hormones and peer relations. Previous studies focused on statistics, academic performance results, and teacher perceptions. This research provides the reasoning behind that data so that schools and teachers can use that reasoning to adjust their PBIS practices in order to enhance their use of PBIS.

This research revealed that students have positive perceptions about PBIS when it is used consistently and accurately. While prior research had the data to prove that PBIS has been effective, this study found out why it is effective. This study found that students are more inclined to behave more productively when PBIS is present and active in classrooms. Students reported that clear expectations, student-teacher interactions, and consistent use of PBIS oriented consequences helped them to be focused and productive during class time. These findings are significant because they could motivate teachers to implement these simple PBIS procedures even more due to students reporting that PBIS practices within the classroom motivated them to behave more productively.

My findings provide new and additional insight to add to the conversation about PBIS in academic literature. Students' perceptions of PBIS and why it is effective provides schools and teachers with information that can help them to implement and integrate PBIS into classrooms and school settings more abundantly and more effectively. These findings from student perceptions about PBIS are significant and meaningful because adjustments and alterations made

to PBIS practices from these findings are based on perceptions and critiques from those who engage in and are impacted by PBIS the very most, the students.

Implications for Practice and Policy

My research implicates that teachers should continue to or begin to implement PBIS practices into their classrooms consistently and constantly. The findings from this study provide teachers with information to learn more about what strategies and procedures can be used more often and how to use them more effectively. Students identified a listed agenda, social contracts, verbal cues, and fairly used reflection sheets as strategies and procedures that are effective in transforming their behavior and contributing to a positive school climate. Additionally, teachers can develop a stronger understanding about how to use PBIS practices more effectively according to shared reports from students. These findings also manifest the significance of simply implementing PBIS and how its integration into the classroom is both positively received by students and effective according to students. Student reports indicated that using PBIS from its very foundation through the use of Tier 1 supports enables PBIS's effectiveness. Students shared that PBIS was ineffective when a teacher uses a Tier 2 support having implemented a Tier 1 support. Students sharing that PBIS is effective and well received is particularly significant at this school site as PBIS practices carry a dismissive stigma among some staff members. At several staff gatherings and trainings at this particular middle school, teachers reported that PBIS is futile and likely not well received by students.

As previously mentioned, my research implicates that teachers should implement PBIS. While this seems to be a simple implication, student reports indicated that not all classrooms have PBIS integrated into classroom curriculum and procedures. Based on these findings, this particular school site can consider leading more PBIS trainings for teachers and staff members.

In providing more PBIS trainings, all teachers can be equipped with the skills and strategies necessary to implement PBIS into their classrooms and the school setting as a whole. Through being provided with the skills and strategies, teachers and staff can more effectively implement PBIS. Additionally, through providing PBIS training for all teachers and staff, the school can develop trainings that inspire teachers to implement PBIS by presenting data and sharing student perceptions from previous studies and this specific study. Providing teachers and staff with data and student perceptions has the potential to increase teacher and staff motivation and buy-in to use PBIS because they are being supplied with data specifically derived from their school site.

Given these findings, it would be beneficial for districts to implement PBIS if behavioral and disciplinary issues interfere with academic achievement of schools. Implementing PBIS can contribute to social change within a district with behavioral and disciplinary issues because implementation gives students the opportunity to be present in their classrooms more often. Students being present in their classrooms more often prevents them from missing instruction time from their teachers and potentially negatively impacting their academic performance due to missing key concepts and learning experiences. PBIS teaches students to reflect on their behavior and understand why their negative behavior was unproductive in order for students to transform their behavior to being more responsible and more constructive. When students go through the process of reflecting on their behavior and in turn transforming their behavior through implemented PBIS practices, they are potentially reducing the amount of time they spend outside of the classroom due to a referral, suspension, or expulsion. Districts with poor academic achievement and performance demonstrated through test scores, and other related indications, can examine the overall behavioral and disciplinary practices at their school to decipher if implementing PBIS practices can be a potential solution in increasing their academic

performance. Implementing PBIS at such schools enables all students to have an equitable amount of class time despite having behavioral issues that may stem from uncontrolled factors because PBIS can withstand and overcome those uncontrolled factors to transform those students' behavior.

Limitations of the Study

Despite yielding significant findings, this study would have been enhanced through spending a greater amount of time collecting data. With a greater amount of time to collect data, this study could have collected more data by interviewing students across all grade levels of middle school, students from outside my classes, and teachers' and staff's perceptions on PBIS. Through only interviewing eighth grade students from this particular middle school, perceptions of students from other grade levels are missing as well as the perceptions of teachers and staff. Gathering perceptions from students across grade levels could have provided further information on how to effectively adjust PBIS practices to better function for specific grades levels. Interviewing teachers and staff would have enabled this study to compare and contrast perceptions between students and teachers to develop a better understanding of how and why PBIS is effective, in turn adjusting PBIS practices so that they work effectively for those receiving it and those implementing it.

The participants in this study provide a limited or biased perspective because they are my students. As mentioned previously, it would have been beneficial for this study to include students from outside of my taught classes. Perspectives from students who do not have me as their teacher are missing from this student and this could have impacted the findings by not including perspectives and perceptions free of potential influence from an authoritative figure. The participants' responses in this study could have been influenced and impacted by the fact

that their teacher was the researcher, tailoring their responses and perceptions to that of which they thought would please their teacher.

In addition to missing the perceptions and perspectives of students outside of my classes, this study is missing participants from grade levels other than the eighth grade. Collecting data from students across all grade levels of middle school could have provided findings on how each grade level perceives PBIS and potentially how each grade level requires unique implementation to best fit their grade's needs in transforming behavior. The findings of this research can be applied to PBIS practices as a whole; however, they yield the greatest implications for teachers who teach eighth grade due to being conducted through the interviewing of eighth grade students.

Lastly, exploring the perceptions and perspectives of teachers' experiences with PBIS could have strengthened findings for this research. Interviewing teachers and staff about PBIS could provide researchers with information about why teachers find PBIS to be effective and in turn use that data to adjust PBIS practices to become more attainable and more implemented by teachers. Collecting data from teachers and staff also enables the opportunity to create more productive PBIS trainings that are carefully created to motivate teachers' and staff's implementation of PBIS based on their perceptions and perspectives.

Direction for Future Research

Future research can contribute to or advance this line of study by interviewing students from across all grade levels in order to compare their responses and identify the effectiveness of PBIS across grade levels. This could help schools to identify what they need to do with their PBIS practices at their schools and tailor it toward their students based on their grade and ages. Additionally, interviewing teachers and staff about their experiences with PBIS and their

perspectives on PBIS can help develop a stronger understanding of why PBIS works on their end. Interviewing teachers and staff can also provide information for creating more productive and meaningful PBIS trainings that are effective in motivating teachers and staff to implement PBIS into their classrooms and across the school.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How would you define a positive school climate? ^[L]_[SEP]
2. Can you provide an example of something that contributes to a positive school climate at Davidson Middle School? ^[L]_[SEP]
3. Can you provide an example of something that detracts from a positive school climate at DMS? ^[L]_[SEP]
4. What do you think Davidson Middle School could do to create a more positive climate? Explain your answer. ^[L]_[SEP]
5. What could teachers do to help make a positive school climate? ^[L]_[SEP]
6. What could students do to help make a positive school climate? ^[L]_[SEP]
7. What makes a classroom have a positive climate? ^[L]_[SEP]
8. How is the check-in and check-out buddy room system helpful? ^[L]_[SEP]
9. What types of school environments (like a classroom) prevent you from misbehaving? ^[L]_[SEP]

Appendix B

Individual Interview Questions

10. What do you think is the most significant contributor to a positive school climate? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
11. Can you give an example of how a teacher has contributed to a positive school climate? Do you think all staff and teachers do a good job at contributing to a positive school climate? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
12. Can you give an example of how a teacher could improve the school climate? What do you think staff and teachers could do to contribute to a positive school climate? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
13. Can you give an example of how a teacher has lowered the positivity at the school? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}How do you think staff and teachers reduce the positivity in our school climate? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
14. How do you PBIS strategies and interventions help make the school climate more ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}positive? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}

Appendix C



December 6, 2018

Codie Cox
50 Acacia Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Codie,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal entitled *Positive behavioral interventions and supports: How does it work and why does it work according to students?* (IRBPHP application #10725) has been approved.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,



Randall Hall, PhD
Chair, IRBPHP