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Consideration of Culture and Context in School-Wide Positive Behavior Support: A Review of Current Literature

Lindsay M. Fallon, MA[1], Breda V. O'Keeffe, PhD[2], and George Sugai, PhD[1]

Abstract

A review of the literature related to culture and student behavior reveals a number of interesting observations that are not surprising. First, culture is a difficult construct to define and has been defined variably over the years. Second, schools are becoming increasingly diverse, and evidence-based behavior management practices have been implemented with varied levels of integrity and varied outcomes. Third, students who spend more time outside the classroom because of disciplinary consequences are at increased risk for negative outcomes, such as diminished academic identity, deficient academic skills, and higher attrition. The school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) framework has been implemented in numerous settings with student populations representing a variety of cultures. A literature review and concept article were developed concurrently and were found to inform each other. In this study, a review of existing literature on culturally and contextually relevant strategies for behavior management in schools was conducted. Based on this review, general recommendations are presented for practitioners, personnel preparers, policy makers, and researchers, especially, in the context of implementing SWPBS.

Keywords

behavior analysis, culture, diversity, positive behavior support

Over the past 15 years, School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) has emerged as a viable framework for assisting schools to establish positive and effective school and classroom environments that enhance academic achievement and social competence of all students (Sugai & Horner, 2009). This effort has emphasized universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, data-based decision making, adoption of evidence-based interventions and practices, early intervention and prevention, specialized and fluent content knowledge, and implementation integrity (Sugai & Horner, 2009). In addition, providing positive, preventive, and predictable school and classroom environments has become a central consideration to academic and social behavior success.

As important improvements in student outcomes and enhancements in support systems have been documented when SWPBS has been implemented, interest in the role and meaning of "culture" has increased, especially, in the context of unique student, teacher, family, and community characteristics (e.g., race, language, cultural norms, familial practices, socioeconomic status; e.g., Jones, Caravaca, Cizek, Horner, & Vincent, 2006). Considering these characteristics is important for ensuring student success in a broad range of contexts, with diverse school populations, and when particularly challenging academic and social behavior problems are experienced.

To discuss the interaction between culture and SWPBS, we reviewed existing literature that emphasizes the subject of culture in the context of behavior and classroom management, as well as school-wide discipline and climate. Because of the high variability in the existing literature, we conducted a narrative review in which we descriptively summarized the contents and features of each article and attempted to develop statements that characterized commonalities and differences. We conclude with guidelines and considerations indicated by our review of the literature and the documented outcomes of SWPBS implementation efforts for researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and personnel preparers.

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As a prevention-based approach for systemic change, SWPBS provides contextual supports to decrease the likelihood of problem behavior and promote the likelihood of positive educational outcomes and productive behavior within a school-wide framework. These supports are characterized generally as preventive, collaborative, data-driven, educative, and reinforcement-based. More specifically, selecting, teaching, and reinforcing specific behavioral expectations are directly based on local teaching and learning contexts and settings.

The approach is organized around a three-tiered support logic (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). The foundational or primary intervention tier (Tier 1) involves supports for all students across all school environments. The main tenets of Tier 1 include explicitly teaching, modeling, and reinforcing positively stated expectations; increasing adult influence through active supervision; using data for decision making; and enhancing expected or desired learner behavior through school-wide positive reinforcement systems. The secondary intervention tier (Tier 2) is composed of targeted efforts to generate positive outcomes for students whose behaviors do not respond to Tier 1 supports. These efforts emphasize increasing (a) prompts for appropriate behavior, (b) verbal and written student instructions, (c) continuous monitoring of specific student behavior, and (d) positive reinforcement and feedback based on behavior performance. Students whose behaviors continue to be unresponsive to Tier 1 and 2 interventions would be considered for more intensive supports found at the tertiary intervention tier (Tier 3) level. These individualized and specialized intervention efforts include, for example, person-centered planning or wraparound processes, function-based behavior intervention planning, targeted social skills instruction, intensive individualized behavior monitoring, continuous data-based decision making and planning teams, and school- and community-based mental health supports.

Definition of Culture

In selecting an operational definition for "culture," a behavior analytic perspective was adopted because SWPBS is based on behavioral principles, and alignment was considered important and desirable (see Sugai, O'Keeffe, & Fallon, 2011, for more a detailed discussion of the use of a behavior analytic perspective in defining culture). In addition, this definition needed to be useful in applied settings and acknowledge that group membership is (a) flexible and dynamic and (b) changed and shaped over time, across generations, and from one setting to another:

> Culture is the extent to which a group of individuals engage in overt and verbal behavior reflecting shared behavioral learning histories, serving to differentiate the group from other groups, and predicting how individuals within the group act in specific setting conditions. That is, "culture" reflects a collection of common verbal and overt behaviors that are learned and maintained by a set of similar social and environmental contingences (i.e., learning history), and are occasioned (or not) by actions and objects (i.e., stimuli) that define a given setting or context. (Sugai et al., 2011, p. 9)

For the purposes of this article, *culturally and contextually relevant* is used to describe and consider the unique variables, characteristics, and learning histories of students, educators, families, and community members involved in the implementation of SWPBS. A major assumption is that effective instructional practices and behavior and classroom management strategies exist (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010), and consideration must be given to culture and context, such as African-American familial expectations, Native Hawaiian values, Native American rituals, low socioeconomic rural communities, large urban settings with high population density, or multidialect Hispanic school districts. In the end, the big question is whether each student reaps the maximum benefit of his or her school experience because culture and context has been considered in how we select, develop, and deliver what is taught.

What Does Culture Have to Do With SWPBS?

Schools are becoming more diverse. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that in 2008, approximately 56% of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were white. Of the remaining 43%, 17% were African American, 21% Hispanic, 5% Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian. Nearly 3% of students identified with more than one race (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In the 2003-2004 school year, English language learner services were provided to approximately 11% of the nation's students, or nearly 3.8 million children (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Forty-three percent of the nation's school-aged children qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2007–2008 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In the same year, 13.5% of students in public schools were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Although the U.S. student population has become more diverse, behavior management practices and outcomes are frequently discrepant among cultural groups, particularly racial groups. Historically, African American students have been more likely to be referred for special education services than Caucasian students (Irvine, 1990) and are more likely to be suspended (Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003). Nearly half of African American males are suspended in middle school (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). As these children age, they are more likely to be disciplined (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Disproportionate suspension patterns are not necessarily associated with lower economic status but are independently predicted by race (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005). Ironically, no evidence indicates that consequences, like detention, suspension, and expulsion, have beneficial effects or deter future misbehavior (Larson, 1998), especially for students with the most at-risk and least-responsive problem behavior. Ironically, suspensions may raise the risk for school failure because of increased time out of the classroom (Walker et al., 1996).

Behavioral supports cannot be universally applied without attention to culture and context. Patton and Day-Vines (2004) cautioned that conflict results when differences exist between cultures, specifically when the thinking, behaviors, and expectations of the dominant cultural group are imposed on individuals from groups outside the dominant culture. With increasing cultural diversity in the classroom, teachers are more likely to devalue, censor, and punish behaviors that are uncommon in the mainstream cultural group (Sheets & Gay, 1996). The results are alienation and marginalization of students who feel culturally different than their classmates and/or teacher (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Many African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are at higher risk because of greater emphasis on teacher and student relationships in the classroom (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Cultural incompatibilities between teachers and students may further perpetuate such alienation and marginalization, especially in the context of the disproportionate use of office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Monroe, 2005b). We extend this discussion to suggest that differences not only exist between cultures but between any two groups who are defined by their learning histories, values and expectations, and ways of operation.

In sum, many students do not experience schools as culturally and contextually relevant and, as a result, are at high risk of lower academic achievement, more frequent and negative disciplinary consequences, and more deleterious social behavioral outcomes. Currently, the use of SWPBS practices and systems is increasing as a viable approach to improving the social and behavioral culture of schools through the use of constructive and preventive strategies, in large part because of the emphasis on data-based decision-making procedures and the importance of learning history and contextual factors and influences. The purpose of this literature review was to examine research-based strategies that considered culture and behavior and classroom management and school-wide discipline and could be used to enhance SWPBS implementation. Specifically, we addressed two questions:

1. How is culture defined in research focused on behavior management, discipline, and improving problem behavior in schools?
2. What culturally and contextually relevant strategies are documented in research focused on behavior management, discipline, and improving problem behavior in schools?

Method

Literature Search Procedure

Computer-based searches for relevant literature were conducted using Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and PsycINFO, using the following descriptors: classroom management, discipline, culture, diversity, race, language, linguistically, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexuality. Additional reference lists were solicited from experts in the field and consulted along with the reference lists of all obtained articles. This process produced 297 studies that were published between 1991 and 2010.

Criteria for Inclusion and Process

Articles were eliminated from the review if they (a) were not published in a peer-reviewed publication or (b) did not have a focus on behavior management. Articles were included in the review process if they had at least three of the following four features: (a) a definition of culture, (b) a definition of and/or a focus on problem behavior(s), (c) a focus on behavior management and/or discipline, and (d) suggestions for culturally and contextually relevant behavior management strategies.

Review Variables and Procedures

This process of elimination and inclusion resulted in 28 studies, of which 21 were qualitative and 7 were quantitative in nature. First, studies were read by a graduate assistant and descriptive variables were noted: (a) authors, (b) year of publication, (c) name of journal, (d) type of study, (e) population(s) studied, (f) definition of culture, (g) problem behaviors addressed, (h) outcomes or results, and (i) suggested techniques, as well as recommendations made from each study were listed. Second, a postdoctoral fellow reviewed each article, noting descriptive variables and recommendations. Any variable description disagreements were discussed between the graduate assistant and postdoctoral fellow until agreement was achieved. Third, the postdoctoral fellow summarized recommendations and determined inclusion of resultant articles in analysis.

This descriptive or narrative approach was taken because of the relatively small number of studies and the high amount of variability in form and detail across the articles.

Results

Most of the 21 qualitative studies included a description of current issues, review of relevant literature, and an intervention recommendation (*n* = 5) or a more comprehensive intervention description (*n* = 9). Other articles included reviews of the literature with a "call to action" (*n* = 3), case studies (*n* = 2), report of teacher interviews (*n* = 1), or a testimonial (*n* = 1).

Authors recommended, described, or studied a variety of interventions, including SWPBS or classroom-wide positive behavior support (PBS; *n* = 4), response to intervention (*n* = 2), social skills training (*n* = 1), and other interventions designed to consist of culturally and contextually relevant pedagogy but with various titles: culturally responsive discipline (*n* = 3), culturally responsive classroom management (*n* = 2), culturally responsive management strategies (*n* = 1), multicultural classroom management (*n* = 1), cultural synchronization (*n* =1), and the constructive discipline model (*n* = 1).

Students in these studies were referenced as African American students (*n* = 10), specifically African American males, or populations described as "students of color," students who are "ethnically or racially diverse," "culturally linguistically diverse" students, "minorities," "non-Euro-Americans," or students who "differ from the mainstream" (*n* = 7). Some researchers described their populations primarily as students living in urban environments (*n* = 4) and/or students from low-income families (*n* = 3).

Authors defined culture in a variety of ways. Some authors referred to culture as meaning *culturally and linguistically diverse* (*n* = 4). Other authors used culture as a synonym for "students of color" or "minority" (*n* = 5) or interchangeably with demographic descriptors such as "urban" (*n* = 2) or "low income" (*n* = 1). Still others referred to culture as pertaining to some or all of the following constructs: race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, language, background, and/or sexual orientation (*n* = 5). Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) defined culture broadly to encompass the "sum total ways of living developed by a group of human beings to satisfy biological and psychological needs" (p. 237). Similarly, McIntyre (1996) defined culture as commonalities in cognitive patterns that exist within a group. Some authors omitted a definition of culture, explicitly or implicitly (*n* = 4).

Problem behaviors were described as noncompliant, unmanageable, conduct-disordered, delinquent, aggressive, dangerous, and violent. Most authors argued that problem behavior is a reaction to or reflection of cultural misinterpretation (*n* = 12). Authors presented a wide range of suggested techniques (see Table 1).

Review of Qualitative Literature

Because of its participatory and experiential nature, qualitative research efforts produce interpretative themes that serve as general considerations or guides to practice. Across the 21 qualitative articles reviewed, the focus was on distinct cultural groups—most often, African Americans—rather than culture as defined in a broad sense. For example, many articles noted discrepancies in disciplinary practices across racial groups, particularly for African American children and, more specifically, for African American males. To summarize the qualitative literature, we provide recommendations from each study and categorize these recommendations (as several studies offer similar suggestions). First, we review recommendations that pertain to school personnel interactions with students. Then, we describe recommendations made regarding educator preparation. Finally, suggestions for school personnel interactions with parents, families, and communities are summarized (see Table 1).

Consider classroom context. Numerous authors suggested that the classroom context or ecology should be considered to improve outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008; Green, 2005; Monroe, 2005a; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Utley, Kozleski, Smith, & Draper, 2002). Cartledge and colleagues (2008) recommended analyzing the classroom context to help reduce inappropriate identification of minority students as needing special education for behavioral disorders. Several authors gave specific suggestions about what to look for in considering classroom context (Table 1).

Preparation of educators. Authors of a number of the articles reviewed emphasized the importance of preservice preparation as a means of improving how culture and context are viewed, and the above classroom recommendations might be implemented. Scholars contended that educators sometimes misinterpret behavior in one setting that is culturally or contextually appropriate in another (Monroe, 2005a). When these misinterpretations are associated with poorly defined expectations, lack of disciplinary consistency, and the use of punitive practices, students from the nondominant culture tend to suffer both academically and socially. When confronted by these misinterpretations, teachers report that their training has not prepared them for managing a classroom with culturally diverse learners (Bullara, 1993). A number of competencies for preservice and inservice professional development emerge across the studies (see Table 1).

Articles on PBS or SWPBS. Four qualitative articles specifically addressed teaching strategies based on PBS for parents (Markey, Markey, Quant, Santelli, & Turnbull,

Table 1. Recommendations for Culturally Responsive Behavior Management, Qualitative Literature

Recommendation, examples	Citations
Classroom context	
Increase positive interactions • Greet students daily • Ask about students' outside interests • Show a caring attitude • Listen to students • Be warmly demanding (being positive, while also being direct and assertive)	Brown, 2004; Bullara, 1993; Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Cartledge, Tillman & Johnson, 2001; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Grossman, 1991; Jones, Caravaca, Ciznek, Horner, & Vincent, 2006; Markey, Markey, Quant, Santelli, & Turnbull, 2002; McIntyre, 1996; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Townsend, 2000; Utley, Kozleski, Smith, & Draper, 2002; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004
Decrease negative interactions • Decrease reactive and punitive responses with students • Decrease reprimands, suspensions, and expulsions	Brown, 2004; Bullara, 1993; Cartledge et al., 2001; Cartledge et al., 2008; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Monroe, 2005b; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Utley et al., 2002; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2003
Engage in equitable interactions • Consequences should be planned, reasonable, and delivered consistently for all students	Brown, 2004; Bullara, 1993; Cartledge et al., 2001; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Grossman, 1991; Jones et al., 2006; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2004
Set explicit, high expectations	Brown, 2004; Bullara, 1993; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Jones et al., 2006; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2004
Teach social skills • Explicitly teach "code switching" • Teach student self-management • Use peer tutoring, mentoring	Cartledge et al., 2001; Cartledge et al., 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Jones et al., 2006; Markey et al., 2002; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Townsend, 2000; Utley et al., 2002
Include students' culture and language • Suggestions ranged from *learning about* students' home culture to *matching* students' home culture (e.g., "cultural synchronicity," Monroe, 2005a, 2005b)	Brown, 2004; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Cartledge et al., 2008; Cartledge et al., 2001; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Markey et al., 2002; McIntyre, 1996; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Townsend, 2000; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2004
Use effective instruction • Increase active engagement (e.g., direct instruction, peer tutoring) • Evidence based practices • Function-based behavior supports	Brown, 2004; Cartledge et al., 2001; Cartledge et al., 2008; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Grossman, 1991; McIntyre, 1996; Monroe, 2005a; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Townsend, 2000; Utley et al., 2002
Teacher Preparation	
Understand that behavior is culturally and contextually learned and influenced • Recognize that behavior is appropriate in different settings • Avoid punishing students for behavior that may be appropriate in other settings	Cartledge et al., 2008; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Grossman, 1991; McIntyre, 1996; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Monroe, 2005a, 2005b; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Townsend, 2000; Utley et al., 2002; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2004
Self-assess the cultural, contextual features and implications of instructional and behavioral decisions • Self-assess one's own biases, culture, and how they affect instruction	Cartledge et al., 2001; Cartledge et al., 2008; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Grossman, 1991; Monroe, 2005a; Townsend, 2000; Utley et al., 2002; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005, Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2004
Learn about students' cultures, families • Cross-cultural immersion in effective instructional environments • Weinstein et al. (2004) listed questions that teachers can ask to find out more about students' families, learning histories	Brown, 2004; Cartledge et al., 2001; Cartledge et al., 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Jones et al., 2006; McIntyre, 1996; Monroe, 2005a, 2005b; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Townsend, 2000; Utley et al., 2002; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2004
Include families and communities as resources • Families may reinforce social skills at home • Families, community members should help determine school expectations	Cartledge et al., 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green, 2005; Markey et al., 2002; Monroe, 2005a; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Utley et al., 2002; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2003
Use data to evaluate outcomes • Student, teacher, program-level data	Cartledge et al., 2008; Green, 2005; Jones et al., 2006; Markey et al., 2002; Townsend, 2000

2002) or using SWPBS in culturally and linguistically diverse settings (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Jones et al., 2006; Utley et al., 2002). Markey and colleagues (2002) described a program for helping parents of children with disabilities living in New Orleans learn positive and function-based strategies for working with their children. Modifications to the program were made to support the low-income families from diverse backgrounds, and included providing transportation and food and increasing the amount of interaction and discussion among families during training.

Cartledge and Kourea (2008) reviewed the literature pertaining to effective behavioral interventions for students from diverse backgrounds, and recommended using SWPBS which could be made "culturally relevant by appealing to students' heritage or cultural background" (p. 364). Jones and colleagues (2006) conducted a case study in which SWPBS was implemented in a New Mexico elementary school where 99% of students were Native American. At first, measures of SWPBS implementation and outcomes were not adequate, and students were not aware of the expectations or engaged in the reinforcement system. School staff consulted the school's native language teacher to find culturally relevant ways to engage students. They attributed an increase in positive school behaviors to the establishment of an environment that was "predictable, consistent, and positive" (p. 116) by clearly defining, teaching, and reinforcing positive school-wide expectations in culturally relevant ways (e.g., relating school-wide expectations to cultural expectations, teaching these through stories about prominent Native American individuals, using tokens with the names and images of these individuals). The descriptive findings by Jones and colleagues supported earlier work by Bullara (1993), who argued that problem behavior in the classroom is associated with two main factors: (a) unclear and poorly defined expectations and (b) lack of disciplinary consistency for those students who do not meet such unclear expectations. Furthermore, he noted that school professionals reported lacking the skills to manage their class effectively and impartially, and resorted to the use of repeated punitive disciplinary practices. As a result, students engaged in aggressive behaviors toward others, escaped or avoided the punitive environment (i.e., leaving class, truancy), committed acts of vandalism, and/or made negative self-statements.

Utley and colleagues (2002) recommended that when family and community members helped create school-wide expectations, videos of actual behavior in different school settings should be shown, and "strong facilitation is needed to make sure that the voices of families and students are not overshadowed by professionals" (p. 203). In addition, they suggested that multiple sources of information should be used to evaluate the successes and needs of students within a school-wide system.

Review of Quantitative Literature

Of the seven quantitative studies resulting from the search, most involved record reviews (n = 4) or quantitative case studies (n = 2), with one experimental single subject design.

Data supporting overrepresentation. In the first of two studies, Gregory and Weinstein (2008) measured defiance through the office discipline referral data for students attending an urban high school (n = 2882) and found African Americans were overrepresented in the referral data, and a few teachers were referring the majority of participants. In their second study, African American students (n = 30) who were most frequently referred by teachers (442 office discipline referrals) were more likely to be defiant when they perceived their teacher to have untrustworthy authority. Gregory and Weinstein also found that a small number of teachers tended to refer a majority of students for perceived rule-violating behavior. The authors concluded that these teachers reacted to behaviors in the classroom that were norm-violating rather than maladaptive and suggested that the teachers were "causing" the behaviors for which referrals were based. Furthermore, authors noted that because students complied with teachers who conveyed trust and legitimacy, teachers should adopt an "authoritative" teaching style, which is warm but demanding. In support of this suggestion, Utley and colleagues (2002) noted that behavioral expectations must be predictable and clearly presented while being inclusive and respectful to families, students, and staff.

Kaufman and colleagues (2010) reviewed office discipline referrals for students (n = 1,668) with at least one prior referral attending a school in a densely populated city district in the Northeast. The authors found that African American students were referred significantly more than Hispanic and White students, and boys were referred significantly more than girls, particularly for aggressive and delinquent behavior.

Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) reviewed the office discipline referral data for students in an urban middle school (n = 610). The main referral reasons were insubordination and noncompliance. Authors discovered that referred students were overwhelmingly African American and male and stressed the need for preventive efforts. In a follow-up, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) reviewed district-wide office discipline referral data for 19 urban middle schools (students, n = 11,001) in a large Midwestern city. Fifty-six percent of participants were African American. They found that African American students were referred more frequently to the office for discipline and suspended disproportionately more than their Caucasian classmates. On further review of office discipline referral data for disruptive behavior, authors concluded that racial and gender differences remain when controlling for socioeconomic status and that African Americans were most often referred for more subjective reasons. However, no study to date has successfully explained this pattern.

Data supporting the effectiveness of SWPBS with diverse groups. In a case study involving a Chicago high school (n = 1,800), Bohanon and colleagues (2006) defined problem behavior as "discipline problems," which were measured through office referral data. SWPBS was implemented in the school, and a decrease in office referrals was observed. Authors further note that fewer students needed Tier 2 and 3 supports a year after SWPBS was implemented.

McCurdy, Mannella, and Eldridge (2003) conducted a quantitative case study of the effect of SWPBS on students' ($n \approx 500$) problem behavior in ethnically and racially diverse inner city elementary school. Fighting and disruption were of most interest and concern. Authors noted significant reductions in office discipline referrals and student assaults after the implementation of SWPBS. From the year prior to implementing SWPBS to the second year of implementation, office discipline referrals decreased by 46%. It should be noted, however, that for the two aforementioned studies (i.e., Bohanon et al, 2006; McCurdy et al., 2003) data were not disaggregated by "culture." Therefore further study is needed to determine if equitable outcomes were attained by culture in evaluating the effectiveness of SWPBS practices.

Lo and Cartledge (2006) conducted a single subject study with four African American boys in elementary school to determine if functional behavior assessment and behavior intervention plans (tier 3) were effective to help students reduce off-task behavior in class. The function of the inappropriate behavior for these students was adult attention. The intervention included teaching students to recruit adult attention appropriately, reinforcing students when they did, and teaching students to self-monitor their use of this strategy. Experimental control was established and the intervention was effective for all participants in reducing off-task behavior to levels near or below peer off-task behavior while increasing students' use of appropriate attention recruiting.

Across the seven quantitative articles, the need to reorganize behavior management in schools, particularly to meet the needs of students from nondominant cultural groups, becomes readily apparent. Although the body of quantitative studies is relatively small, the results support and reinforce the general results from the qualitative and descriptive literature base.

Discussion

The purpose of this literature review was to identify research-based studies that (a) considered culture when studying behavior, classroom management, and/or schoolwide discipline strategies and practices and (b) to use this information to enhance implementation of SWPBS. In general and not surprisingly, we found that relatively little empirical research has been conducted with this focus on culture and behavior management. However, when the qualitative and quantitative results are examined as a whole, a number of general themes emerge. First, cultural factors and learning history are important, and influence academic and social success of students, especially, for students and families from African American and Hispanic cultures and contexts. Second, strategies are noted for using cultural and contextual information to improve decision making. Third, establishing these strategies begins with an emphasis in the preservice and inservice professional experiences of new and veteran educators. Fourth, the general framework of SWPBS represents a promising approach for improving the instructional practices of educators and academic and social outcomes for all students. Finally, the interplay among culture, behavior, and classroom management has not been studied systematically and experimentally, and more empirical work in this area is needed.

Culture is difficult to define, schools are becoming increasingly diverse, and educators are continuing to refine their disciplinary practices to reflect fairness and consistency. These efforts cannot be of greater importance in a time when all children, specifically children in subgroups that suffer marginalization and discrepant treatment, are in need of behavioral supports. The research in this area includes information on disciplinary discrepancies among cultural groups, suggestions for possible interventions, and a few case studies exploring the application of these suggestions in practice. Little experimental research exists that tests strategies for improving behavioral outcomes specifically for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, and for guiding practitioners, policy makers, and personnel preparers.

Although additional research is indicated (e.g., Robinson, 2010), suggestions can be made regarding how stakeholders might enhance their educational practices to be more culturally and contextually relevant for all students, but especially for students who present diverse linguistic and cultural learning histories. Attention to cultural and contextual factors may lead to empowerment of students, as well as increased academic achievement and improved social interactions among students in educational settings (Grossman, 1991). Culturally and contextually relevant practice may increase efficiency within the classroom (i.e., management of behavior inside the classroom vs. through office discipline referrals; Monroe, 2005b). Furthermore, considering cultural and contextual factors in prereferral processes may ameliorate the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education (Klingner et al., 2005). In sum, it will likely be useful in future research to further examine culture and cultural competence, as well as their relevance to SWPBS practices. These ideas are explored in greater detail in Sugai et al. (2011).

Limitations

The results, conclusions, and implications from this review should be considered within the context of certain limitations. First, the "narrative" review methodology is vulnerable to confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) in which reviewer interpretations and conclusions could be influenced by expectations and the process of interreviewer discussions and agreements. However, a more typical and systematic review was not possible because of the range of methodologies used across studies and the dearth of experimental research. Second, the decisions that were made relative to standardization of search terms, selection criteria, and selection processes may have resulted in search outputs that excluded relevant studies, included less relevant publications, and/or overemphasized a given subcategory of research. In addition, we recognize that we did not include certain search terms and topics in the review based on the scope of the study. Therefore, although we believe our search results are representative, they may not be comprehensive of what is actually available.

Third, because the number of studies that focuses specifically on students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse is limited (Artiles, Trent, & Kuan, 1997), a broader search criterion for student characteristics was used. This decision is associated with search results representing students with a broader range of cultural characteristics than is typically considered under culturally diverse. Thus, extensions of these findings to specific or broad cultural groups should be made with these considerations in mind.

Finally, this review was conducted from a specific perspective and definition of culture. The principles of a behavior-analytic perspective were emphasized, with a focus on context or environment, behavioral actions, and relationships between environment and action. As such, our definition of culture was based on individual and collective learning histories, and the context in which that learning history was established and expressed.

Implications

Given the purpose, definitions, and methodology of this review, our review of the literature resulted in several commonly suggested techniques for practitioners, policy makers, personnel preparers, and researchers. These techniques inform recommendations described within the areas of assessment, intervention, and evaluation below. Interestingly, when taken as a whole, these recommendations mirror features associated with the current emphasis on "response-to-intervention," which include (a) universal screening, (b) continuous progress monitoring, (c) data-based decision making, (d) assessment of implementation integrity, (e) continuum of evidence-based practices, and (f) expert local implementation capacity and fluency (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2009.)

Assessment

Several studies emphasize the importance of assessing the ecology of an educational setting to inform instruction and the design of behavioral interventions (e.g., Cartledge et al., 2008; Green, 2005; Grossman, 1991; McIntyre, 1996; Monroe 2005a). This broad suggestion may involve simply assessing whether students value individual or group-oriented activities, or respond to cooperative or competitive environments (Grossman, 1991). In addition, assessing student culture and values may assist in selecting reinforcers that students find most meaningful (Jones et al., 2006). These reinforcers, when applied appropriately, can promote positive student behavior, paramount in intervention efforts. Assessment of the classroom setting should include teacher interactions with students, such as the frequency and distribution of positive interactions, establishment of explicit expectations, and evidence of consistent consequences when expectations are met or not met. Green (2005) recommends numerous possible assessments for tertiary levels of support when working with culturally and linguistically diverse students: "parent and teacher interviews, observations, alternative assessment, informal assessment, curriculum-based assessment, behavior rating scales, student interviews, evaluation of evidence-based pupil-specific interventions, and examination of cultural components that may impact the assessment" (p. 39).

Intervention

Commonly suggested techniques were focused on strengthening intervention supports within culturally and contextually relevant practice, and included stating behavioral expectations clearly and positively (e.g., Brown, 2004; Bullara, 1993; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005), praising or rewarding displays of positive behaviors (e.g., Bullara, 1993), explicitly teaching and positively reinforcing displays of social skills (e.g., Cartledge et al., 2008; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Rivera & Rodgers-Adkinson, 1997), and involving families and community members in the teaching, modeling, and reinforcing of positive, expected behavior whenever possible (e.g., Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Green 2005; Jones et al., 2006; Markey et al., 2002; Weinstein et al., 2003). These suggested techniques are explicitly consistent with SWPBS practices. Additional strategies included teaching and modeling respect (Brown, 2004; Utley et al., 2002; Weinstein et al., 2003) and using students' language (e.g., first language spoken; Weinstein et al., 2003) or "linguistic and colloquial student expressions" (Monroe & Obidah, 2004, p. 263) to provide behavioral supports. These latter strategies are implicitly consistent with SWPBS practices.

Evaluation

Suggested techniques for evaluating culturally and contextually relevant practice primarily fell under two categories: self-reflection and evaluation of data. Several studies advocated for frequent teacher and staff self-assessment or self-reflection of biases, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to student culture (Jones et al., 2006; Townsend, 2000; Utley et al., 2002), which might provide context for any discrepancies noticed in the frequent review of behavioral data (e.g., office discipline referrals). Reviewing behavioral data for trends or inconsistencies aligned with culture or other contextual factors is encouraged within many qualitative studies (e.g., Monroe, 2005a; Townsend, 2000; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004) in addition to one quantitative study (Kaufman et al., 2010). Evaluation should result in modification of current practice to provide culturally and contextually relevant supports for students.

From this literature, it is possible to organize a set of guidelines for improving the cultural and contextual relevance of implementation of SWPBS practices and systems around three areas: general, classroom, and teacher preparation. General guidelines include (a) adopt a response-to-intervention perspective; (b) assess local behavior patterns, values, expectations, and norms; (c) monitor progress continuously; (d) establish familiar, predictable, and consistent local context; (e) teach, model, and acknowledge local expectations; and (f) consider educational and social validity of decisions and priorities from the perspective of student, family, teacher, school, and community.

Classroom educator guidelines include the following: (a) define behavior from contextual perspective; (b) increase positive interactions; (c) decrease negative interactions; (d) engage in equitable interactions; (e) set explicit, realistic, high, and challenging expectations; (f) teach social skills; (g) learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions; and (h) use effective instructional practices and curricula.

Professional development guidelines include the following: (a) adopt a perspective that student behavior is culturally and contextually learned and influenced, (b) self-assess or self-reflect the cultural and contextual features and implications of their instructional and behavioral decisions, (c) assess and consider their students' cultures, (d) view and involve parents as resources, and (e) use data to evaluate outcomes.

In sum, recommendations for culturally and contextually relevant practice remain general in nature as more research is needed to discern specific techniques for providing the most effective supports (Robinson, 2010). For now, practitioners, policy makers, personnel preparers, and researchers are encouraged to consider the cultural and contextual learning histories of students, families, and communities in designing and implementing behavioral assessment, intervention, and evaluation. More specifically, we suggest that educators define, describe, justify, interpret, and teach what they do and see from the perspective of their own culture or learning history, and in the context of the learning histories of the individuals and groups with whom they interact and are responsible. This perspective requires serious attention to individual differences, local expectations, and norms of families and the larger neighborhood and community. In doing so, we hope better decisions will be made about what is "positive versus negative," "equitable versus equal," "appropriate versus inappropriate," "norm following versus violating," and "culturally relevant versus irrelevant" and ultimately what will be best for maximizing the academic and social competence of children and youth and for propelling teaching and learning toward culturally and contextually relevant behavioral supports.

Authors' Note

Opinions expressed herein are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education, and such endorsements should not be inferred.

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