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What is This?

A Contextual Consideration of Culture and School-Wide Positive Behavior Support

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Abstract

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have historically experienced poor outcomes related to academic achievement, special education, school discipline and climate, and juvenile justice. Differences between home and school cultures likely contribute to these outcomes. Evidence-based practices in schools are promoted to improve the academic and social outcomes for all students, but attention must be paid to cultural factors when implementing practices. School-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) is a systems approach to promoting evidence-based practices to affect important social and academic outcomes for all students. The purpose of this article is to consider culture within the implementation context of SWPBS. To achieve this purpose, we adopt and describe a contextual perspective on culture that is based on behavioral theory and principles of behavior analysis, and incorporate findings from a review of the literature related to culture and student behavior.

Keywords

positive behavior supports, applied behavior analysis, culture, context

To elucidate the relationship between culture and evidence-based practice in promoting positive behavioral outcomes, Fallon, O'Keeffe, and Sugai (2011) reviewed the literature on culture and student behavior. They found little empirical research that considered culture and behavior. They concluded that "culture" has been difficult to define and described variably depending on the purpose and perspective (e.g., legal, political, educational). They noted that the need for an operational definition for culture was particularly important because of changing school demographics, increased demands for improved academic achievement, and greater concerns about school safety and student problem behavior, especially in the context of discrepant outcomes for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Although the literature base is variable with respect to the empirical nature of the research evidence, Fallon et al. (2011) concluded that general recommendations could be made about preferred and promising culturally and contextually relevant strategies for behavior and classroom management and discipline in schools. The current article was developed from the conclusions of the literature review (Fallon et al., 2011) that a concrete and actionable definition of culture could guide future research and implementations of SWPBS. Given the importance of improving educational practices with students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the purposes of this article are to define culture in a practical way, elucidate

miscommunications that result from cultural misunderstanding based on this definition, and make suggestions for implementing school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) in culturally and contextually relevant ways.

A Rationale for Considering Culture in Context

Public schools in the United States are becoming increasingly culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse. By the year 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that individuals who have historically been considered the "minority" (i.e., American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander) will be more than 50% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In 2002–2003, approximately 4 million students (8% of the school population) received services for learning English (Hoffman, Sable, Naum, & Gray, 2005). Many students from different racial and linguistic groups experienced significantly disparate outcomes compared to their

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peers, such as lower achievement gains, more reactive and exclusionary disciplinary consequences, higher special education placement rates, and higher dropout rates.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress has documented a persistent achievement gap between Black and White students in math and reading for many years (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). In 2007, Black students scored an average of 26 points (on a scale of 500) lower than White students on the math test and 27 points lower on the reading test. Students who were learning English in U.S. schools (English language learners) also experienced considerably poorer academic achievement than their monolingual peers (Zehler et al., 2003). Because lower academic achievement is linked with numerous negative outcomes for adults, such as incarceration, poorer health outcomes, and poverty (Rudd, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004; Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2006; Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004), ensuring high academic achievement for all students is one of our nation's highest priorities.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience disproportionate disciplinary consequences compared to White students. For example, Black students are 2 to 4 times more likely to be referred to the office than White students (Kaufman et al., 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). In addition, Black students tend to receive more severe punishments and higher rates of suspension and expulsion than White students (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Exclusionary discipline practices necessarily result in time out of class, which is typically time away from instruction. An office discipline referral alone is estimated to take a student out of class for 20 to 40 minutes at a time (Scott & Barrett, 2004). If a student is given an in-school detention or out-of-school suspension, time out of class could be hours or days. In the end, less time in class is associated with less instruction and less learning, which contributes to poorer outcomes for those students.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are disproportionately referred, placed, and classified in different special education categories compared with White students (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Hosp and Reschly, 2003; National Research Council [NRC], 2002). In addition, studies have shown that culturally and linguistically diverse students have been placed in more restrictive special education settings than White students placed in similar disability categories (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Because outcomes for students in special education are typically considerably lower than outcomes for peers without disabilities, inappropriately identifying students for special education services is problematic (NRC, 2002). Students who are culturally and linguistically diverse are also underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. Students from all cultural

and linguistic backgrounds are equally represented in low-incidence disabilities (e.g., blind, deaf, orthopedic impairment), so racial and cultural biases are presumed to contribute to disproportionality in other categories (NRC, 2002).

High school dropout rates are also disproportionate among different racial and cultural groups. For example, in 2007, the dropout rates were highest for Hispanic (21.4%), followed by Native American (19.3%) and Black (8.4%), students compared with White (5.3%) students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2009). Since considerable financial ramifications are associated with achieving a high school diploma, decreasing high school dropout rates, increasing high school completion rates for all students, and decreasing the gap for students who are Hispanic, Native American, and Black become increasingly important.

Although a body of promising and confirmed evidence-based practices is available, the statistics paint a troubling picture of low achievement gains, differential referral and placement patterns, and negative school and community outcomes for groups of students with common cultural or demographic characteristics. To reverse these trends, a careful consideration of culture must be included in our implementation of evidence-based practices, like those included within the framework of SWPBS.

Definition of Culture

Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010) noted that in the research literature examining disproportionality of students from historically underserved groups in special education, "attention to culture . . . is discontinuous, ranging from simplistic to sophisticated perspectives" (p. 288). These authors noted that researchers have not adequately specified how culture plays a role in disproportionality. The following discussion includes a specific definition of culture that may be helpful in understanding disproportionality and improving outcomes for all students.

In the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, culture is defined as the "pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior; customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" (retrieved from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture). However, each social science discipline elaborates on this dictionary definition to reflect its individual priority, interest, and conceptual framework. In Table 1, sample definitions have been selected to illustrate how culture has been defined by various social science disciplines. A common theme is that culture is characterized by what individuals "do" (e.g., "organized practices," "patterns relative to behavior," "products of human action," "learned behavior," "habits," "activities," "behavior"). A few of these definitions highlight what the individual "believes" (e.g., "customs," "social forms," "thought," "language," "values," "perspectives,"

Table 1. Cultural Definitions and Discipline

Source	Discipline	Definition
Dictionary		Pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior; customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group[a]
Researcher/social scientist	Philosopher	Organized practices, artifacts, and narratives; membership within a group in relation to race, ethnicity, primordialism (Cahoone, 1988)
	Sociologist	"Culture . . . consists in those patterns relative to behavior and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes" (Parsons, 1949, p. 8)
	Psychologist	"A culture is a configuration of learned behaviors and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society." (Linton, 1945, p. 32)
	Anthropologist	"The manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the product of human activities as determined by these habits." (Boas, 1966, p. 60)
	Educator	Sum total ways of living developed by a group of human beings to satisfy biological and psychological needs [and] includes patterns of thought, behavior, language, customs, institutions, and material objects[2] (Monroe, 2005b)
		"[Culture] is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies. . . . People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways." (Banks, 1989)

[a]"Culture." 2008. In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved October 1, 2009, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hacker.

"interpretations"). "Culture" seems to be formed or present when a group of individuals is characterized by a common set of actions and beliefs, and these actions and beliefs are transmitted or learned across generations, which, in turn, contributes to the maintenance of the cultural group. That is, across the social sciences, "culture" is defined broadly to encompass shared characteristics and/or behavior within a group context that serves to maintain the identity of the group.

The APA Division 17 Education and Training Committee's (Sue et al., 1982) seminal position paper on cultural competence further reinforces the characterization of culture. Culturally competent counselors are encouraged to be competent in the following broad categories: (a) attitudes/beliefs component: understanding of one's own cultural conditioning that affects personal beliefs, values and attitudes, as well as having positive attitudes and beliefs about others' cultures; (b) knowledge component: understanding and knowledge of the worldviews of individuals and groups with cultures different from your own; (c) skills component: use of culturally appropriate intervention/communication skills (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1982).

An examination of culture from within an education context reveals a wide range of considered demographic variables (e.g., race, ethnicity, economic status, age, disability, oral language, sexual orientation, and geographic location), each of which describes individuals who collectively represent and delineate a particular "cultural" group (e.g., African American, urban poor, Hispanic English-language learners, suburban middle class). Across these cultural subcontexts, actions and beliefs are used to differentiate each cultural group from another. As a result, descriptors have evolved to emphasize the notion of difference, for example, culturally "different," "diverse," or "distinct," or "multicultural." In addition, individuals who come to understand the actions and beliefs of a culture and themselves act according to the norms of that culture are characterized as being culturally "competent," "appropriate," "proficient," "sensitive," "responsive," and/or "congruent."

To conclude, we acknowledge that the above summary of definitions, descriptors, and variables is cursory; however, the importance of context, actions, and beliefs is common across disciplines. In the next section, we further narrow our examination of culture by adopting an approach that emphasizes a behavior analytic, research-based, and school-oriented perspective. We acknowledge that by adopting any specific perspective, we will not satisfy the requirements, assumptions, and principles of other conceptual and theoretical perspectives. Our goal, however, is to establish a working understanding of culture that improves our ability to assess and teach in applied ways that maximize academic and social behavior competence of all students, and is considerate of the characteristics that define a given individual or cultural group.

Adopting a Behavior Analytic Understanding and Perspective

Many theories or "ways of knowing" have been developed and used to describe, understand, explain, and improve the human condition (i.e., humanistic, developmental, ecological, sociological, psychoeducational, behavioral, cognitive).

Each of these theoretical perspectives has established assumptions and working tenets that serve as tools and guides for how the world is described, analyzed, explained, and manipulated. For the purposes of our examination of culture, we adopted a behavioral perspective in large part because SWPBS is rooted in a behavior analytic tradition (Sugai & Horner, 2002), and because applied behavior analysis offers a parsimonious, empirical basis for understanding, explaining, and improving human behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Biglan, 1995; Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007; Skinner, 1953; Wolery, Bailey, & Sugai, 1988).

Behavior analysis has its roots in behavioral theory, which, in general, emphasizes the importance of three basic principles: (a) human behavior is learned, (b) human behavior is lawful in its relation with environment, and (c) human behavior is modifiable through environmental adjustments (Skinner, 1953; Wolery et al., 1988). Applied behavior analysis extends behavioral theory by increasing attention to (a) solving socially important problems in applied settings, (b) continuous and direct measurement of observable behavior, and (c) understanding the contingent relationship between behavior occurrences and environmental factors (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968; Cooper et al., 2007; Wolery et al., 1988).

Given this applied behavior analytic foundation, we propose that culture is defined as *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*. In this definition, "overt" behaviors include physical behaviors ranging from subtle social cues such as physical distance and facial expressions to more obvious physical actions, such as waving or shaking hands. "Verbal" behaviors include spoken language, verbal rules, beliefs, values, expectations, and text-related behaviors such as reading and writing (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001; Skinner, 1957). Behavior analytic nomenclature and principles are fundamental requisites to this definition of culture, and are defined and described in a cultural context in Table 2.

The implications and utility of a behavior analytic approach to defining and describing culture are significant to guiding how schools make decisions about teaching and learning. In particular, an explicit assumption is that shared learning history defines a culture, and differences across learning histories uniquely differentiate cultural groups or communities (Biglan, 1995; Hayes & Toarmino, 1995). From a behavior analytic perspective, individuals within a culture respond similarly to social prompts and cues (antecedent

stimuli) because they are associated with specific and common acknowledgements and outcomes (consequence stimuli). As a group norm, these practices become cultural customs (stimulus control), which are passed to other and new members of the group across a variety of social contexts (response and stimulus generalization), and most importantly serve to sustain the group as a whole (meta-contingency; Glenn, 2004). These customs may take the form of verbal statements, beliefs, or values that prompt culturally specific actions (rule-governed behavior). These group norms, customs, and beliefs, for example, are reflected in groups' language, music, foods, social events, etc. (Skinner, 1984).

Flexibility should be used in interpreting and applying this behavior analytic perspective of culture to education. We acknowledge that individuals may have much in common culturally in some situations, but not in others. This assumption corresponds to ideas of different levels of culture (e.g., macro cultures and micro cultures) and different levels of participation in any particular culture (Banks, 2007). Individuals whose behaviors come under stimulus control for certain social situations are more likely to display a behavior that has resulted in reinforcement in the past in that situation, but are less likely to display that behavior in a different situation if it has been followed by social disapproval (Skinner, 1984). For example, individuals may use a particular dialect at home with their family, but use another dialect at work. In line with Banks' (2007) explanation of macro and micro cultures, cultural groups can be defined on a small level (e.g., a classroom of students, a family, a neighborhood), to a large level (e.g., a state, a country, a religion). Clearly these cultures overlap such that individuals may respond to stimuli in ways that their classmates do in the school context, but the same individuals may respond differently to religious symbols. The extent to which a person has shared a common learning history with others in a group, such that a stimulus (e.g., person, object, symbol, word) occasions a similar action maintained by a common reinforcer, that person would be considered to be a member of a cultural group. So a classroom of students may share a distinct culture, but most of their cultural practices will likely be attributed to the learning history of larger groups, such as a language communities, religious communities, and/or national communities.

In addition, we suggest that even though people may share common learning histories, when an individual's learning history is considered as a whole, each individual is unique (Skinner, 1971). This assumption suggests each individual's expression of certain "cultural" practices or beliefs will be affected or shaped by his or her history of collective experiences; therefore generalizations from a group to an individual can be problematic and can lead to positive and negative stereotyping (Hayes & Toarmino, 1995). The definition of cultural "groups" should be

Table 2. Definitions of ABA Terminology and Principles in Cultural Context

ABA term/principle	Definition	Cultural context
Behavior	An observable or measurable action	A spoken word, a walk, a gesture
Behavioral topography	The physical dimensions of a behavior: what it looks, sounds, feels like (etc).	The spoken words *bonjour, hello* and *hola* all sound different
Behavioral function	The consequence that maintains a behavior	The spoken words *bonjour, hello*, and *hola* are all greetings (maintained by similar social reinforcement)
Reinforcement	Manipulation of consequence events is associated with increased future probability of emission of behavior	A greeting bow is associated with high probability of a reciprocal bow
Contingency	Verifiable or predictable relationship between future probability of emission of behavior and presence or absence of antecedent and/or consequence stimuli	An embarrassing situation is associated with looking away and reduced embarrassment
Stimulus control	Probability of reinforcement if behavior emitted in the presence or absence of specific antecedent stimulus	Parental praise is highly likely if aggressive verbal and physical behavior follows teasing and harassment
Response maintenance	Probability of behavior emission under extinction or more intermittent reinforcement conditions; durability of stimulus control	Continued displays of a clothing custom is observed after parent attention is decreased
Stimulus generalization	Transfer of antecedent stimulus control to untrained stimulus conditions; transfer of stimulus control	Walking behind parents is observed at school as walking behind teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators
Response generalization	Transfer of response stimulus control to untrained behavior variations	Using bowing, handshake, and head nod when greeting parent, teacher, and peer, respectively
Rule governed	Probability of behavior emission is associated with verbal antecedent or rule	Parents say, "That's embarrassing to your family" when student demonstrates academic failure. The student bows head and diverts eyes
Meta-contingency	Multiple interlocking behavioral contingencies are associated with more reinforcement than individual behavior reinforcement	Culture-specific clothing, language, food, etc. are associated with community acknowledgment and safety

considered flexibly, recognizing that large cultural groups may not always predict common individual behavior. For example, "Latino culture" may refer to a large cultural group, within which many different subcultures, languages, and language dialects exist, suggesting different actions and reactions to the same situations. Also, just as all behavior changes in intensity, frequency, and topography over time, cultural behaviors change over time and from individual to individual. This conceptualization of behavior helps to account for cultural differences that may be observed across generations within a given cultural group. Powell (2008) describes this concept further and eloquently in his discussion about "racialization:"

> By racialization, I refer to the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that are both reflective of and simultaneously help to create and maintain racialized outcomes in society. Because racialization is a historical and cultural set of processes, it does not have one meaning. Instead, it is a set of conditions and norms that are constantly evolving and interacting with the socio-political environment,

varying from location to location, as well as throughout different periods in history. (pp. 1–2)

Similarly, in our case, we consider cultural actions and beliefs as important defining features of a group, and acknowledge that these same cultural actions and belief evolve, adapt, and change over time and across settings, sometimes permanently and at other times temporarily.

Ponterotto, Utsey, and Pedersen (2006) added that minority identity development models (e.g., Phinney, 1990) provide a theoretical framework for this process that is compatible with a behavioral perspective. The proposition is that minority group members need to resolve two primary issues or conflicts that result from their status as members of a nondominant group in society: (a) "stereotyping toward their group" and (b) "balancing their cultural value system relative to that offered by the dominant culture." The ultimate goal is for minority youth to "retain their ethnic culture and also adapt to the dominant culture by learning the skills necessary to succeed in the culture" (pp. 62–63).

Finally, because language allows us to assign value arbitrarily (Hayes, Fox, et al., 2001), people may arbitrarily

associate different values with different cultural expressions. For example, in a school setting in which two languages are used for announcements, if students have been taught that things that come "first" are "more important" and one language is always used first in the announcements, students may associate the "first" language as being "more important" and use that language more frequently. Therefore, as described in our literature review (Fallon et al., 2011) and for the purposes of this article, we use the phrase _culturally and contextually relevant_.

> _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 socio-economic rural communities, large urban settings with high population density, or multi-dialect Latino school districts. In the end, the "big" question is whether each student reaps the maximum benefit of their school experience because we have considered the cultural and contextual relevance of how we select, develop, and deliver what is taught.

When considering variables that affect students' academic and social behaviors, the following cultural and contextual features (and interactions among them) may be relevant: ethnicity, exceptionality or disability, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status or class, religion, geographic context (e.g., rural, suburban, urban), immigration status, and nationality. Depending on the individual and local context, one or more of these variables may be more relevant than others. In addition, these variables should be considered at the student, teacher, administrator, family, and community levels, recognizing important interactions among these individuals and groups along the dimensions of identified culture and context.

Given our focus on student academic and behavioral success, we view the "relevance" of the variables that affect the social and academic behaviors of students as an especially important consideration. Relevance is based on the identified context. Local cultures and the specific contexts or settings of each school, its employees, students, families, and communities must be considered in order to successfully choose and implement effective practices. We recognize that certain practices are "effective" for certain outcomes, but we also acknowledge that they must be adjusted for the particular context and participant learning histories. For example, adult attention generally has been found to be a powerful reinforcer that works effectively to strengthen and maintain student behaviors, but the delivery of that attention will be different for a kindergarten student than for an eighth-grade student. For the former, attention is social, public, overt, and interactive. For the middle school student, attention will remain social and interactive, but less often public, more covert, and developmentally appropriate in nature.

Understanding Cultural Miscommunication and Promoting Positive Understanding

Using a behavior analytic framework for describing and understanding culture also can help us understand cultural miscommunications, or times when individuals with different backgrounds interpret and react to a situation differently than intended. Instead of a focus on labeling an individual as "good" or "bad," the emphasis is on assessing and describing what the individual does in the observed context. Again, this context is defined by physical arrangements, normative rules and expectations, actions of others who are present, etc. This approach also acknowledges that behavioral exchanges or chains, for example, between student and teacher and/or student and student are interactive. That is, the behavior of one individual may become the context antecedent for the behavior of another individual, which, in turn, may be the context consequence for the previous behavior. Recognizing that one person's behavior (e.g., a student's) changes or affects the context for another's behavior (e.g., a teacher's) is important from a behavior analytic perspective of cultural exchanges (Glenn, 2004). Although we recognize that the following scenarios are more subtle and complex than we are presenting, they are used to illustrate how cultural miscommunication or misunderstanding might be described and analyzed from a behavior analytic perspective.

Delpit (2006) describes a situation that illustrates a misunderstanding between teachers and students. A teacher might ask students "Where do the scissors go?" with the expectation that the student will put them in the storage box. Students who put the scissors in the box and meet the teacher's expectation are considered responsible and compliant, and the teacher says "thank you." In this scenario, students have learned that engaging in the expected behavior (putting the scissors in the box) when the teacher provides the request ("Where do scissors go?") is associated with teacher acknowledgement and interaction success. In turn, the teacher has learned that students will comply (put the scissors in the box) when the request is made ("Where do scissors go?"), and the supplies are put away.

The situation, however, becomes more complex with students and teachers with different learning histories, and can result in a variety of misinterpretations or behavior interaction chains. In the previous example, a teacher may use "Where do the scissors go?" and "Put the scissors away" interchangeably, that is, using a question as a direction. When students have limited experience with directions that are in question form, they may respond literally and "incorrectly" (according to the teacher) by saying "scissors don't go, they cut"; "in the box"; or "I don't know." Based on their own learning histories, teachers may respond in ways that are inconsistent with the student's response ("intention" or learning history). Although "in the box, of course" might be the correct and appropriate answer for a student who is thinking, "Why would teacher ask a question for which the answer is obvious?" teachers might construe the response as a "smart-aleck" reply and as disrespect, give the student a verbal reprimand and/or a disciplinary consequence and a visit to the Principal's office.

This example ("where do scissors go?") is only one of a multitude of exchanges that reflect a relationship among cultural learning histories, normative expectations, and context-based influences. From our behavioral perspective, the main lesson is that our understanding or assessments should ask (a) what the student can and cannot do, (b) under what conditions these behaviors have been learned and are likely to occur (or not), (c) what context factors compete as antecedent triggers and consequence maintainers of specific behaviors, and (d) how and what students can be taught to enhance their success across contexts. For example, because school "bells" have a variety of meanings (e.g., start class, end school, tardy warning, intercom announcement, class bus release), across a variety of intended audiences (e.g., all or specific groups of students, individual students, all or some teachers, individual staff members), and take a variety of forms (e.g., bell, chime, buzzer, tone, voice, light), teachers should assess what experiences, knowledge, and behaviors students have had with school bells, and teach the required response if the students do not know it, provide practice opportunities if students know the rule but are not fluent with it, and/or teach the range of responses needed across settings. In addition, from a culturally and contextually relevant perspective, teachers also should adjust their wording and manner of presentation to better match student learning histories and experiences inside and outside of school.

In the SWPBS framework, the general approach is to teach school-wide and classroom expectations in an explicit manner (model, lead, and assess), with contextually relevant behavioral examples, and in the settings or context in which the skills are required. Adjustments are made in wording, specific examples, specific instructional activities (e.g., individual vs. small vs. large group; public vs. private practice and acknowledgements), and performance

feedback (e.g., tangible vs. intangible, public vs. private) to increase the match between instruction and learning history.

School staff (teachers, administrators, paraeducators, support staff, etc.) also should recognize that different forms of behavior can be associated with similar or different outcomes (i.e., function) for students. For example, different ways of walking function to move a student around the school. However, appropriateness may be judged differently from one staff member to another. Walking that might be considered "strolling" by one staff member might be viewed as "strutting" by another, and given a specific context or circumstance and the learning history, each form of walking could be appropriate or inappropriate, for example, in math class versus during a sporting event; during morning recess versus in the Vice Principal's office; in the high school cafeteria versus during third- and fourth-grade lunch. The National Research Council (NRC, 2002) indicates that "perceptions of behavioral appropriateness are colored by cultural expectations" (p. 197). The situation becomes more complex when school staff and family members have similar or different ways of walking around the classroom, school, or community.

Students and teachers at all grade levels must consider learning histories, context requirements, and expectations. For example, there is a tendency at the high school level to assume that students have mastered the "homework" expectation and requirement in earlier grades and are "responsible" for doing homework. Although a school-wide homework policy is in place, the rationale, review, enforcement, and acknowledgement of its implementation can be highly variable. In one high school, the homework policy is implemented variably: (a) *when*—anytime before 3:30 p.m. on Fridays in the math department versus only on Mondays in the English department; when entering the classroom for Mr. Tanaka versus anytime during the class period for Ms. Sanchez; (b) *how*—picked up by teachers at student desk in advance placement physics versus put in individual folders and placed in class period box in music appreciation; (c) *why*—work not completed during chemistry class time versus independent practice from biology lab workbook; and (d) *feedback*—graded and available in individual student file folders on Mondays versus scores available at course website and not returned.

Because some students will (and can) read the homework policy in the handbook or syllabi for a school, department, or individual teacher, or learn the expectation when it is reviewed at the beginning of the semester by an instructor, the policy is considered effective for all students. Some students will "violate" the policy because they would not (or could not) read the policy, have had few successful homework experiences, have a limited range of homework responses, do not find homework completion as important (reinforcing), etc. Although this example may be overly

specified, consideration of cultural and contextual factors (learning history) becomes an important consideration in our interpretation and response to a student's success with school expectations and policies.

In sum, as an implementation framework, SWPBS provides best-practice guidelines for enhancing school climate and classroom management; however, the actual look, feel, and sound of what is and how it is taught varies based on contexts and learning histories of students and staff and family members. This logic is applied across implementation levels, such as developing a formal school-wide acknowledgement system, establishing agreements about minor and major rule violations, enacting decision rules for determining student responsiveness to an intervention, or developing and implementing an individual function-based behavior intervention plan.

Suggestions for SWPBS

Given the behavior analytic perspectives and considerations that we have described, the purpose of the following section is to suggest guidelines for the contextually and culturally relevant implementation of SWPBS. We used the implementation blueprint from the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2010) to structure the presentation of these guidelines.

OSEP Center on PBIS
Implementation Blueprint

Professional development and practice implementation in education has traditionally been limited to periodic, expert-driven, and curriculum-focused inservice events and activities. This mode of implementation tends to result in reduced student benefits, less accurate implementation, and short-term use (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Dean Fixsen and colleagues at the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) suggest that successful and sustained implementation of the most evidence-based practice or innovation is related directly to the extent to which implementing systems possess the formal capacity to maximize sustained implementation fidelity, maintain meaningful outcomes, and continuously regenerate based on dynamic operating conditions (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005).

Based on the NIRN approach, the OSEP Center on PBIS developed a blueprint or framework that emphasizes the establishment of implementation capacity or drivers that are based on the phase of practice implementation: (a) exploration, (b) installation, (c) initial implementation, (d) full implementation, and (e) sustainability and scaling up. More specifically, the implementation process is coordinated and guided by a leadership teaming structure that establishes four capacity drivers: (a) coaching, (b) training or professional development, (c) evaluation, and (d) behavioral content expertise. To support the implementation of these drivers, the team works from a dynamic and data-based action plan that considers long-term funding, political supports, implementation and outcome visibility, and institutionalized policy (OSEP Center on PBIS, 2010).

Outcomes, data, practices, and systems across the multitiered continuum of behavior support. The goal of the SWPBS implementation blueprint is to establish local capacity and infrastructure that gives equal consideration to student outcomes, data for decision making, evidence-based practices, and sustainable support for implementers. These four elements are emphasized throughout the multitiered continuum of behavior support, which also can be used to organize the contextually and culturally relevant implementation of SWPBS. A sample of these suggestions by tier is presented in Table 3. Because the literature base is variable with respect to how culture is defined and limited with respect to the empirical support for effective contextually and culturally relevant practices, we consider these suggestions as being conceptually sound and promising with respect to their potential to enhance student outcomes, data-based decision making, implementation fidelity, and systemic support for implementers.

Conclusion

To maximize the outcomes of the evidence-based practices that are included in the SWPBS framework, schools must implement with fidelity. However, this implementation can be enhanced further by considering the cultural context and learning history of students and family, faculty, and community members. Because SWPBS has behavior analytic foundations, we have proposed that culture is a reflection of 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. Using this definition and perspective, we proposed guidelines to improve SWPBS student outcomes, data-based decision making, evidence-based practices, and implementation supports. Klingner et al. (2005) provide an excellent summary for our conclusions:

> For these reasons, we take the stance that school-wide PBS interventions should be proactive and promote a positive, culturally responsive climate that is conducive to learning by all. Teachers, administrators, and support staff should understand that perceptions of behavioral appropriateness are influenced by cultural expectations, that what is perceived as inappropriate varies across cultures, and that behaviors occur within larger socio-cultural contexts; connect

Table 3. SWPBS Elements and Suggestions for Enhancing Contextual and Cultural Relevance

Elements	Suggestions
Tier 1: Primary prevention	
Outcomes	Identify educationally positive student social expectations and behaviors that have similar meaning, understanding, and acceptability across all students, all faculty and family members, and all school settings
	Operationally define school-wide student social expectations and behaviors in observable and measurable terms
	Translate school-wide social expectations and behaviors into language(s) of students and families
	Review vocabulary, terminology, phrases, etc. for possible inappropriate, conflicting, contradictory, etc. meaning
	Establish high, challenging, achievable expectations for all students that are considerate of contextual and cultural learning histories
Systems	Provide opportunities for faculty members to learn about the cultural norms, values, behaviors, customs, etc. of the community of students and their families
	Ensure that membership of school leadership team is representative of the cultural groups of the school and community
	Operate school leadership team meetings in ways that are appropriate to the language, behavioral learning histories, etc., of its members
	Establish contextually and culturally appropriate agreements about consistency of school-wide and classroom expectations and behaviors
	Integrate social behavior with academic support structures and procedures
	Provide formal system to acknowledge individual, small groups, and/or school-wide staff who implement with sustained fidelity and have students who achieve desired outcomes
	Provide progress feedback and encouragement on student, classroom, grade, and/or school-wide progress to faculty, family, and community members
Practices	Develop lesson plans, posters, practices, activities, etc. so that language, images, messages, etc. are appropriate across cultural groups and school contexts
	Include students, family, and faculty members in the selection and use of positive reinforcers, recognition events, acknowledgements, etc.
	Develop and implement social skills teaching and learning activities that are considerate of the learning histories, cultural norms, and values of family, school, and neighborhood communities
	Establish norm-violating behavior monitoring and correction procedures (discipline) that are culturally and contextually appropriate, valid, and meaningful
Data	Define behavioral measures and indicators in terms that are contextually and culturally appropriate and meaningful
	Develop data summarization, analysis, and presentation procedures that are considerate of cultural and contextual factors and learning histories
	Review data at least weekly to ensure adequate progress, implementation fidelity, equitable and contextually appropriate adaptations, etc.
	Use school-wide and classroomwide screening for students whose behaviors are not responsive to Tier 1 practices, and consider possible contextual and cultural learning history factors
	Review data regularly to identify individual or groups of staff members who require additional support for improved implementation
	Review data regularly to identify classroom and nonclassroom settings that are making adequate progress or need additional support
Tier 2 and 3: Secondary and tertiary prevention[a]	
Outcomes	Assess contextual and cultural appropriateness (terminology, language, meaning, etc.) of individualized and small group behavioral expectations and objectives
	Examine consistency and congruence of terminology, language, meaning, etc. of school, family, and community definition of norm-following and norm-violating behaviors and expectations
	Involve individual students, family, and faculty members in the identification, selection, analysis, modification, etc. of norm-following and norm-violating behaviors and expectations
Systems	Implement person-centered, wraparound process that gives equitable, culturally, and contextually appropriate participation and contribution to individual student and small group decision making and intervention development and implementation
	Ensure that behavior specialists (e.g., special educators, school psychologists and counselors, social workers) have capacity to adapt practices to be contextually and culturally adequate
	Include and involve family and community members who can analyze, interpret, and make suggestions about the communications, behaviors, etc. of individual students and family and faculty members from a contextual and cultural relevance perspective

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Elements	Suggestions
Practices	Use practices that have strong empirical foundation
	Use practices that have been documented as being effective and/or adaptable with individual students and faculty members who have varied contextual and cultural learning histories
	Use practices that can be adapted to the contextual and cultural learning histories of individual students and family and faculty members
	Individualize language, activities, reinforcers, etc. to be considerate of contextual and cultural learning histories of individual students and family and faculty members
Data	Use individual student data to guide selection, adaptation, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based practices
	Collect and review individual student on a formative (e.g., daily, weekly) basis
	Establish data-decision rules that enable early progress evaluation and intervention effectiveness (e.g., "3 consecutive days below criterion")

[a]In addition to Tier 1 suggestions.

with their students in ways that convey respect and caring; explicitly teach rules and expected behaviors within a culture of care; provide a continuum of support; and involve families and the community in positive, mutually supportive ways. (p. 19)

Limitations and Future Directions

This article has outlined the importance of improving outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds, the need for a theoretical basis for understanding culture and cultural difference, definitions of culture from other theoretical backgrounds, a behavioral definition of culture, and recommendations for improving SWPBS implementations by attending to student, family, staff, and community cultures. However, this article is limited in its scope and did not present an exhaustive review of the theoretical literature. In addition, the recommendations found in this article will need to be explored theoretically by other authors and empirically in future research. More specific recommendations may be found in the literature review by Fallon et al. (2011).

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