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TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

Veronica Maria Gorgueiro

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Education Specialist

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Veronica Maria Gorgueiro in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVES ON POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate teachers' perspectives regarding the social validity of the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) model implemented at a middle school and a junior high school. Qualitative data were collected through teacher focus groups and categorized then analyzed in order to summarize teachers' opinions regarding PBS and its' effectiveness. Both qualitative and quantitative results revealed that teachers perceived evidence of social validity in the areas of social appropriateness and social importance of effects. Four factors were also identified as the most influential areas to influence the success of PBS implementation. These included (a) administrative support, (b) consistency and clear expectations, (c) school culture, and (d) social skills and lesson plans. Results regarding social importance and teachers' perceptions of overall effectiveness of PBS showed a lack of conclusive data. Overall outcomes suggest that PBS is perceived by teachers as satisfying two of the three conditions for social validity.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the onset of compulsory education in the 1920's, America's public schools have been faced with many challenges in educating the nation's children. Compulsory schooling necessitated the management of a diverse population of children with varied needs, many of whom had not been in school previously or had been unsuccessful in school and whose attendance was now required (Fagan & Wise, 2000). Public schools continue to face many of the same challenges originally presented with compulsory schooling. Yet, in the twenty-first century the pressures facing public education in America seem to have intensified. Not only are educators today required to meet the needs of a diverse student body, but they are also faced with handling dramatic increases in aggressive and delinquent behaviors in schools throughout the country (Safran & Oswald, 2003).

Issues of safety are also confronted in the schools at unprecedented rates, and antisocial behavior has become the number one reason for student removal from classrooms and schools (Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sprague, 1999). A general lack of social competence in students is evidenced by behaviors such as gang membership, drug use, and physical aggression to name a few (Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993). In more dramatic cases, frequent media coverage of school violence and alarming incidents such as school shootings and high rates of student suicide have awakened the public to the critical nature of behavior management in the schools.

In response to these social and behavioral challenges, many schools have adopted a get-tough approach including the use of punishment-based and exclusionary policies and strategies (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Although well intentioned, these policies are

reactive and punitive in nature, and they tend to be problem focused as they target negative behaviors instead of instilling prosocial skills. These disciplinary measures tend to occur in response to undesirable behavior rather than proactively preventing the occurrence of such behaviors (Smith & Sandhu, 2004).

An increasingly popular alternative to the less effective punitive and reactionary discipline measures is the use of school-wide Positive Behavior Support (PBS), which aims to provide a wide range of universal and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while concurrently preventing problem behavior (Sugai, 2002). Within the PBS framework, the origins of problem behavior are not perceived as existing solely within the individual but are viewed as an interaction between the environment and the child (Jackson & Panyan, 2002). PBS interventions are designed to be proactive and to prevent problem behavior by altering a situation before problems escalate while simultaneously teaching prosocial skills (Carr, et al. 1999).

The PBS program implemented by Brigham Young University's (BYU) Positive Behavior Support Initiative (PBSI) is an example of a school-wide PBS model that aims to teach positive social skills to children, thereby enhancing the learning and teaching environment within a school. Through the implementation of the following four components, this PBS model aimed to create a positive and safe school environment that proactively teaches appropriate behaviors and actively reinforces these skills. These components are (a) environmental alterations, (b) skill instruction, (c) research validated interventions, and (d) systems change (Young, Young, Anderson, & Johnson, 2003). The components of the PBSI closely align with PBS principles in order to facilitate initial change and sustained improvement within a school. The PBSI has implemented school-

wide PBS in two secondary schools (a middle school and a junior high school). This PBS implementation has been in effect at both schools since the fall of 2004.

Norman (2005) was the first to evaluate the social validity of the PBSI and found it to be a “socially valid alternative to traditional discipline methods in meeting schools’ changing behavioral, social, and emotional needs” within these settings (p.5). Social validity is an important aspect of any intervention process. A socially valid intervention or program is one that produces socially significant, socially acceptable, and socially important outcomes (Lane, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). For a PBS program to be socially valid it needs to be comprehensive, durable, and relevant (Sugai et al., 2000). The social validity of a PBS program can be analyzed using various methods, including self-report surveys, interviews, and direct observation (Finn & Sladeczek, 2001; Gresham & Lopez, 1996; Kazdin, 1977). The Norman study utilized the Indicators of School Quality survey (ISQ), a self-report survey measure, to measure the social validity of the PBSI at the elementary school level.

A qualitative pilot study to the current study was also conducted to gain a preliminary measure of the social validity of the PBSI at the secondary school level (Pieper, 2007). The Pieper research investigated whether PBS was producing socially valid changes based on teachers’ opinions on an open-ended paper survey. The results of the Pieper research indicated preliminary evidence of social validity and also identified some strengths and weaknesses of PBS perceived by teachers. Using ISQ results Pieper outlined general areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction identified by teachers; however, she suggested there was a need for more in-depth qualitative analysis of social validity.

The current research provides further qualitative investigation of teachers' perspectives on the social validity of PBS in these secondary schools. This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives of PBS through the use of teacher focus groups. This study addressed the questions of what teachers' perspectives on PBS are, and if they feel the PBS is an effective and worthwhile model for social skill instruction in secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning and teaching occur best in school climates that are positive, safe, orderly and courteous (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Disruptive, defiant, and violent behaviors decrease the effectiveness of learning and teaching for everyone involved (Sugai & Horner, 2001). PBS is proposed as an alternative method to traditional school discipline models in response to the challenges facing public schools. Teacher's perceptions of PBS as an intervention model are important in determining its' success and impact in improving learning and teaching environments.

Context and Need for School-wide Positive Behavior Support

Today schools are facing increasing difficulty in providing positive, safe, and effective learning and teaching environments for all students (Smith & Sandhu, 2004). Sugai and Horner (2001, p.1), outlined some of the challenges facing contemporary schools:

1. General lack of discipline, including blatant disrespect and insubordination.
2. Increasing school violence. Examples of this violence include fighting and assaults that occur on school grounds.
3. Over reliance on punishment-based, exclusionary programming such as the use of office discipline referrals, detention, suspensions, and expulsions.
4. Lack of fluency with specialized behavioral practices. Educators who are unfamiliar with procedures such as functional behavioral assessment,

behavior intervention planning and teaching prosocial skills characterize this lack of fluency.

5. Disenfranchisement of families and communities.

In addition to the challenges outlined by Sugai and Horner (2001), American schools also face the pressures of school reform instituted by the Federal Department of Education, Congress, state and local government, and individual schools. Since the passage of various Federal initiatives that call for instructional excellence, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2000) and IDEIA (2005), schools have been asked to meet national Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) test score requirements while also increasing the integration of students with special and diverse needs.

While teachers face enormous pressures to produce adequate figures in student achievement test scores, they are also faced with challenging disciplinary situations. In a presentation outlining the PBS model, Sugai (2002) shared disciplinary statistics from one school district in order to explain the need for positive behavior management in schools across the nation. At the beginning of the school year, one elementary school in this district had 31% of entering 6th graders reading at fluency levels significantly below grade level. An intermediate/senior high school with 880 students reported over 5,100 office discipline referrals in one academic year. One middle school counselor reported spending nearly 15% of his day “counseling” staff members who felt helpless & defenseless in their classrooms because of a lack of discipline and support.

School Discipline

During most of its thirty-six year existence, the Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Towards the Public Schools has identified “lack of discipline” as one of the

most serious problems facing the nation's educational system. American teenagers also reported safety issues as the top problem at their schools (Gallup, 2005). Bear (1998) pointed out that the American public continues to support two traditional educational goals concerning school discipline: schools should develop self-discipline among children, and schools should use externally imposed disciplinary measures when children fail to exhibit self-discipline. It is clear that although the American public agrees that discipline should be taught in schools, it also believes that current methods of teaching discipline are not working (Harrison, 1998).

Reactive Discipline Measures

As concerns about the intensity of school violence have increased in recent years, many schools have instituted policies designed to prevent or prohibit violent and aggressive acts on school campuses (Smith & Sandhu, 2004). Such policies may include the use of security guards, metal detectors, "zero tolerance" policies resulting in suspension or expulsion for certain behaviors, and profiling students most likely to commit violent acts (Sugai, 2002). The goal of these strategies is to quell deviant behavior. The desired results have not been produced by these response measures. Instead, these strategies have resulted in more negative and hostile school environments (Sugai & Horner, 2001). School discipline policies that include exclusionary policies such as suspensions or expulsions usually do not produce long-lasting behavior change and do not typically create teaching opportunities that promote prosocial behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In addition, the majority of these strategies are reactive because they focus on responding to problem behavior rather than proactively preventing it.

Positive Behavior Management

In contrast to reactionary disciplinary measures, positive approaches to behavior management in schools are proactive, preventive, and solution-driven. Many positive behavioral management strategies work from the perspective of promoting optimal levels of development in order to improve behavior rather than focusing on psychological disease and dysfunction as primary reasons for inappropriate behavior (Smith & Sandhu, 2004).

Numerous sources have advocated for more proactive approaches to school-wide discipline (e.g., Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2001; Office of Special Education Programs, 2002; Sugai & Horner, 2002). A recent report on the prevention of school violence presented by the Office of the US Surgeon General and prepared by the US Department of Health and Human Services (2001) recommended that schools utilize prevention-based strategies that (a) break up contingencies that maintain antisocial behavior networks, (b) increase rates and opportunities for academic success, (c) establish and sustain positive school and classroom climates, and (d) give priority to the agenda of primary prevention (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Positive behavior management has been shown to be an effective alternative to reactionary discipline methods. The current study focuses on teacher perceptions and social validity regarding the behavior management strategy of Positive Behavior Support (PBS). PBS will be described in detail in order for the reader to understand the importance of considering the social validity evidence of this behavior management model.

Positive Behavioral Support (PBS)

With the pressure on schools to decrease school violence and increase accountability for student outcomes, research-validated strategies have become crucial components of school-wide discipline and behavior management (Sugai et al., 2000). Systemic factors such as administrative support, team-based problem solving, and data based decision-making assume important roles in the day-to-day implementation of these strategies (Sugai & Horner, 2002). This expanded view of school-wide discipline has caused behavior analysts to expand their unit of study beyond the individual or small group level to include systems or organized collections of behavior such as schools (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The outcome of this extended analysis has resulted in the evolution of school-wide PBS.

PBS is, a systems approach which enhances the capacity of schools, families, and communities to improve the link between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occurs (OSEP, 2006). PBS focuses on establishing school cultures that support adoption and sustained use of evidence-based practices, in turn creating positive, preventive, predictable, and effective learning environments for all students (Zins & Ponte, 1990). PBS represents a major development in school-wide behavior management, with an emphasis on proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors (OSEP, 2006). School environments that exemplify these characteristics tend to be safer, healthier, and kinder with have enhanced learning and teaching outcomes (Sugai, 2002).

PBS is not limited to one particular group of students but is designed to be implemented on a school-wide basis, applying to all students. Proponents of PBS suggest

that learning and teaching environments must be redesigned on a school-wide level to increase the likelihood of behavioral and academic success (Sugai et al., 2000). Schools that adopt a school-wide PBS approach establish a full continuum of behavior supports, including (a) an emphasis on prevention, (b) increasing intensity of behavioral interventions, and (c) a program of prevention for all students in all settings (Sugai & Horner, 2001). Researchers at the OSEP center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports point to five core elements of an effective school-wide PBS system: (a) Clear and consistent school-wide expectations must be established; (b) The expectations must be taught; (c) Appropriate display of the expectations must be rewarded; (d) Consequences must be given for behavioral infractions; and (e) Behavior data must be collected and used to monitor and change school-wide efforts.

Components of PBS

PBS does not advocate a “one size fits all” approach to behavior management by providing specific practices or curriculum but consists of a more general approach to problem behavior in the schools (Sugai, 2002). PBS is the combination of four key elements:

1. Outcomes: academic and behavior targets that are endorsed and emphasized by students, families, and educators.
2. Practices: interventions and strategies that are evidence-based
3. Data: information that is used to identify status, need for change, and effects of interventions.
4. Systems: Supports that are needed to enable the accurate and durable implementation of the practices of PBS (OSEP, 2008).

First, staff must be able to identify desired student and staff outcomes that are measurable, in order to (a) to decide on effective curricula, (b) to conduct meaningful assessment, (c) to utilize diminishing resources, and most importantly (d) to create a positive school climate (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Second, PBS is based on the sustained use of research-validated practices and curricula that have proven to maximize student achievement and teacher outcomes. PBS schools should resist the temptation to discard these proven practices whenever new initiatives, curricula, or strategies present themselves. New practices should be considered for implementation through proven trustworthiness and effectiveness (Carnine, 1997).

Third, PBS is based on the use of data to guide decision-making (Lewis-Palmer, 1999). Data based decision-making can be applied to most areas of the school system, and should be used to guide the selection of new practices. Data should also be collected to evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of PBS. This data analysis can guide modifications of current practices (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Fourth, PBS considers systems supports as necessary to ensure valued outcomes; data based decision-making and research-validated practices. System supports include a school's organizational working structures, policies, operating routines, resource supports, professional development opportunities, and administrative leadership (Sugai et al., 2000).

Prevention within PBS

Another major component of PBS includes a focus on prevention. This focus on prevention stems from increasingly common reports of problem behaviors in the schools

that include acts of violence among students and towards teachers, theft, bullying, substance abuse to name a few (Smith & Sandhu, 2004). PBS prevention derives from research that purports that these behavioral incidences are best prevented when the entire school or host environment supports and uses evidence-based practices. For example, in a PBS school, behavioral expectations are clearly outlined and taught consistently to students. Once these expectations are clear, educators aim to reward students for following the rules rather than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Research on PBS

Various research studies have focused on the effectiveness and implementation of PBS in the schools. The main findings of this research will be summarized in order to compare previous research to the current implementation of PBS in the PBSI.

The use of archival data such as office discipline referrals or suspensions in order to plan and evaluate PBS in a school has been examined extensively (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000; Wright & Dusek, 1998). These studies show that office referrals are an unobtrusive way to measure student behaviors and are helpful in minimizing time in direct observation and behavior rating scales (Wright & Dusek, 1998). Archival data can also be used to establish a “pre-intervention baseline” and to help determine the most effective place, type, and design of PBS interventions to be used in a school (Skiba et al., 1997). These data can also be used before PBS implementation to determine which schools could benefit most from PBS. It is crucial that archival data are accurate or it can undermine the whole process (Sugai et al., 2000). The use of software packages such as the School-Wide Information System

(SWIS, 2002) can assist schools in collecting accurate data. These archival data can be utilized to assess school readiness for implementation, to plan and design interventions, and to provide pre-and post-intervention data.

Research on school-wide implementation of PBS, has indicated that accessible, reliable, and multiple data sources are essential to effective implementation (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Various studies that have analyzed school-wide implementation of PBS (Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993) offer promising results indicating that studies that utilize multiple measures in their assessment produce more comprehensive evaluations (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee (1997) found that primary prevention should also be extended to non-classroom areas such as hallways, playgrounds and cafeterias, which account for up to 50% of problem behavior areas. Four types of interventions were found to be effective in these settings: active supervision, pre-correction, group contingencies, and social skills training (Colvin et al., 1997). The effects of different combinations of these types of interventions were studied (Lewis & Garrison-Harrell, 1999; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998) and found that the use of PBS in multiple settings has consistently demonstrated positive results and increased generalization across settings (Safran & Oswald, 2003). BYU's PBSI has incorporated many of these components and strategies for in their work with area schools. These approaches were used in the schools which were included in this study.

Research literature also indicates that for PBS to be effective in school settings, school-based teams should be formed who will use data based decision-making in determining effective interventions (Lewis et al., 2000). Although research on PBS is in its early stages, particularly at the secondary school level, the investigations reviewed

strongly support the implementation of school-based PBS. PBS offers schools a promising alternative for identifying problems and implementing interventions. Despite these noteworthy accomplishments, there remain numerous unanswered questions in the literature. The issue of social validity and treatment acceptability, or how staff members, parents, and students perceive and value PBS interventions remains a largely unexplored issue (Safran & Oswald, 2003).

Indicators of School Quality

Because teachers are both the primary implementers of the PBS interventions and also consumers of its outcomes, their perceptions are critically important. Previous measures taken to monitor the impact of PBS in the secondary schools have included the tracking of office discipline referral data and anecdotal data from meetings (Taylor, West, & Smith, 2006). The ISQ survey was created by the Center for the School of the Future at Utah State University as a way for school administrators to measure the success of their efforts in school improvement (Taylor, West, & Smith, 2006). The questions on the ISQ were designed to gauge the perceptions of the school community regarding various characteristics of their schools. The ISQ also assessed the risk and resiliency characteristics of the school and community, which was useful in assessing the social and academic risk of the school.

Previous ISQ data from the schools included in this research indicated the need for a deeper analysis of teacher's perspectives on PBS. The ISQ data showed a slight decrease in school satisfaction in the treatment schools that were implementing PBS in comparison to control schools. While these results could have been influenced by various

aspects of each school, and may not have been directly related to PBS implementation, clarification is needed through further analysis of social validity.

In addition, a discrepancy was found between teachers' perspectives and those of parents, students, and teachers at control schools. The results of the ISQ highlighted this discrepancy, but failed to provide sufficient details to significantly impact PBS implementation. Particularly because the ISQ survey does not directly address the specific experiences and views that impact social validity of PBS, a qualitative analysis of social validity was needed.

Social Validity

An important aspect of any PBS program is the degree of acceptance it receives by those implementing it in the school (Kern & Manz 2004). Implementation of PBS is completed primarily by teachers, administrators, and support staff within a school. The perspectives, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of these people regarding the PBS model will significantly influence the effectiveness of the outcomes and its sustained implementation over time.

Components of Social Validity

One way to measure the acceptance and attitudes of those implementing a PBS program is to consider the social validity evidence of the model. Social validity evidence typically includes information about (a) social significance (Are the goals really what the school wants?); (b) social appropriateness (Are the procedures acceptable?); and (c) social importance of effects [Are the consumers (i.e. teachers, administrators, parents, students) satisfied with all the results?] (Wolf, 1978). Wolf's definition of social validity was recently analyzed within the context of school-based intervention in a book by Lane

and Beebe-Frankenberger (2004). In this text, the authors described social validity as consisting of: (a) social significance of intervention goals, (b) social acceptability of intervention procedures, and (c) social importance of intervention outcomes.

Social significance of school-based interventions should improve the quality of life, social status, or educational experience of the student in some way. The social significance of intervention goals is established through the identification of target behaviors that will provide the student with a more reliable and efficient method of handling the environment (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). For example, within the PBS model implemented by the PBSI team, social significance would be shown if the social skills training ensured that students increased their positive peer relationships or received less office disciplinary referrals. Social significance should be assessed at the conclusion of the intervention in order to establish whether or not the goals produced generalization and maintenance (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004).

Social acceptability of school-based interventions occurs when all involved parties (teachers, parents, students, etc.) agree that the intervention steps are necessary, appropriate, and worth the effort to attain the goal (Gresham, 1998). Other factors related to social acceptability include cost, time commitment, required training and support, and the expected amount of positive impact the intervention will have. Within PBS, strong teacher, student, and parental support of the “Positive Behavior Support Committees” at each school could evidence social acceptability. Social acceptability is usually assessed at the termination of an intervention in order to confirm or refute pre-intervention opinions about the effectiveness of the treatment plan and goals (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004).

Social importance of the effects asks those implementing an intervention in school to estimate the social importance of the outcomes it will produce. For instance, before handing out the lesson plans for a specific social skill that will be taught to students, teachers might be asked for feedback about the appropriateness and need for the specific skill among their students. Social importance also evaluates the degree to which changes are produced in direct relation to the intervention. Habilitative validity may also be present if an intervention is socially important. This means that the intervention will create positive consequences for the student that will last over time (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). For this purpose it is important to assess social importance after the intervention is over in order to: “(a) achieve consensus among parties regarding intervention outcomes, (b) evaluate the extent to which goals are attained, and (c) evaluate consumer satisfaction with long-term outcomes” (p.90).

Sugai et al. (2000) defined social validity in the context of a PBS program and suggested that for the program to be socially valid it must be comprehensive, durable, and relevant. To be comprehensive, a PBS program should affect all significant parts of a students' day; not only the time during school hours, but also before and after school and in both school contexts and other contexts such as the neighborhood, home, and community. The program also needs to be durable; the changes must be long-lasting (Sugai et al., 2000). Lastly, the interventions must be relevant, reducing problem behavior and increasing prosocial behavior, which creates more opportunities for learning.

The Importance of Social Validity

In order to increase the probability of designing interventions that address the goals of parents and teachers and produce important social outcomes, it is important to assess social validity at each level of prevention or intervention (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). When all parties involved in implementation have the opportunity to participate in assessing social validity at the beginning, middle, and end of an intervention, there is a greater likelihood for strong commitment by these parties to continue implementation until the goal is attained and to maintain their efforts to sustain positive changes. For example, if a teacher has committed to the PBS team that they will teach social skills and they know the purpose and potential value of this instruction, they are more likely to continue its' implementation. Yet, if the teacher is unsure of the reasoning behind creating new lesson plans for social skills, his commitment to implementation may be weaker.

Social validity assessment can also determine a school's level of readiness for termination of outside reinforcement (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). Within this PBS model, the secondary schools receive outside reinforcement from the PBSI through professional development training and sporadic reinforcements for participation in levels of PBS interventions. To increase the likelihood of generalization and maintenance, it is essential that outside reinforcements fade once the school has taken on PBS as a natural part of their environment. Assessment of social validity can determine at what stage in the fading process a school or intervention team is functioning.

Social validity research can also evaluate the overall culture or climate of the school in order to identify factors that might affect PBS implementation. The ethnic

make-up, socio-economic status, and gender make-up of a school all play a role in the success of an intervention. Teaching, learning, and discipline styles of the individuals within a school can vary immensely and will all determine the social validity of an intervention (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004).

Perhaps the most compelling reason to analyze the social validity of an intervention like PBS is that, “lack of requisite skills for success are associated with poor short-and long-term life consequences” (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004, p. 92). If school-based interventions aim to produce academic or behavioral changes, and they are not socially valid, the negative consequences may be long lasting for the students. Therefore, if a particular intervention is not socially valid within the environment of a school, the efforts should be refocused to a more appropriate model. And, if the intervention is socially valid, all parties involved should be encouraged to focus on its’ implementation.

Teacher’s Perspectives

One important aspect of social validity is the perspective of those who are directly involved in PBS implementation. The primary persons responsible for this are the teachers. Each level of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary) involves the participation of the teachers, and school-wide measures are almost solely dependent on their support. Research has shown that the majority of teachers have specific academic behavioral expectations that they require of students within their classroom (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). These basic expectations may include following directions, completing assignments etc. Each teacher follows their individual teaching style when implementing these expectations and works within their temperament and behavioral

expectations. The variation between teachers with these methods of implementation will greatly affect their acceptability of an intervention like PBS and their commitment to implementation and sustainability of the intervention.

Because of the important role that teachers and teacher buy-in play in the successful implementation of PBS, it is important to understand teachers' experiences, opinions and beliefs about PBS. While the ISQ was effective in bringing to light a discrepancy in teachers' perspectives regarding PBS as compared to parents, students, and teachers in the control schools, it does not provide adequate information to delve into the reasons behind these statistics. Further analysis of the teachers' perspectives as a representation of social validity is needed.

The quantitative measures of PBS implementation and the ISQ survey represent the beginnings of efforts to analyze the social validity of programs implemented with local schools and PBSI. While these tools may be useful for analyzing implementation in schools, they are not sufficient to answer the questions raised by the previous ISQ data. Qualitative research methods, specifically focus groups, allow for a deeper understanding of educators perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, etc. about PBS in their schools. This information is vital to improve the success of PBS implementation in these schools.

Statement of Problem

Analysis of the (Peiper) 2005 Indicators of School Quality survey data showed that the parents, students, and staff surveyed were more satisfied with PBS than were teachers. In addition, the teachers in PBS schools (treatment schools) were shown to be less satisfied with their schools than were the teachers at the control schools. While these results could be due to various factors, and only a small amount of research has

specifically analyzed the opinions of these teachers (Kerns & Manz, 2004); successful implementation of any intervention PBS is inevitably connected to the implementers' (in this case teachers') perspectives on the social validity of the model (Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). Because these teachers are directly involved in the implementation of PBS, a deeper understanding of their perspectives is necessary.

Statement of Purpose

This study expanded on the current social validity research being conducted on the PBSI in secondary schools. The qualitative nature of the study allowed for further insight into the ideas, opinions, and experiences of teachers regarding the implementation of PBS in their schools. It is expected that the data gathered through this research study will provide a wealth of information about what teachers feel are the strengths and weaknesses of PBS. This knowledge is crucial at informing any necessary changes to future PBS implementation and highlights the most effective components of the model. We anticipate this study not only adds to the credibility of the current social validity research on the PBSI model but also contributes to general research on PBS in the secondary schools.

Through the administration of focus groups with teachers, this study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the opinions, experiences, and ideas of teachers regarding PBS and its implementation in their respective schools. The teachers' perspectives were analyzed as a measure of the social validity of PBS.

Research Questions

The focus groups measured the social validity of PBS based upon teachers' perspectives. The focus group discussions were guided by the following research questions:

1. What were teachers' perceptions/perspectives (ideas, experiences, reflections) on Positive Behavior Support?
2. What were teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of Positive Behavior Support as a model for helping students to develop appropriate social skills?

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were teachers from one middle school (grades six and seven=School A) and one junior high (grades eight and nine=School B) in suburban and rural communities in the western U.S. All teachers at both schools ($n=96$) were invited to participate in focus groups. Teacher recruitment techniques included direct solicitation on an individual and faculty-wide basis and emails and letters directed towards teachers. The teachers were also reinforced for their participation through receiving a ten-dollar gift card to a department store. Of the teachers invited to participate, 31 out of 53 the teachers at School A participated, a total of 58.4%; while 23 of the 43 teachers at School B participated, along with two school counselors, yielding an overall response rate of 58.1%. All data from the two school counselors at School B were incorporated into that of the teachers, in order to protect the confidentiality of these individuals. At School A, participants included 25 females (80.6%) and 6 males (19.3%). At School B, participants included 15 females (60%) and 10 males (40%). The focus group participants at each school included teachers from various subject areas and from both general and special education sectors. Experience with PBS implementation also varied among participants, including teachers with as little as two months to as much as three years of experience implementing PBS at their school.

Setting

Schools A and B are in neighboring communities of the same school district. At the time of this study these schools were the only secondary schools in the district to have implemented the PBS. PBS implementation at both schools began in the fall of the 2004-

2005 school year, with a projection of continued implementation through at least the 2007-2008 school year.

School A is a middle school located in a suburban city with a population of about 16,748 people. There are approximately 1,050 students enrolled and 53 teachers. The ethnic breakdown of the student population at School A is as follows: 86% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian and Pacific Islander, and less than 1% Asian. 39% of students are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch and 8% of students are English-language learners. The students are 52% male and 48% female. This school is currently 77% whole school academically proficient, where 80% is the goal (reference not included to maintain confidentiality of the school; the information we retrieved from the state office of education website).

School B is a junior high school located on the outer edge of a middle-sized city with an approximate population of 25,998 people. It has approximately 845 students enrolled and 43 teachers. The ethnic breakdown of the student population is as follows: 87% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic/Latino, and less than 1% American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander. The students are 51% male and 49% female. A total of 33% of students qualify to receive free or reduced lunch and 8% of students are English-language learners. This school is currently 82% whole school academically proficient, where 80% is the goal (reference not included to maintain confidentiality of the school; the information we retrieved from the state office of education website).

Positive behavior support initiative (PBSI)

The PBSI is training platform and administrative support unit that aides PBS implementation in a rural Utah school district. The PBSI began with PBS implementation

at the elementary level in 2002 and extended into two secondary schools in 2004. This implementation of PBS has been lead by the PBSI team at Brigham Young University (BYU). Grounded on tenants of the positive behavioral management, the PBS model that was instituted included the three levels of prevention and intervention. Table 1 presents the ways in which the PBSI aligns with the strengths of PBS.

The PBSI includes the school-wide implementation of: (a) teaching and learning of specific social skill lessons, (b) reinforcement of these social skills through awarding “praise notes” or other reinforcement, (c) ongoing training for all school staff on positive reinforcement of social skills, (d) school-wide collaboration and involvement in the creation of social skill lessons and a reinforcement system, and (e) regular staff and committee meetings to monitor progress and make necessary changes. Specialized group systems of prevention and tertiary-level individualized systems are also implemented on an as-needed basis. This study focused only on the school-wide implementation of PBS in these schools.

While analysis of the social validity of the PBSI has occurred at the elementary level (Norman, 2005), research on the social validity of PBSI in the secondary schools is just beginning. In a recent study, Pieper (2007) began analysis of teachers’ perspectives on the social validity of PBSI in the secondary schools with the Indicators of School Quality (ISQ) survey and a paper survey, which showed the need for continued social validity research.

Table 1

How the Positive Behavior Support Initiative Aligns with Positive Behavior Support

Positive Behavior Support	Positive Behavior Support Initiative
Skill Instruction (OUTCOMES)	Teach school-wide, non-classroom, and classroom rules explicitly Design social skill lessons in simple steps and teach explicitly
Research Validated Interventions (DATA)	Provide social skills instruction Provide ongoing staff development Ensure data collection and data-based decisions Incorporate functional behavior assessment and positive behavior support plans
Environmental Alterations (PRACTICES)	Seek for and reinforce students' appropriate use of social skills and rules Develop and promote common expectations and language
Systems Change (SYSTEMS)	Address multiple contexts and levels approach Implement team based approach Obtain support from majority of school staff

Adapted and modified from "An analysis of the social validity of the Peaceable Schools project – A positive behavior support model," by J. L. Norman, 2005.

Steps in Research Design

This qualitative research study employed an observational case study design, using focus groups as the primary observational technique. The case study design is described by Eisenhardt (1989) as, “a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (p. 534). This type of research design was appropriate for the assessment of the social validity of schools A and B because of the many factors that affected the culture, climate, and overall environment of each school. The flexibility of a case study to be simple or complex allowed for each school to be analyzed thoroughly (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) proposed six steps for developing an effective case study. The first step suggested by Denzin and Lincoln was to bound the case, or to conceptualize the object of the study. The objects of this study were two secondary schools in a rural Utah school district. The focus of the study was limited to an analysis of the social validity of the PBS model in these secondary schools through teacher focus groups. The second step in an effective case study was to select the phenomena, themes, or issues to study and choose research questions. The research questions in this study were chosen to directly assess the social validity of the PBS model. The focus group questions were then selected based on their ability to answer the research questions of the study. The third step included seeking patterns of data to develop the selected issues or object of study. In following this proposed step, after the focus group data were collected and transcribed, they were coded into patterns that answered the research questions regarding the social validity of PBS in the secondary schools. The fourth step was triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation from the data. The data

collected in the focus groups included both verbal and nonverbal data. The observer took notes regarding nonverbal communication. The verbal data were analyzed and interpreted using the NVivo software program, and nonverbal data contributed anecdotal data to confirm coding patterns. The fifth step to an effective case study was to select alternative interpretations to pursue based on the data. In this study various hypotheses were considered in the analysis and interpretation of both verbal and nonverbal data. The sixth and final step outlined by Denzin and Lincoln for the creation of an effective case study was to develop assertions of generalization about the case. After a careful analysis of the focus group data, the generalizability of the study was determined.

Data Collection

The measure of data collection for this study consisted of the use of focus groups in order to answer the research questions and further analyze the social validity of the PBSI school-wide intervention. Lane and Beebe-Frankenberger (2004) described interviews, direct observation, and social comparison techniques as effective measures of social validity (Gresham & Lopez, 1996). Focus groups are a qualitative research method situated between participant observation and an in-depth interview (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups consisted of semi-structured discussions between small groups of people representing a specific target audience, in this case the teachers in two secondary schools with a PBS model in place. The proposed goals of a focus group are to allow for a free exchange of ideas (Edmunds, 2000).

Focus groups consisting of teachers (and two school counselors) were held at each participating school. Teachers at each respective school were organized into focus groups based on their availability before or after school or during their preparation periods. Each

focus group was facilitated by the primary researcher and observed by another researcher who operated the tape recorder and observed the nonverbal communication of focus group participants such as facial expressions and body language. The focus group questions are attached in Appendix A. The selected focus group questions were designed to address the research questions directly, allowing further insight into the social validity evidence of PBS.

Procedures

Permission to conduct the teacher focus groups was obtained from the school district and from the administration at each school in the fall of 2006. Institution Review Board (IRB) approval from BYU was also obtained. Teachers were then asked to participate based on their availability and the availability of the primary researcher and observer who conducted the focus groups. Personal invitations to participate were extended to all teachers in a general faculty meeting, through electronic mail, and by the primary researcher in person.

Time slots for focus groups were presented at these times and the teachers had the option of signing up for a time slot that was (a) before school, (b) during their preparation period, or (c) after school. When a total of six or more teachers signed up for a time slot a focus group was established. The teachers were notified of their focus group time slot by email and in person as soon as a time and date were established; they were also reminded by email of their focus group two days in advance. The teachers were also emailed a copy of the focus group questions two days before their focus group so that they would have time to consider their answers to them and more fully express their thoughts regarding the PBS model.

The focus groups ranged in time from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. The seven focus groups held at school A and five focus groups held at school B took place between October 2006 and January 2007. They consisted of two to eight teachers each, with a total of 58 teachers participating (32 at school A, and 26 at school B). There was an average of five teachers per focus group at each school. At the end of each focus group, the teachers were each given a ten-dollar gift card.

Correlation between Focus Group and Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study. These questions addressed teachers' perspectives on PBS and its' effectiveness as a model for social skill instruction. The focus group discussion questions correlated directly to these research questions.

Research Question One

The first two focus group questions correlated directly with the first research question of the study: What are teachers' perceptions (ideas, experiences, reflections) on Positive Behavior Support? By exploring teachers' ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of PBS, these questions also addressed the teachers' perceptions, perspectives, and reflections of the overall model. The first of these two focus group questions considered strengths of the PBS model: What do you think is a strength of Positive Behavior Support? Please give an example of how this part of PBS is important to you. The second focus group question relating directly to research question one addressed suggestions for improvement: What aspect of Positive Behavior Support (i.e. praise notes, social skills lessons, consistent school-wide rules, or other) would you recommend improving for the future? How would you recommend improving this aspect?

Research Question Two

Focus group questions three and four were correlated with the second research question of the study: What are teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of Positive Behavior Support as a model for helping students to develop appropriate social skills? These questions specifically addressed teachers' opinions regarding the effectiveness of the PBS model. This measure of perceived effectiveness aimed to capture the essence of the teachers' ratings of the social validity of the PBS model, including its' perceived social significance, appropriateness, and importance at the schools. Teachers answered focus group question three: How is Positive Behavior Support beneficial to your school? Please explain or give an example. The effectiveness of PBS was addressed in focus group question four: How effective do you feel Positive Behavior Support has been?

The fifth focus group question provided an opportunity for the focus group participants to voice any ideas, questions, or comments that may not have been covered by the other four questions. Focus group question five was an open-ended query: What else would you like to tell BYU or the PBSI team about Positive Behavior Support? These questions served as guidelines for the discussion in the focus groups, but the primary researcher and observer were also open to impromptu sub-questions or topics brought up by the participants. Because all of the focus groups were tape recorded, all comments made by teachers were transcribed and analyzed. The focus group observer, a graduate student, was also present at each focus group to take notes regarding the nonverbal communications of the focus group participants. These data served as anecdotal support for the concrete data analysis. It should also be noted that both the primary researcher and observer may have been seen briefly by participants at each

school previous to their focus group, but they were most likely not familiar with the primary researchers other through brief encounters on a limited basis.

Data Analysis

Once the focus groups were completed the data from the recorded discussions were transcribed. The focus group transcriptions were then reviewed extensively in order to identify potential themes and patterns in the teachers' comments. The transcription data were then coded and analyzed using the *NVivo* software program, which aides in the organization and analysis of qualitative data. The focus group transcriptions were coded qualitatively into free nodes, tree nodes, and cases. Both qualitative and quantitative results of the node and case coding process are provided in the results section of this manuscript.

Each node is representative of a particular pattern or theme that emerged from the focus group data. Free nodes were formed first as a way to differentiate applicable data to the focus group discussion questions, or those directly relating to the strengths, weaknesses, benefits, overall effectiveness, and suggestions for improvement. These free node data were then further analyzed into specific categories or tree nodes. Both the free and tree nodes were generated from the combined feedback of teachers at both schools. The cases were then identified individually for each school. From the tree node data, specific instances identified by teachers at each school were categorized into cases. For example, under the strengths free node and the school culture tree node, focus groups at School A identified two cases as being a part of their school culture, e.g., accountability and praise. At School B, the School Culture tree node broke down into three cases, namely teacher positivity, praise notes, and the integration of the school's mascot with

PBS principles. The strengths free node for School A is broken down into tree nodes and cases in Figure 1 to provide the reader with an example of this process.

Free Nodes

Based upon the review of the transcriptions from all twelve focus groups, five broad categories or free nodes were formed in order to categorize teachers' answers to the focus group discussion questions and their correlation to the research questions of this study. Major patterns that were consistently discussed by participants across all twelve focus groups were selected as free nodes. Five broad free nodes were created based on the broad analysis of the focus group transcription using NVivo. These five free nodes consisted of: strengths, weaknesses, benefits, overall effectiveness, and suggestions for improvement.

In the free node coding phase, all comments from both schools were coded into one of these five areas, without regard for the specific topic to which the participant was referring. For example, a comment regarding increased administrative support ("I just feel like it is more focused now and that we have more of their support and that the kids can see that support from the principal and not just the teachers") and a comment about the use of praise notes ("I think the praise note system is a real strength") would both be coded under the strengths free node. Once this broad coding phase was complete a second level of coding began. The five free nodes were created to correlate directly with the answers to the focus group questions that aimed to answer each research question. Table 2 depicts how each free node correlates with one or more of the focus group discussion questions.

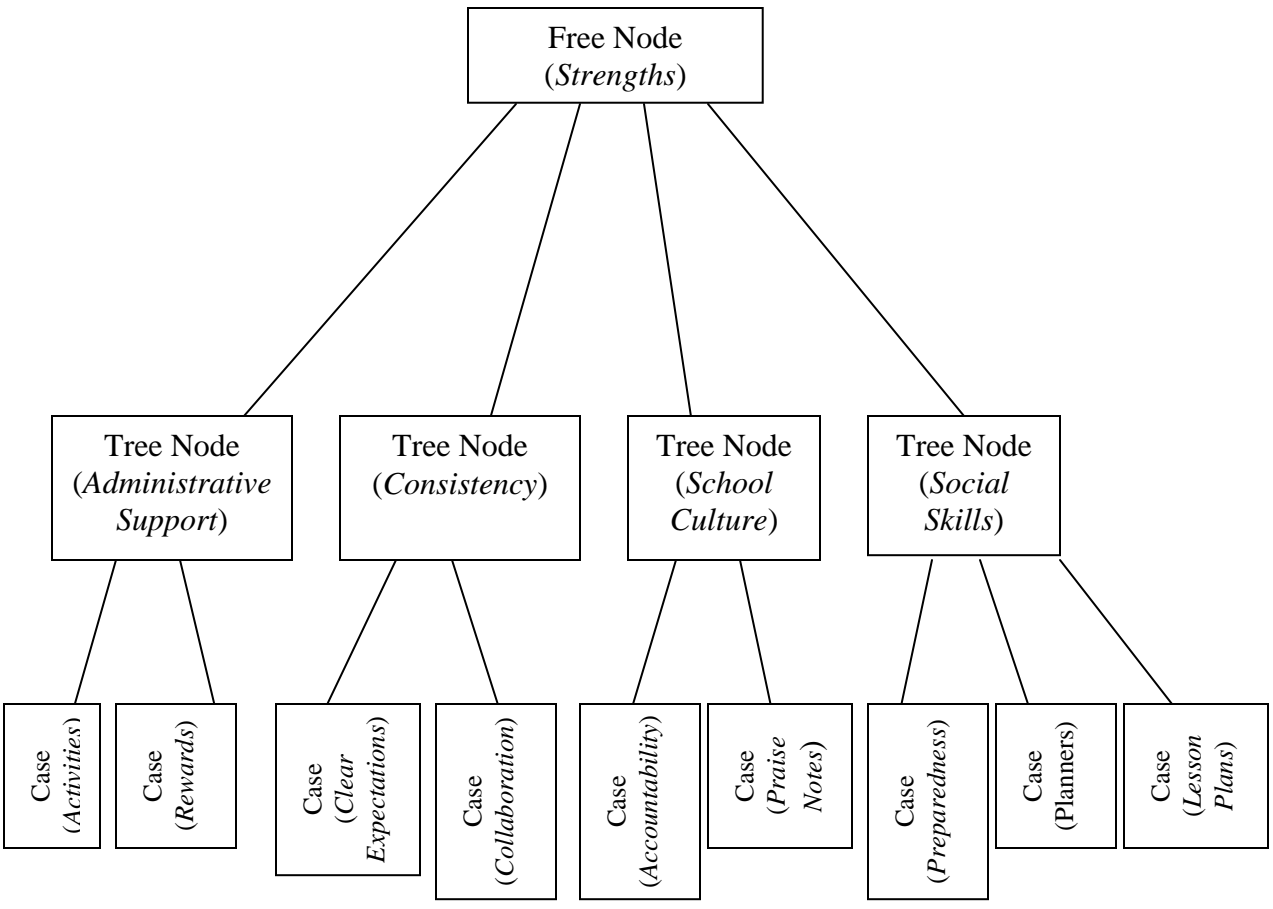


Figure 1. Coding process (school A strengths example)

Table 2

Relationship between Focus Group Discussion Questions and Free Nodes

Focus Group Discussion Question	Correlating Free Node
1. What do you think is a strength of Positive Behavior Support? Please give an example of how this part of PBS is important to you.	Strengths
2. What aspect of Positive Behavior Support (i.e. praise notes, social skills lessons, consistent school-wide rules, or other) would you recommend improving for the future? How would you recommend improving this aspect?	Weaknesses
3. How is Positive Behavior Support beneficial to your school? Please explain or give an example.	Benefits
4. How effective do you feel Positive Behavior Support has been?	Overall Effectiveness
5. What else would you like to tell BYU or the PBSI team about Positive Behavior Support?	Suggestions for Improvement

Tree Nodes

Through a secondary analysis of the focus group transcriptions, the free node categories were broken down into tree nodes. Tree nodes were established with the purpose of providing more depth and specificity on teachers' opinions regarding the PBS model and the respective evidence for social validity. Like the free nodes, the tree nodes were formed based on the combined responses of teachers at both schools and are the most generalizable and important results produced in the coding process. The tree nodes allowed for not only the categorization of themes in teachers' responses, but the actual identification of what they saw as the specific strengths, weaknesses, benefits, and overall effectiveness of the model as well as their suggestions for improvement.

In order for a tree node to be established, at least seven of the twelve focus groups must have mentioned a topic in relation to a specific free node with at least four of the seven focus groups being from School A and at least three from School B. Therefore, if a certain element of a free node was mentioned by at least 58% of all focus groups, it became a tree node. The strengths free node is broken down into tree nodes in Figure 1 to provide the reader with an example of this process.

Cases

Once tree nodes were formed, the coding process became more school-specific. Each tree node was broken down into sub-topics, or cases based on the comments made by participants at each school. These cases were created based on unique factors that each school identified as components of the tree nodes. For a case to be created, the majority of focus groups at a school must have identified a topic. For School A at least four of the seven groups (57%) must have identified a specific element of a tree node for it to

become a case. For School B at least three of the five focus groups (60%) must have identified a topic for it to be a case. Cases were identified by a separate analysis of the tree nodes for Schools A and B. The separation of the schools was deemed appropriate because of the variety of sub-topics brought up by the participants at each school.

RESULTS

Several factors provide information that help to answer the study's research questions. Research question number one, which addressed teacher's perspectives (ideas, opinions) of PBS, can be answered by considering the tree nodes administrative support, consistency and clear expectations, school culture, and social skills and lesson plans. Research question two addressed teachers' views on the effectiveness of PBS as a method of social skill instruction, was answered most directly by a close analysis of the social skills and lesson plans tree node and the respective cases. Both research questions led directly to a description of the social validity evidence of PBS among teachers.

The social validity model of PBS at these two schools was assessed through analysis of the focus group data. Teachers' perceptions indicated both support and caution towards the implementation of the model. The following section outlines teachers' responses and their connection to the research questions. Implications for social validity are also described.

Research Question One

The first research question was, "What are teachers' perceptions/perspectives (ideas, experiences, reflections) on Positive Behavior Support?" In order to answer this question, a review of each of the four main tree nodes, namely administrative support, consistency and clear expectations, school culture, and social skills and lesson plans and their cases were reviewed.

Administrative Support

While there were unique factors at each school that led administrative support to having different meanings based on the respective contexts of the participating schools,

the basic components of the administrative support at each school included the PBSI's involvement and the involvement of the principal and assistant principal at each school. These two administrative entities were involved in all aspects of PBS implementation at both schools at the initiation of the model, including the introduction of the model to school staff, the training of school staff on PBS procedures, the establishment of school-wide expectations, providing reinforcement systems for students and staff, and the collection and reporting of data. Administrative Support was identified by teachers as being a critical factor in the implementation of PBS. It was identified as both a strength and a weakness by 75% of focus groups. Suggestions for improvement were also offered in regards to administrative support by 67% of focus groups.

School A. At School A, 71% of focus groups saw administrative support as a strength of PBS and 86% of focus groups identified the activities and rewards provided by administration as particularly important to their school. Teachers expressed that they enjoyed when positive teacher and student behaviors were reinforced and rewarded through the use of prizes, recognition or direct praise. One teacher noted, "The gifts and prizes were great for the students and for the teachers...whether it be teacher drawings or student drawings I think everybody's had fun with it."

In addition, in 86% of focus groups at School A participants identified aspects of its' administrative support as weaknesses. Specifically, 57% of focus groups perceived administrative consistency and follow-through as an area of weakness, and 71% of focus groups saw teacher training as an area of weakness.

A lack of consistent and standardized discipline procedures among staff and administration was perceived by teachers at School A. This lack of consistency was in the

process of being addressed as the focus groups took place through a collaborative process of creating standardized disciplinary procedures. One teacher reflected on the importance of standardizing school-wide rules:

We are going through each infraction and then deciding as a group what the consequence should be...and that is really great because for instance, chewing gum has never been a big thing for me. If I see them chewing gum I ask them to throw it out but I don't mark it on their citizenship. But for another teacher who has a system that is something that they really feel strongly about. So we have to decide as a school and whatever the school decides then I have to change my system and really crack down on the gum chewers. I think it will be great and I think it will help our school-wide discipline.

Teacher training was also perceived by teachers as an area of weakness within the administrative support component of PBS. Specifically, teachers remarked that more consistent and on-going teacher training was necessary. Particularly for new teachers and teachers new to the school, teachers saw this on-going training as essential. One teacher noted that new teachers needed to be involved:

I also think that one concern is having a way of bringing new teachers on board...I'm not sure there is anything in place that...someone sits down with them and says... 'This is how this is done. This is how long we have been doing it. These are the benefits. This is how it works.'

Focus groups also mentioned that all teachers would enjoy consistent "refresher courses" on specific aspects of PBS and its' importance and implementation at their school.

Teacher training was also identified by 86% of focus groups at School A as an area of

suggested improvement. Teachers suggested consistent and on-going teacher training, particularly for new teachers and teachers new to the school.

Suggestions for improvement were also offered in regards to social skill lesson reminders by administration by 57% of focus groups. Participants mentioned that they would like to receive regular reminders regarding the weekly social skills lessons. For instance, the school principal or a member of the school PBS team could use the intercom to remind teachers on Tuesday evening about teaching the lesson on Wednesday morning. One teacher explained, “We are not getting reminders or emails or anything, and so it’s like, ‘Oh, it’s Wednesday morning, I’ve got ten thousand things to do...and I’ve got to get a social skill lesson together.” Another teacher suggested the use of a weekly reminder on paper in the teachers’ boxes the day before the social skills lesson, and then a morning announcement on the morning the lesson is to be taught. She mentioned that the morning announcement would also inform students of the lesson and hold teachers accountable for its’ teaching.

School B. At School B 80% of focus groups discussed administrative support as a strength, while only 60% noted it as weakness and offered suggestions for improvement. School B identified no specific elements of strength or cases within the administrative support tree node, indicating that less than 60% of focus groups at School B perceived any one component of their administrative support as being particularly effective in implementing the model. In relation to weaknesses of administrative support, participants from 60% of School B focus groups identified data collection and reports as an area of weakness and an area of suggested improvement. Teachers saw a disconnect between the use of data to track office discipline referrals and the connection between the social skills

being taught. More specifically, the teachers reported that the tracking of office discipline referrals (ODRs) and comparing them to praise note data (which represented student's use of social skills) was flawed:

In the past they have used the research of office referrals and I don't think that is effective research...because I don't think kids get sent to the office because they don't raise their hands, and I don't think kids sent to the office because [they don't do] the social skills we are teaching...the kids that I send to the office...have social skills problems, but it's not raising their hands or listening.

Summary of administrative support. In regards to administrative support, groups of teachers at both Schools A and B perceived more weaknesses and suggestions for improvement than strengths and benefits. In fact, no benefits to either school were cited by teachers as stemming from administrative support and only one strength was identified by School A (activities and rewards). In the consistency and clear expectations and the school culture tree nodes, increased teacher and student accountability were mentioned in direct connection with both school administrators and the PBSI's involvement. The planners at School A and the positive school mascot at School B were also mentioned in the school culture and consistency and clear expectations tree nodes as being strengths that were influenced by administrative support.

In direct relation to research question number one, the results of this study indicated that teachers' perceptions of the administrative support at their schools were more negative than positive. These results suggested that administrative support continues to be a highly influential factor for teachers' perceptions of PBS at the secondary school level. There appears to be a connection between administrative support

and consistency and clear expectations, an important area identified by focus group participants.

Consistency and Clear Expectations

Teachers mentioned collaboration and the establishment of clear and consistent school-wide expectations throughout the strength and benefits free nodes. This collaboration occurred between the school staff, particularly the PBS school-based team, school administration, and the PBSI research team. School-wide expectations were formed through this collaboration and with the input of the school staff. Of the twelve total focus groups, 83% perceived consistency in school-wide expectations as a strength of the PBS model and 92% mentioned consistency and clear expectations for student behavior as benefits to their school.

School A. At School A both collaboration among the school-based personnel and consistent and clear expectations for student behavior were mentioned as specific areas of strength of the PBS model. Of the seven teacher focus groups at School A, 86% saw the collaborative process as a particular strength and 71% saw clear expectations for student behavior as a specific strength.

Teachers shared that both the collaboration between the PBSI and school staff and the clear expectations set contributed directly to a sense of consistency in the school. They also mentioned that the clear expectations allowed everyone in the school (teachers, students, parents, etc.) to understand the school-wide rules and expectations:

One thing that I like about [the PBS model] is that I do not have to teach it every hour of every day...because it is school-wide and there's consistent

reinforcement...[the students] are hearing it from a variety of sources...so I don't feel like I am the only one trying to teach them.

The school staff were also in the process of deciding what disciplinary action should be taken for specific behaviors, i.e., should tardies be handled in the classroom or by administration. The development of standardized discipline procedures was the focus of several teacher comments:

In the past we have had big-time consistency problems....and when something should have been done nothing happened and the kids came back and the only thing that had been reinforced was their bad behavior. So now where we are saying... 'if this is the problem the teacher handles it, if this is the problem we involve the parent.' I think that is going to make a big difference in the positive-ness. Because if it is not consistent, it is not positive.

In relation to benefits to the school, 57% of focus groups at School A perceived standardized school-wide rules as a result of the PBS model being implemented at their school. Teachers perceived that the standardization of positive behavior expectations had contributed directly to a sense of stability, clarity, and consistency within the school. One teacher, who was new to the school, spoke of the positive differences she had noticed at School A:

I have never been in a school [where] everybody did it the same way...and that has been really nice...no matter who you talk to we are all doing the same kind-of things. Here everybody is like reminding each other and, 'oh lets do this this way,' ...it is just a total difference than other places.

School B. Common language, rules, and procedures were identified as specific benefits by 80% of focus groups at this school. Teachers perceived that the standardization of rules and procedures had created a common language among students and staff and directly contributed to consistency and clear expectations within the school. The process of accreditation had also recently been completed through a collaborative effort between the PBSI and school staff. Therefore, teachers perceived the standardized rules that had been created as catalysts for consistency throughout the school. One teacher expressed a positive change they had seen since the implementation of PBS:

I think what it is doing is something that probably one-fourth of the faculty has tried to get from the whole time that I have been here for fifteen years, is more uniformity in how we do things as a school. Our belief system, our rules, I see more of a conformity.

Summary of consistency and clear expectations. In relation to research question one, these results indicated that teachers perceived the establishment of consistency and clear expectations as a strength of PBS. Specifically, teachers noted common language, rules, and procedures and collaboration as positive changes in their schools. The consistency and clear expectations established with PBS implementation were also perceived by teachers as benefits to their school and strengths of the PBS model. The connection between the school culture tree node and research question one is summarized below.

School Culture

Teachers perceived school culture to be an important factor in the successful implementation of PBS. School culture was defined by teachers as the overall feeling of

the school. Various factors seemed to affect the culture of a school, including perceived administrative attitudes, the use of teacher input, student accountability, and consistency in expectations. In the school culture tree node, teachers perceived that all of these factors had combined to form more positive school cultures.

School culture was mentioned by teachers as a component of the strengths and benefits free nodes. A total of 92% of focus groups perceived school culture as a strength of PBS at their school and improved school culture was cited as a benefit by 100% of focus groups. Overall, this Tree Node had the most frequent positive comments by teachers at both schools. Only one focus group at School B did not mention school culture as a strength, and all of the focus groups saw improved school culture as a benefit.

School A. At School A, accountability and praise notes were identified as the main contributors to the improved school culture. In regards to accountability, many teachers' comments were connected to the presence of the school principal and his or her effect on the "feeling" or "tone" of the school. For example, one teacher mentioned how the principal would start the day by getting on the intercom and reminding the students to 'be nice to each other' and would even challenge them to 'say something nice to one another' that day. Teachers noted that when the administration provided this type of example, teachers and students were positively influenced and the culture of the school improved.

Teachers noted that increased accountability for student and teacher behavior through the use of praise notes and other school-wide reinforcement systems had contributed to a more positive feeling in their school. They noticed that they were more

likely to be aware of their own behavior and the students' positive behavior than in the past. One teacher explained how his perspective on student behavior has changed:

I think it gives the school a more elementary feel, which is good. I think it gives it more of an innocent type feel...I think it's given the school more accountability for student behaviors so they have lived up to the expectations. The expectations were set fairly high and the students are meeting those expectations.

Closely related to the topic of accountability, the use of praise notes was specifically mentioned as effective reinforcement and motivator of positive student behavior:

Teacher 1: Something that I have noticed that is different this year...I have got a positive reward system and so everything they do right they get rewarded and so they don't want to do bad things as often because they want the [praise notes].

Teacher 2: The kids look forward to them so much and to getting their name called and being able to go down and spin the wheel.

Preparedness was also identified as benefits that contributed to the improved school culture at School A. Comments on preparedness related directly to the use of school-wide student planners. One group of teachers commented on the benefits of the planners relating to student preparation as well as school-wide culture:

Teacher 1: This planner thing is a cultural change as well.

Teacher 2: Actually, we have had planners in the past but they get...tossed, bolted, they take the spiral thing off. This year having a professional looking planner has helped.

Teacher 1: And the teachers all buying into them too.

Teachers at School A also saw increased student accountability and more positive

student behaviors as a specific benefit to the school culture. One teacher noted how the overall student accountability had improved through increased focus on preparedness:

To me the student accountability is greater this year than it has been in the past, and I really like that. As part of the respect issue preparedness is a huge factor with [the students]. And when they realize that they have to be prepared, that is accountability.

Teacher buy-in and unity was also noted as a specific benefit to the culture of the school. They perceived that PBS had allowed teachers to become more unified in their expectations of student behavior and thus led to increased enthusiasm for the principles of PBS:

I think that most of the teachers have come on board, even the reluctant ones. I really think that the feeling tone has really improved in this building in the 5 years that I've been here. We have probably 90% teacher buy in.

School B. At School B teachers' positive attitudes, praise notes, and the mascot were cited by teachers as the greatest strengths of their improved school culture.

Comments regarding teachers' positive attitudes indicated that teachers perceived an increased focus on the reinforcement of positive student behaviors:

Coming here from the very beginning when I walked through the door I saw how positively they were rewarding the students in the office with the wheel spinner and the praise notes and specifically looking for something [positive]. So it has helped me personally to look more for the positive in the students overall than automatically thinking negatively of them.

Teachers at School B also perceived the use of praise notes as a specific strength of their school culture. They felt that praise notes were an effective reinforcement and motivator of positive student behaviors. One teacher remarked how her students listened intently to the morning announcements in order to hear what students earned praise notes:

The kids love the praise notes. They get in my classroom and it will take us a few minutes to get quieted down, but as soon as they hear those names being read they are *silent*, because they want to hear if they win or get one. So that has been a good reinforcement [italics added].

Another teacher mentioned how giving out praise notes has affected her, “I think that has probably the best part for me of PBS is that opportunity to find a child who maybe never gets praise at home and find a way to praise them...and it will change their lives forever.”

At School B, teachers saw the personalization of the PBS principles through the school mascot as a strength of the school culture. The mascot was used on praise notes, posters, and was reinforced by teachers and administrators as a model of ‘chivalry’ and social skills:

I personally have appreciated the focus that having the [mascot] has given the program. I thought when [PBS] was first implemented that it was just kind-of a nebulous thing out there that we really should do...but were not really sure where we were going. But then we got [the mascot]...the age of chivalry...of good manners...of opening the door. I think it gave us...more of a focus of where we wanted to go and what we wanted to teach and why we were going to do it.

Another teacher mentioned the increased sense of ownership among teachers since the introduction of the [mascot]:

I think teaching in the context of the [mascot]...it is more of 'this is what we do at the junior high' rather than 'here's this PBS thing' that, for lack of a better word is being imposed...so I think there is more ownership.

Teachers at School B also saw improved student behavior as a specific benefit to the culture of their school. They mentioned that positive student behaviors had increased and negative student behaviors had decreased. While teachers did mention improved student behavior, they were also hesitant to give all of the credit for this improvement to the PBS model. Instead, many teachers explained the demographic changes that the school had recently undergone. One teacher noted, "My students this year are better than last year, but I don't know if that has something to do with the numbers because they have gotten lower..." Another group of teachers focused on improvements:

Teacher 1: I feel there has been improvement; I'm just not sure what the factors are that contributed to it because there is a lot going on.

Teacher 2: Well and our school changed a lot this year just bringing in the 7th grade. I mean it improved a lot just from losing a lot of the 9th graders and bringing in the 7th graders.

Teacher 3: I think you have good days and bad days and I don't know that you can say your good days are because of PBS. I think you would have a hard time tying it to that.

Overall, it seemed that teachers did recognize improvements in student behavior that positively impacted the culture of the school, but they did not overtly give credit PBS for this improvement.

Teacher and school-wide positivity was also mentioned by teachers at School B as a specific benefit to the culture of their school. They mentioned they had become more aware of positive student behavior and an overall increase in positivity had resulted throughout the school. One teacher mentioned their feelings about the improvements seen at School B, “I think we would all agree that [PBS] is something we want to probably devote more time to and more energy to because I think we agree that recognizing students’ positive behavior is a good thing.”

Summary of school culture. The school culture tree node produced only positive cases at both schools. Improved school culture was cited by 100% of focus groups as a benefit to their school since the implementation of PBS. Preparedness and planners at School A and praise notes at School B were cited as specific benefits, and both schools perceived increased student and teacher accountability and teacher unity. Teachers overall perceptions of their school culture seems to have improved dramatically at both schools.

Therefore, in relation to research question one, teachers in this study did find the cultures at their schools to have improved with PBS implementation. The connection between the social skills and lesson plans tree node and research question one is summarized below.

Social Skills and Lesson Plans

Social skills and lesson plans were also identified by focus groups as an important factor in the implementation of PBS. At both schools, concrete social skill instruction was implemented through the use of posters and weekly, direct instruction of social skills. Each poster described a specific social skill and its’ steps. For example, the poster

on “How to Listen” included the three simple behavioral steps to listening. Each year the schools chose the social skills that would be taught and reinforced, and these posters were placed in clear view in each classroom and in common areas when applicable. The aim of the posters was to serve as a reminder to students as to how to practice the skills, and they also allowed teachers to reference the steps of a skill for correctional or reinforcement purposes. Posters were also referenced during weekly social skill lessons. These social skills were then also reinforced with the school-wide use of praise notes by school staff to reinforce students who practiced appropriate social skills.

Specific aspects of social skills and lesson plans were mentioned by teachers as components of both the strengths and weaknesses of the PBS model. Social skills alone were also mentioned in the benefits and suggestions for improvement tree nodes. All twelve focus groups (100%) perceived aspects of the social skills and lesson plans as strengths of PBS at their school, and 83% of focus groups also saw areas of weakness within the social skills and lesson plans. Improved social skills were noted as a benefit to the school by 83% of focus groups and 58% made suggestions for social skill improvement. Therefore, it seems that teachers at both schools saw social skills and lesson plans as strengths of PBS and having been beneficial to the school, but also cited weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.

School A. Teachers at School A reported only areas of strength for the social skills and lesson plans tree node. All seven focus groups (100%) at School A saw preparedness and planners as specific strengths of the social skills and lesson plans at their school. Specifically, teachers mentioned that student’s levels of preparedness had increased at their school through the use of the school-wide planners implemented in the 2006-07

school year. These planners were different from ones used in the past and were created through a collaborative effort with administration and the PBSI. The school-wide reinforcement system was also focused on the skill of “Being Prepared” during the implementation of these planners, and teachers taught and reinforced this lesson in the classroom as often as possible. One teacher said, “Almost every child right now is using their planner and is constructively keeping track of their life...The uniformity is really good. And they are actually store-bought ones this time, and those have made a big difference.” Another teacher, in speaking about the increased consistency formed by the use of planners said, “There had not been consistency school-wide [with the use of planners] and I think there is now because of how we started out the year...I’m hoping it will make a big difference and...they will use these all year.”

School B. At School B, teachers identified areas of strength, weakness, benefits, and suggestions for improvement regarding the social skills and lesson plans. A significant need for social skills training and lesson plans was identified by 60% of the focus groups as the primary strength of the social skills and lesson plans at this school. Of this need, one teacher noted, “I think it’s good to have the social skills teaching there. I think it’s something that all schools need, coming in I was glad to see it.” Another teacher mentioned the strengths of social skill instruction:

I’ve enjoyed watching [PBS] come into our school because it is basically social skills instruction. And, if [we] don’t have good...social skills we are not going to go anywhere in this world. And so I was really glad to see that.

In regards to weaknesses of the social skills and lesson plans three cases were formed. Age-appropriateness was noted as a specific weakness of the social skills and

lesson plans by 80% of focus groups, and 60% perceived consistency as a specific weakness. In addition, 100% of focus groups identified teacher resistance and discomfort as a specific weakness of the social skills and lesson plans at School B.

Teachers perceived the social skill lessons as inappropriate for the age of the students at their school. They also felt that this lack of age-appropriate skills led to decreased student and teacher buy-in:

Teacher 1: Originally [the social skill lessons] were really structured, very concrete and could not deviate from the steps...and there were a lot of complaints from the students saying, ‘This is really elementary...It’s really childish.’

Teacher 2: I think the word they used was ‘BORING!’

Teacher 1: So it was very difficult...it still is. We still have some resistance from students because of that.

Another teacher explained the differences she had seen between the students of different grade levels:

I teach 7th grade this year and I taught 8th grade last year and my 7th graders are a lot more perceptive to [PBS] or [mascot] than my 8th graders were...I think that the younger kids are more receptive to role-playing and they are more receptive to the steps.

Consistency of social skill instruction was also seen as a specific weakness of the social skills and lesson plans at School B. Teachers mentioned that all teachers at the school were not teaching the social skills consistently. In regards to a lack of consistent teaching of social skills and resistance among teachers, one teacher expressed, “I don’t

care how good the program is, you are always going to have part of your faculty that is not going to go along with it...just because that's the nature of the beast."

Closely related to inconsistent social skills teaching was the perception of teacher resistance and discomfort for teaching the social skills, particularly through role-playing. One teacher referred to the challenge they faced in teaching the social skills to their students:

Sometimes the steps are a little redundant. And...the junior high kids will want to show you how grown up they are. If you at all start to sound like you're prescriptive or juvenile they can be offended. So that's kind of the challenge of it.

Another teacher described their resistance to the prescribed method of social skill instruction:

I teach 9th graders. I've got 35 in my first period class, and I've just struggled with this from day one. You know, 'these are the steps.' You try and adapt and make it your own, but I haven't had much success. I can't get all gushy and excited about them bringing a pencil...to me it seems more 2nd grade or whatever.

At School B, 80% of focus groups also perceived the praise notes as a benefit of the social skills and lesson plans. Overall, the praise note process was seen as something that reinforced students' use of the social skills being taught. A direct connection between the praise notes and social skills was formed for students and teachers as teachers were required to place a check mark on the social skill the student demonstrated. In addition, teachers perceived that teacher-student relationships were improved through the use of praise notes:

I think [praise notes] are a good idea. I have noticed that the kids, even though you don't directly talk to them, by saying it in a note, you can tell that when they get one that there's a little bit of a relationship change.

Teachers also mentioned that the recognition of positive student behaviors through praise notes encouraged teachers to look for more positives than negatives, and thus improved the overall feeling in the school:

Teacher 1: I think any time you concentrate on trying to look for positive things in students that is a good thing for the school. We want to recognize student's behavior. We want to build social skills and behavioral skills in kids.

Teacher 2: I've noticed that it has made me think more in that [positive] mindset too. Not just helping the students but it has helped me. And it helps me stay on my toes and look for students and see the good in them instead of always, you know, "ok this is wrong." So, it helps me too.

In relation to suggestions for improvement, 80% of focus groups at School B saw the need for more real-life applications of the social skills, and 60% of focus groups suggested ways to improve the role-playing component of teaching the social skills. Teachers suggested that a more flexible format of social skills instruction may help with student and teacher buy-in, specifically in relation to role-playing. One teacher said, "I like the concept, and if we could teach the things how we want to I think we'd be a lot better than you know, "here's the role play situations." A specific suggestion regarding lesson plans was proposed by a teacher:

Does it have to be a lesson plan? Does it have to be a 15-minute per day thing?

Can the teachers meet and determine the objectives that our students need and should already have and then as teachers determine what we individually will do to help the students as we're already doing?

In addition, teachers perceived a lack of real-life application accompanying the social skill instruction. Individualizing the lesson plans based on the needs of students in each classroom was another suggestion from teachers:

Teacher 1: One of the biggest treats I have had this year is I have got 7th graders for the first time and this approach works well with them as it's outlined. The simplicity, the straightforwardness; I think it works well with them. But on the other hand I think especially 9th grade does require a teacher to use this in a different format.

Teacher 2: Well, in teaching there is buy-in and you do not have buy-in unless the students know what is in it for them. So teaching this as it's outlined, there is not much in it for the students. But then when it is combined with each individual teacher's curricula and then when those teachers know the students and they can tell them how they can connect it to their lives-then it works. But there is no way to come up with a uniform lesson plan that does that for every single teacher.

Another group of teachers suggested the use of videos as a replacement or supplement to the role-playing aspect of social skill instruction. These videos would depict students using the social skills in real-life situations and be shown in classrooms.

Summary of social skills and lesson plans. The social skills and lesson plans tree node produced mixed results, with slightly more negative than positive cases across schools. But, all negative cases for this tree node came from the teacher focus groups at School B. Teachers at this school perceived five areas of weakness and suggestions for improvement and two areas of strength, while those at School A saw only one strength. Therefore, teachers' perceptions at the two schools differed greatly on this idea, making it difficult to answer research question one in relation to teachers' perspectives on social skills and lesson plans. Overall it seems that the middle school teachers perceive the social skills and lesson plans as a strength of the PBS model, while the junior high teachers do not.

Research Question One Summary

Based upon the comments made in teacher focus groups, the results indicated that four factors had the most impact on teacher perceptions of PBS at their schools: (a) administrative support, (b) consistency and clear expectations, (c) school culture, and (d) social skills and lesson plans. At these schools, teacher opinions regarding administrative support were more negative than positive, while teachers' perspectives on consistency and clear expectations and school culture were overwhelmingly positive. In regards to social skills and lesson plans, the middle school and junior high differed in their opinions. Middle school teachers perceived the social skills and lesson plans as positive and the junior high teachers saw them as more negative.

Research Question Two

The second research question was, "What are teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of Positive Behavior Support as a model for helping students to develop

appropriate social skills?” Although one of the free nodes identified in the coding process was the “overall effectiveness” node, no conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of the PBS model was found based on focus group comments in this area. Because an equal number of focus groups made direct comments regarding the effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of the model, no consensus was obtained in order to answer research question two based on the results of this specific free node and its tree nodes. In addition, all the focus groups at both schools mentioned areas of effectiveness and non-effectiveness in relation to PBS at their schools, but very few of these comments directly addressed the question of whether or not the model as a whole had been effective at helping the students to develop social skills. Yet, the effectiveness of the social skills and lesson plans was addressed indirectly by teachers throughout the focus groups (as summarized in the analysis of research question one). The few comments made by teachers regarding effectiveness are summarized below.

School A

One teacher commented on the effectiveness of the social skill lessons with 7th grade students. She stated, “I think they probably are more effective for my kids because they have a younger mentality.” Another teacher mentioned the difference in effectiveness of PBS implementation between their previous school and School A, “If I had to go by effectiveness between where I was and getting here there is a huge difference with what you guys do here.” One teacher remarked on the difference in effectiveness between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years in regards to social skills, “Last year probably wasn’t as effective because they were learning many skills in a month...and now...it is more focused.”

School B

The interviewer and a teacher discussed the effectiveness of the PBS model:

Interviewer: Has it been effective, at what it is trying to do?

Teacher: I want to say yes, just because my students this year are better than last year...

Only one teacher directly answered discussion question number four regarding effectiveness. This School B teacher remarked,

I don't know if it is necessarily a fair comparison to say that one thing has led to something else when the specific focus...on kids' behavior and every teacher trying to consistently do that I think has made some impact on their behavior. So, question four is 'how effective do you feel the [PBS] model has been?' I personally would answer somewhat.

After a conversation regarding the use of praise notes, another teacher said, "So there it is-positive reinforcement is effective." One teacher mentioned the need to individualize the type of praise given for each student:

And that's again the problem we see with trying to have one program that fits all...some kids don't like to be noticed that way and as you get to know them you know how you can praise them in a way that is effective to that student.

Another teacher at School B addressed the aspect of role-playing as a method of social skills instruction and commented on its' effectiveness for them:

One of the things that has not worked for me, and maybe it is just me and I need more training on how to more effectively utilize it, but role-playing has not been very good...it seems like the kids always just wanted to clown around with

it...and so by having a classroom discussion then some type of little assignment...that's been more effective for me.

When asked by the interviewer if the model had been effective, another teacher stated, "It's really hard to say. I don't know." Praise notes were also mentioned as being effective with students. In another School B focus group, the subject of social skill lessons was mentioned by one teacher in regards to effectiveness:

That just continues to be a source of disagreement maybe or conversation of how to best present those lessons. People worked really hard on them and they follow research-based principles, but somehow they don't seem to be working as effectively for us, at least that's the feedback I hear. I think part of it is you're in charge of 45 minutes of class and now you want us to do 20 more minutes of something. But yet there's not a lot of 'you'll get a grade in [PBS] if students don't, so I don't think they look at it as seriously as I wish they would.

Research Question Two Summary

Based upon the culmination of teacher focus group comments, it is clear that very few comments were made directly regarding the effectiveness of the PBS model and social skill instruction. The few comments made were not sufficient to make any conclusions regarding teachers' perspectives on this topic.

Social Validity Addressed

Both research questions lead directly to a description of the social validity of PBS among teachers. Therefore, Wolf's (1978) definition of social validity is reviewed in light of the teacher focus group data.

Social Significance: Are the outcomes really what society (i.e. the school) wants?

Based upon the focus group data, it is unclear whether or not the outcomes of PBS were what the teachers wanted. For example, only 25% of focus groups mentioned a great 'need' for the PBS program in their schools. One teacher said, "I think it's good to have the social skills teaching there. I think it's something that all schools need. I was glad to see it." But overall there was no consensus among teachers about the outcomes of PBS being desired from the beginning of implementation. Another teacher said, "We didn't select the model-the model selected us. And I think that has had some ramifications. If you're not part of planning the message at the beginning...it's created a little misconnection." Teachers' perspectives on the social significance of the PBS model are unclear because of their initial hesitation to the model. It seems the social significance of the model has increased since initial implementation, but was not fully present at the start.

Social Appropriateness: Are the procedures acceptable?

The social appropriateness of an intervention is determined by whether or not those implementing see its' procedures as acceptable. In this case, the social appropriateness of PBS was based on teachers' perceptions of its' specific procedures. The specific PBS procedures mentioned by teacher focus groups include praise notes, social skills and lesson plans, and specific aspects of the administrative support provided (i.e., training, data reports).

Praise notes, social skills, and lesson plans were specifically mentioned by teachers as strengths of the PBS model. A total of 75% of focus groups saw praise notes as a strength of the PBS model. In regards to the acceptability of the praise note

procedures, teachers had a variety of positive things to say. One teacher said, “I think the praise note system is a real strength. It doesn’t take a whole lot of time for me to do it-but it makes such a difference in a student’s day.” Another teacher mentioned that she has seen students carrying around praise notes they have received all day saying, “Look what I got!” There were also some comments regarding suggestions for improvement of the praise notes. One teacher said, “I like the praise notes, I like what they do for the kids, but I don’t like how hard they are to fill out and give and rip into three pieces....I mean you just feel like you have to spend 20 minutes writing it.” Other teachers mentioned that the public recognition of praise should occur more immediately when a praise note had been given. Overall, it appears that teachers perceived that the strengths of the praise notes outweighed the costs, but improvements could be made to implementation in this area.

In regards to the procedure of social skill lessons, 100% of focus groups mentioned the social skills and lesson plans as strengths of the PBS model. One teacher said, “I think it’s wonderful that we finally teach them social skills in school. And it’s wonderful that we can do it and there’s not someone telling us that we can’t teach something like that in school.” In regards to the actual procedures for social skill instruction, teachers at School B mentioned that the real-life application and age-appropriateness of the social skills being taught could be improved.

Teachers also mentioned some of the procedures implemented by administrators and the PBSI could have improved. At School A, this suggestion for improvement related directly to consistent teacher training, whereas teachers at School B referred to more regular data reports as an area of administrative support to be improved. Overall, teachers

in this study liked the procedures of the PBS model, and found them to be socially appropriate for use, but wanted them to improve in some aspects.

Social Importance of Effects: Are the consumers satisfied with the results?

The social importance of an intervention is determined by the consumers' satisfaction with its results. In this case, the consumers included teachers, administrators, parents, and students. No conclusive data were found regarding teachers' perspectives of the overall effectiveness of PBS. Participants made an equal number of comments about effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the PBS model. Therefore, it is difficult to decipher whether or not teachers viewed the effects of the PBS model at their school as socially important and satisfactory.

DISCUSSION

This study assessed teacher's perspectives regarding the social validity of the PBS model implemented at a middle school and junior high school. Focus groups were used to determine teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the model and its effectiveness at their schools. Teachers also provided feedback about strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement of the model.

The results indicated that teachers' perspectives of PBS were more positive than negative and that teachers with younger students saw the social skills as more effective than those with older ones. Analyses revealed that four factors were particularly influential on teacher's perceptions of social validity: (a) administrative support, (b) consistency and clear expectations, (c) school culture, and (d) social skills and lesson plans. No conclusive evidence was found regarding teachers' perspectives of the overall effectiveness of the PBS model, although many of the PBS procedures (i.e. praise notes, social skills) were found to be socially acceptable. PBS implementation at these two schools was found to be socially significant and socially acceptable, therefore satisfying two of Wolf's (1978) conditions for social validity.

Implications for Practice

Administrative Support

Previous research findings regarding PBS implementation cite administrative support as crucial to success, particularly at the secondary school level (Bohanon-Edmonson et al., 2004). The results of this study confirmed the importance of administrative support in PBS implementation, and further depicts administrator influence on teachers' perspectives of PBS and its' social validity. Participants in this

study indicated that their perceptions of the administrative support at their schools were more negative than positive. These slightly negative perceptions of administrators may stem from various factors which were not directly assessed or measured as part of this research project.

Teachers' perceptions of administrators before implementation of PBS may have impacted their perceptions of PBS once implemented. Since their pre-implementation perspectives on administration were not investigated, this cannot be ruled out as an influential factor. The manner in which teachers were introduced to the concept of PBS and the notion of implementing it in their schools also impacted their perspectives on administrative support. For example, various teachers at School B mentioned that PBS had been "imposed" or "forced" upon them. This perception may have come from the decision-making process undertaken by school administrators and the PBSI at initial implementation. From many teachers' perspectives, it seemed that the school principal and the PBSI made a decision for PBS to be implemented without asking the teachers for input first. Based on this perception, many teachers felt initial resistance to the model and its procedures.

Therefore, it appears that pre-implementation assessment of school readiness is crucial in creating meaningful involvement and commitment from the teachers during PBS implementation. The creation of a school-based PBS team with a building coordinator, diverse school staff members, students, and parents is also an important step in PBS implementation (Bohanon-Edmonson et al., 2004). The use of a team like this at these two schools may have improved teacher buy-in for PBS from the start, as team members could have been involved in the announcement and development of PBS

implementation.

Consistency and Clear Expectations

At both schools in this study, the school mascot was used as a way to integrate school-wide behavioral expectations and reinforcement of these behaviors. The use of a familiar school characteristic to inform students and teachers of school expectations was viewed as successful by teachers and as a factor that greatly enhanced the consistency of expectations throughout the school. Therefore, any measures taken to personalize the PBS model at the secondary school level will likely enhance student and teacher reception of PBS concepts. The uses of a school mascot, school colors, familiar slogans or acronyms are all ways to integrate PBS into the existing culture of the school.

School Culture

Teachers' overall perceptions of their school culture seem to have improved notably at both schools. The increased perception of student preparedness and use of planners as a contributor to improved school culture at School A relates directly to administrative support and the use of a school-based PBS team. These two entities were primarily responsible for the creation of the new planners, and sought teacher input along the way. They also provided the tangible reinforcements for the use of planners, and kept data as the planners were used. Teacher buy-in was also essential to the success of the use of planners. Therefore, it seems that a collaborative effort between administrators and teachers is crucial to creating specific procedures that enhance the culture of a school. This finding relates directly to previous research on PBS, which states that systemic factors such as administrative support assume important roles in the day-to-day implementation of these strategies (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Praise notes were also cited by both schools as benefiting school culture. Many teachers liked the praise notes because they were simple, quick, and created an immediate response from students and a long-term reinforcement for them as well. The reinforcement of teacher and student behaviors is essential to successful PBS implementation and improved school culture. Previous research also states that appropriate display of expectations must be rewarded, and that this reinforcement contributes to the effectiveness of any PBS system (OSEP, 2006).

Social Skills and Lesson Plans

Teachers mentioned the need for more age-appropriate social skills and lesson plans. This was particularly emphasized by the junior high teachers at School B. It appears that the age-difference of the students at these schools may have been influential in forming teachers' perceptions of the social skills and lesson plans. These data indicate that teachers felt that as students get older, the social skills and lesson plans need to be revised to meet their needs and social perceptions of PBS. When this is done, teachers may be more comfortable with teaching the skills. In addition, if student ownership of PBS is established before its implementation, their buy-in will greatly enhance not only their perceptions of PBS, but those of teachers as well. Both of these points are also confirmed in research literature regarding PBS in secondary school settings (Bohanon-Edmonson et al., 2004).

Social Validity

Social Significance

The social significance of PBS seems to have increased at these schools since initial implementation but was not fully present at the start. Because the teachers did not

feel included in the decision to implement PBS in their schools they may not have initially considered whether or not the model was what they wanted or needed; they saw it as an administrative decision that they were asked to follow. It seems that now that teachers have seen the results of PBS in place they find them meaningful to their school environment.

Social Appropriateness

Teachers in this study agreed that the procedures of the PBS model were socially appropriate for use but also gave suggestions for improvement. In particular, teachers at School B saw the social skills lessons as somewhat immature for their students and felt more real-life application was needed. It is likely that these specific concerns regarding social skills and lesson plans related directly to the age of the students at School B, which is a junior high school that included grades seven, eight, and nine. The teachers at School A did mention some student resistance but were much more positive regarding the social skill lessons. It is likely that the younger the students, the more receptive they are to the step-by-step procedural format of social skill instruction and to use of role-playing. Therefore, it seems that social skill instruction with junior high and high school students needs to be adapted to be socially acceptable through using creative methods of social skill presentation, such as videos or skits put on by student leaders or drama clubs. This practice is also mentioned in the research of Bohanon-Edmonson et al. (2004).

Social Importance

No conclusive data were found regarding teachers' perspectives of the overall effectiveness of PBS and whether or not its' results are satisfactory to teachers. Teachers noted that many positive changes had occurred in their schools but were hesitant to give

full credit to the PBS model for these positive changes. They noted that the school demographics had changed with school boundary shifts at School B. At School A the teachers mentioned that their school had begun the accreditation process while simultaneously implementing PBS. Because of these unique variables also occurring in the schools, the teachers were unsure about the effectiveness of the PBS model in light of the many other changes happening at the same time.

In another measure of social importance, the teachers noted the following benefits to their schools: (a) Improved consistency and clear expectations, (b) Improved school culture, and (c) Improved social skills. In further breaking down teachers' perceptions on consistency and clear expectations, improved clarity on school-wide rules was identified as a benefit to both schools. Student behavior was also reported as improving since PBS implementation. Based on these data, it seems that many of the outcomes of PBS were in fact socially important to the teachers but they were hesitant to credit them solely to PBS implementation in terms of overall effectiveness.

Limitations

It is possible that the phrasing of the focus group questions may have influenced trends in teacher's comments. For example, question number two asks, "What aspect of the Positive Behavior Support Initiative (i.e. praise notes, social skills lessons, consistent school-wide rules, or other) would you recommend improving for the future?" Teachers that mentioned praise notes in their suggestions for improvement may have done so because they were prompted for this topic. The wording of the focus group questions may have also influenced the positive or negative nature of participant responses. In particular, questions number one and three tended to elicit responses about the strengths of the PBS

model. Only question number two specifically asked for weaknesses of the model, although many of the responses to question five could also be considered perceived weaknesses. Therefore, the wording of the questions could be seen as a limitation since they may have encouraged more comments about perceived strengths than weaknesses.

Patterns in teachers' comments may have also been affected by their school's administrative enthusiasm for particular aspects of PBS. For example, if administrative support was especially strong for the aspect of praise notes, it is more likely that more teachers from that school would have commented on this topic.

Other limitations of this study include a lack of conclusive data on the effectiveness of the PBS model. Perhaps because of the formation of the focus groups and discussion questions, teachers did not specify whether or not they saw the PBS model as being effective or ineffective overall. Instead they made comments that hinted toward their perceptions of its effectiveness, or said that they were unsure of the effectiveness of the model. It would be helpful to have a more conclusive answer to the question of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of PBS at their schools:

I don't know if it is necessarily a fair comparison to say that one thing has led to something else. The specific positive focus on kids' behavior and every teacher trying to consistently do that has made some impact on their behavior. So, question four is 'how effective do you feel PBS has been?' I personally would answer 'somewhat.'

Demographic data on teachers' experience level and familiarity were also not measured formally. Many teachers mentioned what subject area they taught in, how many years they had been teaching, and how many years they had been at the school. But,

because this was not a requirement or specific question, not all teachers provided this information. This bit of information would have been useful in comparing the perspectives of teachers with different backgrounds.

Treatment integrity regarding overall PBSI implementation also was not formally measured. The amount of treatment integrity with which teachers implemented the model may have influenced their opinions regarding the model. For example, if a teacher was not teaching the social skills regularly, they may have perceived them more negatively or less positively. Previous research indicates a strong connection between treatment integrity and social validity (Kern & Manz, 2004). The use of a treatment integrity measure may have provided much more information on the social validity of the PBS model, and the lack of this measure is therefore a limitation.

Finally, the age-differences of students at each school make direct comparisons more difficult. For instance, teacher's perceptions of social skills varied greatly at the two schools. The age of the students appears to have been the main factor in this difference in perception.

Implications for future research

This study shows potential for future research in this area. Including more schools where PBS has been implemented will give a broader perspective on teacher perceptions. There were some differences in perceptions between the teachers at the two schools that participated in this study. By including teachers from additional schools, a pattern of differences or similarities may be found.

Interviewing students and administrators would allow for a comparison of perceptions at both schools and a more accurate picture of the social validity of PBS. This

information would allow those implementing PBS at the secondary school level to consider all parties and ensure greater social validity.

Measurements of treatment integrity of PBS implementation by the population being interviewed (i.e. teachers, students) would also be helpful in correlating what participants say with what is being done by them. Finally, a more specific measure of overall effectiveness is recommended. Perhaps rephrasing the question with specific elements (e.g., praise notes) would probably have been included in the response if the teachers believed this was important to discuss. Kern and Manz (2004) note how influential the social importance of the goals of any intervention are to its' effectiveness and that social validity will likely be high if the goals are socially important. Therefore, a more efficient measure of social importance is recommended.

Conclusions

Teacher perceptions of PBS are overall more positive than negative, viewing PBS as having more strengths than weaknesses. They report seeing improvements in consistency, clear expectations, overall school culture and student and teacher accountability. In addition, some evidence of social significance and social appropriateness of PBS among teachers was found. Based on the information found, it seems that PBS at the secondary school level shows evidence of social validity among teachers.

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