

A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF A SCHOOL-WIDE
BEHAVIOR PROGRAM WITHIN AN MTSS FRAMEWORK AMONG ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY

by

Ina Ramos

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to describe if the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program within a Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) framework in elementary schools for educators, staff, and students would be culturally responsive and inclusive. The MTSS framework for behavior was generally defined as social-emotional behavior. Bandura's Social Learning Theory and self-efficacy belief was the framework for this study as it explained the significance of the relationship between the program using a framework, such as MTSS, and the importance of being culturally responsive. The methodology that were used included interviews, focus group interviews, and a questionnaire for a variety of educators at various elementary schools and a document analysis and a comparison of those districts and schools that have already implemented MTSS for behavior across the United States. The participants were teachers from more than one school and district. The results of this study show teachers building positive relationships with students and having support from school level and above school level administrators are important factors to implement a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, inclusiveness, MTSS, equity, disproportionate discipline

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Dedication

To my husband for his unwavering support through this journey. Without him, I could not complete and achieve one of my life goals. To my children who supported me and helped me reach my goal. To my parents that supported me through my entire life and showed me with hard work and dreams, anything is possible. And finally, to my 3 fur babies that kept me sane and gave me the therapy when things got difficult during this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS)

Multi-Tiered Support System Behavior (MTSS-B)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Positive Behavior Interventions Supports (PBIS)

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Office Discipline Referral (ODR)

Social Academic Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Culturally Linguistic Diverse (CLD)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Social Emotional Behavior (SEB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this descriptive, single-instrument case study was to describe the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program using a Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) framework among elementary schools, explicitly including cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness for all students. This chapter provides a background of the historical, social, and theoretical effects of the problem, which informs the purpose of the study and shapes the research question about culturally responsive teaching.

Background

Incorporating a multi-tiered systems support for behavior (MTSS-B) as a framework with a behavior program, such as the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), has been gaining momentum in the United States education system (McCart, 2020). The system is for educators to be proactive rather than reactive to inappropriate behaviors in a classroom setting. Rules and expectations are set to minimize students receiving out-of-school suspensions and exclusionary discipline (Sugai & Horner, 2020).

Historical Context

Using MTSS in education has been gaining attention over the past decade. MTSS is also in other fields of study, such as medicine, athletics, and business. MTSS is derived from the Response to Intervention (RtI) system, and the Positive Behavior Interventions Supports (PBIS) system. There are 3 tiers of support in the framework of MTSS-B, PBIS, and RTI. Within each tier is data-driven evidence, from the universal screeners, teachers follow to help students succeed academically and behaviorally. Tier 1 is universal supports for all students from all the staff and faculty in a school building. The universal supports could be items such as morning

meetings, daily check-ins, and closing circles that can take place in classrooms. Tier 2 is for those students that may need more support. Students are given tier 2 support when there are indicators on a screener where the data would be used. The data would be used to indicate what kind of supports a student may need in tier 2, like meeting with a guidance counselor weekly for check-ins. Tier 3 supports are for students that need more intensive support and would be referred to Special Education (SPED) or behavioral health. Within the MTSS-B framework, students should be moved fluidly between the tiers as progress monitoring would provide data to do so. Data are collected with the use of universal screeners and progress monitoring, and as different interventions are tried and tracked, the student moves up into the next tier if needed. If the interventions are successful, the student would either remain in the tier they are continuing with or no longer need the extra support. As a student moves up to tiers two and three, more intensive interventions are introduced, and tracked, and then eventually, if the supports do not show progress, the student would be referred for special education (McCart, 2020).

In behavior, MTSS has gained momentum. MTSS is included in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (McCart, 2020). ESSA, signed by former President Obama on December 15, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d). It is a law that brings equity to the forefront and protects the students who may be at a disadvantage or students who need intensive support in our schools. ESSA is meant to help students prepare for higher education in college or university. Data are provided for educators, parents, students, and communities through statewide assessments so that educators may use the data to help students grow and meet the standards. Data are collected, and student needs are met. MTSS has become a framework for many schools and districts to build their behavior programs and/or systems. It is successful when used with fidelity. MTSS is meant to be a way for education to move away from a generalized discipline for all to an

individualized, data-driven, and positive system (Lloyd et al., 2021). Historically, teachers would be reactive to a student's behavior, but with MTSS, teachers are moving towards being proactive through the reinforcing and modeling approach in the general education and SPED classrooms. At tier 1, teachers would reinforce the desired behavior through positive reinforcement, such as praise or special rewards. Teachers would also model the desired behavior through mini lessons on the targeted behavior. MTSS-B has become the best practice for creating an effective and positive learning environment for all students.

MTSS-B is often used in conjunction with PBIS when schools implement the framework. Most schools in the United States have adopted to use PBIS as a school-wide behavior system. MTSS and PBIS are evidence-based, data-driven, and individualized for each student (Lloyd et al., 2021). However, it needs to be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. Students of color are more often misidentified students as being at risk academically or behaviorally when it is a failure of schools to provide an equity-based universal screener (Miller et al., 2022). Students of color are still disciplined more often than their white peers for minor infractions and suspended more often than their white peers (Fallon et al., 2021).

Social Context

In December 2015, Former President Obama signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which changed education. ESSA is supposed to get equity in education. The purpose was to support and bring attention to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signed into law by Former President Lyndon Johnson. ESEA was a civil rights law to support students of color and students and families in low-income neighborhoods (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down, including schools,

COVID-19 forever changed the education system in the United States (Safir & Dugan, 2021). Education moved online; schools started using digital platforms to teach from home. People began to take notice of the inequalities that surrounded them, especially in education. The social context of Black Lives Matter, police brutality and overt racism in society brought to attention the inequalities of the education system. There was an increase in support needed for students emotionally and socially with the traumas that students experienced during the pandemic (Sullivan et al., 2021).

Theoretical Context

Bandura's Social Learning Theory relates to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and uses MTSS as a framework for behavior. Bandura (1971) explains why people behave the way they do in theory. Social influences, close human contact influences, and extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are motivations for the reasons for behaviors. Behavior comes from observations of other people's behaviors and mimicking those behaviors. Social Learning Theory is of direct experiences, and the foundation of behavior is about rewards and punishment.

The new behavior is learned through observations. Behavior is based on reward and punishment or consequences, which the person learns through experiences and observations. Behaviors are automatically and unconsciously improved and strengthened by the results that follow the action immediately (Bandura, 1971). Consequences are also observed and learned through experiences and modeling. People will subconsciously choose the desired behavior to succeed and for the desirable outcome.

The environment also reinforces desirable behavior or incentive outcomes (Bandura, 1971). People know that specific actions or behaviors will result in a desirable outcome. The anticipation of possible consequences controls actions and behaviors. Students know and

understand the possible consequences of not completing their work. Most behaviors are learned directly or indirectly through the environment and modeling.

Problem Statement

The problem with MTSS-B is that although it is meant to be inclusive for all students, a disproportionate number of students of color are still punished more than their white peers (Fallon et al., 2021). The implementation of MTSS-B is not centered around culturally responsive teaching, resulting in inequitable outcomes when it comes to discipline and the foundation being on a structural bias (Cruz et al., 2020). One prominent reason could be that antiracism is not the center of the theory or design of the framework of MTSS-B (Fallon et al., 2021). Another reason is that the education system is dominated by white female teachers who set the rules and expectations of good behavior (Hussar et al., 2020). Often, the communities and families of students of color are not invited to create the rules and expectations, the design of the MTSS-B, or the implementation of systems (Bal, 2018).

Universal screeners used for data collection in the MTSS-B framework also need to be equitable, and culturally responsive to meet the needs of the students (Miller et al., 2022). In addition to this, screening efforts are lacking in schools and the implementation of screeners is also inadequate for data. Office discipline referrals (ODRs) or internal referrals are used as screeners for an MTSS-B framework or social-emotional interventions (Dineen et al., 2021). ODRs and internal referrals used as screeners to collect data are often based on a teacher's perspective on what kind of behavior is deemed to be concerns or issues. Using ODRs and internal referrals as screeners are also reactive, instead of being proactive and subjective to different kinds of biases (Amemiya et al., 2020).

MTSS is used as a framework to support programs like PBIS and is supposed to be data-driven and have evidence-based practices to support all students (Adamson et al., 2019). All students are kept in the first tier, and as students are assessed and re-assessed, data should show if students need more support, in which case, students will move to tier two. The last tier is reserved for intensive intervention strategies that usually require one-on-one support.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to describe the implementation process of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework among elementary schools, explicitly including cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness for all students.

Significance of the Study

This descriptive case study has theoretical, empirical, and practical significance for educators, administrators, and students. The researcher examined the connection between implementation of a MTSS-B framework and culturally responsive teaching. The case study presented the influences of having culturally responsive teaching on students of diverse backgrounds. The implementation of a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework is connected to Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

Theoretical Significance

Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and social learning theory was significant in this study because it explained that teachers have the self-efficacy to implement the MTSS-B framework with fidelity. Social learning theory models behaviors through teachers, peers, and families. Others observe the behaviors modeled. Behaviors are associated with rewards and discipline and can be derived from cultural settings (Bandura, 1971). Social learning theory and culturally responsive teaching are connected in that much of the behavior students come to

school with are learned through modeling from their home environments. Within the home environments, the behaviors modeled are from the diverse family cultures. Teachers need to know how to implement the framework successfully, with development, using culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching lets students know that there is an acknowledgment of their backgrounds and cultures and that they matter (Abacioglu et al.,2019).

Empirical Significance

The data significance was to triangulate and to see if there were behavior improvements made when a behavior program used MTSS-B as a framework. The data showed a decrease in students with behavior problems and more positive teacher-student relationships. With an equity based universal screener, the data showed a disproportionate discipline decrease with students of color and more of a proactive, culturally responsive environment in a school. Students should feel a sense of belonging and safety. The universal screening should be proactive and be made to understand the needs of the students (Miller et al., 2022).

The data and screeners have the potential to transform the opportunities to provide support and access for all students with appropriate universal supports and services supporting equity (Miller et al., 2022). These school-based services should reduce barriers for access to services provided outside of school (Whitaker et al., 2018) and create a foundation for an equity-based continuum for access to support across all areas.

Practical Significance

Using MTSS-B and strengthening the framework can be used to promote equality. Currently, MTSS-B does not encourage diversity or equity. A solution is to ensure that cultural responsiveness is centered when implementing an MTSS-B framework with a behavior program. Currently, there is a disproportionate discipline among students of color compared to their white

peers, and this disparity has received much attention in studies of culturally responsive teaching and behavior (Cruz et al., 2020). Students with diverse backgrounds are also mislabeled as having a disability when the deficits may be because of personal cultural beliefs and learned cultural behaviors or because students are speakers of other languages other than English.

Research Questions

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to describe the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework among elementary schools, explicitly including culturally responsive teaching and inclusiveness for all students.

Central Research Question

How are teachers including culturally responsive teaching within an MTSS-B framework?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Sub-Question Two

What is the self-efficacy perception of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Definitions

The terms and definitions are essential to this study and are grounded in the literature related to the topic, theoretical framework, and design.

1. *Cultural responsiveness* – Cultural responsiveness is respecting and being responsive to all cultures, making learning relevant and effective (Abacioglu et al.,2020).

2. *Diversity* – Diversity refers to diverse school populations in culture, race, ethnicity, and religious backgrounds (Easton-Brooks et al.,2018).
3. *Equity* – Equity refers to academics and social-emotional learning, meeting students at their level. All students have equity in learning (Anderson, 2021).
4. *Multitier Systems of Support (MTSS)* – a framework of data-based decisions and service using a universal screener and progress monitoring to address the needs of the students academically and emotionally. (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.)

Summary

MTSS-B is meant to be proactive and inclusive for all students. The process of implementation of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework among elementary schools should explicitly include cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness for all students. However, this is only sometimes the case. Culturally relevant teaching within the MTSS-B framework should be a focus of implementation. When culturally relevant teaching is included in the MTSS-B framework, it ensures that all students are included and have a sense of belonging in a community such as a school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This purpose of this descriptive case study was to describe the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework at the elementary school level and whether the program is culturally responsive and inclusive for all students. Within the United States education system, many behavior programs are utilized by many education districts, which are generalized programs for students. These programs may not take into consideration culture and race. These programs best fit white students, and students of color are still disadvantaged due to exclusionary discipline (Bal et al., 2021). Bal et al. found that students of color were more severely punished for less severe incidents compared to white students. This leads to racial disproportionality in discipline for students of color.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory best explains why people behave as they do (Bandura, 1971). There is also social influence, close human contact influences, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for the reasons for behaviors. Cultural influences can also affect behaviors. While behavior derives from the known consequences or responses for the conduct, behavior primarily comes from observations of other people's behaviors and the mimicking of those behaviors.

People can learn from direct experiences as students learn from direct experiences in the classroom. The students know what is considered appropriate behavior in school; usually, there is a reward for the proper behaviors and consequences for the wrong behaviors. In Social Learning Theory, reinforcement has incentive and informative functions (Bandura, 1971). In the formative functions, the person is informed of what the consequences will be if the wrong

behavior is displayed and what the rewards will be when proper behavior is displayed. This illustration is learning by experience. A student may learn about appropriate behavior in the classroom and quickly realize the consequences and rewards for their behaviors. Within behavior, people that understand and know the value or reward of successful behavior will more than likely change their behavior to continue with success. People that remain uninfluenced in consistent reinforcement and modeling may continue to respond oppositely. The responses to the behavior impact whether the behavior will change positively or continue negatively.

Bandura (1971) believed that learning behavior is a direct experience; if stripped down to its foundation, the behavior is about reward and punishment. With this theory, Bandura believed that people have an automatic response system that enables them to behave appropriately to be rewarded. People's behaviors become automatic when they realize what behaviors and rewards will continue the good behavior. However, Dulany (1962), in his seminal study of awareness and intentions in observational learning, discovered that reinforcement does not work if the person does not know what is being reinforced and the relationship the support has with the reward. In other words, if a student models a desired behavior in a class, the teacher will not reward the student without an explanation. The teacher would have to tell the student why they were being awarded. It would not make sense in the mind of the student to be rewarded randomly.

In Social Learning Theory, there is an emphasis on modeling the appropriate behaviors and the effectiveness of modeling (Bandura, 1971). Modeling is an influence that people are exposed to, whether they are aware of it or not. Teachers model the behaviors expected in the classroom and school for their students. Parents model the behaviors exposed at home and out in a public space for their children. Much of the modeling comes from a cultural influence that

cannot be ignored. A child's behavior can directly correlate with that child's culture. The child learns said behavior from their parents or what their parents have modeled within the household. Behaviors are learned directly or indirectly through modeling. Modeling behaviors is challenging to complete if culture is absent from the teaching. Culture needs to be part of modeling desired behaviors because it is part of learning positive rewards or consequences.

Modeling reinforces positive and negative behaviors for those needing to change their behaviors. A teacher giving or using a good model to explain the content in a classroom is indispensable compared to using only verbal cues for students to follow (Bandura, 1971). Students must be shown the desired behavior through modeling so there is no second-guessing or misunderstanding. However, from where does the desired behavior come? What are the origins? Does the desired behavior align with students with diverse backgrounds?

Freire first developed the theory of Critical Pedagogy in 1960. Freire believed in changing education, so students become critical thinkers to solve social injustices. He wanted to progress and reform teaching and liberation of the oppressed. Critical pedagogy addresses issues of racism, inequalities, and the need for learners to take charge of their learning, draw from their personal experiences, and find solutions to level the playing field for everyone (Freire, 1973). Freire's philosophy on education was based on a cultural reorganization, believing that colonial structures and ideologies must be dismantled. When students are taught and shown how to think critically, they become problem solvers and can use this to express their emotions, which is one of the key components of an equity based MTSS framework. Equity-based MTSS includes critical consciousness, critical pedagogy, and critical reflection (Sullivan et al., 2022).

Related Literature

Equity-based MTSS-B is a complex school-wide structure that includes educator knowledge of context, science, and systems, resulting in a data-driven, positive experience for all students (McCart & Miller, 2020). Equity-based MTSS is meeting the needs of all students through informed decisions, using all resources available. There are three foundational concepts in which behavior is formed: behavior is learned, conduct is lawful, and behavior can be altered through the environment (Skinner, 1953). These three concepts are the basis of the evidence-based practices for the MTSS framework. People's behavior is shaped by their environment, which they observe daily. A person's behavior develops as the person's environment develops (Schlinger, 2021). The environment is defined as all the stimuli that affect the person and the person's behavior. It is complex, and multiple details can influence a person and the development of their behavior. With the idea that a person's environment shapes behavior, it can be said that a person's culture is also involved in shaping the behavior. What are the learned behaviors when observed in an environment like school? Are the behaviors Euro-centric, or are they diverse and consider different cultures and practices?

A school is a place where students learn about academics and social behaviors. Students develop relationships, and within the friendships and relationships, they will often model the behavior they learn from home and their culture. Students demonstrate positive concerns for each other and model positive behavior (Banks et al., n.d). Student feelings are developed from reinforcement and experiences (Skinner, 1988). A person's behavior is a product of a person's environment, where cues occur to stimulate behavior. MTSS-B is about modeled behaviors expected in different backgrounds.

Through MTSS-B, behavioral supports start at tier 1, a universal, evidence-based approach for all students in the school (Arora et al., 2019). Tier 1 includes instruction with modeling the desired behavior, social-behavioral skills, social-emotional learning, practice, and feedback. Behavioral education can intensify through tier 2 and tier 3, depending on the data and the student's needs. Tier 2 is targeted instruction for those students that need extra support in behavioral education within small groups with a guidance counselor. Tier 3 is individualized for the student and considered intensive support for those students that need one-on-one support (Adamson et al., 2019).

Disproportionate Punishment

Equity-based MTSS for behavior is a proactive framework for teachers, an alternative to exclusionary discipline for students of color (Sugai & Horner, 2020). Teachers are encouraged to actively teach and acknowledge social behaviors in school to decrease the number of students with challenging behaviors and to improve the school climate (Fallon et al., 2021). As more schools and districts are implementing equity based MTSS for behavior programs, there has been a noticeable decrease in exclusionary school discipline and an increase in positive school climate (Musu et al., 2019).

Disproportionate punishment is defined as minority students, primarily African American and Latino students, being severely punished for less severe incidents than their white peers (Bal et al., 2021). From the U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (2018), the percentages of overall disciplinary actions from the 2015-2016 school year to the 2017–2018 school year have decreased by 2%. However, the data found that school-related arrests, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement have increased. Disproportionate punishment or consequences are associated with negative student outcomes both in and out of

the school environment. Students that have higher than normal disproportionate punishment usually experience dropping out of school or receive more disciplinary actions (Gladney et al., 2021).

When students are suspended or disciplined, there is little evidence of modeling or teaching the desired behavior. The lack of instruction on prosocial behavior and the frequency of suspensions or punishments only causes more negative behaviors from the student (Gladney et al., 2021). Students that receive explicit, culturally responsive instruction can reduce barriers to learning and lessen the disproportionality of punishments. Explicit, culturally responsive instruction can also lead to positive relationships between students and teachers and within the school environment.

The numbers for overall disciplinary actions have decreased, possibly because of the implementation of MTSS-B. The U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (2018) found that 18.2% made up the enrollment of African American boys in pre-school during the 2017-2018 year and yet received 43.3% one or more out-of-school suspensions. White students made up 43% of the enrollment, and only 37% received one or more out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018).

Powell (2020) noted that scholars are observing the impact of exclusionary discipline. Exclusionary discipline harms students and is a source of trauma for families and communities. Students feel targeted at school, and school no longer becomes a haven for students that come from low-income communities (Bell, 2020). Students are suspended for minor dress code violations, standing up when asked to sit, and hugging friends. Students feel unheard and often think that the administration does not let students tell their side of the story. In Bell's study, one

student stated that they thought they would not have been suspended if the administration would hear their side of the story. In the narrative, the student said that he stood because he noticed his pants had fallen below the heel of his shoe; in order not to ruin his new pants, he stood to pull his pants up, and the teacher sent him to the office, citing this action as a severe infraction.

Fallon et al. (2021) stated that suspended students often experience negative relationships with their peers. The suspension also affects their sense of belonging in school and their long-term goals for the school. Suspended students were frequently labeled as bad and were often silenced and ignored during investigations. White teachers often identified African American toddlers' facial expressions as threatening or angry more often than their White peers (Powell & Coles, 2021). This perception implies that African American students are at risk for disciplinary behaviors and the misunderstanding of culture by teachers.

According to Bal et al. (2021), the disproportionality of punishment is a small portion of a greater picture of racism, inequality, and capitalism in the United States education system. Currell (2020) stated that critical pedagogy believes that teaching should challenge learners to think critically about societal power structures and inequalities. Learners develop critical consciousness, are active in their learning, and collaborate with their peers to create and solve problems using their personal experiences. Freire (1960) believed in changing education so students could become critical thinkers to solve social injustices. He wanted to progress and reform education and liberation of the oppressed. Critical pedagogy addresses issues of racism, inequalities, and the need for the learner to take charge of their learning, draw from their personal experiences, and find a solution to level the playing field for everyone (Freire, 1973). Freire's philosophy on education (1973) was based on a cultural reorganization, believing that

colonial structures and ideologies must be dismantled. This philosophy is the large picture in which disproportionate discipline is a portion.

Disproportionate Discipline and Impact on Parents

More parents of color than white parents are affected when their child is suspended or expelled from school (Bell, 2021). More students of color are also disciplined harshly compared to their white peers for the same infractions. Parents of these students of color suspended or expelled are often faced with the dilemma of missing work or not knowing where their child will go. Parents often must miss work to pick up their children. Black families and suspensions significantly impact their lives more considerably than White families. Black families face loss of wages, reduction of wages, loss of jobs, or having to drop down to part-time status because of suspensions. Disproportionate discipline affects not only the students but also their families.

Some school districts have put into place alternatives to school suspensions. However, some parents are finding out that many schools are not using the other options and are going straight to suspensions (Bell, 2021). In Michigan, schools are to consider a student's age, disability, and discipline history before issuing a punishment. Michigan schools are encouraged to use restorative justice practices before going straight to suspensions.

Suspensions are meant to decrease school violence and force students to understand the severity of their choices. When students are suspended, there is a decline in academic achievement, more opportunities for students to get into further trouble, and Black students leaving the district, dropping out of school, or getting arrested (Bell, 2021). Suspensions are less effective than previously thought. If behavioral theorists are correct, such as Bandura, Skinner, and Vygotsky, then the environment of experiencing suspensions only teaches students how to misbehave.

Parents have also reported that mothers of African American students as young as 2 years old were treated differently because of their facial expressions, and teachers also reported being afraid of the toddlers (Powell & Coles, 2018). African American students were at an increased risk for discipline for behaviors that would otherwise be considered developmentally appropriate in White students (Halberstadt et al., 2018).

As with many diverse communities, in Black communities, education is essential and a way to social and financial mobility (Fallon et al., 2021). Narratives with Black parents show that they are in constant negotiations with the education system so that their children can access quality, equitable education. Suspensions trigger embarrassment, frustration, fear, and disgust in many Black families.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practice is a framework to help reduce the suspension rate in schools. Restorative justice is adapted from law practice that emphasizes conflict resolution with a focus on cooperative or collaborative processes (Gladney et al., 2021). The practice of restorative justice reframes conflict in a way that moves away from harsh punishments but toward building a strong community and a method of healing (Zehr, 2019). The theory of restorative justice or practices opposes traditional punitive models of discipline (Lustick, 2020). Each school can frame the practice to fit the needs of their communities, and the restorative practice is from restorative theory.

Like MTSS-B, restorative justice aligns with the three tiers and is proactive. In tier 1, restorative justice uses community-building circles or reentry circles. This prepares students to reenter the school community if they were suspended or conferences to address issues. Tier 2 is the restorative circles and tier 3 is the reentry circle. These 3 tiers are meant to be non-punitive

and positive for all students and to reframe misbehavior as harm to the school and ways to help students heal through social-emotional learning (Lustick, 2020).

Lustick (2020) found that for change to happen, transformation needs to shift from a discriminatory school culture to a school culture that would need teachers to shift their thinking about including culturally responsive teaching and discipline, as well as their purpose in education. There needs to be a deep understanding of a student's culture. Researchers that write and research about disproportionate discipline do not always talk about culturally responsive teaching. This mindset needs to shift in the other direction toward culturally relevant restorative practice (Lustick, 2020). It was recognized by Bal et al. (2018) that an important component of culturally responsive teaching is to include critical consciousness. Critical consciousness can shift the mindset of teachers to follow Freire's thought on critical consciousness, which is to allow students to recognize the problems they are facing and to find solutions together.

There is a caveat to using a restorative justice framework. Safir and Dugan (2021) stated that many leaders will radically change their systems so that the current system in place is equitable. The mistake is trying to make the bigger shift in redesigning a system to restorative justice and not taking into consideration the political, cultural, and social impact of the change in a school. Much like Bandura (1971), including culturally relevant restorative practice (Lustick, 2020), it is the ability to model for students about behaviors with the inclusion of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy. This can transform the school's culture from having a disproportionate discipline to a program where students are taught how to reflect and problem-solve.

Data-Driven Support

Disproportionate punishment has been a concern for the past two decades (Bal et al., 2021). Policy changes have occurred to diminish exclusionary discipline, and different programs and responses were introduced to the education system in the United States. One such program was the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). The data and evidence-based practices would decrease because office discipline referrals (ODRs) would be based on data and because these evidence-based practices would help with problem behaviors (Horner, 2018).

PBIS offered a decrease, but the decrease and benefit were for the White students. A disproportionate percentage of African American, Latino, and Native American students are still being given ODRs and remain overrepresented (Bal et al., 2021). In response, there was a call for a culturally responsive PBIS to be implemented. Cultural responsiveness would be implemented, and evidence-based practices would be implemented so that race would not be a factor.

ODRs are subjective and are dependent on a teacher's skill and experience when filling out an ODR (Verlenden et al., 2021). A teacher must have the ability to observe an occurrence and evaluate what could be ambiguous behavior. The teacher needs to decide if the student's behavior is warranted an office referral. How ODRs are used and perceived is dependent on a teacher's perspective of the policies of the school and the teacher's perspective of the school climate. The reliance on teacher initiated ODRs has been tracked with an over-referral of students of color not only for suspensions or consequences but also tracked towards special education services (Verlenden et al., 2021).

Although PBIS has been effective in improving positive social behaviors (Gage et al., 2019), there are limitations to the program. The first limitation is the need for more evidence of reducing student internalized concerns and promoting SEL (von der Embse et al., 2022).

Another limitation of PBIS is the need for more teacher involvement in the intervention continuum, especially in tier 2. Tier 1 is universal support for all students, which can occur in the classroom and school wide. Tier 2 supports are usually outside the classroom, with small group specialists, such as Math and Reading support. The final limitation of PBIS is that more evidence-based assessment procedures must be implemented. Instead, there is the use of office discipline referrals based on a teacher's perspective, causing covert biases that the teacher may not be aware of.

Universal screeners are to support the core instruction in schools, to make the core instruction stronger, and meet the students where they are, not to have the students meet the curriculum (McCart & Miller, 2021). For MTSS-B, students are given a universal screener, which tells educators which students may need more intensive support in tier 2 or 3. While students are in tier 2 and tier 3, progress will be monitored, creating a fluid and equitable system for students. If the interventions work, students are not kept at the intensive tiers.

Data drives instruction and helps educators make informed decisions for the students. Evidence-based practices are used to meet students' needs based on their instruction data. All available resources are used to support students best, regardless of their tier (McCart & Miller, 2021). Data also informs the MTSS team if professional development is needed for teachers, what kind of instruction is needed for students, and action planning.

Equity-based MTSS is needed for the disproportionate discipline of students of color in schools. Many students of color are punished more frequently and harshly for subjective reasons (Bal et al., 2021). The reasons for punishment were based on minor dress code violations or talking out of turn. Data-driven decision-making from the universal screeners for MTSS-B can

address racial disproportionality discipline. When data is used with fidelity, there should be benchmark screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessments.

Data is based strictly on student answers on how they perceive themselves or how the teachers perceive them. One universal screener is the Social Academic Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS). In SAEBRS, there are 19 items based on general, social, academic, and emotional behavior. This universal tool effectively evaluates and rates students on standard behavior criteria (Severson et al., 2007). SAEBRS is a screener that is given in two ways. One way is for the teacher to fill out the form for younger students in kindergarten to 2nd grade. The teacher or adult would rate the students based on their observations in class and outside of the classroom. In grades 3-5, students would answer questions on a Google Form based on their perceptions. Once the data is collected, data are analyzed, and students have been identified that need tier 2 and tier 3 support (von der Embse et al., 2022).

There are several school districts in the United States that have implemented MTSS-B successfully and with fidelity, including Florida, Kansas, and Michigan. In Florida, the state collaborated with the department of education and the state's Student Support Services Project. The program is called Florida's Behavior Support Project (FPBS) (Florida Center for Interactive Media, n.d). In Kansas, there was an alignment team that dedicated much of their time to providing education and the tools to the schools to successfully implement the MTSS framework. Michigan also followed suit. In each of these school districts, data also played a strong role in keeping MTSS implemented successfully (von der Embse et. al, 2022). Student assessments need to be monitored. Not only is establishing a baseline important, but also progress monitoring throughout the year and recording the data is important to implement MTSS with fidelity.

In a universal screener, such as SAEBRS, a teacher needs to be cognizant of what and how the teachers are filling out the information about the student. Teachers must remember that although one behavior may not necessarily be acceptable within a classroom in the United States or align with American norms, the behavior may be appropriate within that student's culture. With the rising number of culturally diverse students in the United States, immigrants and students may not be aware of cultural norms in the United States.

A case study on a middle school was conducted in a rural town in the United States. At that school, all the teachers were white, and more than half of the teachers were female (von de Embse et al., 2022). The student body had a high population of Hispanics at 23% of the school's student population. The teacher to student ratio was 14:1, which considerably lower than the nation's average of 16:1. This school had been implementing MTSS for three years. The school conducted a bi-annual school climate survey. The survey found that teachers were burned out, stressed out, and needed more support for implementation of MTSS. Students took their own survey on school climate. The results indicated that students wanted more social and emotional support and support in problem solving from the staff at the school. When a universal screener was given to the students and teachers to complete, the screener revealed that at least 30% of the student body were considered at-risk both academically and social-emotionally. There was no mention of a culturally responsive implementation in any of the tiers. Conducting a study on a school without a diverse teaching staff can skew the data.

Universal screeners need to ensure there is accurate data, including reliability and validity to make equitable decisions (Pullen & Kennedy, 2019). Teams also need to consider that not all universal screeners may not be appropriate for some students. Examples of this unequitable practice would be of a non-verbal student, if the screener is for oral fluency in reading or a

student that is autistic and cannot express their feelings for a behavioral screener (McCart & Miller, 2020).

For a universal screener to be considered culturally responsive, teachers need to evaluate the student on a universal screener objectively. The creators of the universal screeners would like to think that the raters are objective; however, the raters may be subjective. Teachers may be subjective on items that ask about a student's learning behaviors. Anthony et al. (2022) found that the teacher's characteristics influence the answers given by teachers. Answers to students are often shaped by the teacher's beliefs and assumptions (Pickens, 2022), affecting the screeners' results to determine if the student needs extra support accurately. Pickens further explained that teachers might face stress from the responsibilities that compete on the job, which can interfere with teachers' perceptions of the students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

A school climate often indicates if the environment values diversity and whether the school promotes a culturally responsive learning environment for its students (DeBoer et al., 2020). A culturally responsive school environment is free of biases and race-based discrimination, acknowledging students' diverse backgrounds and cultures (Nganga et al., 2019). The curriculum is used to reflect diversity; there is a visible challenge towards discrimination, inequality, and bias, and students are believed when students say that they are being targeted because of their identity (Malone, 2021).

A key part of culturally responsive teaching is the teacher's response to students' experiences and needs. Often, the idea of an implementation of culturally responsive teaching is on a superficial level, where cultural days are celebrated with food or a brief lesson on a famous

person. Teachers need to change this mindset to one where curriculum and teaching is adapted to the needs of the diverse student backgrounds (Abacioglu et al., 2020).

With the rising numbers of students of color in the United States education system, there needs to be an awareness of cultures and culturally responsive to these changes. Culturally responsive teaching refers to being responsive to a student's cultural or linguistic background (Cruz et al., 2022). Teachers acknowledge a student's cultural background when culturally responsive teaching is implemented into a curriculum. This acknowledgement helps with a student's sense of belonging in school and their experiences of learning.

A study was conducted to expose the subtle forms of racism and professional microaggressions in teacher professionalism with in-depth interviews with graduates of a teacher education program (Marom, 2018). Although the study took place in Canada, the premise is the same regarding racism and professional microaggressions in teacher professionalism. The study included Aboriginal teachers and their views of being in a mainstream teacher program in Canada. Throughout pre-service teacher training, candidates were reminded of what was appropriate to dress as a teacher, what a teacher should look like, and what a teacher should sound like. One teacher dressed to show that she was an Indigenous person so that students would recognize and relate with the symbols, as there were no symbols for Indigenous students to relate with at this school. This teacher faced subtle criticism and diverse forms of microaggressions because her clothes did not match those of the Western dress code (Marom, 2018). This teacher was trying to be culturally responsive with her clothes but was met with microaggressions from her colleagues instead.

Nash (2018) conducted a narrative study of preservice teachers and their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. One preservice teacher narrated their experiences learning about

the culture and knowing what needs to be done to learn more about their students. She stated that she would have to know exactly who the students are, going deeper than the color of their skin. She realized that it is about including race in teaching, through how a teacher teaches. Different preservice teachers realized that culturally responsive teaching is about including it in lesson planning, building student relationships, and being cognizant of the diverse, cultural backgrounds of students.

African American students had, and still have, the lowest achievement in schools across America. African American males have the highest number of students in special education programs, and African American students are likely the population living in the poorest areas in the United States. African American students attended schools within these areas with low teacher-to-student ratios, where teachers are overworked, underpaid, and the most underprepared compared to wealthier areas. There is a large gap between the children attending these schools compared to their counterparts attending middle-class neighborhoods (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

After the world pandemic hit in 2020, the attention was no longer solely on African American students but also turned to Latino students, students with social-emotional behavior concerns, and Indigenous students. It was evident that culturally responsive teaching and an equity-based framework were needed in the MTSS programs. Schools that practice culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy produced better student outcomes than students in the same grade in the same building that did not receive culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy. In culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy classrooms, students were allowed to think, discuss, and learn using diverse literature (Ladson-Billings, 2021), which contributed to students' successes in school and a decrease in the disproportionate discipline.

There are three elements to culturally relevant pedagogy: academic achievement/student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political/critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Academic achievement is student learning. Students learn from the interaction with teachers. Teachers must remember that academic achievement/student learning differs from content coverage. Academic achievement/student learning is based on growth and what the students have learned from the curriculum. The second element is cultural competence. Cultural competence is a teacher with cultural competency to teach and bring cultural references into the curriculum. Student achievement is high; student self-esteem is high when teachers are socially just and assess from culturally responsive perspectives. The final element is the socio-political/critical consciousness. Socio-political/critical consciousness students know how to make changes and understand the why of what they are learning. Teachers must be prepared to share how to make changes and understand the why of what they are learning with their students (Ansorger, 2021).

Much of what is considered “best practices” in education comes from a middle-class, Eurocentric style of interaction and expectations of student behaviors (Durand & Tavaras, 2021). Within the curriculum, the assumptions and standards are deeply considered Eurocentric. Gay (2018) cited different approaches that U.S schools use often in classrooms. Passive-receptive style, where teachers expect students to only respond when the students are called upon. The culturally responsive teaching curriculum would include a participatory-interactive style, where speakers are expected to engage and collaborate in constructing the dialogue with gestures and through vocalization at the same time the speaker is speaking. This is common among African American, Latino, and Native Hawaiian students.

Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching

When educators use the culturally responsive teaching framework to address the lack of diversity in the curriculum, it brings an enriching experience for students. Learning becomes more meaningful for students, the school and classroom environment becomes cooperative, and there is student engagement with culturally responsive teaching (Abacioglu et al., 2020). A qualitative study was conducted on two history classes teaching multiple viewpoints of history to students. Although this study used a Critical Race Theory framework, it relates to culturally responsive teaching. State standards were used when the curriculum was revised to reflect multiple viewpoints and critical perspectives. The study showed teachers changing the curriculum to reflect various understandings of the topic (Hemmler et. al, 2021). Using a culturally responsive teaching mindset, the teachers turned the learning environment into a genuinely equal learning environment for all learners because it valued all identities and experiences (Kibler et al., 2020). If the teachers did not use culturally responsive teaching, encouraging students to think critically about the material and lessons, where students experienced racism and microaggressions, student experiences with poverty and racism would impact students negatively in learning and their growth (Langenkamp & Carbonaro, 2018).

School diversity plans have been on the agendas of many schools to create an equitable learning environment for students. School-level policies need to coexist with structural policies to address the issues of the exclusion of minority students and the gentrification of institutional racism (Khalil & Brown, 2021). Diversity dissonance suggests that leaders work against institutional racism. Diversity plans can work if teachers are aware of their biases. When teachers acknowledge and address their biases, the school can start working towards a change in

behaviors (Sevon et al., 2021). Working together and enacting reforms is in the best interest of marginalized students (Khalil & Brown, 2021).

The self-efficacy of teachers implementing a culturally responsive curriculum is a theoretical concept from Bandura's social cognitive theory. This theory refers to a belief in the ability to organize and utilize the actions to produce the needed results (Bandura, 1977). For culturally relevant teaching, self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in affecting a student's learning with the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (Cruz et al., 2022).

Teacher's that have an awareness of self-efficacy in culturally responsive teaching is associated with positive outcomes for students of color. It creates a positive student and teacher relationship, and the teachers can respond to student needs more effectively (Cruz et al., 2022). Teachers still need to develop their self-efficacy in culturally responsive teaching, regardless of the positive outcomes. Teachers do not feel that they can implement culturally responsive teaching.

A study showing teachers' self-efficacy beliefs implementing culturally responsive teaching of both preservice teachers and seasoned teachers showed that items on the survey related to curriculum and instruction scored with the highest scores (Cruz et al., 2022). Teachers also believed that they had a good understanding of student preferences, building personal relationships with students and building trust. Teachers scored lowest on questions that related to cultural knowledge and building home relationships or connections. Teachers that worked in private schools scored lower compared to teachers that worked in schools with a diverse student population. Teachers wanted professional development in connecting with students of diverse backgrounds and the results of the study showed that both traditional and alternative credential

teacher programs need to train teachers to feel confident in teaching students with diverse backgrounds (Cruz et al., 2022).

With restorative justice and MTSS-B, using a culturally responsive mindset or culturally relevant pedagogy can give students a voice to problem solve. Lustick (2020) found that in one high school, the students could voice their concerns and solutions for a student with behavior concerns. Teachers learned about their students and their experiences, and students could voice their concerns and tell their side of the story. The teachers and students were able to come up with solutions to help each other and came away with a better understanding of the varying situations and a deeper understanding of each other. Being culturally responsive can explain why the students behave negatively and positively.

Social Emotional Learning and MTSS

The U.S. Department of Education's mission for schools is to promote student achievement and preparation for the world through excellence in education and the assurance of equal access. To achieve this mission, von der Embse (2022) wrote that this is dependent on the MTSS framework to match student needs. There has been a rise in socio-emotional and mental health needs among students since COVID-19 (Russo et al., 2018). Culturally Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students are also over-represented in special education. These students have been diagnosed and misinterpreted with a disability rather than teachers understanding and realizing that the behaviors may be rooted in the student's cultures or linguistic abilities (Cruz et al., 2020).

MTSS-B has been the framework schools have used to help shape the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) of Culturally Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students. MTSS-B is evidence-based and tier 1 services all students, regardless of their cultural background, socioeconomic status,

family structure, and neighborhood level. In theory, culturally responsive teaching should bring a positive experience for students of color and improve the student's educational experiences. Especially the students that have experienced racial or social injustices in school (Gay, 2018). For youth that are CLD, four factors can affect their mental health. The socioeconomic status of their family, their childhood problems or trauma, the structure of the family, and the level of the neighborhood (Deboer et. al, 2022). In a study conducted on the cultural responsiveness of MTSS and CLD youth and mental health, researchers found challenges with implementing an equitable school-based program, describing culturally responsive practices, and giving suggestions on how to implement a program.

The researchers of the study on the cultural responsiveness of MTSS and CLD youth discovered that implementing a framework of a continuum of support for students did not necessarily mean that the support extended to CLD students. They found that when developing a program using MTSS, it was often without cultural sensitivity and leaned toward white cultural norms (Deboer, et. al, 2022). Bandura (1971) describes behavior as learned best from modeling, which applies to Skinner's theory of behavior being known from a person's environment (Schlinger, 2021). Both Bandura and Skinner's theories were developed with white cultural norms, where much of the research and theory for MTSS comes from. Many students with social-emotional behavior concerns do not have access to mental medical health providers because it is too expensive. Their families do not have enough medical insurance, or there is limited availability for these families in lower-income neighborhoods (Graaf & Snowden, 2020). Schools have become where students can receive social and emotional support, starting with a framework like MTSS.

Implementing a theory or practice with culturally responsive teaching can improve mental health for CLD students. There has been no direct focus on culture using an MTSS framework, and it has been a universal program for a generalized population of students (Deboer et al., 2022). Malone et al. (2021) discussed that social-emotional learning and MTSS are largely Eurocentric, evidence-based practices without direct discussions about all the concerns and topics that culturally responsive teaching would require. The absence of culturally responsive teaching in social-emotional learning and an MTSS-B framework can affect the mental health of CLD students.

Using culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy will challenge teachers to rethink their perceptions of student behaviors (Parkhouse et al., 2020). It may increase student learning engagement and academic achievement. For student learning engagement and academic achievement to happen, teachers need professional development and training in both approaches. There is a lack of knowledge on how to be culturally responsive in their instruction, diversify the curriculum and guide a student's curiosity or inquiry on diversity and social justice issues (Neri et al., 2019). The problem comes from the lack of culturally diverse teachers in the education system. Eighty percent accounted for White teachers in the United States (De Brey et al., 2019) while the population of culturally diverse students rose.

Multimodal Practices

Multimodal practices include passing stories through oral language, music, video, on a digital platform, or person-to-person through reading a book or telling a story from memory. In education, multimodal practices include bringing culturally responsive teaching into schools and removing the archaic learning and teaching methods from books written from only one perspective. These practices can also have students think critically about the ideology of color

blindness and give students voices to challenge what they are learning. Students can bring solutions to the curriculum and race inequality (Mills & Unsworth, 2018).

Different sets of literature taught across the United States and Canada were researched. Much of the literature taught from the early grades up to high school is not diverse, the main characters are always white, or the character of color is written in a way that is stereotypical, both in overt and covert manners. In three early childhood literature, class and racial biases in the speech were followed. Within the three books, the characters were not racially or culturally diverse, and themes of racial segregation were included in the books. The teacher used a culturally responsive method of questioning the students. The themes were challenged by the teacher's method of culturally responsive questioning, and the students were able to think critically about the stories they read (Mills & Unsworth, 2018).

At schools where not talking openly about race and appearing to be unbiased, the use of culturally responsive teaching was absent. Teachers unknowingly created a culture of individualism, limited academic levels of students of color, and intensified marginalization of various cultures (Mills & Unsworth, 2018). Students needed to be more engaged with their learning. Teachers became oblivious to the issues those students of color faced.

Teachers need to explicitly teach students the desired behaviors while considering the student diverse backgrounds. Teachers can use meaningful connections to student backgrounds and add cultural relevance to the instruction to engage students and raise student achievement (Gladney et al., 2021). This instruction can also decrease disproportionate discipline, suspensions, and add to a student's learning.

Preservice teacher programs also need to include how to teach with a culturally responsive mindset. Nash (2018) conducted a narrative study of preservice teachers and learning

about culturally responsive teaching in a preservice teacher program. One preservice teacher noted that learning about culturally responsive teaching happened in only two classes. The preservice teacher felt that to be truly a teacher that is culturally responsive, is to be emersed in a different culture.

A robust curriculum needs to be included with points of view from diverse voices. The European voice has been dominant, especially in the history curriculum across the United States (Hemmler et al., 2021). There is rarely a curriculum that shows and represents all cultures and their impacts on the building and history of the United States. Providing different perspectives allows for an environment for students to think critically and ask questions about the different groups' actions and the reasons behind those actions. Using culturally responsive teaching as a guide, implementing these voices and points of view can be possible (Hemmler, 2021).

Literature Critique

MTSS-B needs to be culturally responsive for all students, and assessments need to be administered so that there is no discrimination against students that are from racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse backgrounds (Thompson et al., 2022). Much of the data collected on universal screeners, such as the SAEBRS, are of teachers' perceptions, and the teachers' explicit and implicit biases can affect the result of the screeners (Verlenden et al., 2021).

One study completed using SAEBRS showed the participants (teachers) as being generally female and white (Whitely & Cuenca-Carlino, 2020). The study was conducted in an urban elementary school with a low-income population of students. The study found that most of the results were impacted by teacher bias, which skewed the results in a negative or positive direction. There was a lack of diversity found at the urban school, as most of the teachers were white and female.

MTSS-B tier 1 needs to be implemented with good quality support. When MTSS-B is implemented in schools, many of the schools focus on tiers 2 and 3, without much thought to the quality of tier 1 support. Tier 1 takes the most time during implementation; it is ongoing and requires an enormous number of materials and resources to successfully implement universal support for all students (Sullivan et. al, 2020). Tier 1 is the foundation in which culturally responsive teaching should be implemented alongside with the implementation of the MTSS-B framework. The successful implementation of MTSS-B framework needs administrative leadership, an integrated educational framework, family and community involvement, and an inclusive policy structure and practice (SWIFT Education Center, n.d). Looking deeply into the MTSS framework, Sailor et al. (2018) found that MTSS was driving student improvement and the domains of administrative leadership, integrated educational framework, family and community involvement, and inclusive policy structure and practice were there to keep the framework sustainable.

Exposure to trauma, racism, and poverty can affect students of color and their needs (Margherio et. al, 2019). These exposures can be ignored and disregarded when screening, which perpetuates the already oppressive system. Ignoring these issues can further cause inequality and can misrepresent students (Kim et. al, 2021). The environment where the student comes from can influence their behavior in school. Teachers also need to recognize their own biases and be sure that when they give the screeners, they are not perpetuating these biases in their screeners.

Tier 1 attends to the whole child; therefore, teachers need to be aware of the trauma and mental health of students of color that may have experienced trauma. For tier 1 to be successful, at least 80% of students should respond to the practices put in place (Sullivan et. al, 2020). All

necessary structures must be put in place so that educators are prepared to implement MTSS-B in their schools and classrooms with culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching.

Teachers have expressed that professional development in culturally responsive teaching and implementing an MTSS-B framework is needed (Gladney et al., 2021). This professional development can help in teacher development and effective application in the classroom. Professional development also must be effective so that teachers can implement culturally responsive teaching and MTSS-B in their instruction with confidence. Gladney et al. have found in studies that the traditional one-day professional developments were not effective and did not give the teachers the tools needed to implement culturally responsive teaching and MTSS-B with confidence and effectiveness.

Systemic changes need to happen in schools to advocate for students of color. School psychologists can advocate for a systemic change to change the oppressive systems in education (Fallon et. al, 2021). Fallon et. al. stated that school psychologists can influence school leaders and educators to advocate for change and share their knowledge with the community. MTSS can be culturally responsive with the knowledge and influence of a school psychologist.

MTSS frameworks are often considered culturally neutral because the education system tends to lean more towards the white cultural norms rather than addressing the different cultural norms that a classroom with different cultural backgrounds may have (Caldera et al., 2020). When culturally responsive teaching leans towards white cultural norms, it can harm students of color through the promotion of culturally inappropriate curriculum and assessment procedures, inappropriate interactions with students of color, interacting with students of color in an oppressive way, or misdiagnosing behaviors that are normal as being disorders.

Systemic change can happen through teacher self-efficacy in pre-service teacher programs and professional development. In 2018, 52.5% of students were non-white, which makes up more than half of the students in the United States (Hussar & Bailey, 2019). With culturally, linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse students on the rise, it is imperative that teachers know how to teach in multicultural classrooms. Working on an educator's self-efficacy in culturally responsive teaching, there is success in working with diverse students (Parkhouse et al., 2019), which can lead to fewer behavior issues. Teachers need to know how to adapt to culturally responsive teaching for diverse students in their classroom, use the students' diverse backgrounds as a learning resource, and ensure that students work collaboratively with respect for one another's culture so that an inclusive environment is created (Choi & Lee, 2020).

Although there has been an effort towards educational equity across the United States, pre-teacher programs are grounded in color blindness, the idea that race is not essential but insignificant to life experiences and opportunities. There is a presumption that all individuals are equal, regardless of where they come from (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching should include teachers acknowledging a student's race instead of ignoring it.

Pre-service teachers need an understanding of cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness to provide culturally responsive instruction to students (Cherng & Davis, 2019). With culturally responsive instruction being available in the pre-service teachers' program, there would be an association with better teaching, a knowledge of differences that occur within the classroom, a knowledge of cultural differences and understanding that occur within the classroom, which leads to a better classroom climate. With this knowledge, it would be easier to implement an equity based MTSS framework in all schools across the United States.

Von der Embse (2022) explained the significant steps of implementing a successful MTSS framework, guiding steps for tier 1 evaluations and universal screenings, but there is no mention of culturally responsive evaluations, implementations, and universal screenings. Successful implementation of MTSS is to ensure that the services match student needs, but there is no mention about ensuring that the diverse backgrounds of the students are also acknowledged. The questions asked in the guiding tier 1 evaluations are about objective outcomes, data-driven processes for monitoring and evaluating the progress of implementation, and the frequency of monitoring. There are no questions about how and when and where to implement a culturally responsive MTSS framework or use of evaluations.

Definition of Equity-Based MTSS

Equity-based MTSS is a framework to meet the needs of the students. The curriculum is fluid, and culturally responsive, and all tools are used to ensure that the student receives universal support based on data (Mijares et al., 2017). Opportunity, access to resources, and culture are involved in an equity-based system for all students. Students will have a welcomed sense of belonging; teaching and learning are fluid, all based on a diverse culture and accepting different characteristics, traits, backgrounds, and learning abilities.

When an equity based MTSS system is implemented, it is a complex structure that benefits all students positively. The design is built together by educators from different backgrounds of knowledge, which they then use to inform what best fits their students. It is data-driven, based on diverse academic levels, backgrounds, and behaviors, using all social resources to meet the needs of all students in a timely fashion (McCart, 2020). Building an equity based MTSS system will be based on a tiered system, tier 1 servicing all students, tier 2 and 3 becoming more intensive support for students based on data.

A strong component of an equity based MTSS system is including a universal design for learning (UDL). When including a UDL, the foundation is for all students, it is universal for learning (CAST, 2018). Included in the UDL for MTSS is differentiated instruction daily. Integrated learning and integrated service delivery are included in the UDL model for MTSS. Integrated learning is for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning, which are looked at as one unit. Integrated service delivery is accessible in different and multiple ways, and it is for the different needs of students (McCart & Miller, 2020).

MTSS-B is a framework that needs to be implemented with fidelity and, at the same time, tailored or localized for the needs of each school (Bal et al., 2021). Since each school and community has a diverse background, being culturally responsive to the community's involvement can be challenging. How these frameworks can be implemented with fidelity so students can have a greater understanding of school expectations and be understanding of other cultures can also be a challenge (Bal et al., 2021).

MTSS programs that include SEL also need culturally responsive teaching, student-based inquiry projects, and opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers (Jagers et al., 2019). Promoting culturally responsive education in an MTSS program is underserved in low-income communities (Malone et al., 2021). At all tier levels, culturally relevant pedagogy will encourage students to use these skills at home, school, and out in their communities (Brown et al., 2018). Positive changes can happen at all tiers within the urban communities when cultural relevance is present, and students can self-regulate their emotions and self-competence.

MTSS programs that include cultural relevance can also promote a school culture based on positive racial identity development, exposure to cultural practices, respect for other cultures, and preparation for bias and discrimination through different times in their lives (Malone et al.,

2021). Cultural relevance in an MTSS-B framework can create high levels of engagement in learning, emotional support for each other, and empathy. Students feel safe and empowered and have a sense of belonging (Gbolo & Grier-Reed, 2019). An inclusive, culturally responsive MTSS framework for behavior can also avoid punitive reactions toward students (Pickens, 2022), leading to disproportionate discipline.

Equity-based MTSS-B requires equity to be the center of practice in schools. MTSS is for all learners; however, explicit attention must be paid to equity so that neutrality is avoided. Neutrality does not mean equity (Sullivan et al., 2022). Sullivan (2021) wrote that the norm in education is Eurocentric. Learning, behaviors, student development, and student well-being are centered in European ways. The focus goes from which students to support to the needs of the students and the resources necessary to support the students in academic, social, and behavioral aspects (McCart & Miller, 2020).

In an equity based MTSS framework, within the 3 tiers of support, the framework consists of being responsive to the student rather than reactive to their behaviors. The fluidity of the framework includes ensuring that instructional resources are available for all students based on student needs (McCart & Miller, 2020). The teachers, building staff, students, and community are all involved in planning and implementing an equity based MTSS framework.

Many schools that implement MTSS-B often do not consider the students' diversity or cultural contexts (Malone et al., 2020). Schools that do not consider diverse student cultures often have minority students that are lonely and depressed and have suicidal thoughts (Madubata et al., 2019). These feelings may stem from racism experienced in schools or microaggressions that are indirect or subtle. Students of color often have racial and economic traumas in schools, homes, and neighborhoods. There has been increased racism and microaggressions since 2016

in the United States (Edwards & Rushin, 2018). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2019), 63% of racism incidents were reported by the media, and 33% of the 63% were reported by teachers. With these incidents, many administrators did not reaffirm school values or denounce the bias or racism within their schools (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019).

Summary

An equity-based MTSS-B system where all students are equally treated to avoid unnecessary suspensions has been at the forefront of many school districts. Many MTSS-B systems have been paired with PBIS, SEL, or Social Emotional Behavior (SEB). Much of the research on having an MTSS system in a school has been based on academics because of the tiered system. The tiered system was first introduced in Response to Intervention (RtI).

In the United States, there are many generalized programs to address the behavior. Many of these programs need a culturally responsive teaching component. These programs do not consider the culture of students, and discipline is disproportionate, where students of color are still at a disadvantage (Bal et al., 2021). Bandura's theory of social learning (1971) describes why people behave as they do. People model from their observations and the anticipated knowledge of consequences and rewards for their behaviors. Equity-based MTSS-B should include critical consciousness, critical pedagogy, and critical reflection (Sullivan et al., 2022).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this single instrument, the descriptive case study, was to describe the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework. Based on the MTSS framework, the behavior program explicitly included culturally responsive teaching and to be inclusive and equitable for all students in an elementary school setting. This chapter presents the procedure, implementation, design, and analysis for this case study.

Research Design

A qualitative study was utilized for this study because it was representative of a world that was complex and constantly changing. The qualitative methods were supported by constructive paradigms, representing a socially constructed reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research also consists of the transformations of the world into a series of representations through field notes, interviews, conversations, and recordings. Through case studies, researchers can collect, share, and analyze data created from the participants' perspectives (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi-Moghadam, 2018; Yin, 2018). This single-instrument, descriptive case study was based on interviews, a questionnaire, and data collected from the universal screener. A single instrument, a descriptive case study, was used in this study because it was relevant to current events and was complex and socially constructed.

A descriptive case study was an appropriate design for this research because the case study showed a gap in connection between cultural responsiveness, equity, and inclusiveness and a school-wide behavior program. There was a social phenomenon happening in the United States education system with inequality and the demand for a more culturally responsive curriculum. Usually, a researcher would ask questions to explain the how or why of a social

phenomenon, and the more questions on the how and why the more relevant a case study becomes. A case study often focuses on the in-depth social phenomenon and gives a real-world perspective, such as small group behaviors (Yin, 2018).

Hedrick et. al, (1993) suggested that the first condition of a case study is to form the research question. Using the who, what, where, why, and how questions can help guide what the study will be about and where it will lead. The question form is also essential, as it could indicate the correct research method to use (Yin, 2018). The form of the research question should be created to match the research method.

The second condition of a case study is controlling behavioral events and focusing on the contemporary (Yin, 2018). A case study defines contemporary as the fluidity between past and present, not just the present (Yin, 2018). A case study relies on both past and present sources of evidence. This study reaches into the past of racism, inequality, and disproportionate discipline in education and connects to the present with culture, equality, diversity, and inclusiveness in education with an awareness of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Research Questions

Below are the listed questions used in this study.

Central Research Question

How are teachers including culturally responsive teaching, equity, and inclusiveness within an MTSS-B framework?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Sub-Question Two

What is the self-efficacy rate of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants were unique in this single instrument, descriptive case study. The study took place within the continental United States, but questions and interviews were through social media and email correspondence. At the time of the study, the researcher was overseas, and the participants were within the continental United States. The time difference and locations made things difficult for any face-to-face interactions.

Site (or Setting)

The setting of the study was within the United States and outside of the continental United States, but still within an American school system. The school districts were varied within different states. The sites chosen are diverse, with diverse student and teacher populations and different views on behavior and culturally responsive teaching. The schools, districts, and names are pseudonyms to preserve the confidentiality of the participants and sites.

Participants

Participants in this study were classroom teachers from different school districts that range in experience and grades taught. There were Special Education Teachers, ESOL / CLD teachers, and general education classroom teachers. In all, there were 13 participants.

Researcher Positionality

Schools in the United States are becoming more diverse than in past years. As an educator, I aim to ensure that all students have an equitable education. Implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy is an important step to ensuring equitable learning. I am constantly researching to find ways to implement culturally responsive teaching into my lessons and into

the school culture. Students should feel school is a safe space to express themselves and to learn how to find their voice to be upstanders in the world. I have seen many situations of microaggressions happening towards students of color, students of color being treated differently, and being disciplined more often than their white peers because the teacher is frustrated with not understanding the student's culture or what the student is trying to say, if the student also is a speaker of another language other than English. To close the cultural gaps, school administration, staff, and educators need to develop an understanding of diversity and cultural competency to best serve students from diverse backgrounds and achieve success for these students.

Interpretive Framework

As a researcher, my interpretive framework falls under Critical Theory. The Critical Theory perspective researchers are concerned with a methodological way of research to empower others who are restrained by race, class, and gender (Creswell et al., 2018). I want to see social change in the world and social justice with a culturally relevant pedagogy in education. I want to share with others my own experiences, in addition to other people's stories and experiences using the case study. This type of researcher needs to have a quick mind and find ways to bring social justice to unjust situations.

As Christians, we need to follow God's way of what is just, what is right, and what is wrong. Jesus served people, washed people's feet, and served and helped others. We, as Christians, also need to live in the likeness of Jesus. It is an extension of who God and Jesus are and what is expected of us to live as Christians. The Bible speaks of having compassion for others to help those that cannot help themselves. Proverbs 31:8-9, it states, "to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and

judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” The heart of education is to speak up for those that do not have a voice, such as our students.

Philosophical Assumptions

Three philosophical assumptions were addressed: ontological assumption, epistemological assumption, and axiological assumption. Each philosophical assumption centers on a person’s values and belief system. The researcher’s position will also provide direction for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Stating philosophical assumptions in this chapter will help the reader understand how I view the world and approach my research.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption is based on the beliefs about the nature of reality. People with ontological solid assumptions often ask if there is one universal reality or multiple realities. There are multiple realities, as every person has their interpretations of reality. Each person living has their version of reality. What is considered necessary to them is their reality. What they believe is their reality. Each person has a different reality.

Epistemological Assumption

This assumption addresses what counts as knowledge, how it is justified, and the relationship between what is being researched and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case study, my relationship and experiences are subjective because I am part of a developing program. As an educator, the school I teach is developing and implementing an MTSS-B program. The knowledge I bring to the study is my experiences as a student that was treated unfairly because of the way I looked and where I was from. With my personal experiences, I can speak on the side of the student and as an educator.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption brings the extent to which the researcher's values are known and brought into the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Usually, the values and influence of a researcher are unknown. My values are known and brought into this study and are at the forefront. I believe that all students deserve an education that is equal and inclusive no matter their race, religion, sexual orientation, or social-economic status.

Researcher's Role

My role as the human instrument in this study was that of researcher and observer. At the time of this study, I was part of the staff at the school that was developing an MTSS-B program. I brought my years of experience as an educator, and my years as a person of color and as a woman. There were implications for the data collection and data analysis procedures, in that I can become invested personally.

I went to school in Canada, where I experienced racism from my peers and teachers. I was the student that wondered why there were no characters in stories that looked like me, teachers that looked like me, or anyone of significant importance that looked like me. I brought these experiences and gave a viewpoint that others may not have thought about.

Procedures

The following procedures were reasonable to the extent that this study can be replicated using the permissions, information about securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval, soliciting participants, data collection, and analysis source, and how the study achieved triangulation.

Permissions

Permission was asked and granted by the participants to conduct interviews and complete questionnaires. The official permission had been granted; an IRB approval letter

accompanies this document in the appendix (Appendix A). The purpose of obtaining IRB approval was to show and document the ethical design of the research and reassure the participants that the study is safe and well-planned (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Recruitment Plan

The sample pool that was used in this study was purposeful and included 13 participants. The participants were teachers. The educators were from different districts, with varying experiences and expertise. The quality of participants can provide accurate information to researchers and best support the answers to research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These are the participants chosen because when creating an MTSS-B program for a school, for it to be equitable, all voices need to be heard and valued (McCarty, 2020). Also, a sample size of 5 – 25 participants should help to provide a theme and patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The size provided expertise in the education field.

Data Collection Plan

Three data sources were used for the case study on implementing an MTSS-B framework that is culturally responsive and equitable for all students to fill in the gaps of cultural responsiveness, equity, and inclusion for all students as follows. The first data source was interviews with specified questions. A second data source was a focus group, and the third data source was a questionnaire.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

Interviews with the participants were at a convenient time for them, and they were completed remotely through video calls. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. There were pre-determined open-ended questions (Appendix C). There was flexibility and, if necessary, clarification for the interviewees (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The participants were

informed of the reasons for the research, guaranteed confidentiality, and had have every opportunity to end their participation at any time. There are 10 questions, and notes were taken to maximize engagement and the quality of responses. The goal is to make the participant feel comfortable and that they are having a conversation (Vagle, 2018).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your familiarity with the MTSS framework, social-emotional learning, and behavior. SQ1
2. How do you implement a behavior program school-wide using culturally responsive, equitable, inclusive language? SQ2
3. How do you model for the students and those teachers that may not know what these behaviors look like or sound like? RQ
4. How inclusive do you think your school is for staff and students? RQ
5. How influential is a student's culture or the inclusion of their culture in their learning? RQ
6. What thoughts would you like to share about behavior and the relationship with cultural responsiveness regarding an MTSS-B framework? SQ1
7. What essential items must be included when implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework? RQ2
8. How important is the wording of a universal screener to be culturally responsive? SQ2
9. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with MTSS, behavior, culturally responsive teaching, or culturally relevant pedagogy? RQ

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Initial coding generated possible codes and familiarized the researcher with the data (Saldaña, 2009). NVio Coding helped preserve the participants' answers and reduced the researcher's bias. Coding also helped the researcher find common themes throughout the responses to the interview questions on culturally responsive teaching and the importance of including it in the implementation of MTSS-B. There was also a cross-case analysis of the responses to the questions for commonalities of events, activities, and processes.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

Focus group data collection is a type of interview. The researcher allows the interaction to happen naturally among the group members, and a natural dialogue occurs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Kreuger and Casey (2014) mentioned that focus group data collection can be particularly advantageous because data collection can happen when members are familiar and comfortable with each other. This data source can reveal interesting information about the individuals, their feelings, and their thoughts. A protocol was followed: an introduction, a topic review, and focus guidelines. Open-ended questions were also asked (Appendix D). The purpose of the focus group was to have increased insight into perceptions and experiences with different behavior programs and equity and culturally responsive teaching. Afterward, a transcription was sent to participants, and asked to provide feedback for accuracy via email. This method was to ensure that all focus group participants were understood, and allowed for reflection, validity, and reliability of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus Group Questions

1. What should the goal be for a school-wide behavior program using MTSS? CQ
2. How do you implement a behavior program school-wide using culturally responsive, equitable, inclusive language? SQ1

3. How do you model for the students and teachers who may need to learn what behaviors look or sound like within the MTSS-B framework? SQ2
4. What would you like to add to this conversation about MTSS-B, culturally responsive teaching, or culturally relevant pedagogy? CQ

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The questions asked were open-ended purposely to create an open and ongoing dialogue among the group members. Recording the dialogue and asking follow-up questions to ensure detailed answers were included. Coding was used to generate initial themes. Manual pre-coding occurred to ensure significant or rich discussions (Saldaña, 2009). After coding, common themes were noted and compared to the individual interview responses to look for further common themes. A cross-case analysis was done to look for a single, common theme in the responses.

Questionnaires Data Collection Approach

Questionnaires was sent to participants about their thoughts and knowledge about MTSS-B, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The questionnaires also had questions about equity, inclusion, and diversity (Appendix F). The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain more data on the MTSS-B experiences of the participants in different school districts and states.

Questionnaire Questions

1. What is your knowledge of MTSS and MTSS-B? CQ
2. What is your ethnicity? If you are a first-generation American or Canadian, where is your family from? SQ2
3. What is your knowledge about culturally responsive teaching? SQ1

4. What are your thoughts on discipline in schools? Do you feel that discipline is fair for all students? CQ
5. Do you believe that one group of students is disciplined more than others? Why? SQ2
6. Describe your beliefs in the tiered system of PBIS / MTSS. SQ2
7. Please add any comments about culturally responsive teaching and your experiences with it. CQ

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

The data gathered from the questionnaires were coded according to recurring words and phrases. Then, the data was separated and analyzed for common themes. From the data, I can see if there are patterns across the participant responses.

Data Synthesis

The responses to the questions were grouped based on the data collection methods and how the questions align with the research questions. Data was analyzed and generated into a single set of themes. The themes brought together a common theme among the responses which helped triangulate the observations, and interpretations of the researcher. The original data was preserved through an Excel file, and themes were generated from data analysis. All codes, articles, and data were reviewed and compiled together.

Trustworthiness

Positivists often question trustworthiness in a qualitative study because the views on validity and reliability are different. In quantitative research, hard data can be collected and evaluated, whereas in a qualitative study, data is collected through stories, observations, or interviews. Guba and Lincoln (1985) establish trustworthiness using five terms: credibility,

transferability, dependability, ethical considerations, and confirmability. These equate to validity, reliability, and objectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), ensuring credibility establishes trustworthiness. There are 14 provisions made by researchers to record trustworthiness in their qualitative research accurately. The main ways of achieving credibility are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). I achieved credibility in three ways: data triangulation, member checking, and participant debriefing.

Triangulation

In this study, there is a triangulation of qualitative methods, data collection methods, sources, and theories to explore if MTSS-B can be successfully implemented and be culturally relevant and responsive in an elementary school setting. Data collection methods included using individual interviews of educators. Source triangulation was achieved by using interviews, focus group questions, and questionnaires. Theory triangulation was achieved using Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory and Skinner's Theory of Behavior (Vargas, 2017) as the guiding framework.

Participant Debriefing

A technique I used frequently during this study was participant debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) which allowed me to discuss emergent findings with colleagues to ensure my analyses were grounded in the data. There are some data available in the literature that provide some correlation to my findings. Participants were also informed of the process and what the study involved. Information was given to the participants to receive their consent to participate

in the study as well as after the study. Participants were notified that there was no deception of the participants in this study.

Member Checking

Having undergone many of the same experiences and transitions myself that students of color experience in school with microaggressions, racism, and disproportionate discipline, I have an insider's perspective. These experiences can be an advantage for researchers, using personal experience, and reflecting on what the participants mean when they respond during interviews or surveys (Rossman and Rallis, 2016). Participants verified transcripts from interviews to ensure that there is accuracy. Colleagues verified data to ensure accuracy in the data as well.

Adoption of Research Methods Well Established

The adoption of research methods is well-established in qualitative investigation and information science (Shenton, 2003). In the case study of using MTSS-B, the line of questioning in data gathering sessions and how the data are analyzed are from past projects successfully implemented in other schools. The additional data analysis aided in furthering my research on culturally responsive teaching and MTSS-B or show that implementations of MTSS-B and culturally responsive teaching can be successful.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that transferability shows findings that may have applicability in other contexts. Transferability is achieved mainly through thick descriptions when describing research findings. The definitions used in the history of the case study, the MTSS-B implementation, and the reason for the implementation tell of the importance of using a culturally responsive behavior program and the success of implementing plans. Using the information and data, others can take the research and fill in any gaps that there may be. Others

can also use the data and research in other settings to implement a culturally equitable educational program successfully.

Dependability

Findings that are consistent and can be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and are demonstrated through an effective description of the procedures in the study. Dependability is often done through an inquiry audit by a dissertation committee. In this case study, the findings were consistent and can be repeated through the description of the procedures in the implementation process of the MTSS-B system. Specifically, descriptions of the method I developed for this study were supported by the literature, and this study could be replicated for any population.

Confirmability

Confirmability is neutrality in the finding of a study. Confirmability is where the study was not shaped or influenced by the researcher's bias, opinion, or interest. The respondents shape the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail was transparent in this case study, and it can be tracked if necessary. It was detailed with procedures, raw data, analyzed data, and the final report. Different aspects of triangulation were also used, including triangulation of qualitative methods, data collection methods, sources, and theories to explore if MTSS-B can be successfully implemented and be culturally relevant and responsive in an elementary school setting.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were used in the case study. After IRB approval, permission for interviews and focus groups were asked for. The permission asked for was through writing or verbally granted by the participants. The call for participants was done through social media so

that there can be various participants. All names of participants were referred to by pseudonyms. Any data collected was securely on the researcher's laptop, where access can only be obtained through a password. The folder the data stored was stored in also was password protected. The laptop was stored in a locked office for additional protection.

Summary

In this case study, three methods of data collection and analysis were gathered to ensure the research is detailed and precise. Interviews and surveys were used for educators. Focus group interview were also used for educators. The research followed Yin's collection and analysis methods as it best fit the researcher's positionality and topic about the implementation of a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework in an elementary school setting.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single instrument, descriptive case study was to describe the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework. Based on the MTSS framework, the behavior program explicitly included culturally responsive teaching and was inclusive and equitable for all students in an elementary school setting. In this chapter, there were participant descriptions; the data, in the form of narrative themes, tables, presented by theme; outlier data; and research question responses.

Participants

Pseudonyms were used for participants and locations to protect each participant's confidentiality. A request was posted on social media (Facebook) asking for participants for this study. Many participants responded and as more details were given, participants were referred for this study. The table shows participant names, number of years teaching, ethnicity, grades taught and if applicable, content area.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Content Area	Ethnicity	Grade Level
Amy	17	Math, Reading, SPED	Jewish	K, 1 st , 2 nd , 4 th , 6 th – 8 th
John	22	Spanish, ESOL	Irish	K – 12 th
Mary	29	General Education	Latina	6 th – 12 th
Noelle	5	General Education	Mexican	2 nd
Sarah	19	General Education, SPED	Scottish	1 st , 2 nd , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th
Chris	12	Music, General Education	Korean & African American	K – 12 th
Jan	3	General Education	Nordic	1 st , 4 th
Maria	4	SPED	Mexican	3 rd – 6 th
Valerie	27	General Education	Mexican	6 th , College
Bree	9	General Education	British	2 nd
Alice	20	General Education, ESOL, Reading	Caucasian	PreK, K, 1 st , 2 nd
Natalie	29	General Education, ESOL, Reading, SPED	Hispanic, European	K, 1 st , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th
Darren	5	General Education	Italian	K, 1 st – 3 rd

Amy

At the time of this study, Amy was a certified teacher in Georgia of Jewish decent. She taught Special Education and taught for 17 years. Upon completion of her master's degree in special education, she also received her certificate as a reading specialist and math specialist. Amy has taught grade levels Kindergarten to 8th grade.

John

John started his career in New York. John is Irish. At the time of this study, John taught Spanish at the high school level and English as a Second Language at both the high school level and elementary school level. John started his teaching career with the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) in Asia and during the time of this study, was teaching there.

Mary

At the time of this study, Mary taught for 24 years and is Latina. She has taught grades 6-12 Social Studies and is currently teaching 5th grade for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). She also has taught 3rd; 4th grade and was also an information specialist for DoDEA.

Noelle

Noelle has taught in El Paso, Texas. During the time of this study, she taught 2nd grade for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and has taught for 5 years. She received her master's in Social, Emotional Learning. Noelle is Mexican and traveled overseas for the first time when teaching with DoDEA.

Sarah

During the time of this study, Sara taught for 19 years, most of those years with the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). Sarah's family comes from Scotland. She

has taught 1st, 2nd, and 4th grades in the general education classroom. She also taught Special Education in grades Kindergarten to 5th grade and 6th grade. At the time of this study, Sarah was teaching 4th grade in Asia.

Chris

Chris is Korean and African American. She has taught for 12 years Kindergarten to 12th grade. Her area of specialty is Music. She taught for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) for most of the 12 years and during the time of this study, taught in the public-school sector in Virginia.

Jan

Jan is Nordic and has taught for three years. She was new to the profession and for two of the three years, taught in South Korea. Jan has taught 1st grade and 4th grade. At the time of this study, Jan was back in the United States studying to get her master's degree as a Reading Specialist.

Maria

Maria has taught for 4 years and is of Mexican decent. She taught Special Education for all 4 years. Maria has taught grades 3rd through 6th. During the time of this study, she was teaching in California. Her student teaching was completed in Asia with the Department of Defense (DoDEA).

Valerie

Valerie has taught for 27 years. Her family is from Mexico, but she grew up in the United States. She taught mostly in New Mexico, and Asia. She has taught 6th grade through to college-level students.

Bree

Bree has taught for nine years. She taught only 2nd grade in Colorado. Her family is British. Bree grew up in Colorado. At the time of this study, she was in Colorado, teaching 2nd grade.

Alice

At the time of this study, Alice has been teaching for 20 years in the general education classroom, as an English as a Second Language teacher (ESOL), and a Reading Specialist. She grew up in the United States. She has taught pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades. During the time of the study, she was teaching in Asia for the Department of Defense (DoDEA).

Natalie

During the time of the study, Natalie has been teaching for 29 years. She has a mixed heritage of Hispanic and European. Natalie has taught grades Kindergarten, 1st, 4th through 6th grades. Natalie has been in the general classroom, an ESOL specialist, Reading Specialist, and has taught in Special Education.

Darren

Darren is Italian and has taught for five years. He has taught in the general education classroom. Darren has taught grades Kindergarten, 1st through 3rd grades. He has taught in Tennessee and for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) in Asia. At the time of this study, Darren was teaching in Hawaii.

Results

The results of the questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus group interview carried a similar theme, especially in the realm of Culturally Responsive Teaching. MTSS for both academics and behavior was still a new concept for many of the teacher participants. The data

was triangulated through three data collection methods that include a questionnaire, individual interviews, and a focus group interview. The questionnaires were sent through Google Forms. From the responses on the questionnaire, the participants were either asked to participate in individual interview or the focus group interview. The individual interviews took place through Google Meets, Zoom, in person or via Google Forms. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Interview questions were open-ended which allowed the participants to add their thoughts and share all the information that they thought to be relevant to the question. The questions also facilitated participant views about culturally responsive teaching and the multi-tiered support system of supports.

The focus group interviews took place either in person or via Zoom. Each group took about 45 minutes to an hour. The questions were open for discussion among the participants. The participants also listened to each other and added more information as each participant saw fit. The focus group interviews revealed the passion teachers have for their students. The themes identified were knowledge of MTSS-B, culturally responsive teaching, discipline, and all of the themes begin with the teacher. The results are presented in this chapter based on common themes found in the responses.

Knowledge of MTSS-B

The framework of MTSS and MTSS-B is still a new concept in teaching. Many of the teacher participants either knew very little about MTSS, have briefly experienced it at some point in their teaching careers, or have never heard of MTSS. Many of the teachers mentions MTSS and RtI or MTSS and PBIS as being similar or the same. Most of the teachers were able to explain that MTSS is a tiered system of supports for students.

The participants that have not heard of MTSS-B were either new to the education field or have taught overseas for a long time. Chris mentioned, “I know it has something to do with culturally responsive teaching and promoting student wellness at school.” Chris recently returned to the United States to teach after teaching for a long time overseas. Another participant that works in DoDEA said she just completed the training and said, “I know it is an initiative that some schools have piloted, and all schools will begin implementing.”

Many of the participants are aware that there is big push for it, “I know there’s a shift in most schools to place a value on social-emotional learning. The goal is to positively impact student behavior.” Darren replied in an interview. Darren was asked to talk about his familiarity with the MTSS framework. He also was a teacher that taught overseas and has been in the education field for 5 years.

There is a strong bond between knowledge of MTSS-B and PBIS. When MTSS-B was mentioned in any of the interviews or focus group interview or questionnaire, the word PBIS was mentioned with it when referring to behavior. When the participants were asked about their knowledge or familiarity with MTSS, most replied with a strong correlation to RtI. Bree said, “Commonly referred to as RtI still, even though it is slightly different.” She also mentioned it being a formal process to help support students through push-in, pull-out, and small groups.

Knowledge of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Every teacher participant had knowledge of Culturally Responsive Teaching, and some have used or is currently using it actively in their classrooms. Each teacher participant defines Culturally Responsive Teaching is an environment where, student life experiences and cultural backgrounds are used to foster engagement, and inclusivity in learning. “I use it even if my state has created bills against it technically.” Jan said. This was interesting, as it was the only

mention of a state mandated bill against culturally responsive teaching. She also said, “The teacher strives to make as much personal connection as possible with the students individual to understand strengths and areas of need.”

Teachers have a clear passion for helping all students, particularly those who show an interest in learning, but it is clear from the responses that teachers have a heightened passion when working with marginalized students. The teacher participants’ definition of marginalized students are students of color, or a challenging socio-economic home life. One of the participants said, “Any teacher worth their salt does this in their room everyday.” This participant has taught for 44 years. She said, “This is how you should teach but social media, administration, school boards, and parents just get in the way.” This response ties in with the one from Jan about her state mandating not to be culturally responsive when teaching.

Many of the teacher participants state that Culturally Responsive Teaching should be a topic for Professional Developments for educators, unfortunately, in many of the responses, these kinds of Professional Developments are not given. One participant responded with, “Educators need to understand how different cultures view discipline, rewards and education.” John was able to summarize what all of the participants said in one sentence, “More PD on this topic would be beneficial.” Teachers also notice when they have applied or apply Culturally Responsive Teaching in their daily lessons, there is a strong correlation with positive student learning and Culturally Responsive Teaching. Maria said, “Culturally responsive teaching allows students to understand that they are recognized and accepted.” Darren said he has witnessed teachers that have refused to learn about what it means to be culturally responsive, “have more behavior problems in their classroom and less positive relationships with their students.”

Discipline in Schools and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Teachers agree that many students of color, especially young Black boys, are disciplined more than their white peers. Teachers also agree that all discipline is not fair and that some groups of students are held to a higher standard and given more chances than other students. “In the total of education? Yes. I believe I have seen bias towards different groups.” Alice stated.

John noted that, “Overall I believe that there are various groups of students who are disciplined more than others. Students are most readily grouped by the physical traits of their ethnicity.” He also noted that although there is a history of African American students are more aggressive and prone to unacceptable behavior, other ethnicities also experience the same stereotypes and biases. “For example, a recent president of a country referred to immigrants from Mexico and Central America as rapists and murderers. In an age where messages such as this can be constantly bombarded to citizens, it is not surprising that one’s perceptions of people of color will be biased from the start, even at a sub-conscious level.”

Chris, who is half Korean, and half African American has noticed that students are targeted based on their background and ethnicity. “I feel that some groups are expected to have higher expectation and held to a higher standard to behave compared to others. Black boys are targeted and given less understanding than other races and even females.”

A few of the participants believe discipline is equal and fair for all students. Most have never seen unfair discipline in their school environments. One participant believes it depends on the administration and the district. “Some are fair others are afraid to do anything but give a pat on the hand. Administration is afraid of parents.” This statement correlates with John’s statement of the mindsets of the public being set by public figures stating the stereotypes publicly, regardless of whether it is at a conscious or sub-conscious level.

Culturally Responsiveness and MTSS-B

Most teachers agree that building a strong, positive relationship with students is one of the most important elements to implement a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. Many also agree that raising concerns, proper training and professional development are keys to implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework in any school. Tammy said, “Have a sensible goal, take small steps, and having teacher cooperation is a must.” Bree also includes that being aware and intentionally including cultural and emotional supports is a must with a clear definition of the school goal with MTSS-B.

Sarah said, “I think it is something we should have training on, and it should be something that teachers can watch in action, in real time by their peers. Not enough time is given to work with (training) to ensure everyone knows what it is and how to implement it.” John agrees with Sarah but also stated that “I have seen teachers endure a great deal of frustration who feel like some of those meetings that establish the systems of support do not provide the teacher with enough resources to carry out any plan effectively.” A great outcome of having the right kind of training and professional development and, “With the support I received (to include taking a lot of PD that specifically targeted culturally responsive teaching), set up a mindset that I continue to carry with me when it comes to my classroom environment.” John stated with confidence.

Outlier Data and Findings

Some of the teacher participants also made comparisons between boys and girls, staying away from the topic and idea of culture and race. Many stated that they have witnessed more boy students being labeled and disciplined at a higher rate, than girls in their schools. There

were also comments made about students with special needs, those students that are in a Special Education (SPED) or have Individual Education Plans (IEP).

Outlier Finding #1

Two teacher participants discussed discipline issues between boys and girls. They both mentioned that they have noticed that it is unfair between the sexes and that boys are disciplined more than girls. Noelle stated that boys tend to be more active and exhibit externalizing behaviors compared to girls. However, Noelle believes strongly that both boys and girls can externalize and internalize behaviors. Valerie noted that discipline is tougher for girls when it comes to dress code. When reviewing the student code of conduct manual, for any school, there are specific dress codes for students. However, more restrictions for girls for reasons unknown. One dress code regulation for girls is not wearing spaghetti straps and the straps need to be at least two fingers wide with no purpose or explanation.

John stated that he doesn't believe one group is disciplined more than others but "I believe the discipline itself varies for different groups of students. For example, I believe boys receive harsher discipline than girls typically."

Outlier Finding #2

Throughout the questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus group questions, a common outlier finding of those students in SPED with IEPs often were not disciplined fairly compared to their peers. Mary stated that she once had student diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). That student was running around and ran right into another student knocking the other student over. Another teacher that also witnessed the incident, quickly sent the student with ADHD to the office for physical harm and was not interested in hearing about the student's diagnosis.

Maria sees discipline is often not equal, especially with her SPED students. Many teachers have stereotypes or biases for these students. She also said, “I find that discipline is often unfair for students with special needs because MTSS and MTSS-B and PBIS are not as integrated with discipline as they are with teaching.”

Research Question Responses

This section provides the responses to the research question. The responses provided were obtained from the three data collection methods. The responses to the central research question and sub-questions address the purpose of this study.

Central Research Question

How are teachers including culturally responsive teaching, equity, and inclusiveness within an MTSS-B framework?

The participants’ perspective on including cultural responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness within an MTSS-B framework is that it is important to include a student’s cultural background. This builds strong relationships between student and teacher. To have a culturally responsive classroom starts with teachers. Each participant that was interviewed and asked this question stated that it always starts with the teacher. Once a culturally responsive classroom is established, the relationship between teacher and student enables the student to feel safe to learn and make mistakes.

Some participants noted that using certain models, such as the Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework would also help. The CASEL framework is a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework that help to create skills and environments to aid in students’ development both academically and behaviorally. There are 5 competencies within the framework: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

relationship skills and responsible decision making. Implementing the CASEL framework aids in promoting what MTSS-B is. Other participants mentioned their schools use the Positive Behavior Intervention of Supports (PBIS) guide to help implement MTSS-B. All participants agreed that administering a needs assessment should be done to recognize the students that may need the extra support.

Some participants mentioned that working with underserved populations is both rewarding and frustrating for the same reasons serving other students is frustrating: the best students are sometimes neglected to deal with other student discipline situations. Mary said, “the distractions of the troublemakers take away so much time from the good students, that I wonder how much more successful the good students could be without me being taken away from their learning so much to discipline other students.”

Sub-Question One

How are the experiences of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

The teacher participants that have been in education for a long time mentioned in their interviews, questionnaires, and focus group interviews that MTSS is another rebranding in education. MTSS has gone through many different names: PBIS, Discipline with Dignity, Conscious Discipline, and RtI to name a few. What the teachers are most concerned about is the labelling or mislabeling of students. Regardless of what name is given for a behavior intervention, the labelling or mislabeling of students is the biggest concern for many of the participants.

Sub-Question Two

How is the self-efficacy rate of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Many of the participants believe that the self-efficacy rate could be improved with professional developments or trainings. The professional developments or trainings need to be led by a person that has a deep knowledge of culturally responsive teaching and MTSS-B. The facilitator also needs to be aware of the current climate of education and what educators go through daily. Teachers also mentioned they would like more trainings on how to implement culturally responsive lessons and how to be more culturally responsive teachers for students. There were responses of participants that were still unsure what a culturally responsive teacher or culturally responsive lessons look like or were unsure if the participants were being culturally responsive at all.

Summary

This chapter presented a descriptive summary of the participants in the study and provided the thoughts and knowledge about culturally responsive teaching and MTSS-B. The participant's narratives included the number of years taught and their cultures. Themes emerged from the collection of data from interviews, questionnaires, and focus group interviews. The themes showed a correlation between culturally responsive teaching and MTSS and the desires for more professional development on both culturally responsive teaching and MTSS.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this single instrument, descriptive case study was to describe the process of the implementation of a school-wide behavior program within an MTSS framework. Based on the MTSS framework, the behavior program will explicitly include culturally responsive teaching and be inclusive and equitable for all students in an elementary school setting. In this chapter, there will be: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to have an understanding if the implementation of an MTSS-B framework could be culturally responsive for students. Research on MTSS-B and culturally responsive teaching was about one or the other, rarely about both. MTSS was usually together with academics and other programs, such as PBIS or RtI. Culturally responsive teaching was usually together with the theories of Critical Race Theory or racism experienced in a school setting. The sparse research on MTSS-B and culturally responsive teaching suggests frameworks and theories that should be researched and discussed together. The findings of this case study add to the little research discussed previously. The participants' responses in this study were based on experiences and evidence-based teaching strategies.

Interpretation of Findings

This section includes a summary of material from emerging themes and subthemes discussed in the previous chapter. The themes that developed were knowledge about MTSS-B, knowledge about culturally responsive teaching, and discipline in connection with cultural

responsiveness. The interpretation of findings supports the correlation with the research questions and demonstrates that teachers are the key and the foundation to maintaining relationships, MTSS-B, and culturally responsive teaching.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Thirteen teachers of varying experiences shared their thoughts and perspectives through a questionnaire, interviews, and focus group interviews. The data were collected through these methods and the analysis of documents provided by participants. These three methods were used for the purpose of triangulation of data. Themes emerged after the data was analyzed in this study. The themes include MTSS-B and culturally responsive teaching, the relationship between MTSS-B and PBIS, and the foundation of MTSS-B starts with the teacher and administration.

MTSS-B. Participants were asked to talk about their experiences, perspectives and knowledge about MTSS-B, their role in establishing a culturally responsive MTSS-B within a school. MTSS is data-driven with evidence-based practices to support all students (Adamson et al., 2019). There are gaps when it comes to equity and MTSS-B. Participants discussed what was needed when implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework in a school using universal screeners. The participants thought that the language used in a universal screener was very important. The language used on the universal screeners is important because it influences how the questions were answered and much of it can be left up to interpretation.

Universal screeners need to be equitable and culturally responsive to truly meet the needs of the students (Miller et al., 2022). Too often, Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) are used in place of universal screeners in MTSS-B which can skew the data. The data would show the frequent visitors to the administrator's office instead of giving equal support to all students. Students that are quiet and do not bring attention to themselves would the students that would not

show up in the data on ODRs. ODRs are often from the viewpoint of the teacher, which means the teacher decides what is considered appropriate behavior from the teacher's cultural perspective. Having only one perspective on what is appropriate behavior, often leads to being reactive instead of being proactive and subjective to different kinds of biases (Amemiya et al., 2020).

Many of the participants acknowledged that different cultures have different ways of expressing different emotions. One participant noted, "Being loud and talkative could be a way of learning and expressing themselves in some cultures." Different cultural norms need to be considered when implementing an MTSS-B framework. If different cultural norms are not considered, then the framework would not be equitable for all students.

Equity in Discipline. Participants expressed their thoughts on equity in discipline. Disproportionate discipline in schools often target students of color and are severely punished for less severe incidents than their white peers (Bal et al., 2021). Many of the participants agreed that discipline in schools was not equal or fair. Teachers do not frequently consider a student's culture and assume that the student is being disrespectful. There are some groups of students that are held to a higher expectation level and are often not disciplined for the same infraction compared to many students of color.

Biases and stereotypes feed into how students are disciplined. One participant noted that if biases and stereotypes go unchecked by the teacher, there is little investigation into the underlying antecedents. High expectations need to be held for all students, especially in the realm of how to treat others, how to interact with others, social-emotional skills that students will need as they get older (Cunninghame et al., 2020). All the participants are invested in holding all students accountable for their actions, regardless of where they are from and what color their

skin is. With this kind of passion of educators, implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework could happen easily.

Strong Relationships. All the participants agreed that having strong relationships with students is the foundation of a successful culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. Ensuring that a teacher knows and understands a student's culture and what the cultural norms are can help the teacher to make an informed decision about which tier the student should be in. A key component of cultural responsiveness in education is the teacher's response to a student's needs. Teachers need to change their mindset of what they believe is culturally responsive teaching to being adaptive to the needs of diverse student backgrounds (Abacioglu et al., 2020).

One of the participants discussed being part of a pilot program at their school for the implementation of MTSS and noted that an underlying theme is having a strong relationship with the students. They did notice that they often do not have the time to build relationships with their students because of the many different tasks teachers are asked to complete throughout the duty day, or the many interruptions such as phone calls from the office, early dismissal for a student, and the various safety drills. Some mentioned that the relationship with the home also needs to be viewed as a partnership, which leads to building strong relationships with the community as well.

One way to build relationships is to have time carved out during the day specifically for social-emotional check-ins and to build the relationships needed. Focusing on positive language has seen an increase in positive relationships between teachers and students. Understanding between teacher and students has turned into a strong bond that has also improved student academics because they are able to focus more and know they are in a safe classroom environment. There is a need to create meaningful relationships with each student, especially

with marginalized, underrepresented students and students of color. When teachers make the extra effort to build these relationships with their students, and it is genuine, students are most likely to be motivated in the classroom (Ahn et al., 2021).

Some schools have adopted restorative practices. Restorative practices are proactive, much like MTSS-B, and is a framework to help with conflict resolutions with a focus on collaborative or cooperative process (Gladney et al., 2021). Utilizing a powerful practice like restorative practices could help with the underlying antecedents for those students that may need the support in this area. Having a strong framework such as restorative practices, would build the strong relationships that are important when implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This section discusses possible suggestions for policy and practice. The specific implication of policy relates directly to school districts and administration at the school level and above the school level. The implications for practice are suggestions for educators and school-level administrators who work directly with students.

Implications for Policy

The issues of the lack of student support, racism, and education not being culturally responsive also have historically been an issue in education. MTSS is included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (McCart, 2020). ESSA is a law that brings equity and protection for disadvantaged students or students who may need intensive support in schools. MTSS is meant as a way for education to move away from a one-size-fits-all discipline to an individualized, data-driven, positive system (Lloyd et al., 2021).

The participants of this research confirmed the need for administrative, at and above the school level, support for those that work directly with students. The findings are also confirmation that education in the United States is still disproportionate and still affects students of color more than white students (U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights Data Collections, 2018). The participants also agreed when asked their opinions about discipline and if they felt that it was disproportionate.

MTSS-B is a framework that is not a program that can be duplicated and copied for each school to use in the exact same way all other schools in the district are using the MTSS-B framework. MTSS-B is a framework that should be individualized to each school based on their demographics. Many districts have adopted PBIS and use PBIS as their MTSS-B framework. The issue with PBIS is that it is a one-size fits all program and does not take into consideration student cultures (Bal et al., 2021).

A consideration for districts is to implement the framework a little bit at a time, really look at each school individually and have the teachers of the school decide what would work best for their school and students. If administrators and districts chose to implement MTSS-B with this idea and with a coaching team that would train the committee and eventually the entire staff and faculty, it could be implemented with fidelity and with the intended goal of MTSS-B. The programs in place currently, are generalized programs for students. These programs best fit white students and students of color are at a disadvantage (Bal et al., 2021).

Another implication to consider is the professional developments (PD) and trainings required to really understand what the spirit of MTSS-B is. Often, districts hire outside resources to do trainings that have trainers that do not know what it is like to be an educator.

Most of the participants in this study have stated that having the right kind of PD and training is imperative for a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework to succeed.

Implications for Practice

The participants hold a strong belief in building strong relationships with their students and in having support from school-level and above school level administrators for a successful implementation of an MTSS-B framework. The participants also believed that using effective strategies in the classroom and intrinsic rewards may be useful in the implementation of an MTSS-B framework. Behaviors are modeled through teachers, peers, family, and culture. Behaviors are associated with rewards and discipline and can be derived from the cultural settings of the student (Bandura, 1971). Bandura believed that behavior is about reward and punishment, which enables people to have a response system to automatically behave as expected when the expected behaviors are rewarded.

Having strong relationships with students is a motivator for students to do well academically, which may be useful training or PD for schools. The training and PDs can help foster strong relationships and benefit students, staff, and faculty within the building. Building positive relationships can create a proactive environment rather than a reactive environment, which has been the norm for many schools. This type of training and PD can also include how to build positive relationships with the parents. Having specific training and PD directed toward building positive relationships will create a culture within the school that is welcoming, solution oriented and culturally responsive.

A school that does not have an MTSS-B framework can still use the strategies of building positive relationships with students and parents. Culturally responsive strategies can also still be utilized to ensure all students feel safe to speak openly to a trusted adult at school. When students

feel seen and heard, students feel safe. Utilizing these strategies can open a dialogue within the school among students, faculty, staff, and the community of more strategies or expand on the strategies already in place to be culturally responsive. Many students look to the adults in the school for guidance on different aspects of their lives both socially and academically.

Schools that already have an MTSS-B framework in place can expand on the framework with culturally responsive and relevant strategies. Faculty, staff, and students should be encouraged to take action and have the difficult conversations about biases, stereotypes, racism, and sexism they experience or have projected both consciously or unknowingly.

Theoretical Implications

This study utilized Bandura's Social Learning Theory as a framework to examine the ability to implement a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. The premise of the theory best explains why people behave as they do (Bandura, 1971). Social influence, close human contact influences, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are some of the reasons for behaviors.

Cultural influences also affect behaviors and how a person might react to a situation. Behaviors come from the observation of other people's behaviors primarily, and the mimicking of those behaviors. One significant finding that emerged in this study was the theme of building strong relationships with students to know and understand the student's experiences and culture.

Bandura's theory correlates with the idea that all students require positive relationships through modeling, example, and culture. Participants felt strongly that a successful culturally responsive MTSS-B framework begins with a strong teacher and student relationship. For example, the participants believed that students are more likely to achieve academically and social-emotionally when they feel a genuine connection with their teachers and other adults in the school compared to the superficial connections.

Further data analysis showed teachers using a variety of ways to model behavior expectations. Many know that they are seen by all students and adults and make an effort to try to model what appropriate behavior should be. Other teachers use daily discussions in their classrooms and other kinds of frameworks, like the Collaborative for Academic Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL) 5 competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making. One teacher specifically mentioned using non-gendered language and not making assumptions about identity and cultural backgrounds. Social Learning Theory emphasizes modeling the appropriate behaviors and the effectiveness of modeling (Bandura, 1971). Modeling is an influence everyone is exposed to both subconsciously and consciously. Behaviors are modeled at home by families and at school by teachers. Much of the modeling comes from cultural influences which cannot be ignored. Modeling behaviors is challenging to complete if culture or acknowledgment to culture is absent.

Many of the participants believed that to be culturally responsive, is a teacher's response to students' experiences and needs. The participants also believed that there is a superficial level of implementation of culturally responsive teaching, such as cultural days being celebrated with food or a brief lesson on a famous person. The participants voiced that there needs to be more professional development and a change in mindset on culturally responsive teaching. Abacioglu et al. (2020) believed that the mindset needs to be to one where the curriculum and teaching is adapted to the needs of the diverse student backgrounds. This acknowledgement to a student's cultural background helps with a student's sense of belonging and experience of learning.

Implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework in any school is more than likely to succeed if there is proper training, professional developments, and support from above school level administrators. Many teachers voiced their concerns of having not enough support

or receiving trainings from those that have never been in a classroom, or it has been a long time since they were in a classroom. Participants all agreed that support, building strong relationships with students and trainings are vital for a successful culturally responsive MTSS-B framework.

Empirical Implications

This research provides information that can be useful to educators, administrators and stakeholders who work with students. Empirically, this research addresses the need to think about cultural responsiveness and combining it with an MTSS-B or MTSS framework. Culturally responsive MTSS-B frameworks need to be thought of together with the growing population of students from other cultures. This study reveals the importance and crucial role of teachers, administrators (school level and above school level), and stakeholders working with students to build positive relationships.

Adults involved with working with children need to have a culturally responsive mindset, developing positive relationships with their students and families, and creating a safe environment in a school building. Students learn from the interaction with teachers and teachers must remember student achievement and learning differs from just covering content.

Teachers need to be aware of cultural competence, to learn about cultures and be aware of the different cultures within the school and classrooms. Students that are aware or know of socio-political consciousness know how to make changes and understand why they are learning (Ansorger, 2021). When cultural responsiveness is brought into a curriculum, learning becomes more meaningful for students, the school and classroom environment becomes cooperative, and there is student engagement (Abacioglu et al., 2020).

This research shows that through culturally responsive teaching and implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework teachers can provide a pro-active school environment

instead of a reactive environment. Many negative behaviors can be avoided, and students can feel safe to express their thoughts and ideas. MTSS-B is a framework that schools use to help shape the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) of Culturally Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students. Researchers found challenges in implementing an equitable school-based program, describing culturally responsive practices, and giving suggestions on how to implement a program (Deboer et al., 2022) The research found that a framework of a continuum of support for students did not always extend to CLD students. The absence of cultural responsiveness in CLD students and social-emotional learning can affect the mental health of CLD students.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships with students, which can help in academic success (Scales, et al., 2020). The study suggests that work must be put in by teachers to get to know each of their students to help students achieve better in and outside of the classroom. While previous empirical research studies have shown the implementation of MTSS and MTSS-B, there is little research that examined the implementation of a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. Schools not discussing openly about race openly and appearing to be unbiased, the use of culturally responsive teaching was absent. Teachers, without realizing it, created a culture of individualism, limited academic levels of students of color, and intensified marginalization of various cultures (Mills & Unsworth, 2018). Providing different perspectives allows for an environment for students to think critically and ask questions about the different groups' actions and the reasons behind the actions (Hemmler, 2021).

Limitations

One limitation of this study is my familiarity with the participants in the study, as I have worked with many of the participants for many years. I had to be careful in making assumptions

about how the participants were going to answer the questions. I had to be careful in eliminating my personal biases or preconceptions in the process. Due to the relationships, I have with the participants, I provided opportunities for participants to check the accuracy of their interview answers to guarantee any possible bias would not occur. I also assured participants that their responses were going to be confidential, and that pseudonyms would be used in lieu of their names. Where they worked was also obscure in description. I also had to be careful to keep the discussions focused and not become personal in nature.

The second limitation is that the research focused mainly on classroom teachers. The focus of MTSS-B is to ensure that all adults who work with children in the school building are involved and aware of the approaches the school has chosen for the MTSS-B framework. Having only one perspective limits the research to only one perspective. The sample size of participants is narrow and while satisfactory for this study, the sample size of one perspective is not enough to allow the results to be generalized to a larger population of educators. In addition, MTSS, MTSS-B, and culturally responsive teaching are relatively a new idea in education. Combining both MTSS-B and culturally responsive teaching is also new with little research on both, which leads to the need of further research.

Delimitations

Delimitations help helped to streamline and limit the criteria of the study to keep the sample size in one perspective for the purpose of this case study. The case study model was selected for this research because MTSS-B and culturally responsive teaching is still a new idea and not many schools have implemented both. Most schools focus on MTSS for academics, or MTSS-B or culturally responsive teaching. It is rare to see a school focused on a MTSS-B framework that purposefully includes culturally responsive teaching.

Faculty members that are new to education are likely in the process of becoming familiar with what MTSS-B is and the need for culturally responsive teaching. These new educators may also be determining the best strategies to implement a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework and struggling with the idea if there is an unfamiliarity with different cultures and their way of life.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the findings, limitations and delimitations in this study, further research is necessary for a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. While there is a fair amount of research on MTSS or MTSS-B (SEL) or culturally responsive teaching, there are gaps in literature for specifically culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. The findings of this study may bring attention to the importance of roles of teachers, administrators, trainings, professional development and relationship building. The information from this study can be used to aid school level and above school level administrators on the needs of a successful implementation of a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework.

The results of this study may provide insight on the importance of having the difficult conversations, trainings, and professional developments on culturally responsive teaching. With the insights gained from trainings and professional development, it may help school level and above school level administrators with data on how a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework creates a pro-active school culture and success for students. It would be beneficial to determine how many schools are involved in these culturally responsive trainings and professional developments to gather data and create further study and research.

Positive relationships and preservation of positive relationships between teachers and students was emphasized by participants as one of the main ways to successfully implement a

culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. It would be interesting if the participants attended workshops and national conferences to confront their biases and learn about the challenges many students of color face in school and in the community. It would be interesting to learn about what new strategies the participants learned and how they use them with building positive relationships with their students and the success of it. It would also be interesting to learn about the participants that may not attend these conferences and workshops and compare the relationships with students to gather data.

Future research could also be data gathered from the students and other adult members of a school. From the students that have experienced culturally responsive MTSS-B framework, data can be gathered to compare to those students that have not experienced a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. Other adult members of a school also contribute to relationships with students and student well-being. Gathering further research from the perspectives of school nurses, specialists and aides would be beneficial. The data could be used by a school that begins to implement a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework.

Conclusion

This study enhanced the research on students of color, culturally responsive teaching, and implementing a MTSS-B framework. The study explored each separately and then gathered and triangulated the data on implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. The perspectives of the participants came from questionnaires, personal interviews, and focus group interviews. The participants included 12 teachers all varying in experience and years in education. Using Bandura's theory of Social Learning (1971) discussing why people behave the way they behave, I examined the responses gathered by the participants on student behavior and the importance of culturally responsive teaching. The findings suggested that teachers have a

crucial role in fostering the relationships with students and that school level and above school level administration need to provide support, trainings and professional developments to implement a successful culturally responsive MTSS-B framework. Additionally, having the difficult conversations, trainings and professional developments on cultural responsiveness were identified as key factors in implementing a successful culturally responsive MTSS-B framework.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 30, 2023

Ina Ramos
Janet Deck

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1277 MTSS-B: Can It Be Culturally Responsive?

Dear Ina Ramos, Janet Deck,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B
Consent Letter

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others cannot easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked drawer. Files will be password protected as well. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the survey, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. If you have completed the survey but wish to withdraw from the interview/focus group portion, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Ina Ramos. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at somarkat@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Janet Deck at jsdeck@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-1277
Approved on 5-30-2023

Appendix C

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How are teachers including responsive teaching, equity, and inclusiveness within and MTSS-B framework?

Sub-Question One

How are the experiences of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Sub-Question Two

How is the self-efficacy rate of teachers implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework?

Appendix D

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your familiarity with the MTSS framework, social-emotional learning, and behavior. SQ1
2. How do you implement a behavior program school-wide using culturally responsive, equitable, inclusive language? SQ2
3. How do you model for the students and those teachers that may not know what these behaviors look like or sound like? RQ
4. How inclusive do you think your school is for staff and students? RQ
5. How influential is a student's culture or the inclusion of their culture in their learning? RQ
6. What thoughts would you like to share about behavior and the relationship with cultural responsiveness regarding an MTSS-B framework? SQ1
7. What essential items must be included when implementing a culturally responsive MTSS-B framework? RQ2
8. How important is the wording of a universal screener to be culturally responsive? SQ2
9. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with MTSS, behavior, culturally responsive teaching, or culturally relevant pedagogy? RQ

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

1. What should the goal be for a school-wide behavior program using MTSS? CQ
2. How do you implement a behavior program school-wide using culturally responsive, equitable, inclusive language? SQ1
3. How do you model for the students and teachers who may need to learn what behaviors look or sound like within the MTSS-B framework? SQ2
4. What would you like to add to this conversation about MTSS-B, culturally responsive teaching, or culturally relevant pedagogy? CQ

Appendix F
Questionnaire

1. What is your knowledge of MTSS and MTSS-B?
2. What is your ethnicity? If you are a first generation American or Canadian, where is your family from?
3. What is your knowledge about culturally responsive teaching?
4. What are your thoughts on discipline in schools? Do you feel that discipline is fair for all students?
5. Do you believe that one group of students is disciplined more than others? Why?
6. Describe your beliefs in the tiered system of PBIS / MTSS.
7. Please add any comments about culturally responsive teaching and your experiences with it.