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An Examination of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Conscious Discipline as an Intervention to Challenging Behaviors in the Preschool Classroom

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An Examination of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Conscious
Discipline as an Intervention to Challenging Behaviors in the Preschool Classroom

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Abstract

In the field of early childhood education, there has been a growing concern over the number of challenging behaviors being displayed. To decrease the display of challenging behaviors, educators have been looking for positive strategies and supports to help manage the display of challenging behaviors such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Carter, Van Norman, & Tredwell, 2011), and Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2014). When managing the display of challenging behaviors, a shift has occurred from using negative discipline practices to implementing positive guidance approaches in early childhood (EC) classrooms (Carter et al., 2011). When educators teach the children what is expected as well as clearly define those expectations in a positive manner, educators are guiding the child's social and emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Research has shown that when positive guidance strategies like PBIS, and Conscious Discipline are implemented in EC classrooms, the display of challenging behaviors is lessened. Resources for this capstone study include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies. The research examined what positive guidance strategies are, the benefits of implementing positive guidance strategies in the classroom, and best practices for incorporating positive guidance into an early childhood classroom. Research has shown that through the implementation of positive guidance strategies in EC classrooms, children develop stronger social-emotional skills, are better able to manage their own behaviors and emotions more effectively, and with the reduction in the display of challenging behaviors in the classroom, educators are able to spend more time engaging in learning activities with the children.

Keywords: Positive Guidance, Challenging Behaviors, Early Childhood, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Conscious Discipline.

Chapter One

In the field of early childhood education, there is a growing concern over an increase in challenging behaviors children are displaying in early childhood classrooms. It is because of these behaviors early childhood educators feel that classroom management is the most challenging aspect of their day. Campbell (1995), Levign et al. (1996), Webster-Stranton and Hammond (1998) state, “That is no surprise when 10-20% of preschool aged children engage in significant challenging behaviors” (as cited in Carter et al., 2011, p. 1). This is cause for concern because of the potential long-term effects early behavioral issues can have on a child. The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning defines ‘challenging behavior’ as any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults (Center in the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning [CSEFEL], n.d.). Children between the ages of three- and six-years-old who display challenging behaviors (i.e., noncompliance, aggression, destruction of property, and general lack of self-preservation) early on are more likely to experience discipline problems, potentially leading to dropping out of school, having run-ins with the juvenile justice system, experience peer rejection, unemployment, or even early death (Ritz et al., 2014).

Even more cause for concern is each year as many as 8,710 three- and four-year old children are expelled from or asked to leave state-funded preschool or kindergarten classrooms. In early childhood educational settings, the expulsion rate of early childhood aged children is thirteen times higher than children in grades K-12 classrooms. As many as 39 percent of early childhood educational and care settings reported having at least one expulsion in the past year (National Association for the Education of Young children [NAEYC], 2006).

This capstone research study is focused on the question: How can early childhood teachers implement positive guidance strategies to reduce challenging behaviors? The research that guided this question suggested that the positive guidance strategies early childhood educators have implemented in early childhood classrooms include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Conscious Discipline. The importance of implementing positive guidance strategies to reduce challenging behaviors in an early childhood classroom is to eliminate the need to expel young children from early childhood education programs and develop their social-emotional skills which in turn will develop a strong foundation for the rest of their education to be built upon. Children suspended or expelled from early childhood programs are no longer able to receive the benefits those programs provide them. When young children are expelled from early childhood education programs, the child loses the chance to learn, socialize with other children, and interact with positive role models. The child misses out on chances to develop and practice skills needed to be successful in school and in life, including social and emotional skills, as well as experiences harmful effects on development, education, and health. Children are more likely to view themselves negatively and believe they are not capable of learning. Children who are expelled are more likely to develop ongoing behavior problems that lead to difficulty later on in school, and also develop negative views about learning in general, school, teachers, and the world around them (National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, 2021). For educators to reduce the display of challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms, they must move away from rewards and traditional discipline and begin implementing positive guidance strategies such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Conscious Discipline.

Scope of Research

The scope of research included in the study encompassed an examination of positive guidance strategies utilized in preschool classrooms and the impact on reducing challenging behaviors. The specific positive guidance strategies examined were Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) approach, and the Conscious Discipline program. In addition to examining the specific positive guidance strategies of PBIS and Conscious discipline, the theoretical approaches positive guidance strategies are based upon were examined, with those being the Behaviourist Approach, the Cognitive-Constructivist Approach, and the Social-Constructivist Approach. The decision to focus on the pre-kindergarten age group stems from spending many years teaching this age group and witnessing first-hand the escalation in the number of challenging behaviors being displayed by the children. Through these first-hand experiences it became a strong interest of mine to learn best practices for managing these behaviors and how to implement them effectively.

Definition of Terms

There are many programs that support the growth and development of a child's social-emotional skills that also utilize the implementation of positive guidance approaches for early childhood classrooms. For this paper, the two programs to be examined are the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Conscious Discipline.

Challenging Behaviors. Challenging behaviors are any repeated behavior that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with the child's optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults (McCabe & Frede, 2007). Challenging behaviors can be short-term, or ongoing, occur frequently or sporadically, with differing levels of intensity, and be internalizing or externalizing. Internal challenging behaviors are often directed inward. These

behaviors could include difficulty concentrating, avoiding activities, being socially withdrawn, crying, or hiding. Externalizing challenging behaviors are directed outward. These behaviors include hitting, spitting, destruction of property, running away, and screaming.

Positive Guidance. Positive guidance is based on the belief that any means of child guidance should focus on building up a child's self-control rather than on a behavioral outcome. Positive guidance focuses more on building the child's control over self than the adult's control over the child (Morgan, 2009). Positive guidance is an approach educators use a variety of strategies including reasoning, giving choices, problem-solving, negotiation, conflict resolution, and redirection when managing a child's behavior. Rather than punishing a child for their mistakes, the positive guidance approach helps children learn from those mistakes.

Behaviorist Approach. The behaviorist approach views a child as being a "tabula rasa" or empty slate. The idea of viewing a child as an empty or blank slate was proposed by John Locke (Miller, 2013). The behaviorist approach sees child guidance as being external, and an adult directed process where the adult or educator is responsible for the development of appropriate behavior (Miller, 2013). Behaviourism works on the stimulus-response approach and believes external stimuli and reinforcement of responses determine whether the child learns a desired behaviour (McMullen, 2010).

Cognitive-constructivist Approach. The Cognitive constructivism approach focuses on mental processes, rather than the observable behavior. Constructivists believe learning and behavior comes from within the child and is relative to a stage of cognitive development. Knowledge and behaviour are assimilated through experiences and then refined through testing in social situations. Thus, a child is responsible for making the decision to behave properly, and

the adults are only there to act as a role model and guide (Wen, 2007). A cognitive constructivist teacher uses developmentally appropriate practices to reduce mistaken behaviours.

Social-constructivist Approach. The social-constructivist approach views the child as a fully communicative being with agency, who fully participates in life experiences and seeks to build relationships (McMullen, 2010). The approach believes learning and development are collaborative where the child constructs their learning while interacting repeatedly with the social and cultural environment and internalizes it (Wen, 2007).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach that can be implemented to improve safety and promote positive behavior of children in a school setting, and then carried over into a home setting. PBIS focuses on the prevention of challenging behaviors instead of punishment for said behaviors. At its core, PBIS “calls on schools to teach students positive behavior strategies, just as they would teach about any other subject. In the schools, all students learn about behavior, including children with IEPs and 504 plans (Lee, n.d.). Children are not able to meet their school’s behavioral expectations if they are unsure of what the expectations are. Under PBIS, all children learn about what constitutes appropriate behavior, and common language is used when being taught so it is easily understood. The children learn how to behave in different situations and setting through explicit instruction.

Conscious Discipline. Conscious discipline is a social-emotional learning program that teaches children how to deal with the emotions they are experiencing in a safe and appropriate way without resorting to aggression. The program focuses on the educator teaching oneself about self-control and self-regulation first, and then teaching the children. The program helps

individuals become aware of how they respond to upset to and understand their own emotions. It also teaches the individual how to regulate themselves once they have been triggered.

What is really wonderful is that it is an inside-out program – it teaches adults to manage their own upset, sadness, happiness, anger. Then, in turn, it teaches us how we can teach children the same thing. Then they too can manage their own upset when triggered and understand their own feelings (Cotter, 2020).

Conclusion

The research examined concluded that how a teacher chooses to respond to the behaviors a child displays, both appropriate and challenging, can influence the classroom environment in positive and negative ways. By implementing positive guidance strategies in the classroom that encourages positive behavior, the children will learn they are more likely to gain the educator's attention when desired behaviors are displayed than they would through the display of challenging behaviors. By simply changing the way by which educators interact and respond to the children's behaviors, teachers may be able to reduce the display of challenging behaviors, which would limit the disruption from learning and the number of children who are being expelled from their early childhood education settings.

In the next chapter, literature pertaining positive child guidance strategies will be reviewed in the context of how positive child guidance strategies can be implemented in preschool classrooms as interventions to the display of challenging behaviors, following the scope of research stated above. It is following this idea that the focus of this research paper, and the solution to this research question will be explored: How can prekindergarten teachers implement positive guidance strategies to reduce challenging behaviors?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a growing concern over the number of children displaying negative or challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms. Due to this display of challenging behaviors, many early childhood educators feel that classroom management is the most challenging aspect of teaching. Campbell (1995), Levigne et al. (1996), Webster-Stranton and Hammond (1998) state that, “This is no surprise when 10-20% of preschool-aged children engage in significant challenging behaviors, (as cited in Carter et al., 2011, p. 1). This is cause for concern because of the long-term negative effects early behavioral problems have on a child. Children between three- and six-years-old who display challenging or negative behaviors are more likely to experience discipline problems later, potentially drop out of school; experience peer rejection, unemployment, or even premature death (Ritz et al., 2014).

To reduce these potential negative outcomes from occurring, interventions must take place that promote appropriate, socially responsible behaviors, and aid in the child’s social and emotional development. The research findings found two approaches that can be implemented in early childhood classrooms to accomplish this, which are the implementation of positive guidance and negative guidance practices. Positive guidance is an approach where adults use a variety of strategies which include reasoning, giving choices, problem-solving, negotiation, conflict resolution, and redirection when approaching children’s behaviors. Rather than punishing children for their mistakes, the positive guidance approach helps children learn from their mistakes. Through positive guidance, children learn to solve their own problems by using guidance techniques. The focus of this literature review is to research the following question: How can prekindergarten teachers implement positive guidance strategies to reduce challenging behaviors?

This review begins with a synthesis of research defining positive child guidance along with an in-depth examination of the major theoretical approaches related to child guidance to provide a foundation of this topic. Further positive guidance strategies will be reviewed and analyzed, with those guidance strategies being Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) approach and the Conscious Discipline approach. This chapter concludes with an in-depth examination of how positive child guidance strategies are implemented in early childhood education classrooms.

Defining Positive Child Guidance

In the field of early childhood education, positive guidance is increasingly becoming a familiar term and strategy being implemented in its classrooms. Many experts find positive guidance techniques to be the most appropriate way for early childhood educators to guide learning and respond to children's behaviors (as cited in McFarland, Saunders, & Allen, 2008). Positive child guidance is based on the principles of developmentally appropriate practices and focuses on helping young children feel safe and secure, develop healthy self-esteem, respect others and themselves, and learn how to cope with a variety of stressors. Positive guidance helps children understand and build the skills needed to handle the feelings they may experience at any given time. When positive guidance is implemented correctly, aggression and bullying in the classroom is minimized. Most importantly, positive child guidance helps children develop self-control and compassion, which are important qualities for children to possess (Marion, 2013). Furthermore, guiding children's behavior is something that is done throughout the day, not only when a child is exhibiting challenging or unsafe behaviors. In an early childhood classroom where positive guidance is being implemented, educators are attentive and aware of what is always occurring. Through the combination of these actions by educators that children feel

noticed, confident, and secure (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2013).

Positive child guidance is also known as “positive discipline”. By definition, discipline is what people do to guide, encourage and otherwise help others learn what is acceptable and appropriate behavior, what it looks like, and how it is done (North Dakota State University Extension Services, n.d.). Discipline is a way to teach children to follow the rules or correct challenging behaviors. Positive discipline discourages the display of challenging behaviors while teaching the children how and what they are expected to do and holds the child accountable for doing so. Positive guidance helps the child see the connection between what they do and what happens next – the natural and logical consequences. Positive discipline is a way of teaching and guiding children by letting them know what behavior is acceptable in a way that is firm without being demeaning towards the children. It is a positive method of teaching a child self-control, confidence, and responsibility.

Positive discipline is a self-concept approach to discipline (Gartrell, 1987). It teaches children to be responsible, respectful, and resourceful members of their community, and is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught, and that discipline teaches. Positive discipline means, “helping young children understand they can learn from their mistakes, and it starts with showing them how” (Gartrell, 2020, p. 2). The goal of positive discipline is to guide the children by means of positive helping interactions toward self-discipline, which has self-acceptance as well as self-control as its dynamic. Another goal of positive discipline is to help the children develop positive self-concepts and healthy consciences.

Theoretical Approaches of Positive Child Guidance

To provide a framework for the theory-based positive child guidance strategies, the approaches that form the foundation for positive child guidance will be reviewed. The approaches reviewed include the Behaviorist Approach, the Cognitive-Constructivist Approach, and the Social-Constructivist Approach. An educator's personal philosophy of education and classroom management affects how the children are viewed and how the children learn the intentions and reasons behind their behaviors (Miller, 2004). Educators use many different approaches when guiding children's behavior. The classroom and behavior management approaches that are implemented by educators are guided by different theories and beliefs. Three theories that form the foundation of positive child guidance are the behaviorist, cognitive-constructivist, and social-constructivist theoretical approaches.

Behaviorist Approach

The philosopher John Locke proposed that children be viewed as a "tabula rasa" or empty slate (Miller, 2013). In the behaviorist approach, the child is passive, and the environment is believed to be accountable for all the learning and behavior (McMullen, 2010). Child guidance is considered to be external by behaviorists, as well as an educator directed process. The educator is responsible for the development of what is considered to be appropriate behavior. The approach uses a stimulus response approach and believes that whether the child learns a desired behavior is determined by the external stimuli and reinforcement responses the child receives from the educator (McMullen, 2010). A teacher who implements the behaviorist approach focuses on the observable behaviors and then identifies and selects goals for the child (Miller, 2004). When a child displays a desired behavior, a reward is given. When a child displays an inappropriate behavior, the child is punished. Even though few teachers use punishment, the

punishments are often viewed as consequences. The consequences may be in the form of losing recess, a trip to the center director's office, having privileges removed, or having to be in time-out. This approach leads to operant learning of what is considered desired behaviors, while leading to the extinction of the undesired behaviors which is the central idea of the behaviorist approach (Miller, 2004). When a child receives positive reinforcement for choosing to behave in an appropriate manner, the child receives intrinsic motivation to continue behaving appropriately. The desired behavior will occur more frequently, while the undesired behavior will occur less often, eventually leading to a complete extinction of that behavior.

With the behaviorist approach being centered around children being rewarded for appropriate behavior and punished for undesirable behaviors, the problem became a child's behavior was reliant upon extrinsic rewards and punishment to control the child's behavior and motivate the child. Moberly, Waddle, and Duff (2005) conducted a study that explored the most common motivational practices and classroom management strategies that were being used by Prekindergarten through grade three teachers in Missouri public schools. In addition to exploring the most common practices that were being implemented, the authors sought to determine the range of actual costs for "rewards" given to the children and the sources of the funds to purchase the rewards. The educators were asked to comment on the level of support received by administration and parents, as well as to indicate the factors that most influenced their choices of behavior management strategies (Moberly et al., 2005). The authors implemented a quantitative research design utilizing a survey which was designed to generalize from a statewide, random sample to a larger population about selected characteristics or behaviors. For this study, 374 educators were chosen at random from the Missouri Department of Education and Secondary

Education's statewide database of teachers in the specified grade levels. Out of the 374 educators that were chosen, 124 completed and returned the surveys.

Moberly et al. (2005) found in their study that stickers, stamps, pencils, prizes, and candies were some of the items commonly used as reinforcers in early childhood classrooms. Praise was also used as an external motivator which could be categorized as an intangible reward, while time-outs or the removal of privileges were commonly implemented as punishments in the classrooms (Moberly et al., 2005). While behaviorist educators use praise to motivate children in early childhood classrooms, Gartrell (2004) maintains that conventional praise is ineffective because it holds little meaning for the child receiving the praise. When praise is used frequently, the child becomes dependent on adult approval, which inhibits internal motivation. For conventional praise to be effective, it must be selective and specific so it provides the child with meaningful feedback and builds positive self-esteem (Gartrell, 2004).

Even though research indicates the use of time-outs as a form of punishment for inappropriate behaviour in early childhood classrooms as inappropriate and ineffective, time-outs continue to be a common practice. Time-outs are a form of external control that is forced on a child which inhibits a child's ability to develop self-control. Time-outs make a child feel rejected and a negative image is reinforced (Gartrell, 2004). A study conducted by Moberly et al. (2005) concluded that any form of punishment can result in the child experiencing anger, lead to rebellious behaviors and seeking revenge (Moberly et al., 2005). When educators are attempting to cultivate social competence in students, these feelings are unfavorable because they deter the child from learning to respond to their own needs appropriately and from participation in social problem-solving situations.

Cognitive-Constructivist Approach

With the central idea of the behaviorist approach centered around the display of a desired behavior by a child being reinforced with rewards and the display of inappropriate behavior being punished, cognitive constructivism focuses on mental processes. Constructivists view the child as an active constructor of their own knowledge instead of absorbing the knowledge passively. It is believed that learning and behavior come from within the child and is relative to the stage of cognitive development the child is currently in. Wen (2007) stated that according to Piaget, development of an individual is supreme over learning, learning follows after development has occurred, and knowledge is gained through assimilation and accommodation (as cited in Kaur, 2016). Knowledge and behavior are assimilated through the experiences a child is provided and then refined through testing in social situations. It is because of the assimilation of knowledge and behavior by way of the experiences a child has that they are responsible for their own decision to behave properly, and the adults and educators around the child are merely the role models and guides for the child (Wen, 2007).

Constructivists believe intrinsic motivation is crucial for the development of behavior instead of external motivation like the behaviorists believe (as cited in Kaur, 2016). The development of appropriate behavior is a natural process where the child has internal motivation with minimal intervention from educators. Guidance from the perspective of a constructivist is viewed as a process guided by the child where the educator fosters autonomy by providing a positive learning environment and does not solve a child's problems for them but assists the child in solving the problem independently. When discussing a child's behavior, constructivists refer to a child's inappropriate behavior as 'mistaken' behavior. By referring to the behavior as

‘mistaken’ instead of ‘misbehavior’, educators are reminded that the child is still developing and is only beginning to learn complex social skills (Gartrell, 2004).

In early childhood classrooms, educators implement developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) to aid in reducing the occurrence of mistaken behaviors (Gartrell, 2004). Inside early childhood classrooms that implement developmentally appropriate practices, the physical environment is well-constructed and supportive, which decreases the chances of conflict occurring and aids in the children learning from the mistakes that have been made (Marion & Koralek, 2013). In addition to a well-constructed and supportive learning environment, having a well-organized indoor space and well-planned transitions help in decreasing the display of challenging and disruptive behaviors. The educator’s role in a constructivist classroom is to create an environment that is stimulating and provides rich and engaging experiences that support a calm and creative display of behaviors by the children. In a cognitive constructivist classroom, educators are seen as facilitators. When a child’s basic needs have been met, the child will develop the aptitude, social skills, and bodily control that are necessary to behave appropriately (Kaur, 2016).

Social-Constructivist Approach

A social-constructivist approach views the child as a fully communicative human being who is able to fully participate in the experiences of their life and seeks to build relationships with others (McMullen, 2010). Where the constructivist approach believes that development is dominant, the social-constructivist approach believes that learning and development occur simultaneously. As the child interacts with their social and cultural environment, the child is constructing their learning and assimilating the new knowledge. It is in the social-constructivist

approach that child guidance is neither adult-directed nor child-directed; it is the interactions that occur between the adult and the child in which either can lead or follow (Miller, 2004).

Positive guidance is provided to the children by educators who are implementing a social-constructivist approach when Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), private speech, scaffolding, and self-regulation are used (Kaur, 2016). When a child is developing self-regulation skills and acquiring mental tools, the adults and peers around them play an important role as they create a zone of proximal development (Miller, 2004). Appropriate behavior is developed by a child when exposed to concepts, skills, and words that are just beyond their current ability level, but are within reach of possible achievement (Wen, 2007). Educators help the child monitor their behavior by scaffolding the given behavior within the child's ZPD. When just beginning, educators aid the child in understanding which behaviors are appropriate and which are not, and the reasoning behind it. The child then internalizes what they have learned and uses it to guide their own future behavior through the use of private speech. A social-constructivist educator views the child as "an extension of a family with a particular lifestyle, socio-economic status, home language, ethnic and cultural background" (Gartrell, 2012). It is because of this belief educators fully believe in the importance of having a partnership with the children's families to enable the full effectiveness of a positive guidance approach.

In summary, a behaviorist approach to classroom management is focused on the establishment of clear expectations for desired behavior, monitor the behavior of the children, and then reinforce the display of desired behaviors and redirection for the display of undesired behaviors. Cognitive constructivists view children as being actively involved in the gaining of knowledge instead of passively absorbing it. It is also believed the learning and behavior come

from within the child. Social constructivists believe that a child's learning and development occur simultaneously as the child interacts with the world around them. The common thread between the three theoretical approaches that form the foundation for positive child guidance is educators guide the child in learning what is appropriate behavior and redirect inappropriate behaviors. In the next section, positive guidance strategies of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Conscious Discipline will be reviewed and analyzed.

Positive Child Guidance Strategies

Positive guidance is a framework where children learn acceptable social practices and appropriate ways to express their feelings. Children need guidance to be safe, stay physically and emotionally healthy, develop social, intellectual and language skills, and develop self-concept and self-control. The goal of positive guidance is to develop children's self-control, encourage children to assume responsibility, and assist them in making good decisions ("Positive Guidance", n.d.). Educators in the field of early childhood education must value childhood and understand that a child's early years are a time of immense development and learning. Children will make mistakes and it becomes the educator's job to assist the child in learning how to respond or express themselves in a socially acceptable way. All behavior, positive and negative, has meaning. With understanding of why a child may be behaving in a particular way, the educator then becomes better able to provide a child with what they may need and later teach the child a skill to get their needs met in a more acceptable way ("Positive Guidance", n.d.). There are many different positive child guidance strategies available for educators to implement within the early childhood classroom to aid in the development of appropriate behavior and reduce the display of challenging behaviors, with two such strategies being the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), and Conscious Discipline.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach that can be implemented to improve safety and promote positive behavior of children in a school setting, then be carried over into a home setting, and is a “promising model for supporting appropriate behavior and decreasing challenging behavior in early childhood classrooms” (Carter et al., 2010). PBIS has recently emerged as an alternative best practice for managing discipline challenges occurring in early childhood classrooms and improving the children’s behaviors (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007).

PBIS focuses on the prevention of challenging behaviors instead of punishment for the display of challenging behaviors. At its core, PBIS calls on educators to teach children positive behavior strategies, just as educators teach any other subject. In these schools, all children learn about behavior, including those with IEPs and 504 plans” (Lee, n.d.). Children are not able to meet the school’s behavioral expectations if they are unsure of what the expectations are. Under PBIS, all children learn about what is considered appropriate behavior, and common language is used while being taught so it is easily understood. The children learn how they are expected to behave in different situations and settings through explicit instruction. Importantly, the schools gather and use data to make decisions about potential behavior interventions for individual children if the need should arise.

PBIS is a three-tiered framework, where each tier aligns with the type and amount of support the children need. In tier one, the PBIS systems, data, and practices impact the children across all settings. The foundation for delivering proactive behavior supports and preventing challenging behaviors is established. The school-wide behavioral expectations are taught, and procedures for encouraging family-school collaboration are practiced. Tier one support also

includes asking for and utilizing family input to ensure school-wide supports are effective. Tier two applies to the children who need more targeted support behaviorally because they were not successful with tier one support alone. In tier two, an intervention team with a coordinator is formed for the child. Family to school collaboration includes two-way communication about the targeted supports a child receives. That communication consists of the purpose and approach to the targeted supports and a discussion about the families' role in their child's behavioral support. Tier three support is for children for whom tiers one, and two supports have not worked. The children receive more intensive, individualized support. Tier three support includes frequent two-way communication between the child's family and school about the child's individual behavior plan, reference Figure 1: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Pyramid.

Figure 1

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Pyramid (Center on PBIS, 2021)



Through the implementation of PBIS, educators can address a child's behavior from an individual standpoint as well as the children's behavior on a school wide level in a structured manner. It is encouraged that all relevant individuals, including a child's family, be involved in actively planning, implementing, and evaluating the behavioral supports a child is to receive. The involvement of all relevant individuals in the planning process and then the implementation of the supports is important because not only does a child's challenging behaviors disrupt the classroom and the amount of time educators spend on instruction, but the display of challenging behaviors by a child can carry over and cause stress within the child's home. Families can also aid educators in developing a reward system that can be implemented in the classroom to help the child achieve success following the classroom's expectations.

Algozzine and Algozzine (2007) conducted a study that investigated and compared classroom environments in two randomly selected schools in a large metro school district in the southeast region of the United States. One school was participating in a school-wide positive behavior support program that was part of a federally funded research project, and the other school, which had similar demographics, was not using a systematic approach to classroom discipline. The behaviors that were being observed were whether the educators participating in the study were actively monitoring student behavior, using appropriate voice tones, unified correction procedures. The classrooms were observed a total of three times (in the fall, winter, and spring). The authors found that the rates of monitoring and use of appropriate voice tone were higher in the school that was using the systematic approach to classroom discipline, while the school that was not had lower rates of monitoring and use of appropriate voice tone for the observations that were conducted in the fall. For the observations that were conducted in the spring, the positive behavior support classrooms continued to have higher rates than the non-

systematic classrooms. The data from this study supports the theory that the use of proactive, positive behavior supports in a classroom helps in decreasing the display of disruptive behaviors and improves discipline within the classroom (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007).

Conscious Discipline

Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2000) is a comprehensive classroom management program that fosters healthy social-emotional development for young children while integrating all learning domains, which are social, emotional, physical, cultural, and cognitive domains.

Conscious Discipline uses the activities and classroom routines to teach the children problem solving skills in addition to providing the children with a sense of safety.

The program's foundation is based on a constructivist and relational-cultural perspective.

Conscious Discipline is based on research and practices in child development, neuropsychology, and character education (Bailey, 2017). Conscious Discipline was developed by Dr. Becky Bailey in 1996. According to Bailey (2000), traditional classroom management had been based on the assumption that it is possible to change people, to base behavior management on external rewards and punishment, and to avoid conflict. Conscious Discipline is based on the assumption people only change if they want to, the foundation for behavior management is the relationships that exist, the desire to problem solve, and conflict is necessary for learning, teaching, and relationship building to occur (as cited in Caldarella et al., 2012).

At its core, Conscious Discipline is about the personal growth of the adult, and the personal growth of the child while raising the emotional intelligence of the adults present in the child's world. The first step in implementing Conscious Discipline consists of educators being trained in the seven basic powers of self-control, with those being: perception, unity, attention, free will, love, acceptance, and intention (Caldarella et al., 2012). When the educator adopts the

seven powers of self-control, the relationship an educator has with conflict is changed to create a proactive response rather than a reactive response.

In addition to being trained in the seven basic powers of self-control, educators are also trained in the seven basic skills of discipline, with those being: composure, encouragement, assertiveness, choices, positive intent, empathy, and consequences. The seven basic powers and skills are designed to help educators become more in tune with their inner state, better manage their own emotions in a healthy and appropriate way and learn to be proactive – instead of reactive – during challenging situations. Only once educators have become successful in implementing the seven basic powers and skills in their own lives are they able to effectively teach students to use them in the classroom. When educators are implementing Conscious Discipline in their classrooms, the seven powers of self-control empower the educator to utilize the seven basic skills of discipline. These skills help the children to become productive members of a social group. In Conscious Discipline, that social group is referred to as a “school family”, which is used as the foundation for the motivation system being implemented. “Conscious Discipline builds intrinsic motivation into the class climate by meeting every child’s needs for security, belonging and contribution” (Bailey, 2017, p. 5). Teachers create the family like classroom environment through the classroom routines, rituals, safety, and the classroom learning centers that are supportive of social-emotional learning as well as add meaning to the academic content. Through the implementation of Conscious Discipline, the children are provided with a positive school climate supportive of academic achievement as well as the development of pro-social skills. With the positive relationships in place, the school family becomes the fundamental motivation for the children to choose appropriate behaviors while in the classroom.

In a study that was conducted by Caldarella, Page, and Gunter (2012), the authors evaluated early childhood educators' perceptions of the social validity of the Conscious Discipline program. Social validity is the "extent to which an intervention or program is considered important and acceptable by stakeholders" (as cited in Caldarella et al., 2012, p. 592). There are three components to social validity, which are the significance of the program, the appropriateness of the procedures, and the importance of the effects (as cited in Caldarella et al., 2012). For the study, the authors examined each of the three components using a mixed methods study-that used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Caldarella et al. (2012) selected 17 early childhood educators from a public preschool program in the Intermountain West of the United States, 10 of the educators were certified educators and 7 were paraeducators. All 17 educators had received training in Conscious Discipline, comprised of seven 45-minute sessions that were conducted by an expert trainer, and all were currently implementing the program in their early childhood classrooms.

The preschool the author's conducted the study at, was designed to serve children with special needs. The preschool was comprised of 244 children who were enrolled in the special education program and 113 children enrolled in Title I. Research showed that 64% of the children were male, and the age range was between 3 years 0 months and 5 years 7 months. The ethnicity of the children in the Caldarella et al. (2012) study was comprised of Caucasian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Asian American, and African American children.

The educators completed a survey consisting of twelve items addressing the educator's perceptions of Conscious Discipline. The survey used the five-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree); and two open-ended questions pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of the program as perceived by the

educators. According to the survey results, the educators' perceptions of the program were rated highly, with 100% of the educators in agreement on the importance of social and emotional skills being taught in the early childhood classroom. Many of the educators reported liking the use of Conscious Discipline in the classrooms and found it easy to blend with the current curriculum being used. Caldarella et al. (2012) acknowledged that the results of the survey indicated most children liked the Conscious Discipline program but were not using the skills taught independently. According to Caldarella et al. (2012), "most of the open-ended responses indicated that the participants believed Conscious Discipline to be socially valid" (Caldarella et al., 2012, p. 595). The study showed that early childhood educators can reduce the display of challenging behaviors by using positive guidance strategies since the early childhood educators agreed that social-emotional skills should be taught in early childhood classrooms, and the Conscious Discipline program improves the children's social-emotional functions within the classroom. While more research needs to be conducted on the Conscious Discipline program, the existing research indicated that the Conscious Discipline program does influence a reduction in the display of challenging behaviors in early childhood education classrooms.

Implementation of Positive Guidance in the Classroom

The focus of positive guidance is on helping children learn from their mistakes, instead of punishing children for making them. Through the implementation of positive guidance techniques in early childhood classrooms, children learn to solve their problems independently by using guidance techniques.

When implementing a positive child guidance or positive discipline approach for behavioral classroom management, it is important educators understand what constitutes typical development for the age of the children, as well as considering the many reasons for why the

child is behaving a particular way (Miller, 2004). Educators accomplish this by observing each child individually and carefully, and by forming a close and trusting relationships with every child. With positive guidance not being a “one size fits all” approach, educators must use individualized responses for each child’s behavioral display. Gartrell (1995) recommends viewing children as engaging in “mistaken behavior” instead of “misbehavior” as “mistaken behavior” implies a child makes mistakes as they are learning complex life skills, while “misbehavior” implies a child is engaged in willful wrongdoing (McFarland & Allen, 2008). The term “misbehavior” influences educators to “judge the child rather than figure out how to help the child solve their problem” (Gartrell, 2000, p. 4). The consequence of educators judging a child for their misbehavior instead of helping them solve their problem is the educator tends to label the child, resulting in the child labeling themselves which often makes the behavior problems worse. The child labeling themselves becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Young children are just beginning the lifelong process of learning complicated and confusing life skills that many adults still have not fully learned. As children learn these life skills, they are going to make mistakes. It is important for educators to view conflicts that occur in the classroom as mistakes, not misbehaviors, and guide the child in learning those life skills (Gartrell, 2000).

When implementing positive guidance in early childhood classrooms, educators must begin by building a trusting relationship with every child including the children the educator may have difficulty connecting with and understanding (Gartrell, 2020). In the article “Instead of Discipline, Use Guidance”, Gartrell (2020) states that educators “must build these relationships from day one, outside of conflict situations” (Gartrell, 2020, p. 2). Only when children know and trust their educator in day-to-day interactions will they listen to them when conflicts arise, after everyone has had a chance to calm down. Positive guidance is centered around a child’s need to

feel safe and secure through personal acceptance, the establishment of sensible limits, gentle corrections, and genuine encouragement (Gartrell, 1987). It also addresses challenging behaviors while being respectful of the child's needs and emotions.

One positive guidance method that can be implemented in early childhood classrooms for guiding children's behavior involves telling children exactly what they are expected to do rather than telling them what they should not be doing. At the same time, educators should refrain from using the word "don't" when giving children instructions. Being constantly told "No" can make a child feel like they are unable to do anything right quickly which may lead to the child being hesitant to try new things or to make mistakes (McFarland & Allen, 2008). Positive phrasing should be used as children often tune out negative instructions but will respond to statements that are posed in a positive manner. The children are encouraged to exhibit positive behaviors using praise (Zeigler, n.d.). Positive phrasing conveys what the desired behavior is while at the same time does not lead to the child feel self-conscious or bad about themselves. Positive statements make it clear to the child what they can do and lets the child know how to behave in the future. A positive statement should be as clear as possible, avoiding any terms that may not be understood by the children.

In addition to educators guiding the children on what is expected, educators should model problem solving skills and conflict management by suggesting words for the children to use to communicate with the other children appropriately. Modeling these skills for the children teaches them skills needed in the future when conflicts arise. When introducing the children to the skill of conflict management, the educator has the role of an active coach. Gartrell (2000) calls this high-level adult mediation (Gartrell, 2000). During high level mediation, the educator "teaches the problem-solving process, provides works if necessary to help the children into the process,

and guides the children toward successfully solving the conflict” (Gartrell, 2000, p. 7). A crucial component of conflict management is the educator does not impose but negotiates a solution all can live with. Educators know the children have developed their negotiation skills when the educator is able to use low level mediation with the children. Low level mediation occurs when the educator is more of a facilitator than an active coach during the problem-solving process. When the children require only a few prompts from the educator during the problem-solving process, the children can usually agree on a solution to a common problem, come up with possible solutions to the problem, and often even implement the solution independently (Gartrell, 2000).

The primary goal in an early childhood classroom that implements positive guidance for behavioral management is for the children to take charge and fully engage in child negotiation independently. At the child negotiation level, when a child uses aggressive words or actions towards another child, the other child suggests the use of words to solve the problem, and then continue to do so. In the article, *Beyond Discipline to Guidance*, Gartrell (1997) outlines six key guidance practices. First, educators must understand that children’s social skills take time to develop, and children will make mistakes along the way. Second, educators should reduce the need for mistaken behavior by adjusting the environment to better fit the needs of the children. It is important for educators to develop positive relationships with each child. Additionally, educators are to implement intervention strategies that are solution oriented in the early childhood classrooms, such as conflict management. It is also critical for educators to build partnerships with the children’s parents to learn as much as they can about their child. Finally, educators should use teamwork when working with other adults in order to best meet the children’s needs (Gartrell, 1997).

During the implementation of conflict management, the educator models and teaches a consistent five step strategy for the children to use. Step one is the cool down step, if cooling down is needed. During the cooling down step, separation may be needed to give the children time to calm down, so they are in the right frame of mind for mediation. After everyone is cooled down, the children independently put the problem into words and agree with what it is. The educator helps guide the children to put the problem into words if needed. After the problem has been put into words and agreed upon by those involved, the children come up with possible solutions to solve the problem. Again, the educator can help the children if needed. Once the children have come up with possible solutions the children decide on one solution to try and try it. During the final step, step five, the educator monitors, encourages, and guides the children, if necessary, in trying the agreed upon solution – and acknowledges the children for the effort put into trying to solve the problem (Gartrell, 2000).

Conclusion

Research has shown how a teacher chooses to respond to the behaviors a child displays, both appropriate and challenging, can influence the classroom environment in positive and negative ways. By implementing positive guidance strategies in the classroom that encourage positive behavior, while ensuring the strategies are being implemented appropriately, the children will learn that they are more likely to gain the educator's attention while behaving appropriately than they would through the display of challenging behaviors. In this literature review the theoretical approaches that form the foundation of positive child guidance have been reviewed, with those being the behaviourist approach, the cognitive-constructivist approach, and the social-constructivist approach (Kaur, 2016). Research analyzed for PBIS showed most children received the behavioral support needed from within the universal supports tier of the

PBIS pyramid. The children needing more assistance to be successful received more direct teaching from the selected tier, tier two, support groups. Research analyzed acknowledged that with the increased use of the universal supports from tier one of the PBIS pyramid attributed to fewer displays of challenging behaviors by the children.

Research analyzed has shown that Conscious Discipline is an evidence-based, trauma-informed curriculum that is backed by research, and uses a brain state model that aides in the development of a child's social-emotional skills (Bailey, 2017). When implementing the Conscious Discipline curriculum, an educator's commitment to practicing the strategies for themselves as well as guiding the children through the curriculum as they learn to use it independently is important to changing the behaviors of the children as well as the educators.

In this chapter, literature pertaining to positive child guidance strategies has been reviewed in the context of how positive child guidance strategies can be implemented in preschool classrooms as interventions to the display of challenging behaviors, as well as the exploration of the research question: How can prekindergarten teachers implement positive guidance strategies to reduce challenging behaviors? The research question was answered through the analysis of the theoretical approaches that form the foundation of positive guidance strategies, the analysis of what positive child guidance strategies are, as well as the analysis of two positive child guidance strategies being implemented in preschool classrooms which are PBIS and Conscious Discipline. In chapter three the applications of research, limitations, and future studies will be addressed.

Chapter 3: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

In this chapter, the research from the literature review, the application of PBIS in early childhood classrooms, the limitations of the research, and any gaps that have been found, and potential future research studies will be discussed. The research that was examined for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) being implemented in classroom and school settings proved that children need to begin learning about and developing their social and emotional skills during the early childhood education years in order to address the display of challenging behaviors before the behaviors can potentially derail a child's learning. Conscious Discipline is a program that is focused on the learning and development of a child's social-emotional skills. Conscious Discipline is evidence-based, backed by research, and is also trauma-informed.

Insights Gained from Research

Through the theoretical approaches which form the foundation of positive guidance strategies, as well as positive guidance strategies, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Conscious Discipline, insights were gained. The insights that were gained from the research examined on the implementation of PBIS and Conscious Discipline was while they are quite different behavior management programs, both programs were successful in decreasing the display of challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms as well as increasing the amount of time educators were able to spend teaching and the children learning. In their study, Carter, Van Norman, and Tredwell (2011) showed that the display of challenging behaviors in a classroom decreased by implementing the first tier of behavior supports, which is the universal supports. With the tier one supports being intended for all children, every child learns what the behavioral expectations were for everyone, an acknowledgement system that is used to reinforce

the display of desired behaviors was created, and a system for addressing misbehaviors was developed (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS], 2021). Through the implementation of Conscious Discipline children learn about their emotions, how to process them appropriately, and take control of their own behavior. Children being in control of their own behavior leads to the prevention of challenging behaviors.

Limitations & Gaps

Through the analyzation of the research articles and studies conducted for this paper, one limitation discussed in many of the research articles was many of the studies that had been conducted used small sample sizes (Carter et al., 2011; Carter & Pool, 2012; Pinkelman & Horner, 2019). Another limitation that was discovered was that not only did many of the studies use small sample sizes, but early childhood educators from similar demographics had been used (Caldarella et al, 2012; Ritz et al, 2014). While Caldarella et al. (2012), found that the Conscious Discipline program was socially valid through their study, the authors noted that a limitation of the study was the social validity ratings were not solicited from other stakeholders, such as parents, students, or school administrators, where the social validity ratings had only been those of early childhood educators in the schools where the study had been conducted (Caldarella et al., 2012).

Pinkelman and Horner (2019) noted that one of the gaps and limitations for implementing PBIS in preschool programs is funding. The research analyzed suggested that the cost of training staff, initial supplies needed to implement the program in its classrooms and schools, as well as the long-term commitment needed for the program to be successful may not be in the school or childcare program's budget. For those in private childcare and school settings, parents are already paying for the high cost of childcare and preschool programs out of pocket. For the

programs that are state or federally funded, the allocation of funds for the school year are determined by the school budget. Pinkelman and Horner (2019) discussed how funding is always an issue when beginning the implementation of PBIS in early childhood classrooms and programs. Funding for new programs is not only difficult for PBIS, but also for all positive guidance programs.

Applications of Research

The findings from the literature review indicate that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Conscious Discipline are programs that can be implemented in early childhood education classrooms as interventions for the display of challenging behaviors. Carter and Pool (2012) suggested that the application of tier one universal supports of the PBIS pyramid model alone will substantially aid in the reduction of challenging behaviors being displayed in early childhood education classrooms. In addition to the implementation of the PBIS pyramid model to reduce the display of challenging behaviors is through the implantation of the Conscious Discipline program as the program focuses on the development of a child's social-emotional skills and empowers the children to take control over powerful emotions and behaviors. The analysis of research studies, as well as the review of literature has shown that the implementation the PBIS and Conscious Discipline approaches within early childhood education classrooms reduces the display of challenging behaviors among preschool-aged children.

Future Studies

The analysis of research articles and studies for the literature review chapter presented ideas for possible future studies of PBIS, Conscious Discipline, and Positive Child Guidance. As noted in the Cater et al. (2011) article, educator fidelity with the implementation of the tier one supports in PBIS needs more research in order to be able to validate the success of the supports

for all children. Educator fidelity was a common limitation noted within the PBIS research studies that were examined. Another possible future study would be to replicate many of the previous studies conducted using a larger and more diverse population of educators as well as also including additional stakeholders, to provide a more thorough and complete evaluation of the social validity of the programs (Caldarella et al., 2012; Carter et al., 2011; Ritz et al., 2014). In addition to using larger and more diverse populations of educators as participants in the studies, the educators should come from a larger pool of schools, as well as from different geographical areas (Ritz et al., 2014). Another possibility for a future study would be to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of the different behavioral management programs, compare the strategies one-to-another, or compare the effectiveness of strategies across various functions of student behavior. This study could also include conducting research to determine the effectiveness of the strategies educators are implementing in their classrooms and if those strategies are being chosen based on relevant theories and an understanding of the functions of noncompliant student's behavior (Ritz et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The early years of any child's life are a critical time for building the early foundation of learning, health, and wellness for success in school and later in life. During these years, children's brains are developing rapidly, influenced by the experiences, both positive and negative, that they share with their families, caregivers, educators, peers, and communities. A child's early years set the trajectory for the relationships and successes they will experience for the rest of their lives, making it crucial that children's earliest experiences truly foster – and never harm – their development. When a child is punished, the child may feel stressed, hurt, rejected, and angry. Those feelings make it harder for the child to learn valuable emotional and

social skills. Regardless of what is going on in the children's lives, educators need to do their best to educate young children about what is acceptable and appropriate social behavior, not punish them for what they have yet to learn. In the closing section of his article, *Instead of Discipline, Use Guidance*, Dr. Gartrell says,

Guidance should not be thought of as a weak alternative to traditional discipline – it's being a good coach who doesn't give up on any member of the team. Your efforts at guidance don't have to be perfect, but if you persist and reflect, you will get good results. Do these things and you will feel positively about yourself as a teacher – and that will help with the inner calm you need to guide children toward healthy emotional and social skills. (Gartrell, 2020, p. 8, para. 5)

Through the implementation of positive child guidance strategies, like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Conscious Discipline, as an intervention to challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom, and encourage positive behavior, the children will learn that they are more likely to gain their educator's attention when they behave appropriately than they would if they were to display challenging behaviors. By simply changing the way by which teachers interact with and respond to the children's behaviors, teachers may be able to prevent the display of challenging behaviors leading to the creation of a classroom environment that is more conducive for learning.

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