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Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support

Norah Alshehri

Being a school principal is not an easy job. It needs a lot of patience. Last year was a challenging year for me. I was a new principal who was anxious to work with teachers and kids but I faced a lot of hard times with students. Teachers came to my office and didn't know what to do with their class, Kids were misbehaving and sent to the counselor, but most of the time they kept misbehaving and causing problems for their teachers or to their friends. Our vice principal and counselors were dealing with emergencies all day, every day. Experienced and new teachers were strained and burned out. Unfortunately, we were struggling with a number of girls who were suspended from school due to behavioral problems in classes or with their teachers.

I had one girl who was a frequent flyer in the classroom. I will call her Star. She came in often to fill out a pledge. She was not very cooperative. She would knock over a chair or make silly noises. One Thursday afternoon, I saw her in the office with a bandage on her hand. I said, "Oh, honey, What happened?" She replied that she was hurt because of a fight with a girl who consistently bullied her and called her names. I said that I was so sorry and gave her a hug. She melted into me. The vice principal gave me a surprised look. I spoke to the counselor to find a way to protect her and to spread a school culture against bullying. A few days later I saw her in the office again, and I said, "Hey, how is it going?" It turns out she earned a ticket from the counselor for helping in the preparation of a parent/teacher conference. I told her how proud I was of her and gave her another hug. Whenever I have a few extra minutes, I stop by Star's classroom. I kneel by her

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chair and ask her to read to me or show me what she is writing. When I look at a student at class, I whisper to myself: “I want them to be successful. I want our school to set them up for success.”

I think we have to become comfortable with changing the ways in which we handle classroom discipline, starting with lessening our reliance on office referrals. This year and during the school immersion at the American schools, I noticed the counselor and the principal’s way to handle students’ problems. I witnessed some of their work with students to improve their behaviors using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), which is a multi-tiered system of wraparound services to improve behavior and achievement.

On April 25, 2016, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, Arabia, started Vision 2030, a progressive plan to change the Saudi economy, by lessening Saudi Arabia’s oil dependence, diversifying its economy, and advancing public service sectors like education, tourism, health, recreation and infrastructure. Saudi Vision 2030 has three important objectives: “a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation” (Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.). To accomplish Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has to improve the education system. As a result, the Ministry of Education has created an educational reform plan, which includes a variety of improvements, such as bettering schools’ teaching methods.

My topic of PBIS will play an important role in the Vision 2030 educational policy initiative. It can help to create a positive school culture and to build the school identity. It can also decrease the amount of time spent on behavior issues negatively impacting academic achievement. Because PBIS creates clear and consistent, multi-tiered interventions, there is more focus on student learning and less on behavior. My topic will impact the social, economic, and political situation in KSA. PBIS encourages positive behavior and achievement and discourages negative, anti-social behavior, which will have a positive impact on society. Specifically related to gender equity, PBIS expectations are a set of stated expectations, which create a school culture that is positive, consistent, and focused on teaching social and emotional competency to and for both genders.

Principal support is the difference between a PBIS system being sustained or abandoned. McIntosh, Kelm, and Canizal Delabra (2016) state that a principal’s involvement greatly impacts the school-wide implementation of PBIS (p. 106). When principals choose to support the program and become involved, schools are more likely to continue the use of PBIS practices and student behavior has a greater likelihood of improvement. Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, and Vincent (2004) state that “researchers have identified a range of positive outcomes from implementation of SWPBIS (School Wide PBIS)...SWPBIS schools experienced a substantial decrease in the number of office discipline referrals (ODRs)” (p. 2). PBIS improves student behavior as evidenced by fewer office discipline referrals, for example. It is therefore a way to support students, teachers and administrators to

create a healthy school environment. Research has shown that PBIS is related to positive outcomes for students, including reduced problem behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). In schools that use PBIS, students demonstrate increased emotional regulation (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012) and improved academic achievement (McIntosh, Bennett, & Price, 2011; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). The focus of PBIS is prevention, not punishment. Therefore, PBIS is beneficial to all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students and even families. Family support is essential to the fidelity of PBIS implementation as it has a positive impact upon children's academic performance and behavior: "Family engagement is a term used to describe active, interactive, and dynamic ways that families support their children" (Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011, as cited in Garbacz, McIntosh, Vatland, Minch, & Eagle, 2018, p. 127). The school and family must be aligned and work together to support the child. By working together, both the school and the family are able to teach the child how to positively behave at school so that the child is successful.

During my visits to U.S. schools, I noticed the impact of PBIS on students and teachers. My immersion school had established behavioral supports and a social culture to help students to have success in school and beyond. In general, the school climate was positive and safe. Students understood the consequences and reward for their actions. They had clear steps to take charge of their own behavior and monitor each other. If a student misbehaved, the student would go to a special room and be asked to write a reflection. At the end of the reflection, the student would be asked to state whether he or she had misbehaved. This was effective in helping the student to see what he or she had done wrong. In addition, the teachers would often address the problem before it even happened, creating a positive learning environment. My immersion school was an example of a successful implementation of PBIS. The school climate has become more cohesive, positive and structured. Teachers have a clear knowledge of implementing positive interventions in the classroom which have decreased office referrals and interruptions to instruction. By addressing the students' needs with specific interventions, they could pinpoint areas for improvement and provide needed support to increase academic growth for all students.

Based on my research and my own professional experience, I can conclude that PBIS will help to improve students' behavior and result in fewer office discipline referrals. PBIS will also support students, teachers and administrators by creating a healthy, positive learning environment. There are different steps to take to implement PBIS, which was the base of my action research. To implement my action research, I created a Plan of Action with detailed steps. Some important steps include sharing the action research project with my supervisor and with the first grade teachers so that they understand PBIS and its implementation. Also, I plan on educating families about the program and the importance of their support. After sharing, I will train teachers and school staff on PBIS practices. Then, I will

implement PBIS at the elementary school level first in the first grade initially and slowly increase grade level participation after an implementation and evaluation cycle. Finally, I will collect data about the improvement, the obstacles and discuss the solutions with my team.

One of the largest obstacles is training all the parties involved. I have to gather a team of trainers so that they can train a fairly large number of teachers if I want to apply to the different classes in the first grade. It is also important to have mentors for these teachers so that they have someone to consult with. I will also need to train the mentors. Another obstacle is the budget. I will need to hire trainers to train these teachers in PBIS. I will also need to pay the mentors to work with the teachers in implementing PBIS. We will also need to buy appropriate resources for the teachers. One other obstacle is having the district and also the Ministry of Education approve the implementation of PBIS. First, I will need to go to the MOE for their approval; then I will have to seek approval from the district. This process will take a long time. Once I have gained approval, I will be able to implement PBIS in my school.

The American education system has many benefits and approaches that can be adopted in Saudi Arabia. One of those approaches is PBIS. My experiences have been so positive in my studies and in my immersion experience that it is important that American educators remember that while there are many difficulties faced in the education system in the United States, there are also many positive aspects that benefit students in their learning. This is why I want to adopt a PBIS approach in my school so that students increase their learning.

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