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Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies Affecting Students of Color: A Systematic Review

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Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies Affecting Students of Color: A
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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Zero tolerance policies in schools have had many negative impacts on students of color, including the "school to prison pipeline" where students of color are being funneled from schools into the criminal justice system. The purpose of this systematic literature review was to conduct an exhaustive compilation of research exploring interventions and alternative options to zero tolerance disciplinary policies in schools and to identify their impact on minority students given the extent of research that is available. Empirically based quantitative and qualitative studies based on program effectiveness were included as well as both peer-reviewed and grey literature. Terms for inclusion and exclusion are presented in this review. Fourteen studies met all inclusion criteria and were sorted into four categories using the public health model of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention, as well as multi-level interventions. Primary level interventions had the most studies, followed by secondary interventions. Only one tertiary intervention was included. The findings indicated that the effectiveness of the interventions presented were inconsistent at each level and pointed out a significant need for more research at all levels of prevention. While zero tolerance discipline policies disproportionately affect minority students, limited research is available on the effects of alternative policies on these students. There is a need for additional research in the development, implementation and effectiveness of alternative programs including staff training and support, long term impacts and standardization among programs and policies.

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Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies Affecting Students of Color: A Systematic

Review

The definition of "zero tolerance" is a "strict, uncompromising, automatic punishment to

eliminate undesirable behavior" (Wilson, 2014, p. 50). The term "zero tolerance" can be traced

back to the 1980's where it was first used in federal policies regarding drug use. Zero tolerance

policies then started to make their way into public schools in the late 1980's and early 1990's

due to increasing concerns over drugs and violence in schools (Allman & Slate, 2011; Browne-

Dianis, 2011; Skiba, 2014).

The Federal Guns Free School Act of 1994 was an important piece of legislation that

contributed greatly to zero tolerance policies in schools becoming widespread throughout the

nation. This legislation required that states receiving federal funding have laws in place that

would expel any student who was found to have a weapon on school property for a minimum of

one year and refer the student to the court system (Skiba, 2000; Wilson, 2014). The Federal

Guns Free School Act also included a mandate that schools must have a policy in place to review

situations on a case by case basis. This was to ensure that schools were abiding by the laws in

place governing discipline for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (Allman & Slate, 2011; Skiba, 2000).

These policies were put in place to protect students and maintain a safe school

environment. However, research shows that school safety has not decreased since the 1990's and

zero tolerance policies have not had an impact in keeping schools safer (Browne-Dianis, 2011;

Evans & Lester, 2012; Skiba, 2014). Therefore, alternative discipline and preventative policies

should be researched and implemented to replace zero tolerance policies that have not proved to

be effective in meeting their purpose.

Effectiveness of Zero Tolerance

There has been a multitude of research over the last 30 years on the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies, and the research overwhelmingly shows that zero tolerance policies in schools are not effective in many ways (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Evans & Lester, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Comprehensive data on the effectiveness and implementation of zero tolerance policies can be difficult to obtain because of the lack of consistency in recording disciplinary data. Oftentimes the data that is collected does not distinguish between race, age, suspensions and expulsions and the specific offenses that occurred (Keleher & Applied Research Center, 2000; Skiba, 2000). However, there are three consistent themes throughout the literature related to zero tolerance policies that lead researchers to the conclusion that zero tolerance policies are ineffective and often harmful. These themes include: 1) the lack of success in correcting "negative behavior"; 2) the manner in which zero tolerance policies are implemented; and 3) racial biases that are prevalent and can be dangerous to minority students.

Correcting and addressing "negative behavior." The first theme is the lack of success in addressing and correcting negative behaviors in students with behavioral problems. While schools missions are to educate students and help them succeed in graduating, zero tolerance policies frequently have the opposite effect (Evans & Lester, 2012; Skiba, 2000; Wilson, 2014). Harsh punishments are often doled out for incidents both severe and minor and may not allow the student an opportunity for guidance or learning (Evans & Lester, 2012). While suspension is the most widely used type of discipline, the majority of the infractions are minor situations such as disruptions, disrespect and dress code violations, and less often severe incidents, such as weapons violations or violence (Skiba, 2000; Wilson, 2014).

An important factor for youth to succeed in school is the relationships they develop with their peers and with trusted adults. One of the consequences of zero tolerance policies is that when students are absent from school due to suspension, they become less connected to the school community (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). Furthermore, zero tolerance policies can make it difficult to build trusting relationships with adults because they can be seen as adversaries (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). With both suspension and expulsion, students are removed from the educational setting, often with little supervision. This gives them the opportunity to spend more time with other students that have been removed and often leads to re-offense (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba, 2000). When a student returns to school after a suspension, they are further behind academically and may have difficulty catching up, which can contribute to higher dropout rates (Allman & Slate, 2011; Skiba, 2000). According to Skiba (2000), "school suspension and expulsion seem to be effective primarily in removing unwanted students from school. For troublesome or at-risk students, the most well-documented outcome of suspension appears to be further suspension, and eventually school dropout" (p. 14). The research indicates that addressing and teaching students' social and emotional skills or utilizing positive behavior interventions and supports are more effective than exclusionary discipline and decreases the propensity for students to drop out of school. Nice

Implementation of policies. The second theme in the literature is the inconsistent manner in which zero tolerance policies are implemented. While zero tolerance policies were originally created to provide a uniform punishment for specific behaviors related to drug use and violence, in practice, discipline can be arbitrary and the punishments given out do not always match the offense. Zero tolerance policies have changed over the decades to include many

misbehaviors including minor infractions such as disrespect, missing class and dress code violations (Skiba, 2000; Wilson, 2014). Zero tolerance policies are often used subjectively and rely on the interpretation of those administering the policies. The intent and the circumstances surrounding the offense are not always taken into account (Allman & Slate, 2011; Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). There are many examples which show the extreme punishments that students are dealt due to zero tolerance: the 25 black students handcuffed, brought to jail and charged after a food fight; a group of students who were suspended for "gang representation" when they were break dancing; the five year old suspended for wearing a plastic ax as part of his firefighter costume at a school party; and the 8th grader who received the same treatment for taking a Tylenol as she would have for using marijuana (Browne-Dianis, 2011; Keleher & Applied Research Center, 2000; Skiba, 2000). In recent years, there have been many cases that have gone to court due to the severity of the punishment and the lack of due process. In many of these cases, schools have falsely claimed that "their hands are tied" when it comes to administering discipline (Skiba, 2000). Yet the research is consistent in showing that punishments are being given in a highly inconsistent manner and, in some cases, the school administration is using their discretion, rather than policy, when determining what the outcome will be for students (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Keleher & Applied Research Center, 2000; Skiba, 2014).

Racial biases within zero tolerance policies. Inconsistencies within the implementation of zero tolerance policies are seen most clearly in the devastating effects that these policies have on minority students. This leads to the final theme observed throughout the literature- the racial biases of zero tolerance policies. Racial biases in school discipline are shown throughout the literature and are seen in both urban and suburban, rich and poor school districts (Skiba, 2014).

One study, based on parental reports, found that American Indian students had the highest rate of suspension and expulsion at 38%, followed by black students at 35% (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008). Black, Latino and American Indian students are more than twice as likely as white students to drop out of school (Children's Defense Fund, 2009). Seventy percent of in school "arrests" are black or Latino. Black and Latino students are two times as likely to be expelled from school as white students (Children's Defense Fund, 2009; Keleher & Applied Research Center, 2000; Skiba, 2000). While black students are being disciplined more harshly than their white counterparts, it is often for the same or less severe offenses. There is no evidence that shows that black students are misbehaving at a rate that is significantly greater than white students (Browne-Dianis, 2011; Skiba, 2000; Skiba, 2014).

In many districts, the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system as well as the number of expulsions have increased significantly since zero tolerance policies were implemented (Browne-Dianis, 2011; Skiba, 2014). An alarming trend where students are pushed out of schools and into the criminal justice system has come to be known as the "school to prison pipeline" (Wilson, 2014). One study found that "students who were suspended as a disciplinary action were nearly three times more likely to have a juvenile justice contact in the following year" (Wilson, 2014, p. 51). Exclusionary discipline contributes greatly to this by criminalizing students instead of educating them, disproportionately affecting a much higher rate of minority students (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Browne-Dianis, 2011; Wilson, 2014). The school to prison pipeline also shows the correlation between the high rates of school discipline and the high incarceration rates for black males (Children's Defense Fund, 2009; Wilson, 2014). While schools are pursuing "safe environments" by using exclusionary discipline, they are unwittingly promoting the criminalization of students. The literature indicates that the

safe school environment based on zero tolerance policies may have a direct correlation to institutional racism.

Research Question

Schools across the nation are using zero tolerance policies to address a wide variety of behaviors in schools. Research has shown that these policies are not effective in reducing "negative behaviors," and may harm many students, with a disproportionate number being minority students (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Evans & Lester, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Despite the overwhelming research, there are still educational systems including parents, teachers, and school staff who believe that zero tolerance policies are necessary or who are not open to change (Wilson, 2014). Supporters of zero tolerance policies report that without these policies in place, students will feel like they can "get away" with anything or that school safety will be compromised (Skiba, 2000). In other words, there are some school staff and parents who believe expulsion is necessary to keep schools safe, even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary.

While there has been extensive research on zero tolerance policies, as well as growing data on alternative interventions in schools, an area that is lacking in research is the impact that these zero-tolerance policy alternatives have specifically on minority students. Many of the available studies offer data related to the effectiveness of alternative interventions, but this data focuses on the student population as a whole and does not break down the results based on race or ethnicity. Based on the research summarized above surrounding the school-to-prison pipeline, there is evidence that minority students and white students experience different implementation of policies and different outcomes due to such discipline. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the outcomes from even alternative interventions can be applied equally to white and minority

students. The purpose of this systematic review is to conduct an exhaustive compilation of research exploring interventions and alternative options to zero tolerance disciplinary policies in schools and to identify their impact on minority students given the extent of research that is available.

Methods

This study uses the systematic literature review method. A systematic literature review is meant to be authoritative in presenting the available body of literature and what is known about the topic. This claim can be made based on the exhaustive and methodical search for all relevant literature and the rigorous analysis once the literature has been collected.

Study Types and Levels of Publication

This study is intended to be a synthesis of what alternatives to zero tolerance policies are being used, and the impact they are having on minority students. This study focused on reviewing evidence of interventions' effectiveness, not other researchers' interpretations of the results. Therefore, only empirical articles were considered for selection. Pretest-posttest, comparison, experimental and quasi-experimental quantitative research designs were included in the selection process as well as qualitative and mixed method studies.

Several educational organizations and government agencies have been involved in studying school discipline approaches as well as the school to prison pipeline and offer valuable insight, even if their research has not been published. These topics have also been the focus of several dissertations. For that reason, peer-reviewed literature and grey literature were both included in the search. Grey literature is the "unpublished, non-commercial, hard-to-find information that organizations such as professional associations, research institutes, think tanks, and government departments produce" (University of Michigan, n.d., para. 1).

Literature Search

      Sensitivity and specificity. A systematic literature review is intended to be authoritative on the topic, drawing from all relevant research. In order to pull all relevant research from the chosen databases, both a sensitivity and a specificity search must be conducted. A sensitivity search will retrieve a high number of studies, including both relevant and irrelevant studies. It in essence casts a large net around studies, hoping to capture all potentially relevant studies. A specificity search will be more focused on all of the aspects of the topic and retrieve a smaller number of studies. These studies will be highly specific to the topic, but the search will likely miss other relevant studies due to its narrower lens (Petticrew & Roberts, 2005). These two search techniques help to initially establish the potential scope of the search project.

      For the sensitivity search, the terms used included "restorative justice", which returned 103 results on the database ERIC, "school discipline" with 672 results; "social emotional learning" with 112 results; "response to intervention" with 1030 results and "zero tolerance" which returned 321 results. The terms used for the specificity search included "school to prison pipeline", returning 48 results on the ERIC database, "positive behavior system" with 1 result and "exclusionary discipline" with 28 results.

      Search terms and databases. The search terms that were used to locate the relevant studies included: "zero tolerance;" "classroom behavior management;" "PBIS;" "school discipline;" "exclusionary discipline;" "restorative justice;" "positive behavior interventions;" "social emotional learning;" "response to intervention;" "school-based mental health" and "school to prison pipeline". These search words must have been located in the title, abstract, or subject terms of the article. The databases that were used to retrieve the studies for this literature

review included ERIC, SOCIndex and Child Development and Adolescent Studies. In addition

to the database search, the following government and association websites were also searched for

relevant literature: the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP); the National

Education Association (NEA); the US Department of Education and the School Social Work

Association of America (SSWAA). Not all of the association and government websites searched

provided any relevant studies. Some of the websites referenced literature which was not available

directly through the association without a membership. In those cases, the article name and

author was searched by using the EBSCOhost search engine and retrieved successfully.

Eligibility Criteria

The initial search yielded 126 results that met the following initial inclusion criteria

based on a title and abstract review: (a) the study was an empirical research design based on

school discipline, interventions or violence prevention; (b) the study took place in a U.S.

kindergarten through 12th grade school; (c) the sample in the study must be students, as this

review is not interested in parent/teacher outcomes; and (d) the study was published no earlier

than 1995. The following criteria was used to rule out articles at all points throughout the search:

(a) the study focused on implementation of the interventions but not results; (b) the interventions

took place outside of the school setting; and (c) the study was based on teacher opinions of the

interventions and implementation.

Once the initial results were located, they were reviewed in their entirety. During this

review, studies were ruled out if they did not meet the above criteria and were missed during the

first review. Additional criteria for inclusion was also used at this point in the process, which

included two pieces. The first was that the study had to include behavioral outcomes or

discipline statistics (such as the frequency of suspensions and expulsions over the course of the

intervention). Social and emotional findings were not considered; while the social and emotional

realm have an impact on student behavior and discipline outcomes, that is outside the scope of

this study. The second criteria that was added at this stage was that the results of the study must

be representative of minority students. The category of "minority student" included any

racial/ethnic group represented in the study that was non-white. There were two criteria for

determining whether or not the study represented minority students: (a) the study separated the

results based on racial/ethnic group; or (b) a minimum of 80% of the study sample size was

identified as nonwhite. Following this review, 14 studies remained that fit all inclusion criteria

and were used for the final study.

Conceptual Framework

The public health model of prevention identifies three levels of prevention: primary,

secondary, and tertiary. Primary level prevention seeks to prevent an issue from developing;

secondary prevention seeks to identify and address issues and concerns at an early stage; and

tertiary interventions occur after there has already been an incident, and the focus at this level is

on restoration or recovery (Mendes Davidson, 2011). This framework will be used to organize

the specific interventions that are implemented and reviewed within the available literature and

to identify the type of studies that have been conducted. This framework will be helpful in

determining which levels of intervention have a stronger body of literature backing them up and

which areas are lacking in research.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the findings some key terms are used when referencing school discipline

approaches. These terms include: exclusionary discipline; suspension; and expulsion.

Exclusionary discipline refers to the removal of students from the school environment using

either suspension or expulsion. Suspension is the temporary removal of the student from the

classroom and/or school for a specified period of time, and can include in-school or out-of-

school suspension. Expulsion refers to the permanent removal of the student from the school.

Additionally, the word "behavior" is frequently used throughout the literature and

findings section and includes variations, such as "behavioral concerns;" "behavior

interventions;" and "problem behaviors". "Behavior" is used to describe many different

infractions and can include minor infractions, major infractions and perceived offenses.

Minor infractions include broken rules that are non-serious and low-intensity, such as dress code

violations, disrespect and gum chewing (Flores, 2010; Skiba, 2000). Major infractions consist of

incidents such as weapons and drug violations and physical aggression (Skiba, 2000). The

evidence showing that minority students are overrepresented in school discipline often indicates

that a large majority of referrals for minority students are due to ambiguous, subjective matters,

where white students are generally referred for specific violations (Flores, 2010). In some cases,

the student may be wrongfully identified as having behavioral problems. Therefore, "behavior"

can also include perceived wrongdoings including situations where the offense is a subjective

interpretation of the student's actions, such as disrespect or "threatening behavior."

Research Synthesis

Of the 14 studies which met all of the aforementioned criteria, qualitative methods were

used in 13 (93%) of the studies. One (7%) study used both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Some studies used mixed methods for results unrelated to the focus of this study, so only the

research method used for this review's findings were included in the above number. Seven

studies (50%) used interventions that fell into the "primary prevention" category, four (29%)

studies explored secondary preventions, one (7%) study was based on a tertiary intervention

program and two (14%) studies detailed multiple categories (see Table 1). The research that

studied multiple intervention categories were the two dissertations that were included in this

systematic review.

Table 1 Studies Included in the Research Synthesis

Author(s), Year published	Intervention Framework	Prevention Level	Location	Sample	Analysis
Bruns, et al. (2005)	School-Based Mental Health	Secondary	Baltimore	787 elementary students	Quantitative
E'guya Dilworth, et al. (2002)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	New Jersey	208 3rd grade students	Quantitative
Espelage, et al. (2013)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	Midwest	3616 6th grade students	
Flores (2010)	Positive Behavior Interventions and Support	Primary, Secondary & Tertiary	Arizona	400 K-6th grade students & 200 7th-12th grade students	Quantitative
Gregory & Ripski (2008)	Relational Approach	Tertiary	Unidentified	32 9-12th grade students & 32 teachers	Quantitative & Qualitative
Hudley, et al. (1998)	Attributional Change Theory	Secondary	California	384 3rd-5th grade students	Quantitative
Hussey & Guo (2003)	School-Based Mental Health	Secondary	Ohio	201 K-5th grade students	Quantitative
Jones, et al. (2010)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	New York City	942 3rd grade children	Quantitative
Jones, et al. (2011)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	New York City	1184 K-5th grade students	Quantitative
Kang-Yi, et al. (2013)	School-Based Mental Health	Secondary	Pennsylvania	468 ages 6-17 years old	Quantitative
Lewis, et al. (2013)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	Chicago	1170 students over 6 years; 3rd-8th grade	Quantitative
McCormick, et al. (2015)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	Unspecified	435 K-1st grade students & their parents, 122 K-1st grade teachers	Quantitative
Norton (2009)	Positive Behavior Interventions and Support	Primary, Secondary & Tertiary	South Carolina	702 7th grade students	Quantitative
Yungbluth (2008)	Social Emotional Learning	Primary	Unidentified	733 K-8th grade students	Quantitative

Findings

Primary Interventions

Primary interventions refer to the interventions that are used school-wide and not targeted to any particular "at-risk" group. These interventions focus on preventative measures and proactive strategies to prevent or reverse any early risk factors for future behavioral problems. Fifty percent (n = 7) of the included studies focused solely on primary preventions, which interestingly, was the largest category. All included primary prevention studies were based on the social emotional learning framework.

Social emotional learning (SEL). SEL is a primary prevention intervention framework that is based on the idea that the social, emotional, mental health and academic domains are all interrelated when it comes to a child's development and success in school (Jones, Brown, Hoglund & Aber, 2010; Jones, Brown & Aber, 2011; McCormick, O'Connor, Cappella, & McClowry, 2015). SEL is an integrative approach, focusing on how support and improvement in one area will have a crossover effect on all other areas (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011; McCormick, et al., 2015). While in the past the majority of universal programs have focused on only one domain, such as academic achievement or social skills, the development of SEL programs over the last 15 years has gained increasing interest (Jones, et al., 2011).

SEL programs emphasize a wide range of topics, such as cooperation, diversity, and violence prevention (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2013), but all SEL programs have the overall goal of promoting social and emotional competence (E'guya Dilworth, Mokrue, & Elias, 2002). Social and emotional competence refers to the ability to regulate emotions, address interpersonal conflict and manage challenging social and emotional situations (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002; Espelage, et al., 2013). The overarching goal of the SEL intervention framework is

to "change how children think, feel, and behave in situations of potential interpersonal conflict" (Jones, et al., 2010, pg. 834).

    Specific programs. Six individual SEL programs were included in this systematic review: 1) the 4R's program; 2) Second Step: Student Success through Prevention; 3) Talking with TJ; 4) INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament (INSIGHTS); 5) Students' Creative Response to Conflict; and 6) the Positive Action program.

    4R's program. The 4R's program, referring to reading, writing, respect and resolution, is a literacy development program which uses a language arts curriculum to teach social and emotional skills to children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. There are seven units throughout the school year with each unit based on an age appropriate book. The 4R's program uses discussions centered on the chosen book to practice the specific social-emotional skills for that unit (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011).

    Second Step. Second Step: Student Success through Prevention is a middle school program focused on reducing youth violence. Highly interactive weekly lessons are conducted which emphasize social-emotional learning skills such as empathy, problem solving skills, emotion management and bully prevention (Espelage, et al., 2013).

    Talking with TJ. Talking with TJ is geared towards elementary school-aged children with a "teamwork building" focus for second and third grade students and a "conflict resolution" component for fourth and fifth grade students (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002). "TJ" is a character that is incorporated throughout the program in video lessons, comic books and other classroom exercises. Students can join "TJ's Team" by indicating their desire to work on the weekly skills being taught. This program was implemented as a five week pilot session with the study results focused solely on third grade students (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002).

INSIGHTS. INSIGHTS is designed to decrease disruptive and off-task behaviors in students with high-maintenance temperament. Students learn skills to increase classroom engagement through weekly lessons while parents and teachers are taught strategies for working with the child's temperament in a positive way, instead of working against the child's temperament (McCormick, et al., 2014).

Students' Creative Response to Conflict (SCRC). SCRC focuses on five themes to accomplish its mission of positive conflict resolution: affirmation, communication, bias awareness, creative conflict management, and cooperation (Yungbluth, 2008). The program aims to help students recognize that others care about them and by managing conflict in a positive manner these supportive relationships will be nurtured (Yungbluth, 2008).

Positive Action program. The Positive Action program is used for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The program teaches skills through a curriculum that is designed to help students feel positively toward themselves, leading to motivation to use positive strategies to acquire and maintain these positive feelings. School-wide supports are also provided in addition to classroom lessons to recognize and reinforce positive interactions (Lewis, DuBois, Bavarian, Acock, Silverthorn, Day, & Flay, 2013)

Contributing theories. Several theories have influenced the SEL framework and the specific interventions modeled after this framework including: developmental cascades theory, temperament theory, self-esteem enhancement theory and supportive relationships theory. In addition to these individual theories, the "multilevel program theory" postulates that the different ecologies of a person's life intersect and influence one another.

Multilevel program theory contributes to SEL programs by asserting that there are multiple levels that contribute to change (i.e. individuals, classrooms, school environments) and

that change must happen in multiple settings and domains over time as each domain affects the

others (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011). The cumulative impact that development in one

domain has on all other domains is part of the developmental cascades theory and highlights the

importance of having an integrated approach (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011).

Temperament theory can be used to understand why children with different

temperaments respond to stressors in numerous ways (McCormick, et al., 2015). Temperament

is a set of dispositions that emerge early and are a product of many factors and complex

interactions that occur over time. An individual's temperament can play a role in the way they

are seen and treated by others. For example, children with high maintenance temperaments are

often seen as less intelligent or less capable, and are provided a significant amount of negative

feedback, but receive little positive feedback (McCormick, et al., 2015). SEL programs based on

temperament theory teach the importance of reframing, rather than trying to change a child's

temperament (McCormick, et al., 2015).

Self-esteem enhancement theory describes an individual's motivation to feel self-worth,

and how these feelings are maintained through the use of cognitive and behavioral strategies

(Lewis, et al., 2013). When used as a framework for SEL programs, this theory articulates that

as students learn to apply these cognitive and behavioral strategies, they also develop adaptive

beliefs, values and actions, leading to positive social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral

outcomes (Lewis, et al., 2013). Supportive relationships theory explains how good

communication skills and management of emotions will help contribute to the development of

supportive relationships (Yungbluth, 2008). Through positive reinforcement, students will

associate positive communication and prosocial reactions to stronger relationships with adults

and other students. Conversely, aggressive responses and difficulty handling strong emotions

may push those closest to them away (Yungbluth, 2008).

   Staff training. Once SEL programs are formed with the influence of the aforementioned

theories, training and implementation of the programs must occur. Staff and teacher training

prior to the introduction of SEL programs and throughout the school year varies greatly.

Teachers are trained in the curriculum and implementation and may also receive training in

additional areas such as child development stages (Espelage, et al., 2013). The length of the

training and the follow up support for teachers can consist of as little as just four hours of

training (Espelage, et al., 2013) or can entail a 25 hour initial course followed by several ongoing

coaching sessions throughout the year (Jones, et al., 2010). Some programs also provide teacher

and staff training in social-emotional skills so that the skills being taught will also be modeled by

the school staff (Jones, et al., 2010).

   Implementation. Universal SEL programs are curriculum based and are most often

taught in the classroom during the school year (Espelage, et al., 2013; Lewis, et al., 2013). Some

programs are short term, lasting only five weeks (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002), others last

throughout the school year (Espelage, et al., 2013) and still others are designed to follow the

students through multiple grade levels, building on the previous years (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones,

et al., 2011; Lewis, et al., 2013; McCormick, et al., 2015). The majority of SEL programs take

place with elementary school age children but middle school students can also benefit from the

skills that are taught (Espelage, et al., 2013). The literature indicates that individual SEL

programs are not meant to be the only universal intervention used, but should be complemented

by supports provided in multiple other areas of the student's life (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al.,

2011).

Classroom lessons incorporate many interactive elements, such as group work, discussions, role plays, dyadic exercises and activities (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002; Espelage, et al., 2013; Jones, et al., 2010). Skills lessons are taught which include activities such as identifying and responding to acted out feelings, learning communication skills such as eye contact and paraphrasing, and identifying strategies for handling frustration (Jones, et al., 2010). Understanding and detecting emotional and situational cues in others, and responding appropriately to these situations are also emphasized (Jones, et al., 2010; McCormick, et al., 2015). Activities focused on positive relationships, a healthy body and mind, and feeling good about oneself are incorporated into the classroom (Lewis, et al., 2013). The purpose of classroom activities is to ensure critical understanding of the target skills and how to use them in many different settings (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002).

Video-based learning, with demonstrations of target skills and interviews with students, is another method for demonstrating and incorporating the skills into the classroom (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002; Espelage, et al., 2013). The 4R's program places a specific focus on literacy development as a teaching tool, with each of the seven units throughout the year beginning with an age appropriate book designed to complement the social and emotional skills being taught (Jones, et al., 2010). While SEL classroom programs use classroom instruction to teach social skills, the goal is that students will be able to transfer these skills to many situations and across many settings (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002; Espelage, et al., 2013; Jones, et al., 2011).

Effectiveness of SEL interventions. SEL intervention outcomes and effectiveness vary within the literature. Some studies include outcomes related to all students that took part in the intervention. Others focused on a particular group of students, such as high maintenance

temperaments in the INSIGHTS program (McCormick, et al., 2015). Several SEL studies had

outcomes related to social-cognitive processes such as attributional biases and normative beliefs

about aggression (Espelage, et al., 2013; Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011; Lewis, et al.,

2013; Yungbluth, 2008). Other outcomes are related to outward behavior, such as bullying and

physical aggression (Espelage, et al., 2013; Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011; McCormick, et

al., 2015; Yungbluth, 2008). Many studies had a high percentage of non-white participants

(E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002; Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011; Lewis, et al., 2013;

McCormick, et al., 2015; Yungbluth, 2008) but did not analyze the results between racial and

ethnic groups.

Social-cognitive processes. Hostile attribution bias refers to situations that are perceived

to be hostile or negative, even though the situation may actually be neutral or positive (Jones, et

al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011). For example, an accidental spill would be perceived as purposeful

or "mean." This can lead to more frequent aggression because individuals may feel that they

have been wronged or purposefully hurt, even in a benign situation (Jones, et al., 2010). The

4R's program found that the intervention was effective with decreasing the hostile attribution

bias with students in the intervention group (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011). After the

first year of the 4R's program results showed significantly lower levels of hostile attribution bias,

followed by second year results showing that there were continued slower rates of increase

compared to the control group (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011). The participants in the

4R's program consisted of approximately 46% Hispanic students, 41% African American

students and 5% white students. No significant difference was found between racial and ethnic

groups in the effectiveness in decreasing the hostile attribution bias with students in the

intervention group.

The impact of specific SEL programs on normative beliefs about aggression was measured in several studies, with mixed results. Normative beliefs about aggression refers to the individual's level of acceptance with using aggression in various situations, with lower numbers indicating lower acceptance. The Positive Action program showed a positive effect with students in the intervention group showing lower normative beliefs about aggression compared to the control school (Lewis, et al., 2013). However, the 4R's program showed no statistically significant effects on normative beliefs about aggression after the first or second year of the program for any racial or ethnic group (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011). Yungbluth's (2008) "Creative Response to Conflict" program found that kindergarten through eighth grade students showed a reduction in their normative beliefs about aggression after being involved in the "creative response to conflict" SEL program for one school year. However, there was no effect in beliefs about retaliating against another individual using aggression (Yungbluth, 2008). While each of the above programs had different results, the racial composition of the participants was comparable. The Positive Action program consisted of approximately 55% African American students and 30% Hispanic students (Lewis, et al., 2013). The 4R's program comprised of 46% Hispanic students and 41% African American students (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011). Over 90% of Yungbluth's (2008) sample were African American students. Neither Lewis, et al.'s (2013) nor Yungbluth's (2008) study included a comparison between racial and ethnic groups in the findings.

Outward behavior. While Yungbluth's (2008) study indicated positive effects in the area of social-cognitive processes, there were no changes in outward behavior including fighting and bullying. This was also the case in the "Talking with TJ" program, where significant effects were found in the social-cognitive processes and beliefs, but no significant effects were found in

teacher reported social skills or prosocial behaviors among the predominantly African American participants (E'guya Dilworth, et al., 2002). The 4R's program initially saw no effect on aggressive behaviors after the first year, but second year effects showed that the intervention group showed slower growth of aggressive behaviors while the control group's growth of aggressive behaviors increased (Jones, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2011).

The Second Step program was effective after one year at reducing physical aggression with students in the intervention school being 42% less likely to report physical aggression over those students in the control schools (Espelage, et al., 2013). However, throughout the study Hispanic students indicated a higher probability of physical aggression and African American students indicated a significantly higher probability of physical aggression when compared with white students (Espelage, et al., 2013). The Second Step program made no significant effects in the areas of verbal/relational bully perpetration, homophobic perpetration or sexual violence perpetration on the total sample, but did show that African-American students indicated significantly higher probability for each of these areas compared to white students (Espelage, et al., 2013).

While the program "INSIGHTS into children's temperament" was a class-wide, universal approach, the study took into account only the students with high maintenance temperaments when reviewing outcomes. High maintenance temperaments were identified by high levels of negative reactivity and physical motor activity, and low levels of task persistence. This temperament type has been linked with increased behavioral difficulties in school (McCormick, et al., 2014). This program had 435 kindergarten and first grade students as participants, with 75% being African American and 15% Hispanic. Of the 435 total participants, 69 students were identified as having a high maintenance temperament. The statistical results of the study

indicated that there was a moderate impact for these students on each of the behavioral outcomes (McCormick, et al., 2015). Disruptive behaviors decreased for children with high maintenance temperament types in the interventions group, while disruptive behaviors increased for that group of children in the control group. Students in the intervention group with high maintenance temperaments showed a decrease in off-task behaviors and an increase in behavioral engagement, where both of those outcomes remained stable for students in the control group (McCormick, et al., 2015).

The Positive Action program showed promising results, with all outcomes indicating positive program effects when comparing the control group to the intervention group (Lewis, et al., 2013). Student self-report outcomes indicated that students in the intervention group were less likely to report engaging in violent behavior, bullying or disruptive behaviors. The results from both parent reported data and school disciplinary data aligned with these student results, with fewer reports by parents of bullying or conduct problems and fewer disciplinary referrals and suspensions for the intervention group (Lewis, et al., 2013).

Secondary Interventions

Secondary interventions consist of programs that are geared towards students who may have increased risk factors for "problem behaviors" or who need a targeted intervention to address issues and concerns at an early stage (Mendes Davidson, 2011). Twenty-nine percent (n = 4) of the included studies focused on secondary interventions.

School-based mental health. School-based mental health programs use a variety of specific interventions to provide increased supports to at-risk students (Bruns, Moore, Stephan, Pruitt, & Weist, 2005; Hussey & Guo, 2003; Kang-Yi, Mandell, & Hadley, 2013). Students are often referred for having difficulty with social or behavioral functioning due to severe emotional

and behavioral difficulties or mental health issues (Hussey & Guo, 2003). School-based mental

health programs aim to improve the child's social and behavioral functioning (Hussey & Guo,

2003) as well as improve academic outcomes and decrease frequency that exclusionary

discipline is administered (Bruns, et al., 2005). School-based mental health services can be

provided by both school-employed practitioners and outside mental health providers (Bruns, et

al., 2005), however all three included studies based on school-based mental health consisted of

outside agencies providing these services. According to Bruns, et al. (2005), outside providers

are more likely to provide a wider spectrum of services, where school-employed professionals

are more likely to provide legally mandated services.

Several specific interventions are used with school-based mental health programs,

including case management, individual treatment planning, one to one support throughout the

day, training to teachers and family members, diagnostic assessments and the development of

individualized education programs (Bruns, et al., 2005; Hussey & Guo, 2003; Kang-Yi, Mandell,

& Hadley, 2013). The "Beech Brook" program offers a group for students, where they meet

with other students who are dealing with similar issues. In these groups, they are able to learn to

self-manage their symptoms and learn coping and interpersonal skills (Hussey & Guo, 2003).

Services are delivered through a "wraparound" approach, meaning that the services are provided

in the student's normal school setting, with program staff onsite throughout the school year and

support provided for students and families (Hussey & Guo, 2003).

Limitations to school-based mental health. The literature shows that one challenge for

school-based mental health services is that often students are not referred until after they have

been suspended. Mental health services are most effective when students are referred early and

can receive some type of intervention (Bruns, et al., 2003). Another limitation to school-based

mental health is that typically programming is not included over the summer. However, clinicians who have provided summer services have reported that this addition to school-year services is possibly the most effective treatment option for students (Hussey & Guo, 2003).

Results of school-based mental health on exclusionary discipline and behavioral symptomology. In-school and out of school suspension rates were examined to determine what effect school based mental health services have on exclusionary discipline. Forty-one elementary schools with expanded school mental health services were compared to 41 elementary schools with no school-based mental health services (Bruns, et al., 2005). A total of 787 students were part of the sample, with each group consisting of just under 90% non-white students. Surprisingly, neither in-school or out of school suspension rates were impacted by the presence of school-based mental health services in these schools. However, there was a positive association between percentage of non-white students, out-of-school suspension days and duration of suspensions within the school, meaning that schools with a higher percentage of minority students had longer suspensions and more days of out-of-school suspension (Bruns, et al., 2005).

Kang-Yi, Mandell and Hadley (2013) discovered that school-based mental health programs did have an impact on suspension rates, with a significant decrease in out of school suspensions in schools providing these programs. While the rate of in-school suspensions increased as out of school suspensions decreased, the overall risk of being suspended was significantly lower after the implementation of the programs. The racial and ethnic groups represented in this study included 76% African-American students, 11% white students and the remaining 13% of students identifying in the category labeled as "other" (Kang-Yi, et al., 2013). The study did not differentiate between racial and ethnic groups when analyzing the results.

The "Beech Brook" program measured the impact of school-based mental health services on behavioral symptomology and found that there was a statistically significant effect for students in the domains of conduct and attention problems. There was also an outcome for critical pathology, which includes dangerous behaviors such as fire setting, but the researchers found it difficult to observe and rate this outcome in the school setting (Bruns, et al., 2003).

The BrainPower program. Students who display aggressive tendencies early on are at risk for many problems over time, including negative developmental outcomes, difficulty maintaining relationships, higher level of school dropout and an increased need for mental health services (Hudley, Britsch, Wakefield, Smith, Demorat, & Cho, 1998). Based on attribution theory, the BrainPower program is designed to reduce peer aggression with program methods related to improved social cognition and behavior. Attribution theory explains how some children with high aggression are unable to clearly attribute intent, mistaking accidental or ambiguous circumstances as aggressive or purposeful (Hudley, et al., 1998). Highly aggressive children are not always able to read social cues and have difficulty taking time to think about a situation and cool down, instead responding immediately with retaliation (Hudley, et al., 1998). They may believe that negative behaviors have a hostile intent and react according to that belief (Hudley, et al., 1998). By displaying hostile reactions themselves, these children are likely to invoke hostile responses from those around them, creating a harmful environment that continues to bring out negative reactions (Hudley, et al., 1998).

The "BrainPower" program is based on the assumptions that highly aggressive children can learn to recognize accidental and non-hostile attributions and can learn to react in a more appropriate manner (Hudley, et al., 1998). The students chosen to be part of this study were classified as being "aggressive" based on ratings by teachers and peers. The 12 session program

was designed to teach students how to recognize and categorize social cues, as well as how to

read intent and respond in a non-hostile manner (Hudley, et al., 1998). The results from this

study were based on pre-test, post-test, six month, and 12 month follow up. Self-control was

measured by teacher ratings and included statements such as "controls temper in conflict

situations" and "responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other students" (Hudley, et al.,

1998, p. 275). The intervention results showed significant effects on self-control, which lasted

through each follow up. Student attributions were measured through student questionnaires with

hypothetical situations, designed to measure the students' judgement of intent. The intervention

had an immediate positive effect on the participants' skills in reading intent, however, by the 12

month follow up those results had reverted back (Hudley, et al., 1998).

Tertiary Interventions

        Tertiary interventions include programs that provide individualized interventions to

students in need of greater support. Tertiary interventions address students after an incident has

already occurred. Suspension and expulsion are commonly used as tertiary interventions, while

alternative models focus on restoration and recovery (Mendes Davidson, 2011). Only one

empirical study was found that addresses this specific group of students and also sorted out the

effects on minority students in the results.

        Relational approach to discipline. Studies have shown the importance of the teacher-

student relationship and have indicated that closer relationships between the two can lead to

fewer problem behaviors (Norton, 2009 & McCormick, et al., 2014). Unfortunately,

exclusionary discipline often breaks down the relationship between the student and teacher and

can lead to more behavioral issues in the classroom (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). This can lead to a

cycle where the student is disciplined, leading to an even poorer relationship with the teacher,

followed by increased discipline (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Some students may decide to resist their teacher's authority if they feel that the teacher is

misusing or doesn't have a legitimate "right" to the power they are administering. Giving

tedious work, subjectively administering discipline or acting like a parent all are ways that

teachers can lose their legitimacy in the eyes of some students. However, by earning the

students' trust, demonstrating care and concern for the needs of the class and by engaging the

students, the teacher is likely to connect and elicit cooperation (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Using a relational approach, Gregory and Ripski (2008) explored the relationship between

students' trust in teacher authority and the impact that has on discipline and cooperation in the

classroom (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, 32 teachers and 32 disciplined students

participated in a study to look into an association between the students' behavior (whether it was

cooperative or defiant) and the perception of the teachers as being trustworthy (Gregory &

Ripski, 2008). Ninety-one percent (n = 29) of the students and 22% (n = 7) of the teachers

sampled were black, 63% (n = 20) of the teachers were white, and 9% (n = 3) of the students and

15% (n = 5) of the teachers were from other ethnicities. The racial and ethnic groups of student

and teacher respondents were not identified throughout the findings.

The teachers completed surveys as well as interviews which were then analyzed and

sorted to determine whether or not each teacher used a relational approach to discipline. The

teachers who were reported as using a relational approach used methods such as understanding

the emotional cues of students so that they can be reengaged and kept on track, being able to

constructively solve conflict, having the skills to both prevent conflict but also intervene when

rules are broken and taking the time to get to know students individually (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

The student participants chosen were assigned to in-school suspension and completed surveys rating their trust in teacher authority and their own defiance. Results from the study showed that teachers who used a relational approach to discipline gained higher student trust in teacher authority, leading to decreased defiant behavior from the students (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Multi-Level Interventions

Some programs and frameworks include interventions at multiple levels. The studies included in this section are interventions where the outcome results are based on interventions that fall on all three levels.

Positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS). PBIS, also referred to as school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SW-PBIS) or school-wide positive behavior supports (SW-PBS), is an intervention framework adapted from the public health model that encompasses all intervention levels by applying various levels of support based on the needs of each student (Flores, 2010; Norton, 2009). According to the literature approximately 80 - 90% of all students will be successful with primary level, universal, interventions and will not need any additional behavioral support beyond that. Of the remaining students, roughly 10- 15% may need additional, small group supports and less than 5% will need intensive, targeted interventions (Flores, 2010; Norton, 2009). PBIS is research based and focuses on promoting positive behaviors by addressing discipline issues and behavioral concerns proactively (Flores, 2010). It is also based on the premise that both individual factors, such as poor social and academic skills, and environmental factors, such as inconsistent behavioral expectations, poor

supervision or unfair rules, are the cause of behavioral problems (Flores, 2010). According to

Norton (2009), "everyone wins with PBIS. That is, students became more motivated with

positive behavior, staff members united to promote positive behavior and parents showed the

community they were committed to reinforcing positive behavior and fostering academic

success" (p. 8).

   Implementation of PBIS. The literature shows that before PBIS can be implemented

school-wide, all staff must be trained in the changes, language and reasoning of PBIS. School

staff members play a role in creating the language, expectations and rules for students. An action

plan needs to be put into place to determine how expectations and rules will be taught to

students, how data will be collected and how consequences and positive reinforcement will be

given. The majority of the school staff must be on board with the implementation in order for

PBIS to be effective, as PBIS relies heavily on consistency among staff members (Flores, 2010).

PBIS programs are intended to address both the school environment and the specific needs of the

students through behavioral support (Flores, 2010).

   Individual factors. A key piece of the PBIS framework designed to influence individual

factors is teaching students standards of behavior and rewarding students for good behavior

(Norton, 2009). School staff should reinforce good behavior and supportive strategies need to be

provided for social competence and academic achievement (Norton, 2009).

   Environmental factors. Research has found that problem behaviors can sometimes be

linked to unintentional factors in the school environment, such as unclear expectations and

reactive measures (Flores, 2010). Changes to the school environment based on the

implementation of PBIS start with creating a common language and definition of behavioral

problems. Rules and expectations are implemented and taught to all students at the beginning of

the year and reinforced throughout the year. Inappropriate behaviors must be corrected using a

systematic method that is fair and equitable to all students. Schools should continually evaluate

the discipline practices in place by using a data-based system that measures progress among the

behavioral outcomes of students. Office discipline referrals, in-school suspensions, out of school

suspensions, attendance and academic progress are commonly used to track progress (Flores,

2010; Norton, 2009).

PBIS goals. PBIS interventions seek to not only decrease problem behaviors, but also to

improve academic achievement through increased instructional time (Flores, 2010; Norton,

2009). Increased instructional time is achieved in two ways and affects both students impacted

by time out of the classroom due to office referrals or suspension and the whole class. Every

time a student is referred to the office for behavior problems, that student loses an average of 20

minutes of instructional time (Flores, 2010). In school and out of school suspensions increase

the loss of instructional time for the affected student exponentially (Flores, 2010).

Norton (2009) describes the impact of PBIS on student achievement by using Sugai's

(2008) diagram showing the domino effect of PBIS. This domino effect begins with the use of

data in the implementation of PBIS interventions at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary). Data

collection allows the PBIS leadership team to understand behavioral and discipline patterns and

recognize areas of support and development for school staff members and teachers. The

additional support for teachers leads to more positive teacher interactions with students and a

higher level of consistency when teaching and reinforcing classroom rules and expectations.

This helps improve the student-teacher bond, resulting in fewer behavior problems and

classroom disruptions. This progression allows for more instructional time and the desired

outcome of increased academic achievement.

PBIS outcomes. The effectiveness of the PBIS interventions based on the two included studies is mixed. Norton (2009) investigated a program at three middle schools with a history of discipline issues. The PBIS program being implemented was focused on promoting positive changes in the school environment and improving systems for data collection, discipline and positive reinforcement. Norton (2009) found that the schools with the intervention resulted in decreases for both in-school and out of school suspensions for the student population as a whole. There was a decrease in in-school suspensions for white, African-American and Hispanic students. However, despite the overall decrease in out of school suspensions for white students and African-American students, there was an increase in out of school suspensions for Hispanic students.

Flores (2010) studied a PBIS program that was conducted in two rural Arizona charter schools from 2005-2008. Both schools had a similar breakdown of racial and ethnic groups, with approximately 50% of the participants identifying as Hispanic and 44% identifying as white. The two schools implemented a PBIS program over a three year period, with the first year consisting of staff training followed by two years of school-wide implementation. During the first and second years of the program, the schools received considerable support from Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports of Arizona (PBISAz). The schools continued to implement the PBIS model during the third year, but received less support from PBISAz.

Flores (2010) found that in "school A" white students were overrepresented and Hispanic students were underrepresented in suspensions and office referrals after the first year of the study. "School B" had no indication of over or underrepresentation in either outcome for any ethnic group. After the second year, which was the implementation year with significant outside support, school A showed no indication of over or underrepresentation for office referrals but

found that white students were overrepresented and Hispanic students were underrepresented in suspensions. School B found that white students were underrepresented and Hispanic students were overrepresented in both office referrals and suspensions. After the final year of the study, school A showed no indication of over or underrepresentation for any ethnic group in office referrals or suspension. The results for school B changed from the previous year, with white students now being overrepresented in suspensions and Hispanic students being underrepresented in both office referrals and suspensions. The inconsistency among these results indicates that staff training and the implementation of the program could be affecting the success of the intervention (Flores, 2010).

Both schools had an overall drop in office referrals and suspensions between the first and the second year of the PBIS implementation, but an increase during the third year. School A had a greater number of referrals during the third year than either the first or second. There was no significant difference found among individual ethnic groups in either school in the number of office referrals over the three year period. The only significant difference between ethnic groups in suspensions was in school B between years two and three, where suspensions for white students increased at a higher rate than they did for Hispanic students. These results show that the PBIS implementation was effective the second year, while receiving considerable support, however once the support was removed, the positive effects diminished. These results lead to questions about long-term sustainability of the program after the withdrawal of support from PBISAz (Flores, 2010).

Discussion

The purpose of this systematic review was to conduct an exhaustive compilation of research exploring interventions and alternative options to zero tolerance disciplinary policies in

schools and the identify their impact on minority students given the extent of research that is

available. Due to the criteria requiring the study to break down results among racial and ethnic

groups, only 14 studies were included. This shows that despite the growing body of literature

critiquing zero tolerance policies for their negative impact on students of color, few studies have

been done to investigate the impacts of programs that are meant to be alternative options on

students of color.

Program Overview

Primary interventions, while limited in number, had the most studies followed by

secondary interventions. Only one study was filed under the tertiary level, with the participants

being discipline referred students, but the intervention itself was not a tertiary level intervention.

During the literature collection phase of the review, several articles provided a theoretical

approach to tertiary interventions, but lacked the empirical evidence. Several others were

empirical research designs but did not differentiate results between white students and other

racial and ethnic groups. This draws attention to the gap in the literature surrounding

interventions for the students at the highest risk for exclusionary discipline measures. While all

levels of prevention would benefit from more research, effective tertiary interventions are

necessary in order to stop the funneling of students of color out of school and into the prison

system.

All primary interventions in this review were based on the social-emotional learning

framework. The impacts of the individual programs were inconsistent: while some programs

showed positive effects in some behavioral outcomes, such as a slower growth of aggressive

behaviors, others showed no effects in those same areas. All SEL studies found moderate to

significant effects in social-cognitive processes such as attribution biases and normative beliefs

about aggression. This finding is not surprising considering the foundation for SEL programs is

that social, emotional and cognitive changes lead to improved behavioral outcomes; and that

change happens over a significant period of time and through many levels of intervention (Jones,

et al., 2010).

The majority of the primary prevention programs within the synthesis collected data and

outcome results after being exposed to the intervention anywhere from five weeks (E'guya

Dilworth, et al., 2002) to two years (Jones, et al., 2011). The positive effects in social-cognitive

processes may translate into positive changes in behavioral outcomes, but those changes may not

be evident until later. Serious behaviors typically start to increase in later elementary school

(Jones, et al., 2010), so it is possible that these programs may have an impact on behavioral

outcomes that would be measurable over several years. Moreover, many of the SEL

interventions throughout the literature were not designed to be implemented as a single program,

but as one part of a multilevel approach. However, the study results base effectiveness on the

implementation of a single program. In order to see the full effects of the programs, data

collection needs to be designed to see effects over several years and with several sample groups.

The possibility of greater effectiveness on behavioral outcomes over longer periods of time can

be seen when considering the results of the 4R's study. The first year results showed no impact

on aggressive behavior, but positive results started to appear after the second year. Conversely,

multi-year data collection can indicate which aspects of the intervention achieve short term

results but are not effective as long term outcomes, such as the results from the secondary level

"BrainPower" program on the outcome of "reading intent" (Hudley, et al., 1998).

The results were equally inconsistent for the secondary and multi-level interventions and

data for tertiary interventions was nearly nil. While one school-based mental health program

resulted in a decrease in school suspensions (Bruns, et al., 2005), the second study showed no

significant effects (Kang-Yi, et al., 2013). Study results related to behavioral outcomes only

showed statistically significant effects in increasing self-control (Hudley, et al.,1998) , and the

domains of conduct and attention problems (Bruns, et al., 2005). The multi-level PBIS

interventions highlighted the differences among the results from the two studies. One study

found no overall effect of the PBIS intervention on the frequency of office referrals and

suspensions, but did find that each year there was a variation in the over and underrepresentation

of white students and Hispanic students on the two outcomes. Between the two schools in the

study, both groups were over and underrepresented at some point in the three years that data was

collected (Flores, 2010). The second study found that in-school and out-of-school suspensions

were overall decreased among schools with a school-based mental health program, however

Hispanic students saw an increase in out-of-school suspensions.

This review provided an overview of several similar programs, but they were all unique

in many ways. Even programs that fell under the same overarching framework, such as social-

emotions learning, had unique factors regarding the purpose, implementation and study design.

With so many different programs and studies, it is difficult to get a solid research base to back up

any specific program. Standardized intervention methods and implementation could provide a

structure for future programs that would allow for the replication of studies in different schools

and districts. Studies such as this one, which collate the literature are also helpful in terms of

seeing where the research is needed.

Cultural Relevance

Even with alternative approaches to discipline and school-wide preventions, racial biases

can contribute, at times unwittingly, to continuing the current trend of inequity in school

discipline. For example, a lack of positive support can also contribute to the racial disparities

between students of color and white students. Norton (2009) references a study that found that

the attitudes of teachers could be biased based on the racial makeup of the class- with African

American students and Hispanic students receiving less positive support in the classroom and

white students receiving a greater amount of praise and flexibility in the classroom. This leads to

questions about the level of support for minority students based on the ethnicity of the teacher.

Only one study in this systematic review supplied the race and ethnicity for the teachers that

were part of the study. Even though schools may implement preventative programs, these

programs are still susceptible to racial biases impacting the success for minority students. Thus,

it is imperative that training for staff include cultural competency where staff members reflect

and dissect the cultural lens from which they view and interact with students of a different race

or ethnicity from their own.

      Patterson, Hale, and Stessman (2008) found that the culture and climate of many public

schools in the United States align closely with white, middle class values and practices. This

was demonstrated in part through the expectations for families, such as high parental

involvement in their child's school (Patterson, Hale, and Stessman, 2008). High parental

involvement in school might not be possible or preferred for all families, due to factors such as

socio-economic status or cultural norms. However, schools may view these expectations as

indicators of students or families desire to succeed, putting the blame on the individual without

considering what role the school may played. Creating culturally relevant programs involves

examination of the school's culture and climate and ongoing assessment of the programs to

determine if they are effective for students from all racial and ethnic groups. Patterson, Hale, and

Stessman (2008) also found that these expectations and beliefs about students and families made

it easier for teachers and schools to place the blame on the students for school failure or lack of

achievement, without any realization that these practices may be a factor in student

disengagement. The school environment and even alternative intervention and prevention

programs could be unknowingly reinforcing stereotypes and generalizations about students and

families based on cultural differences and practices.

Person-in-Environment

The person-in-environment framework that guides social work practice is essential when

considering school discipline and prevention methods. The PBIS model touches on this

framework with the emphasis on both individual and environment factors affecting student

behavior and achievement but stops at the school level. The ability for a child to succeed in

school goes beyond the school walls. Many students deal with circumstances that take their focus

off school. For example, poverty is a significant issue that deeply affects children and families. A

child living in poverty may be hungry, living in a transient environment or experiencing a high

amount of stress that limits his or her ability to concentrate in school or complete assignments

and study outside of school. While school-based programs may be helpful for a child while at

school, it is possible that these programs lose efficacy over the summer or don't focus on the

acute stressors that may be affecting the child outside of the school environment. It is imperative

that there is a continuum of care that provides support within the school as well as collaboration

with community supports and providers creating a holistic approach to reducing the social,

emotional and environmental barriers that can impede a child's education attainment.

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Limitations to the Study

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School discipline, especially as it relates to the school-to-prison pipeline, requires a

multifaceted approach and has many influencing factors. This synthesis certainly did not cover

the many dynamics that influence the impact of school interventions including those discussed above. This study included only empirical research related to the impact of interventions on minority students. These criteria significantly decreased the number of included studies, as many studies included all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, into one group in the results. There were too few studies to give definitive evidence related to a specific intervention or intervention type (i.e. social-emotional learning, school-based mental health).

Another limitation to this study is that the inclusion criteria only allowed for studies from the United States. Other countries may have insight that could be useful in the development of alternative interventions to be used in the United States. It is also possible that some relevant studies were missed during the literature search. Many of the search terms were phrases and frameworks that do not apply to every type of intervention, so some literature may have fallen outside of those search terms.

Finally, the articles included in this study only looked at African American and Hispanic students, leaving out several other ethnic groups such as American Indian students. In the studies that separated the results by racial/ethnic group, these students were included in the "other" category if included at all. While studies report that American Indian students are disproportionately represented in suspension, expulsion and school dropout rates (Children's Defense Fund, 2009; Wallace, et al., 2008), there were no studies that met the inclusion criteria for this review that focused on any group besides African-American and Hispanic students.

Suggestions for Future Research

This review highlights a need for further research in the area of school discipline and interventions, with a specific focus on minority students. Research shows that even among differing ethnic and racial groups there can be disparities in discipline referrals and treatment of

students. For example, African American students are more commonly seen as disruptive and

have a higher amount of disciplinary referrals than Hispanic students. Also, studies show that

Asian students receive more positive feedback and praise over African-American students

(Norton, 2009, pg. 33). Those biases may be hidden when study results are combined into one

group. This review contained limited studies that broke down specific racial and ethnic group

data, but within the studies that did include this information, the research regarding differences

between racial and ethnic groups was supported. Espelage, et al. (2013) found that in all

behavioral areas, such as verbal or bullying perpetration, African American students indicated a

far higher probability for each area over white students. Within this same study, African

American students indicated a higher probability in all areas over Hispanic students. It would be

beneficial to compile data regarding the effectiveness of alternative programs as a whole, and

then conduct further research on the alternatives that are the most promising to determine

whether the positive effects will be replicated when looking at specific racial and ethnic groups,

including groups unrepresented in this review such as American Indian students.

Additionally, there is little empirical data at all levels of prevention as it specifically

relates to minority students, with tertiary intervention models especially lacking. Tertiary

interventions have historically funneled students of color out of schools and into the prison

system through suspensions, expulsions, and juvenile justice referrals, which is why further

research on alternative tertiary interventions is crucial. Since a disproportionate number of

students who are referred for suspension and expulsion are students of color, this level of

intervention is especially important to identify the impact on minority students.

There are several other areas that came up briefly in the literature and could be explored

in future research, such as whether or not the race or ethnicity of the teachers and school staff

affect the study results and in what ways do positive or negative feedback influence the impact of

intervention programs. Additionally, while not discussed in many of the included studies, the

implementation of these programs would be beneficial to consider when determining

effectiveness. The amount of training and support given to the staff proved to be a factor in the

success of a multi-level PBIS prevention (Flores, 2010) and likely contribute to the success of

interventions at all other levels. While some programs have outside groups providing training

and support (Flores, 2010), other programs may be implemented by school personnel such as

administrators or school social workers.

Finally, research focusing on long term effects and impacts is also needed, as many of the

intervention and preventative programs are designed to effect change over a period of time and

in conjunction with other intervention methods. Therefore, research focused on long term effects

and impacts is necessary to truly assess the viability of these programs as being effective and

long lasting in reducing negative behaviors, reducing the use of exclusionary discipline and

ultimately students of color out of the school to prison pipeline. Schools and districts should

consider standardized interventions and a prevention model that encompasses multiple years so

students can gain the most benefit from a multi-tier approach and the effects of the program can

be measured over several years and several student groups. This would require that schools have

funding to implement and sustain these programs with fidelity over time.

Conclusion

In theory, the primary and secondary intervention approaches to behavioral problems and

school discipline provide quite a contrast compared to exclusionary discipline. While

exclusionary discipline responds only to the incident and specific behavior, alternative policies

see the whole person- social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral. Exclusionary discipline is

punitive, without providing an opportunity for learning, whereas alternative policies are proactive and teach alternate behaviors (Flores, 2010). In practice, while some studies have shown promising results, there is still work to be done to ensure that alternative intervention models are fair, equitable and effective. A three-tiered intervention model can be valuable in decreasing the disparity between minority students and white students in relation to school discipline, however training and ongoing support for school staff as well as continued evaluation of effectiveness must accompany these programs.

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