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How Effective General Education Management Strategies and Awareness of Cultural Environment Could Decrease the Need for Initial Special Education Services

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HOW EFFECTIVE GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND AWARENESS OF CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT COULD DECREASE THE NEED FOR INITIAL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

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To my students whose actions were misunderstood in the classroom, I pray that you all are taken care of by passionate and inspiring teachers that lead you to live up to your full potential because you deserve it! No matter where you come from, I pray that you are provided the same opportunities for success that your same-aged peers are. I pray that you are encouraged by those around you to take those opportunities and flourish.

To my fellow teachers, I pray that you encourage students of all backgrounds to lead successful lives. I pray that you are able to celebrate the little things, yet strive for high expectations that are attainable.

Thank you to my family that has taught me to have a strong work ethic. Love you all!

Abstract

During my time as a federal setting III EBD teacher in a self-contained elementary-aged program, there have been two critical elements in this field that have provided me the passion to tackle this topic of effective classroom management strategies for problem behaviors and the environmental factors that may drive those problem behaviors. I chose this topic to provide my students hope for a successful future, even if the world outside of school is setting them up for failure. As a federal setting III EBD teacher, I saw my students struggling in school because environmental factors, such as lack of sleep or homelessness. As I tried to support them in the best ways I possibly could, I realized that this needed to be a team effort… This leads me to the second element special education that drove me to these topics, which was the lack of effective strategies that kept students like mine from being successful in the general education. As a federal setting III EBD teacher, I could not help but ask myself questions like, "Are my students only in this program because they are homeless, tired, and/or hungry?" Because of these factors, my students struggled to control their emotions and exhibit expected classroom behaviors. It was difficult for them to sit down in their seats, problem solve, or resolve conflicts. My students were always in fight, flight, or freeze mode due to the neglect, abuse, or lack of resources obtainable to them outside of school. Then I continued to ask myself, "Why am I constantly being called to de-escalate situations and provide them with breaks? Is this something that could be addressed by the general education teacher to maximize their time to learn?" These are the questions I would ask myself on a daily basis and I am sure that other teachers can relate and find these strategies and understanding of environmental factors helpful to create a higher success rate for our students.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Personal Connection to Topic

This researcher chose this topic based on experiences in a Federal Setting III EBD self-contained program. While being a case manager to nine students with severe behaviors, she noticed a theme. She noticed that a lot of the problem behaviors that she was seeing, were occurring because there was a huge discrepancy among classroom expectations and expectations at home. Many of the students on her caseload were homeless, hungry, and/or neglected outside of school. Eight out of nine of the students were boys. Eight out of nine of the students were of African American descent. In addition, all nine of the students did not have a positive male role in their lives. As a result of these unfortunate circumstances, the students would look for attention in any ways that they could in the school setting. The major behaviors that were observed would include verbal or physical aggression towards peers or staff members, blurting, deviance, elopement, and defiance towards any sort of directions given to them by authorities in school. A passion developed for this topic for many reasons. The students on the caseload were not taught at home to be organized or compliant, but they were taught how to survive in traumatic situations and how hard to work to get food on their tables. It was very difficult to provide academic instruction when a student would be worrying about where they would be sleeping that night or if someone would be there to help them off the bus after school.

History of Classroom Management

In the educational documentary Teach Us All created in 2017, the history of education was analyzed and the evolution of culturally responsive teaching was addressed. In 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education had declared segregation in schools unconstitutional. White individuals were outraged and in 1957 the Little Rock 9 entered a former all-white school. At this time, the

Little Rock Police and violent protesters refused to let the students of color into Little Rock Central High. As a result, President Eisenhower sent 1,000 paratroopers from Port Campbell, Kentucky to take federal control of the Arkansas National Guard. As a result, students of color were able to enter the school and begin their education with their white peers. In 1958, Ernest Green was the first black student to graduate Little Rock Central High.

There are many ways that classroom management strategies have evolved since 1958 as educational systems continue to obtain more effective strategies. In a study from Ohio State University in 1993, there is one strategy that was looked at much differently than it would have been in 2018. Classroom management strategies were researched to reduce racially-biased treatment of students. Bullara found that some common factors that lead to problem behaviors in the general education classroom were unclear and poorly specified classroom expectations and lack of consistency in discipline. For example, if a classroom expectation was for boys to take off their hats when entering the classroom and the teacher does not consistently enforce this rule then some students may feel like they are treated unfairly and unjustly. In addition, if one student is singled out for having his hat on and not following the classroom expectations then the student may interpret that as racial favoritism (Bullara, 1993). Furthermore, to prevent this type of situation from occurring, the teacher should explain the expectation and its function. For example, "gentlemen take off their caps when entering a room, or many caps having gang inferences so that no caps will be worn in class," (Bullara, 1993, p. 359). Next, the teacher needs to follow through with a consequence every time the expectation is not met. Finally, the teacher needs to explain the expectation and maintain it themselves. In 1993, Ohio State University expressed that the way to keep consistency with these classroom expectations and consequences is to precisely define the rules of the classroom. For example, the rule is "All students should not

be late and should be seated when the bell rings, and any student who is late will be marked tardy." If Jason is out of his seat when the bell rings and Carmella runs into the classroom as the bell is ringing, they should both receive the consequence of being tardy.

Cultural Environment and Classroom Behaviors

In a study about culturally responsive literacy practices in early childhood by Bennett, S.V., Gunn, A.A., Gayle-Evans, G., Barrera IV, E.S., and Leung, C.B. in 2017, early childhood educators are acknowledging an ongoing increase of cultural diversity in their student populations. They found that it is important for teachers to grow in culturally responsive teaching strategies so that their students can be engaged in the learning process and make real-world connections to what they are learning. They found that the foundation for culturally responsive teaching consists of these frameworks: developing a culturally responsive classroom community; family engagement; critical literacy within a social justice framework; multicultural literature; and culturally responsive print rich environments. Researchers also focused on what educators should be implementing in their classrooms. "When teachers can create an environment and nurture/foster their relationships with students, as well as help their students develop relationships with each other build upon respect, care, empathy, and trust," (Bennett, et al. 2017). There are culturally responsive teaching strategies that can be easily implemented, such as greeting students at the door, modeling "please" and "thank you," and most importantly actively listening to students." In addition, it is crucial for teachers to utilize students' interests in their lessons so that they can create real-world connections and be engaged and motivated to learn more.

What Would Be Considered "Effective" Classroom Management Strategies?

In a podcast called Common Sense, the subject of behavior management was discussed by two elementary general education teachers from Texas. The educators explained that their experiences of classroom management in diverse communities were fairly negative because the classroom expectations that were set in place for them were impossible to portray. For example, sitting in your chair all day with minimal transitions was very difficult and being silent for the majority of the school day felt impossible. The educators described the scholarly position that students are expected to sit down quietly with their hands folded in their laps. Because it was so difficult for them to exhibit these expected behaviors, they were seen as "bad." Their suggestions were providing classroom expectations to be kind to one another and to be unique, by welcoming mistakes to occur. Classroom expectations should include the students input by asking the students in the beginning of the year what they want to see in the classroom throughout the school year rather than the teacher telling them how they want the students to act. The educators also discussed their thoughts about consequences and how they should be logical. For example, if work is hands-on during work stations and the student does not get their work done then their consequence may be to complete that activity during free choice time. They mentioned that taking away recess time for not completing their work is not a logical consequence because nothing negative occurred during their recess time. They also mentioned that consequences should be made in the moment. The educators opposed to giving out consequences later on in the school day because they are less likely to learn anything from the situation. The podcast by two educators described effective classroom management strategies as maximizing learning, meanwhile providing a safe and comfortable environment where the students can make mistakes and celebrate their individuality.

In a survey given to general education teachers of elementary, middle school, and high school-ages, they were asked to describe what culturally-responsive teaching strategies they have found to be effective. An elementary school teacher described administration's requirements to pass out PBIS tickets and rewards will not work unless the students understand the reasons behind classroom norms and expectations. If a student is given skittles in first grade and expects them again in second grade, what did that reward really teach them? Both general education teachers of middle school and high school-ages agreed that being culturally-responsive can mean many things. Every student has a variety of interests, activities, beliefs, and hobbies that make up their own culture. Thus, it is important to build a strong rapport in the beginning of the school year to gain their trust and find out what will engage them in learning.

These educators were also asked what opportunities they provide for their students to share their cultural values and differences in a safe environment in an effective way? A middle school general education teacher explained that personal narrative pieces allow her students to share their values and provide as much detail as they desire. By having her students read their narratives aloud, it provides the entire class to be introduced to a new side of that student that they may not have been able to see in the classroom. A teacher at the high school level expresses how effective it is to provide students with the opportunity to share their opinions through open discussions.

In addition, these teachers were also asked what effective steps they are taking in order to close the growing achievement gap. At an elementary level, a general education teacher finds it effective to have close relationships with families. At the middle and high school levels, teachers find it crucial to find their students' passions and learning about their cultural values so

that they can provide materials and assessments that can provide an accurate representation of their students' knowledge.

In contrast, a special education teacher at Spanish-Immersion school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, expressed what classroom expectations she put in place for her elementary-aged students of all cultures so that they can feel comfortable and safe in her space. This educator explained that her classroom expectations are short, simple, and effective. "Sea seguro, amable, responsible" means to be safe, kind, and responsible. These three short expectations cover a lot and can be applied across all school settings.

An equally important viewpoint was expressed in an interview with a former student with severe Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. Now, at twenty-seven years old, the man was able to look back at his educational experiences and reflect on what went wrong. Educated in a more traditional-style of teaching in rural Minnesota, this former student explained that he would have been more successful if lesson plans were taught with less PowerPoint presentations, less lectures, and more hands-on activities. He expressed that he got the most out of classes, such as wood shop, because he was constantly doing something with his hands and actively learning. He explained that it was difficult to be required to take notes during class and listen to the lecture at the same time. When expressing his experiences with tests, the former student claimed that tests were very difficult for him. If he could have verbally taken his tests or provided his answers in essay-form, rather than responded to multiple-choice questions, then he feels like he could have been more successful.

Thesis Question

As a federal setting III EBD special education teacher at an elementary school, I noticed that I consistently asked myself the same questions each school day. Are my students in this program because of the lack of resources they have outside of school? Because of their homelessness, hunger, and neglect that my students endure outside of school that cause problem behaviors outside of school, are they bound for failure? Why is it that I am being called to de-escalate situations and address problem behaviors in the general education setting when my students are exhibiting behaviors that could be taken care of in that setting, with the proper training? For example, when my student takes too long of a bathroom break, is frustrated with his reading because it's too hard for him, becomes triggered more easily than their same-aged peers, it is not a means to call his case manager and for the student to be brought into the special education as a form of punishment. I have learned throughout my experiences that there is a misunderstanding that has spread throughout school systems. There is a misunderstanding that students that exhibit problem behaviors that stem from frustrations from environmental factors (i.e. homelessness, hunger, or neglect, etc.) are not to be placed in under the special education category of Emotional Behavioral Disorders. There are effective strategies within the general education classroom that teachers can be trained in to practice so that education systems can decrease overall initial evaluations for this reason.

Definition of Terms/Abbreviations:

Response to Intervention (RTI): The response to intervention model (RTI) is a multi-tiered instruction model structured to promote high-quality research-based instructional techniques that limit learning difficulties in the classroom (Whitten, et al. 2009).

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A community or group of educators who meet regularly to discuss various topics in education which may directly affect their Work.

Culturally-Responsive Teaching (CRT): According to Brown University, it is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. Some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are: positive perspective on parents and families; communication of high expectations; learning within the context of culture; student-centered instruction; culturally mediated instruction; reshaping the curriculum; and teacher as facilitator (https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a schoolwide and evidence-based practice that obtains core elements at each of the three tiers in the prevention model (https://www.pbis.org/research).

Emotional/Behavior Disorder (EBD): is an emotional disorder characterized by excesses, deficits or disturbances of behavior. The child's difficulty is emotionally based

and cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, cultural, sensory general health factors, or other additional exclusionary factors.

Coping Power (CP): An evidence-based cognitive-behavioral intervention developed for aggressive at-risk preadolescent children in school-based prevention studies.

Check-In/Check-Out (CICO): A research-based intervention designed for students who display non-threatening, conduct-related challenging behavior.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Research Process

Research was found through the internet search engines of Academic Search Premier and Google. Under Academic Search Premier, academic peer-reviewed articles were found by searching key terms, such as "effective classroom management strategies" and "culturally-responsive teaching strategies." Under the search engine of Google, the key terms searched included "Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports," "Professional Learning Communities," "Response to Intervention (RTI)," "Zones of Regulation," and "mindfulness techniques for the classroom." Resources were also accumulated from related Bethel University required textbooks, such as *RTI Success: Proven Tools and Strategies for Schools and Classrooms* written by Whitten, Ph.D., Esteves, Ed.D., and Woodrow, Ed.D in 2009. Other resources were gathered through professional development trainings through the Mounds View Public Schools, which included the Nurtured Heart approach developed by Block, Glasser, and Bravo in 2012 and Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain by Zaretta Hammond in 2015.

Effects of Cultural Environment

What is culture?

"The brain uses cultural information to turn everyday happenings into meaningful evenings. If we want to help dependent learners do more higher order thinking and problem solving, then we must access their brain's cognitive structure to deliver culturally responsive instruction," (Hammond, 2015, p. 22-34). According Zaretta Hammond, a former teacher and lecturer on culturally responsive teaching at St. Mary's College Kalmanovitz School of Education in California, there are three levels of culture. Surface, shallow, and deep culture help educators understand how culture operates on a surface, intermediate, and deep level. Surface culture

consists of observable and concrete elements including holidays celebrated, cultural food dishes, music, and clothing. Shallow culture consists of unspoken rules including eye contact, thoughts towards elders, concepts of time, personal space, etc. This is the nonverbal communication, also known as rapport, that instills trust among people within the culture. Finally, deep culture includes people's views of good or evil and conscious assumptions that govern the world. This is where the brain interprets threats or rewards throughout an environment, also called mental models. More specifically, mental model schema guides the individuals within the culture to function and behave throughout an environment.

The Brain and Culture

For culturally responsive teaching strategies to be effective, educators must understand the way the brain works. First, it is important to understand the physical structures of the brain (Hammond, 2015, p. 36-50). There are basic structures that are important to understand before beginning to understand culture, which include the Reptilian Region, the Limbic Region, the Neocortex Region, cellular structures, and the Nervous System.

The Reptilian Region is the first brain layer, which is made up of the brainstem and the cerebellum. This part of the brain is always on and always reacting. Even when sleeping, the Reptilian Region allows an individual to wake up when they hear a loud noise or smell smoke. The brainstem is also a part of this region and connects to the spinal cord. These work to keep the human body alive by controlling the automatic functions, such as breathing, heartbeat, body temperature, digestion, blood pressure, and balance. The Reptilian Region also houses the reticular activating system (RAS), which is responsible for alertness and attention (Hammond, 2015).

The Limbic Region is placed on top of the reptilian region, which is only present in mammals. It can also be called the emotional brain. "This region links emotions, behavior, and cognition together," (Hammond, 2015, p. 38). The Limbic Region supports the human body to learn from experiences, manage emotions, and its memory. This region contains three structures that help manage memories and emotions: the thalamus; hippocampus; and the amygdala. The thalamus helps the human body with all incoming sensory information that the reticular activating system (RAS) passes through and directs it to other parts of the brain to process. The hippocampus houses the memory system, which includes the short-term and working memory. The amygdala includes the human body's fear system that detects any social or physical threats.

The Neocortex Region is home to the executive functioning (Hammond, 2015). This region oversees the individual's thoughts and manages the working memory. It controls planning, abstract thinking, organization, self-regulation skills, and the imagination. "The neocortex has an almost endless capacity to learn and rewire itself," (Hammond, 2015, p. 40).

The brain contains cellular structures made up of neurons. "Because of neuroplasticity, the brain can grow an unlimited amount of gray matter in response to our continuous learning," (Hammond, 2015). Neuroplasticity determines the human's capacity to do complex thinking and problem solving. Learning occurs when neurons communicate with each other. The brain exchanges information through short, fingerlike extensions known as dendrites. In addition, neurons can communicate faster through neural pathways called myelination.

Lastly, the Nervous System is the final structure to understand about the brain. This contains the safety-threat detection system that is how humans can monitor danger in social settings (Hammond, 2015). This mainly happens in the autonomic nervous system, which has

three branches: the sympathetic nerve; the parasympathetic nerve; and the polyvagal nerve. The sympathetic nerve keeps the human body relaxed and seeks its well-being. The parasympathetic nerve keeps the human body alert and reacts to danger if need be by fight, flight, or freeze. The polyvagal nerve is the social engagement system in which keeps the human body connected to other individuals.

According to Zaretta Hammond, the brain obtains principles that work together in creating culturally responsive rules (Hammond, 2015). The first principle consists of the brain seeking to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others in the community. Hammond explains, "The brain's two prime directives are to stay safe and be happy. The brain takes its social needs very seriously and is fierce in protecting an individual's sense of well-being, self-determination, and self-worth along with its connection to community," (Hammond, 2015, p. 47). The amygdala keeps the brain on high alert by detecting microaggressions that may be subtle, verbal or nonverbal comments, personal jabs, or blatant insults that may be directed towards students of the minority. It is important for culturally responsive practitioners to create a safe environment for students of the minority and to familiarize themselves with common actions or conditioning of students that are of the majority.

The next principle explains that positive relationships keep our safety-threat detection system in check. Positive relationships provide the amygdala to stay calm, while always on high alert, and the prefrontal cortex focuses on higher order thinking and learning.

The third principle of culturally responsive brain rules is described as culture guiding how individuals process information. "Cultures with a strong oral tradition rely heavily on the brain's memory and social engagement systems to process new learning," (Hammond, 2015, p.

48). If common cultural learning aids, such as stories, music, and repetition are used in schools, learning will be more effective.

The fourth principle of culturally responsive brain rules explains that attention drives learning. Each student interprets lessons differently and every brain's reticular activating system is tuned to novelty, relevance, and emotion. In other words, when instruction is provided orally, students are more likely to pay attention to it when they can make a personal connection to it.

The fifth principle of culturally responsive brain rules describes all new information being coupled with existing funds of knowledge in order to be learned. The limbic system operates the human body's capacity for background knowledge. This internal information that is stored away helps the body to make sense of new information. When new information is presented to a student that already has a general understanding of the content, they can build off that old information and store new information away for the future.

The sixth and final principle of culturally responsive brain rules describes the brain physically growing through challenge and stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning. As students learn, their brain is fulfilling its main purpose to get smarter, survive, and thrive in life. Brain growth occurs when new information is retained, when the brain is engaged in a new task, or when the it completes a puzzle. In this process, the brain will grow and so will its capacity to grow neurons, dendrites, synapses, and a thick coat of myelin to increase speed (Hammond, 2015).

Values Taught at School vs. Values Taught at Home

According to Kent L. Koppelman's text *Understanding Human Differences: Multicultural Education for a Diverse America*, there are seven traditional approaches that are taught in schools. These approaches include setting an example. This approach describes parents and

teachers being role models to their children and students (Koppelman, 2011, p.5-6). The next approach is the use of rules and regulations to promote favorable behaviors. An example of this would include promoting punctuality and consequences when a student is not on time to class. The third approach is to persuade and convince. Teachers may convince or persuade their students to accept certain values that the school feels to be important. The fourth approach is to appeal to conscious. This is portrayed when a teacher responds to a student making an inappropriate comment by saying, "You don't really believe that, do you?" The fifth approach provides limited choices in order to manipulate students into making acceptable decisions. The sixth approach is illustrated by inspiring people to embrace certain values, rather than other values. Finally, the seventh value is emphasizing religious or cultural beliefs without providing the students an opportunity to question them.

Are these traditional approaches fit for all cultural values? Is it the parents fault for placing the student in that environment? All these approaches are assumptions that all the students obtain the same values coming into the school.

The Impacts of Labels

As Koppelman stated, young children are only minimally aware of skin color and often unaware of race. When a child is asked what their skin tone is at age three, they are likely to name the color of their shirt or favorite color. When asked what their skin tone is at age four, children begin to understand skin color is permanent and do not include any negative connotations to that skin color. At age five, children may be more interested in the differences in skin colors among people by asking questions. This is when they may begin to be aware of race or societal attitudes (Koppelman, 2011, p. 16). Koppelman states that true awareness of skin color does not exist until about age eight or nine. This may seem apparent when teachers hear an

unexpected terms from students during unstructured times at the playground or free time and have to consciously confront the class about name calling or other forms of prejudice.

How do these unexpected terms of prejudice or racism affect young students? "Sometimes members of a subordinate group believe and internalize myths, stereotypes, and prejudices expressed about their group by the dominant group. Even for those who do not internalize the negative messages, being called derisive names, especially by other children, has an impact on children and youth," (Koppelman, 2011, p. 16).

Preparation to Be a Culturally Responsive Practitioner

Being a culturally responsive practitioner does not include having multiple strategies to use in a diverse classroom. It is a mindset. "Too often, we focus on only doing something to culturally and linguistically diverse students without changing ourselves, especially when our students are dependent learners who are not able to access their full academic potential on their own. Instead, culturally responsive teaching is about being a different type of teacher who is in a relationship with students and the content in a different way," (Hammond, 2015, p. 52). There are steps to take in order to begin this process.

First, the educator must unpack implicit bias (Hammond, 2015, p. 52-68). Many times, educators are stuck in their comfort zones because the amygdala works to keep the human body there. Although, in order to be a culturally responsive practitioner, the teacher will have to talk about sensitive issues such as race, racism, classism, sexism, or any other kind of "-ism." In order to talk about these issues, the teacher must begin with an intention and make a commitment. One must find other practitioners of similar racial, cultural, or class background and see how their journey developed over time. One must read about others' journeys and learn from their findings. One could find a mentor who has already walked the path.

Next, the practitioner must examine their own cultural identity and make the familiar strange. "A critical step for teachers is to understand how their own cultural values shape their expectations in the classroom- from how they expect children to behave socially, take turns during discussions, or even pass out classroom materials. A student's different way of being or doing can be perceived as a deviation from the norm and therefore problematic if not recognized as just different," (Hammond, 2015, p. 55). There are three internal tasks that the practitioner must work through: identifying their cultural frame of reference; widening their cultural aperture; and identifying their key triggers. In order for a practitioner to identify their cultural frames of reference, they must accept themselves as cultural beings. By doing so, reference points are formed that shape their mental models about teaching, learning, and about dependent learners of color. The second task of creating a map of cultural reference points consists of creating time and space to work through aspects of surface, shallow, and deep cultural for clues about one's own culture. The educator might ask themselves questions such as-

- "How did my family identify racially or ethnically?"
- "What kind of community did we grow up in?"
- "Was I the first in your family to attend college?"
- "How would I describe my family's economic status in terms of middle class, upper class, working class, or low income?"

Then the educator may shift through shallow cultural beliefs and experiences by asking themselves questions such as-

- "What did my parents, neighbors, and other authority figures tell me that respect looked like growing up?"
- "What did disrespect look like?"

- "How was I trained to respond to emotional displays, such as crying, anger, and happiness?"
- "What got me shamed in the family?"
- "Were there opportunities to earn praise as a child?" "How so?"

Next, a similar reflection should take place according to the educator's deep cultural values related to communication, school, self-motivation, and effort. Those behaviors should be listed then the educator should ask themselves further questions such as-

- "How did you come to believe this?"
- "What did my culture teach me about intelligence?"
- "Did I grow up believing some groups were smarter than others?"

The next step in preparing to become a culturally responsive practitioner, the educator must widen their interpretation aperture. Educators interpret other people's actions solely through their own personal and cultural lenses. In doing so, a challenge lays in misinterpreting others' actions or intentions. It is important for educators to regularly practice mindful reflection. Here are helpful tips to do so:

1. The educator should spend time viewing the replay in their mind without any judgment.
2. The educator should make a list of all assumptions, reactions, and interpretations of behaviors as the scenario replays.
3. The educator should try on alternative explanations for the student's behavior based on the information accumulated regarding their cultural beliefs and values.
4. The educator should check their explanations by consulting with other teachers.

5. The educator should build their cross-cultural background knowledge. They should be committed to being a lifelong learner of culture and constantly working towards widening their interpretations of behaviors.

6. Finally, the educator should leverage technology and watch positive movies or television series that will allow them to virtually step into another cultural experience. The educator can use these resources as opportunities to widen their interpretations.

Next, the educator must identify their personal triggers. When the brain's alarm system becomes triggered, the human body can become culturally reactive in an effort to protect itself rather than provide a culturally responsive reaction (Hammond, 2015). When the educator learns and acknowledges their personal triggers and what sets them off, then they can work towards creating a plan to provide a culturally responsive reaction the next time it occurs. By creating a plan, the educator may rewire their brain to react in a way that have a positive impact on students of diversity.

Finally, the educator must practice emotional self-management strategies by identifying their triggers, labeling the feelings that arise when triggered, and creating an "early warning system" or plan for the next time the trigger occurs. The S.O.D.A. strategy is a specific strategy to gaining control of emotions when feeling triggered. The S.O.D.A strategy stands for stop, observe, detach, and awaken. This simply means to stop and pause before reacting to stimuli that may be challenging and working hard to stay open-minded. When observing, the educator should check themselves and, instead of reacting to the stimuli, take a breath. When detaching from a trigger, the educator must deliberately shift their consciousness to something more pleasant or inspirational. To awaken means the educator must shift their focus from themselves

to the person in front of them and be in the moment. Try to take the other person's perspective by thinking about how they are feeling in that moment.

Effective System-Wide Approaches to Problem Behaviors

Response to Intervention

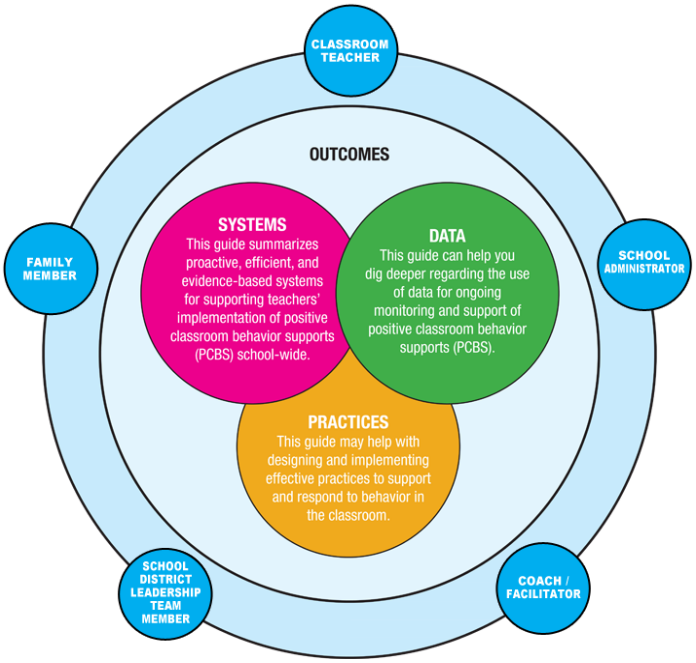
The response to intervention model (RTI) is a multi-tiered instruction model structured to promote high-quality research-based instructional techniques that limit learning difficulties in the classroom (Whitten, et al. 2009). The instructional tiers that make up RTI are Tier III, Tier II, and Tier I. Tier III is made up of intensive interventions specifically designed to meet students' individual needs. These interventions could be provided in a small group or one-on-one setting with frequent progress monitoring. Tier II interventions consist of supplemental, research-based instructions that occur in small groups that target specific strengths and needs. Again, progress monitoring occurs. Tier I interventions include high-quality classroom instruction using research-based programs and instructional methods. Progress would be monitored at least three times per school year. By using this multi-tiered instructional model, students with specific learning strengths and interests can be reached and led to their full potential in the classroom to see success. This model is also used to benefit students who struggle in the classroom. The RTI framework provides academic interventions to identify deficits and beneficial learning styles for students.

In a study by McDaniel, Lochman, Tomek, Powell, Irwin, and Kerr in 2018, they wondered if students with elevated behaviors in the general education classroom required tiered behavioral interventions targeting individualized behaviors. These interventions are efficient and effective to prevent the need for special education services due to behavioral needs. In this study, 433 students in an urban public elementary school in a small city within the Southeastern United

States. This is a high-need school with high rates of disciplinary problems and poor academic performance. 98% of students are African American ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. In this qualitative study, various behavior assessments were utilized, such as the Behavior Assessment of Children in School-2 (BASC-2) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The experimental procedure required screen and consent for each classroom teacher to have at least five students participate that exhibited disruptive behaviors. It also required teacher training in CICO, training in coping power interventions, a participant condition assignment given to a student at random, and each teacher must have filled out an Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for each student participating to confirm inclusionary criteria. As a result of the study, tier two identification/interventions and positive behavioral interventions/supports were effective strategies when working with students with problem behaviors in the general education classroom. They were effective meaning the use of these strategies would decrease the need for special educational services. In conclusion, the increased use of interventions in the general education classroom decreased target behaviors overall. By providing staff training in PBIS and multi-tiered interventions, there could be an overall decrease in special education referrals for behavioral problems in the classroom (McDaniel, et al. 2018).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a schoolwide and evidence-based practice that obtains core elements at each of the three tiers in the prevention model (https://www.pbis.org/research).



The first prevention tier is called the primary tier, which includes core elements of the following: behavioral expectations defined; behavioral expectations taught; reward system for appropriate behavior; clearly defined consequences for problem behavior; differentiated instruction for behavior; continuous collection and use of data for decision-making; and universal screening for behavior support.

The next tier is the secondary prevention tier, which includes the following core elements: progress monitoring for at risk students; system for increasing structure and predictability; system for increasing contingent adult feedback; system for linking academic and behavioral performance; system for increasing home/school communication; collection and use of data for decision-making; and basic-level function-based support (https://www.pbis.org/research).

The final tier consists of core elements regarding the tertiary prevention tier: Functional Behavioral Assessment (full, complex); team-based comprehensive assessment; linking of academic and behavior supports; individualized intervention based on assessment information

focusing on (a) prevention of problem contexts, (b) instruction on functionally equivalent skills and instruction on desired performance skills, (c) strategies for placing problem behavior on extinction, (d) strategies for enhancing contingence reward of desired behavior, and (e) use of negative or safety consequences needed; and the collection and use of data for decision-making (https://www.pbis.org/research).

PBIS also focuses on bully prevention at school, which has been studied by Scott Ross, Ph.D., Rob Horner, Ph.D., and Brianna Stiller, Ph.D. Elementary ages focus on giving students the tools they need to acknowledge bullying, provide explicit instructions on how to respond to bullying, and it provides a redefinition of the bullying construct (https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/bullyprevention_ES.pdf).

Expectations and Consequences

Classroom expectations are set as a guideline to what the classroom should look and act like. It is most effective when the classroom expectations are created with the students' input because they are more likely to follow them if they had helped create them. Classroom expectations should be specific and clearly stated throughout the room for students to reference throughout the school year. If they can be easily misinterpreted, students will look for ways to create their own clear interpretation of the expectations. The classroom expectations should be limited to five or six in order to minimize confusion or intimidation within the classroom. Finally, classroom expectations should address positive student behaviors rather than rules like, "Do not chew gum in class," (Smith, 2004).

When giving consequences in the classroom, there are five key assumptions.

1. There are no punishments, only consequences.
2. Consequences are used to pause and get students' attention.

3. Consequences should be organized in a hierarchy.
4. Educators have no control over their students.
5. Consequences teach students that they have no power of choice in the classroom.

Consequences should be natural and logical. For example, when a student writes on their desk, their consequence is to clean it up (Smith, 2004). They should provide wiggle room for the teacher. Teachers should not focus on giving fair and equal consequences to all students; they should be focusing on maximizing the students' learning experience. Therefore, consequences may look different from student to student. Although, consequences should not take away from the students' learning experience, but consequences should provide an opportunity to further their learning of social skills. When the student chooses to not follow the classroom expectations, it helps when the educator frames all consequences around their choices to do so. For example, "You have chosen to hit a friend sitting next to you, therefore you should discuss with me what your consequence should be." By holding the student accountable for their actions, the student should have input in what happens next and what their plan is so that it does not happen again. Together, the teacher and student should collaborate on the consequence and decide on an action plan together.

Finding the Why

Why are students acting out? There is a plethora of reasons that students may be showing problem behaviors in the classroom. It is an educator's responsibility to understand why (Smith, 2004). Students may not understand the lesson and become frustrated; they may want to push away feelings of failure. The students' expectations may be unrealistic to follow. Students may be experiencing economic and/or financial struggles outside of school and the last thing they want to think about is obtaining a lesson objective. Students may be unmotivated to follow

along due to bullying or traumatic experiences from their past. Some may even be experiencing hunger or thirst and that is affecting their abilities to learn in the classroom. The fact is that all students come from different backgrounds, different cultures, different beliefs, and obtain different learning styles to comprehend information. Students do not exhibit problem behaviors because they are bad. Educators must look for ways to establish trustworthy relationships with their students in order to figure out the why.

Helpful approaches that help to determine why problem behaviors are occurring include having positive connections with students, using "I-Statements" and active listening, and if students are hungry then one must feed them making positive connections with students, educators may learn their personal interests and plan to create lesson plans that reflect their real-world experiences. When making those connections, the students will be more likely to retain key information from the lesson when they are able to relate the lesson objective to their lives. By using "I-Statements" and active listening, this allows the students personal time with educators when they are not playing the role of an authoritarian. It is beneficial when the teacher makes an effort to listen to the student's point of view then repeats it back to the student. Active listening by including the word "I" can help reduce students' desire to defend themselves when unexpected behaviors occur. For example, an educator might say, "DeShaun, I am concerned when I have to keep redirecting you to follow instructions. How can I help you?" Lastly, by providing students with an opportunity to support their basic needs, such as eating, drinking, or going to the restroom, educators may understand why students are acting the way that they are.

Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community represents a group of staff and/or teachers that focus on continuous improvement of their performance, as well as student learning (https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/best-practices-for-professional-learning-communities.shtml). PLCs are a reliable source of student learning. These groups enable teachers to continually learn from each other and provides opportunities for resources for to be shared and in-depth discussions about what is effective and what is not effective in the classroom. Professional learning communities offer educators a collaborative space to collect inquiry and act research (http://www.allthingsplc.info/about). Not all PLCs are effective and/or collaborative, but they all share a common goal to achieve better results for their students and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Teaching Racial Literacy

Dr. Howard C. Stevenson from the Grade School of Education at University of Pennsylvania teaches an approach to cope with racial discrimination and reduce racial threats by promoting racial literacy. Dr. Stevenson notes that the key to coping with racial discrimination is to understand our differences. Racial literacy can easily be explained in three main points: read; recast; and resolve. The first step "read" is the ability to recognize when a racial threat occurs then recognizing our initial reaction to it. The second step "recast" is using mindfulness to reduce our overreactions to racial threats. By reducing reactions, one may create a more realistic reaction to a situation. The final step "resolve" is the idea of being able to make a healthy decision and reaction (https://www.ted.com/talks/howard_c_stevenson_how_to_resolve_racially_stressful_situations#t-576).

To teach racial literacy, a strategy should be provided to reduce racially threatening situations. Racial literacy can be taught in three simple steps: calculate; locate; communicate; then breathe and exhale. To calculate, one must recognize what feeling they are having at the moment. How intense is it? The individual must rate that feeling on a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most intense). The next step is to locate the feeling. Where in body is this feeling? Be specific. The next step is to communicate. What self-talk and images are coming to mind during this racially threatening situation? Finally, the last step is to breathe and exhale. At this point, it is important to reflect on this process and what the body is communicating during a racially stressful situation (https://www.ted.com/talks/howard_c_stevenson_how_to_resolve_racially_stressful_situations#t-576). By following these steps, one may work to reduce these unconscious and initial feelings in order to rationalize their reactions.

The Zones of Regulation

The Zones of Regulation is a framework to foster self-regulation and emotional control (http://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html). The Zones of Regulation was created by Leah Kuypers, M.A., ED., OTR/L is a systematic, cognitive behavioral approach to teach self-regulation strategies by categorizing all the different ways that people feel and states of alertness that people experience into four concrete colored zones. This framework provides specific strategies for students to become more aware and independent in controlling their emotions and impulses, manage their sensory needs, and improve their abilities to problem solve. The Zones of Regulation is designed to promote independent regulation using visual aids. There are four zones- the red zone, yellow zone, blue zone, and green zone. The red zone describes extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions

(http://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html). These feelings would be described as experiencing anger, rage, devastation, terror, or explosive behaviors in which a person may lose control of their body. The yellow zone is described as heightened states and elevated emotions, but a person still has some control of their body during these states. In the yellow zone, an individual may be feeling stressed, frustration, excitement, silliness, or nervousness. The blue zone is described as low states of alertness when a person feels sad, tired, sick, or bored. This is when a person still has some control over their body. Finally, the green zone describes the calmest state of alertness when a student feels happy, focused, ready to learn, or content. This is when an individual has full control over their body. This framework helps students to become aware of their emotions and promotes independent emotional regulation that can easily be implemented into a classroom.

Nurtured Heart Approach

According to the Children's Success Foundation, the Nurtured Heart Approach (as presented at a recent staff development training in the Mounds View Public Schools in Mounds View, Minnesota) it is to transform children with intense behaviors and emotions and by helping them to flourish. This approach started as a result of intense behaviors in schools. The characteristics of intense behaviors exists, but has a consistent response and pattern come from teachers' traditional classroom management practices? The Nurtured Heart Approach team surveyed 100,000 teachers informally to find that 100% said that they have been trained to work with "normal" students, although less than 1% of teachers said they have been trained adequately to encounter intense students with high levels of unexpected behaviors in school (Block, et al. 2012). Traditional styles, such as ignoring behaviors or providing consequences to promote acceptable behaviors, often inadvertently make intense situations worse. The Nurtured Heart

Approach encourages teachers to build students' inner wealth by making every moment an opportunity for success, being in the moment, and recognizing the positive aspects of the student's every decision. The Nurtured Heart Approach expresses that every student has a portfolio of experience that they carry around with them. A student with intense behaviors typically may grow up with labels or a reputation, such as being "bad." Although, this approach intentionally works to re-frame an intense student's personal portfolio in a positive and encouraging way.

For example, this researcher imagined a student by the name of Aaron. Aaron is a 15-year old boy and has grown to have a reputation of having numerous detentions each school year for tardiness and unexpected behaviors in the classroom. Aaron's personal portfolio has been filled with constant negativity, failure, and ongoing discouraging comments towards him. It is the teacher's responsibility to re-frame Aaron's portfolio under the Nurtured Heart Approach. For example, when Aaron is tardy for English class and the teacher may respond by saying, "Aaron, I see that you have made it to class today and I appreciate that you have the motivation to participate and learn today because we are glad to have you here." When the teacher responds in a positive way to an unexpected behavior in school, the teacher is acknowledging his greatness by expressing that they are grateful that Aaron made it to class, even though it may not have been all of the class.

Another important aspect of the Nurtured Heart Approach is to remember to provide students with the same amount of attention when they are providing expected behaviors and unexpected behaviors in school (Block, et al. 2012). Students with intense behaviors tends to receive the most attention when they are exhibiting negative and unexpected behaviors. Students of intensity also tend to strive for that attention, whether it is negative or positive. Therefore,

when they learn that they will receive the most attention from their teachers when they exhibit a unexpected behavior then they will continue to exhibit unexpected behaviors. In this case, it is important for the educator to choose what actions not to energize. For example, when 5-year old learns that he will be held every time that he cries, but is not held when he isn't crying, he will continue to cry just for the sake of being held.

Another important aspect of the Nurtured Heart Approach is that ignoring is counter-productive (Block, et al. 2012). According to the Children's Success Foundation, ignoring just invites kids to "up the ante." Ignoring an unexpected behavior is a more traditional approach to problem behaviors and has been found to be passive and ineffective. Instead, refusing to provide energy is very affective and pausing the energy flow by eagerly waiting for the right moment to turn it back on again is most effective to promote positive behaviors.

The Nurtured Heart Approach expresses their knowledge of the video game theory, which describes students that cannot focus on schoolwork, but can play video games with mastery and accomplishment (Block, et al. 2012). This is because the children are playing a specific game of their choosing, which obtains a storyline that truly makes sense to them and follows their own logic that is different from their everyday lives. Video games provide children with a sense of successfulness by providing them with rewards and goals to accomplishment throughout each phase of the game. This video game theory provides a perspective of students striving for success. When they feel success in small increments, such as tokens or accomplishment in moving up in phases, they are more likely to stay engaged until they complete the game with mastery. Video games also show a sense of clear and straightforward directions and expectations. Each phase is predictable and provide strong incentives to continue

with the game. Video games also always provide consequences. Although, in a short moment, the child can hop back onto the game and desire to continue playing in order to win.

The Nurtured Heart Approach also names ten ways to propel your challenging child to greatness provided by Lisa, Bravo, Howard Glasser, and Melissa Lynn Block.

1. It is important to resist energizing negativity unconsciously. Educators may accidentally celebrate negativity when we give it time and energy that students prefer. Educators should be aware that energizing that negativity will send the child a message that he or she is willing to celebrate unexpected behaviors because that is what is occurring in the present (Block, et al, 2012).
2. It is important to realize that all the using terms, such as "good job," or "way to go," are not acknowledging the student's greatness. Educators must provide radical appreciation for expected behaviors (Block, et al, 2012).
3. It is important to realize that greatness is a choice that students may choose to exhibit (Block, et al, 2012). Educators also have the choice to choose to see their greatness, even when it is difficult to do.
4. There is a different in "catching a student being good" and creating greatness. When the educator takes advantage of the moments during the day where he or she can acknowledge the student's behaviors and mirror back what they see by providing details about what expected behaviors the student is choosing to exhibit (Block, et al, 2012).
5. It is important to remember, as an educator, that letting the child see their greatness will encourage the child to continue to show their greatness more often (Block, et al, 2012).

6. It is important to remember that discussion and lectures regarding expectations should be done when a rule is not being broke, but they should be taught throughout the day when the student is in a calm and engaging state (Block, et al, 2012).
7. The educator must be authentic and genuine when acknowledging the student's greatness by providing positive energy in those moments (Block, et al, 2012). When a child is being disrespectful, it is likely that they have not seen proper modeling of respect. It is the educator's responsibility to model respect (Block, et al, 2012).
8. Notice those moments where the student is doing the right thing as making a good choice (Block, et al, 2012).
9. It is important for the educator to acknowledge that their personal connection and relationship with the student is a gift and the educator's positive energy and celebrations are the prize when expected behaviors occur (Block, et al, 2012).
10. Finally, it is important for educators to know that celebrating positive and expected behaviors in the classroom does not mean providing prizes. It simply means to give the students your positive energy and verbal celebrations (Block, et al, 2012).

The Nurtured Heart Approach also provides exercises that can be practiced within the classroom in order to increase students' self-esteem levels by acknowledging their overall greatness.

Effective General Education Classroom Evidence-Based Practices for Problem Behaviors

In a study by Gage, Scott, Hirn, and MacSuga-Gage in 2018, the relationship between teachers' implementation of classroom management practices and student behavior in elementary schools were studied. Researchers wondered if there was a positive correlation between teachers' classroom management practices and student behaviors and success in the classroom.

In this study, classroom management practices included active instruction and supervision of students (teaching), opportunities for students to respond, and feedback to students. Latent class analysis was used to examine the degree to which teachers implemented evidence-based classroom management practices and whether there was a relationship between those teacher behaviors and students' time engaged in instruction and the rate of disruptions. 1,242 teacher-student dyads from 65 elementary schools across several school districts in a southeastern state was observed during a typical classroom instruction period. Schools ranged from 251 to 832 students. The schools were state-funded to provide response-to-intervention (RTI) training involving the authors of this study. School administrators were made aware of the observational study and asked if they would like to be involved. Teachers were given the choice to leave the study at any time. This qualitative study utilized various behavior assessments, such as the Multiple Option Observation System for Experimental Studies observation and recording software was used to observe 15-minutes at a time at random. Classroom-level data was gathered in this study from direct, 15-minute classroom observations. No names of students or teachers were used during this study. Observers sat in the back of the classroom and remained anonymous to the rest of the class. They systematically picked a random student who would be their target student. Target students rotated between males and females. To choose the target student, observers also used a row and seat combination for the observation session or physical location descriptor in the classroom to choose them. The results indicated that students in classrooms with low classroom management practices were significantly less engaged. There was no positive correlation found between the use of classroom management practices and disruptive behaviors. In conclusion, the research had shown that there is a positive relationship

between teachers using evidence-based classroom management practices and student success (Gage, et al. 2018).

The Greatness Exercise

The Nurtured Heart Approach, as mentioned previously by the thesis writer, transforms children with intense behaviors and emotions and helping them to flourish (Block, et al, 2012). A specific exercise from the Nurtured Heart Approach is the greatness exercise, which is an opportunity to acknowledge students' quality of greatness in an interactive exercise. In this exercise, the class would stand in a circle and take turns by acknowledging another person's greatness by using "greatness words" and "greatness statements." Examples of greatness words would include describing another person in the class as loyal, honest, caring, patient, hilarious, friendly, etc. There are three ways to begin a greatness statement in which describes why the other person is great. Greatness statements may begin by saying, "I see that you…" "I noticed that you…" or "It looks like you…" The directions of the greatness exercise can be described as the following:

1. The instructor has the class stand in a circle.
2. Each person takes a turn to turn to the person on their right and describe them by using a "greatness word" and "greatness statement." For example, a second grader named Javier turns to Katherine on his right. Javier says, "Katherine, you are honest. I see that you are honest because you raised your hand to tell Mrs. Johnson in class that you did not finish your homework last night and I admire your honesty."
3. The class would continue this process until every person has shared about another person in class and they have received a greatness word and statement in return (Block, et al, 2012).

This exercise is to be practiced at the end of the class period. By doing the greatness exercise, the students' portfolios can be strengthened and the students' self-esteem can be increased by positivity and collaboration with their class (Block, et al, 2012).

Mindfulness

According to the Mayo Clinic of Minnesota, mindfulness is a type of meditation in which one focuses on being intensely aware of their senses and feelings in that moment without any interpretation or judgment (https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/mindfulness-exercises/art-20046356). Mindfulness may be in the form of breathing methods, relaxation of the body and mind, guided imagery, or other practices that help to reduce stress, anxiety, or depression. The main idea of mindfulness is to focus the individual's attention away from the stressor. The Mayo Clinic has researched-based evidence that supports the effectiveness of mindfulness, which shows that it reduces conditions of stress, depression, pain, anxiety, insomnia, and high blood pressure. Further research has even shown a positive correlation with mindfulness meditation and the reduction of symptoms for asthma and fibromyalgia. In addition, when one's thoughts and emotions are balanced and the individual has a higher acceptance of one's self, mindfulness overall improves attention, decreases job burnout, improves sleep, and improves diabetes control.

Examples of mindfulness that can be taught in the classroom are found on the Left Brain Buddha website, which is a coaching program led by Sarah Rudell Beach, M. Edu. who is the Chief Mindfulness Officer and the founder of Brilliant Mindfulness LLC. Left Brain Buddha organization not only provides resources for mindfulness in the school setting, but for people of all ages to use in all settings to increase their quality of life. One example provided is called taking a "Mindful Minute." By showing a one minute video that can be found on YouTube, the

teacher would tell the class to breathe deeply, slowly, and quietly (https://leftbrainbuddha.com/5-mindfulness-practices-bring-classroom/). Next, the teacher would instruct the class to close their eyes or watch the screen that displays calming visuals, such as falling snow. The final step is to have the students listen for the bell or some sort of non-verbal cue from the teacher when the minute is over.

A second mindfulness practice for the classroom provided by the Left Brain Buddha organization is called taking a mindful break. The steps to taking a mindful break include ringing a bell or another form of a nonverbal cue to signal the class that it is time to take a mindful break (https://leftbrainbuddha.com/5-mindfulness-practices-bring-classroom/). When the class hears the signal, everyone will stop whatever they are doing and silently stand and stretch. Next, everyone will sit down for 30-seconds and do mindful breathing. When the bell rings or the nonverbal cue is signaled, each student will silently think of something they are grateful for then the lesson proceeds. According to the Left Brain Buddha organization, a middle school teacher at the 2015 Educational Minnesota Conference shared the positive effects that his class has shown since implementing it into his classroom.

A third example of mindfulness that can be used in the classroom is called "check in with your attention." The Left Hand Buddha organization lists steps that teachers would train their classrooms in taking before administration. Step one involves the teacher saying, "Attention check!" to the class. Step two is where the class stops what they are doing and the teacher says, "Check in with your attention." Then follows up with three questions, "Is your attention here, in class?" "Is your mind wandering?" "If so, where had your attention gone?" The third and final steps describes the teacher explaining to the class that mind wandering is expected and completely normal (https://leftbrainbuddha.com/5-mindfulness-practices-bring-

classroom/). Lastly, the teacher explains to the class, "Now, you have a choice to redirect your attention."

A fourth example of mindfulness in the classroom provided by the Left Brain Buddha organization is having a "mindful moment" at the end of each class period. The steps to this strategy include ending class with a three to five-minute break and telling the class, "Close your eyes and focus on your breath." Then the teacher asks, "What have you learned?" "What have you accomplished?" Next, the teacher would provide the rest of the time for silence. Finally, the teacher would end the three to five minutes with a positive statement based on the class's performance during that period (https://leftbrainbuddha.com/5-mindfulness-practices-bring-classroom/).

These strategies can be used for all ages from pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade.

Breaks

Including breaks into the students' school day increases engagement, keeps them actively involved, and breaks up monotony during a classroom instruction or classroom discussions (Smith, 2004).

Brain breaks are another way to increase focus awareness (https://mindup.org/mindup/mindup-for-teachers/). It is a way for the students to stop and think about what they are doing. Then they can acknowledge how they are feeling and why. When facilitating a brain break, the teacher can direct the class to close their eyes by using a chime or a nonverbal cue. While their eyes are closed, the room is silent. When the students hear the chime or cue again, they will open their eyes, look up at the front of the room, and smile. Initial coaching is necessary before administering this mindfulness strategy in order for it to be effective. An effective time for using this type of break could be after unstructured play time,

such as recess, for elementary ages. This break provides them with time to focus on their breathing, become aware of their emotions, time to regulate their emotions, and letting go of any frustrations that might have escalated them so that they can rationalize their thoughts from the websites as follows.

GoNoodle is a website that provides teachers with interactive activities and desk-side movements for the students to get up and get moving (https://support.gonoodle.com/article/241-what-is-gonoodle). The website provides numerous videos that can be shown in the classroom for grades kindergarten through fifth grade brain breaks. There are a variety of categories for teachers to pick from that include short videos to provide brain breaks in class, such as mindfulness based, curriculum based, sensory and motor skills, school life, and movement type (https://app.gonoodle.com/categories).

An effective curriculum and framework that includes brain breaks is called the MindUp Program. MindUp is a program created by famous actress Goldie Hawn and The Goldie Hawn Foundation in 2003 (https://mindup.org/coming-soon.html). It has been created to assist children in developing the mental fitness that is crucial for success in schools, work, and life. MindUp is a non-profit organization that is a response to a global epidemic of childhood aggression, anxiety, depression, and suicide. Its practices are based off neuroscience in order to teach children how to manage stress, regulate their emotions, and face resilience of the 21st century. This curriculum has been published by Scholastic and includes a fifteen-lesson series based off four major pillars, which include neuroscience, social-emotional learning, positive psychology, and mindful awareness. With the series of lessons provided, the class builds awareness and self-regulation skills to increase their academic performance, self-control, empathy, and optimism.

Rewarding Expected Behaviors

The use of rewards can effectively help in managing classroom behaviors. Although, rewards and gifts are two different things. Rewards should be given when the following guidelines are met (Santrock, 2011, p. 493-494):

1. Effective reinforcements are chosen. These reinforcements may be individualized. For example, one student may be motivated to learn when told he can earn some time playing on the iPad. Another student may be motivated to cooperate by receiving verbal praise from a teacher.
2. Use prompts and shaping effectively. By rewarding improvement through prompting and shaping, rather than promoting perfection, students may be more motivated to learn.
3. "Use rewards to provide information about mastery, not to control students' behavior," (Santrock, 2011 p. 494). For example, a student may get more learning out of becoming student of the week rather than receiving a piece of candy for sitting down quietly.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Throughout this thesis paper, I consistently been keeping my students in mind and how I can do better and lead my students towards success. During my experiences as a federal setting III EBD teacher at an elementary school, I have asked myself questions in which I wanted to research effective strategies that would benefit my students and maximize their opportunities to learn. My learning goal for this thesis was to research effective classroom management strategies that incorporates the effects of cultural environment and that could be practiced in the general education to, overall, decrease initial evaluation requests for special education services. I reached this goal by addressing the effects of cultural environment by explaining what culture is, how the brain is affected by culture and classroom expectations, the inconsistency between values taught at school and values taught at home, the impact of labels, and how to prepare to become a culturally responsive teaching practitioner. Next, I addressed effective system-wide approaches to problem behaviors, such as RTI, PBIS, expectations and consequences, the importance of educators finding their why, teaching racial literacy, the Zones of Regulation, and the Nurtured Heart approach. Lastly, I had addressed effective general education classroom evidence-based practices for problem behaviors by providing specific practices like the greatness exercise, mindfulness, how to give breaks in the classroom, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and the difference between providing rewards and gifts.

Limitations of Research

I did not find many limitations of research due to the topic being so relevant to today's educational systems and practices. A plethora of my research was introduced to me during professional development trainings through the Mounds View School District. The only

limitation of research found was determining whether what research was too old and irrelevant because there was such a large amount of research done within the last three years. I struggled to determine if studies from 2004 were still relevant, but I reflected on my own personal experiences and found the information to be helpful in my workplace. Therefore, I used it as relevant information and built off that information by finding research from 2017 and 2018 that supported it.

Implications for Further Research

According to my research, more effective general education classroom evidence-based practices for problem behaviors can be found. Although, I did not find it difficult to find effective classroom practices. Since the topic of culturally responsive teaching is so relevant and it is crucial to continue finding system-wide approaches and classroom practices, further research should be studied in these areas. It would be beneficial for current culturally responsive practitioners of the minority to come forward and provide their opinions on the matter because the education system can learn from its past and it is ever-changing. I have hopes that open-minded and inspiring educators will come forward in a time like this to fight for justice of all people and speak for those who have been silenced and feel unsuccessful in the system set up for them.

Professional Application

As I had mentioned before, I taught in a federal setting III EBD, self-contained, program at an elementary school. At this point in my career, I realized that the 89% of the students on my caseload were of color and 100% of my students struggled with abuse, neglect, homelessness, and/or poverty. Early on in this experience, I asked myself, “Are my students in this program because of the color of their skin or because they are so tired and/or hungry that they cannot meet

classroom expectations?" My job was to provide my students with proper instruction in core academic subjects, meanwhile, I was also responsible for de-escalating my students when they felt emotionally dysregulated. When general education teachers called me repeatedly because my students took too long in the bathroom, were blurting during instruction, used inappropriate language, or they eloped due to boredom, sleepiness, or hunger. Because of these calls, I would arrive in the general education classroom to escalate the student even further because I had brought so much attention to the situation. At that point, their small problems had become enormous problem behaviors because of the negative attention they had received. Once I de-escalated the situation and my students were in a calm state, often times we would decide that they acted that way because they needed a power nap, a snack, or a quick break to get back on track. I also noticed the stigma that was placed on my students when I would come into the general education classroom because I became known as the discipliner and they had become known as the "bad" kid in class. Therefore, I consistently asked myself, "Aren't there other strategies that could be used manage classroom behaviors in the general education so that special education did not always have to be the plan B?"

I came to these realizations early on and I actively worked to find effective strategies to lead these students of diverse cultures to success. The Nurtured Heart Approach helped me to respond to students with high emotional needs, including extreme aggression. By celebrating the small things and re-framing their personal profiles, I could help to reduce the stigma placed upon my students. The EBD label affected them and brought a negative light to their experiences in school. I only hope that they can break that stigma, but as their case manager I tried my best to do so.

I provided scheduled breaks for my students with precise dialogue so that it was a quick transition to and from break. During these breaks, many of my students with high sensory needs and/or trauma enjoyed doing yoga as a form of mindfulness.

All my students needed reward systems. They each carried individualized point sheets with them and we would discuss their scores one-on-one at the end of each day. In doing so, I found it important to praise my students even if they accomplished a simple task of picking up a chair after throwing it out of anger. My students would then be rewarded breaks at the end of the day if they met classroom expectations for the day or, if they did not meet expectations that day, they could have the chance to earn a break if they turned their day around by celebrating a random act of kindness or acknowledging a proud moment. For example, if a student had hit someone at recess because they became triggered and could not control their body and later they held a door open for a teacher then I would acknowledge that and reward them for turning their day around.

Every day, I would use the Zones of Regulation to communicate with my students with high emotional needs. When they were in the green zone, we would celebrate by earning small breaks or receiving verbal praise. When they were in the red zone, I would support my students in getting back into the green zone by de-escalating the situation and helping them to calm down. For every student I had a different strategy to help de-escalate them when they had lost control of their bodies and emotions. When they became calm again, we always debriefed on what happened. I would ask, "What triggered you? What happened before you were triggered? What is your plan to respond the next time that the trigger occurs?" When they were in the blue zone and feeling tired, I provided them opportunities to have breaks or take power

naps. Then when they were in the yellow zone, sometimes we would take a mindfulness break by using a GoNoodle video to calm our bodies and get ready to learn.

As a Filipino-American, most of my students found it difficult to relate to me. It was extremely difficult to earn their trust in the beginning of the school year because my face and calm demeanor was not familiar to them. As a result, I found it helpful to create a strong relationship with their families and keep in constant communication with them. As my relationships with their families grew, my students grew to respect and trust me. Once I earned their trust, I was much more effective at de-escalating their "problem behaviors" in the classroom. Trust paved the way to make real progress in their academic performance and social/emotional awareness.

Once I earned their trust, I used strategies to engage my students in learning. I would find interests and motivators and I would run with it. For example, one of my students wanted to become a police officer and many of my other students had negative stigmas linked to the police. My husband is a police officer and he came in every week to build positive relationships with my students. He did not come in his uniform. I wanted my students to see that he was a regular person that was personable and trustworthy. As the weeks went on, my students became more and more comfortable having tough conversations with my husband. They trusted him enough to ask him questions about stealing, jail, and even discussions about their plans to go to prison one day. My students are growing up thinking that prison is the safest option for them. Prison provides them with water, food, and a bed. I hope that I was able to instill into my students' heads that prison does not have to be in their plan. They can be successful. They can have healthy relationships. They can seek support in me because I know that God will protect them.

Connecting It All to God

As a special education teacher that believes in God, I will continue to pray for my students. I will pray for their educational journey and well-being. I chose this profession because I care about my students. I know that children are innocent and precious. I genuinely want to see them succeed in life. I work hard at my job because I know that, for some students, I may be the only one that smiles at them that day. I may say the only positive thing that they hear all day… or all week. As a teacher, I constantly put myself in my students' shoes because I had a difficult time finding connections with my teachers or someone to trust in school. I found comfort in God and I hope that, as I pray for my students, they can find comfort in God's love as well. I also pray that God will keep them safe from harm and lead them to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Conclusion

I have learned so much throughout this experience of writing a thesis on environmental factors and effective classroom management strategies for the general education. I am looking forward to using these strategies in my classroom and I am hopeful that these findings can help other educators improve their classroom management skills and outlook on problem behaviors in general. Overall, I hope that these findings could decrease special education referrals as general education teachers seek help from their intervention and special education teams for support and ideas to decrease problem behaviors and create their spaces for all students to feel safe and comfortable to learn. As always, God will support educators to continue to support our students and lead them to success if we ask him for it. I pray that He will look out for our students, especially our students that have environmental factors that seem to set them up for failure. I pray that God leads their teachers to be the light that they need to feel safety, warmth, and comfort in a world that does not always provide them with such feelings.

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