Positive Behavior Support:

A Proactive Strategy for Minimizing Behavior Problems in Urban Multicultural Youth

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Abstract: The social–emotional needs of children in urban school communities place these students at risk for educational failure. For these children, successful teaching and learning models appear particularly complex because they must combine both multicultural approaches and effective positive behavior support (PBS) strategies that promote healthy, prosocial behaviors. This article examines trends in the racial disparity in exclusionary discipline procedures that impact the schooling experiences of urban children, presents a conceptual framework for understanding culturally influenced social behaviors, and discusses ways to incorporate multicultural education into PBS programs.

Eliminating school discipline problems is a major element for improving the nation's schools. In a recent national report, Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools (U.S. Public Schools, 1996–1997), statistics showed that aggressive and violent behaviors are increasing among children and youth in U.S. schools and that school discipline is critical to the prevention of student problems and behavior. Rutherford and Nelson (1998) noted, "Although many children and adolescents occasionally exhibit aggressive and sometimes antisocial behaviors in the course of development, an alarming increase is taking place in the significant number of youth who confront their parents, teachers, and schools with persistent threatening and destructive behaviors" (p. 71). Skiba and Peterson (2000) agreed: "The shocking and tragic violence that has played out in our nation's schools in the last 2 years has elevated

the status of school discipline from an issue of perennial concern to one of national urgency" (p. 335).

The threat and problems of school violence are not restricted to students identified with emotional and behavioral disorders and students residing in inner-city or urban-poverty environments. Recent school tragedies and scenarios of violence throughout the country have affected students across geographical, ethnic, and socioeconomic boundaries. Sugai and Horner (2001) explained, "In schools across the United States, educators and families are engaged in valiant efforts to maximize academic achievement and to create and sustain safe and orderly environments for all students. These efforts are associated with a variety of initiatives, for example, character education, safe schools and healthy environments, proactive schoolwide discipline, drug-free zones, multiculturalism and diversity, and

inclusive education" (p. 16). One current schoolwide initiative is positive behavior support (PBS), a systems approach to enhancing the capacity of schools to educate all children, especially those with challenging social behaviors (Kline, Simpson, Blesz, Smith Myles, & Carter, 2001). PBS has a rich, empirically derived database, steeped in applied behavior analysis and, more recently, in the application of functional behavior analysis to solve school-related behavioral issues. Because of careful documentation, researchers can show how the principles of shaping, fading, prompting, and rewarding can help individuals and groups modify and improve their behavior and cognitive processes. However, in reviewing the literature on PBS, the majority of studies included students with a range of disabilities—pervasive developmental disabilities, mental retardation, autism, learning disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disturbances (EBD; Carr et al., 1999).

To improve school success for every student, issues that are not typically considered as part of behavioral education must be addressed by general and special educators. Researchers and practitioners must examine issues related to classroom discipline, cultural diversity, and culturally responsive teaching to develop successful approaches for teaching prosocial skills and reducing antisocial behavior. Sugai and colleagues (2000) noted,

> The use of culturally appropriate interventions also is emphasized in the PBS approach. *Culturally appropriate* describes interventions that consider the unique and individualized learning histories (social, community, historical, familial, racial, gender, etc.) of all individuals (children with problem behaviors, families, teachers, community agents, etc.) who participate in the PBS process and approach. Data-based problem solving and individualized planning processes can help to establish culturally appropriate interventions; however, individual learning histories ultimately can affect how data are summarized, analyzed, and used. (p. 134)

Sugai et al. confirmed, "PBS emphasizes the importance of procedures that are socially and culturally appropriate. The contextual fit between intervention strategies and the values of families, teachers, schools, support personnel, and community agency personnel may affect the quality and durability of support efforts" (p. 136).

In spite of these claims, the use of PBS in diverse, inner-city urban schools has its critics. Critics point to the underlying tensions of who is deciding what behaviors are appropriate, for whom, and under what conditions. More than simply acknowledging that cultural norms may vary among groups, the notion that some types of behaviors are acceptable or not is highly charged since the dominant cultural norms, even in many inner-city schools, are predominantly White and/or middle class. Because the social behaviors of urban at-risk African American and Hispanic/Latino youth are culturally influenced, it is critical that

PBS and multicultural perspectives are infused to increase school success and life choices, academically and socially, for these students. Therefore, the purposes of this article are to (a) examine trends in the racial disparity in exclusionary discipline procedures administered to minority youth, (b) present a conceptual framework to understand culturally influenced social behaviors of urban multicultural children, and (c) discuss how to incorporate multicultural education principles and approaches into PBS programs.

National Trends in Discipline Policies and Procedures

To reduce the incidence of violence in public schools, preventive measures and school disciplinary sanctions known as *zero tolerance policies* have been implemented. These school policies include punitive disciplinary strategies for dealing with disruptive and violent behaviors in schools (i.e., suspension and expulsion), maintaining order in the school buildings, ensuring the school security and the safety of teachers and students, and fostering a school climate to prevent the occurrence of school violence. Yet, a compelling body of research indicates that these "get tough disciplinary measures often fail to meet sound educational principles, and in some cases, their application defies commonsense . . . some of these policies employ sweeping interpretations of the federal law by including violations not intended to be covered by the laws" (Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. 3). Over the counter medicines such as aspirin, Midol®, and even Certs® have been treated as drugs, and paper clips, nail files, and scissors have been considered weapons. Other policies apply the theory of zero tolerance to a broad range of student actions that have no connection to violence and drugs.

National trends indicative of the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American and Hispanic/Latino students have been consistently documented and cannot be overlooked (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Townsend, 2000). The nondiscretionary punishment guidelines and harsh disciplinary approach promulgated under zero tolerance policies have come under intense scrutiny. During the 1998 school year, more than 3.1 million students (K–12th grade) were suspended, and approximately 87,000 students were expelled in school districts throughout the country (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1998). Statistics provided by the Applied Research Center (1999) revealed that African American children, particularly African American boys, are disciplined more severely than children from any other minority group. For example, in South Carolina's public schools, 61% of African American students were charged with a disciplinary code violation, even though the African American student population is 42%. Furthermore, when compared to White students,

African American students were disciplined for minor acts of conduct (e.g., loitering), discretionary offenses (e.g., disrespect for authority), and disciplinary cases in which a school administrator's decision about misbehavior might have been biased (Building Blocks for Youth, 1999). In a similar vein, the U.S. Department of Education (1998) statistics revealed that approximately 25% of all African American boys were suspended at least once over a 4-year period. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1999), racial disparities in school disciplinary policies have been documented in predominantly African American and Hispanic/Latino school districts. For example, zero tolerance policies addressing violence (85%), firearms (97%), other weapons (94%), and drugs (92%) were more likely to be adopted in urban, minority school districts than predominantly White school districts (71%, 92%, 88%, and 83%, respectively). National data on rates of school discipline and suspension for African American students were between two and three times higher than suspension rates for White students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000). In addition, African American students were more likely than White students to be suspended more than once (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1995). More recently, Costenbader and Markson (1994, 1998) reported that African American students are also more frequently exposed to harsher disciplinary strategies (e.g., corporal punishment). When school suspension and expulsion are allowed as punishment for infractions, their use appears to increase (Advancement Project, 2000).

Policymakers, researchers, and educators have expressed their concerns about the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education. National trends indicative of the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American and Hispanic/Latino students have been consistently documented and cannot be overlooked (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Townsend, 2000). One plausible explanation is that urban multicultural students at risk for school failure are influenced by many social factors including poverty, racism, sexism, family dysfunction, crime and violence, and substance abuse. These living conditions influence six areas of social development, as identified by Morse (1985):

1. A history of poor adult–child relationships with an accompanying need for positive supportive relationships.
2. A tendency to lack a sense of personal efficacy or power and the associated need to experience this by better understanding the learning process and developing a sense of personal responsibility and power.
3. A closely related focus on external factors that influence their behavior and the need to learn to accept responsibility for their behavior and to see how they can control their own learning and behavior.
4. Low self-esteem, especially related to such school behaviors as achievement and peer friendships, and the need to develop and validate a positive self-esteem through positive social interactions and school success.
5. A poorly developed sense of social cognition and inability to understand others' feelings or points of view and take this into account when making decisions and the need to learn to understand others' responses and to work cooperatively with others.
6. Poor problem-solving skills and the need to develop these skills as a means to enhance self-efficacy and self-esteem as well as to develop an important life-long skill. (pp. 1–5)

Gay (1993) remarked that most teachers do not know how to understand and use the school behaviors of these students, which differ from their normative expectations, as aides to teaching. Therefore, they tend to misinterpret them as deviant and treat them punitively. She noted,

> Most curriculum designs and instructional materials are Eurocentric. . . . They are likely to be more readily meaningful and to have a greater appeal to the life experiences and aspirations of Anglo students than to those of ethnic minorities. Thus, when attempting to learn academic tasks, Anglo students do not have the additional burden of working across irrelevant instructional materials and methods. A high degree of cultural congruency exists between middle-class and Anglo students' culture and school culture. These students do not experience much cultural discontinuity, social-code incompatibility, or need for cultural style shifting to adjust to the behavioral codes expected of them in school. (pp. 182–183)

Even though it is true that student behavior is influenced by factors outside the control of the school, studies on school and teacher effectiveness have demonstrated that teachers and schools have a major impact on how students behave and learn and on how they feel about themselves (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Therefore, another approach to understanding student problems is to consider the impact of culture on students' social behavior.

Understanding Culturally Influenced Social Behaviors

During the last decade, many educational theorists have become interested in sociocultural theory and multicul-

tural perspectives. These perspectives bring together the disciplines of psychology, semiotics, education, sociology, and anthropology on issues related to language, cognition, culture, human development, teaching, and learning (Garcia, 1994). The implications of multicultural perspectives for general and special educators are that (a) social behaviors are influenced by culture, (b) learning and social interactions are inextricably connected and inseparable from cognition, and (c) both teacher and student are engaged in the process of constructing knowledge through shared social activities and dialogue. Therefore, general and special educators are challenged to (a) interpret the social behaviors of learners from culturally diverse backgrounds, (b) distinguish social behaviors from deficits, and (c) employ effective instructional strategies to help these learners maximize their schooling experiences and acquire the most productive interpersonal skills (Cartledge, Lee, & Feng, 1995).

Consequently, the inclusion of culturally diverse students, particularly those with EBD, requires general and special educators to develop effective and efficient management techniques and interventions. Numerous problems arise when general and special educators fail to consider the role of culture and the experiences students may bring to school. Cultural diversity cannot be ignored in the behavioral assessment of urban students because the social context of learning and the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the family, peer group, and community profoundly influence students' emotional, behavioral, moral, and cognitive development. Therefore, before judging behaviors as deviant, general and special educators must acknowledge culture and social environment as critical factors when developing effective educational practices. Kauffman (1989) noted, "Nearly all behavioral standards and expectations and therefore nearly all judgments regarding behavioral deviance are culture-bound; value judgments cannot be entirely culture-free. In our pluralistic society, which values multicultural elements, the central question for educators is whether they have made sufficient allowance in their judgments for behavior that is a function of a child's particular culture" (p. 212). Because culture influences interpersonal relations and behaviors, study results of children's social competence cannot be generalized outside the culture in which they are obtained. To understand the influence of cultural factors on children's behavior, researchers must conceptually and empirically validate a cultural framework that reflects the dynamic interactions between children and their cultural context.

As members of a cultural group, people interact with the dominant society and become aware of different ways of behaving, different expectations, and they may change their thinking individually or collectively (Shade, 1997). It is understandable that deviant social behaviors (e.g., aggression, violence) are not inherent characteristics of culturally diverse groups. Issacs (1986) identified a host of

external factors that affect the emotional status of multicultural children and youth:

1. Racism and discrimination.
2. Mass media and the way in which ethnic minority groups are portrayed.
3. The strain of acculturation and the migration experience.
4. Legal constraints and strategies for circumvention, such as issues on American Indian reservations.
5. Language and communication pattern differences.
6. Socioeconomic status, especially since ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented among those defined as living in poverty.
7. The American economy and the availability of employment opportunities.
8. Geographic isolation and resource-poor environments; such environments include urban inner cities, rural areas, reservations, barrios, and other enclaves in which people of color are isolated from the mainstream.
9. Inter- and intra-group conflicts and tensions.
10. Assimilation and the loss of some of the most highly skilled/competent members of ethnic minority groups to the larger society. (pp. 2–4)

In examining social behaviors from cultural perspectives, it is important to understand that culture is integral to every aspect of being, influencing to varying degrees one's thinking and acting, interpersonal relations, and social competence (Cartledge & Feng, 1996; Gay, 2000). A cultural systems approach to education "considers the organization of society, specifically the roles and status assigned to cultural groups within a society as a major determinant of cognitive and social development" (Garcia, 1994, p. 197). Earlier, Ogbu (1991) suggested that the specific social placement of a cultural group within the broader social fabric of society will directly affect the values, perceptions, and social behaviors of members of that group. For several decades, distinct culturally influenced social behaviors have been found between multicultural children and European American children (Cartledge & Milburn, 1996; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). Sidebars 1, 2, 3, and 4 describe culturally influenced social behaviors in African American, European American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American children.

Sonia Nieto's (1999) understanding of the concept of culture is critical for understanding urban, multicultural children and youth. Nieto, in citing the work of Brice Heath (1995), pointed out that "urban dwellers in the United States are creating new cultural categories based upon shared experiences because, according to her, these young people 'think of themselves as a *who* and not a *what*'" (p. 45). Nieto further stated, "Multiple identities of

Sidebar 1. Comparison of African American and European American's Culturally Influenced Social Behaviors

	African American	European American
Mannerisms/behavior	• Interpersonal skills • Tendency to get involved in heated discussion/debate with others • Tendency to express emotions of anger and hostility	• Impersonal in communication style • Emotionally calm • Tendency to avoid confrontations • Tendency to engage in turn taking in discussion meetings
Communication style	• Expressive or verbal presentation style of communication • Tendency to express opinions in an intense and dynamic way • Tendency to use of concrete, nonabstract words that imply action • Tendency to use personalized experiences, sounds, and images to express oneself • Tendency to use call and response patterns of communication (i.e., back channeling)	• Preference for indirect communication style or concealing one's ulterior motives • Avoids insults or hurting people's feelings • Tendency to engage in conversations using personal information about oneself (e.g., position, residence, occupation)
Social interactional style with adults and peers	• Tendency to engage in body language, looks, gestures, and signals to "tell it like it is" • Tendency to use a nonverbal communication style (e.g., body language) to express feelings, stance, and to send a message of support or nonsupport • Tendency to share personal experiences with others • Tendency to validate knowledge in relation to one's own personal experiences • Tendency to work cooperatively and/or collaboratively • Tendency to have a high degree of social sensitivity to facial expressions and social cues in the environment • Tendency to challenge school personnel based on attributes of strength, generosity, and persuasiveness	• Tendency to work competitively with peers • Tendency to not challenge school personnel because of position and/or credentials
Eye contact	• May not use eye contact in conversations	• Often maintains eye contact in conversations

Note. Based on data from Black Students and School Failure: Policies, Practices and Prescriptions *by J. J. Irvine, 1990, New York: Greenwood.*

youths have important and far-reaching implications for the development and implementation of multicultural education: It is evident that simplistic and bounded conceptions that focus just on specific racial or ethnic groupings fail to capture the realities of many urban youths who live with complicated and heterogeneous realities" (p. 52).

Incorporating Multicultural Approaches into PBS Programs

The behavior management tradition has been characterized by change and the integration of concepts from other models (e.g., cognitive behaviorism, self-management, so-

cial skills training; Jones & Jones, 1998). We propose that the PBS model must be (a) characterized by change for the 21st century; (b) grounded in effective, respectful, supportive teacher relationships; and (c) integrated in multicultural education principles and approaches. Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997) conceptually defined multicultural education programs using several different frameworks and approaches, three of which have direct implications for the PBS model. The first approach, *teaching the exceptional and culturally different*, "accommodates students who are considered exceptional or culturally different through the use of teaching strategies or culturally relevant materials that otherwise might be used in pull-out programs for students with special needs" (p. 173). One specific goal of this approach is to help students improve their academic performance and social skills in general education classrooms. The second approach, *human relations*, is designed to promote unity, tolerance, and acceptance within the existing social structure. The school's curriculum program goals are focused on (a) developing positive relationships among students of diverse backgrounds, (b) enhancing personal characteristics (e.g., self-concept/ self-esteem), (c) changing stereotyped perceptions, and (d) understanding individual differences and similarities. This approach emphasizes cross-cultural communication strategies, collaboration, and cooperative learning among culturally diverse groups. The third approach, *multicultural education* (MCE), supports the human relations approach by teaching students to learn how to respect each other, how to get along with others, and how to develop positive self-concepts by using a curriculum that is culturally responsive to the culture, language, and learning styles of students.

Multicultural education encompasses the role of cultural pluralism in U.S. education and can be integrated into beliefs about teaching and learning. Gay (1994) noted,

1. Cultural background and ethnic identity are critical determinants of human attitudes, values, and behaviors in all settings, including teaching and learning.
2. Racial, cultural, and ethnic biases permeate schools and society, and thereby minimize individual and social potential.
3. The diversity that characterizes individuals and cultural groups requires a plurality of instructional programs and strategies, if education is to be most effective for all students.
4. The ethnic identity and cultural backgrounds of students are as important as their physical, psychological, and intellectual capabilities in planning and implementing effective educational programs. (p. 49)

Advocates of multicultural education principles have translated general education principles within a conceptual

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Sidebar 2. Culturally Influenced Social Behaviors of Asian American Children

Social behavior	• Authority-oriented
	• Conforming
	• Self-controlled
	• Cooperative
	• Academically oriented
	• Shy
	• Low-levels of social communication skills
Self-confidence	• Low assertiveness
	• Internalized behavior
	• Excessive modesty
	• Reluctant to express feelings
	• Socialized to be family oriented
	• Harmonious relationships emphasized
	• Shy
	• Conforming

Sidebar 3. Culturally Influenced Social Behaviors of Hispanic Children

Language	• Slow to initiate conversations with peers and others
	• Receptive and expressive English skills are minimal
Interpersonal behaviors and peer interaction skills	• Cooperative, quiet, and obedient
	• Passive, shy, less socially competent
Verbal behavior	• Difficulty making positive statements about the qualities and accomplishments of others
	• Difficulty describing one's feelings or moods
	• Difficulty conducting group activities
	• Difficulty appropriately responding to cues
	• Low level of class participation
	• Difficulty expressing opinions

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framework of including cultures, experiences, contributions, and perspectives of different ethnic, racial, cultural, and social groups in school programs and practices (see Gay, 1994). As illustrated in Table 1, general education

Sidebar 4. Culturally Influenced Social Behaviors of Native American Children

Play behaviors	• Socially active • Formation of same-gender dyads and triads • Spontaneous and creative • Spirit of cooperation and harmony emphasized with peers	Touch	• Public displays of affection are not encouraged • Hand shakes involve a gentle clasping of hands • Young children do not receive gentle touches and hugs
Close friends	• Best friends are close relatives • Respectful of family members	Gestures	• Gestures are used to reinforce main idea of a conversation
Verbal behavior	• Shy/silent in class (Hopi tribe) • Speaks out in class frequently (Choctaw tribe)	Personal space	• Persons converse side by side and not face to face • Prefer to stand 2 to 3 feet from one another
Prosocial behavior	• Value of sense (Navaho Tribes) • Good-natured in interactions with each other • Spirit of belongingness • Spirit of mastery • Spirit of independence • Spirit of generosity	Time	• Regard time on a continuum with no beginning or end
		Speech	• Silence is viewed as a strength • Language is allegorical • Language is spoken in low tones and soft voices
Problem behavior	• Feelings of rejection and alienation • Frustrated by a lack of mastery • Feelings of impotence and lack of self-control • Selfishness	Engaging behavior	• Interruptions are considered rude • Listening skills are taught • Children do not initiate conversations in mixed-aged groups • Observation learning is taught • Internal focus of control • Children are encouraged to be independent • Self-discipline and personal responsibility are emphasized • Group-centered orientation
Eye contact	• Direct open-faced eye contact is avoided (Navaho, Lakota, and Sioux tribes)		
Facial expression	• Feelings and emotions of pleasure, pain, and joy are not expressed	Learning style	• Visually oriented

Note: *Patterns of social behavior are tribe-, age-, and gender-specific. Generalizations about the social behaviors of Native American children should be avoided so as not to perpetuate stereotypes.*

principles have been "multiculturalized" and shown to be complementary within a culturally pluralistic framework.

Successful PBS programs for urban, multicultural students require cultural sensitivity, caring and respectful relationships between teachers and students, and a nurturing school environment to create learning communities in schools (Gay, 2000; Obiakor, 1994, 2001; Osher, Woodruff, & Sims, 2000). Accordingly, developing and reviewing codes of acceptable, schoolwide behavior with families,

students, teachers, and administrators is an essential first step of using PBS at the schoolwide level. These discussions must be anchored by multiple segments of performance-based evidence such as video clips that show a range of student deportment not only in the classroom but also on the school grounds, in the hallways, cafeteria, and library. By engaging families and students in reviews of actual student performance, the subsequent dialogue leads to a broader agreement on what constitutes acceptable student behav-

Table 1. Multicultural Translation of General Education Principles

General education principles	Multicultural education principles
1. Teachers should build upon and expand the learning potential and style preferences of students.	1. Teaching styles should match the learning styles of different ethnic individual and cultural groups.
2. Education should facilitate the self-acceptance of students.	2. Education should help students accept their ethnicity as an essential component of their personal development.
3. Education is necessary for social consciousness, democratic citizenship, and personal well-being.	3. Knowledge about cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity is needed for citizenship in a democratic and pluralistic society.
4. Education should promote intolerance for all forms of discrimination and oppression.	4. Students should be taught an ethic of social justice for culturally diverse groups and individuals.
5. Relevant teaching methods and materials increase learning.	5. Multicultural content, experiences, and perspectives improve learning for culturally different students.
6. Education should transmit the cumulative knowledge of humankind	6. Students should learn about the contributions that diverse groups and individuals have made to humankind and culture in the United States.

Note. *From* At the Essence of Learning: Multicultural Education, *by Geneva Gay, 1994, West Lafayette, IN: Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education. Copyright 1994 by Kappa Delta Pi. Reprinted with permission.*

ior in the school. Critical to this process is the involvement of facilitators who represent the full range of multicultural experiences, backgrounds, and ethnicities within the school community. Of course, this may mean that teachers and other professionals need to moderate their standards of student comportment based on the dialogue and agreed standards of performance. Logically, it means that families and students need to develop a greater appreciation for the difficulty of managing behavior in group situations where the degrees of freedom may not be able to be as broad as they are in family and community settings. Strong facilitation is needed to make sure that the voices of families and students are not overshadowed by professionals (Mehan, 1993).

Fine, Weis, and Powell (1997) stated, "The process of sustaining a community must include a critical interrogation of difference as the rich substance of community life and an invitation for engagement that is relentlessly democratic, diverse, participatory, and always attentive to equity and parity" (p. 250). This dialogue of difference needs to occur at the classroom level, acknowledging the different standards of behaviors that urban, multicultural students bring with them to the classroom. It is critical that we educate one another about how these standards of behavior have been established, their purposes, and the outcomes for groups and individual children. The dialogue must continually be punctuated with specific examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior so that teachers and their students can come to mutual agreement about what constitutes good citizenship within each classroom. From a multicultural perspective, these opportunities for developing shared standards, norms, and sanctions represent an important step in developing democratic classrooms in which students as well as teachers have opportunities to voice their concerns, opinions, and perspectives publicly.

An ongoing collection and review of information about student behavior is essential to establishing school

norms about behavior and improving prosocial teaching and learning. In order for the school community (i.e., students, school staff, parents, community members) to achieve this goal, they must be educated about how to define the norms and how the norms can be used and evaluated. Culturally responsive PBS models must focus on the (a) school's demographic composition of students; (b) students who are referred for chronic, inappropriate behaviors; (c) students who are earning poor grades; (d) students who are not attending school; and (e) students who do not have schooling opportunities to learn. Aggregated student information can be reviewed frequently to (a) uncover potential biases in teaching, (b) discuss antisocial student behavior, and (c) remediate poor academic performance. Through frequent and continuous review of information about student behavior, the school community can continue to hold itself responsible for reaching its democratic goals of "engaged citizenship" for all of its students. These three elements are essential to fostering culturally responsive PBS programs, particularly in schools where students from nondominant cultures (i.e., African American, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian America) are the majority. A shared dialogue and agreement among school personnel about school and classroom norms must be a part of the school culture so that opportunities for democracy and citizenship are created and flourish within schools.

A comprehensive and positive schoolwide model of PBS that is determined by problem type (e.g., students with serious problem behavior, students at risk for problem behavior, students with chronic/intense problem behavior) and intensity of behavior support (e.g., universal interventions, specialized group interventions, and specialized individual interventions) has been developed, validated, and implemented in classroom environments (Sugai & Horner, 1999). There are three levels of support:

1. clear expectations and positive feedback,
2. functional assessment and individualized interventions, and
3. functional assessments and comprehensive services across multiple environments (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001).

In addition, schoolwide efforts must employ effective instructional programs and interventions that have been shown to have positive benefits for urban, multicultural youth. Highly effective programs (e.g., Success for All; Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, in press) and strategies (e.g., classwide peer tutoring, cooperative learning, social skills instruction) have been well-documented in the literature. These interventions focus on improving academic and critical thinking skills and developing prosocial skills (e.g., empathy, getting along, appropriate ways to seek help). For instance, in a multicultural framework, factors such as culture, socioeconomic status, language diversity, peers, family, school demographics, and community play a critical role in defining problem type, intensity of behavior support, and implementation of interventions. Consider the following case:

> Kim was an Asian American student who was truly having problems in school. She was abusive to her peers and not doing well in her classes. In her "good" school, there was the presumption that all Asian Americans were great students. As a result, her teacher did not want her to be tested and placed in special education or alternative programs. Kim's parents thought she needed to see a counselor, and the teacher refused, indicating, "Asian Americans do not have learning or behavioral problems. They are smart minorities who do not need counselors to survive." Kim continued to be exceedingly disruptive, and her teacher never responded. On one occasion, Kim took a knife and stabbed one of her classmates in the hand. It was only then that the school responded and placed her in an "alternative" program where she began to receive counseling. (Obiakor, 2001, p. 90)

This case reveals typical problems that many culturally diverse learners experience. Many Asian Americans suffer in school because they endure psychological problems related to the "model minority syndrome," and teachers downplay the effects that stressors have on their socioemotional well-being. In applying a PBS model, a functional assessment would reveal that Kim had chronic problem behaviors and that specialized individual interventions were needed to change her behavior. The use of culturally responsive interventions approaches was recommended as one solution to ameliorating her behavioral problems (Nevin, Harris, & Correa, 2001; Obiakor, 2001; Utley & Obiakor, 2001). Recommendations included (a) actively listening and communicating with parents, (b) discussing the teacher's biases and her expectations, (c) addressing Kim's socioemotional level of functioning, (d) recognizing the impact of stressors (e.g., acculturative stress) on her behavior, (e) implementing cultural practices, (f) working with Asian American staff members (e.g., interpreters) on the multidisciplinary team, (g) examining Kim's interpersonal interactions with peers within the school setting (e.g., verbal and nonverbal communication patterns, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings), and (h) providing counseling services.

One essential component of infusing multicultural principles into the PBS model is cultural competence, which involves practitioners having the capacity to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different from "mainstream" U.S. culture. Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Issacs (1989) defined *cultural competence* as follows:

> The word culture is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function in a particular way: the capacity to function within the context of culturally-integrated patterns of human behavior as defined by the group. Thus, cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or amongst professionals and enables that system agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. (p. 3)

The essential elements of a culturally competent system include (a) valuing diversity, (b) having the capacity for cultural self-assessment, (c) recognizing the dynamics inherent in cross-cultural interactions, (d) having cultural knowledge, and (e) developing adaptations to interventions and service delivery options that reflect an understanding of cultural diversity. Issacs and Benjamin (1991) outlined critical aspects of cultural competence:

1. The concept of cultural competence applies not just to Euro Americans but to all of us who have been born, educated, and live on American soil. Very few things in American institutional structure have prepared us to live harmoniously in a pluralistic and multicultural society. Therefore, every one of us needs to learn and practice from a culturally competent perspective.
2. To bring about a shift in attitudes and behavior, we must learn to accept our own ethnicity and another's without judgment.
3. It is imperative to recognize the importance and acceptability of culture as a viable concept for all ethnic groups.
4. There is no one model or approach to cultural competence and knowledge development. Therefore, in our attempts to become more sen-

sitive to other cultures, we must avoid substituting one set of stereotypes for another.

5. Cultural competence is a dynamic, developmental process and a state towards which we should strive, but it takes a long-term and consistent commitment to achieve.

6. Cultural competence requires ongoing sharing, communication, and dialogue about differences in perceptions and experiences.

7. It should be acknowledged and recognized that cultural competence requires an understanding of the region, size and diversity of the ethnic minority population, and sociopolitical climate within the school system or agency. (pp. 37–38)

Barriers to Implementation: Research to Practice Issues

To implement the suggestions in the previous section, we must examine potential barriers: (a) teacher and principal recruitment, selection, preparation, and ongoing development; (b) issues of measuring and tracking aggregate student behavior performance information; (c) effective family and student involvement in school governance; and (d) epistemological tensions between PBS and multicultural education proponents. In this next section, we explore some of the tensions within each of these issues.

In a recent survey, beginning teachers reported that they feel poorly prepared to deal with issues of classroom management and discipline (Farkas, Johnson & Foleno, 2000). When teachers lack "multiethnicity and reflective nationalism," this problem is exacerbated (Banks, 2001). The most effective preparation of urban teachers has occurred when they are (a) carefully selected (Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995), (b) prepared with a focus on understanding the influence of culture on learning and pedagogy (Trent & Artiles, 1998), and (c) placed as an intern in multicultural school settings (Kozleski, Sands, & French, 1993). Unfortunately, the traditional recruitment practices, the selection of teachers, and the preparation, development, and training diverge from these recommendations and examples of culturally relevant teacher education programs are relatively rare (Cochran-Smith, 1995).

This need for ongoing reflection and discovery about the influence of culture, class, and ethnicity does not end with entry into the teaching profession. Veteran teachers reported that they recognized the need for further education about the impact of culture on teaching and learning (Schultz, Neyhart & Reck, 1996). Similarly, principals reported a lack of knowledge about culturally relevant teaching practices. Without a solid understanding of the relationship between culture and learning, it will be difficult to implement culturally relevant PBS models in schools (Cartledge & Milburn, 1996; Trent & Artiles, 1998; Utley & Obiakor, 2001).

Gathering and interpreting evidence of culturally relevant PBS practices poses a second challenge. Much of current school accountability reform has focused on single measures of student learning, often captured by a standardized test offered once a year. Problems with measurement and the timing of the release of the data complicate school accountability processes. Recommending that culturally relevant PBS co-opt the process of publicly reviewing evidence of student behaviors poses similar dangers if single sets of information are used to make judgments about culturally relevant practice. Helpful evidence comes from a variety of sources, collected over time, and aggregated in such a way that successes and potential problems can be spotted and addressed as needed. Many schools in inner city urban areas lack the resources to collect and aggregate such information.

The scholarly works of Fine, Weis, and Powell (1997), Keith (1996), and Anyon (1995) speak to the complexity of creating serious and thoughtful involvement of families and students in school decision making. This is the third challenge to creating culturally relevant PBS practice. These authors each make the case that much of what passes for participation is reactive and passive rather than active and constructive. For culturally relevant PBS to be realized, professionals, families, and students must all wrestle with achieving interactive, participatory norm setting and resetting to ensure that one cultural perspective does not dominate the rule making, the norm setting, and the curriculum.

The epistemological tensions between behavioral scientists, practitioners, and the social constructivists pose a fourth challenge to achieving culturally relevant PBS practice. The underlying assumptions and perspectives of multicultural scholars conflict with those of the positive behavior support researchers. On the one side, we have pluralistic views of reality that operate simultaneously. Multicultural scholars herald a rich tapestry of ideas, celebrate varying rituals and routines of human behavior, and appreciate diverse languages for the way that they influence the exploration and elaboration of understanding (Banks, 2001; Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). From a multicultural perspective, tensions caused by the hegemony of dominant worldviews are eased through the recognition, support, and interest in alternative viewpoints. On the other hand, the PBS paradigm emphasizes reinforcement and consequences to change behavior. Human behavior is objectified, measured, interpreted, and influenced by using change principles that work across settings, individuals, and time. If PBS programs are implemented without considering multicultural pedagogy and practices, a potential conflict arises if the preferred behaviors are reinforced by members of the "dominant" cultural perspective and the values, beliefs, and lifestyles of urban, multicultural children are devalued. Without conscious effort, the dominant viewpoint will prevail, in most situations, and individuals who align themselves with the

dominant view will seek to alter and change the behaviors of urban, multicultural children. Culturally relevant PBS models can only occur in contexts that acknowledge and explore these different worldviews and their potential impact on the learning, behavior, and instructional practices.

Conclusion

The racial disparity in discipline procedures continues to be problematic. There is great merit in implementing schoolwide PBS interventions that provide the necessary social, cognitive, and effective conditions for learning to occur. It is critical to understand the mediating effects of culture on the social behavior of urban, multicultural children in order to distinguish what kinds of behavior need to be addressed and what kinds of behavior supports (e.g., interventions) are needed. General and special educators must examine their expectations, broaden their knowledge base, and develop skills so that behavior problems are not based on unidimensional or deficit perspectives. Culturally responsive teaching must be multidimensional and encompass curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, instructional strategies, and performance assessments that are based on cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives of urban multicultural youth. The implications of this rapprochement are significant in terms of retooling our teacher and school leadership preparation programs and instituting culturally responsive PBS practices in schools.

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