Supportive Practices for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in PBIS Schools: Part 1

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Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) have been proven to effectively reduce unwanted behaviors in classroom and non-classroom settings, office discipline referrals, and to increase important academic and social outcomes. While tremendous gains have been made in PBIS schools, disproportionality and exclusionary practices adversely affecting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (CLDS), especially African American and Latino students, continues to exist across the country (Skiba et al., 2011). Consequently, experts are reframing SWPBIS to consider issues of racial disproportionality, equity, and bias.

Research suggests that the prevailing assumptions driving these discriminatory practices are due to deficit thinking and a cultural mismatch between students, their schools, teachers, and support staff (Riddle, 2014). This mismatch is further exacerbated by a systematic and implicit racial bias that is pervasive in the use of exclusionary discipline (Riddle, 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Implicit racial biases are unconscious, automatic conceptions we have based on stereotypes about a specific race (Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, & Horner, 2016). Implicit racial bias and deficit thinking can impact the development of a school culture in ways that unintentionally favor White students and place CLDS at disadvantage. This article serves as the first of a two-part series that focuses on building an awareness of our current discipline gap and strategies that individuals and PBIS teams can use to deepen their professional knowledge. The second part of the series will provide practices that can be used to support CLDS in PBIS schools. While my research focuses on Black and Latino students in schools, the strategies outlined in this article can be contextualized to marginalized students across other contexts.

What is Cultural Mismatch and how does it Impact CLDS in Schools?

Cultural mismatch exists in schools because the dominant culture typically influences all functions of school and often excludes the voices of historically marginalized children and their experiences (Fruchter, 2007; Noguera, 2003). CLDS navigate multiple contexts between home and school. These contexts include cultural norms, social codes, and values that are often in conflict with one another (Lareau, 1987; Noguera, 2003). During these interactions, students negotiate numerous social and cultural identities, which can affect their behaviors and experiences at school. Part of the challenge is a lack of understanding that teachers and schools have regarding this phenomenon. They don’t realize that CLDS occupy and navigate different spaces that are constantly changing and often misunderstand or misinterpret certain responses as
oppositional behavior. Cultural mismatch affects language learning, delivery of curriculum, school culture, and student behavior. It unintentionally creates experiences that disenfranchise CLDS and contributes to increased discipline issues and race-based opportunity gaps in schools (Riddle, 2014).

Strategies to Address Issues of Racial Equity and Disproportionality?

Below are some foundational strategies to support adults learning about issues of equity and disproportionality in schools. The first strategy involves reading and discussing literature on these issues occurring at the local and national level. This strategy helps faculty and staff understand and move past the idea that poverty is the only reason for the academic and behavioral struggles of CLDS. The following reports can be used by individuals and leadership teams to encourage discussion around equity and disproportionality.

- 2013–2014 Civil Rights Data Collection A First Look (June, 2016): provides key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation’s public schools
- U.S. Department of Education Guidance to Schools on Ensuring Equity and Providing Behavioral Supports to Students with Disabilities

A second strategy involves increasing our awareness and knowledge in the area of implicit racial bias and cultural mismatch. This can involve the following individual and team-based activities:

- Going online and taking the Race Implicit Association Test (IAT) at: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/. Learning about implicit racial bias and our socio-historical context can aid individuals and leadership teams in understanding whether or not they have implicit racial biases.
- Learning how to discuss implicit racial bias is essential for addressing equity and disproportionality in schools. One resource that is increasingly being used is Singleton and Linton’s (2006) book titled Courageous Conversations About Race. In some schools this book has been used to engage the entire faculty in honest conversations about race based academic disparities and ways to address equity. In addition, the article White Fragility, by Robin DiAngelo (2011) is another valuable resource that explains why racism is a challenging topic for people to discuss.

A third critical strategy involves explicitly naming the role of race in schools and using disaggregated discipline data to identify and address disproportionality. The Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports provides the following resources for individuals and leadership teams to download from the PBIS.org website and use to problem-solve and action plan around their discipline gaps.

- Recommendations for Addressing Discipline Dis-proportionality in Education (McIntosh, Barnes, Eliason, & Morris, 2014)
- Using Discipline Data within SWPBIS to Identify and Address Disproportionality: A Guide for School Teams (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, Smolkowski, & Sugai, 2014)
Conclusion

This article briefly discussed issues associated with disproportionality and foundational strategies individuals and leadership teams can use to deepen their knowledge about inequities impacting the discipline of CLDS. In part 2 of this article, I will focus on strategies for working directly with CLDS in PBIS schools and provide examples of practices that are helpful and harmful to CLDS, specifically Black and Latino students.

References


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