

## **Strengthening Positive School Discipline Practices through Professional Development**

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This exploratory study addressed the scarcity of research into professional development for school-wide positive behavior support. A train-the-trainer model was designed. These principles were embedded within the recommended guidelines for implementing school-wide positive behavior support. School-based individuals were selected by building administrators to become trainers. Once trained, they instructed school faculty. Content knowledge, skill acquisition, and social validity were assessed. Results indicated substantial improvement in the development of educators' skills and understanding of SWPBS. Participants offered mixed perceptions of acceptability. Future research is recommended for investigating the acceptability and effectiveness of SWPBS professional development.

### **Introduction**

Today's schools are faced with an increasing number of difficult challenges. Federal legislation includes standards for highly qualified teachers and academic yearly progress (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Classrooms are becoming more diverse culturally and behaviorally as children from all types of backgrounds, languages, and areas of risk are educated together (O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2002). Despite these challenges, schools work to fulfill their mission of educating responsible citizens for the next generation. One of the challenges schools face within this mission is how to decrease problem behavior while ensuring that students' social and emotional needs are met.

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These challenging conditions and the desire to ensure school safety have led to zero tolerance discipline policies, which at their heart are punitive and exclusionary (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Even when a philosophy of zero tolerance is absent, common disciplinary procedures tend to be punitive or reactive. For example, the most widely used methods of discipline include telling students to stop the behavior; depriving students of privileges, mobility (in the form of isolation or detention) or the company of friends; counseling; in-school suspension; and contingency contracting (Cameron, 2006; Cotton, 1990).

Evidence suggests that punishment is not effective in reducing problem behavior (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In fact, reactive and punitive practices inadvertently reinforce antisocial behavior, strengthening the likelihood of it continuing (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Mayer and Sulzer-Azaroff (2002) report that using punishment as the sole strategy for managing problem behavior leads to increased aggression and other anti-social behaviors. Unfortunately, punitive discipline tends to predominate in proportion to the alternative, which is to take a positive, preventive approach to discipline (Skiba, et al., 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

### ***Positive Behavior Support***

One empirically investigated alternative to punitive discipline methods is positive behavior support (PBS). Positive behavior support began as an intervention model in the field of developmental disabilities and is becoming more widely adopted by educators (Carr et al., 2002). The model is derived from applied behavior analysis principles and implements interventions to accomplish goals that are grounded in the ideals of person-centered planning, improving quality of life, and creating a supportive environment to change problematic behavior (Carr et al., 2002). Lucyshyn, Horner, Dunlap, Albin, and Ben (2002) characterize PBS as proactive, educative, and reinforcement-based.

The school-based PBS model consists of three tiers--one, two, and three, (also known as primary, secondary, and tertiary) which is now recognized as schoolwide positive behavior support (SWPBS; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Reschly, 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002). These tiers identify a continuum of support for students. Tier one focuses on pro-active teaching and creating supportive environmental systems to enable all students to meet behavior expectations. Tier two support targets students who are at-risk for developing chronic problems (about 15% of the school population). The third tier attends to individual students (about 5%) with chronic and severe behavior issues. Students move into the secondary and tertiary tiers when the primary tier proves insufficient in helping students meet expectations (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Reschly, 2008).

The primary level of SWPBS (Tier one), also called universal support, consists of a wide range of strategies targeted at achieving positive social and learning outcomes and preventing problem behavior through a systemic approach for schoolwide, classroom, and non-classroom contexts (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). These strategies include clearly articulated rules that are explained to students in concrete, situation-specific terms; teaching and rehearsing of expected behaviors and procedures; pre-correction reminders to alert students to expectations; high rates of positive recognition; and consistent procedures for preventing problem behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The use of school wide practices creates a consistent discipline standard (Sugai & Horner, 1999), which allows the school community to unify behind a common vision.

Successful use of SWPBS strategies requires a paradigm shift from traditional practices and entails systematic implementation. Sugai and Horner (2002) provided recommendations for organizing SWPBS systemic change and additionally offer guidelines for implementing the content of SWPBS. These recommendations and guidelines include creating a school team, obtaining staff buy-in, developing an action plan, implementing with fidelity, and creating a system of data-based monitoring. Given that educators and other staff may be unfamiliar with SWPBS strategies and systems,

professional development is needed to ensure that SWPBS content is learned and that practices are implemented with fidelity (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Such training will support these individuals in being effective change agents within the school as the PBS strategies are introduced and implemented.

### ***Professional Development***

What form does effective professional development take in SWPBS? While professional development is strongly encouraged (Sugai & Horner, 2002), the extant literature in SWPBS focuses on developing school teams and organizational change. The purpose for the team approach is so that proactive methods for developing social and emotional behavior are shared across all school community persons, rather than leaving the responsibility to be managed by only a team leader, which is often a school psychologist, other mental health providers, and administrators. Information on the training of teachers in the behavioral principles that underlie SWPBS is limited in the school-based research literature.

One exception is a study from Barton-Atwood, Morrow, Lane, and Jolivette (2005). These researchers taught a one-day workshop to 22 educators from different school districts supported through a statewide program assisting SWPBS implementation. The workshop covered 12 applied behavior analysis concepts and strategies, as well as information on social skill training for students. This study measured perceived knowledge, confidence in using, and perceived usefulness of the concepts and strategies included in the training. Participants rated themselves as to how much they felt they knew about the topic, how confident they felt in using the information or skill, and how useful they thought the knowledge or skill was; actual knowledge was also measured through participants' written definitions and explanations.

The outcomes of this study indicated that from pre-test to post-test all educators improved in the areas of perceived knowledge, confidence in using, perceived usefulness, and actual knowledge of the 12 concepts. Although reporting positive outcomes, the

application of the Barton-Atwood et al. (2005) study is limited by the brevity of the training (one day), the fact that participants were from a variety of schools, and lack of evidence of follow-up support. It was not reported if the information was disseminated to the rest of the teaching staffs at these schools, nor were the training strategies described (e.g., role play, case studies, etc.) This raises the concern that this training fails to serve the key purpose of PBS, which is to unify faculty. Despite these limitations, this study provided preliminary evidence that professional development activities within the context of SWPBS can be successful in enhancing teacher knowledge and confidence.

In light of the limited guidance provided for the best methods of how to conduct staff development in SWPBS, it becomes important to look at training in positive behavior support for individuals with disabilities or severe behavior problems. Dunlap et al. (2000) describe the key features of the training model developed by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Positive Behavior Support. These features include training a multidisciplinary audience and promoting collaboration, using a case study format, implementing a dynamic training process, doing comprehensive training, and building infrastructure in the community to support the system's functioning. The recommended delivery of content within the model includes readings, lectures, guided discussions, case examples, group activities, role plays, and time to deliver feedback on how participants are applying the skills in their work or families. This delivery recommendation has clear application in SWPBS in that it allows educators to apply a variety of strategies, which allows them to test the efficacy of the content for themselves. The key features of PBS professional development for working with individuals with disabilities described here provide a foundation for implementing SWPBS.

Additional features may be taken from the general education professional development literature. Although there is not a single, unified list of best practices in professional development, there are practices that have been found effective in the context where they

have been tested (Guskey, 2003). At the forefront of these best practices is the need to consider the school context in designing training in order to meet the goals of improving student outcomes (Guskey, 2003) and to create teacher change, or, as Sparks (2003, p. 1) says, to “deepen understanding, transform beliefs and assumptions, and create a stream of continuous actions that change habits and affect practice.”

Strategies with the greatest potential to affect these two goals are those that are implemented schoolwide, are long-term with follow-up provided, encourage collegiality, and have administrative support (Richardson, 2003). Additionally, professional development offerings which access sufficient funding for implementation, develop buy-in from participants, acknowledge the beliefs and practices of participating teachers, use outside resources (e.g., staff developer), and encourage common goals among participants have been more successful in improving student outcomes and creating teacher change (Richardson, 2003). The recommendations of the National Staff Development Council (2001) advocate activities that will affect the everyday interactions of teachers and student, while several lists of professional development guidelines include the need for follow-up support (Guskey, 2003). Colvin, Kameenui, and Sugai (1993) mention the need for proactive strategies for education and early intervention, support from building administrators, and a comprehensive, year-round training model. Ingvarson (1998) stated that the nature of many professional development activities leads teachers to feel that professional development is being done to them. To avoid this, professional development needs to include teacher input. Combining these recommended strategies into a single professional development model would increase the probability of effecting teacher change.

In addition to incorporating recommendations for the design and delivery of professional development, effective training includes evaluation. As Guskey (2003) points out, evaluation is essential for improvement and success. One important evaluative measure that is often overlooked is social validity, the degree to which a program is

valued by key stakeholders (Schwartz & Baer, 1991; Wolf, 1978). If the goals, procedures and outcomes are not valued by those involved, the program will not likely sustain over time. Professional development that is not valued on each of those dimensions will not be effective in motivating teacher change, and will thus not be effective in promoting positive student outcomes.

While preliminary evidence exists for the use of effective professional development within the context of SWPBS (Barton-Atwood, et al., 2005), more research is needed on its effectiveness when all the general educators in the school are involved. This research is particularly needed for general educators who are learning to apply new behavioral principles within their classrooms. Specifically, the lack of literature indicates that more research is needed in the areas of SWPBS sustainability, context-specific content, faculty buy-in, and evaluation in relation to professional development.

In summary, teachers typically manage behavior with practices that are reactive rather than preventive (Cameron, 2006; Cotton, 1990; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). School-wide Positive Behavior Support offers a systemic solution but because the philosophies and skills depart from the traditional reactive, punitive practices, educators need professional development in order to change the paradigm. Although proponents of SWPBS recognize this professional development need, little has been published to suggest an effective model to meet these needs.

In an effort to develop a model to assist educators in implementing PBS, this preliminary study examined a train-the-trainer professional development model created to address these concerns. Specifically, this study was designed to examine two research questions: (1) what effects does the professional development model have on teachers' knowledge and skill acquisition in relation to SWPBS?, and (2) do trainers and administrators perceive the training methods and content to be of value in addressing their school's needs?

## **Method**

### ***Setting***

Three rural and three suburban schools in the Western United States participated in the study as part of their initial implementation of SWPBS. Five of the schools served K-5<sup>th</sup> grade students and one school served K-7<sup>th</sup> grade students. The schools served approximately 3,403 students. The percent of students eligible for free and reduced price school lunches in the six schools ranged from 21%-43%.

### ***Participants***

Six school trainers participated in the study evaluating the effectiveness of a train-the-trainer professional development model. One trainer was a principal and five were experienced teachers. Three of the five teachers were serving as staff developers (one who leads out on professional development support within the school), one was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher and one a 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher. A total of 160 general educators across the six schools participated in the training ranging in experience from 0-36 years. School administrators expected all teachers to complete the training regardless of research participation. Of the 160 faculty participants, 105 consented to participate in the research. Females made up 93.5% of the faculty participants, and males 6.5%. Approximately 98% of the participating teachers were Caucasian.

### ***Materials***

Materials for the trainers included four PowerPoint presentations with companion presenter notes to ensure adequate coverage of the content. The PowerPoints varied in length, but contained approximately 20 slides of new material. The presentations for the second, third, and fourth sessions began with slides reviewing all previous content, and continued with the new content slides. In addition, a training manual that further described the content of the PowerPoint presentations and contained additional readings was used. Trainers were also given a syllabus as an example of how the content might be divided into smaller instructional sessions and

encouraged to adapt it to meet their school's needs. Master copies of the measures, which are described below, were also included. Teachers participating in the training were given copies of the training manual only.

### ***Measures***

The effectiveness of this training was measured in three ways: repeated administrations of the PBS Knowledge Assessment (PBSKA) to measure knowledge acquisition, use of the Skills Mastery Assessment (SMA) to measure skill mastery, and an electronic survey to measure administrators and trainers perceptions of the value of the training method and content. Each measure is described more fully below.

*PBS Knowledge Assessment (PBSKA).* The PBSKA evaluated participant knowledge of several content areas (e.g., basic principles of behavior, social skills instruction, corrective teaching), following a multiple baseline achievement test model (see Miller and Weaver, 1972). This model tests all content areas, even those not yet introduced, in each assessment. Therefore, as content is introduced it would be expected that PBSKA scores for that subsection of content would improve. The assessments were refined from quizzes developed for an undergraduate special education class where positive behavior support skills are taught. A test construction specialist at the university was also consulted. The assessment for the trainers consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions. The assessment for the teachers was redesigned to contain 21 multiple-choice items. This change was made to facilitate more items in each content area, as compared to the quizzes from which they drew, allowing participants more opportunity to demonstrate improvement. Tests included items covering all the skills and principles taught in the SWPBS training. Content was scored by topic in subsections to assess knowledge gains in more detail.

*Skills Mastery Assessment (SMA).* A SMA was developed and used to allow the trainers and teachers to demonstrate, through role-play situations, their mastery of three instructional strategies: direct

teaching, corrective teaching and effective praise. *Direct teaching* is a strategy to introduce and teach a social skill to a group or individual for the first time. The *corrective teaching* strategy is used to instruct a student when s/he has failed to use step(s) of a skill in part or in entirety. *Effective praise* is a technique for providing specific, immediate, sincere, and contingent feedback following the demonstration of a skill.

*Stakeholder Value Questionnaire (SVQ)*. The formal measurement of the degree to which stakeholders perceive the goals, procedures and outcomes of a program to be of value is seldom included in program evaluations. In response, administrator and trainer perceptions of the acceptability and value of the training method and content were measured through two brief electronic questionnaires designed for each group. Questionnaires consisted of both Likert-type and open-ended questions. Likert-scale type questions focused on the procedures related to the implementation of the training using a five-point scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Open-ended questions were designed to prompt suggestions regarding how the content and delivery of the training sessions could be improved.

### ***Procedures***

*School Change*. As is true of any program, the success of SWPBS is dependent on effective leadership, systems change and ongoing professional development (Sugai & Horner 2002). Prior to the implementation of this professional development model, each school created a steering committee to design SWPBS as recommended by Sugai and Horner (2002). School committees consisted of teachers from varying grade levels, administration, a school psychologist or counselor, parents and a university representative. Each committee met to identify areas of school strengths and needs. Then they designed a SWPBS program to address the unique needs, which is also in alignment with effective PBS implementation (Sugai & Horner, 2002). All faculty and staff were given an opportunity to review the SWPBS plan and give feedback in an effort to secure commitment before implementation began at the start of the school

year. Following the approval of the plan, the role of the committees shifted from design to governing implementation and ongoing decision-making.

The professional development component of the SWPBS plan gave consideration for the possibility that SWPBS may be unfamiliar and require changes in teacher and staff behavior. The earlier decisions of the steering committee created common goals that provided coherence to professional development activities. Efforts were made to reduce common complaints associated with professional development. Common complaints include not accounting for the context of the specific school (Guskey, 1995) and not connecting with an overall plan of change (Kelleher, 2003). University and district personnel encouraged 90% faculty participation in the SWPBS training with the expectation that at least 85% had to participate to ensure receiving a \$300 incentive each school could spend, as they desired.

*Training.* The SWPBS professional development training consisted of three phases: Phase 1 – training-of-trainers, Phase 2- training of faculty, and Phase 3- follow-up. Each training phase is described in detail below.

*Phase 1* of the professional development training included the selection and training-of-trainers followed by knowledge acquisition and skill mastery evaluations. To increase the feasibility of implementation and future sustainability independent of the affiliate university, the district, in collaboration with the university, adopted the training-of-trainers model. (For an example see Anderson, Russo, Dunlap, and Albin, 1996). Although the district recommended staff developers to be the trainers at each school, principals were allowed to choose any qualified person to serve as their respective school trainer. Trainers were offered a half-credit of graduate level continuing education on completion of their training and another half credit upon completion of faculty training. Credit was offered as a practical way to provide meaningful compensation

as university credit influences teacher position on the pay scale and impacts qualifications for re-licensure.

Trainers were instructed using the same methods and materials that they later used when teaching faculty members at their schools. Three training sessions were held for the trainers in April and May of the school year preceding SWPBS implementation in each school. A review session was held shortly before the school year began. The four training sessions lasted a total of 8 hours which fulfilled the seat time requirement for university credit.

PowerPoint presentations and discussion activities were used to present the philosophy and concepts behind SWPBS. Readings were assigned to promote meaningful discussions. Instruction took place in a class-like setting, and trainers were free to ask questions and make comments. Time was also built into each session for administering the PBSKA, practice of newly learned skills including role-play rehearsal, and evaluation of skill mastery using the SMA. The content of the training sessions is outlined in Table 1.

*Phase 2* of the study consisted of training the faculty and evaluating knowledge and skill acquisition. Upon completion of the PBS training, the trainers taught their respective faculty the same content described in Table 1 with one exception - - the faculty training material was specific to the social skills each school had identified as important for all students in their school to master. Whereas, trainers were instructed using a set of social skills selected by the university trainer as examples. Individualizing the skills to meet school needs demonstrates the adoption of an important principle of professional development (Guskey, 2003).

*Phase 3* was the follow-up component of the training. Follow-up support for use and implementation is an important part of effective professional development and is often overlooked in professional development in schools despite the benefits (Richardson, 2003).

Table 1. Training Content

<i>Session</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Content</i>
<b>1 (3 hrs)</b>	<b><i>Intro to Social skills Instruction and Relationship Building</i></b>	Pre-test PBSKA
		Reading Discussion - Long, N. (1997)
		The Therapeutic Power of Kindness
		Effective Praise
		Instructive Praise
		General Praise
		Practice Effective Praise
<b>2 (2 hrs)</b>	<b><i>Social Skills Training and Pre-Teaching</i></b>	Review of all previous content
		First PBSKA
		Reading Discussion - Knoff, H. M. (2003)
		Character Education vs. Social Skills Training
		Direct Teaching Strategy (DTS)
		Practice DTS
		SMA – Effective Praise
<b>3 (2 hrs)</b>	<b><i>Discipline and Corrective Teaching</i></b>	Review all previous content.
		Second PBSKA
		Reading Discussion - Young, K. R., et.al.
		A Teaching Approach to Discipline
		Corrective Teaching Strategy (CTS)
		Practice CTS
		SMA – DTS
<b>4 (1 hr)</b>	<b><i>Review</i></b>	Review of all previous content.
		Third PBSKA
		A Teacher's view of implementing SWPBS
		SMA – CTS
		Instructional materials were distributed to the trainers.

The training model used in this study had ongoing support built into it in recognition that support after training is critical to the successful implementation of SWPBS and effective professional development (Guskey, 2003). The trainer was on-site full-time and available for teachers to access on a regular basis. Additional support was available to both the trainer and faculty from a university consultant, as needed.

### ***Evaluation***

School trainer and faculty knowledge was assessed by way of the PBSKA at the conclusion of each training session. Teacher ability to use direct teaching, corrective teaching, and praise was evaluated using the SMA. After practicing these instructional strategies with a partner, teachers were asked to demonstrate their competency via role-play to a university staff member or trainer who recorded results using the SMA. Role-play was used to allow observable evaluation of skill mastery and to build fluency and competency. Demonstrating mastery of each of the strategies on the SMA was required for successful completion of the training. The two versions of the SVQ were administered electronically in each of the schools following the completion of faculty training.

## **Results**

### ***Knowledge Acquisition***

The first Positive Behavior Support Knowledge Assessment (PBSKA) served as a pre-test or baseline measure of knowledge of the content covered throughout the professional development trainings. The following three tests were measures of knowledge acquisition after instruction in each of the three content areas was completed. While trainers completed the PBSKA tests during their training, their scores were anonymous and aggregated with that of school administrators who participated alongside them. This was the result of an administrative oversight of not assigning codes to retain anonymity but allowing data disaggregation; therefore, no trainer results are reported for the PBSKA.

*Professional development in SWPBS*

Teachers from across the six schools scored an average of 49% on the baseline, PBSKA 1, and 70% on PBSKA 2, an improvement of 21%. A paired t-test showed this was a statistically significant difference, ( $p$ -value  $<.0001$ ). PBSKA 3 was given following instruction in two-thirds of the content with teachers averaging 83%, and the average score on PBSKA 4 was 86%. These gains were also significant ( $p$ -value  $<.0001$ ). Comparing PBSKA 1 and PBSKA 4 as a pre-test and post-test shows a 38.6% increase in the average score, which was statistically significant as well ( $p$ -value  $<.0001$ ).

Each school showed a similar pattern to the overall results, with the largest gains occurring between PBSKA 1 and PBSKA 2. Schools A, B, and E made significant gains between each test, and between PBSKAs 1 and 4. School C, with only four consented participants (not enough to meet the assumptions of the t-test), made gains between PBSKAs 1 and 2, PBSKAs 2 and 3, but lost ground between PBSKAs 3 and 4. Their overall average difference in percentage results was only 14%. However, two of the participants gained 19% and 34%, while the two others made 0% and 2%. Schools D and F also made significant gains, except between PBSKAs 3 and 4. The pre-test to post-test gains for all schools (excluding school C) were statistically significant. The mean percentage point difference between pre and post PBSKA (all teachers), with  $n = 98$ , was 38.6 ( $SD = 17.1$ ), lower and upper confidence intervals 35.2 and 42.0, respectively;  $p < .0001$ . Details of pre to post-test differences for each school are given in Table 2.

*Table 2. Mean % Point Difference Between Pre and Post PBSKA Tests, Teachers By School*

<i>School</i>	<i>Paired t-test</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval</i>		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>PBSKA 4 – PBSKA 1</i>	<i>Percentage Points (SD)</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	
(A)	(n = 23)	41.8 (13.9)	35.8	47.8	$<.0001$
(B)	(n = 17)	45.5 (14.6)	38	53	$<.0001$
(C)	(n = 4)*	NA	NA	NA	NA
(D)	(n = 20)	33.8 (20.0)	24.4	43.2	$<.0001$
(E)	(n = 12)	45.2 ( 6.7)	41	49.4	$<.0001$
(F)	(n = 22)	35.2 (18.5)	27	43.4	$<.0001$

*\* Too few to meet assumptions of t-test*

### ***Skills Mastery***

Trainer and teacher mastery of skills were assessed in three areas: Direct Teaching, Corrective Teaching and Effective Praise. The skills mastery assessment was used to evaluate whether teachers and trainers met the mastery criteria of 100% for the performance of each skill. Of the six trainers who consented to participate in the study, five out of the six mastered the Direct Teaching and Corrective Teaching skills at 100%. Six out of the six met the mastery criteria for Effective Praise. Trainers reported that ninety-nine of the 105 teachers (94%) who consented to participate in the study met the mastery criteria for the three skill areas.

### ***Stakeholder Value***

Administrator and trainer responses to the SVQ were summarized in two categories: Likert-scale type questions and open-ended responses. Administrator and trainer responses to Likert-type scale question are described in detail in Figure 2. Administrator responses were mostly favorable but there was lack of agreement as to whether personnel valued the incentive for participation. The majority of administrators, three of five, felt that the information taught was critical for effective and sustainable implementation.

Trainers were mostly favorable in their responses as well. However, two of the five trainers didn't feel that the university sessions prepared them to train their faculty and one out of five trainers strongly disagreed that the incentives for participation were valued and that one trainer per school was sufficient.

Administrators made the following open-ended comments on the SVQ about the training:

- *It was good to have the freedom to spread the training across the school year.*
- *Talk with administrators about what is needed – make sure training has value and isn't just time consuming.*
- *There is so much professional development in the district already.*
- *The 'plate' is indeed very full for most classroom teachers.*

Trainers made the following comments about the training and made suggestions for future implementation of professional development.

- *I enjoyed the university training and the materials presented. The University trainers were key, they knew the material and were always helpful and happy.*
- *Vary the presentation mode (not always PowerPoint)*
- *Program is forced on us and there is nothing we can do about it.*
- *Teachers try and do as little as possible so it looks like they support this program.*
- *The training is too long.*
- *The beginning of the school year is too demanding to require 8 hours of professional development.*
- *Although this is a good program, we are totally swamped with more meetings than ever this year.*
- *How do we inservice the rest of the school? [meaning non-faculty support personnel]*
- *Our teachers feel stupid about having to pass off skills.*

## **Discussion**

This preliminary study of a professional development package for general educators employed recommended effective practices from the professional development literature and from PBS. For example, university staff working with the schools secured administrator support before agreeing to assist with SWPBS implementation and supported schools in creating common goals, two guidelines for professional development (Colvin et al., 1993; Richardson, 2003). As recommended by the National Staff Development Council (2001), efforts were designed to affect the everyday practice of teaching as well as the everyday development of social and emotional development of students' behavior. The content centered on principles and practices which, if incorporated, could directly change student-teacher interactions and school climate (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

In addition to the school trainers, university staff members were assigned to schools as an additional resource for ongoing support and follow-up. This model supports Richardson's (2003) recommendations that long-term professional development with

follow-up and the use of outside resources are key characteristics of effective professional development and Colvin's et al. (1993) recommendation of a year-round, proactive training model. Although training schedules varied across schools as part of the contextualization (Guskey, 2003), additional support and encouragement was provided across the school year. This research investigated two questions: (1) what effects did the professional development package have on educators' knowledge and skill acquisition in relation to SWPBS? and (2) do trainers and administrators perceive the training methods and content to be of value in addressing their school's needs? This study serves as a first step toward developing and refining a professional development model for SWPBS, which brings the best in professional development together with positive behavior support principles in order to assist schools in their change process and offers answers for distributing the efforts of school discipline and the development of students' social and emotional skills across various school personnel.

### ***Training Effectiveness and Limitations***

Results of this preliminary study indicated that the SWPBS professional development activities employed were successful in enhancing the knowledge and skills related to classroom discipline and teacher-student relationships for educators. Teachers trained at their respective schools showed gains in knowledge as measured by the PBSKA. By PBSKA 4, teachers made an average thirty-eight percentage point gain [95% confidence interval (35%, 42%)] to show knowledge of an average of 86% of the material. Data on participant learning provides a first step in determining whether or not teacher understanding of the principles were deepened, which is considered by some to be essential to teacher change (Sparks, 2003).

While the reported results are a reasonable level of mastery to attain, and the pre to post-test gains were quite strong, the lack of data on the trainers' mastery of the content to correlate with faculty achievement limits the conclusions drawn. There is some literature in other content areas to suggest that the trainers' depth of

understanding demonstrated during their training sessions is positively correlated to more proficiency in guiding their faculty members to a complete level of mastery (Ma, 1999; Shulman, 1986). Further study of this issue of trainer expertise is recommended. Additionally, treatment fidelity measures, lacking in this study, would provide more insight on trainer effectiveness and faculty learning.

The individual school results, particularly those that showed either non-significant gains between PBSKA tests, or who actually showed declines in scores between administrations, would be better understood in the context of school differences in training and adherence to training recommendations. For example, it is possible that some sessions were truncated or rushed due to time constraints or other factors. Additionally, some material may not have been adequately covered or may have been understood differently due to school cultural beliefs. Although the individual school faculties made statistically significant gains in knowledge of positive behavior support principles, further work is needed to better understand how much these apparent knowledge gains change educators' day-to-day efforts.

The SMA criterion of 100% mastery was very demanding. All of the trainers met the criterion for Effective Praise, and five of six mastered Direct Teaching and Corrective Teaching. The two trainers who each missed one of the SMAs did not fail them, but did not attempt them with the University personnel. The subsequent lack of follow-up was an oversight on the part of the University project assistants. It is unknown whether the trainers purposefully skipped the SMA as there was an overall resistance to the mastery demonstrations, in other words the "passing off" of skills via role play. As one trainer commented on the SVQ, which was also noted anecdotally during training of trainers, "Our teachers feel stupid about having to pass off skills." This seems to show a lack of teacher 'buy in' (Richardson, 2003) and highlights the importance of teacher input (Ingvarson, 1998). Even though this was the

sentiment, teachers who participated as research subjects completed all three SMAs at a rate of 95% as reported by their trainers.

### ***Implications for Future Research and Practice***

While there should be limited compromise about promoting skill mastery because of its power in building fluency, confidence and competency, this finding of resistance points to an area for further investigation. Although there is good evidence for role-playing as a strategy for children and youth in social skill acquisition, adult learning theories suggest that a different approach may be needed for adults (Kiely, Sandmann & Truluck, 2004). Investigating an alternative to role playing as an acceptable way for educators, as adult learners, to develop and demonstrate competency may be warranted. At the least, care should be taken to provide a clear rationale for role-playing or any other method used. Further, because educators so often teach in isolation from other adults, they may feel exposed when demonstrating their skill. Acknowledgement of their feeling, accompanied by expressions of confidence and warmth, elements of collegiality and collaborative work, may help lessen the discomfort and increase the effectiveness of the SMAs. Both Richardson (2003) and Dunlap et al. (2000) cite these elements as important for successful professional development.

Just as the professional development model in this study was designed around elements of effective professional development, the design attended to elements that would make it of value to educators. Efforts to enhance the perceived value of SWPBS professional development included the school leading out in their goals, use of the train-the-trainer model, and flexibility in the training schedule. School personnel chose their own goals, schoolwide rules, and social skills. The university staff assisted schools in fitting their purposes into the framework of SWPBS. Employing an internal trainer from each school served had the purpose of adding two dimensions to enhance the perception of value. As Bloom (2006) noted, participants in professional development may be resistant to the activities if they perceive the trainer as lacking credibility. Therefore, the internal trainer was employed to increase credibility,

and the local support the internal trainer provided was included to increase the acceptability and sustainability of the SWPBS model. Finally, flexible training schedules were used to make the procedures more acceptable to stakeholders, as training was fit into the school's regular activities and context.

### ***Perceptions of Training and Additional Implications for Practice/Research***

Mixed results were documented from the measures that attended to the second research question about the perceived value of the methods and content in meeting school needs. A majority of responses to the Likert-type questions on the SVQ from both administrators and trainers were positive in all areas. Negative responses, from the same stakeholders, were reported in the areas of content and the value of the incentives. These merit attention in order to refine this professional development model.

Although contextualizing the training to each faculty by their steering committee was a top priority in this model as recommended by Guskey (2003), the university project personnel provided the training content to the trainers, based on SWPBS principles (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). At least one principal felt that the presented content was not of value, despite the attention given in the model for the recommendation of securing administrative support (Colvin et al., 1993; Richardson, 2003). However, the baseline PBSKA for both trainers and teachers showed poor understanding at the outset, which would indicate that this type of content was needed in order to shift the behavior management perspectives of these participants. The SWPBS approach is designed to create proactive systems that support students in meeting behavioral expectations and develop educators' use of the teaching approach to discipline. Perhaps making a more clear contrast between traditional, reactive disciplinary practices (Cameron, 2006; Cotton, 1990; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 2000) and positive behavior support practices (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Lucyshin et al., 2002) early in the training with administrators and other stakeholders would help them value the content. Further research

that attends to this issue is warranted, particularly if educators are going to accept a paradigm shift of sharing the role of supporting the development of social and emotional skills of students within the school community, rather than deferring to specialists, to maintain this responsibility.

Additional themes arising from the open-ended questions were the professional development demands and the expectation for participation from the district. While the training was acceptable, teachers in this district generally had more professional development demands than they felt they could manage. An attitude of resignation toward the perception of a district-mandated program was exemplified by several comments by trainers. Ingvarson (1998) warned that this attitude could arise without sufficient participant input into the content of professional development. Sugai & Horner (2002) also recommend a threshold of 80% staff agreement prior to attempting implementation of SWPBS. These themes suggest that school leaders need to prepare faculty carefully to understand the purposes of the training, and the potential empowerment it will give them in transforming their classrooms and schools, and to elicit from faculty before and during training their perceived needs.

This study adds to the evidence of efficacy provided by Barton-Atwood et al. (2005) for SWPBS professional development with general educators. Participants in this study, like those in the Barton-Atwood et al. (2005) study, showed knowledge gains in SWPBS principles. Additionally, participants demonstrated skill mastery in important facets of SWPBS. Unlike the Barton-Atwood et al. participants, who were asked for their perceptions of the usefulness of the training, perception data was only obtained from trainers and administrators, not from faculty participants, a limitation of this study.

The study under discussion differs from previous work by evaluating the effects of professional development of all educators within individual schools while using a train-the-trainer model. This study also adds to the literature on SWPBS by using two levels of

evaluation suggested by Guskey (2003), evaluating participants' learning and their reactions, which are atypical of most studies reported. Although the application of results is limited by several factors, including SWPBS being in its initial phases at the schools studied, and school contexts differing in the study schools, this professional development model has promise for assisting schools in applying the five steps of successful SWPBS implementation (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Given the potential of the model, future research needs to address the limitations of this study and to extend its findings. The treatment integrity with which training was implemented should be monitored and more rigorous design methods implemented, such as monitoring skill use before, during, and after training. The perceptions of teachers regarding the value of SWPBS training has yet to be evaluated. Finally, more needs to be done to increase the perception of value of professional development activities for trainers and administrators.

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