

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BUILDING LEADERS' EXPERIENCES WITH LEADING
POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (PBIS) INITIATIVES IN
UPSTATE SOUTH CAROLINA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jason Michael Ramey

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of elementary school building leaders with leading Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiatives in upstate South Carolina. The theories guiding this study were the growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) and the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996) as they tie into the experiences of building leaders through their journey. The central research question in this study was: What are the building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives in an upstate South Carolina elementary school? This study sought to discover the experiences of building leaders who were implementing PBIS. The data collection methods included 14 semi-structured interviews with building leaders from upstate South Carolina elementary schools to obtain data from their experiences. Additional data was collected through document analysis in meeting notes from building leaders. Focus groups were used by me to further identify overarching themes from the data collected in interviews. Moustakas's (1994) method of data analysis included the process of coding, code clustering, and narrating. Imaginative variation was used with a structural description of how these ideas occurred, while intuitive integration took place with the description of the essence and the meaning of the experience, which follows the work of Moustakas (1994). The results showed four themes prevalent in the PBIS initiative. Building leaders experienced a growth mindset open to the initiative, close-mindedness during the initiative, leadership behaviors having a positive impact on the initiative, and an increase in team or shared leadership.

Keywords: PBIS initiatives, transcendental phenomenology, growth mindset, transformational leadership

Copyright Page

Dedication/Acknowledgement

The experience of writing a dissertation is one I will never forget as long as I live. I want to thank my wife Andrea for encouraging me to go on this journey in the first place. You have always supported my educational and professional goals and this would not have been possible without you. We found out you had Colon Cancer in the middle of this process and you still helped out so much with the kids and the everyday tasks in life while taking Chemotherapy treatments that allowed me to reach the finish line and become a Doctor. I love you!

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List of Abbreviations

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS)

Shelbyville School District (SSD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Administrators across the United States have implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to focus their energies on positive student behaviors to shape their school's climate. The purpose of PBIS "is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools" (PBIS, 2018, p. 1). This involves putting a specific plan in place to reward students who are making good choices and giving their best effort academically with a systemic multi-tiered framework approach (Evanovich & Scott, 2016).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand elementary school building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina. The description of administrator experiences will hopefully fill a gap in the literature which currently exists pertaining to elementary school leadership experiences in PBIS initiatives. These experiences would detail the journey from initial leadership team building to preparations for implementation and continuing through the experiences of implementation and beyond.

Chapter One of this dissertation will provide a framework for the research being used in this study. The chapter will present relevant background information on PBIS implementation and the impact this has on administrators with a focus on the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for the problem in this study. A section for situation to self, which will include the reasoning behind this study and the problem statement to examine the context for the study is presented in this chapter. Chapter One will address the purpose statement that states the focus and intention of the study. The significance of the study will be analyzed in the chapter followed by definitions for terms used. Finally, an overall summary of the information included in the initial chapter will be presented.

Background

The process of implementing PBIS initiatives in elementary schools includes using a tiered framework developed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center, which is funded by grants from the United States Department of Education (PBIS, 2018). PBIS is defined as, “a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students” (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012, p. 2).

The problem in this research study was a lack of empirical evidence showing building leaders’ experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. This problem is interesting for building leaders in upstate South Carolina, in the Southeast region of the United States, and nationally because of the process each building leader experiences with PBIS initiatives. The building leaders’ experiences are unique because only 20% of schools in the United States have implemented PBIS (Country Health Rankings, 2017).

The research in this study would extend the current knowledge and understanding of the implementation and sustainability of PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. Building leaders would benefit from a description of the study including other leaders who have already implemented PBIS initiatives. The information below is a background of the relevant literature that exists in the historical, social, and theoretical context for PBIS and the implementation and execution of the program’s initiatives in schools.

Historical Context

Although elements of the program were used in years prior, PBIS was originally founded in 1997 (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). But even before the late 1990s, researchers and educators alike were looking for ways to address behavioral disorders by examining possible behavior

interventions (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). True action was taken toward the development of the PBIS program as it is known today with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997, which was legislated to provide schools with assistance on evidence-based practices that would help provide supports for students with behavioral disorders (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

During the 1980s there was a desire for effective interventions that could be used with students who had behavioral disorders (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). In response to this desire, researchers and scholars at the University of Oregon began research studies and evaluations of different intervention programs to examine the best possible ways to address behavioral disorders (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). This research led to the development of school-wide systems being put in place to focus on prevention and taking the attention away from the negative behaviors and placing it on the positive behaviors displayed by students in schools (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

The 1990s was a decade when the University of Oregon researcher's work led to the development of the PBIS Center (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). This center was funded in part from the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 which provided funding nationwide to researchers and schools who were attempting to address behavioral disorders through the development and use of PBIS (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). During the 2000s, the National Technical Assistance Center was created to shape the framework of PBIS around the country and to assist with professional development in schools that have implemented the PBIS program (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

Research on the history of PBIS shows administrators have arguably the biggest impact on the implementation and overall success of PBIS in their schools (McIntosh, Canizal Delabra,

& Kelm, 2016). Building leaders “play pivotal roles in adopting, implementing, and sustaining practices in schools” (McIntosh et al., 2016, p. 107). The amount of support a building leader provides the PBIS program can make the difference in a successful implementation and sustained process or abandonment of the program by a school (McIntosh et al., 2016). With their answers to interview questions in this study, building leaders described their actions throughout the PBIS initiative which showed their impact on implementation and the success or failure of the program in their schools.

Historical research about the impact of PBIS initiatives from the 1990’s until today show another important factor for building leaders is the ability to provide clear and concise directions to the staff throughout the entire PBIS process (Flannery, Frank, McGrath Kato, Doren, & Fanning, 2013). A building leader’s effectiveness can be altered by the ways he or she defines the expectations given to the staff. Research shows faculty and staff feel that, “Defining expectations required building consensus among staff as to the critical expectations that would be applicable in all settings” (Flannery et al., 2013, p. 279). The historical context for the topic of building leaders’ experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools is driven by the research presented and has changed even in recent years.

Social Context

PBIS initiatives in elementary schools have socially impacted all stakeholders around the United States. One of the most impactful ways building leaders can use PBIS initiatives to change people’s lives in the school and the school community is to provide support to all school stakeholders (Richter, Lewis, & Hagar, 2012). Research shows that, “principal/administrative support is a key component of establishing socially proactive school environments” (Richter et. al, 2012, p. 74). But providing support alone is not enough for building leaders to have a

positive social impact throughout implementation and sustainment of PBIS initiatives. Research shows that it is “just as important to understand the concerns, needs, and insights of the very people we are asking to change” (Feuerborn, Wallace, & Tyre, 2013, p. 228). The experiences of the building leader throughout this process are interesting because of the impact that each decision can have on staff and community members alike.

Another impact building leaders may have socially through PBIS initiatives is understanding the beliefs and feelings of the people who will be the actual implementers of the program (McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014). While the building leaders are responsible for the PBIS initiative, the people implementing the day-to-day operations of PBIS are the faculty and staff. Researchers consider school personnel as the “core implementers of SWPBS, understanding their perceptions and beliefs is critical to enhancing sustainability” (McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014, p. 31). Stakeholder buy-in and belief in the program will have an impact on the attitude (positive or negative) each person may possess while implementing and sustaining the program (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). This is one of the more interesting aspects of the study, which I attempted to probe in the questions asked to building leaders about their experiences with leading PBIS initiatives.

School faculty and staff have responded in a prior research study that their attitudes are swayed one way or another by the efficiency and effectiveness of PBIS meetings that take place within their schools (McIntosh et al., 2013). Building leaders must ensure their faculty and staff members remain positive about the PBIS initiatives, especially with the importance of their role in the implementation and sustainability of the program. Leaders are wise to use data to support the effectiveness of the program and to ensure that meetings are focused and efficient (McIntosh et al., 2013). The true influence building leaders are having with PBIS initiatives is changing the

culture socially for teachers and students in their schools (Reno, Friend, Caruthers, & Smith, 2017).

Theoretical Context

The theoretical context of this research study revolved around two theories: growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) and the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996). The growth mindset theory focuses on two mindsets possessed by adults: fixed mindset and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). A growth mindset is one that encourages people to be innovative, creative, willing to experiment and to learn from their failures (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). In schools with a PBIS setting, this theory recommends that building leaders analyze their own mindset (fixed or growth) along with the mindset of their staff. The fixed mindset is described by Dweck as believing that your qualities are what they are and cannot be changed (Dweck, 2006). This mindset gives people the sense that they must prove their worth over and over (Dweck, 2006).

When analyzing the growth mindset of a school, the organizational structure of the building has an influence on the teachers' belief system in how the staff can collectively help the students to learn and grow (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b). Previous research outlines the sub-factors for a growth mindset culture. The core of a school growth mindset is made up of three different sub-factors. These include open communication and support, collaborative planning, and shared leadership (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b). As part of the building leaders' experiences with PBIS implementation, interview questions specifically focused on the type of mindset the building leader felt they had throughout implementation.

The growth mindset is detailed by Dweck as being based on the ideas that you can shape your qualities by giving great effort, accepting help from other people, and being strategic (Dweck, 2006). Research shows that teachers who possess a growth mindset have shown to

develop positive psychosocial skills in their students, which leads to students making choices to interact and engage in academic behaviors that lead to an increase in positive outcomes (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b). With the impact shown from a growth mindset in teachers, the responses to interview questions from the building leaders are telling when considering their experiences implementing and sustaining PBIS compared with this growth mindset theoretical framework of the study.

The transformational leadership theory developed by Bass (1996) centers around the concept that employees are motivated by a culture which is goal oriented and encourages a positive method of organizational development (Oberfield, 2014). Transformational leaders are those who, “who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3). This definition was pertinent to this research study and provided the theory as a backbone for the theoretical framework of the study because of the transformational impact administrators may have had implementing PBIS initiatives.

Transformational leaders can become role models for their followers who are inspired by them. They also challenge their followers to take more ownership for their own work and have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their employees to provide them with opportunities to perform better (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Hauserman and Stick (2013) expressed Bass’s thoughts writing that, “transformational leaders sought new ways of doing things and were less likely to support the status quo. They attempted to create and shape an environment and encouraged followers to be a part of the process” (p. 188).

When developed properly, transformational leadership can enhance the motivation, morale, and performance of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The theory is fitting for this study

because leadership practices influence the success of the program. The information in this next section provides a background of the relevant literature that exists to provide an historical, social, and theoretical background for PBIS and the implementation and execution of the program's initiatives in schools.

Situation to Self

My motivation for conducting this transcendental phenomenological study was my educational journey from the classroom as a history teacher to my current role as an elementary administrator in upstate South Carolina. I have experience both as a building leader and with leading PBIS initiatives. The intent of this research study was to allow me to fill a gap in the literature that existed related to the experiences of building leaders during and throughout PBIS initiatives.

I used *epoche* to ensure my own experiences and biases with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina did not have an impact on the study. Moustakas (1994) describes *epoche* as to “refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33). *Epoche* was important for the design of this study because I refrained from judgment and did not let my own perceptions enter in the study. Moustakas (1994) suggested that researchers should find a quiet place throughout a research study to reflect and set aside his or her own biases or prejudgments.

The study addressed the following three philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. According to Creswell (2013), the ontological assumption questions the nature of reality. I reported the different perspectives in this study as themes developed from the data collected without allowing my own beliefs or bias to impact these ideas (Creswell, 2013). The epistemological assumption is the idea that knowledge is possible

(Creswell, 2013). With this assumption in mind, I went into the field and conducted my interviews with the participants in the study in the setting in which the phenomenon took place to seek knowledge about the phenomenon of leading a PBIS initiative.

Because of my position as a building leader who has experienced the phenomenon being studied, I had to bracket myself and my own experiences and beliefs out of the study. The axiological assumption is when the researcher acknowledges that biases are present (Creswell, 2013). Because of my experiences as a building leader in a PBIS initiative, I assumed biases existed in my mind about the implementation and sustainability of a PBIS initiative. These biases included doubts about a school staff's ability to buy-in to the initiative, a leader's ability to change the mindset of a staff from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, and a leader's ability to become a transformational leader in a mandatory initiative. The research paradigm will be postpositivism for this study. Creswell (2013) described postpositivism as having, "elements of being reductionistic, logical, empirical, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on priori theories" (p. 24). Postpositivism was fitting for my study because leading a PBIS initiative involves using logic, empirical data, and analyzing cause-and-effect scenarios to determine the best decision-making processes for a building leader.

Problem Statement

The problem this study seeks to investigate is that recent research regarding PBIS (Cawthon, 2016; Molloy, Moore, Trail, Epps, & Hopper, 2013) includes a focus on administrator roles but have only focused on quantitative studies or qualitative case studies concerning supports, framework, and school climate. While much research exists on the different elements of PBIS (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014; Filter, Sytsma, & McIntosh, 2016; McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014; McIntosh,

Predy, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013), there is a lack of phenomenological studies giving voice to the building leaders who have experienced the phenomenon of leading their school through a PBIS initiative.

The focus of this transcendental phenomenological study was building leaders' experiences with the implementation process of PBIS at the elementary school level at a school district in upstate South Carolina. The study included building leaders who have completed at least year one of a PBIS initiative and allow their responses to this phenomenon build further research to fill the gaps in the current PBIS literature. Cawthon (2016) used a case study design and included the perceptions of building leaders as well as other stakeholders. This study explicitly focused on the experiences of the administrators within the phenomenon of being a building leader with a PBIS initiative. A qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological approach that discovers the experiences of building leaders using a growth mindset and transformational leadership style in South Carolina had yet to be explored.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my research was to investigate the impact a growth mindset and transformational leadership style has on building leaders who experienced leading a PBIS initiative at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. At this stage in the research, building leaders' experiences with PBIS implementation was generally defined as administrators, school counselors, lead teachers, who use "a school-wide prevention strategy that establishes a positive school climate and the behavioral supports needed to reduce behavior problems and enhance academic performance" (Molloy et al., 2013, p. 594). This connects with the building leader in the PBIS setting because of its emphasis on improved behaviors through positive interventions. The building leaders who used a transformational leadership style were given a

voice through this study to describe the phenomenon of leading PBIS initiatives in an upstate South Carolina elementary school.

Two theories guided this study. First, the growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) focuses on the two kinds of mindsets adults possess: fixed mindset and growth mindset. In schools with a PBIS setting, this theory allowed building leaders to analyze their own mindset (fixed or growth) along with the mindset of their staff. Dweck (2006) also suggested leaders who develop or have a growth mindset are more likely to accept the challenge of mandatory implementation of initiatives: “People in a growth mindset don’t just seek challenge, they thrive on it. The bigger the challenge, the more they stretch” (p. 21). This theory connected the experiences of the building leaders in a PBIS setting from implementation and beyond the with growth mindset model set forth (Dweck, 2006; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014).

Second, the transformational leadership theory developed by Bass (1996) centers around the idea that employees are motivated by a culture that is goal oriented and positive with organizational development (Oberfield, 2014). When developed properly, transformation leadership could enhance the motivation, morale, and performance of followers (Langston University, 2017). One study done by a group of researchers (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015) wrote that a transformational leader “was typically focused on the end product, uniting staff in the pursuit of goals that match the leader’s vision, while finding ways to excite even the most uninterested employee” (p. 3). The description of the phenomenon provided by the participants was analyzed through the theoretical lens of both the growth mindset and transformational leadership theories.

Significance of the Study

The research in this study will extend the current knowledge and understanding of the implementation and sustainability of PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. Building leaders around the country will benefit from a description of the study from other leaders who have already implemented PBIS initiatives. The information in this study is significant because of the impact such research could have in the field of educational leadership. This section includes a breakdown of the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this study.

Empirical Significance

The empirical significance of this research will hopefully develop an understanding of elementary school building leaders' experiences leading initiatives in the PBIS setting in upstate South Carolina. A gap in the literature exists (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey et al., 2014; Filter et al., 2016; McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013) and there is a lack of prior research on PBIS when it pertains to phenomenological studies that give a voice to the administrators who described their experiences through implementing PBIS initiatives and beyond. This research attempted to fill the gap in literature with the focus on a transcendental phenomenological study and administrator experiences through the implementation of PBIS initiatives.

This research will also be significant for the 80% of building leaders and administrators around the country who have not yet implemented PBIS. With popularity of PBIS growing (PBIS, 2018), administrators and building leaders could be part of a future mandated implementation of the program. This study will also impact the stakeholders in schools around the country because of the impact PBIS has had not only in schools but also in school communities.

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical impact this study can make consists of building leaders' ideas about their experiences in a PBIS setting that could lead to professional growth. This connects with Dweck's (2006) idea of the growth mindset. No prior research has used the growth mindset theory to explore PBIS research and the impact it could have on future administrators working in the field. Using the growth mindset theory in this study, I analyzed participant responses through the lens of Dweck's growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014).

Another theoretical impact of this study will be the impact on leaders implementing PBIS initiatives through the lens of the transformational leadership theory (Allen et al., 2015; Bass, 1996; Oberfield, 2014). This theoretical framework will allow leaders to describe experiences of staff motivation and overall school culture through the PBIS initiative with their responses being analyzed and compared to leaders who have used the transformational leadership theory to guide their administrative decisions in their schools. The stakeholders in the school were impacted as well by the approach of a transformational leader within a mandatory PBIS initiative.

Practical Significance

Practically, this study will develop an understanding of building leaders' perspectives in a PBIS setting and will provide insight into the administrator's role during all stages of the PBIS implementation process. Research has focused on different elements of PBIS, implementation, the impact of administrator effectiveness and staff buy-in (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey et al., 2014; Filter et al., 2016; McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014; McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013). But the practical impact of this study was to allow building leaders and researchers alike to analyze the voice of the participants in this detailed study of a transcendental phenomenon.

PBIS implementation is “grounded in the behavioral and prevention sciences and emphasizes within a multi-tiered support system framework (a) measurable outcomes, (b) evidence-based practices, (c) implementation systems, and (d) data for decision making” (PBIS, 2018, p. 1). The implementation quality of PBIS initiatives “matters because programs delivered with high quality are more likely to produce the desired effects” (Molloy et al., 2013, p. 593). I asked questions to participants who were working to implement and sustain PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. The answers to these questions will have a practical impact that could lead to improved practice and different mindsets for administrators and building leaders in schools around the country. The examination of the growth mindset and transformational leadership theory could alter the way administrators approach PBIS initiatives.

Research Questions

The purpose of my research was to investigate the impact a growth mindset and transformational leadership style has on building leaders who experienced leading a PBIS initiative at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. The description of administrator experiences will fill a gap in the literature which existed pertaining to elementary school leadership experiences in PBIS initiatives. These experiences detailed the journey from initial leadership team building to preparations for implementation and continued through the experiences of implementation and beyond.

The central research question and sub questions below guided this transcendental phenomenological study:

Central Question

What are the building leaders’ experiences leading PBIS initiatives in an upstate South Carolina elementary school?

The importance of this study was to provide researchers, building leaders, and administrators with the type of information that can only be collected from this transcendental phenomenological study. A gap in the literature existed that was lacking in prior research (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey et al., 2014; Filter et al., 2016; McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013) on PBIS when it pertained to phenomenological studies that gave a voice to the administrators who described their experiences through implementing PBIS initiatives and beyond. This central research question allowed me to examine the central idea of the topic which was centered around the experiences of building leaders who are led PBIS initiatives in their schools.

Sub Questions

1. How do building leaders describe their own growth mindset from the PBIS experience?

The non-existence of Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory in previous research on PBIS implementation and initiatives made this sub question important for the study. Looking through the lens of the growth mindset, I used this sub question to guide the questions that were used during interviews with the building leaders in the study to examine the phenomenon they experienced in their year-plus of the PBIS initiative (Dweck, 2006).

2. How do building leaders describe their own transformational leadership skills from the PBIS experience?

The experience of leading a PBIS initiative has been impacted by the leadership skills and style of the building's leader. When developed properly, transformational leadership can enhance the motivation, morale, and performance of followers (Langston University, 2017). The theory is fitting for this study because leadership practices influence the success of the program.

Not all administrators are transformational leaders and this sub question allowed the participants to examine their experience through the eyes of transformational leadership.

3. How do leadership behaviors impact the implementation and sustainability of PBIS programs?

The overall experience of leading PBIS initiative in a school is different from the specific experiences for an administrator during the implementation process for the program in a school. Research shows the implementation portion of leading a PBIS initiative is as important as any other factor in the program (Flannery et al., 2013). The framework for PBIS implementation “requires schools to focus on optimizing several foundational systems and implement schoolwide practices designed to prevent and effectively respond to student misbehavior” (Flannery et al., 2013, p. 268). This sub question allowed me to examine the experiences from building leaders implemented PBIS in their schools and experienced the phenomenon through the lens of transformational leadership (Bass, 1996).

Definitions

1. *PBIS* – Is “a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students” (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012, p. 2).
2. *Evidence-based Interventions* – Are decisions made to assist students struggling academically or behaviorally and are backed by data that resulted from previous research studies (PBIS, 2018).
3. *Ingredients* – Are the types of implementation ideas used to assist schools with buy-in for PBIS initiatives (PBIS, 2018).

4. *Buy-in* – Is evident when faculty and staff in a school have a firm belief in the initiative being presented to them by administration or building leaders (Molloy et al., 2013).
5. *Stakeholders* – Is any person within a school or the school community who is impacted or effected in any way by the decisions made at the school (McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014).
6. *Implementers* – Are administrators or building leaders who are leading the implementation of educational initiatives in a school (Cressey et al., 2014).
7. *Growth Mindset Theory* – Is “based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your effort, your strategies, and help from others” (Dweck, 2006, p. 6).
8. *Transformational Leadership Theory* – Centers around the idea that when used properly it “enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers” (Langston University, 2017, p. 1).
9. *Transcendental Phenomenology* – Is the approach that “engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).
10. *Qualitative Research* – Is a “legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 6).

Summary

Chapter One of this dissertation provided a framework for the research that was used in this study. This chapter included a background detailing a summary of relevant literature on PBIS implementation and the impact this had on administrators with a focus on the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for the problem in this study. A section for situation to self is presented in this chapter along with the problem statement, which was the reason for interest in

the study, and a purpose statement that provided the focus and intention of the study. The significance of the study was analyzed in the chapter followed by the research questions for the study, and definitions for the terms used and an overall summary of the information are included in the initial chapter. The chapter has a direct focus on the problem in the study, which was the lack of empirical evidence showing building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina, and the purpose of the study, which was to describe the experiences of building leaders with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of my research was to investigate the impact a growth mindset and transformational leadership style has on building leaders who experienced leading a PBIS initiative at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. This study provided qualitative data and evidence on building leaders' experiences throughout the process of implementation and beyond with PBIS initiatives to help fill the gaps in the current literature pertaining to PBIS and building leaders. PBIS has become a popular program in recent years to address the need for social and emotional learning as it pertains to student behavior and school climate. PBIS initiatives are evidence-based and impact all stakeholders within a school community. A large body of research demonstrates PBIS has a positive effect on behavioral and academic outcomes (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey et al., 2014; Filter et al., 2016; McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013).

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the study, which revolved around the growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) and the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996). The theoretical framework section provides examples of how the two theories connected the study. This chapter also includes a review of the current relevant literature that pertained to building leaders and their participation with PBIS initiatives and addressed the gap in literature on building leaders' experiences with PBIS initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

The mandatory implementation of PBIS in upstate South Carolina elementary schools allowed building leaders to analyze their mindset. The growth mindset theory focuses on two mindsets possessed by adults: fixed mindset and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Dweck

originated the growth mindset theory in 2006 focusing on one's mindset. A growth mindset is one that centers on the ideas of someone being innovative, creative, willing to experiment and grow from failures (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014).

In schools with a goal toward PBIS implementation, the growth mindset theory recommends that building leaders analyze their own mindset (fixed or growth) along with the mindset of their staff. The fixed mindset is described as "believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the *fixed mindset*—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over" (Dweck, 2006, p. 6). Dweck's growth mindset theory led to the advancement of literature on the topic of the mindset for elementary school building leaders. The theoretical framework in this research study uses the mindset of the leader to examine the phenomenon of implementing a mandatory PBIS initiative.

The transformational leadership theory developed by Bass (1996) also contributed to the theoretical framework of this study. Bass's theory centers on the concept that transformational leaders empower employees and allow them to grow by addressing their needs and aligning those with the goals of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The transformational theory shows that leaders must provide an employee with a heightened sense of self-worth to allow them to become truly committed to the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This theory led to the advancement of literature on the topic of transformational leadership since its development in 1996.

The transformational leadership theory involves the use of a leadership approach that eventually brings about change in the social systems of an organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This definition was pertinent to this research study and provided the theory as a backbone for the theoretical framework of the study because of the transformational impact administrators may

have had implementing PBIS initiatives. The topic of building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools may potentially advance or extend the use of the growth mindset theory and the transformational leadership theories. The experiences of the building leaders being studied in this research will provide examples for future researchers that could impact and extend the use of the theory in education.

Growth Mindset Theory

Dweck (2006) wrote that people who believe their own qualities as a professional are cemented into place and therefore possess a fixed mindset. She expressed that most people are taught this trait from an early age and continue to remain in a fixed mindset until they are exposed to the benefits of a growth mindset. A growth mindset revolves around the idea that, regardless of the hand you are dealt in life, you can learn and grow from your experiences and other people (Dweck, 2006). People with a growth mindset believe that a person's ability is not immediately or directly known and their actions, effort, and attitude in life can have an impact on their outcomes (Dweck, 2006). Leaders can be change agents leading to a change in the culture of a school with a willingness to develop a growth mindset (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016a).

Leaders must be able to analyze their own mindset to best determine how to lead a mandatory PBIS initiative. When the leader embraces the growth mindset, he or she will focus on developing relationships with their staff members to lay the foundation for being able to provide honest feedback in planning and executing an initiative (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2016). The leader must reflect on their own beliefs and thoughts and interact in an honest dialogue with their staff about what led to their decisions or actions (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2016). The growth mindset is also effective for leaders who promote persistence in their schools (Chao, Visaria, Mukhopadhyay, & Dehejia, 2017). Leaders must understand that they must model the

behaviors of persistence for their staff to follow suit and provide their staff with ongoing professional development opportunities to remain actively engaged in the PBIS initiative (Farrell, Collier-Meek, & Pons, 2013).

Another example of the growth mindset having an impact on building leaders is understanding what it takes to be a successful principal. The success or failure of a school has a direct correlation with the skill, ability, and effectiveness of the building principal (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014). The character of a building leader can have the greatest impact on the school having success (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014). Authoritative leaders who are effective in executing tasks have shown to be the most successful (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014). Within the self-analysis of a building leader, he or she must determine what an authoritative leader looks like and if they possess a growth mindset are they willing to grow from the experiences of being the authoritative leader of a school throughout an initiative like the PBIS mandate in this study.

Dweck (2006) wrote that leaders who create a culture in their organization centered around the growth mindset believe in human development. She also wrote the leaders do not constantly feel the need to prove they are better than others (Dweck, 2006). These leaders will not attempt to take credit for the work others have contributed to and do not cut down other people to make themselves look better or feel more important (Dweck, 2006). What makes a leader different through the growth mindset is how he or she is constantly striving to improve (Dweck, 2006). These types of leaders are honest with themselves and try to have people around them who are honest and will address the areas in which improvements are needed (Dweck, 2006).

Leaders must be aware of their own propensity to a fixed mindset. Dweck (2006) wrote about the traits of leaders with a fixed mindset saying these types of people think some people

are superior while others are inferior. Because of these traits, the building leaders with a fixed mindset will spend much of their time trying to repeatedly reaffirm their superiority to others (Dweck, 2006). Many leaders with a fixed mindset want to be the only person in charge and do not prefer having shared leadership roles within their workplace. Dweck (2006) described this as being the only big fish in the company or school, which allows the leader to look like they are above others in the building to separate themselves from the rest of the group.

Building leaders must understand the mindset of their staff throughout the PBIS initiative as well. Although research-based practices are shown to be most effective in implementing initiatives in schools, the principal's ability to gain support from the school community and stakeholders is vital to the success of the initiative (McIntosh et al., 2016). When attempting to gain and sustain the support of building teachers and staff, the leader must understand fixed mindsets will exist within their school. Dweck (2006) wrote that people with a fixed mindset believe there is no growing from where they currently stand, and they cannot grow further or take on more (Burton, 2014). Although successes from PBIS schools around the country are evidenced by data this may not be enough for some staff members with a fixed mindset. Building leaders must be ready to encourage their staff to fight through the urge of the fixed mindset to make excuses, act defeated, or just give up when the PBIS initiative faces challenges (Burton, 2014).

Throughout PBIS initiatives building leaders should provide their staff with the opportunity to engage in professional development opportunities that can develop their own growth mindset. Having a focus on the mindset of a building's staff can have a direct impact on the overall success of a PBIS initiative in an elementary school (Gutshall, 2013). The growth mindset should be discussed with all school stakeholders if a building leader wishes to move

people away from a fixed mindset (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). A person's perception of their own intelligence level or ability to succeed should not be measured by one test, examination or evaluation (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

Character cannot be measured from test scores or an evaluation of a teacher by an administrator. Dweck (2006) wrote that character is something that can allow you to reach the top and stay at the top. The example Dweck used in the text describes the parallels between sports and other traditional business organizations. She wrote that those who have true character must work even harder because it takes even more energy and a growth mindset to continue to strive for greatness once you have achieved a high level of success (Dweck, 2006). While character cannot be addressed through an evaluative score, Dweck (2006) wrote that those with a growth mindset are people who showed the most character and heart. She wrote that these people not only had talent but more importantly they had the mindset of a champion (Dweck, 2006).

Staff members or teachers with a fixed mindset can be challenged by a building leader with a growth mindset to analyze their thought process and start to change how they think about handling a challenge like a mandated initiative (Gutshall, 2013). Faculty members with a fixed mindset do not possess the belief that they can grow or overcome adversity. One of the characteristics of teachers or staff members with a growth mindset is grit. The promotion of grit is something that should exist in buildings where leaders want to spread the growth mindset. By promoting grit, leaders will not accept the idea of "we can't" as an answer from any of their stakeholders (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). The success of a district-level mandate like the PBIS initiative that was examined in this study is one that takes a growth mindset and grit to succeed (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

A building leader must provide structure to a school beginning a PBIS initiative as part of the growth mindset. The structure set forth by a building leader has a direct impact on the belief of the teachers to be able to successfully implement initiatives like PBIS (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b). When analyzing the growth mindset of a school, the organizational structure of the building has an influence on the teachers' belief system in how the staff can collectively help the students to learn and grow (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b). Previous research outlines the sub-factors for a growth mindset culture. The core of a school growth mindset is made up of three different sub-factors. These include open communication and support, collaborative planning, and shared leadership (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b, p. 204). Teachers will be more willing to believe in the possible success of a mandated initiative with the possession of a growth mindset that could be developed from the leadership example of the building leader (Hanson, Bangert, & Ruff, 2016b).

Dweck (2006) wrote that the growth mindset is one that is based upon one's belief in change. She described this change as something that does not erase the experiences teachers and building leaders have been exposed to over the years but a set of new beliefs that take their place beside the old beliefs for the individual (Dweck, 2006). Dweck (2006) also wrote that people are constantly keeping a running account of the things that happen to them and around them. Where problems occur is when individuals interpret that account in an inappropriate or negative way (Dweck, 2006). The mindset one possesses is what frames what type of account an individual has in their head. A person with a fixed mindset will frame an account of events with a negative focus negatively judging themselves or others (Dweck, 2006). While a person with a growth mindset is sensitive to both positive and negative ideas of the account in their mind (Dweck, 2006).

Transformational Leadership Theory

The transformational leadership theory centers on the idea that transformational leaders change the commitment, involvement, loyalty and overall satisfaction of their employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass wrote that the biggest impact a transformational leader can have is on the attitudes of their followers or employees and their commitment to the organization or the leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Job satisfaction, intentions to leave the job, and the way people behave within the organization are all impacted by the commitment he or she has toward the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders possess the ability to enhance the commitment by their employees and the organization as a whole (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Bass (1996) wrote that the transformational leader is charismatic, conveys his or her beliefs, motivates and inspires his or her staff, and raises the level of creativity and the ability to solve problems in their building. Because of the nature of a mandatory initiative, like PBIS implementation at the elementary school level, leaders are almost forced to possess traits of a transformational leader. He or she must motivate or inspire their staff to rally around and support this mandatory PBIS initiative or risk wasting the time and energy of the school's stakeholders.

The transformational leadership theory centers on the concept that employees are motivated by a culture which is goal oriented and encourages a positive method of organizational development (Oberfield, 2014). Transformational leaders can become role models for their followers who are inspired by them. They also challenge their followers to take more ownership for their own work and have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their employees to provide them with opportunities to perform better (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Hauserman and Stick (2013) described the ideas of Bass writing that, "Transformational leaders

sought new ways of doing things and were less likely to support the status quo. They attempted to create and shape an environment and encouraged followers to be a part of the process” (p. 188).

Research has shown that the leadership style of a building leader impacts the efficacy, ability to engage students, and the academic emphasis provided by teachers to their students (Allen et al., 2015). Transformational leadership is one of the most influential leadership models in education because of the impact a transformational leader can have on school climate (Berkovich, 2016). These types of building leaders inspire teachers and staff to work toward a shared vision and goal, to be problem solvers, and to be able to handle the challenges given by their administration because of the support through coaching and mentoring that are provided from the leader (Berkovich, 2016).

Although a leader’s style of leadership alone cannot turn around student academic performance alone, it can have a direct impact on the relationship with his or her staff, job satisfaction, and the overall climate of the school (Allen et al., 2015). Transformational leaders are less likely to accept the status quo in education (Hauserman & Stick, 2013), which is important because of change being the only guarantee in the field. Administrators who take on the role of a transformational leader will create an environment that will encourage their staff and stakeholders to be a part of the process instead of just living in it or through it (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Leaders in organizations can affect the levels of commitment by fostering relationships that lead to a greater commitment to the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). An effective transformational leader can effectively use that commitment from the employee and show how it aligns with the goals and values of the organization provided by leadership (Bass & Riggio,

2006). Bass (2006) wrote that leaders face an even greater challenge in the present professional landscape where commitment is not easily attained. Professionals today put the enhancement of their own careers above the overall success of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Because of this, one of the most important things transformational leaders must do is enhance and maintain their relationships with employees to obtain a deeper commitment to the goals of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Administrators and building leaders with the mindset of a transformational leader are better equipped to handle the changes that are constant in education (Berkovich, 2016). Leaders can also impact the climate of their school through their chosen leadership style in an initiative like mandatory PBIS implementation. When a leader encourages their staff to participate and have an active role in the development of a school-wide initiative, trust can be built by the leaders which could lead to a more positive school culture (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Effective leaders guide their staff in the direction that best suits their school building. But effective leaders must gain the trust of their staff before they become truly effective.

Transformational leaders build trust through both instructional and collegial leadership (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014) but also through community building in and out of the school and showing the example of professionalism as the leader of the school. Leaders must recognize through research and leadership styles like transformational leadership that teachers and staff members are more likely to respond in a positive manner to leaders who are more open, transparent, and democratic (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). The way a principal interacts with people and promotes the school through events in the community and organizations like the Parent-Teacher Organization has an impact on the motivation of staff members, which has an impact on school culture (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014). A transformational leader

understands the way he or she presents himself or herself has a direct impact on how teachers and staff feel they should present themselves.

Effective transformational leaders can lead their employees or followers to engage in the challenges set forth by the leader to meet a goal or vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The employees or followers also feel a sense of accomplishment by being associated with a successful transformational leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This feeling is possible because effective transformational leaders enhance the self-worth of the people who are working with them or for them (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Increases in self-worth and self-efficacy have been closely correlated with increases in overall performance by companies and organizations around the world (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders must try to increase the self-efficacy of their employees but another challenge they face is to make their schools more efficient. Leaders must ensure their teachers and staff can perform their job but the staff also must be willing participants (Corcaci, 2016). Research shows teachers in schools who have implemented PBIS possess more knowledge in teaching, reviewing, and reinforcing expectations for students than those who are not in a school that has implemented PBIS (Ficarra & Quinn, 2014). Motivation is important for transformational leaders to provide for their staff but there is also a limit to the results that come from that alone. If a staff lacks the skill or ability to perform their tasks, the leader's ability to motivate will not be enough to make the PBIS initiative successful (Corcaci, 2016).

Bass wrote about different leadership styles and determined that transformational leadership is most effective (Bass & Riggio, 2006). One of the ways transformational leaders can make an initial difference with their staff is to meet their lower-level needs that include fairness and stability (Oberfield, 2014). But the biggest way leaders can gain the trust of their

staff is to be transparent with the availability and use of information (Oberfield, 2014). Every school building should have teacher leaders that will serve as leaders who will directly assist the transformational leader. Those teacher leaders will become the key players who serve as the lead collaborators between the building leader and teaching staff (Shulman & Sullivan, 2015).

Organizational culture is another area where effective transformational leaders are focused (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The makeup of an organization's culture is passed on from generation to generation of workers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The culture can include values and assumptions by the employees of what is right and wrong within the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass wrote that organizational culture is the "glue that holds the organization together as a source of identity and distinctive competence" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 99).

Leaders in organizations come and go. While each leader has an impact on the organizational culture of the company or school, the organizational culture is maintained by its traditions (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) showed the leadership style of a building leader will impact PBIS initiatives. This makes the role of the transformational leader important within a PBIS initiative because of the impact initiatives have on organizational culture. Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) interviewed building leaders who have experienced the implementation of school-wide PBIS found that staff support was the most critical factor throughout the initiative. Staff members who were interviewed in previous studies expressed their concern about philosophical differences between the staff and building leaders as some of the biggest roadblocks or barriers during the implementation stage of the PBIS initiative (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Transformational leaders have the main role in the development of a positive school culture with the staff and students. Leaders must share their experiences with the staff and students as much

as possible to ensure the school stakeholders understand the leader recognizes the contributions of the most important people in the school (Hartman, Johnston, & Hill, 2017).

Related Literature

The existing knowledge for building leaders implementing PBIS initiatives includes the history of PBIS, initiatives, implementation of the program, sustainability of the program, experiences of building leaders with PBIS, and the relationships between teachers and administrators through the process of implementation and sustainment of a PBIS initiative in an elementary school. A synthesis of the knowledge of building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives is presented in this section from literature created by researchers and scholars in the education field.

History and Foundation of PBIS

PBIS is a preventative, three-tiered continuum that focuses on teaching appropriate and expected behaviors to all students and staff within a school (Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2015). The system of supports also is evidence-based and data-driven to provide educational leaders with a framework to create a positive school climate and teacher measurable behavior outcomes (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). PBIS attempts to reinforce the desired behaviors within a school with a systems-based approach (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). The program has shown a reduction in problem behaviors and an increase in academic performance (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013).

PBIS started in the late 1990s from an idea and concept to have behavior management practices become non-aversive (Dunlap, Kincaid, Horner, Knostrer, & Bradshaw, 2014). PBIS is defined as, "a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for

all students” (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012, p. 2). The original formation of PBIS in its current state was founded in 1997 (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). But even before the late 1990s, researchers and educators alike were looking for ways to address behavioral disorders by examining possible behavior interventions (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

The idea of positive behavior supports became more popular in the 1990s as managers and building leaders wanted to move away from behavior management and toward behavior supports (Dunlap et al., 2014). True action was taken toward the development of the PBIS program as it is known today with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1997, which was legislated to provide schools with assistance on evidence-based practices that would help provide supports for students with behavioral disorders (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Around 20,000 schools nationwide have implemented PBIS to support student behaviors and with a goal to change the culture in a positive manner in elementary, middle, and high schools (Bradshaw, Waasdorp & Leaf, 2014; Mathews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2014). PBIS has a lengthy and rich history of promoting positive student behaviors and leading to an increase in the academic performance of students (Cramer & Bennett, 2015).

PBIS uses a multi-tiered research-based approach that includes a primary, secondary, and tertiary tier (Brandt, Chitiyo, & May, 2014). The primary tier is critical because this is the tier in which the PBIS school philosophy is set by the building leader and provides all stakeholders, teachers, and students, with a set of expectations that will be the backbone of the program. The primary tier is the level where the behavioral consequences and rewards are taught, implemented, and sustained, while also teaching staff members what data will be tracked and where it will be available (Brandt et al., 2014).

The secondary tier of PBIS is where interventions are provided for students who are not or have not responded to the supports put in place on the primary tier. Building leaders need to ensure their students and staff understand that the secondary tier is also where PBIS becomes effective as a support for both behavior and academics (Brandt et al., 2014; Dunlap et al., 2014). Students who are not meeting the expectations in the first tier will receive more social, emotional, and behavioral supports through supplemental interventions that could take place both in and out of the classroom (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Students who do not respond to the supports setup on the primary tier and secondary tier will become targeted on the tertiary tier (third tier). When a student reaches the tertiary level, he or she is provided with a specific and individualized plan to specifically analyze what supports will best benefit the student and the school moving forward (Brandt et al., 2014; Dunlap et al., 2014). Students at this third tier or intensive level will receive individualized supports that could include a behavior intervention plan or a functional behavior assessment (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

PBIS Impact on School Climate

School climate is impacted daily by the behaviors of students and teachers (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). Schools who have underperformed and have had high numbers of behavioral and discipline issues have also been schools where the overall school culture and climate has not been positive (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). The impact of PBIS on school culture has been shown from lowered numbers of office discipline referrals, lowered levels of disruptions in class and the hallways, and an increase in student attendance in schools (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). Students also showed fewer instances of emotional disruptions, perceived incidents of bullying and less overall peer rejection (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). PBIS has had an impact on teacher

performance as well (Reinke et al., 2013). Schools who have implemented PBIS show an increase in teacher self-efficacy which is directly related to teacher and student performance (Reinke et al., 2013).

While evidence-based practices and a multi-tiered approach are part of the foundation of any PBIS initiative, one of the biggest impacts from the program is the impact it has on a school's climate. School climate has been in the forefront of educational reform for the past 30 years and has been referred to as the "quality and character of school life" (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014, p. 301). The main idea for reform in school climate is to promote more civil, safe and supportive schools (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). The policies that have traditionally been used in schools prior to the year 2000 do not provide any sort of positive culture or climate. Thapa et al. (2013) suggested that five dimensions of school culture exist in each school that includes safety, teaching and learning, relationships, institutional environment, and the school improvement process.

The prior focus has simply been on the negative behavior and in most cases the negative consequence that will be given to the student following the behavior (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). Using positive supports to combat negative attitudes and behaviors will allow building leaders the opportunity to change the culture for all students and staff (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). PBIS is designed to keep students in class more, further engage them in instruction, and hopefully increase the academic success of the students through the increase of learning in the classroom as opposed to being out of school for disciplinary reasons (Gage, Sugai, Lewis, & Brzozowy, 2015; Reno et al., 2017)

Gage et al. (2015) showed the implementation of a school-wide PBIS program correlates with an increase in positive school climate. The problem behaviors in schools have been reduced

by the implementation of PBIS as well as an increase in teacher self-efficacy (Gage et al., 2015). The climate is impacted because building leaders are no longer sitting back and reacting to negative behaviors. The administrators are promoting positive behaviors and getting out in front of the negative behaviors that will never totally go away. While promoting positive behaviors is a core element of PBIS, administrators must also be consistent with the enforcement of disciplinary actions. Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) showed that teachers and staff members who see this type of initiative in a negative light reported that administrators did not hold students and staff accountable for not meeting the expectations set forth in the PBIS initiative.

The push for school climate reform came from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). They recommended in 2009 that school climate reform should include a data-driven approach which focuses on dropout prevention, connectedness in school for students, and the development of healthy relationships (Thapa et al., 2013). School climate also impacts student learning, academic achievement, graduation rates, and teacher retention in schools (Thapa et al., 2013). Student engagement also impacts school climate and has been important in changing cultures positively in schools. Building leaders need to place their focus on the fact that students who are engaged in class, stay in class, and remain working are less likely to exhibit negative behaviors (Flannery, Fenning, McGrath, & McIntosh, 2014).

Bullying is another behavior that has an impact on a school's climate. Schools that have implemented school-wide PBIS have provided data that shows an increase in feelings of safety from both students and staff, fewer behaviors considered problem, and less behaviors determined to be bullying or student victimization (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). An improved school culture for students and staff can also impact the stakeholders in a school. This impact could lead to

changes in the way the people in a community feel about a school. School-wide PBIS implementation led by a building leader can lead a more comprehensive approach toward anti-social behaviors from students and staff, along with more attention on school violence and equality (Gage et al., 2015).

PBIS Implementation

Implementing PBIS requires building leaders to provide a collaborative process that includes a thoughtful and steady-eye toward long-term goals and sustainability (Feuerborn, Wallace, & Tyre, 2013). Implementing school-wide PBIS with fidelity (accurately and fluently) means expectations are clearly defined, taught and reinforced through school-wide expectations (Freeman et al., 2015). Data-based decisions are also used to monitor the implementation of interventions and student response while differentiated levels of support are used in response to student need (Freeman et al., 2015). Systems are also established to sustain the implementation of PBIS and to meet the overall goal of improving student behavior and academic outcomes in the classroom (Freeman et al., 2015). Having a successful PBIS implementation process requires the building leaders, faculty and staff to establish concrete behavioral expectations and consequences (Evanovich & Scott, 2016).

Researchers (Fallon, McCarthy & Sanetti, 2014) wrote that, during the implementation of PBIS, it is important that practices are implemented with fidelity and those that are not should receive immediate attention. Several key practices are included during the implementation of PBIS. These include a set of three to five social-behavioral expectations that apply to all students and settings within a school (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). A system of consistent classroom and office-managed consequences are developed as well (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). These consequences are focused on keeping the students in the classroom and removing the

student from class only takes place when there is no other alternative option is appropriate (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). Students who are not meeting the explicit expectations presented during the PBIS implementation within the school will receive social, emotional, and behavioral support in the form of supplemental interventions that could include group-based interventions (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Leading a mandatory PBIS initiative is a challenge alone. The planning leading up to PBIS implementation can be exhaustive and involves many different people in and out of a leader's school. But the implementation of school-wide PBIS can lead to the success of the program or doom it to failure before it ever begins because implementation is not straightforward or complete (Aydin, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014). The building leader needs to plan to put people in his or her building in positions to assist with the plan for implementation. One of the bigger challenges in the implementation phase will be the interaction with and reaction of the adults in the building (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). The relationships developed by the building leader with their staff can determine how well those interactions go when he or she must address the reaction of those staff members to the news of a mandated initiative (Evanovich & Scott, 2016).

Building leaders and their PBIS implementation team must prepare for resistance from teachers and staff regarding the mandatory initiative. It is the responsibility of the building leader to gain teacher and staff support for the initiative and the success of the PBIS program rests on the ability to sell the staff (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). The sources of the opposition or negative kick-back from staff members in those schools were tied to the perception of poor leadership from teachers and staff members while others reported feelings of hopelessness

toward change, new ideas, and initiatives (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). In addition, teachers and staff must be aware of their own biases toward initiatives like PBIS (Cramer & Bennett, 2015).

Building leaders must educate their staff both in meetings with administrators but also by providing professional development opportunities for them to learn about PBIS and the successes the program has shown across the country in the past two decades (Aydin et al., 2014).

Researchers (Evanovich & Scott, 2016) defined the logic of PBIS through four simple steps.

First is the identification of predictable failures by the leadership team (Evanovich & Scott,

2016). Next is the development of effective preventative strategies (Evanovich & Scott, 2016).

The third step is to provide consistent application of the details within PBIS (Evanovich & Scott,

2016). And, the fourth and final step is to have an evaluation of outcomes (Evanovich & Scott,

2016). With these four logical steps taught to the teachers and staff, the likelihood of effective implementation is more likely (Evanovich & Scott, 2016).

Research shows administrators have arguably the biggest impact on the implementation and overall success of PBIS in their schools (McIntosh et al., 2016). Building leaders “play pivotal roles in adopting, implementing, and sustaining practices in schools” (McIntosh et al., 2016, p. 107). The amount of support a building leader provides the PBIS program can make the difference in a successful implementation and sustained process or abandonment of the program by a school (McIntosh et al., 2016). Building leaders who have not provided positive reviews of their experiences with implementing PBIS point directly to staff support as the biggest barrier to the lack of success with the program (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). Leaders need to remain open with information about PBIS regardless of the results in the program’s infancy. Staff members and stakeholders will only buy-in and help the implementation succeed if they trust the building leader in the process (Aydin et al., 2014).

A challenge for building leaders in planning for PBIS implementation and creating staff buy-in is the inevitable kick-back from some staff members who may not believe in rewarding students for something that traditionally has been an expectation (Feuerborn et al., 2013). Teachers in previous research studies have expressed the idea that preferred punitive consequences for students as opposed to proactive or instructional ones (Feuerborn et al., 2013). The challenge for building leaders when facing this type of philosophical difference in their school is to establish that the belief system in PBIS is part of the culture in their school and is not optional.

Before leaders can expect buy-in and a collective belief in a PBIS initiative, they must establish the understanding of belief and logic in the process of the program (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Once the expectations are agreed upon with school stakeholders, building leaders must ensure these are taught to all students as well as posting these expectations throughout the halls of the school (Evanovich & Scott, 2016).

The recent research on PBIS implementation shows one member of the implementation team should be a coach whose purpose in the building is to supplement the building leader in providing training to the teachers and staff from the beginning of the program through the implementation process and beyond (Cavanaugh & Swan, 2015). The leadership team would oversee the foundational activities of PBIS while guiding and monitoring implementation fidelity (Freeman et al., 2015). A building level leadership team should be one that is representative of the larger staff and should use data to drive their decision-making processes to implement future decisions (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Implementation research also shows, with the use of a PBIS coaching model (Rieffannacht, 2016), improved results in schools around the country with implementation and

sustainability of the program (Cavanaugh & Swan, 2015). While coaches may not be available for all building leaders around the country because of funding or other factors, researchers suggest the coaching model to be considered by administrators to help support implementation and sustainability (Cavanaugh & Swan, 2015). Coaches are able to get a whole-school picture of what is working throughout the implementation of PBIS (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). Coaches in many schools implementing PBIS reported staff concerns about their leadership, staff morale, the lack of accountability throughout implementation, and the negative school climate that arose during implementation (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Sustainability of PBIS

McIntosh, Predy, et al. (2014) showed that school team functioning and administrator support were the most important features for the sustainability of a PBIS initiative. More research about the impact of PBIS initiatives shows another important factor for building leaders is the ability to provide clear and concise directions to the staff throughout the entire PBIS process, which has an impact on the sustainability and success of PBIS (Flannery et al., 2013). A building leader's effectiveness can be altered by the ways he or she defines the expectations given to the staff. Research shows faculty and staff feel that expectations must be clearly defined so each teacher or staff member would know what is expected in all settings throughout the PBIS initiative (Flannery et al., 2013).

Building leaders must change the culture in a positive manner to sustain the PBIS program in their school (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). The way teachers thought under the old-school disciplinary style must fade away with a change toward an open mindset where a focus is placed on providing supports to students who are not meeting school expectations. Without this change in mindset among the teachers, the building leader will struggle to sustain the PBIS

program. Achieving staff support for a mandated program like PBIS is difficult because change on a systemic level can only occur when the majority of a school staff changes their practices (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). Research shows that 80% of a staff must buy-in to the PBIS initiative order for it to succeed in their school (Filter et al., 2016). Staff buy-in refers to the commitment of teachers and support staff to the principles within the philosophy of the intervention (Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015).

For PBIS to succeed and sustain in a school, Feuerborn et al. (2013) suggested that building leaders have a four-step strategy in place for understanding and supporting staff needs. The first step is to develop a clear understanding of staff perceptions (Feuerborn et al., 2013). This will allow building leaders to assess what possible kick-back could from teachers and staff and what attitudes (positive and negative) to expect toward PBIS. The next step is to secure resources for PBIS (Feuerborn et al., 2013). This step is vital because the implementation of PBIS will not succeed without the necessary resources secured and in place prior to implementation.

The third step is to reveal to the staff a need for change and the need for PBIS (Feuerborn et al., 2013). Building leaders become salesmen and saleswomen in this role, but a sales pitch could be needed to get the staff on board. The fourth and final step building leaders need in place for understanding and supporting staff needs is to build knowledge and skills (Feuerborn et al., 2013). Some teachers could be willing participants in the PBIS process but may not understand how their current role fits into the implementation or sustainment of the program. It is the role of the PBIS leadership team, including the building administrators, to ensure everyone understands how their role coincides with PBIS and how successful everyone can be from it (Feuerborn et al., 2013).

Because the implementation of school-wide PBIS is so complex, it makes the sustainability of the program even more difficult (Filter et al., 2016). This requires building leaders to examine research on the sustainability of PBIS programs in schools. The research shows that administrators must let the data gathered from the interventions and supports in the building guide their decision making (Mercer, McIntosh, Strickland-Cohen, & Horner, 2014). Leaders must also have their PBIS teams in place to support the mission and vision of the building leader and provide constant information and feedback to the stakeholders, teachers, staff and students to ensure the belief in the program is sustained (Mercer et al., 2014).

The implementation process in a school has a constant impact on the sustainability of PBIS but research shows that sustainability is in fact nothing more than a constant form of ongoing implementation with fidelity (Mathews et al., 2014). Sustainability of PBIS is impacted by staff support, the integration of PBIS into typical practice, and parent involvement as well (McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014). Building leaders must find effective and efficient ways to constantly review the procedures and information that was presented to their teachers, staff and students during the implementation process. But it must be done in ways that do not turn off or offend the teaching staff and students (Mathews et al., 2014). Building leaders and their PBIS teams must plan during the initial stages of the initiative to have reviews of implementation practices built into their multi-year PBIS plan (Mathews et al., 2014).

Experiences of Building Leaders with PBIS

The experiences of building leaders who have already led a school through a PBIS initiative should have an impact on each administrator who would also encounter the same challenge and experience. These leaders with experience in PBIS initiatives have targeted predicting behaviors as one of the most important aspects of implementation and sustainability

(Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Horner, Sugai, Fixsen, Horner, and Fixsen (2017) wrote the practice of implementing and sustaining PBIS requires the expectations be described with precision and shown to have a significant outcome socially for students and teachers alike. Teachers and staff members want to know exact how to make something work and they want evidence that it will work if executed properly (Horner et al., 2017).

Leaders should also be versed in the data and positive results from those who have experienced successes in changing the mindset of their teachers and staff. Teachers who work in schools with PBIS implemented have reported to be better equipped to handle progress monitoring and academic interventions in their classrooms because of the training they received as part of the PBIS initiative (Ficarra & Quinn, 2014). Administrators who have experienced the implementation of a PBIS initiative reported that they were most successful by participating with their teachers and staff, and being open and honest (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Cressey et al. (2014) showed the implementation of PBIS by building leaders and their teams have improved the overall health of schools.

The experiences of building leaders who were leaders in the implementation and sustainment of a PBIS initiative also show data systems allow all stakeholders to constantly evaluate the overall performance and effectiveness of school-wide PBIS in a building or district (Horner et al., 2017). This data shows the fidelity with which PBIS was implemented in each school and provides stakeholders with an evaluation about different patterns of school behavior, the responses to those behaviors by teachers and administrators, and the rewards or consequences given for those behaviors (Horner et al., 2017).

When building leaders show their teachers and staff they are emotionally and professionally invested in the success of a mandate like PBIS, they are more likely to accept and

become invested as well (Mathews et al., 2014). The building leader should place much energy and effort into the relationship with his or her teaching and support staff. This support internally can make or break the success of the PBIS initiative (Thapa et al., 2013). Another area where building leaders who have experienced leading a PBIS initiative have expressed importance was through recognizing teachers and staff and rewarding them along with the children throughout the process (Farrell et al., 2013).

Staff buy-in and commitment to the PBIS initiative has been targeted in prior studies as two of the most important aspects which predict the success and sustainability of the program (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). Building leaders have reported that true organizational change, which is the goal of a PBIS implementation, can occur with dedicated leadership and a few other factors (Cressey et al., 2014). Those factors include a collaborative effort across disciplines, 3-5 years of detail data-driven systematic implementation, and input from all stakeholders across the community (Cressey et al., 2014).

Relationships Between Teachers and Administrators in PBIS Initiative

Administrators and building leaders are on the frontline when making decisions to impact the outcomes of PBIS initiatives. Building leaders must take the framework from the leaders in the United States on PBIS (PBIS, 2018) and make real-world decisions to ensure the success of these initiatives in their schools, including the allocation of school-level funds. Leaders must also include all staff members throughout the PBIS initiative. While using leadership teams for the different elements of the implementation and sustainment of PBIS is important for an efficient program in schools, all stakeholder voices must possess true value in schools for the implementation to become a success (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Districts around the country are providing funds to their school for PBIS but in most cases the school-based building leaders are responsible for deciding where those funds are used (Molloy et al., 2013). Building leaders must develop the relationship with teachers and other staff members to ensure the buy-in that is needed for the PBIS initiative to succeed. Teachers and staff members with philosophical differences about PBIS may also resist buy-in for the initiative and have a negative opinion about the funding that is being provided to their school for the program (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). This challenge provides building leaders and administrators with an opportunity to shine a light on the internal struggle students are having daily that are outside the realm of teachers being able to handle these behaviors (McIntosh, Ty, & Miller, 2014). PBIS is a way to help teachers work with students who may not have the mental ability to handle punitive reprimands or consequences that have been handed down in the past (McIntosh, Ty, & Miller, 2014).

Researchers have determined the most effective way building leaders can ensure buy-in from their faculty and staff is to increase staff knowledge of PBIS, provide the staff with opportunities to have input in the PBIS initiatives in the school, to show positive outcomes from the implementation of PBIS, and provide effective administrative leadership throughout the life of the PBIS initiative (Filter et al., 2016, p. 29). Leaders must also consider the impact a mandatory initiative like PBIS will have on the staff members individually. Teachers and staff may try to look through a positive lens at PBIS and support a growth mindset. But eventually they will consider how this will affect them personally (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

School administrators play an important role in the success of evidence-based practices in schools (Pinkelman et al., 2015). While different building leaders can take the lead in a PBIS

initiative, the principal is most important because of his or her ability to influence broad support and the recruitment of teachers who will support the system (Pinkelman et al., 2015).

Stakeholder buy-in and belief in the program will have an impact on the attitude (positive or negative) each person may possess while implementing and sustaining the program (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). These are lofty tasks for building leaders to execute, which makes the experiences of building leaders in a PBIS initiative interesting and impactful to other administrators and leaders around the country. Tyre & Feuerborn, (2017) showed as staff members learn about a new program or initiative like PBIS they will evaluate it with both accurate and inaccurate information provided to them. Building leaders must communicate open and freely to avoid any confusion when it comes to this inaccurate information (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Building leaders must analyze their own leadership style and vision when implementing a mandatory initiative like PBIS in a school. In schools with a PBIS setting, building leaders could use Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory. This theory recommends building leaders to analyze their own mindset (fixed or growth) along with the mindset of their staff. The fixed mindset is described as "Believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the *fixed mindset*—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over" (Dweck, 2006, p. 6). The fixed mindset will be present in every school building implementing PBIS. It is the job of the building leader or administrator to promote and enhance the growth mindset, which could lead to a better relationship between teachers and administrators throughout the initiative (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Dweck (2006) described the process of a change in mindset as going into a brand-new world where you stretch yourself to learn something new.

PBIS involves a change in systems and mindset throughout a school and even some school districts. Some teachers, who have philosophical differences with PBIS and rewarding students for positive behaviors, could suggest that we as educational leaders are lowering our standards. Dweck (2006) warned about this idea when she wrote that lowering our standards simply does not work. She wrote that many educators lower standards for students to experience some success but that it just leads to poorly educated students who feel entitled and come to expect praise (Dweck, 2006). But she also warns that just raising our standards is a recipe for disaster as well (Dweck, 2006). Through the growth mindset, building leaders must ensure teachers and staff are buying-in to the systems in place through PBIS and not possessing a fixed mindset about raising or lowering standards.

For a leader to have staff buy-in and change the mindset between the administrator and teachers during the entire PBIS initiative, he or she could possess the traits of a transformational leader. Bass (1996) centers around the idea that employees are motivated by a culture that is goal oriented and a positive with organizational development (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders also enhance the self-concepts of their followers by building connections between their own strengths and beliefs and the beliefs and goals of the leader and the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Within the PBIS initiative, a transformational leader provides a set of expectations and goals but empowers teachers and staff members to exceed expectations (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

When developed properly, transformation leadership could enhance the motivation, morale, and performance of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The staff buy-in and change in mindset between teachers and building leaders is important for the fidelity of the implementation and sustainment of PBIS in schools across the country (Brunh, Gorsh, Hannan, & Hirsch, 2014).

Another important factor for staff buy-in is the leader's ability to have followers identify with him or her as an effective leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders who appear as competent are more likely to garner support among a staff (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Organizational culture and leadership skills are intertwined. The culture that is already established when a leader takes a job will have an impact on them just as their leadership skills will have an impact on the culture. Transformational leadership skills can have a major impact on the organizational values in a school (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

One of the ways building leaders and administrators can develop the relationship between teachers and administrators is to create an atmosphere through transformational leadership that involves specific feedback (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). Most feedback that is provided to teachers is confined to formal evaluations, peer reviews, or evaluations completed by coaches within the school (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). Building a culture within the framework of the school along with the PBIS initiative is one of the ways leaders can inspire teachers to buy-in to a different mindset in the school (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014).

Summary

PBIS has become a popular program in recent years to address the need for implementations that pertain to student behavior. PBIS initiatives are evidence-based and impact all stakeholders within a school and in districts where it has been mandated that all schools implement the program. Evidence has shown PBIS to have a positive impact on behavioral and academic achievement of students around the country (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey et al., 2014; Filter et al., 2016; McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013).

What is not known about this topic is a clear understanding of impact PBIS initiatives have had on building leaders in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. The purpose of this

transcendental phenomenological study was to understand building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools to address the gap in the literature. Chapter Two provided a review of the theoretical framework for the study, which revolves around the growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) and the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996). This chapter has produced a focused view of the topic being studied and the impact it will have on filling the gap in the literature through the history of PBIS, initiatives and the implementation of PBIS, the sustainability of PBIS, building leaders' experiences with PBIS, and the relationship between teachers and administrators throughout a PBIS initiative.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

A transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994) was used to complete this research study. Transcendental phenomenology is a methodology that serves in a systematic, logical, and coherent way that allows researchers to provide others with a quality description of an experience or phenomenon (Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Moustakas (1994) outlined human science perspectives and models, the conceptual framework of transcendental phenomenology, human science inquiry, intentionality, noema, and noesis. He dissected the ideas of epoche, reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis.

Moustakas (1994) reviewed the methods and procedures for conducting human science research and provides examples of phenomenological research. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. The purpose of Chapter Three is to examine the procedures, research design, and analysis that was used in this research study. The following subsections will be explained within this chapter: research questions, setting, participants, procedures, researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and an overall summary of the chapter. These subsections will provide specific details for the reader about the methodology that was used in this research study to better help them understand the steps that took place, which will ensure that this study can be replicated in the future.

Design

The qualitative method (Creswell, 2013) addresses the meaning people attribute to a social or human problem. The qualitative method is appropriate for this study because I, as the

researcher, analyzed the experiences of building leaders in leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. The qualitative method is open-ended in nature and allowed for the experiences of the participants to lead the research without having parameters hindering the analysis of a phenomenon. I used the qualitative method through semi-structured interview questions, document analysis, and focus groups to discover the building leaders' experiences and analyze their growth through the lens of the growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) and the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996).

Phenomenology is the research design that fit best with this research study. Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological approach as a subject returning in their mind to an experience to gain a complete perspective that provides the basis for their reflective analysis of the experience (p. 13). The research approach for this study was transcendental phenomenology. The procedures in transcendental phenomenology are described by Moustakas (1994) as researchers engaging in systematic and disciplined manners to put their prejudgments to the side regarding the specific phenomenon being studied. Within the design of transcendental phenomenology, one of its core processes is known as *epoche*. Moustakas (1994) described *epoche* as to “refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33). *Epoche* was important for the design of this study because I used a disciplined and systematic effort to refrain from judgment and did not let my own perceptions enter in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggested that researchers should find a quiet place throughout a research study to reflect and set aside his or her own biases or prejudgments.

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives in an upstate South Carolina elementary school?

Sub Questions

1. How do building leaders describe their own growth mindset from the PBIS experience?
2. How do building leaders describe their own transformational leadership skills from the PBIS experience?
3. How do leadership behaviors impact the implementation and sustainability of PBIS programs?

Setting

The setting for this transcendental phenomenological study was in a predominantly urban upstate South Carolina public school district (Shelbyville School District) (SSD) in Ocala County. Pseudonyms were used for the district name, the county in South Carolina, each of the building leaders' names, and the schools where each led the PBIS initiative. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of building leaders with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. The building leaders were given a voice through this study to describe the phenomenon of leading PBIS initiatives, which in this region of the country leaders had not previously been given a voice on this topic.

This district fit the criteria (at least one year complete leading a PBIS initiative) for this study because they mandatorily implemented PBIS in all schools (elementary and secondary) during the 2016-2017 school year. This district is located near the area where I live, which ensured the ability to conduct interviews face-to-face. The SSD had a leadership hierarchy that

included a school board, district superintendent, district associate superintendent, director of elementary education, director of secondary education, director of professional learning and choice programs, director of technology, director of facilities, and director of student services. Falling below these positions in the organizational flowchart were each building principal for the schools in the district, followed by the assistant principals in each school. This was part of the consideration when selecting a district to be examined for the study in upstate South Carolina.

SSD currently had 17 operational elementary schools and at least two administrators in each of the buildings. These elementary schools served students from Pre-K through fifth grade or kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographics in SSD included 17,774 students Pre-K through 12th grade, 28 schools, and 1,220 teachers. The percentage of students in poverty from the district was 58%.

Participants

This transcendental phenomenological study used purposeful sampling because it sought out participants who meet criteria of study (Creswell, 2013). The criteria for this research study led me to select and secure building leaders who serve in one of the following capacities: principals, assistant principals, or guidance counselors in upstate South Carolina schools who implemented PBIS at least one full school year ago (2016-2017 school year) to serve as participants in the qualitative study. I obtained district approval from the superintendent to conduct research prior to seeking Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study (see Appendix A for Superintendent approval). Then, after acquiring IRB approval, I contacted potential participants to obtain consent and agreement to participate in the study. The sample size included 14 participants who fell under the title of building leader.

The sampling procedure used in this study was purposeful. This procedure was designed to find individuals who can tell stories about the experiences he or she has lived (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling was a fit for this study because the building leaders experienced the phenomenon of leading a PBIS initiative. For this study, 14 building leaders were selected and secured to participate. They came from the Shelbyville School District (SSD) with the stipulation that they experienced the phenomenon being studied and were a building leader during the PBIS initiative in the district. The demographic information for each participant (building leader) is included in this section. Pseudonyms were used for the leaders' names to ensure confidentiality for the study.

Procedures

The first step in the transcendental phenomenological study was for me to seek permission from the SSD to conduct research on their elementary school sites. I sought Liberty University and IRB approval. After gaining approval from the IRB, I conducted a pilot study with a face-to-face interview with a participant allowed me to collect data with audio recording devices and become more comfortable with interviewing a participant. Following the pilot study, I interviewed 14 district employees (building leaders) as participants (Creswell, 2013). When contacting potential research participants, I explained the phenomenological study in detail to give full disclosure of the purpose for the study in a recruitment letter (see Appendix B) along with an Informed Consent form (see Appendix C). I did not pressure participants to sign the consent form and was sensitive to the confidentiality for participants throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants in person, at the building leader's school site, using multiple devices to record each of the interviews. Immediately

following the interviews, I started the data analysis process by transcribing the data myself. Focus groups were interviewed in person at a site agreed upon by the participants. Documented meeting notes taken by the determined scribe for PBIS and staff meetings at schools participating in the PBIS initiative in the SSD were obtained and analyzed. Specific meeting notes, emails and recalled conversations were requested from participants to ensure enough data was collected for a complete document analysis. The questions asked in the interviews and focus groups were developed by me for this study using research from a similar study (Rieffennacht, 2016) and literature (Creswell, 2013). To ensure the face and content validity of the interview and focus group questions, I have completed an expert review. The experts who participated in the review of my interview questions are in the educational field and have completed their own dissertations on topics pertaining to PBIS. This review led me to change the order of my questions and to analyze how the interview questions focus on the central and guiding research questions. After the interviews, focus groups, and documents were collected this data was analyzed through preliminary grouping, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, and validation (Moustakas, 1994).

The Researcher's Role

My role in this transcendental phenomenological study was to conduct research as the human instrument (Moustakas, 1994). I am currently a building leader in an upstate South Carolina elementary school, the same job that was the focus of this research study. Because of this, I did not select any participants with whom I have directly worked. I have worked in the SSD, which could have led to bias or assumptions about the experiences of the other building leaders in the study. I was one of the building leaders who was forced to implement PBIS in my elementary school. Although I developed a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), I was initially

hesitant about the school district forcing building leaders to implement PBIS if they wanted to or not. Because of this experience, I used *epoche* within this phenomenological study to keep my own personal views or ideas out of this study did not allow this to affect how I viewed the data or conducted analysis in this study. Although I related to having experienced the phenomena focused on in the study, I remained ethically and morally removed from the study and did not allow other bias or assumptions to impact the research or analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection for this transcendental phenomenological study took place using three different rigorous techniques discussed by Moustakas (1994). These techniques included face-to-face interviews, document analysis from PBIS team meeting notes and faculty meeting notes and emails/conversations about the mandated PBIS initiative, as well as a focus group interview. Data was collected in the aforementioned order, with me collecting data on the specific experiences from building leaders who experienced the phenomenon. I obtained meeting notes, emails/conversations from PBIS team meetings and faculty meetings to analyze the experience of the building leaders' interactions for planning during the initiative, and analyzed the data collected from an interview with a focus group, which provided a different atmosphere in the process of examining the experiences of building leaders taking a lead role in a PBIS initiative. When being interviewed in a group, the experiences of other building leaders provoked ideas and thoughts about experiencing the phenomenon that participants may not have remembered or thought of during their one-on-one interview with me.

The most appropriate and common form of data collection in a transcendental phenomenological investigation is the long interview on a topic (Moustakas, 1994). This long interview is done in an informal way and includes the use of open-ended questions that allow for

the participants to share their experiences in their own words that are not led by specific or angled questioning (Moustakas, 1994). The interview should also include an introduction between me and the participant in a social conversation that allows the participant to become more comfortable with myself, who is asking the questions. The responsibility falls on me to frame the questions and informal interview in a way that allows the participant to feel comfortable enough to provide an honest and accurate account of their experience (Moustakas, 1994). I transcribed the data collected from the face-to-face interviews and focus groups.

Interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews was one of three forms of data collection I used. This form of data collection (long interview) is the most often used source in phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). The interview in a phenomenological study involves the utilization of open-ended questions and comments through an interactive process (Moustakas, 1994). I secured the interviews with building leaders following IRB and school district approval from the superintendent of the SSD. The semi-structured interviews were face-to-face at the school of the participant or meeting place of his or her choice that was familiar and comfortable.

I began the interview with an attempt to build a warm rapport with the participant through social conversation or a brief meditative activity (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggested that the researcher should then ask some initial questions to jog the memory about the experience with the phenomenon for the building leader. This should allow the participant building leader to put themselves in a frame of mind to give a full account of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). It was up to me to create an atmosphere where the participant was comfortable and was able to present an accurate and honest account of their experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Two forms of technology were used to record the interviews. This ensured the participant and I could capture the experience of the building leaders with this phenomenon during the interview and not develop the need for another participant because of a technological malfunction. By using this data collection strategy, I answered the central research question in the study as well as the three sub questions. I developed interview questions based on those prior phenomenological research studies on PBIS and PBIS initiatives. The questions were developed using both the Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013) texts that require the use of interviews as a form of data collection.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions:

1. Describe your professional journey to becoming a building leader.
2. Specifically describe your roles and daily duties as a building leader.
3. From your experiences as a building leader, what has been the most rewarding?
4. What has made those experiences the most rewarding of all?
5. Please describe your experience with first being introduced to PBIS.
6. What were your initial thoughts about PBIS initiatives becoming mandatory in your school district?
7. Describe your demeanor and mindset in general when it comes to being a building leader.
8. How would you describe your leadership style? How does leadership style impact school climate?
9. Describe the impact leading a PBIS initiative had on you directly.
10. Please describe the ways the PBIS initiative impacted student behaviors in your school.

11. How were the professional behaviors of your teachers impacted by the PBIS initiative?
12. Describe the impact the PBIS initiative had on the working relationship, collaborative relationship, and personal relationship between you as a building leader and the teaching staff.
13. Describe the process of leading your building through the implementation phase of PBIS.
14. Reflect on your own experience through implementation and beyond. Which elements of the PBIS experiences were most difficult? Which were most rewarding?
15. How would you explain the process of leading a PBIS initiative to a building leader who has not experienced the phenomenon?
16. Describe the development of your staff mindset throughout the PBIS initiative. Describe your own mindset development.
17. We have talked a lot about your experiences with being a building leader taking the lead role in a PBIS initiative. What other ideas would you like to add about experiencing this PBIS initiative?

Questions 1 and 2 in the interview were attempts to trigger the participant's mind (Moustakas, 1994) about the journey of becoming a building leader and having them discuss their responsibilities with the school related to PBIS. These questions focused on the role of building leader but did not jump right into the experience of being a building leader during a PBIS initiative. This was by design (Moustakas, 1994) to allow the participant to think back and focus on specifics from the past. This helped to trigger past experiences on the questions following one and two. These questions were adjusted if needed from the responses given by the

participant that led to a more thorough insight of experiencing the phenomenon.

Questions 3 through 7 wound together the experiences of being a building leader and being exposed to PBIS in general. The questions were presented following me having the participants jog their memory about their experiences as a building leader. This idea (Moustakas, 1994) was for me to open the mind of the participant to describe their best experiences as a building leader blended in with their thoughts about PBIS and the initiatives that made the program mandatory in each school. My line of questioning asked both questions that could strike and positive and negative response from the participant to get a true idea of the experience. These questions were adjusted if needed from the responses given by the participant that might have led to a more thorough insight of experiencing the phenomenon.

Question 8 focused on transformational leadership (Bass, 1996). As part of the theoretical framework in this study, I questioned the participants about their experiences with transformational leadership. This was telling for me to find out whether the building leader used this style of leadership or if they led without realizing a specific style of leadership. This question was adjusted if needed from the responses given by the participant that might have led to more thorough insight of experiencing the use of transformational leadership.

Mandatory PBIS initiatives take away the choice for building leaders to decide if the program is something they want. Research (PBIS, 2018) shows the program attempts to put into place a specific plan to reward students who are making good choices and giving their best effort academically with a systemic multi-tiered framework approach (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). PBIS has an impact on all stakeholders, especially those in leadership roles (PBIS, 2018). Questions 9 and 10 were designed to focus on these elements. These questions were adjusted if needed from the responses given by the participant that might have led to more thorough insight

of experiencing the phenomenon.

Questions 11 through 13 were designed to focus on the implementation phase of the PBIS initiative while examining the experiences of the building leader and teaching staff with collaborative work throughout the process (Cressey et. al, 2014; PBIS, 2018). One of the more interesting aspects of this phenomenon was the building leader's ability to obtain buy-in from the teachers in each school building. Research shows building leaders must obtain buy-in from the staff members and be an active participant in the implementation phase for the program to become sustainable. These questions gave the participants a chance to express their feelings about this experience between the building leader and the staff members. These questions were adjusted if needed from the responses given by the participant that might have led to more thorough insight of experiencing the phenomenon.

Questions 14 through 17 were designed to allow the participants to express their ideas about the most rewarding and most difficult aspects of the PBIS initiative. The questions asked the participants to describe the phenomenon to a building leader who has not yet lived the experience. The idea for me was to have the participant think back and relive the positive and negative outcomes of the experience while describing the feelings of working with their colleagues and teaching staff to lead a district-wide initiative (McIntosh et al., 2016). Another aspect examined in question 16 was part of the theoretical framework in this study. The growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) focuses on people having a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. The questions asked by me were designed to analyze what type of mindset the building leaders and staff experienced through the PBIS initiative. These questions were adjusted if needed from the responses given by the participant that might have led to more thorough insight of experiencing the phenomenon. Question 17 allowed the participant to provide a conclusion to

the questioning and gave the building leader the opportunity to share any other information that came to mind from the experience of leading a PBIS initiative.

Document Analysis

Document analysis involves procedures used to analyze and interpret data that comes from the examination of documents and records related to a specific study (Schwandt, 2015). Document analysis addresses issues that involve obtaining access to records and examining the authenticity of the documents (Schwandt, 2015). The documents being analyzed in this phenomenological study were meeting notes provided by the building leaders to me along with any other emails/conversations or flyers that were used throughout the PBIS initiative. These meeting notes came from PBIS team meetings and staff meetings that were held during the time of the PBIS initiative. The participants were asked to redact any student and faculty names, as well as personal information prior to giving them to me. Access to these meeting notes, emails/conversations, and flyers were approved by the building leader in each school. The notes from the PBIS team meetings provided me with information about the experiences and details that helped paint a picture about the initiative in the building leaders' schools. The staff meeting notes provided me with an idea about the mindset of the building leaders during the initiative and provided an idea of how much of an emphasis was placed on PBIS during whole-staff meetings. This form of data analysis was collected following the interviews of the participants and helped answer the central research question from this study: What are the building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in an upstate South Carolina elementary school? To ensure that this form of data collection helped to answer the research questions, I emphasized to the building leaders the importance of providing me with detailed notes, emails/conversations and flyers from the PBIS implementation and planning meetings throughout the initiative.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are interviews or conversations that bring together a group of people to discuss or review a specific topic (Schwandt, 2015). I used two face-to-face focus groups that were the final data collection strategy used in this study. This form of data collection followed the interview process and document analysis to allow me the opportunity to analyze the data from the first two forms of collection to create the talking points and questions that were used with the focus group. This was an appropriate form of data collection for this study because it allowed participants from earlier interviews to come together and analyze the experience as a group. This provoked discussion and ideas that were not shared in the initial interviews that led to a much richer database of information for me. Successful focus groups require careful planning, prepared questions, skillful moderation of the discussion, and thorough analysis of the data (Schwandt, 2015).

A total of 11 of the building leaders from the original participant group in the study were selected to participate in one of two focus groups. Three of the 14 building leaders selected to participate in the study were unable to participate in the study groups due to scheduling conflicts. Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested between five and eight participants for most non-commercial research topics. I had two focus group interviews which included five and six participants each and took place at two different centrally located schools within the school district of the building leaders. The two focus groups were scheduled after all individual interviews were completed and documents had been collected. All building leader participants were contacted by email and asked to sign up for the meeting at the most convenient time and place for them. During the focus group meetings, I used two forms of technology to record the interactions with the focus groups. By using this data collection strategy, I was able to answer

the central research question in the study as well as the three sub-questions.

Standardized Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. What types of belief systems existed in your buildings before the PBIS initiative?
2. What impact did collaborative planning and shared leadership have on your staff before the initiative?
3. What changes took place with collaborative planning and shared leadership after the initiative?
4. Describe the motivational levels of your staff prior to the initiative.
5. What were the strengths and weaknesses of your staff prior to the initiative?
6. What changes took place with motivation after the initiative?
7. What types of changes did you see with the strengths and weaknesses of your staff following the initiative?
8. What concepts were most sustainable throughout the PBIS initiative?
9. Describe the changes you witnessed socially from your staff throughout the entire initiative.
10. How would you describe the initiative in your building in three words or less?
11. In what ways were the growth mindset shared with the stakeholders in your schools throughout the initiative?
12. How would you describe the overall satisfaction of your employees following the initiative?

Question 1 focused on the mindset of a staff and the beliefs of staff members in a school before the implementation of PBIS (Dweck, 2006). This was important to the focus group when analyzing a growth mindset because it allowed the participants with the opportunity to hear about

the different belief systems that were in place in each of the building leaders' schools. Question 2 focused on the idea of shared leadership within a school. This is part of looking through the lens of transformational leadership (Bass, 1996), which allowed the focus group to analyze the impact of collaborative planning and work within a staff.

Questions 3 and 4 continued the thought processes that were triggered in questions 1 and 2 by breaking down what changes were seen following the PBIS initiative. Question 3 asked the focus group the specific changes seen from the initiative in collaborative planning. This allowed building leaders to share the experience and give their own interpretation of the amount of growth (Dweck, 2006) that took place in their building. Question 4 focused on the motivational levels of the staff members and included both the growth mindset and the leaders' abilities to help transform the mindset of their staff (Bass, 1996).

Questions 5 and 6 were an attempt to focus on a before and after experience with the PBIS initiative. PBIS initiatives are attempts for schools to change the school culture with all stakeholders (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Question 5 focused on the strengths and weaknesses of a staff. This gave the leaders in the focus group an opportunity to reflect upon the identity of their building's culture before the mandatory PBIS initiative. Those responses triggered an analysis within the group to reflect upon the motivational levels of a staff following the initiative, which was the focus of question six. This also showed the effectiveness of a growth mindset in each of the schools (Dweck, 2006).

Questions 7 and 8 were another attempt to probe even deeper into the growth mindset of all stakeholders in a school impacted by a PBIS initiative. Question 7 was a deeper dive into the change experienced by the building leader before and after the implementation of PBIS. Research shows (PBIS, 2018) that leaders have a direct impact on the success of PBIS,

especially in the implementation phase of the program (Cressey et al., 2014). The question allowed for leaders to self-analyze their own effectiveness through the growth experienced by their staff throughout the experience (Dweck, 2006). Question 8 focused on the aspects of the PBIS initiative that were most sustainable. This too examined the effectiveness of the leader by reflecting upon what decisions made that were most successful from the leader's perspective (Bass, 1996).

Question 9 focused on the social change that took place in a building leader's school through the PBIS initiative. Examining the social habits of a school staff is one way to analyze the mindset of the stakeholders within a school (Dweck, 2006). This question was an attempt for the building leaders to think back to the effectiveness of the PBIS initiative in changing the culture of a school through the relationships and interactions of a staff. Question 10 was a direct reflective question about the entire PBIS initiative (Bass, 1996). By asking the building leaders to describe the experience in three words or less, it gave each of them a chance to summarize the phenomena in a succinct way.

Question 11 directly gave the building leaders an opportunity to reflect on the growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Some leaders may have used and referenced a growth mindset with their staff and stakeholders throughout the PBIS initiative, while other leaders may have promoted the growth mindset without knowing they were using Dweck's concepts. This question allowed the members of the focus group to analyze the use and effectiveness of the growth mindset. Question 12 was one final attempt to have the building leaders analyze the experience through the overall satisfaction of the employees in a school throughout the initiative. This was another way to analyze the experience and effectiveness of the PBIS initiative (Bass, 1996).

Data Analysis

Moustakas's (1994) method of analysis of phenomenological data was used to guide data analysis in this study. I bracketed myself out of the study using the concept of *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). I attempted to bracket out my own personal bias from impacting data analysis by using *epoche* (see Appendix E). Once the data was collected from the informal interview, focus groups, and documents, I organized and analyzed the information collected. I used the complete transcription from each participant in one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews that took place as part of the research study during my data analysis. I coded one-on-one interview transcripts and focus group interview transcripts, as well as the documents provided by the building leaders which allowed for further data analysis. Qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) was used for the data analysis portion of this study using a program called NVivo 12. This software allowed me to organize the data into different folders that included codes and nodes, which allowed me to be able to access specific topics and themes quickly (Creswell, 2013).

Preliminary grouping was used to form a list of every expression relevant to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This process began with the horizontalization of the information from the transcribed interviews and focus group, as well as the documents I collected (Moustakas, 1994) to place a value on the statements made within the data. The horizons (Moustakas, 1994) were presented in a visual chart (see Appendix F). From the results in the horizontalization process, I then analyzed the importance of the reoccurring ideas or themes from the interview. This process is referred to as clustering (Moustakas, 1994). The clustered ideas or themes from the interview were then used to provide the textural descriptions of the experience of the participant (Moustakas, 1994). Intuitive integration took place with the description of the

essence and the meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994) from each of the participants in the study who experienced the phenomenon. Imaginative variation (see Appendix G) is described by Moustakas (1994) as a way for researchers to unify the varying experiences of the participants into themes. This was used to assist with the theme development and capture the overall essence of the experiences for the participants in the study.

Trustworthiness

For this transcendental phenomenological study to become credible, I was responsible for establishing trustworthiness in the study by addressing the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability outlined below. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established the basis for trustworthiness in qualitative studies.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this study, I completed face-to-face interviews in which the participant's entire responses were recorded and transcribed while direct quotes were used (Schwandt, 2015). The triangulation of data lent to the credibility of the study by using different sources to produce a deeper understanding of an experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent observation was used to help identify the characteristics and issues that are most often found within the experience of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability and Confirmability

The dependability and confirmability in this qualitative study ensure that I was consistent with what was reported within and throughout this study. To establish dependability in the study, I ensured the process was logical, traceable, and documented (Schwandt, 2015). I gave detailed accounts of the setting for each interview and focus group and the moods and atmosphere surrounding both the participants and researcher. Confirmability was established in

the study by using member checks to allow the participants to read their documented responses to my questions (Schwandt, 2015). This review confirmed I have presented an accurate picture of the experience the building leader had living through the phenomenon.

Transferability

A quality research study provides researchers with the opportunity to apply the content from this study and transfer it into another study in the future. To establish transferability in the study, I made clear how this research will transfer to future research on similar studies (Schwandt, 2015). The responsibility in all research studies falls on me to provide thorough and specific details about the study to ensure transferability (Schwandt, 2015). I also included an audit trail (see Appendix D for Audit Trail) that provides a detailed account of events in the order they happened during the study. I developed an *epoche* journal (see Appendix E for epoche journal) to bracket out my own experiences and preconceived notions about PBIS initiatives and the experiences of a building leader.

Ethical Considerations

Because of the sensitive nature when using human participants, I took several factors into consideration ethically. Prior to the study, I sought university and IRB approval. I acquired permission from the superintendent of the SSD to conduct research on their elementary school sites and with their employees (building leaders) as participants (Creswell, 2013). When beginning to conduct research, I disclosed the purpose of study. I did not pressure participants to sign consent to participate and was sensitive to populations available throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

While collecting data, I respected the site and avoided the deception of participants by being clear with the specific details within the study. I was conscious of the balance of power

and avoided the exploitation of participants. I did not use participants by collecting data and not giving back (Creswell, 2013) information from the study. When analyzing data, I avoided siding with participants and did not disclose only positive results. The privacy of participants was respected, and pseudonyms for the school system, schools and participants were used to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

Ethical considerations were taken in how data is reported. When publishing the results of the study, I shared data with others, did not duplicate publications, and provided complete proof of compliance with ethical issues and lack of conflict interest (Creswell, 2013). The protection of data was ensured by storing all data on a computer that is password-protected. Any printed or paper documents collected in this study were stored in locked cabinets and will be destroyed three years after the completion of this study. Any digital files used in the study will be deleted with the same timeline.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand building leaders' experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. The purpose of Chapter Three was to examine the procedures, research design, and analysis that would be used in this research study. The data collection process reviewed in this chapter included me interviewing participants about their experiences, the collection of documents for analysis, and the use of focus groups to analyze participants' experiences with the phenomenon. Data analysis procedures were reviewed within the chapter and include coding, code clustering, narration, intuitive integration, and imaginative variation.

The study provided a voice to building leaders who have experienced the different aspects of a PBIS initiative in an upstate South Carolina elementary school. The following

subsections were explained within this chapter: research questions, setting, participants, procedures, researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and an overall summary of the chapter. These subsections provide specific details for the reader about the methodology that would be used in this research study to better help them understand the steps that would take place, which could ensure that this study could be replicated in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate and describe the impact of a growth mindset, transformational leadership style and leadership skills on building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results of the data analysis in this study. In this chapter, I provide an overview about each of the participants which is followed by the results from the study.

The chapter includes themes that are clustered together to help provide a description of the essence of experiencing the phenomenon of being a building leader during a mandatory PBIS initiative in an upstate South Carolina elementary school. The results from the study are presented in a narrative form and are organized by theme. Pseudonyms were used for all study participants to ensure confidentiality. All quotes from participants are presented verbatim, which includes verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to more accurately depict participants' voices. The chapter also analyzes how the data collected answers the research questions in the study.

Participants

The criteria for this research study led me to select and secure building leaders (principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, or coaches) in upstate South Carolina schools from the SSD who implemented PBIS at least one full school year ago (2016-2017 school year) to serve as participants in the qualitative study. The school district, schools, and building leaders participating in this study are being described using pseudonyms.

Of the 24 building leaders invited to participate, 14 were secured and met the criteria to be part of the study. Two participants were building principals, 10 were assistant principals and two participants were guidance counselors who served as building and team leaders during the mandatory PBIS initiative. The 14 participants all took part in one-on-one interviews and 10 of the 14 participants took part in one of the two focus groups of 5 people each.

The 14 participants in the study shared their views of experiencing the phenomenon of being a building leader in a mandatory PBIS initiative. While the roles for the individuals in the study were similar as building leaders, each had different experiences with the amount of input they had in building the PBIS teams and the implementation of the program in their schools. The experience level of each of the building leaders varied from three years up to 20 years in their current administrative or counselor positions. The information below gives greater detail about each of the individual participants in this study using pseudonyms.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	School Pseudonym	Position in School	Years of Experience as Building Leader	Ethnicity	Gender
Allan	Adelaide Elementary	Principal	20	Caucasian	Male
Alicia	Adelaide Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	Caucasian	Female
Allison	Adelaide Elementary	Guidance Counselor	3	Caucasian	Female
Brenda	Benjamin Elementary	Assistant Principal	8	Caucasian	Female
Crystal	Clara Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	African American	Female
Grace	Gauer Elementary	Assistant Principal	4	African American	Female
Julia	Jefferson Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	Caucasian	Female
Kristal	Knotwood Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	Caucasian	Female
Michael	Marshall Elementary	Principal	7	Caucasian	Male
Marissa	Marshall Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	African American	Female
Melanie	Marshall Elementary	Guidance Counselor	4	Caucasian	Female
Rhonda	Revere Elementary	Assistant Principal	10	African American	Female
Steve	Sunkist Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	Caucasian	Male
Wanda	Westmoreland Elementary	Assistant Principal	5	Caucasian	Female

Allan

Allan is the principal of Adelaide Elementary School and has been in the field of education for over two decades. One of the things that stood out as important for Allan in his daily roles as principal was being visible and available for parents and teachers alike at his

school. He also talked about one of the most important functions of his job being a facilitator to making sure his teachers had what they needed to be successful individually but more importantly being able to provide the students with what they needed in the classroom.

Allan expressed he was initially optimistic when being introduced to PBIS but admitted he struggled with the idea of rewarding students for behavior he deemed appropriate and expected: “Initially going into it. And, and honestly throughout the whole thing, I felt, I was only doing it for a year.” He continued, “I believe in offering incentives and rewards to children. On a personal level, I struggle with rewarding students for things they are expected to do. And so, I’ll be honest, that was a drawback to me.”

Alicia

Alicia participated as the assistant principal at Adelaide Elementary School and has over 15 years in the education field and is in her fifth year as a building leader at her school. She described her role as a building leader as one where she provides support for all stakeholders:

I think the biggest thing is being a supporter to everybody. Supporting anything the teachers need any staff member, the teachers, parents, um I just feel like that's our biggest role is to be the supporter, um whether it's an instructional supporter disciple supporter, anything I feel like that's just our role all day long.

Allison

Allison is the guidance counselor at Adelaide Elementary School. She is currently in her third year as a guidance counselor in the SSD and was given the lead role for the PBIS team as the school worked through the mandatory PBIS initiative. Her outlook about the initiative was positive and had a personal impact: “I would say the impact for me, directly, is it was a new initiative, and it was a new program set out the first fall I was in this role. So, therefore, it felt

kind of like mine, a little.” She continued, “But it also set me up as being able to introduce it and train the staff in it, as a person that they could trust, or come to.”

Brenda

Brenda is the **assistant principal** at Benjamin Elementary School and stated this is her 20th year in the education field and her third year as a building leader at her school. She described her role as a building leader as all-encompassing and one where she feels like she has a hand in everything that is going on in her building. Brenda described the most rewarding parts of her job as a building leader centering around the relationships she is able to build on a daily basis with the students.

Brenda said she was on board with the mandatory district rollout of PBIS at her school but, like many others in her position, was apprehensive about rewarding students for things most people think they should do because it is the right thing to do:

It is a little worrisome to me that, this isn't just in the schools but as a society, that we are rewarding children um, adults, people for behaviors that are just suppose-should be or are supposed to be socially normed.

She continued, stating, “I worry about what we're doing to the ones that are well-behaved and don't often get that recognition, they're overlooked just because they fly under the radar, and that are just good, well-rounded kids.”

Crystal

Crystal described her professional journey in education, which included teaching in both middle and high school. She talked about making the transition into administration where she has spent the last five years in the role of assistant principal in two different schools. She talked about how she has experienced education in the elementary, middle and high school levels and

how the kids are what give her a true passion for the job. She said the true reward as a building leader in an elementary school is to see the kids grow each year physically, mentally, emotionally and academically.

Crystal spoke about her reaction to the PBIS initiative becoming mandatory in the school district and how her prior experience with PBIS helped with her feelings on the initiative: “I was okay with that (mandatory PBIS initiative), but the, my only thought was, if it's not done correctly, implemented correctly, it's gonna, you know, have some push back and backfire.” She continued stating,

having known about PBIS a little bit before it was introduced here, I kind of already knew what to do, and how to implement it. And I already had some incentives and, um, rewards set up, and then after working with the team and getting our committee together, um, it turned out to be good.

Grace

Grace is an assistant principal at Gauer Elementary School and is in her fourth year of this role as a building leader while having spent over 15 years in the education field. She expressed that each day in her role is full of unknowns and you just have to take what the day brings you although you have a list of tasks that you would love to complete. Grace said that the most rewarding experiences as a building leader include the relationships she has developed with the students and teachers in the schools she has worked with. She gave a specific experience that was most rewarding that involved a struggling teacher and she was excited when the light bulb finally went on for that particular educator. Grace talked about the initial reaction to the PBIS initiative becoming mandatory stating:

My first thought was getting buy in, because even though it was in place, um, with anything with PBIS, you know, you have to have buy in from everyone. And I think, for me, it was that piece of it that's hard because some people have a misconception of what it is and they think the four to one ratio and they're like, I got to say four good things to this one, bad thing.

She continued along this line of thinking about the teachers adapting to change with the changes in the students by stating,

we wanted to change what our expectations were, and getting our teachers to understand that, just because they were there, we have to follow our kids. That process was hard in getting our teachers to understand that change with them.

Julia

Julia described her journey in education, which included seven years as an elementary classroom teacher and then two years as a math coach. She talked about making the transition into administration where she has spent the last four years in the role of assistant principal in two different schools. She talked about what has been the most rewarding part of her job as an assistant principal which centered around the idea of helping people, students and adults alike, help accomplish something. She continued to state that the amount of time she has invested in the job is worthwhile when she sees the people she works with succeed.

Julia talked about her first introduction to PBIS stating:

I feel like good classroom management, you already have PBIS in it. Naturally, you know your teachers that are good at classroom management, they have that positive reinforcement naturally built in to what they do. So, I feel like the principals behind

PBIS aren't, you know, brain surgery by any means, but trying to get everybody in a district and everybody in a school to buy in to that, you know, can be a challenge.

Kristal

Kristal was an assistant principal at Knotwood Elementary School during the mandatory PBIS initiative and is currently in her first year of a role in teacher support at the Central Office for the SSD. Kristal spent 13 years as an elementary school teacher before becoming an assistant principal for 6 years. She expressed that the best part of being an administrator in schools is having the ability to help teachers and students and truly making a difference in people's lives.

Kristal expressed she liked the idea of PBIS becoming mandatory in the school district:

I thought it was a great idea because when you have so many initiatives going on that are different in different buildings, whether it's how you do RTI, whether it's how you handle discipline, or, or anything. If you, if there's not consistency, it, it kind-of, it's like putting together pieces of a puzzle.

She continued stating, "the fact we were gonna have a universal system put in place where, um, you're focused on positive behavior and rewards, um, I thought it was awesome. I mean it was positive. How could it not be awesome?"

Michael

Michael described his career path in education. He told me he had been a middle school mathematics teacher for 13 years before being hired as an assistant principal at a Montessori elementary school. He talked about making the transition into elementary education after spending over a decade at the middle level. After three years as an elementary assistant principal, he was hired as principal at Marshall Elementary School where he remains today and

is in his third year at the school. Michael discussed his thoughts about the most rewarding parts of being a building leader:

I like seeing people be successful. I like seeing people take ownership, and then being inspired to do things that maybe they had not originally one, thought that they could do or had never really even thought of. So, for me, I enjoy seeing, not only our kids be successful, but, the adults in your building be successful as well. To me that's the most rewarding experience from any leadership capacity whether it's coaching, whether it's management, whether it's an instructional leader. Just being able to see people be successful, putting people in positions to be successful.

Marissa

Marissa stated she was an assistant principal at Marshall Elementary School and is in her fifth year of this role as a building leader while having spent over 15 years in the education field. She expressed that she taught third grade for 10 years before transitioning into administration five years ago after being hired as the assistant principal at Marshall Elementary where she currently in charge of discipline, RtI and all IEP and 504 meetings.

Marissa said her biggest reward in education is developing relationships with the students and parents at Marshall Elementary: “I like to do home visits out in their neighborhoods and just pop up and say, you know, I'm just here to check on you guys and make sure things are going okay.” She feels building those relationships help her when she has to have tough conversations with the families:

It really does make a difference, because I'm able to build those relationships and say, hey, you know, I love 'em, but this is the consequence for what they've done, and they, they are very receptive to it, I really don't have much pushback.

Melanie

Melanie described her journey in education that included a change from wanting to be a classroom teacher to a guidance counselor. She talked about making that transition into guidance counseling where she has spent the last five years in the role in two different schools including her current role at Marshall Elementary School. Melanie expressed that she is in charge of guidance lessons and seeing small groups and individual students on an as-needed basis.

Melanie also talked about being the go-between for families and outside agencies when support is needed:

If a parent calls and says you know, I can't make this bill, I kind of try to work with them for things like that. I organize like, the giving tree at Christmas. I am in charge of all the attendance plans and all of that goes along with that. I do check in, check out with kids.

Rhonda

Rhonda is an assistant principal at Revere Elementary School and is in her fifth year of this role as a building leader while having spent over 15 years in the education field. She expressed that she was an elementary school teacher and coach before becoming a building leader as an assistant principal. Rhonda said her most rewarding experiences as a building leader are seeing the smiles on the students faces when they come to the school each day.

Rhonda stated that she was completely on-board with the mandatory PBIS initiative coming to the SSD:

I think every school should have positive behavior interventions in school, whether it be mandatory or not. To me, it's a no-brainer. If you want positive results from kids, you

have to provide positive opportunities for them to show and you have to exude that, be an example of that and expect that.

Steve

Steve described his journey in education as one that developed from the classroom as a middle school math teacher for a decade before wanting to become an administrator. He was hired as an elementary school assistant principal, the position he has held for the past four years. He transferred last year to Sunkist Elementary School in the SSD. He talked about his most rewarding experiences as an administrator being the relationships he is able to develop with the students each year. Steve talked about his reaction to the PBIS initiative becoming mandatory in his school district:

It's how I always treated kids, with respect, with rewards, with treating ... teaching them how to grow their character. So for me, it was just totally seamless and what we do as a, you know, quote unquote "discipline procedure" to how we want to treat kids. I want people to talk to me, if I'm not doing something right, don't throw the book at me every single time. Show me what to do differently. And when I am doing something well, tell me I'm doing something well. It's how we all want to be treated, so for me, PBIS is just seamless to what we all want.

Wanda

Wanda is an assistant principal at Westmoreland Elementary School and is in her fifth year of this role as a building leader while having spent over 15 years in the education field. She expressed that she enjoys the relationships she develops with the students and staff at her school. She stated she would never want to work in a position at the Central Office because she loves

being in a school building to work with students and teachers directly. Wanda said the most rewarding part of her job is being able to work with and serve others in her leadership role. Wanda stated her prior experience with PBIS led her to believe in the mandatory initiative in the district:

I believe in PBIS. I believe in the long-term changes of PBIS. I believe that in order to change somebody you have to teach them better ways. So for me, it was an easy transition. It was something that I believe in wholeheartedly. I think that when a kid makes a mistake, it's an opportunity for me to show them a different way, or make a different choice, or to have a conversation about how can we do this better? I don't believe that I can ever punish a kid to make him better, to make him right. So for me, it was an easy transition. It was almost like thank you, but now everybody else was hopefully gonna move in that direction.

The results section below shows the theme development from the study. The Open Codes to Themes is displayed in a chart (see Appendix F). Following the theme development section I discussed the research questions responses that were developed from my data collection.

Results

Preliminary grouping was used to form a list of every expression relevant to the experience from the data collected (Moustakas, 1994) from one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews and other documents collected from participants pertaining to the PBIS initiative. This process began with the horizontalization of the information from the transcribed interviews (Moustakas, 1994) to place a value on the statements made from the participants in the interviews. These horizons are represented in a visual chart (see Appendix F). I then analyzed

the importance of the reoccurring ideas or themes from the interviews and documents provided by the participants. The clustered ideas or themes from the interviews were then used to provide the textural descriptions of the experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). I used imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) to unify the experiences of the participants into themes to capture the overall essence from experiencing the phenomenon.

Throughout the one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews, the building leader participants expressed an overall positive outlook about the experience of leading a mandatory PBIS initiative in upstate South Carolina elementary schools. While a few leaders admitted to close-mindedness when implementing PBIS in their schools, many participants described an overall positive attitude through the lens of a growth mindset when describing the experience. Building leaders also expressed a positive outlook about the impact of the initiative on the professional behaviors of their teachers and staff along with a positive impact on overall student behavior in their school. The administrators and counselors agreed that the ability of the principals and assistant principals in the presentation of the PBIS initiative to their staffs had a large impact on the successes or failures of the implementation of the program. The guidance counselors were especially candid in their responses having experienced this as a PBIS leader on the individual school teams but not being in an administrator's role at each school.

When asked about the advice they would give future administrators or counselors who may experience the same mandatory PBIS initiative, the participants expressed the importance of patience with the process. They talked about how exhausting it can be to start PBIS from scratch and stated each leader should set realistic goals and not expect a finished product immediately. The building leaders also talked about the importance of flexibility and admitting when something is not working and having the ability to change on the fly and try new things, even

though explicit expectations need to be established for the teachers and students in each school building.

Intuitive integration took place with the description of the essence and the meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The meaning and essence of this experience for building leaders in the SSD was finding a way to positively handle a tough situation with being given a mandatory PBIS initiative. Every participant, with a growth or fixed mindset, talked about how they were forced to approach the initiative in the way that was best for them as a building leader but also what was best for their students and staff. No matter the mindset, the essence of their experiences centered on how best to implement PBIS in a positive manner for their school.

Theme Development

I was able to develop four prevalent themes during the data analysis process in the study, which included grouping, horizontalization, and clustering ideas. Throughout the entire process these themes were consistently prevalent to the experience of principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors: (a) experienced a growth mindset open to the PBIS initiative, (b) experienced close-mindedness during PBIS initiative, (c) leadership behaviors had positive impact on PBIS initiative, and (d) experienced an increase in team or shared leadership throughout the PBIS initiative.

Theme one: Experienced a growth mindset open to PBIS initiative. Using the growth mindset theory in this study, I analyzed participant responses through the lens of Dweck's growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). With the impact shown from a growth mindset in teachers, the responses to interview questions from the building leaders were telling when considering their experiences implementing and sustaining PBIS compared with the growth mindset theoretical framework of the study. Three open-codes appeared within the

growth mindset theme: open-minded to PBIS, changing professional behaviors, and the impact of PBIS on student behaviors.

Open-minded to PBIS. Seven of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how they and/or the staff had an open-minded attitude toward the mandatory PBIS initiative. The responses that included directly eluding to an open-minded attitude stemmed from question 4 in the one-on-one interview which stated: What were your initial thoughts about PBIS initiatives becoming mandatory in your school district? Wanda described her positive attitude stating, “When SSD moved toward it (mandatory PBIS initiative), I had a...I was positive. I believe in the long-term changes of PBIS.”

Marissa talked about the impact of her school’s PBIS system called the STAR system and how she and the other teachers mindset was impacted by the excess in negative student behaviors stating, “I think initially, when we started the STAR system, the mindset of the staff was, we got to do something.”

Kristal voiced the opinion that the only possible impact of the PBIS initiative was positive: “So, the fact we were going to have a universal system put in place where you’re focused on positive behavior and rewards, I thought it was awesome. I mean, it was positive. How could it not be awesome?” Michael expressed his staff showed an open-mindset to the PBIS initiative, which was proven by the number of teachers and staff who participated in the voluntary meetings for the rollout of PBIS:

I really attribute that to just the fact that I had so many members of our staff come in to help contribute and write it (PBIS school matrix). That was automatically some buy-in and some ownership within the program when it was rolled out.

Melanie attributed some of her open-mindset to the PBIS initiative from things she heard from other schools participating in similar PBIS programs:

I was okay with mandatory, because I liked the idea. But I thought it seemed like a good idea. I'm hearing all the time about different school-wide things that people are doing. And I think that PBIS can be really great.

Steve shared his open-minded approach centered around doing what was needed and what was best for his school:

We just kind of sat down with about twenty different teachers is where we started with, and it was, "What do we need to improve on our school?" And it ... so that's how our PBIS kind of morphed. It wasn't, "We're gonna start PBIS." It was, "What do we need to help improve our school?" Our teachers saw the need, that's kind of how we flowed into PBIS.

Allison presented a positive and open-minded attitude with her staff and PBIS team when the school headed into the PBIS initiative stating: "This is the course we're on. Jump on board. Let's go."

Grace noted in one of the focus group interviews that:

I think with any initiative, you have to have buy in, and you can't just say, "Here it is, and go with it." I think this year has been the most beneficial for us, because the teachers felt like they were part of it. And I've even heard them talking to each other about, because we've established morning meetings this year, and even some teachers that we met the other day said that there are other teachers that are doing it that they didn't think would do it or would have the buy in this year. So, I think that was a part of it, just getting them out, letting them see the process but have buy in and have communication about it.

Changing professional behaviors. Seven of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how their professional behaviors and/or the behaviors of their teachers changed during the mandatory PBIS initiative. The responses that included directly talking about a change in professional behaviors stemmed from questions 9 and 11 in the one-on-one interview which stated: Describe the impact leading a PBIS initiative had on you directly; and, How were the professional behaviors of your teachers impacted by the PBIS initiative?

Wanda talked about the mindset of teachers changing with a focus moving from punishment to restorative behavior intervention stating:

Teachers, they will come to me now and go, this kid is struggling with this behavior, how can we address it versus can you just punish it. Multiple of them that are coming to me and our behavior management assistant because I'm CC'd on a lot of that and saying, this kid is struggling here, what strategies do you suggest?

Brenda expressed the initiative had a positive impact on teacher behavior, which has helped to change their professional behaviors:

They have had to more clearly define what they want and what their expectations are.

And they have to model it which sometimes is a real difficult thing for adults to do. But I think that is-it has made them better educators and I do think that they look for the good in students most of the time because of it.

Kristal talked about her experience in witnessing professional behaviors change when she said, "I think it impacted them because they realized that by rewarding positive behavior that they were noticing kids they might not normally notice and they were reaching some of the kids who were working for rewards that normally would not, um, have the drive to do so." Michael talked about how the impact of the initiative had a bigger impact on the professional behaviors of

the teachers more so than the behaviors of the students stating, “I think one of the biggest benefits to the program for us is that it actually I think had a bigger impact on our, on adults in the building than it did kids.”

Steve noticed a change in professionalism and attitudes with the teachers at his school stating:

They as a school, we are much more positive in our workings with the kids. When we first got there, it was, "I'm going write them up, and I want you to kick them out." That was their mindset. And so now we've changed that mindset of, "Well I've got these five kids, they're doing the right thing, but the other fifteen aren't." "Well what are you doin' for the five?" Okay, you start ticketing the five, these other fifteen are gonna go, "Well they're getting all the praise and all the rewards.

Allison shared during her interview the idea that the teachers changed the way they acted with one another after experiencing the PBIS initiative:

I believe that it has given people a little bit more freedom to hold each other accountable. And this is our ... remember this on our PBIS thing. And I also just think it's brought an awareness of how we are all acting.

Alicia stated she noticed a change in professional behaviors in the way the teachers approached the students when addressing their behavior. She said, “they were more conscious of doing that to show them how they needed to act and were more mindful of the procedures and the things in teaching the students and modeling that than they were before.” In the first focus group interview, Steve talked about the professional behaviors changing once the teachers and students witnessed some success:

For us, it changed because they saw it working. They saw that it truly was making a difference. That their kids are doing some things right so if you really harp on those right things, the other kids who are not doing are going to start falling in line with because they see you doing a great job.

Impact of PBIS on student behaviors. Seven of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about the impact of the PBIS initiative had on student behaviors, while meeting minutes provided by building leaders included discipline data documentation that showed a decrease in student discipline referrals from the start of the PBIS initiative. The responses that talked about a change in student behaviors stemmed from question 10 in the one-on-one interview that said: Please describe the ways the PBIS initiative impacted student behaviors in your school.

Kristal talked about student behaviors changing on the bus: “So, one positive thing I really saw was the decrease in bus referrals. And it also gave our bus drivers a chance to be a part of our initiative.” Steve provided documentation showing that discipline referrals decreased beginning with the year of the mandatory PBIS initiative and in his one-on-one interview stated, “Well, there was 375 referrals the year before I got there. After year one, we were down- we, last year, we had under 200. So, we almost cut it in half.”

Allison reported a large impact at her school with the change in student behaviors and discipline referrals stating, “It has impacted them significantly.” Michael discussed in the second focus group interview the improvement in student behavior referrals since the PBIS initiative took place stating, “I think in, in our building, we've seen a shift. I don't see the, the amount of discipline referrals come in from the 80%. So, I think the 80% has been reduced.”

Theme two: Experienced close-mindedness during PBIS initiative. While the growth mindset theory is the lens through which this study is designed, the opposite viewpoint when it comes to attitude and approach for a mandatory PBIS initiative is a fixed mindset. The fixed mindset is described by Dweck (2006) as believing that your qualities are what they are and cannot be changed. This mindset gives people the sense that they must prove their worth over and over (Dweck, 2006). The responses to interview questions from the building leaders and documents collected from the participants in the study were telling when it comes to being close-minded and having a fixed mindset about a mandatory PBIS initiative. Two open-codes appeared within the close-minded theme: close-minded to PBIS and resistance to buy-in.

Close-minded to PBIS. Four of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how they and/or the staff had a close-minded attitude toward the mandatory PBIS initiative. The responses that included directly eluding to a close-minded attitude stemmed from question four in the one-on-one interview which stated: What were your initial thoughts about PBIS initiatives becoming mandatory in your school district?

Allan talked about his initial close-minded thoughts about the initiative:

I struggle with rewarding children for things that they are expected to do. And so, I'll be honest, that was a drawback to me. We're rewarding kids in some facets for doing exactly what they're supposed to do, and there's got to be a breaking point at some time, because we can't get rewarded for everything that we're supposed to do in life.

Brenda talked about how she feels PBIS takes away from common expectations that should be in place for all members of society. She said, "it is a little worrisome to me that, this isn't just in the schools but as a society, that we are rewarding children um, adults, people for behaviors that are just suppose-should be or are supposed to be socially normed."

Alicia talked about her apprehension toward the mandatory PBIS initiative:

So, my initial experience to it was not good it was like, "Oh here's another thing we have to do, and we're being made to do it, and everyone in the district has to do it, and you make what you're doing try to fit into it." Thought what we were doing was good, but it didn't fit into what we were doing for PBIS so, therefore, we had to change it all, and start all over again.

Julia spoke about the resistance she faced as a building leader in a school with a close-minded attitude about a mandatory PBIS initiative:

Because people naturally, you know, when you're being told to do something, you kind of have a negative taste for it. Whenever we were originally rolling it out at my first school, um, we had a lot of pushback from our teachers. And a lot of the pushback came from them feeling as though it was just one more thing. They felt like they didn't have the time to do it.

Resistance to buy-in. Six of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how they and/or the staff had a resistance to buy-in for the mandatory PBIS initiative. Additionally, the meeting minutes from three of the schools' PBIS meetings showed the team discussed negative feelings from teachers and staff about the initiative, which shows a resistance to buy-in. The responses that showed a resistance to buy-in toward PBIS stemmed from question four in the one-on-one interview which stated: What were your initial thoughts about PBIS initiatives becoming mandatory in your school district?

Marissa stated, "I think the element that was most difficult for me has been the continuation of the buy-in. Their (teachers) mind shift, mindset kind of shifted, because it was, this is going to take away from what I want to do in my class."

Kristal talked about buy-in being a problem from the initial PBIS meetings:

I think the teacher buy-in was the most difficult because, when we first started our PBIS meetings it would, I felt like often times it was a, I had to navigate the conversations to steer it back towards a positive nature because often times it would be, it would turn into complaining from a couple of the teachers on the committee.

Michael talked about resistance to buy-in being a natural reaction or feeling when a mandate is presented to a teaching staff:

I think anytime you use mandatory you're gonna initially get push back. So anytime you mandate something, people are going to be turned off right off the bat because I think when something is mandated (laughs) you mandate change. I think there's a natural inclination for people to feel like that you're telling them that they're doing something wrong.

Melanie described teacher buy-in as the most difficult part of the PBIS initiative: "Most difficult would be teacher buy in, which I definitely understand some of the concerns that the teachers had, especially when they haven't had like any true professional development on it."

Alicia stated the initial buy-in was an obstacle for the implementation of PBIS at her school:

I think for me was initially getting over, okay we have to do this and trying to find a way to sell it to the staff and get their buy-in. Well, because it was very much a part of that and trying to figure out what was going to work for us.

Grace talked in her one-on-one interview about the necessity for buy-in during a PBIS initiative: "I will say, um, with PBIS honestly, we had to have buy in from our teachers, but still, um, there are some that don't want to work." In the first focus group interview, Allan expressed a struggle with buy-in because of the discipline component working with the program: "I feel

like we've been back and forth. Like I feel like the struggle for us when we first implemented PBIS last school year, it was teachers felt as if their hands were tied on discipline and all.”

Theme three: Leadership behaviors had positive impact on PBIS initiative. The leadership skills and behaviors of building leaders have arguably the biggest impact on the implementation and overall success of PBIS in their schools (McIntosh et al., 2016). The amount of support a building leader provides the PBIS program can make the difference in a successful implementation and sustained process or abandonment of the program by a school (McIntosh et al., 2016). With their answers to the interview questions in this study, building leaders described their actions throughout the PBIS initiative, which showed their impact on implementation and the success or failure of the program in their schools. Three open-codes appeared within the growth mindset theme: positive approach, consistent leadership, and servant leadership.

Positive approach. Four of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how having positive attitude had a positive impact on the PBIS initiative. The responses that included directly eluding to positive impact from a positive approach stemmed from question seven in the one-on-one interview which stated: Describe your demeanor and mindset in general when it comes to being a building leader.

Allan talked about his positive attitude having an impact on the PBIS initiative stating: I think if you have that attitude that if people in the building are happier, they're going to do a better job. So, we started out the school year with that, with a big kickoff. PBIS, we tried to make it as positive as possible for our teachers. And we stressed to them the importance of, this is going to help. It's going to help your behavior of your classroom, it's going to encourage your kids to support one another.

Kristal stated:

I think that you have to have a positive leader. I think it has a great impact on climate. I think it just, it just reiterates the fact that you got, you have to focus, you have to praise and focus on positive, positive actions for kids especially that need it.

Crystal expressed a positive approach in her leadership stating, “I’m very approachable, always happy, normally. All the time always happy. I always look at the positive, try to look at it, you know, the positive is always a better way to look at things.” Allison talked about how the PBIS initiative helped her to use her positive approach to assist students and teachers throughout the process:

I love my job. I’ve loved getting to work with the kids. If anybody asks me, I have the best job in the school because I sometimes, I just get to go play with them for a little bit. It set me on a positive platform to be able to assist them, help them, consult with them in their classrooms.

Consistent leadership. Four of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how having consistent leadership skills had a positive impact on the PBIS initiative. The responses that included directly eluding to positive impact from a positive approach stemmed from question seven in the one-on-one interview which stated: Describe your demeanor and mindset in general when it comes to being a building leader.

Allan talked about the importance of leaders providing the teachers with consistency stating:

Do teachers like consistency? Yes. Do teachers want to be on their own too? Yes. And you have to marry those two together. You’d have to let them see that it is a school wide structure, but you can have some flexibility still within your classroom walls.

Marissa talked about the importance of consistency from the building leaders throughout the process when she said:

The consistency of the expectations is also something that, it's been kind of challenging, because in the cafeteria, for instance, the expectation is that you are to monitor the kids but we want you to fix it and even if you don't think they can, if you're consistent and everybody is shared in what they're doing, then they will buy in.

Michael talked about the importance of consistency for him throughout the PBIS initiative:

And, so, you know, for me I try to just be very consistent in how I respond. I push, there are certain things that I push. I want us to be innovative, I want us to be creative in our, our problem solving, I want us to think outside the box and do, try to do things a little bit different, for the, for the hopes of improvement, but I also try to be very consistent how I respond to the people that I work with.

Kristal talked about consistency being important to the success of the PBIS initiative among many other things building leaders are having to juggle saying, when you have so many initiatives going on that are different in different buildings, whether it's how you do RtI, whether it's how you handle discipline, or anything. If you, if there's not consistency, it kind-of, it's like putting together pieces of a puzzle.

During the first focus group interview, Steve talked about the impact a consistent leader can have on a PBIS initiative:

I think, I think for us it's to...as admins, as leaders, we have to make sure it stays at the forefront. I think it helps for teachers to see um that we as uh administrators are keeping it at the forefront, keeping that positivity going.

Servant leadership. Four of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how a servant leadership approach had a positive impact on the PBIS initiative. The responses that included directly eluding to positive impact from a positive approach stemmed from question seven in the one-on-one interview which stated: Describe your demeanor and mindset in general when it comes to being a building leader.

Wanda talked about staying positive as a building leader throughout the PBIS initiative by being a servant leader for her teaching staff:

I believe in servant leadership. I have, I believe my job is to serve. So what makes it the most rewarding is to see other folks succeed. Whether that be a student that we're trying to help via the RTI process, one of our kids in our class that needs help or support, or whether it's a teacher or even a family.

Marissa talked about how being a servant leader helped her with being a building leader during the initiative: "I'm also a servant leader. I'm not a person that's just going to tell you to do something. I'm going to dig in and help and help out however I can. I wouldn't ask you to do anything that I wouldn't be willing to do." Kristal talked about feeling like she has always been a servant leader and how that impacted her conversations with teachers during the initiative:

I've always felt like I was more of a servant leader. I, you know I just expect people to do what they're supposed to but, um, step in and have conversations when things aren't being done in the manner, you know, they need to be done in.

Rhonda talked about her approach as a servant leader that helped provide positive results in the PBIS initiative:

I am a servant leader. I am not going to ask anybody to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. I take the team approach. I think that if you have those on board, ah, within the building, that you get more and better results as opposed to telling people what to do.

Theme four: Experienced an increase in team or shared leadership throughout

PBIS initiative. Another theme that was developed during data analysis was an increase in team or shared leadership by building leaders who experienced this PBIS initiative. When looking through the lens of the transformational leadership theory, building leaders can become role models for their staff members who are inspired by them. They also challenge their followers to take more ownership for their own work and have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their employees to provide them with opportunities to perform better (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This idea was evident throughout the data analysis from the one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews and documents collected from the participants in the study. Building leaders expressed an increase in their team or shared leadership skills throughout this PBIS initiative. Two open-codes appeared within this theme: shared leadership and collaborative relationships.

Shared leadership. Information from PBIS team meeting notes provided by five of the participants in the study show a specific reference to and structure of a shared leadership due to the PBIS initiative. Four of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how they experienced an increase in team or shared leadership. The responses that the increase in shared leadership stemmed from question 12 in the one-on-one interview which stated: Describe the impact the PBIS initiative had on the working relationship, collaborative relationship, and personal relationship between you as a building leader and the teaching staff.

The responses stemmed as well from question three in the focus group interviews which stated: What changes took place with collaborative planning and shared leadership after the initiative?

Allan talked about the impact the PBIS initiative had on the increase in shared leadership at his school:

I certainly believe in a team approach. I don't believe that if I dictate something, that it's going to be successful. I think you have to include all stakeholders. I think when people see that they have a voice, and they have some say, it may not always agree with you and me, but if they have some insight into it, they're going to be supportive.

Michael talked about the teachers in his school taking ownership with a sense of shared leadership:

I think when people have a common vision and a common goal those are factors that can lead to better collaboration and more productive collaboration. And, so for us, you know, it allowed me to be able to bring in more than half of my staff during the summer where we wrote, exactly wrote out what our plan was going to be. I didn't have to worry about buy-in at the start of the year because over half of the staff had come in over the summer to contribute into doing it. So just those collaborative efforts to give the teacher some ownership.

Rhonda talked about the impact of shared leadership stating, "I think that people like to be a part of the process and not just being told procedurally what to do." Steve answered the question about the impact of the initiative on collaboration stating:

We developed it all together. So, again, it wasn't something that, we came out the first day of school where our first faculty meeting and said, "We're going to do X, Y, Z." It

was, "What do we need as a school? What do the teachers see that needs done?" And that's where we focused our PBIS initiatives first.

During the second focus group interview, Michael talked about specifically using his role as a building leader to promote shared leadership during the PBIS initiative:

One of the things we've tried to do is expand, and, and our PBIS team is one of those avenues that we, or formats where we try to share some of the leadership. We've implemented action teams in our building, so the PBIS team is one of those action teams but everybody in our building has some sort of role.

Collaborative relationships. Five of the participants in the one-on-one interviews talked specifically about how they experienced an increase in collaborative relationships. The responses that the increase in collaborative relationships stemmed from question 12 in the one-on-one interview which stated: Describe the impact the PBIS initiative had on the working relationship, collaborative relationship, and personal relationship between you as a building leader and the teaching staff. The responses stemmed as well from question three in the focus group interviews which stated: What changes took place with collaborative planning and shared leadership after the initiative?

Wanda expressed the development of collaborative relationships within the PBIS initiative stating, "it's given us a common language, it's given us a data focus that we can have those conversations with to make the environment better for kids, to help the kids make better choices and to help teachers help kids." Marissa described the collaboration that took place between the grade levels in their school during the PBIS initiative:

We actually let the staff lead it. Those that were sitting around the table over the summer, they gave up their time to help plan and create, were the ones that introduced it.

So, what that did was, it allowed every grade level to have a representative that they could go back to and ask questions.

Michael talked about the collaborative opportunities the PBIS initiative created for him as a building leader:

I think when people have a common vision and a common goal those are factors that can lead to better collaboration and more productive collaboration. And, so for us, you know, it allowed me to be able to bring in more than half of my staff during the summer where we wrote, exactly wrote out what our plan was going to be.

Rhonda talked about how the collaborative process of the initiative took the pressure off the teachers:

I think teachers like that it was a school-wide process because sometimes they run out of things to do for kids. So, as a collaborative effort we were doing something school-wide and then it kind of took of the, I guess the heat, if you will, off of them knowing we were altogether striving for the same goal.

Crystal said the PBIS initiative “brought us together to come together and build a bond to think collaboratively.”

Research Question Responses

One central research question and three research sub-questions guided this research study on the impact of a growth mindset, transformational leadership style and leadership skills on building leaders’ experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. I examined data, categorized statements made by the participants in the study, and reviewed documents provided from the participants to arrive at answers to the following research questions.

Central research question. Many different ideas were expressed by building leaders during one-on-one and focus group interviews to answer the following central research question: What are the building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives in an upstate South Carolina elementary school? The 14 participants shared their memories of the experience during the mandatory implementation of PBIS in their schools. The two principals in the study, Allan and Michael, had different approaches to the initiative. Allan felt as if he wanted to do just enough to meet district requirements and was only committed in his mind to having PBIS sustained in his school for one year. While Michael expressed a different sentiment and felt this was a great opportunity to create a sense of shared leadership in his building.

Assistant principals gave accounts of experiencing ups and downs throughout the process and stressed the importance of a positive attitude and patience from building leaders who may experience such an initiative in the future. Two of the assistant principals, Kristal and Rhonda, felt the experience was nothing but positive and helpful for each of their schools. Kristal talked about new initiatives being inevitable and the idea that a positive reward system should have already existed in every elementary school with or without the initiative. Rhonda stated the mandatory PBIS was a no-brainer for her and welcomed the initiative because of the positive impact on the students and staff.

The two guidance counselors, Allison and Melanie, shared how the experience of being a building leader throughout a mandatory PBIS initiative had a positive impact on their ability to take on more of a leadership role with their teaching peers. Allison talked about it being her first year in her school and thought the initiative allowed her to take a leadership role on the PBIS action team which led to an easier transition to collaboration with the teaching staff. Melanie gave a similar recollection of the experience and felt like the initiative allowed her to further

develop her relationship with the principal and assistant principal at her school because of the leadership role they gave her throughout the initiative. The essence of the experience from this phenomenon for building leaders in the SSD centers around the idea that the ability, behaviors, and mindset of principals, assistant principals and guidance counselors has a direct impact on school culture, student behavior, and a school's ability to succeed in the face of mandated change.

Research sub-question one. Two themes (open-mindedness to PBIS and close-mindedness to PBIS) arose in data analysis to answer the first sub-question: How do building leaders describe their own growth mindset from the PBIS experience? Looking through the lens of the growth mindset, I used this research question to guide the questions that were used during one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews with the building leaders in the study. The desire was to examine the phenomenon they experienced in their year-plus of the PBIS initiative. The first theme found from these questions was expressed by seven of the building leaders participating in the study and focused on the idea that building leaders experienced open-mindedness when they described their own growth mindset through the PBIS initiative.

Michael described the impact of his staff being open-minded throughout the initiative, including the writing of the original PBIS matrix, stating,

I really attribute that to just the fact that I had so many members of our staff come in to help contribute and write it (PBIS school matrix). That was automatically some buy-in and some ownership within the program when it was rolled out.

Allison was another building leader who expressed a positive and open-minded attitude with her staff and PBIS team when the school headed into the PBIS initiative stating, "This is the course we're on. Jump on board. Let's go."

The second theme for research question one described an opposite viewpoint from the first theme. This viewpoint, expressed specifically by four of the building leaders in the study, describes one of close-mindedness when approaching a mandatory PBIS initiative. Allan spoke about how difficult it was to be open-minded about the initiative because of his own strong personal beliefs:

I struggle with rewarding children for things that they are expected to do. And so, I'll be honest, that was a drawback to me. We're rewarding kids in some facets for doing exactly what they're supposed to do, and there's got to be a breaking point at some time, because we can't get rewarded for everything that we're supposed to do in life.

Brenda expressed that her close-mindedness toward the PBIS initiative centers around the idea that students are being rewarded for things she does not think merit a reward. She said, it is a little worrisome to me that, this isn't just in the schools but as a society, that we are rewarding children um, adults, people for behaviors that are just suppose-should be or are supposed to be socially normed.

Research sub-question two. A theme developed to answer the second research question: How do building leaders describe their own transformational leadership skills from the PBIS experience? This theme centers around the idea that building leaders experienced an increase in team or shared leadership throughout PBIS initiative. By looking through the lens of the transformational leadership theory, building leaders described experiences of staff motivation and overall school culture through the PBIS initiative with their responses being analyzed and compared to leaders who have used the transformational leadership theory to guide their administrative decisions in their schools. This viewpoint focuses on the idea that, using

transformational leadership skills, building leaders developed a sense of shared leadership and collaborative relationships throughout a mandatory PBIS initiative.

Michael described the impact of shared leadership in his school when discussing his experiences with the PBIS initiative:

I think when people have a common vision and a common goal those are factors that can lead to better collaboration and more productive collaboration. And, so for us, you know, it allowed me to be able to bring in more than half of my staff during the summer where we wrote, exactly wrote out what our plan was going to be. I didn't have to worry about buy-in at the start of the year because over half of the staff had come in over the summer to contribute into doing it. So just those collaborative efforts to give the teacher some ownership.

The impact of collaborative relationships within the PBIS initiative was shown with Wanda stating, "it's given us a common language, it's given us a data focus that we can have those conversations with to make the environment better for kids, to help the kids make better choices and to help teachers help kids." Marissa talked about the impact of collaborative relationships through the PBIS initiative by allowing the staff members to take leadership roles:

We actually let the staff lead it. Those that were sitting around the table over the summer, they gave up their time to help plan and create, were the ones that introduced it. So, what that did was, it allowed every grade level to have a representative that they could go back to and ask questions.

Research sub-question three. A theme developed to answer the third research question: How do leadership behaviors impact the implementation and sustainability of PBIS programs? This theme centers around the idea that leadership behaviors (positive approach and consistent

leadership) had a positive impact on a mandatory PBIS initiative in an upstate South Carolina school district and was expressed in one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and documents provided by the participants in the study.

Allan expressed his feelings about the impact of his attitude on the overall success PBIS initiative from day one in the process stating:

I think if you have that attitude that if people in the building are happier, they're going to do a better job. So, we started out the school year with that, with a big kickoff. PBIS, we tried to make it as positive as possible for our teachers. And we stressed to them the importance of, this is going to help. It's going to help your behavior of your classroom; it's going to encourage your kids to support one another.

Kristal expressed a similar sentiment about the impact a building leader with a positive attitude can have on a school by stating,

I think that you have to have a positive leader. I think it has a great impact on climate. I think it just, it just reiterates the fact that you got, you have to focus, you have to praise and focus on positive, positive actions for kids especially that need it.

Consistent leadership behaviors also impacted the implementation and sustainability of the PBIS initiative in the SSD. Allan spoke about the importance of leaders providing the teachers with consistency stating,

Do teachers like consistency? Yes. Do teachers want to be on their own too? Yes. And you have to marry those two together. You'd have to let them see that it is a school wide structure, but you can have some flexibility still within your classroom walls.

Kristal stated how critical consistent leadership behaviors were to the success of the PBIS initiative saying,

when you have so many initiatives going on that are different in different buildings, whether it's how you do RtI, whether it's how you handle discipline, or anything. If you, if there's not consistency, it kind-of, it's like putting together pieces of a puzzle.

Steve expressed his feelings about the impact a consistent leader can have on a PBIS initiative stating,

I think, I think for us it's to...as admins, as leaders, we have to make sure it stays at the forefront. I think it helps for teachers to see um that we as uh administrators are keeping it at the forefront, keeping that positivity going.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate and describe the impact of a growth mindset, transformational leadership style and leadership skills on building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. The purpose of Chapter Four was to present the results of the data analysis in this study. In this chapter, I provided an overview about each of the participants which is followed by the results from the study.

The chapter included themes that were clustered together to help provide a description of the essence of experiencing the phenomenon of being a building leader during a mandatory PBIS initiative in an upstate South Carolina elementary school. The results from the study were presented in a narrative form and were organized by theme. Pseudonyms were used for all study participants to ensure confidentiality. All quotes from participants were presented verbatim, which includes verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to more accurately depict participants' voices. The chapter also analyzed how the data collected answers the research questions in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate and describe the impact of a growth mindset, transformational leadership style and leadership skills on building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. At this stage in the research, building leaders' experiences with PBIS implementation was generally defined as administrators, school counselors, and lead teachers who use "a school-wide prevention strategy that establishes a positive school climate and the behavioral supports needed to reduce behavior problems and enhance academic performance" (Molloy et al., 2013, p. 594).

Three research questions guided this study on the impact of a growth mindset, transformational leadership style and leadership skills on building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. Data collection included one-on-one interviews with 14 participants, 2 focus group interviews from 10 participants and document analysis that included meeting notes and minutes from PBIS building leaders participating in the study.

Chapter Five includes a summary of the finding in this study to answer each of the research questions, a discussion section that includes the study findings and how that correlates with the empirical and theoretical literature from Chapter Two and an implications section to examine the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. The chapter includes a delimitations and limitations section to analyze the boundaries, scope and focus of the study, while looking at the potential weaknesses of the study that could not be controlled. The chapter

concludes with recommendations for future researchers on the topic and a summary of the most important takeaways from the study.

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study show building leaders developed a growth mindset through the initiative and experienced a growth in team or shared leadership in their schools. The building leaders found that their own leadership behaviors had an impact on the initiative. The leaders did find a great deal of resistance from teachers and staff members who were close-minded about the PBIS initiative.

In answering the central research question, the 14 participants provided a recollection of the experience of being forced to implement PBIS in their schools. The two principals in the study had different approaches to the initiative. One felt as if he wanted to do just enough to meet district requirements, while the other felt this was a great opportunity to create a sense of shared leadership in his building. Assistant principals gave accounts of experiencing ups and downs throughout the process and stressed the importance of a positive attitude and patience from building leaders who may experience such an initiative in the future. The guidance counselors who participated shared how the experience had a positive impact on their ability to take on more of a leadership role with their teaching peers.

In answering research sub-question one, How do building leaders describe their own growth mindset from the PBIS experience?, 13 out of 14 building leaders from the SSD who participated expressed different elements of experiencing a growth mindset about the PBIS initiative. The leaders talked about the leadership team in their schools having an open-mind about the PBIS initiative in different forms. Some leaders talked about being excited about the initiative and taking it on full blast from the first year while others talked about having an open-

mind about the initiative but taking it as slow as they deemed necessary to fit the needs of their school. The leaders addressed their growth mindset by talking about how their presentation of the PBIS initiative helped lead to professional behaviors that changed throughout the process.

The biggest support for the growth mindset of building leaders came from the improvement of student behaviors after the implementation of PBIS at each school during the initiative. Building leaders talked about their discipline data from referrals decreasing, which they all stated helped with the growth mindset of their staffs. Although this did not dismiss all resistance to the initiative, it was something that helped veteran teachers to have more of a growth mindset following the charge of the building leaders in the study. Thirteen out of the 14 participants expressed having their growth mindset challenged by a close-minded attitude from teachers or stakeholders in their schools. They talked about the biggest challenge of the initiative centering around trying to get those resistance to the initiative to buy-in to have a growth mindset about PBIS.

In answering research sub-question two, How do building leaders describe their own transformational leadership skills from the PBIS experience?, 12 out of 14 building leaders from the SSD who participated expressed different elements of experiencing an increase in team or shared leadership throughout PBIS initiative. By using transformational leadership skills, building leaders developed a sense of shared leadership and collaborative relationships throughout a mandatory PBIS initiative. Following the national and district-wide PBIS framework, each of the building leaders talked about a team being one of the most important elements of the initiative. Instead of the building principal handing down information or decisions about PBIS, a model of shared leadership led to more buy-in and sustainability from all stakeholders throughout the initiative. All of the participants commented positively about the

impact the initiative had on developing collaborative relationships in their buildings. Even in buildings with more resistance to PBIS, the initiative allowed their staff to work together and have a say in the decision-making about the program.

Answering research sub-question three, How do leadership behaviors impact the implementation and sustainability of PBIS programs?, building leaders talked about how their leadership behaviors impacted the implementation and sustainability of PBIS programs. Thirteen out of 14 building leader participants talked about the impact a positive approach had on the behaviors of their staffs during the initiative. These leaders expressed the idea that regardless of the initiative it was important for them to have a positive approach as a leader but it was more important during a mandatory initiative where push back was possible. Nine of the 14 participants talked about the importance of consistent leadership skills. The consensus of these leaders was consistency being important so there was a clear vision for what was expected during the PBIS initiative. The final open-code that developed in answering research question three was building leaders describing their use of servant leadership. Six of the 14 participants described being servant leaders and how important it was to show the stakeholders in each building that they were willing to do everything they would ask others to do.

Discussion

This study was defined by the empirical and theoretical literature included in Chapter Two on the impact a growth mindset, transformational leadership style and leadership skills had on building leaders' experiences leading PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina. The discussion section gives researchers more insight on the subject by analyzing how the study's findings have a connection with prior empirical and theoretical

literature on PBIS initiatives around the country and provides a case for how I have extended the research on the subject and contributed to the educational field.

Empirical Literature

The results from this study have added to the information previous researchers found when exploring the experiences of building leaders who have implemented PBIS in their schools. This research is significant because it helped to develop an understanding of elementary school building leaders' experiences leading initiatives in the PBIS setting in upstate South Carolina. A gap in the literature existed (Cawthon, 2016; Cressey et al., 2014; Filter et al., 2016; McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014; Molloy et al., 2013) and there was a lack of prior research on PBIS when it pertains to phenomenological studies that give a voice to the administrators who described their experiences through implementing PBIS initiatives and beyond. This research helped to fill the gap in literature with the focus on a transcendental phenomenological study and administrator experiences through the implementation of PBIS initiatives. The experiences of all 14 building leader participants in this study show that all their schools had a sense of being open-minded to the mandatory initiative. Only three leaders (one principal and two assistant principals) confessed to having more of a traditional, close-minded approach to the initiative, while the other 12 participants claimed to possess a growth mindset for the initiative.

This research is significant for the 80% of building leaders and administrators around the country who have not yet implemented PBIS. With popularity of PBIS growing (PBIS, 2018), administrators and building leaders could be part of a future mandated implementation of the program. This study will impact the stakeholders in schools around the country because of the impact PBIS has had not only in schools but also in school communities. Although PBIS has become mandatory in many of the school districts surround the SSD in upstate South Carolina,

the data collected and analyzed in this study will be significant for future leaders as they approach a mandatory PBIS initiative. The 14 participants in this study described their experiences by outlining the successes and struggles of leading such an initiative. This will help to fill the gap in the literature and give specifics about the experience of leading a PBIS initiative at the elementary school level. By having principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors participate, I found different perspectives from the different positions in elementary schools who could be building leaders in a similar future initiative.

Theoretical Literature

The results from this study have added to the information previous researchers found when exploring the experiences of building leaders who have implemented PBIS in their schools by looking through the theoretical lens of the growth mindset theory and transformational leadership theory. The theoretical impact this study made is the examination of building leaders' ideas about their experiences in a PBIS setting that could lead to others' professional growth. This theoretical idea connects with Dweck's (2006) growth mindset. No prior research had used the growth mindset theory to explore PBIS research and this research could have on future administrators working in the field. Using the growth mindset theory in this study, I analyzed participant responses through the lens of Dweck's growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). Eleven of the 14 participants maintained they possessed a growth mindset throughout the initiative and expressed it had a positive impact on the attitude and mindset of the stakeholders in their schools.

Another theoretical impact of this study is the impact on leaders implementing PBIS initiatives through the lens of the transformational leadership theory (Allen et al., 2015; Bass, 1996; Oberfield, 2014). This theoretical framework allowed leaders to describe the experiences

of staff motivation and overall school culture through the PBIS initiative with their responses (data) being analyzed and compared to leaders who have used the transformational leadership theory to guide their administrative decisions in their schools. The stakeholders in each of the schools were impacted as well by the approach of a transformational leader within a mandatory PBIS initiative. Seven out of the 14 building leaders talked about using a transformational leadership style to positively impact their PBIS initiative. The experience of these building leaders, detailed in Chapter Four, will assist future leaders and administrators who try to decide what type of approach is best suited for a future PBIS initiative.

Implications

This section addresses the implications of the study in the following areas for building leaders who led PBIS initiatives at the elementary school level in upstate South Carolina: theoretical, empirical, and practical. This section provides an analysis for the impact this study could have in the field of education on building leaders in the future who may face a similar experience with leading a mandatory PBIS initiative in an elementary school.

Theoretical Implications

In schools with a goal toward PBIS implementation, the growth mindset theory recommends that building leaders analyze their own mindset (fixed or growth) along with the mindset of their staff. The theoretical implication revolves around a fixed mindset, which is described as “believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the *fixed mindset*—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over” (Dweck, 2006, p. 6). Principals who have experienced the phenomenon of leading a mandatory PBIS initiative, such as the two principals who participated in this study, have the unique perspective of seeing the impact of having a growth

mindset. An example of the use of a growth mindset having implications on future building leaders from this study is understanding what it takes to be a successful principal.

The success or failure of a school has a direct correlation with the skill, ability, and effectiveness of the building principal (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014). The character of a building leader can have the greatest impact on the school having success (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014). Authoritative leaders who are effective in executing tasks have shown to be the most successful (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014). Within the self-analysis of a building leader, he or she must determine what an authoritative leader looks like and if they possess a growth mindset are they willing to grow from the experiences of being the authoritative leader of a school throughout an initiative like the PBIS mandate in this study.

The theoretical implication is shown through the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1996) involves the use of a leadership approach that eventually brings about change in the social systems of an organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This definition was pertinent to this research study and provided the theory as a backbone for the theoretical framework of the study because of the transformational impact administrators may have had implementing PBIS initiatives. This study on the experiences with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools has extended the use transformational leadership theory from the interviews done with 14 different building leaders in the SSD.

The inclusion of two guidance counselors as building leaders in this study was unique because many previous studies on PBIS initiatives focused on administrators as the building leaders. This study gave light to the fact that guidance counselors are building leaders and played one of the lead roles in each of the schools from the 14 participants in the study.

Research on PBIS shows building leaders must change the culture in a positive manner to sustain

the PBIS program in their school (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016) and is part of the theoretical implications in this study. The way teachers thought under the old-school disciplinary style must fade away with a change toward an open mindset where a focus is placed on providing supports to students who are not meeting school expectations. Without this change in mindset among the teachers, the building leader will struggle to sustain the PBIS program. Achieving staff support for a mandated program like PBIS is difficult because change on a systemic level can only occur when the majority of a school staff changes their practices (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Empirical Implications

The strength of this study comes from having different building leaders who talked about the impact of having a growth mindset, which shows the empirical impact in the study. For Allan, the principal who was resistant to the initiative and did not present a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) to his staff, he struggled to have PBIS become successful in his school. This aligns with previous research (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2016) that showed the importance of leaders analyzing their own mindset to determine the best way to handle implementing and sustaining a mandatory PBIS initiative. Allan freely admitted to only doing the initiative because it was mandated by the school district and he was candid in his description of why he did not agree with rewarding students for doing what he and others in the building felt like they were supposed to do. The experiences of the building leaders studied in this research will provide examples for future researchers that could impact and extend the use of the theory in education, which shows the empirical impact in the study.

Ten assistant principals were interviewed in this study and each talked about the expansion of team and shared leadership in their buildings during the PBIS initiative. Having a transformational leadership approach (Bass, 1996) was something the assistant principals

attributed to the increase in the collaborative process of attacking a mandatory PBIS initiative. One of these assistant principals, Grace, expressed this type approach was necessary to get buy-in from the staff. This follows previous research (Hauserman & Stick, 2013) which showed the importance of building leaders possessing a transformational leadership approach that includes creating an environment in which followers become a part of the process.

Allison, the guidance counselor who thought the experience allowed her to become someone the staff could come to as a confidant, described the experience as one that developed her ability to collaborate with the entire staff. Because of the nature of a mandatory initiative, like PBIS implementation at the elementary school level, building leaders are almost forced to possess traits of a transformational leader (Bass, 1996). He or she must motivate or inspire their staff to rally around and support this mandatory PBIS initiative or risk wasting the time and energy of the school's stakeholders (Oberfield, 2014).

Practical Implications

The practical implications from this study are shown through the experiences of the principals, assistant principals and guidance counselors who participated in the study. The principal who possessed a growth mindset during the initiative had a much different perspective from the experience than a principal who possessed a fixed mindset. He talked about how his growth mindset had a positive impact on his staff buying in and developing more of a growth mindset in all aspects of their job, which shows the practical implication in the study.

This study will have practical implications on assistant principals around the country who will experience a PBIS initiative in the future as they decide what type of leadership approach or style is most appropriate for such a challenge. The data in the study shows how important guidance counselors can be in their role as a PBIS team leader. Both counselors talked about

how their positive outlook and support role provided teachers with a different opportunity to share in the leadership on the PBIS teams at the different schools. They felt being able to work with the teachers and not be in an administrative capacity gave them both an advantage that most administrators would not have. This has practical implications for future schools who may participate in a PBIS initiative and could lead to more guidance counselors having a stronger role in the process.

Recommendations

Based on the results from the study and the theoretical, empirical and practical implications, I have recommendations for principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors who could experience a mandatory PBIS initiative in elementary schools in the future. These recommendations are important because they could have a direct impact on the success of the building leader facing the challenge of implementing a district or county wide mandate. Research within this study shows (Dweck, 2006) the mindset and approach of a building leader is one of the main factors in the success of a school. The results from the study also show the building leaders attitudes and approaches to the initiative had a direct impact on the successes and failures in each of the schools.

First, I recommend principals promote a growth mindset to all stakeholders in the school prior to presenting the PBIS initiative to them. This would have an impact on teachers and students alike thinking about their mindset before any major initiative involving change. Leaders must model the behaviors they expect from their staff and having a growth mindset will inspire and encourage teachers and stakeholders to develop and grow (Dweck, 2006). Principals should also attempt to possess the character traits of a transformational leader. While this sounds like a monumental task, it is not hard for an administrator to motivate their teachers and staff by

involving them in a culture of shared leadership and transparency (Bass, 1996). When facing a PBIS initiative principals cannot wait until the last minute to present the mandate to their staff. They must strive to be open, honest, and provide their staff with the reasons why this initiative is a positive for all school stakeholders.

Next, I recommend assistant principals take a lead role in the implementation and sustainability of any future PBIS initiative. Having been an assistant principal, I know the types of delegation that takes place within schools to meet the needs of programs like PBIS. In my schools, our guidance counselors were delegated the responsibility of the lead role for the PBIS action team. Because other tasks and roles were given to me as the assistant principal, I was not as active on the PBIS team as I should have been or would like to be. In the future, I would raise my voice louder to ask for a larger role, especially for the sustainability of the program in my school. While guidance counselors possess many of the traits needed for success in their toolbox, the ability of a building administrator to hold people accountable and ensure the fidelity of implementation and sustained success. PBIS research shows the building principal must attend at least 80% of all PBIS meetings as part of the matrix for success (PBIS, 2018) but the schedule for principals will not always allow this to happen. Assistant principals must take the initiative to be the leader in the building, if possible.

Finally, I recommend that guidance counselors are given a leadership role in any PBIS team development but are not left to be the ultimate leader of the PBIS action team. The counselors participating in the study felt like their leadership role was unique because they were not building administrators, which led to more vocal participation from teachers and other stakeholders in meetings held under their leadership. However, it is necessary for one of the building administrators (principal or assistant principal(s)) to have the lead role for any PBIS

team, especially throughout the implementation phase of any such initiative. My own personal experiences and evidence (documents from PBIS team notes/meetings) gathered in this study provided evidence that many principals delegated the lead role for the PBIS team to guidance counselors. Having worked in two schools with PBIS implemented and fully operational, the guidance counselors are not as effective when placed in the ultimate lead role of any PBIS team.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations in this study were centered around the choices I made as the researcher to choose the SSD as the setting for the research. This district fit the criteria (at least one year complete leading a PBIS initiative) for this study because they mandatorily implemented PBIS in all schools (elementary and secondary) during the 2016-2017 school year. This district is located near the area where I live, which ensured the ability to conduct interviews face-to-face. Only building leaders (principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors) in this district were considered to be participants in this study. I chose a transcendental phenomenological study to find the true experience from a building leader who took part in a mandatory PBIS initiative.

The research study has delimitations but it too has limitations. One of those limitations in the study was only using one school district in the upstate region of South Carolina. I used the district near the area where I live but I also needed a district that met the criteria and was located in upstate South Carolina. There are other districts who fit this criteria but because I only chose to use one this is considered a limitation in the study. Another limitation in the study is only having 2 principal participants and 2 guidance counselor participants while having 10 assistant principals participate. While the study focuses on all three roles as building leaders, more participation from principals and guidance counselors could have made the study more rich in detail.

Recommendations for Future Research

After an analysis of the findings and recognizing the delimitations and limitations in the study, I recommend that future research takes place to replicate the type of transcendental phenomenological study designed in my research. While other schools and school districts in the upstate of South Carolina could provide a more detailed and rich experience of the building leader using this study as a springboard, I think it could also be used to research in different areas and regions of the state and country. Because this study was singularly focused on the elementary level, it could also be used to provide a guide for future phenomenological studies on both the middle and high school levels. Although this study focused on the positive aspects and attitudes toward leading and facing the mandatory implementation of PBIS, many participants shared information about stakeholders who were close-minded about the initiative. Future studies could focus more on the ways building leaders handled this negativity toward a mandatory initiative in education. The recommendations are based upon the data from this study, which found building leaders had a more positive experience leading a PBIS initiative in upstate South Carolina using traits of the growth mindset theory and the transformational leadership theory.

Summary

The research study was designed to explore the experience of leading a mandatory PBIS initiative in an upstate South Carolina elementary school. These experiences from this study provide future building leaders with a glimpse into the mindset of a building leader who is presented a mandate from the district level to implement a program in their school. This research expands on the previous literature about PBIS initiatives and the role of a building leader throughout. The study gives a unique perspective from three fronts for principals,

assistant principals, and guidance counselors. The findings from the study show that most of the participants felt like a positive attitude and having traits of the growth mindset theory and transformational leadership theory had a large impact on the PBIS initiative and their schools in general. The impact for the building leaders who participated stretched past just PBIS because it forced more of a team or shared leadership role for the other non-building leaders in each of the schools.

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APPENDIX A: Approval to Conduct Research

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 29, 2018

Jason Ramey

IRB Approval 3557.112918: Elementary School Building Leaders' Experiences with Leading Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Initiatives in Upstate South Carolina: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Jason Ramey,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter

Date:

To: Building Leader Who Experienced PBIS Initiative

I am currently a graduate student at Liberty University who is conducting research as part of my doctoral program. The purpose for my research study is to examine the experiences of building leaders (administrators or counselors) who were part of a mandatory PBIS initiative in elementary schools in Upstate South Carolina. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you meet the parameters of being a building leader during a mandatory PBIS initiative in an elementary school in Upstate South Carolina and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete a face-to-face interview, provide meeting notes from PBIS team meetings, and participate in a focus group with other participants who have experienced the same phenomena. The face-to-face interview and focus group should take no more than an hour each and I will occur at a time and place that is convenient to you. Your participation in this study will be completely confidential and your name nor your school or district names will be included in the study.

If you wish to participate, please complete the attached consent form and have the signed form with you in person when we meet for the interview. Once I receive your response to the email with your intentions to participate, I will respond to setup the interview.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jason Ramey, Ed.S. Liberty University

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
11/29/2018 to 11/28/2019
Protocol # 3557.112918

Informed Consent Form

Elementary School Building Leaders' Experiences with Leading Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Initiatives in Upstate South Carolina: A Phenomenological Study

Jason Michael Ramey
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be part of a research study that will examine the experiences of elementary school building leaders in leading a PBIS initiative. You were selected because you were determined to be a building leader in the Upstate of South Carolina who led a PBIS initiative in your elementary school and are at least 18 years of age or older. I ask that you please read the entire form below and ask any questions that may arise before agreeing to be part of this study.

Jason Ramey, a doctoral candidate in the Liberty University School of Education, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of building leaders with leading PBIS initiatives in upstate South Carolina elementary schools.

Procedures: With your consent to participate in this study, I would like for you to do four things as a participant:

1. Participate in a face-to-face interview at an agreed upon place and time. This will take about one hour to complete and I will be recording the interview via audio with two devices to ensure the data will be collected from the interview.
2. You will be asked to submit any meeting notes and/or agendas from your PBIS team meetings. Please redact student, faculty names, or other personal information from these documents. They will only be used to analyze the main topics or ideas addressed by the building leaders during the implementation of PBIS and throughout the experience.
3. Participate in a focus group of building leaders who will meet to discuss the phenomenon together following the completion of the one-on-one interviews in this study. This will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you and will include 5 to 8 of the other participants from this study. This focus group should take about one hour.
4. You will be asked to review the transcripts from this research study. This will be a chance for you to review your statements from the one-on-one interview and focus group interview. This helps to ensure you meant what you said in the initial responses to the questions asked in the interview and focus group. This should take about 20 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks from participating in this study are minimal. Any risks would be the same as any person would experience in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit by participating in this study. However, participants will have the opportunity to discuss the experience of leading a PBIS initiative in an Upstate South Carolina elementary school with other leaders who have experienced the same phenomenon.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
11/29/2018 to 11/28/2019
Protocol # 3557.112918

Compensation: You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Pseudonyms will be used for participants, schools, and districts to protect the identities of participants and maintain confidentiality. All interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in locations where others will not be able to overhear any conversations.

The data from this research study will be secured on a computer and password protected. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Any information shared by the focus group will be more difficult to remain confidential because of the participation with you and other building leaders who experienced the phenomenon. But any data collected from the focus group that will be used in any published report will also be presented in a way to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

All records, data, and other information collected throughout the process of this study will be kept for a period of three years following the study. At that time, all documents, data, notes and information will be shredded and destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to not participate in this study, this would in no way impact your relationship with Liberty University or your school district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you were to decide to withdraw from this study, please contact the researcher at jramey4@liberty.edu. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: This study is being conducted by Jason Ramey. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, please contact Jason Ramey at 803-487-5940 or jramey4@liberty.edu. You are also able to contact the researcher's chair, Dr. Gail Collins, at glcollins2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify Jason Ramey if you wish to obtain a copy of this consent form for your records.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
11/29/2018 to 11/28/2019
Protocol # 3557.112918

Statement of Consent: I have read and understand all the information above. I have asked questions about the study and I have received answers. I am hereby giving my consent to participate in this research study.

_____ The researcher has my consent to obtain an audio recording of me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: Audit Trail

Date	Action
July 18, 2018	Received permission to conduct study from school district Superintendent.
November 29, 2018	Received IRB permission to collect data for study
December 1, 2018	Contacted potential participants for possibility of taking part in study
December 17-19, 2018	Completed first two one-on-one interviews for data collection
December 20, 2018	Began collecting document analysis data from participants
December 21-23, 2018	Transcribed interviews one and two
January 10-17, 2019	Completed one-on-one interviews three through nine for data collection
January 18-25, 2019	Transcribed interviews three through nine
January 23, 2019	Completed one-on-one interview 10 for data collection
January 28, 2019	Transcribed interview 10
January 31, 2019	Completed one-on-one interview 11
February 1, 2019	Transcribed interview 11
February 11, 2019	Completed one-on-one interviews 12 and 13
February 13-14, 2019	Transcribed interviews 12 and 13
February 18, 2019	Completed one-on-one interview 14
February 20, 2019	Transcribed interview 14
February 25, 2019	Completed focus group interview one
February 27, 2019	Completed focus group interview two
February 28-March 4, 2019	Transcribed focus group interviews one and two
February 28, 2019	Collected final document analysis data from participants
	Member checking was completed with participants following the completion of each transcription. Most participants commented about saying umm but did not ask for any of their comments to be changed or omitted.
March 5-March 20, 2019	Began coding and identifying themes from interviews and document analysis. Wrote Chapters four and five. Submitted to Dr. Collins for review.

APPENDIX E: Epoch Journaling

Date	Biases	Experiences Causing Bias
July 18, 2018	I consider the PBIS initiative a positive impact on elementary schools.	This bias exists from my own interactions as a building leader in an elementary school taking part in a PBIS initiative.
August 15, 2018	I consider the growth mindset to be critical to the success of a PBIS initiative.	This bias exists from my own experiences with staff members who did not have a positive attitude about their ability to possess a growth mindset.
December 17, 2018	I think most interviews will be upbeat and positive about the PBIS initiative after completing my first one-on-one interview.	This bias exists from my interview and interaction with the building leader. She spoke glowingly about the impact the initiative had on her school.
January 17, 2019	I am beginning to question whether the PBIS initiative has had a positive impact on building leaders and schools.	This bias exists because of three straight interviews in which the tone of the building leaders was negative toward the initiative and PBIS.
March 6, 2019	I am having to ensure I do not develop a bias toward the codes and themes that are presenting themselves throughout the process.	This bias exists because I have a positive opinion about the impact of PBIS in elementary schools. Some of the themes presenting themselves are in a negative light.

APPENDIX F: Horizontalization Chart

Recurring Ideas	Horizons
We need a positive reward system in place for our students...	PBIS Rewards
Why are we rewarding students for doing what they are supposed to do?	
The students liked the rewards at first but we had to find new rewards fast...	
Why do we have to implement PBIS if behavior is not a problem here?	Teacher Behaviors
Teachers were concerned about not being able to have their own management in classroom...	
It is hard to sell a mandatory initiative to a staff that is already overwhelmed..	Administrative Behaviors
We need something to improve behavior and classroom management...	
We were just doing the initiative because it was mandatory in district...	
We need clear expectations in our school for both students and teachers...	School Expectations
The expectations in our school have not been made clear enough by (us) administration...	
The culture in our school is not where it needs to be...	School Culture
The culture in our school is good but teachers want more support...	
The culture in our school needs an overhaul...	
We did not know what to expect during the implementation of the PBIS program...	PBIS Implementation
We tried to involve as many staff members as possible when planning our PBIS rollout and initiative...	

Appendix G: Imaginative Variation Chart

Imaginative Variation Perspectives	Themes
Open-Minded to PBIS	Experienced a growth mindset open to PBIS initiative
Changing Professional Behaviors	
Impact of PBIS on Student Behaviors	
Close-Minded to PBIS	Experienced close-mindedness during PBIS initiative
Resistance to Buy-In	
Positive Approach	Leadership behaviors had positive impact on PBIS initiative
Consistent Leadership	
Servant Leadership	
Shared Leadership	Experienced an increase in team or shared leadership throughout PBIS initiative
Collaborative Relationships	