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## Culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports: A process-oriented framework for systemic transformation

Aydin Bal

This article presents Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS), the first framework to operationalize cultural responsiveness in the context of positive behavioral interventions and supports in the United States (Bal 2011). To develop the CRPBIS framework, I first conducted a systematic review of literature. Then, I developed the CRPBIS framework based on the literature review and interdisciplinary literature from cultural psychology, organization studies, learning sciences, critical geography, cultural studies, as well as education research. Finally, to test and refine the framework in practice, a multisite, mixed-methods formative intervention study was conducted in the state of Wisconsin between 2012 and 2015 (Bal et al. 2014, 2016; Bal 2016, 2017; Bal, Afacan, and Cakir 2017; Bal, Afacan, and Clardy 2017).

In the United States, youth from racially minoritized communities—especially African American, Native American, and Latino—disproportionately receive exclusionary school discipline more severely and frequently for less objective reasons such as disrespect, dress code violations, and excessive noise and are placed in special education programs with the label of emotional disturbance (ED; Skiba et al. 2002; Office for Civil Rights 2014; U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services 2016). Disproportionality in behavioral outcomes is an enduring, adaptive systemic crisis. Its patterns and predictors change within and across historical and geographical contexts. Concern about disproportionality has spurred policy changes. The 2004 reauthorization of the special education law—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—mandates that states and districts assess disproportionality and allocate 15% of federal funds to eliminate it through prevention and early intervening services. Among the programmatic responses, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)—a multi-tier systems of supports model—has emerged in the past twenty years. PBIS is one of the most important innovations in education for addressing behavioral problems. Fast becoming the primary means of providing behavioral support, PBIS is the only

schoolwide model specifically mentioned in IDEA (2004). To date, PBIS has been implemented in more than 20% of U.S. schools (approximately 20,000). In thirteen states, more than 40% of schools implemented PBIS (Horner 2015). Globally, PBIS has been increasingly used in various national education systems including Canada, Qatar, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Australia. My hope is that the CRPBIS framework will inform the movement to address the double bind that researchers and practitioners experience regarding behavioral outcome disparities and the implementation of PBIS in diverse school contexts.

### **PBIS: Challenges and possibilities**

PBIS aims to reorganize schools to precisely classify needs and deliver services for students experiencing behavioral problems (Sugai et al. 2000; Sugai and Horner 2006). Grounded in applied behaviorism and relying on the ideals of standardization and accountability, PBIS takes into account the whole school context as the unit of intervention. It strives to create a cohesive, supportive, and positive social climate for all students by providing early intervening services and unifying resources. There are four central tenets of PBIS: outcomes, evidence-based practices, data-based decision making, and systemic change (Sugai and Horner 2006). Although PBIS enjoys policy support and popularity, the literature has not been able to resolve three critical issues: (a) making PBIS culturally responsive; (b) facilitating reciprocal and sustained student, family, and community involvement; and (c) addressing disproportionality.

The first unresolved problem is cultural responsiveness. Originally, the four tenets of PBIS were conceptualized as “culture-neutral” that should work universally across all contexts and groups if schoolwide PBIS is implemented with high implementation fidelity (Sugai et al. 2000). On the other hand, the developers of PBIS stated, “PBIS emphasizes the importance of procedures that are socially and culturally appropriate. The contextual fit between intervention strategies and the values of families, teachers, schools, support personnel, and community agency personnel may affect the quality and durability of support efforts” (Sugai et al. 2000, 136). Since the development of the original CRPBIS framework in 2011 (Bal 2011), there has been an increasing attention to cultural responsiveness in PBIS. Academicians and technical assistance centers have generated several products (e.g., rubrics, lists, professional development workshops, briefs, and articles). The promise was that practitioners will be culturally responsive or make their systems culturally responsive if they use those products. The rubrics, guidelines, and reviews include overly generalized, often abstract discrete suggestions that were not supported by adequate empirical evidence and considerations of users’ local contexts such as valuing diversity and developing awareness toward implicit

racial biases (e.g., McIntosh et al. 2014; Banks and Obiakor 2015; Cramer and Bennett 2015). The products were developed in response to the developers' orientations, knowledge, and interests (e.g., funding or tenure). The literature is yet to provide a robust framework that lays out how to achieve cultural responsiveness in diverse and ever-changing social-historical contexts of local schools and education agencies based on their needs, histories, interests, and goals.

The second issue is about student, family, and community involvement. In the PBIS literature, cohesion and collaboration among staff, families, and community members is assumed to produce and maintain safer, more effective school contexts (Sugai and Horner 2006). Ideally schoolwide behavioral expectations and reinforcements should be generated by all stakeholders, thus motivating the whole school community toward the same goal (Chen, Downing, and Peckman-Hardin 2002; Sugai et al. 2000). Nevertheless, in reality, students, families, and community members—specifically those from nondominant backgrounds—are excluded from the decision-making processes (Bal 2011, 2016). Both the original PBIS model and the products on culturally responsive PBIS positioned school staff as the active subjects of systemic change activity and students, families, and community members as the passive objects. The third unresolved issue is racial disproportionality. Multiple studies found PBIS implementation is linked to a reduction in office discipline referrals (ODRs) and recidivism and increased perception of safety (Bradshaw et al. 2010). However, even after PBIS, African American students remain overrepresented as recipients of exclusionary discipline (Vincent and Tobin 2011).

As a result of these unsolved problems, educators, administrators, and policy makers find themselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they must address immediate issues in their schools or districts related to disproportionality and authentic partnership with students, families, and community members. On the other hand, practitioners are expected to implement PBIS with high implementation fidelity and in a cultural responsive way. To date, the literature has not offered a solution to this double bind. The present article addresses this gap presenting the CRPBIS framework. Going beyond suggesting “culture matters,” the CRPBIS framework lays out how culture matters. Instead of offering yet another product, the framework offers an instrumental theory of culture and a systemic transformation methodology, called *Learning Lab*. Through the Learning Lab process, local stakeholders develop and implement their own culturally responsive PBIS model in response to social-historical-geographical context. CRPBIS strives to open up decision-making processes to those who have been excluded from schools' activities and builds coalitions among local stakeholders for the purposes of examining and re-mediating the exclusionary and punitive school systems and

addressing disproportionality from the ground-up. In what follows, the literature review methodology is presented. I then discuss the racialization of school discipline and provide an analysis of how PBIS has evolved. Lastly, I present the CRPBIS framework and the implementation of Learning Labs.

## Review of the literature

I reviewed education and social science literature to identify prior guidelines, rubrics, conceptual and empirical articles, and research syntheses on cultural responsiveness in PBIS. I searched four electronic databases: Academic Search Premier, the U.S. Department of Education's Education Resources Information Center, Education Full Text, and PsycInfo between 1975 and 2011. I used the following combinations of keywords: *PBIS* or *positive behavior\** or *SWPBIS* or *schoolwide positive behavior\** or *intervention\** or *support\** or *intervention\** or *support\** or *PBS* or *positive behavior\** *support\** AND *intervention\** or *treatment\** or *program\** or *model\** or *therap\** or *research* AND *culturally responsive* or *culturally competent* or *culturally adequate* or *culturally sensitive* or *cultural competency* or *cultural adequacy* or *cultural responsiveness*. I manually searched reference lists of the selected publications. I could identify only one case study conducted in a school serving Native American students (i.e., Jones et al. 2006). The review did not reveal a framework for culturally responsive PBIS that had been published before 2011. Hence I developed the CRPBIS framework (Bal 2011).

## Racialization of behavioral problems

All children have a right to free and appropriate public education in safe, supportive, and inclusive schools. The popular belief is that schools help youth to become productive citizens and achieve social mobility. Yet, critical educators warn that schools do not challenge but reproduce the power, privilege, and interests of the dominant groups (Giroux 1983; Freire 2000; Anyon 2005; Danforth, Taff, and Ferguson 2006; Ladson-Billings 2006; Harry and Klingner 2014; Erickson 2009; Darling-Hammond 2010; Artiles, Dorn, and Bal 2016). The reproduction of power structure (e.g., racial order) and systemic inequalities found in the society are perpetuated as the nondominant students' ways of being, knowing, speaking, and behaving are often devalued or pathologized.

The racialization of behavioral problems in schools has a long history in the United States (Children's Defense Fund 1975). African American, Latino, and Native American youth are disproportionately subjected to suspension, expulsion, and harsher disciplinary punishments (Skiba et al. 2002; Losen and Gillespie 2012; U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education

and Rehabilitation Services 2014). For example, African American students accounted for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of all expulsions, and yet they made up only 18% of the student population (Office for Civil Rights 2012). Exclusionary discipline and its racialized presence begin in preschool: “Of the school districts with children participating in preschool programs, 6% reported suspending out of school at least one preschool child. ... black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 42% of the preschool children suspended once, and 48% of the preschool children suspended more than once” (Office for Civil Rights 2014, 7). Disability identification is supposed to protect students with disabilities from exclusionary disciplinary actions (IDEA 2004). However, students with disabilities are more likely to experience discipline as compared to their peers without disabilities. Again, African American students with disabilities constituted 21% of the students with disabilities, but 44% of those with disabilities subject to mechanical restraints (Office for Civil Rights 2014). Punitive and exclusionary behavioral management strategies, policies, and programs, as exemplified by the zero-tolerance policies, were found harmful (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008; Orfield, Siegel-Hawley, and Kucsera 2014). These practices and policies are ineffective and associated with academic failure, dropout, and involvement in the correctional system (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008; Losen and Gillespie 2012). Youth placed in special education labeled as emotionally disturbed have some of the most negative academic, social, and post-school outcomes (Wagner et al. 2006; U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services 2016). Under such circumstances appeared the school-to-prison pipeline: for students from nondominant groups, the penal system becomes destiny, as schools are feeding prisons (Alexander 2012). Noguera (2003) observed that “those most frequently targeted for punishment in school often look—in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status—a lot like smaller versions of the adults who are most likely to be targeted for incarceration in society” (342—343).

### **Evolution of PBIS: A cultural-historical analysis**

To address behavioral problems, U.S. schools often use reactive, punitive, and exclusionary disciplinary actions such as suspension (Skiba et al. 2002). In the last two decades, PBIS emerged as a new way of thinking about behavioral problems and school discipline. PBIS offered a promising approach to improving the timeliness and effectiveness of behavioral support. PBIS is grounded in Skinner’s radical behaviorism that has been the most influential theory in the field of special education (Kauffman and Landrum 2006). Behaviorism takes measurable acts of individuals as the unit of analysis: An act (observable and

measurable) is predicted by antecedents and modified by consequences, such as reward, known as operant conditioning (Bijou 1993). If a behavior is reinforced, its likelihood is increased. This and other “universal laws” of learning in behaviorism are seen as culture-neutral or color-blind. A genealogical understanding of behaviorism and the role that it played in U.S. education system is vital to understand the cultural-historical evolution of PBIS.

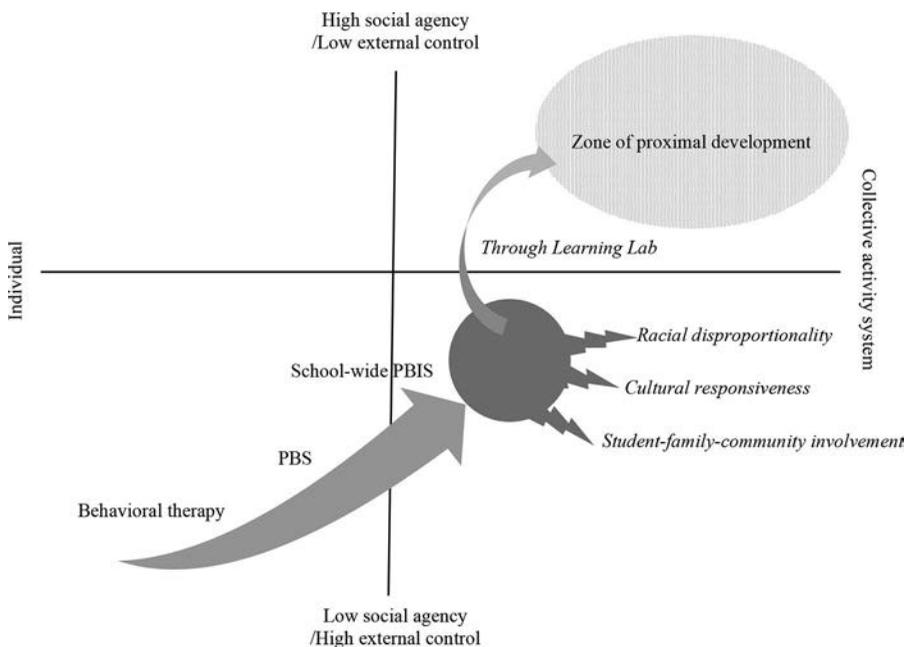
In the nineteenth century, large bureaucratic infrastructures were evolved to handle education through compulsory schooling, preparing nations’ children to be capable future workforce in highly compartmentalized massive industrial production systems was the function of formal schooling (Foucault 1995; Stevens, Wood, and Sheehan 2002). At the same time, self-governing, morally directed, autonomous bodies as object of research started to dominate educational sciences (Popkewitz 1997). The invention of this new anatomy is not an abrupt discovery but a convergence of multiple cultural-historical processes outside of the schools such as church, military, and hospitals (Foucault 1995). Frederick Winslow Taylor’s theory of scientific management was the major influence in curriculum and instruction and behavioral management in U.S. schools. Taylor’s theory that suggested the excessive standardization and control of workers’ actions in mass production was adopted and dictated the work of students and educators.

The time and motion measurement and control infrastructures (e.g., tools, techniques, and statistics) were built in education systems. This milieu affected curriculum, instruction, discipline, and classification practices based on norm-based aptitude and achievement tests as well as the architectural designs of schools (Gallego et al. 2001; Bal 2017). School discipline has been used as a process to classify and rank learners and distribute them across spaces for a better economy of behavioral management: “By assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all. It made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding” (Foucault 1995, 147). The use of behaviorism has provided tools for the microanalysis, measurement, and modification of isolated actions of individual students that were well fitted to the atomization of students and teachers, specifically as relates to the education of students identified as abnormal or disabled.

Applications of behaviorism for students experiencing psychological problems evolved from behavioral therapy to applied behavioral analysis, and, finally to PBIS (Dunlap, Sailor, Sugai, and Horner 2009). Behavior modification gained popularity in the twentieth century and were used predominantly for individuals with severe behavioral problems and developmental disabilities who were institutionalized for aggression or deviant behaviors (Dunlap et al. 2009). The institutions (e.g., asylums) functioned as therapeutic spaces for “fixing” individuals within highly controlled environmental conditions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, disability rights movements and deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities gave rise to the inclusion movement and the opposition to aversive behavioral modification techniques, including electric shock or corporal punishment. The special education law of 1975 guaranteed free and appropriate public education of youth with disabilities in least restrictive environment. Practitioners systematically applied nonaversive behavior therapies and techniques (e.g., positive reinforcement and token economy) to alter dysfunctional or abnormal behaviors and their immediate conditions maintaining those behaviors. Moving PBIS from segregated institutions to public schools gave a rise to the earliest model of schoolwide PBIS (Dunlap et al. 2009). Since the 1990s, PBIS has been expanded to the whole school context focusing on explicitly teaching behavioral expectations, which are observed and reinforced consistently across all spaces, including the cafeteria, restrooms, and playground (Walker et al. 1996).

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of PBIS. In the earliest model, the ontological realm of behavioral therapy and its object was an autonomous individual placed in high external control and low agency contexts. Schoolwide PBIS expanded the traditional unit of analysis from single individuals to collective activity system of schools (Singer and Wang 2009; Horner 2015). However, the existing theoretical and methodical tools stuck in the original zone of high external control-low agency and are not capable of supporting PBIS in this expansion. Among PBIS scholars, behaviorism is



**Figure 1.** Evolution of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and paradigm expansion through Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Learning Lab.

the dominant theory—with some variations of cognitive-behaviorism. Accordingly, school is conceptualized as a clutter of autonomous bodies and homogenous racial, linguistic, and ability groups, such as English language learners or Native American students. The aim is to change acts and thoughts such as developing awareness towards teachers' implicit biases to address racial disparities (see, e.g., McIntosh et al. 2014).

### ***Guiding principles of PBIS***

PBIS emphasizes early intervention and prevention, continuous progress monitoring, data-based decision making, evidence-based practices, interventions, and the coordination of school resources and activities (Sugai and Horner 2006). PBIS is a team-based process that includes teachers, administrators, guidance staff and paraprofessionals (e.g., playground attendants). The PBIS team determines schoolwide rules and expectations and creates a behavioral support plan to show how minor and major behavioral problems should be handled. The team meets regularly to review school data, make modifications in the behavioral plan, and report outcomes to staff (Lewis and Sugai 1999). PBIS is usually implemented in three tiers (Sugai et al. 2000). The primary tier supports are universally provided for all students and within which educators (a) directly teach social skills and expected school behaviors, (b) create opportunities for students to practice those behaviors, and (c) reinforce compliance (Sugai and Horner 2006). It involves preparing schoolwide behavior support and proactive behavior management plans. Ideally, desired outcomes and corresponding reinforcements for demonstrating these outcomes should be cogenerated and thus valued by students, families, educators, and other stakeholders (George, Kincaid, and Pollard-Sage 2009). In reality, school and district staff serving on the PBIS committee define the schoolwide expectations and students, family, and community members are excluded from the decision-making processes (Bal et al. 2014; Bal, 2016). The secondary tier emphasizes addressing individual students' "risk factors," such as low achievement and truancy. Functional behavioral assessment and "evidence-based" interventions are used for students who are not responsive to universal supports in small groups. In the tertiary tier, students who are unresponsive to the secondary tier interventions and supports are exposed to individualized interventions. The PBIS team determines which students require more intensive interventions based on monitoring a number of data sources in a given time period and location: attendance, tardiness, suspension, and academic outcomes.

### ***Culture in PBIS***

There is a recent interest in the literature to take culture into consideration in PBIS implementations (Vincent et al. 2011; Fallon, O'Keeffe, and Sugai

2012; Sugai, O’Keeffe, and Fallon 2012). These recent efforts represent a move from the culture-neutral approach to the cultural deterministic approach (Artiles et al. 2010). The cultural deterministic approach uses an essentialist, static conceptualization of culture in relation to racial/ethnic group and social class membership (i.e., all or none), as implied in the following definition: “Culture: the language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviors, and material objects that are passed from one generation to another. Every person on the planet is a member of at least one culture” (Skiba and Ritter 2011, 6). PBIS scholars using the cultural deterministic approach recommend that teams pay attention to diverse cultural identities and the so-called home cultures: “To facilitate all students’ social success in schools, then, behavior support delivery needs to bridge various degrees of divergence between students’ cultural identities and the school environment” (Vincent et al. 2011, 221). As such, one’s culture determines and thus explains, for example, why Native American students act in certain ways and how to work with Native nations. PBIS scholars using cultural determinism have an a priori assumption that the characteristics associated with nondominant groups’ presumed explicit behaviors (e.g., greetings), values (e.g., collectivist or individualistic cultures), or cognition (e.g., learning styles) may result in a cultural mismatch, misunderstandings, and erroneous special education and discipline referrals (see, e.g., Utley et al. 2002; Wang, McCart, and Turnbull 2007; Eber, Upreti, and Rose 2010; Banks and Obiakor 2015). The main promise of the cultural deterministic approach in the PBIS literature is that through a “cultural consideration” and schoolwide scientifically proven, academic and behavioral instructions, practitioners can aptly identify “true cases” of behavioral problems that are free from cultural influences (e.g. Eber, Upreti, and Rose 2010).

I argue PBIS should go beyond cultural determinism and use a cultural instrumentalist approach relying on a dynamic, practical, and generative conceptualization of culture and cultural mediation. Built on the four central tenets of PBIS, the CRPBIS framework used the cultural instrumentalist approach and offers a process for increasing equity in opportunities, access, and outcomes by maintaining inclusion in decision-making activities in PBIS implementations. The CRPBIS framework offers the possibility of implementing culturally responsive interventions to renovate school-wide behavioral support systems and outcomes with local stakeholders, specifically those who have been historically excluded from decision-making activities in schools.

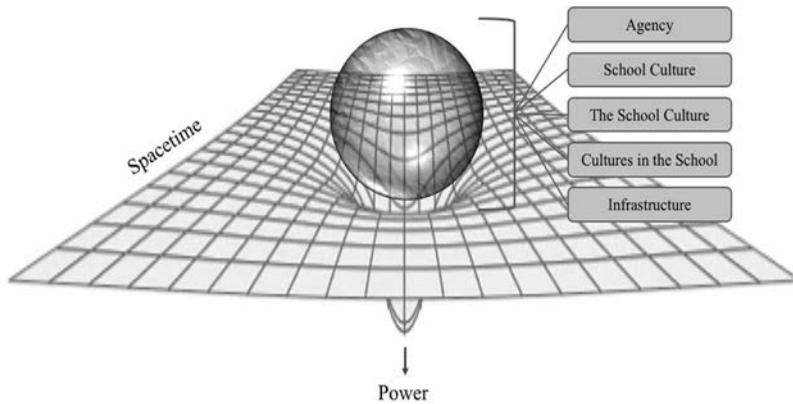
## **CRPBIS**

In the development of CRPBIS, I used Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) developed by Vygotsky and his followers. CHAT is firmly

grounded in historical materialism (Marx and Engels 1998). CHAT emphasized three significant features: (a) centrality of mediation via cultural artifacts; (b) genetic (developmental) analysis; and (c) grounding the analysis in everyday activity (Cole 1996). Scholars using CHAT have examined how individuals learn and change themselves and their environments as active agents using artifacts (Engeström and Sannino 2010). The CRPBIS framework defines culture as the residue of a group's collective problem-solving activities and historically accumulated artifacts that reflect group's efforts to survive and thrive in ever-changing circumstances (Gallego, Cole, and The Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition 2001; Bal 2011).

Humans are biologically cultural. There is no part of human life that is unmediated by culture. Yet, "culture is very difficult for humans to think about. Like fish in water, we fail to 'see' culture because it is the medium within which we exist" (Cole 1996). Culture is instrumental. It regulates the ways in which people engage in everyday activities (Rogoff 2003). It provides a toolbox of artifacts that both enable and constrain human actions (Cole 1996). Erickson (2009) refers to *culture* as a "product of human creativity in action." People do not belong to culture. They make and use culture to achieve individual and collective goals and change themselves and their environments. Our thoughts and actions emerge in culturally mediated, socially constructed, and historically evolving collective activities (Leont'ev 1974; Cole 1996; Engeström 1987; Gutiérrez and Rogoff 2003; Greeno 2006). As participants in multiple and ever-changing activity systems (e.g., family, PBIS team, language arts class, and a basketball team), students appropriate cultural practices in and outside of the schools (Nasir et al. 2006).

The CRPBIS framework considers five interacting components of specific school contexts: *Individual factors*, cultures in the school, agency and the practices and experiences that students and teachers bring to school; *institutional factors*, school culture, such as rules, division of labor, privileged behavioral practices, and narrative styles; *interpersonal factors*, the school culture, the unique culture of a school that emerges as a school community works together (Rogoff 2003); and *infrastructure*, durable network relations and collective material and conceptual structures that function as a glue to make a community more than the sum of autonomous individuals (Bowker and Star 2000). Figure 2 depicts the cultural layers of an activity system that mediate individuals' actions. These elements are in a dialectical relationship with each other. Contradictions within and between those components are the sources of trouble as well as innovations (Engeström 2015). In this formulation, each activity system moves in spacetime context and gravitates toward power that is constantly negotiated and reproduced (Bal 2017). In a given activity (e.g., a sixth-grade language arts lesson, office discipline referral,



**Figure 2.** The school culture.

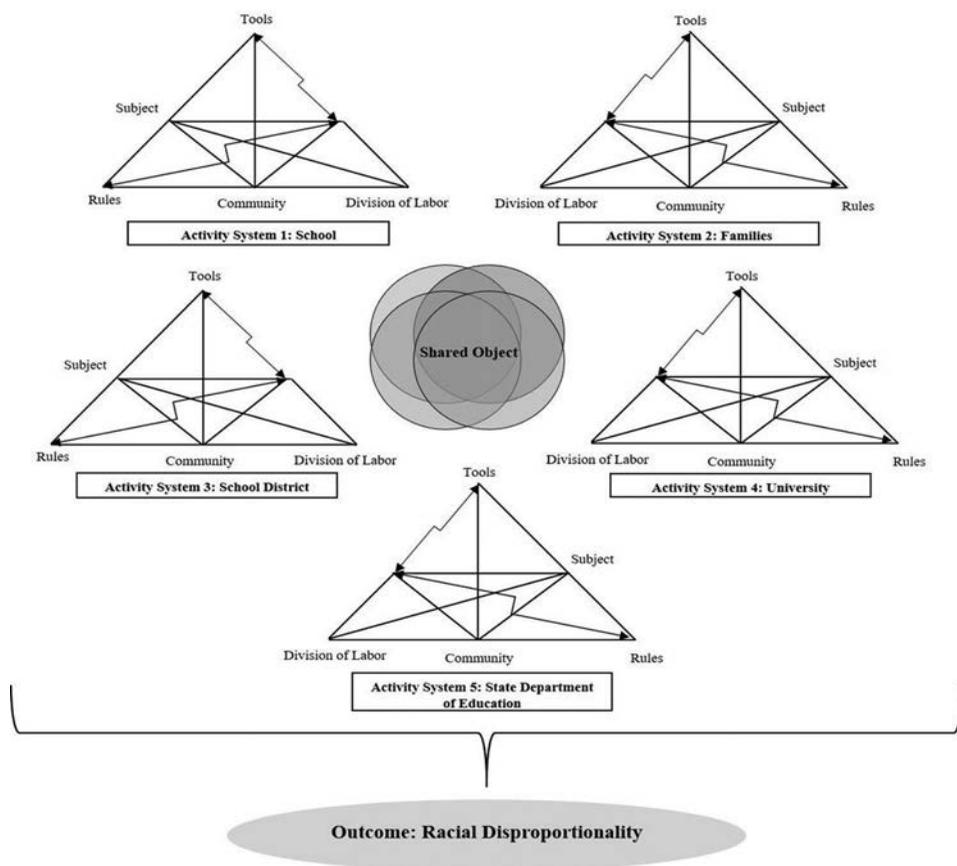
behavioral assessment, PBIS team meeting or basketball game on the playground), these cultural layers merge and become a context of actions.

### ***A paradigm shift in PBIS through CRPBIS***

In agreement with Moje and Hinchman (as cited in Klingner, Sorrells, and Barrera 2007) that “all [educational] practice needs to be culturally responsive in order to be best practice” (225), CRPBIS proposes a paradigm shift in the PBIS service delivery model to an instrumental conceptualization of culture moving away from surface outcome disparities to the processes that reproduce those disparities. With this shift, researchers and practitioners more comprehensively understand and address complex and adaptive enduring equity issues that are reproduced in/through schooling. Therefore, practices of school discipline cannot be solely understood and transformed by taking individuals’ discrete acts determined by biological make up, stimulus-response conditioning, or cognitive thoughts as the unit of intervention. Such individualistic approaches locate the problem within individual students, bury racism in the psyche of educators, and, more importantly, blackbox the systemic processes that maintain the long-lasting inequities. In her important work on the racialization of the criminal justice system, Alexander (2012) showed how political and economic forces have formed and maintained a racial order in the United States. In this process, the interests of politicians, federal and local law enforcement agents, and business converged to reproduce disproportionate representation of African American and Latino people in the criminal justice system through seemingly colorblind policies, legal decisions, and acts such as war on drug. Therefore, individualistic and ahistorical approaches that solely focus on the surface outcomes cannot adequately intervene the complex and dynamic notion of systemic inequities such as racial disproportionalities in the criminal justice system, wealth,

health, housing, and education (Washington 2006; Alexander 2012; Piketty 2014; Harry and Klingner 2014; Desmond 2016). Then, how can we systematically intervene disproportionality in the everyday realities of schools?

CRPBIS suggests forming reciprocal and productive family-school-community coalitions as a solution for building positive, supportive, effective, and adaptive schoolwide behavioral support systems. CRPBIS takes a culturally mediated object-oriented collective activity system (e.g., school, district, and PBIS team) as the unit of intervention as demonstrated in Figure 3. “Humans enter into a relationship with nature that is realized through the process of labor, through activity using tools; consequently, their relation to nature becomes one mediated primarily by objects. But through this process humans enter into a certain relationship with other humans, and only through these relationships—with nature itself” (Leontiev 2005, 14). Object-oriented and culturally mediated activity as the unit of intervention is useful for building upon the existing knowledge base of PBIS. Minimum elements of an activity system constitute the object, subject, mediating cultural tools, rules,



**Figure 3.** Constellation of multiple activity systems with a partially shared object (Bal 2016).

community, and division of labor. Object holds an activity system and its components together and provides the motive of the activity. The object of an activity system (e.g., a disturbing student) is socially, historically and spatially co-constructed. Object balances the various goals of the participants and maintains coordination among multiple activity systems (e.g., school, district, and families). An activity system is full of practices, histories, conflicts, negotiations, and power/privilege differentiations, as well as collective innovations and solutions. These contractions generally seen as obstacles in PBIS implementation must be solved via a streamlined and highly controlled implementation with high fidelity (Sugai 2011). In CRPBIS, diverse perspectives, goals, and histories are seen as the resources and driving forces of expansive learning in an activity system (Engeström 2008).

In the CRPBIS Project, the concept of cultural responsiveness was taken as a floating or empty signifier (Lévi-Strauss 1987). In education, cultural responsiveness signifies different things to different people and communities from discrete acts of teachers (e.g., greeting Latino students in Spanish), to celebrating students' ethnic or religious identity in schools (e.g., Ramadan), to a list of qualities for practitioners (e.g., awareness about implicit racial biases), and to more comprehensive curricular arrangements in classrooms (see for example, Gay 2002). As a floating signifier, cultural responsiveness is "all those things together; but is that not precisely because it is none of those things, but a simple form, or to be more accurate, a symbol in its pure state, therefore liable to take on any symbolic content whatever" (Lévi-Strauss 1987, 64). A floating signifier enables communication and coordination between multiple activity systems. Instead of imposing a set definition of cultural responsiveness to local stakeholders, we provided a process, Learning Lab, through which, local stakeholders develop their own culturally responsive behavioral support system that is responsive to their school culture—the everyday realities and histories, needs, resources, and goals of their local school communities.

### **Implementing CRPBIS in schools**

To test and expand the CRPBIS framework in practice, I have conducted a mixed methods research project in the state of Wisconsin since 2012. The CRPBIS project was funded by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to examine and address racial disproportionality in behavioral outcomes in the state schools. The CRPBIS research team has conducted descriptive and multilevel analyses to study the extent of disproportionality in special education identification and school discipline. We found that Native American, African American, and Latino students disproportionately received suspension and expulsion and African American and Native American students were overrepresented in special education for ED (Bal, Betters-Bubon,

and Fish 2017). To examine and intervene the educational processes that reproduce those disparities, we then moved to local schools and implemented Learning Labs in three public schools (Cole Elementary School, Rogoff Middle School, and MLK High School) in two districts between 2013 and 2015 (Bal et al. 2014, 2016; Bal 2016; Bal, Afacan, and Cakir 2017). PBIS implementation was studied in the fourth school (Scribner Elementary School) related to disproportionality and family-school-community partnership without a Learning Lab.

CRPBIS is built in the four tenets of schoolwide PBIS (outcomes, evidence-based practices, data-based decision making and systemic change). The goal of CRPBIS is to promote positive social behaviors and support students' learning, engagement, and need for safety, belonging, and affirmative identification. CRPBIS follows five interceptive actions: (a) forming Learning Lab; (b) determining desired outcomes; (c) empirically and culturally validating research-based practices; (d) using data for continuous improvement and innovation; and (e) systemic change. Together, these actions aim to renovate school systems to restore effectiveness, efficiency, and justice and address racial disparities in behavioral outcomes.

### ***Forming a Learning Lab***

*Learning Lab* is an inclusive research and innovation site for local stakeholders to collectively examine and transform existing discipline systems that exclude and marginalize students from nondominant communities. Learning Lab is a task force—not a focus group. It addresses a historical, systemic contradiction (e.g., racial disproportionality) through an inclusive problem solving and decision-making process. Examining and re-mediating a school system requires using diverse perspectives and experiences of multiple groups (e.g., students, families, administrators and community representatives) and forming collective agency and critical dialogue among members. Multiplicity in perspectives, experiences, and goals may facilitate making visible the often-invisible institutional practices and jointly developing ecologically fit solutions (Freire 2000; Gutiérrez 2008; Soja 2010). Members meet for eight to ten consecutive sessions for a specific objective (e.g., designing a transparent, effective, and just behavioral support system to address disproportionality). The process seeks to rouse and sustain an expansive systemic transformation owned by stakeholders, specifically those from nondominant communities.

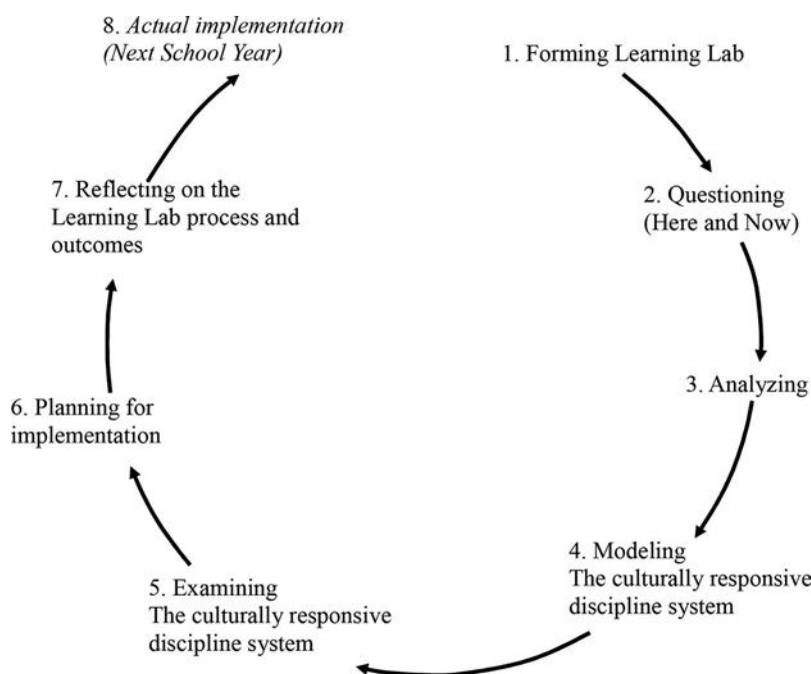
A Learning Lab comprises families, students, teachers, behavior interventionists, social workers, support staff, and school leaders. It may also include district or state representatives (e.g., external PBIS coaches), local community members from business, nongovernment organizations (e.g., the Urban League, the Boys and Girls Club and YWCA), and advocates. For example, the CRPBIS Learning Lab formed at MLK High School was comprised of fourteen members with the following roles: Two administrators (assistant principal and dean of students/

internal PBIS coach), five teachers, five parents, one student, and one community representative (the director of an organization serving the city's Latino community). The racial composition included six White, three African American, three Latino, and two Hmong members (Bal 2016). This school's PBIS team included fifteen school staff all of which were White.

The CRPBIS research study showed that having ten to fifteen members within Learning Labs might work well. Two members (an internal PBIS coach and a parent or an assistant principal and a graduate student or faculty from a local university) can serve as co-facilitators who are responsible for leading the Learning Lab sessions and logistics such as child care, food, meeting place, and interpreters (Bal et al. 2016). It is natural some members may miss the meetings. Like any other school-based teams, the work should continue as long as the diverse communities of practice are represented at each meeting. Developing goals and new or edited instructional and assessment tools is open for negotiation, appropriation, and resistance. Learning Lab activities focus on developing collective agency. Members are co-innovators. Engeström (2008) called this movement “collaborative interdependence.”

Learning Lab uses the *functional method of double stimulation* (Vygotsky 1978). In double stimulation, “the subject is put in a structured situation where a problem exists ... and the subject is provided with active guidance towards the construction of a new means to the end of a solution to the problem” (van der Veer and Valsiner 1991, 169). The starting point of Learning Lab is daily problems as experienced by participants related to the existing system (rules, roles, and division of labor) and its outcomes. These problems are examined through qualitative and quantitative data such as participants' perspectives or school's discipline data served as primary stimuli. Then, interventionists and members use various artifacts (e.g., maps of existing discipline system) that serve as secondary stimuli to facilitate collective agency among participants. Here *agency* refers to the human ability to purposely impact their behaviors and surroundings (Sannino 2015).

The Learning Lab process follows a cycle of systemic change (Engeström 2008, see Figure 4). The cycle starts with forming a Learning Lab that represents the diversity within the school. Members question and analyze their here and now—the problems they face, such as the extent of disproportionality. Members are asked to record critical incidents related to the problem in their everyday work (e.g., ODRs, suspension, expulsion, and special education placement for ED) as well as the seemingly “race-neutral” institutionalized acts, rules, roles, and assumptions such as schoolwide expectations and how behavioral incidents (e.g., disrespect, insubordination) are defined and handled. These data function as primary stimuli to examine the problem in its specific spacetime context. Once Learning Lab members established a comprehensive understanding of the outcome (e.g., schoolwide ODRs desegregated by race), they move to a root cause analysis. Facilitators use conceptual models such as research literature on



**Figure 4.** Cycle of systemic change (Bal 2016).

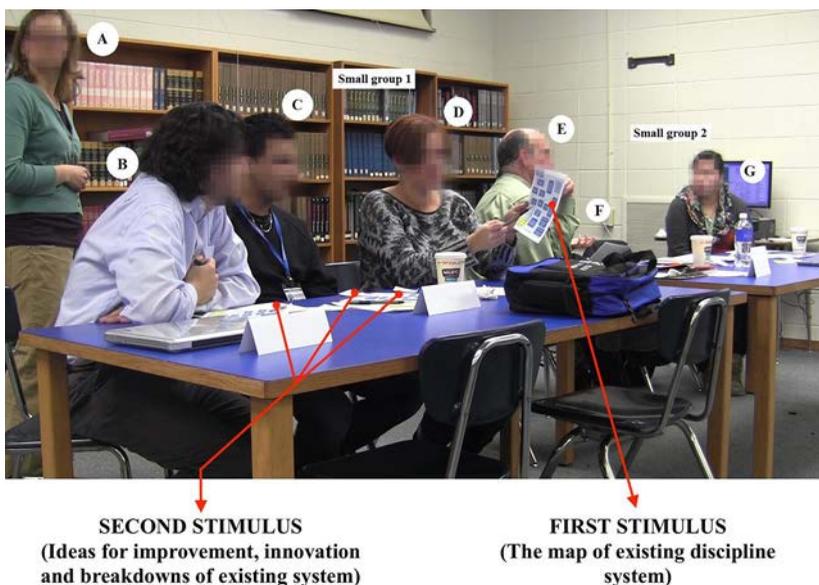
racial disproportionality and school reform along with new analysis tools such as mapping out the existing discipline system (e.g., a flow chart showing how a behavioral disturbance in the class is handled and who is responsible for what). These conceptual and material artifacts serve as secondary stimuli to move from problem identification to problem solving. See [Figure 5](#) for members at Rogoff Middle School engaging in empirical and historical root cause analysis through mapping out their existing system. Members analyze the components of five interacting activity systems—school, families, districts, state’s education agency, and university—and trace manifestations of the contradiction (e.g., conflicts, dilemmas, and double binds; Engeström, 2008).

Through empirical and historical analyses, members move on multiple time scales among the past, the present, and the future, and on multiple spatial scales (from neighborhood to city and to state), to analyze their discipline system. Teachers in the MLK high school Learning Lab, for example, discussed that they did not have opportunities to restore relationships with students when teachers sent students to detention. Parents stated that they did not receive notification about behavioral incidents unless their children received suspension (Bal et al. 2017). The map stimulated the ideas for improvements. Once the existing discipline system was thoroughly analyzed and visually represented facilitators formed small groups with three or four members and asked each small group to develop their ideal behavioral support system (see [Figure 5](#)). In the sixth session, the facilitators asked each



**Figure 5.** Rogoff Learning Lab members mapping out the existing behavior support system in Learning Lab Session 8 (November 21, 2013).

group to discuss the purpose of their existing system that was just mapped out, identify problems, and brainstorm possible improvements. Those ideas were used as secondary stimuli (see Figure 6). The next step is to merge the existing system with the ideal system including newly emerged solutions. This new system is called the culturally responsive behavioral support system



**Figure 6.** Members working with small groups on modeling and examining process in Learning Lab 6 (February 25, 2014). A: Minah (facilitator), B: Brian (facilitator), C: Grant (student), D: Gisella (Former MLK parent/Boys and Girls Club Representative), E: Edwin (Special education teacher), F: Gloria (Parent), G: Harriet (Teacher). Reprinted from Bal, Afacan, and Cakir (2017).

as it is responsive to diverse experiences, perspectives, and goals of the school community. The culturally responsive system is rigorously examined. Finally, members work on an implementation plan for the next school year. Analyses of Learning Labs are beyond the scope of this review. For detailed analyses, see Bal (2016), Bal et al. (2014), Bal et al. (2016), Bal et al. (2017). Below I discuss how Learning Lab can make the four key tenets of PBIS culturally responsive and help PBIS implementers move into a new zone where the unit of intervention is collective activity systems within a context of low external control and high collective agency (see [Figure 1](#)).

## **Outcomes**

The first tenet of PBIS is to determine desired behavioral outcomes consistent across the school (Dunlap et al. 2009; George, Kincaid, and Pollard-Sage 2009; Sailor et al. 2009). To make this tenet culturally responsive, members critically examine whether desired and locally meaningful outcomes are determined in an inclusive process. Members should be mindful of and seek to overcome legacies of the school culture and its practices such as reactive and aversive practices as ways to control students who belong to nondominant groups, deeply structured power relationships, privilege differences, historical segregation of educators from families and community members. Learning Lab members may individualize systemic problems. For example, a small group of Black and Brown students with severe behavioral problems often called “frequent flyers” or “tier-three students” cause disproportionality. Learning Labs ought to pay attention to behavioral and academic outcome disparities in their districts and states. However, it is equally important to develop a critical stance toward the sociocultural constructions of success/failure, competence/incompetence, and deviance through the institutionalized processes in the United States. This repositions the focus from what desired behavioral outcomes are determined to how a representative group of stakeholders determines the outcomes. For example, the concept of respect is a commonly agreed upon desired behavior in PBIS implementations. Nondominant students disproportionately receive discipline referrals for disrespect (Skiba et al. 2002; Losen and Gillespie 2012). Respect is grounded not only in the cultural understandings that individuals bring to schools, but also within the school cultures and everyday interactions and historical configurations of how respect is defined within and outside school walls (Jones et al. 2006).

CRPBIS conceptualizes learners as social agents who transform their social and material environment and, as a result, their behaviors, cognition, and emotions. In determining desired schoolwide outcomes, members should aim to increase all students’ participation in socially positive, academically rich, and inclusive learning activities. Diversity in experience, practice, interest, language, and ability that learners bring to the school is not only

valued but used for facilitating a systemic change. This allows all students to be empowered in determining the content, direction, and outcome of their activities, leading to learner-driven personal and social change. Working with a diverse group in determining desired outcomes, such as why these outcomes are relevant and what they look like, encourages members to examine their own assumptions about the purpose of schooling and the goals of promoting certain ways of behaving within that setting.

### **Practices**

The promise of PBIS is to use evidence-based interventions that match each student's individualized needs; further, ongoing assessments determine the extent to which students respond to these evidence-based instructions and interventions (Klingner and Solano-Flores 2007). As Sugai and Horner (2006) summarized, “[t]he SWPBS approach is about redesigning learning and teaching environments so that the best and most appropriate evidence-based practices can be adopted and implemented at the classroom and schoolwide levels” (256). Historically, the interventions deemed as “evidence-based” are seen as objective and culture-free and likened to medical treatments. That is, they were considered to be universally appropriate for “treating” or “fixing,” student behaviors if they were used as prescribed. The use of terms like “dosage,” “side effects,” and “placebo” used to describe the nature and intensity of interventions demonstrate this predisposition in the special education intervention research (Bal 2017). However, there are significant limitations in the literature. The first limitation is that nondominant communities are significantly underrepresented in research. In education and psychology, studies often do not include nondominant people, report participants' racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, or discuss the findings disaggregated by students' demographic characteristics (Graham 1992; Trent et al. 2014). For instance, Vasquez et al. (2011) conducted a systematic review of the literature on learning disabilities. They identified 1,169 studies published between 1995 and 2009. Of those, only 10% focused on culturally and linguistically diverse students (Vasquez et al. 2011). However, the findings from studies using exclusively dominant group participants “tend to be overgeneralized, particularly by educational leaders and policy makers, without a close enough look at variance and possible treatment  $\times$  attribute interactions or school or teacher effects” (Klingner, Sorrells, and Barrera 2007, 227). In selecting the interventions in different tiers, members should consider which intervention works with whom, by whom and under what circumstances (Klingner and Edwards 2006; García and Ortiz 2008; Solano-Flores 2008). Some widely used second-tier interventions include Check and Connect, Check-In/Check-Out, First Step to Success, social skills trainings, and mentoring programs such as Big

Brothers and Sisters or Boys or Girls Club have been studied with the participants from nondominant communities (Hawken et al. 2009). First Step to Success program was found to reduce behavioral problems in teachers and students in a Native American nation in Arizona (Diken and Rutherford 2005). Moreover, in academia, where official knowledge regarding education practice is produced, people from nondominant communities are underrepresented. Seventy-seven percent of full-time tenured or tenure tract faculty and 84% of full professors are white (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2017). Academia may work to justify and maintain the existing social order. Cornel West (1988) observed this in relation to the anti-Black logic of natural and social sciences: “black ugliness, cultural deficiency, and intellectual inferiority are legitimized by the value-laden, yet prestigious, authority of science” (22).

By a critical examination of the schoolwide practices and expectations, CRPBIS shifts the goal of the discipline system from controlling the minds and bodies of students and educators to supporting the development of students’ and educators’ agency and power to act in innovative ways that shape their schools and practices. The focus is the cultural re-mediation of educational processes and practices: How does culture enable and constrain student learning and behaviors? In this respect, equity is not offering the same academic and behavioral programs to all students but “enabling youth to appropriate the repertoires they need to live the richest life possible and reach their full academic potential” (Nasir et al. 2006, 499). The cultural nature of learning embraces adaptive expertise, the development of flexible knowledge that facilitates effective navigation across varied settings and tasks (Sawyer 2006). One of the most crucial considerations in exploring student learning is the discontinuities between informal learning and the formal learning activities (Bransford et al. 2006). Moll et al. (1992) showed that teachers who developed an understanding of Latino families’ funds of knowledge—cultural-historical practices, experiences, and skills—could use what students brought to school for increasing participation and success of students. The teachers reflexively analyzed their own practices, developed higher expectations, and tied the academic activities to families’ cultural resources and everyday realities (Moll et al. 1992).

To provide transformative learning activities, schools can use culturally relevant pedagogy to “maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students, develop a community of learners, encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another” (Ladson-Billings 1995, 480). Interventions solely meant to increase nondominant students’ compliance with schoolwide behavioral expectations may harm the social and psychological wellbeing of nondominant students and further marginalize them. Educators using culturally relevant pedagogy can use nondominant students’ informal learning experiences without stereotyping (Lee,

Spencer, and Harpalani 2003). Bransford et al. (2006) suggested that in such culturally relevant learning environments, students (a) appropriate the school-based knowledge and thinking, various cultural resources and practices, collaboration, and previous experience to reason unique configurations of real-world problems; (b) construct their own knowledge in meaningful and valued activities; (c) reflect critically on their own process of learning and actions; (d) experience flexible and just-in-time feedback; (e) feel safe and a sense of belonging; and (f) be adaptive expert learners who maximize future learning opportunities. Programs informed by culturally relevant pedagogy are reported to generate sustained positive academic outcomes (e.g., college attendance, lower dropout rates) for minority students who were at risk of failing academically and being placed in special education (Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani 2003). In a recent study on the effect of the ethnic studies program in San Francisco schools, assignment to ethnic studies courses increased ninth-grade student attendance by 21% points, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23% points (Dee and Penner 2016).

### **Data**

Working with complex systems and achieving adaptive, just, and effective change requires comprehensive and continuous data analyses. It is crucial for Learning Lab members to implement a data collection and review process in which members continuously engage in data-based decision making considering the types of data collected to determine if the practices produce desired outcomes, which students and adults are in need of supports and how existing behavioral support systems and interventions can be modified to better meet their changing needs, goals, and resources. Learning Lab members use multiple resources to examine disproportionality. Data from multiple sources can be visually represented via interactive data maps to advance members' understanding about spatiotemporal patterns of disproportionality in their school, district, and state. The following data maps can be used: <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/maped/storymaps/oss/> and <http://crpbis.apl.wisc.edu/>. Data collection and analysis also focus on the interactions of various elements of the school culture (see Figure 2).

Oppression can only be fully understood from the perspectives and experiences of the oppressed people (Crenshaw 1989). Collins (2001) suggested that to dismantle the racial paradox in the United States, we need to privilege the voices of subordinated groups. Learning Lab creates a space for those groups to voice their experiences, concerns, and goals. But Learning Lab also seeks to derive power for those nondominant groups over their school systems uniting them and offering a process to move from problem identification to problem solving. Learning Lab members should understand the educational opportunities, power/privilege, and positive academic identities (e.g., smartness) are

not available for all. Thus, it is crucial for Learning Labs to involve students' and families' perspectives in data generation, analyses, and data-based decisions. Multiple data sources facilitate practitioners' reflexivity and record historical and contemporary processes of individual and systemic development and change (Snow 2015).

Data may be collected through observations and assessment of social interactions and climate in the school. Members can use multiple data collections tools, including the ones used in PBIS implementations such as school climate surveys (Horner 2015) and appropriate other tools such as the informal learning checklist developed by the Learning in Informal and Formal Environments Center (Banks et al. 2007). In the CRPBIS project, members formed dyads (e.g., a parent and a principal) and collected observational data through an equity-walkthrough spending a half-day in school observing student and adult interactions, classroom spaces and activities, and artifacts (e.g., posters on the walls) as they analyze their existing behavioral support system (Bal 2016). The dyads shared the data sources (e.g., photographs and observation notes). This information enriched members' understanding of their system along with the school's behavioral data and members' diverse experiential knowledge and helped members to develop locally meaningful solutions as they renovated their systems.

From the historical materialist perspective, it is vital to go beyond mere criticism with endless chains of signifiers (West 1988). Otherwise, reform teams such as Learning Lab may be stuck in problem identification from individual experiences, priorities, and agendas and the meetings can serve the place for catharsis that provides a moral model of socially acceptable emotive responses and relieves the built-up anger of the oppressed people without emancipatory imaginations and concrete changes in practice.

### ***Systemic change***

PBIS scholars suggested that school staff needs sustained systems-level support if they are to achieve an organizational change: "The emphasis on person-centered planning and team-based decision making extends behavior support beyond manipulation of events in the immediate life space of the individual to recognition that schedules, staffing patterns, cultural expectations, physical conditions, budgeting, and organizational policy are also likely to affect the success of support" (Dunlap et al. 2009, 5). Organizational studies showed organizations have cultures that cannot be understood solely by focusing on individuals' discrete acts and cognitive or moral qualities (Blackler and McDonald 2000). The PBIS literature still lacks robust theoretical frameworks to facilitate and examine organizational change.

PBIS scholars pointed out that "schools will need to work collaboratively with families, businesses, local and state agencies, and researchers, but much

can be done in and by schools to improve school climate, maximize academic and social outcomes, and create safer school environments” (Sugai and Horner 2002, 45). However, the PBIS literature has not offered a methodology of collective knowledge production and systemic design with local stakeholders. The main reason for this shortcoming is an ontological one: Although PBIS has moved its unit of analysis to the whole school context, it has maintained the use of high external control, bureaucratization of all school places, and standardization of procedures (Figure 1). It has not developed apt conceptualizations and tools for this new unit of analysis. Through Learning Lab, a zone of proximal development is formed to move PBIS to this new space (Figure 1). A zone of proximal development is as “the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in the everyday actions” (Engeström 2015, 138). Learning Labs aim to facilitate a space for this movement. In this space, PBIS is implemented with low external control and aims to facilitate high social agency among stakeholders for their critical dialogue, inclusive decision-making, and collective innovation.

### **Implications for state and local education agencies**

Since the 1980s, disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes have dramatically widened (Darling-Hammond 2010). At the same time, the U.S. education system has flooded with market-driven reform efforts, with a heavy emphasis on standardization, individual accountability, testing, and punitive policies that mirror a culture of consumerism, punishing state, and the interests of elites (Giroux 2014). These education reform efforts have not been able to address racial disparities (Darling-Hammond 2010). Deep social problems such as racial disproportionality cannot be solved by the acts of single individuals, single schools, or the reactive, top-down policies and market-driven reform efforts. The racialization of discipline is a symptom of larger injustice in the society. A strategic, inclusive, democratic, equity-oriented grassroots political struggle is essential to dismantle complex, adaptive, systemic problems in local education systems. A strategy that the practitioners, researchers, and community members can use is coalition building (Soja 2010). Coalition building endorses “more progressive and participatory forms of democratic politics and social activism, and provides new ideas about how to mobilize and maintain cohesive coalitions and regional confederations of grassroots and justice-oriented social movements” (Soja 2010, 6). Learning Lab can serve as a site for coalition building in local education agencies (Bal 2016; Bal et al. 2016).

The complex, enduring societal problems have economic, political, social, moral, and emotional components to consider when we strive to intervene

in such problems and develop new imaginings. Alexander (2012) examined the racialization of criminal justice as the main system of control, exclusion, branding, isolation, stigmatizing, and demoralizing of Black and Brown bodies and how the system of mass incarceration has created a new racial caste system as an extension of, yet qualitatively different from Jim Crow and slavery. Once individuals are branded as criminals, their race, social and economic conditions and history are stripped away. The exclusion and punishments against the people who are caught in the criminal justice system (e.g., ineligibility to vote, serve on juries, and receive housing assistance) are seen as just and natural. Yet those acts are not the worst of it: “The shame and stigma that follows you for the rest of your life- that is the worst” (Alexander 2012, 161). Then, how can we create an effective reform to disrupt and dismantle those powerful discourses and more importantly imagine new worlds? Alexander suggested,

The first and the most important point is that criminal justice reform efforts- standing alone- are futile ... If the ways we pursue reforms does contribute to the building of a movement to dismantle the system of mass incarceration, and if our advocacy does not upset the prevailing public consensus that supports the new caste system, none of the reforms, even if won, will successfully disrupt the nation’s racial equilibrium. Challenges to the system will be easily absorbed or deflected, and the accommodations made will serve primarily to legitimate the system, not undermine it. (236)

Similarly, in the era of standardization and accountability and constant coordinated attack against public education and color-blind acts (e.g., zero tolerance), the racialization of behavioral problems can serve a system of exclusion and branding that as object forming process. CRPBIS and other systemic interventions can only work as a part of larger social struggles in and outside of academia and schools to transform the disabling systems with people who reproduce and suffer from them.

States and school districts interested in CRPBIS may choose specific school sites for Learning Lab implementation. The practices, procedures, and outcomes (e.g., culturally responsive behavioral systems) developed by local stakeholders in those pilot schools. The other schools then can adopt the Learning Lab methodology and the culturally responsive systems developed by the pilot schools. Facilitators from the pilot sites can provide professional learning workshops to their colleagues. This will challenge the typically designed workshops relying on external experts and technical assistance centers. Learning Labs may also provide a springboard for reciprocal partnerships between university and local education systems. This will allow all parties to share resources and power and conduct community-based or practice-embedded education research.

Traditionally, research and practice, design and implementation, and effectiveness and equity have been conceptualized as binaries. CRPBIS aims to go

beyond those binaries. By uniting multiple communities of practice, marrying systemic critique with systemic redesign, a reciprocal school-family-community-university partnership blurs the boundaries between research and practice and creates opportunities to address urgent problems of practice and to co-design effective and equitable systems.

## Conclusion

Any system that “neglects use and user semantics is bound for trouble down the line—it will become either oppressive or irrelevant” (Bowker and Star 2000, 7). The CRPBIS framework operationalizes cultural responsiveness as an inclusive decision-making process, Learning Lab, through which stakeholders develop systemic solutions to the systemic problems that they face. The CRPBIS implementations may facilitate collective agency among stakeholders and more importantly create an institutional memory for inclusive decision making. Diverse experiences and interests that students and families bring to schools should be utilized as resources for building democratic education systems (Dewey 1997).

Much of education research is about and for people. Students and families as well as practitioners are positioned as the objects of research activities where researchers are the subjects. CRPBIS offers a methodology for a paradigm shift: producing knowledge with people. Families, students, custodians, bus drivers, librarians, social workers, administrators, para-professionals, teaching interns, community leaders, activists, and researchers become the subject in a knowledge and activity producing activity. CRPBIS institutionalizes this shift by opening up schools’ decision-making and problem-solving processes to those from nondominant groups historically that have been excluded and marginalized in/through education research.

Building positive, supportive, and inclusive schools demands bold and persistent experiments in practice that inform and are informed by research. An effective and sustained systemic transformation is dialogical and continuing. It facilitates orchestration of multiple histories, goals and interests, bound by a shared object and new imaginings for a better future. The use of the CRPBIS framework holds promise as a way to nurture schools as democratic institutions and facilitate local stakeholders’ productive and sustained participation in designing the kinds of school systems of which they wish to be a part.

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