The Use of Functional Behavior Assessment and Positive Behavioral Support Plans as Pre-referral Interventions for Students At-risk for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

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The Reality: Is it Avoidable?

Students with high rates of problem behavior are often on a fast track for referral to special education services.
The Role of Pre-Referral Intervention

- Pre-referral interventions are mandated when a student is referred for special education services.
- These interventions are often carried out in a superficial manner and prove ineffective.
- As a result, school personnel may expend a great deal of time and effort completing the testing and required paper work for the referral and the child may be placed unnecessarily.
| The student is appropriately placed in the curriculum relative to ability and skill level. | Classroom rules are in place and teacher expectations are clearly defined. |
## Additional Considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What interventions have been attempted?</th>
<th>Do current teaching and management strategies reflect best practice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Key to Successful Intervention

Functional Behavioral Assessment has been successfully used to devise effective interventions for a variety of problem behaviors (DuPaul & Ervin, 1996).

Functional Behavioral Assessment attempts to determine the function of problem behavior or the reasons for its occurrence in order to optimize treatment outcome (Carr et al., 1994; O’Neill et al., 1997).
Might the Use of FBA Procedures Help Eliminate the Need for Referral?

A reason for the current research was to determine whether the use of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) in constructing pre-referral interventions would potentially decrease the number of special education referrals.
Research Questions

Seth: What are the effects of teacher praise on attention maintained disruptive behavior?

Adam: What are the effects of social skill instruction and positive reinforcement on physical aggression?

Irwin: What are the effects of teacher praise on talk-outs, aggression, and off-task behavior?
A Study of Teacher Praise
Seth’s Research Question

What are the effects of teacher praise on attention maintained disruptive behavior?
Introduction

Gunter and Jack reported that when teacher praise rate was increased the aversive behaviors of the students decreased: negative interaction decreased and positive interaction increased (1994).
Rationale

- Seth was referred for his disruptive behavior because it was a concern to his teachers and administrators.
- The purpose of the investigation was to examine a positive behavior support plan that included social skills instruction for Seth, instruction for his teacher, and increased teacher praise rates.
Functional Behavioral Assessment
Results

- The results showed that Seth’s disruptions in class were maintained by attention.
- Teacher praise or positive attention was needed to replace the negative attention the participant had been receiving.
Demographics

Demographic information for subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>SES*</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 (mother)</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Low socioeconomic status (SES) was determined by the student's free or reduced lunch status. F = free lunch, R = reduced lunch, P = paid by parent
Settings

School

Urban elementary school
Approximately 573 students
53% Caucasian
40% Hispanic
7% Other ethnic groups

Title I school
67% qualified for free or reduced lunch
High mobility rate

Seth’s Classroom

Teacher
B.S. degree
1 year experience
Dependent Measure

- The target behavior:
  - Disruptive Behavior
    - calling out
    - yelling at the teacher
    - singing aloud during silent reading time
    - laughing aloud at teacher

- Problem behavior was at its peak during teacher instruction.
Experimental Design: ABAB (Reversal)

A Baseline
B Implementation Teacher Praise
A Baseline
B Reimplementation Teacher Praise
Intervention

Seth was directly taught social skill of “How to Get the Teachers Attention”.

The Steps Included:

1. Look at the teacher.
2. Raise your hand.
3. Wait patiently to be called on.
4. Ask your question in a respectful voice.
Procedure

- Seth received instruction on each social skill step.
- Seth repeated the step.
- Role plays correctly modeled getting the teacher’s attention.
- Seth practiced using the complete social skill.
Teacher Instruction

The teacher was taught how to give specific and contingent praise.

She was instructed to praise specific behaviors such as:

- Reading quietly
- Getting teacher attention appropriately
- Sitting in chair
Teacher Prompt

- Teacher wore a MotivAider to increase praise
  - MotivAider- A small instrument that vibrates at set timed intervals.
  - Teacher was instructed to praise each time the MotivAider vibrated.
- Praise delivered
  - Seth 1 incident of praise/3 minutes
  - Whole class 1 incident of praise/3 minutes
  - Individual student 1 incident of praise/3 minutes
Results

- Results indicate a functional relationship between increased teacher praise and low rates of disruptive behavior.
- Disruptive behavior increased when teacher praise decreased.
Teacher Praise: Seth

Graph showing the rate per minute of teacher praise and discipline behavior over sessions during baseline and intervention periods.
Social Skill Instruction

The positive effect of social skill instruction on the behavior of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) has been documented (Mathur & Rutherford, 1996).

Specific social skill instruction has helped students with EBD deal effectively with anger (Mathur, Kavale, Quinn, Forness, & Rutherford, 1998).
Adam’s Research Question

Will a positive support plan that includes a social skill and reinforcing use of the social skill decrease angry outbursts?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<th>Parent</th>
<th>SES*</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1(mother)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>LD, Referred for BD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Low socioeconomic status (SES) was determined by the student's free or reduced lunch qualification. F = free lunch, R = reduced lunch, P = paid by parent
Settings

School

Urban elementary school
Approximately 573 students
53% Caucasian
40% Hispanic
7% Other ethnic groups

Title I school
67% qualified for free or reduced lunch
High mobility rate

Adam’s Classroom

Teacher

B.S. degree
1 year experience
Dependent Measure

Number of office disciplinary referrals per month over a period of 9 months.
Pre-experimental Design

- An AB design was used to assess the effects of the intervention.
  - The 2 phases included a baseline and an intervention phase.
Adam was taught the social skill in a 1:1 setting. The Cool Card with the steps of the social skill served as a token reinforcer. Each time Adam used the skill he could tear a tab off the cool card.
1. Take a deep breath
2. Count to 5
3. Clinch and release hands
4. Relax
How to Keep Your Cool

1) take a deep breath
2) count to five
3) clench and release hands
4) relax
The skill was modeled for him and he practiced several times.

There were six tabs on the card and each time he used the skill he would tear a tab off.

When all of the tabs were torn off he redeemed his card for a prize.
Results

- Adam’s data indicate a possible relationship between the intervention and decreased outbursts.
Office Referrals: Adam
Conclusions

- Implications for Practice
  - The positive effects of teacher praise on student behavior have been known for a long time.
  - In spite of its documented effectiveness as a tool for improving behavior, "teacher praise occurs relatively infrequently in many classrooms."

Conclusions

- Social Skill instruction in general education classrooms is an important prevention strategy (Kamps and Kay, 2002,).
- The use of the cool card can be considered a form of self-monitoring because it increased self awareness.
The Effects of Classwide Teacher Praise: Irwin’s Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether increasing teacher praise to all students would decrease one specific student’s problem behavior maintained by attention.
## Demographics

Demographic information for subject

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (mother)</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1-to-1 tutoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Low socioeconomic status (SES) was determined by the student's free or reduced lunch status. F = free lunch, R = reduced lunch, P = paid by parent
Settings

School
- Urban elementary school
- Approximately 555 students
- 78% Caucasian
- 15.5% Hispanic
- 6.5% Other ethnic groups
- 39% qualified for free or reduced lunch

Irwin’s Classroom

Teacher
- 1st Year (intern)
Baseline and intervention sessions were conducted in the participant’s general-education classroom.
Dependent Measure

- The target behavior observed was class disruption.
- Behaviors included:
  - Physical aggression
    - hitting and kicking
    - pinching and poking
  - Verbal aggression
    - name calling
    - criticizing
    - threatening
  - Off-task behavior
  - Talking/yelling out
Experimental Design

1. Baseline
2. Implementation Teacher Praise
3. Baseline
4. Implementation Teacher Praise
Teacher Instruction

- The teacher was taught how to give specific and contingent praise.
- She was instructed to praise specific behaviors
  - Reading quietly
  - Getting teacher attention appropriately
  - Sitting in chair
Teacher Prompt

- Teacher wore MotivAider to increase praise.
  - MotivAider was programmed to vibrate at 30 second variable intervals with the mean set significantly below the target student’s baseline rate of problem behavior
  - Teacher was instructed to praise each time the MotivAider vibrated
Results

- Results indicate a functional relationship between teacher praise and low rates of disruptive behavior and high rates of on-task behavior.
- Rates of disruptive behavior increased when teacher attention decreased.
Praise Study: Irwin
Conclusions

- "Teacher praise in combination with effective teaching practices and social structures that support prosocial behavior can contribute greatly to creating a positive learning environment. Within such environments, praise provides a non-intrusive, naturalistic strategy for positively affecting the behavior of students with EBD."


- In this study the use of praise to the entire class was sufficient to increase the students’ appropriate behavior.
Summary of Findings

- Findings suggest that students who might be referred for special education services because they engage in high rates of problem behavior can be helped to change their problem behaviors at the “pre-referral stage.”
Summary of Findings (continued)

In the three examples:

1. The function of each student’s problem behavior was determined through functional behavioral assessment - including teacher interviews and direct observation.

2. Interventions were developed on the basis of FBA information to assist at-risk students in learning socially appropriate school and classroom behavior.
Summary of Findings

3. All interventions were implemented by the student’s regular education classroom and carried out by the student’s general education teacher.

4. Early intervention based on FBAs led to the creation of interventions that were:
   - successful (changed problem behavior)
   - efficient (implemented by general education teacher)
   - cost-effective (no special education referrals & services were needed).