The Effects of Praise Notes on Students Displaying Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors

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Study 1:
Using Peer Praise Notes (PPNs) to Increase the Social Involvement of Students with Internalizing Behavior
Currently in press in Teaching Exceptional Children

Background Literature
Students who are withdrawn
• Are at risk for academic failure
• Have difficulty with peer relationships
Positive Peer Reporting (PPR)
• Students verbally report their peers’ prosocial behavior
• PPR has helped increase the social interactions of withdrawn students
Written Praise
• Peer-to-peer written praise has not been explored

Method
Participants
• 3 adolescents enrolled in a Jr. High life skills class
• Identified as displaying internalizing symptoms using the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD)
• Selected by observation for low social involvement
Study Design
• A reversal (A-B-A) single-subject design was used
Behavioral Observations
• During baseline, treatment, and withdrawal phases: Target students’ interactions were observed during peer activity time for 12 min., four days a week
• Partial interval recording was used
• Target behavior: Social Involvement
• Social engagement: any positive verbal or nonverbal interaction with a peer
• Participation: involvement in a game with structure or rules
Treatment
• Students received instruction on how to write Peer Praise Notes (PPNs); they wrote 2 each day
• Group contingencies and public posting were used to reinforce the writing of PPNs

Results: Study 1
Peer praise notes (PPNs) were effective for all participants: target students’ interactions increased significantly during treatment and remained high during return to baseline phase.

Discussion
These findings indicate that Peer Praise Notes produced distinguishable improvements in the social involvement of three socially isolated adolescents. This study extended previous research by:
1. Examining a junior high school population
2. Utilizing written peer praise

References

Study 2:
Using Teacher-written Praise Notes to Decrease Students’ Externalizing Behavior
Currently in press in Preventing School Failure

Background Literature
Praise
If delivered correctly, praise increases students’ on-task behavior, motivation in the classroom, and academic success.
Teacher Praise
Builds students’ self-esteem, provides encouragement to students, and builds a close student teacher relationship
If praise increases positive outcomes, will externalizing behaviors (measured by ODRs) decrease?

Method
Participants
• 1,809 students attending a Middle School (grades 6 and 7) in the western US

Implementation
• School-wide intervention which lasted two years
• Positive expectations for behavior
• Weekly instruction of social skills
• Teacher-written praise notes given to students
• Teachers used direct instruction to teach social skills lessons
• Teachers were instructed to praise students demonstrating social skills or other appropriate behavior
• Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) were tracked

Discussion & Recommendations
Strategies that appear to be effective:
1. Instructing teachers on how to praise effectively
2. Giving feedback to teachers, e.g., number of praise notes written and names of students who had not received one
3. Reviewing praise notes & ODR data with teachers to demonstrate the impact of praise on student behavior & ODR
4. Most importantly, reinforcing teachers for writing praise notes

References