Praise Notes: An Effective Part of School-wide Positive Behavior Support?

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Outline

• Introduction
• Literature
• Case Study
• Applications
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- Was a corresponding effect produced in Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs)?

- What does the research say about written praise notes?
Literature
Literature General Praise

- The term ‘praise’ means to value highly (Shepell, 2000)

- It involves commending the worth of an individual or expressing admiration or approval (Blote, 1995)

- Praise is positive reinforcement thought to encourage desirable behavior, while extinguishing undesirable behavior (Thomas, 1991).
Teacher Praise

- Teacher praise contains positive affect and is a more intense, detailed response to student behavior (Blote, 1995)

- Praise has been widely recommended as an important reinforcement method for teachers because it can build self-esteem, provide encouragement, and build a close relationship between student and teacher (Brophy, 1981)

- Of elementary students, 91% preferred to be praised often or sometimes (Burnett, 2001)
Effective Teacher Praise

- Teacher praise was most effective when it was behavior specific (Brophy, 1981)

- Effective praise includes constructive encouragement by focusing on improvement and efforts, using sincere comments and recognizing students’ feelings (Hitz & Driscoll, 1994)

- Praise can be motivational in the classroom if reinforcement is descriptive, and involves using student’s name, choosing appropriate praise words carefully and describing precisely the behavior that merits the praise (Thomas, 1991)
Effective Teacher Praise

- Praise is most effective when
  - immediately delivered
  - given frequently
  - enthusiastically
  - teacher looks at the child
  - teacher describes the behavior
  - variety of praise statements are used

(Loveless, 1996)
Effects of Teacher Praise

- Those who receive verbal praise report having more intrinsic motivation than those who do not receive it (Cameron & Pierce, 1994)

- When praise is sincere, promotes autonomy, comments on competence without social comparison, and creates realistic expectations, it increases intrinsic motivation and improves perseverance (Hederlong, 2002)
Effects of Teacher Praise

- Students who received more general praise were more satisfied with their classroom than those students who received less praise. Praise seems to be an important strategy for managing classroom behavior (Burnett, 2002)

- Praise for work in the classroom and frequent public praise for good work or behavior at assemblies led to better behavior (Rutter, 1979)
Effects of Teacher Praise

- Praise increases students’ on-task behavior (e.g., attending to teachers, reading, writing, or work-related discussion with a peer...) (Ferguson & Houghton, 1992)
Effects of Teacher Praise on Students with EBD

• Praise is widely recognized as an effective practice for both correct academic responses and appropriate social behavior (Gunter & Coutinho, 2001; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000; Gunter & Denny, 1998)

• Praise provides a non-intrusive naturalistic strategy for positively affecting the behavior of students with EBD (Sutherland, 2000)

• Teacher praise has a positive effect on reading achievement and math achievement of students with EBD (Gable & Shores, 1980)
Effects of Teacher Praise on Students with EBD

- Verbally praising students for correct responses and appropriate social behaviors can improve academic outcomes and decrease levels of disruptive and aggressive behaviors of students with EBD
  (Sutherland & Wehby, 2001)

- Students’ on-task behavior increased when the teachers’ behavior-specific praise increased
  (Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000)
Teacher Written Praise?

• Most students (69%) preferred not to have public praise, while only 31% wanted public praise (Burnett, 2001)

• PeaceBuilders (a research-driven program) has identified written praise notes for positive actions as one of the characteristics that create a more peaceable school environment (Lackey, 1997)
Case Study
Project

School-wide prevention and intervention model in secondary settings
- Middle school—grades 6 and 7
- Junior high school—grades 8 and 9 / 7-9

Positive Behavioral Support Model
- School-wide positive expectations for behavior
- School-wide, weekly instruction of social skills
- Teacher committee to address school climate
- Praise notes to promote a positive school environment.
Praise Notes

• Teachers asked to write a note to students describing specific instances when they observed students using social skills appropriately.

• Teacher training on qualities of effective praise:
  - Specific
  - Genuine
  - Timely
Praise Note

Middle School

I want to recognize __________________ for:

☐ Following Instructions
☐ Apologizing
☐ Other __________________

Listening
☐ Showing
Appreciation

Specifics:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Teacher ______________________ Date __________

White Copy Student    Yellow Copy Front Office    Pink Copy Teacher

Introduction  Literature  Case Study  Applications
Praise Note

Is a Peaceable School

for:

Date ______________ Grade ___ Teacher ____________________

White Copy (Student)  Yellow Copy (Drawing)  Pink Copy (Teacher Records)
Praise Note

Soaring to Greater Heights

I want to recognize:

Eagles soar to excellence by showing:

Safety First
I like to learn
I Do My Best
I appreciate & celebrate individual differences & similarities

For:

Date ___________ Grade _________ Teacher ___________

White Copy (Student) Yellow Copy (Office) Pink Copy (Teacher to Parent)
Praise Note

Chivalry in Action
I want to recognize:

For:

Exhibit Positive Behavior through:
Unwavering Commitment to the Code of Conduct
Being a Responsible Citizen
Being a Successful Learner
Being an Effective Communicator

Date __________________ Grade _______ Teacher _________

White Copy (Student) Yellow Copy (Office) Pink Copy (Teacher to Parent)
Implementation

• Set goals for number of praise notes
• Reminder posters in classrooms
• Weekly drawings for prizes
• Winners announced for additional recognition
• Service Learning class gathered praise notes
• Teacher incentives and recognition
Data
Participants

Middle School - Grades 6-7

Total Students – 1094
Male/Female – 551/543
Free, Reduced Lunch – 39%
Participants
Middle School - Grades 6-7

African-American - - - - 0%
Asian - - - - - - - - - - 0%
Caucasian - - - - - - - - - - 90%
Hispanic - - - - - - - - - - 9%
Native American - - - - - 1%
Pacific Islander - - - - - 0%
Case Study

Office Referrals

- ODR in 04-05
- ODR in 05-06

Occurrences Per Day Per 100 Students


Introduction  | Literature  | Case Study  | Applications
Case Study

Praise Notes Per Month During 05-06

- Students with an ODR
- Total Praise
Case Study

ODR Difference & Praise Notes

- ODR Change (04-05 to 05-06)
- Praise Notes to students with ODR
Does Praise Effect ODR?

Praise given to students with ODR

VS

Difference between the two years of ODR

(per day per student)

Correlation = .72

(p < .05, n = 10 months)
Applications
Musings/Reflections

• Students picking up notes has had a beneficial impact

• PBS committee has been concerned with notes getting to parents (public relations)

• Reinforce and continue to teach staff about the use of effective and specific praise
  – Non-example “Joanie is a great kid!”
Musings/Reflections

- Example “I want to recognize Kelsey for being a great listener. I can always call on her and her responses show that she is right with me. She follows instructions and always make good decisions.”
Musings/Reflections

- Teachers praising Teachers - interest in recognizing each other
- Students praising students/staff “Caught Ya” notes
- Tie into the school mascot
- Teaching basic civility
Further Research Ideas

- Can this be replicated?
- Does recognition of positives change teacher attitude which affects & effects student behavior & performance?
- As the school environment becomes more positive, do EBD students experience greater change?
- Teacher to teacher praise – Student to student praise?
Expressions

...I wrote up a couple notes on Monday without thinking much about it and for some reason I think I hit the nail on the head. One girl came up to me after class and thanked me. She was really excited to show the note to her mom. Another boy who usually received negative notes from substitutes was wonderful for my sub the other day. It's cool to see how students rise to the occasion when they know the adults in their lives notice their positive gestures.
Expressions

. . . I gave a note to a student last year. He placed it in the slip cover of his notebook where it remained for the rest of the year. I didn’t realize it would have such a profound effect on him.

. . . One student took the note home to his parents who put it on the refrigerator where it remained for the school year. The parents commented it was the first good thing they had heard about their son since elementary school.
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