

Why a Positive Approach to Behavior?

A RESEARCH SUMMARY

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POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Effective teachers spend more time promoting responsible behavior than responding to irresponsible behavior (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000; Brophy & Good, 1986; Thomas, Becker, & Armstrong, 1968; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

In a review of the literature, Brophy (1981) determined that teacher praise was most effective when it was behavior specific (e.g., Smith & Rivera, 1993; Walker, 1979).

The use of contingent, behavior-specific praise has been linked to positive student outcomes, including increased student academic engagement and decreased disruptive behavior (Bain, Houghton, & Williams, 1991; Beaman & Wheldall, 2000; Broden et al., 1970; Brophy, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1986; Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Espin & Yell, 1994; Ferguson & Houghton, 1992; Gunter et al., 1993; Hall, Lund, & Jackson, 1968; Hall, Panyan, et al., 1968; Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 1968; Moore Partin, et al., 2010; Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Martin, 2007; Shores, Cegelka, & Nelson, 1973; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000; Thomas, Becker & Armstrong, 1968; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004; Ward & Baker, 1968).

Teacher reprimands, in conjunction with a reduction in teacher praise, resulted in an increase of disruptive behavior (O'Leary & Becker, 1969).

Praise has been shown to increase the intrinsic motivation of students (Cameron & Pierce, 1994) **and help the learner develop a feeling of competence** (Brophy, 1981; Gottfried, 1983; Swann & Pittman, 1977). **Increases in teacher praise have positive effects on reading achievement** (Gable & Shores, 1980) **and math achievement** (Luiselli & Downing, 1980).

RATIOS OF INTERACTIONS

In general, teachers should offer praise statements more often than corrective statements. Researchers have recommended at least a 3:1 ratio (Fredrickson, & Losada, 2005; Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993). **Others have recommended that teachers strive to maintain a ratio of 4 or 5 positive statements to 1 corrective statement** (Good & Grouws, 1977; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

John Gottman and colleagues (1998) explored the positive-to-negative ratios in marriages. Using a 5:1 ratio, which Gottman dubbed "the magic ratio," he and his colleagues predicted whether 700 newlywed couples would stay together or divorce by scoring their positive and negative interactions in one 15-minute conversation between each husband and wife. Ten years later, the follow-up revealed that they had predicted divorce with 94% accuracy.

INCENTIVE SYSTEMS

The use of positive reinforcement can actually increase intrinsic motivation (Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001). **Concerns that children will become dependent on extrinsic reinforcement are unwarranted** (Akin-Little, Eckert, & Lovett, 2004).

Token systems have been used to address a variety of academic and social behaviors (Christensen, Young, & Marchant, 2004; Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, & Montrose, 1971; Sulzer, Hunt, Ashby, Koniarski, & Krams, 1971) **and self-management skills** (Self-Brown & Matthews, 2003; Seymour & Stokes, 1976).

Group contingencies have been used to improve academic and social behaviors and reduce disruptive behaviors (Lo & Cartledge, 2004), **increase positive and decrease negative verbal interactions** (Hansen & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2005), **decrease transition time** (Yarborough, Skinner, Lee, & Lemmons, 2004), **and increase achievement, appropriate classroom behavior, and peer social acceptance** (Nevin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1982). **The Good Behavior Game is one of the most well-researched group contingency systems** (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969).

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