

Positive Feedback and Ratio of Interactions

A RESEARCH SUMMARY

There is evidence in the research literature that positive feedback and a 3:1 (at a minimum) ratio of positive to negative interactions works to motivate students. The following quotes, taken from *Discipline in the Secondary Classroom* advocate for these strategies. Accompanying references support each statement. Page numbers indicate the page in *Discipline* from which the quote is drawn.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

"...you can significantly increase the probability that your feedback will encourage and motivate students to behave more responsibly in the future."

(Lalli et al., 1999; Silva, Yuille, & Peters, 2000) [pg. 151]

"...they provided specific and descriptive confirmation of what you did correctly."

(Alberto & Troutman, 2003) [pg. 153]

"...remember that students' motivation to engage in any behavior will be related to the degree to which they value the rewards of that behavior AND their expectation of succeeding at the behavior."

(Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001; Laraway, Snycerski, Michael, & Poling, 2003) [pg. 145]

"...observational studies regularly show that most teachers pay significantly more attention to students' misbehavior than they do to students' positive behavior. In 1971, Dr. Wes Becker wrote about studies he had done with elementary-level teachers who had been reprimanding and reminding students about out-of-seat behavior during work periods. He encouraged the teachers to reprimand students more immediately and more consistently:

"Don't miss a single student who gets out of their seat at the wrong time."

"The teachers assumed this would decrease the out-of-seat behavior. In fact, the number of students getting out of seat at the wrong times actually increased.

"Dr. Becker called this phenomenon the Criticism Trap because, although the teachers thought they were doing something effective (for example, reprimanding or issuing a consequence for an inappropriate behavior), the students who were starved for attention were getting out of their seats, at least in part, to get their teachers to look at them and talk to them. The students' need for attention was satisfied when their teachers told them to get back in their seats—which they typically did, at least initially. This, of course, tended to reinforce the nagging on the part of the teacher because the students usually sat down when asked to do so. But before long the students would realize, consciously or

unconsciously, that they were not getting attention when they were doing what the teachers wanted, so they would get out of their seats again. The teachers would reprimand again, giving the desired attention, and the students were again reinforced for getting out of their seats. Although these studies were done at elementary level, the phenomenon can continue into secondary level"

(Becker & Englemann, 1971). [pg. 157]

RATIOS OF INTERACTIONS

"One of the most essential behavior management strategies is also perhaps one of the most difficult to implement. This strategy involves making the effort to interact with every student more frequently (at least three times more frequently) when the student is behaving appropriately than when he or she is behaving inappropriately

(Henderson, Jenson, & Erken, 1986; Martens, Lochner, & Kelly, 1992) [pg. 156]

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