Diverting Disruptive Behavior

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

The effects of early intervention on the defiant behavior of students, using a social skills curriculum!

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Abstract

Diverting Disruptive Behavior

This study will examine the social and emotional skills of students in two Duval County elementary classrooms. Students will be given a pre- and post survey to find out if an early intervention of a life and emotional skills curriculum can decrease defiant behavior in first and second grade students. The parents of these students will receive a pre- and post survey to collect data from their families. The intervention will consist of two programs, Learning for Life and Second Step. These programs will be taught from August 9, 2004 until October 11, 2004, two days a week, and discussed during community group time on the other three days. After the community group time of about twenty minutes, students will write reflections in a journal reacting to the group time activities. At the end of the day, the students will write journal entries based on their daily behavior charts. At the end of the timeline, we will collect the student's journals and give the post test. We will send home the post survey for the parents at this time. We will analyze the data and chart and graph the information to find out if the intervention made a difference in actual classroom behavior and student development.

The purpose of this study is to describe the effects of early intervention on the defiant and disruptive behavior of students, using a social skills curriculum. The schools involved in this study are both ranked as A schools by the state of Florida. One school, Fort Caroline Elementary, has an enrollment of about 700 students. It has a diverse population with many students coming from a nearby housing project and many apartments. It is considered a school in transition due to the rapid change in the population. The other school, Fishweir Elementary, is a music magnet school of about 500 students. The population is mostly white. During this past year I have had the opportunity to observe the students who will be entering second grade in August 2004 at one school. I saw many inappropriate and disruptive behaviors such as defiant, disrespect, dishonesty, stealing, bullying, hitting and fighting, that I would like to change. I asked a colleague at the second school to be involved in the Action Research. I felt that this Action Research would provide clues for solving these behavior problems and bring about reform.

Area of focus Statement:
The purpose of this study is to describe the effects of early intervention on the defiant and disruptive behavior of students, using a social skills curriculum.

Review of related literature:
One of the greatest challenges that educators face today is giving students with behavioral disorders and inappropriate behaviors, tools that will help them function independently in an appropriate manner. As the momentum of inclusion is increasing, teachers are facing classrooms where students display various academic and behavioral characteristics; therefore, teachers are constantly looking for effective instructional strategies and classroom management techniques. Dr. Elizabeth Bondy (1999) says the Responsive Classroom approach focuses on creating a balance between academic and social learning in classrooms. Research supports that students can not learn in a poorly managed classroom. Classroom teachers meet daily with a diverse population of students. Approximately 12-22 percent of all students in school suffer from mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders, and relatively few receive mental health services (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Classroom teachers tend to be attracted to flexible, easy to implement and inexpensive teaching strategies and techniques that keep students actively involved.

Research has shown us that teachers' behaviors have more impact on student achievement than other variables. A comprehensive literature review by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) amply demonstrates the importance of effective classroom management. In a meta-analysis of over 100 studies (Marzano, 2003) found that the quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management. In fact the meta-analysis indicates that on average, teachers who had high-quality relationships, personal connections with their students, had 31 percent fewer discipline problems, rule violations, and related problems over a year's time than did teachers who did not have high-quality relationships with their students (Marzano, 2003).

The most effective classroom managers (teachers) have the following characteristics: they show appropriate levels of providing clear purpose and strong guidance regarding

both academics and student behavior; exhibit appropriate levels of cooperation where the students and teacher function as a team; and are aware of high-needs students and have specific strategies and techniques for meeting some of their needs (Marzano, 2003).

It is important to encourage habits that will build good character traits. Developing character that will determine a child's destiny is too powerful to ignore. A relationship-building approach helps the student develop positive, socially appropriate behaviors by focusing on what the student is doing right. It puts the initial responsibility for behavior change on the teacher, the most capable and only professional in the classroom. The relationship program more often leads to success (Hall, 2003).

The Learning for Life (1999) program has been developed and designed to support schools in their efforts to prepare students for life in our society. It is designed to enhance social and life skills, assist in moral and character development, and encourage positive personal values. Learning for Life offers a recognition plan that will motivate positive behavior, foster a sense of belonging to the group, assist in building self-esteem, and reward a positive work ethic. Learning for Life was recommended by Duval County to enhance and support the social studies curriculum in the elementary grades.

Studies by Kriete (2003), Marzano (2003), Walker (2003) and Bondy cited in Walther-Thomas & Brownell supported the following statements about building community within classrooms using the classroom meeting strategy. Transforming a classroom group into a caring community of learners requires many ingredients. The teacher's purpose and set of expectations are essential beginning ingredients, but they are not enough. The teacher also needs time, patience, and good tools for turning intention and expectation into action and behavior. Classroom meetings can transform groups into caring communities by offering daily instruction and practice in building community (Kriete, 2003). Eventually, this daily practice of morning meetings bonds a class together into a close-knit community. The way that teachers begin each day sets the tone for learning and speaks volumes about what and whom they value, about their expectations for how people should treat each other, and about the way they believe learning occurs in the classroom. Teachers, who start the day welcoming each student and encouraging them to welcome each other, sharing news, listening to individual voices, and communicating as a caring group, are sharing the message that every person matters and that individual and group interactions matter. They encourage a classroom climate that is friendly, thoughtful, courteous, warm, and safe.

Many studies evaluated the effectiveness of a positive behavior support intervention. Wolf and Risley provided the essential model for positive behavior support, and the applied analysis that is the foundation of positive behavior support (Fixsen, & Dunlop 2004). They were the first to conduct research in the contexts in which children and families were living. They worked to solve real problems of real people in real situations and found ways to add the research component to that endeavor. Out of the collections of single-subject research designs grew larger, replicable efforts that could be implemented broadly to have a more dramatic effect on social problems. Achievement Place, a group

home alternative to institutionalization for children with delinquency problems, grew into the Teaching-Family Model.

Hall (2003) discussed a classic study, 400 Losers, by Ahlstrom and Havighurst (1977) in which they discovered that their six year long intensive intervention program did not help a group of at-risk youth find success. But to their surprise, a handful of the participants did turn their lives around. The ones that "made it" all had one experience in common. Each had developed a special relationship with either a teacher or a work supervisor during the treatment program. These adults valued the students, treated them as individuals, and expressed faith in their ability to succeed.

In the process of researching information I found several techniques and strategies that were referred to and used repeatedly. Based on validated procedures, and self-monitoring strategies, the Good Student Game is an easy to implement intervention designed to help elementary students stay on task. The Good Student game which evolved from the Good Behavior game, is a classroom interventions used to reduce problem behavior such as: *Out of seat* defined as any instance a student left a designated area without the teacher's permission; *Incomplete assignments* defined as students' not completing designated class work assignments. *Talk outs* were defined as any vocalization that was out of turn. The Good Student Game proved to be an effective classroom management tool for meeting the variety of needs for classroom teachers. The basic contract used in many schools and classrooms are more than bribery, they are useful for making students accountable for their actions. They help make appropriate behavior more rewarding than inappropriate behavior. Contracts also individualize students needs, those with severe behavioral needs have contracts that are specially designed for them. The key is to find plans that are simple and effective (Hess, 2003).

Finally, in all the studies I examined, there were three levels of behavioral interventions: the behavioral analysis level, contingency management level, and the life arrangements level. Although the vast majority of research on behavioral adaptation has focused on the first two levels, Risley (1996) noted that the life arrangement level "appears to be the most powerful, durable, and inexpensive level of behavioral intervention … and should always be the strategy of choice" (p. 434). This broad view of behavior support-emphasizing lifestyles variables and adopting quality of life as both a desirable outcome and a recommended intervention –is a characteristic of positive behavioral support. The immediate use and social value of goals, procedures, and outcomes need to be validated to assure the relevance and acceptability of an intervention to those most directly involved in or affected by the intervention. Wolf (1978) referred to these social validation data as the heart of applied behavior analysis.

Today more than ever we are seeing violence, profanity and other outrageous acts by children in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The studies I examined revealed that the quality of teacher-student relationships is the most important aspect of classroom management. One of the classroom teachers' most important jobs is classroom management. Of all the variables in a comprehensive literature review classroom management had the largest affect on student achievement. Therefore, teachers need to

provide clear purpose and strong guidance regarding both academics and student behavior. Teachers and students need to cooperate as a team sharing concerns about the needs and opinions of others. Teachers should be aware of high-needs students and have a stock of specific techniques for meeting some of their needs. Positive support from the parents, administration, support personnel and the community to bring about positive changes in student behavior is also needed. In this Action Research we as teachers will be using life skills curriculum to nurture, encourage good behavior traits, and build character, which will ultimately help determine a child's destiny! **Teachers can make a difference; they can create a community that nurtures and develops social and emotional skills as well as academic learning.**

Defining the Variables:
The effects of early intervention on the behavior of first and second grade students at two schools

Research Questions:

- Will early intervention decrease defiant and disruptive behavior in second and first grade students?
- Does having parents read the behavior comments and sign planners as well as reading logs assist students in responsibility?
- How has the classroom community group affected the students' attitudes?
- Has the intervention affected the students' learning?

Intervention:
Meeting time

- Community development will be taught daily after lunch.
- During the week we will use the Second Step program- Empathy training, Impulsive Problem Solving, and Anger Management

Membership of the Action Research Group:
As a classroom teacher I am concerned about teaching the whole child. I am responsible for one self-contained second grade class at Fort Caroline Elementary. Susan Wright is responsible for one self-contained first grade class at Fishweir Elementary.

Negotiations to be undertaken:
We received permission from the principals and resource teachers, Music, Art, Media, and Physical Education and cafeteria workers to implement this action research.

Timeline:
From June 24, 2004 to July 24, 2004

- Planning Action research and write proposal

Implement Action: August 23, 2004 – October 22, 2004
January 24, 2005 – March 18, 2005

- Give Pretest and collect baseline data
- Implement programs

- Learning for Life: Life Skills (Respect, Responsibility, Honesty/Trust, Perseverance, Citizenship, Courage, Self Discipline)
- Second Step:(Empathy, Impulsive Problem Solving and Anger Management)
- Student behavior check-list (frequencies of misbehavior)
- Responsibility check-list (homework and reading log)
- Give Post test (Last day of study)

Data Analysis and Collection: Oct. 22- Nov. 6, 2004
March 18-April 29, 2005

Resources:
Programs:
- Learning for Life
- Second Step Program

Data Collection:
Pretest and posttest (survey questionnaire)

Classroom Teacher checklist
Resource teachers' checklist
Lunchroom workers' checklist

Evaluate academic progress – (as confidence improves grades improve)
Student behavior check-list
Discipline card record
Responsibility check-sheet (Homework, Planner, Reading Log) signed and returned daily (see attachments)

Method:

In this field study, two samples were obtained, a second grade class at Fort Caroline Elementary School and a first grade class at Fishweir Elementary School. The study will include an intervention that takes place within the classrooms. We obtained permissions from our principals to perform action research in our classrooms. This study began the week of January 24 through January 28, 2005 to find a baseline on behavior, we counted the number of times each student broke a rule in both classes. Then, a teacher created pre/post test was completed by each child. This pre/post test came from an overview of the Second Step program.

Then, we began the intervention of a social skills curriculum called Second Step. Twice a week for seven weeks beginning January 31 through March 18, 2005 we taught a lesson from the Second Step curriculum. The time that was set aside for this was called Meeting Time. Meeting Time lasted for about thirty minutes each day.

At the end of seven weeks, we took another behavior count on the number of times rules were broken in a week to see if there was a difference and gave the pre/post test to the

children again. For the next six weeks beginning March 19 and ending April 29, 2005 we stopped the intervention. There was no Second Step curriculum used during this time.

At the end of these six weeks on April 29, we gave a final pre/post test and checked the children's behavior count for the week ending April 29, 2005. Then we compared all of the measures to see if the intervention had made a difference in our student's behaviors. The length of the study totaled thirteen weeks.

I received a new student February 22nd who has demonstrated very disruptive behavior. She has definitely had a negative affect on the classroom climate. Also I was absent for two consecutive days February 28th and March 1st which created a lot of negative behavior. It has taken several days to regain control.

Conclusion:

We collected data from the students in the form of a questionnaire that we found in the first grade Learning for Life teacher's guide. We had the students fill out the questionnaires at the beginning, middle, and end of the eight weeks. This data proved to be inconclusive because our very smart students knew what was expected and marked happy faces for all the answers every time.

Looking closely at the graphs for the second grade class, student 4 had 13 infractions in behavior before the Learning for Life curriculum. After the four weeks of intervention, the student had only 7 infractions. However, after the intervention stopped for four weeks the student made 11 infractions. When compared to the first grade graphs, student 5 had a similar occurrence. Student 5 had 35 infractions in behavior before the Learning for Life curriculum. After the four weeks of intervention, the student had only 7 infractions. At the end of the eight weeks, the student had increased to 10 infractions.

According to the graphs, the data clearly indicates that improvement in behavior occurred during the four week intervention with the Learning for Life curriculum. It also revealed that the younger students were more easily influenced by the intervention and experienced longer lasting effects on their behavior.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Mills, G.; Action Research Text book p.216, Table c-3 Comparison of student responses
p.216, Table c-3 Comparison of parent responses
Charts and Graphs of findings
Student behavior check-list filled out by the teachers to determine a weekly letter grade based on behavioral criteria
Discipline card record
Responsibility check-sheet (Homework, Planner, Reading Log) signed and returned daily

The Findings:

According to the data collected August 23 to October 22, 2004, all of the student's behaviors improved during the intervention period however many students reverted back to previous behavior during the last four weeks without intervention. Therefore I would like to continue the study to see what the results would be with further intervention.

Action Planning:

I want to acknowledge and thank The Jacksonville Urban Systemic Initiative which has provided support for this Action Research by providing educational opportunities, funding through a grant from the National Science Foundation.

My reaction to doing this Action Research project is one of excitement. I have spent the whole summer researching and coming up with a plan I feel will be beneficial for my students. Research also shows that the more nurturing the classroom environment the more focused students are on learning. Research has also shown that frequent and excessive noncompliance in school (or home) is an indication of future antisocial behavior. A young child's defiance is often a trigger to more serious problems. Hopefully by treating this behavior early we can prevent the development of more destructive behavior and actually decrease this behavior altogether. By teaching young children social and emotional skills as well as life skills, we hope to make a difference in the lives of our students, and increase their learning gains.

On Line Resources:

- http://www.prenhall.com/mills
- http://www.cfchildren.org
- http://www.learning-for-life.org
- http://www.safeandcivilschools.com

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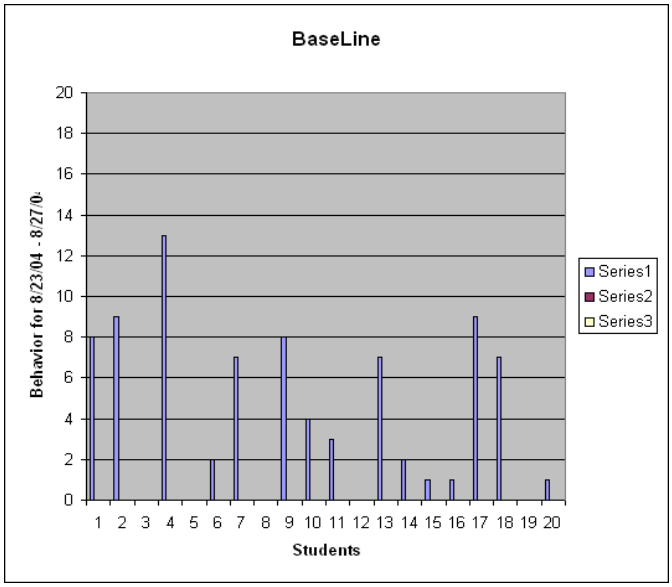
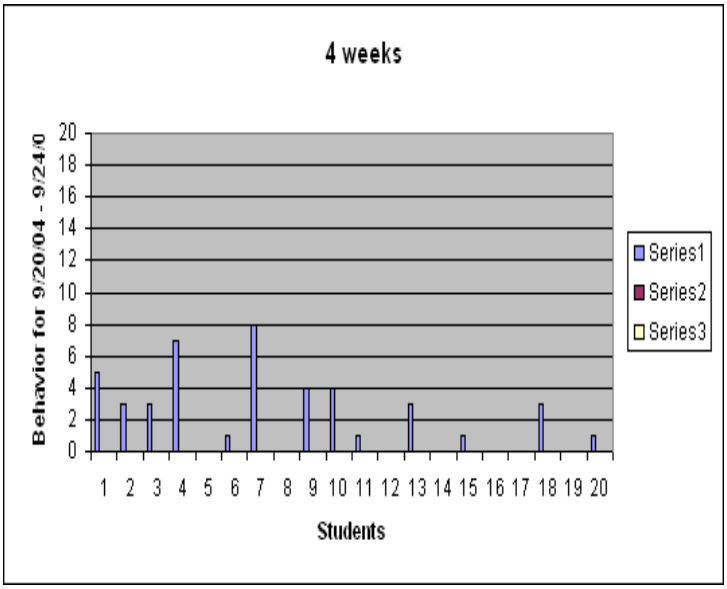
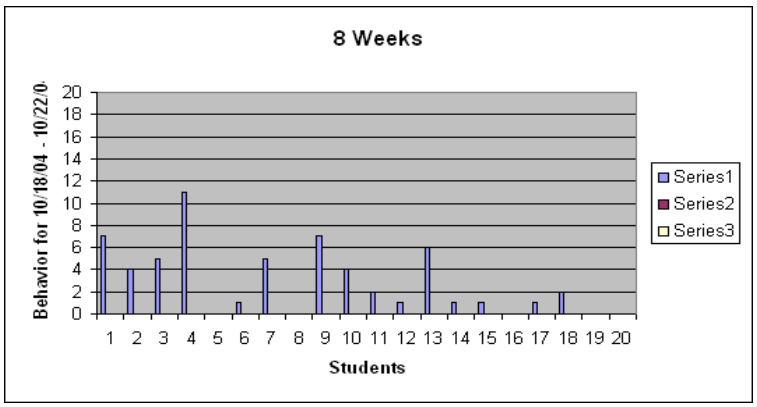
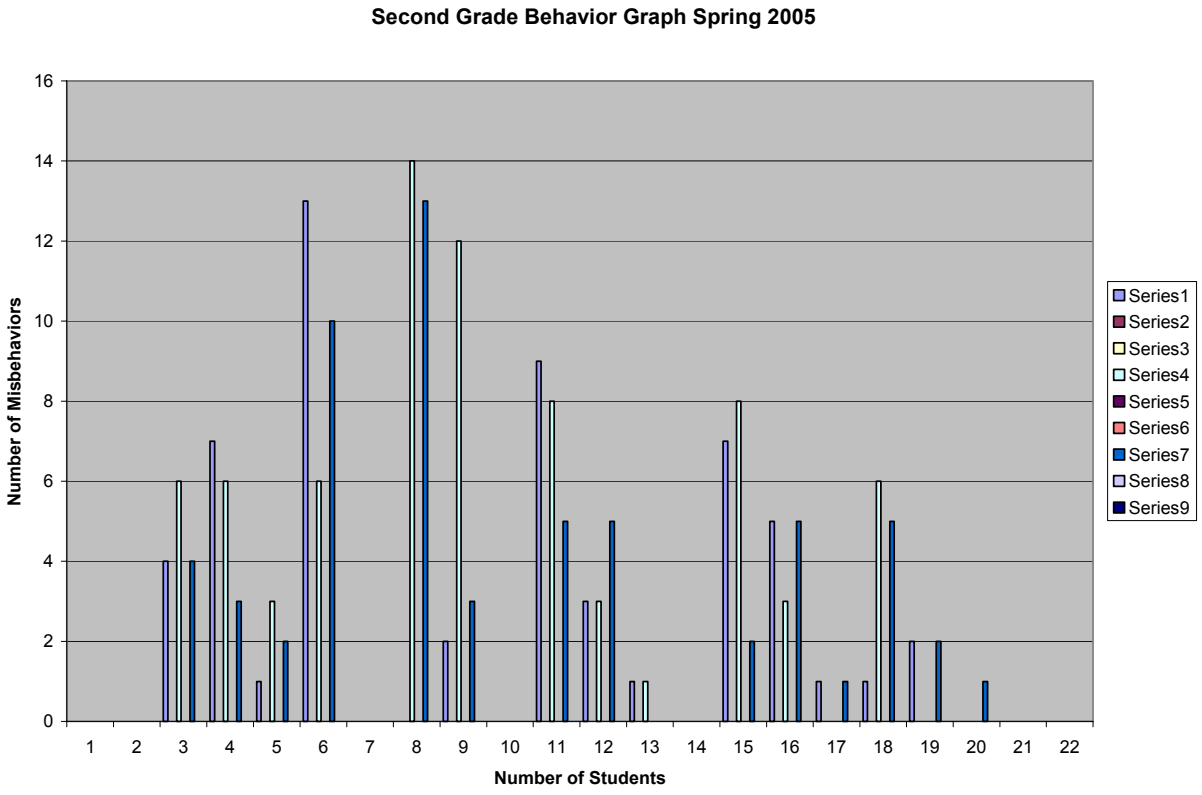
Appendices

(2nd Grade) Behavior Graph 8/23/04 - 10/22/04		
Baseline (0 weeks)	Middle of the Semester (4 weeks)	End of the Semester (8 weeks)
8	5	7
9	3	4
0	3	5
13	7	11
0	0	0
2	1	1
7	8	5
0	0	0
8	4	7
4	4	4
3	1	2
0	0	1
7	3	6
2	0	1
1	1	1
1	0	0
9	0	1
7	3	2
0	0	0
1	1	0








Second Grade Behavior Graph Spring 2005
Number of Misbehaviors
Number of Students
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22
Series1
Series2
Series3
Series4
Series5
Series6
Series7
Series8
Series9