

Diverting Disruptive Behavior In First Grade Students

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 a Duval County elementary classroom. 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 grade students. The intervention will consist of a program called Second Step. The program will be taught from January 31, 2005 until March 18, 2005, five days a week, and discussed during meeting time. At the end of the day, the teacher will write in the student's planners entries based on their daily behavior charts for parent notification. At the end of the timeline, I will give the posttest. I 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.

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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 school involved in this study is ranked as an A school by the state of Florida. The school is Fishweir Elementary School, 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 first grade in August 2004 at this 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 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 cannot 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 grade students at one Duval County School

Research Question:

- Will early intervention decrease defiant and disruptive behavior in first grade students?
- How has the classroom community group affected the students' attitudes?
- Has the intervention affected the students' learning?

Intervention:

Morning meetings

- Community development will be taught daily after the morning announcements.
- Twice a week we will use the Second Step program

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 first grade class at Fishweir Elementary.

Negotiations to be undertaken:

I will get permission from the principal and resource teachers, Music, Art, Media, and Physical Education.

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
- Second Step Program
- Student behavior check-list
- Compare Conduct Card with baseline Conduct Card
- Give Posttest (Last day of study)

Data Analysis and Collection: Oct. 22- Nov. 6, 2004

March 18-April 29, 2005

Resources:

Programs:

- CHAMPs

- Second Step

Method:

In this field study, one sample from a first grade classroom at Fishweir Elementary School was obtained. The study will include an intervention that takes place within the first grade classroom. I obtained permission from my principal to perform action research in my classroom. This study began the week of January 24 through January 28, 2005 to find a baseline on behavior, I counted the number of times each student broke a rule in my class. Then, each child completed a pre/post test. This pre/post test came from an overview of the Second Step program.

Then, I began the intervention of a social skills curriculum called Second Step. Twice a week for seven weeks beginning January 31 through March 18, 2005 I 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, I 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 I stopped the intervention. There was no Second Step curriculum used during this time.

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

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

After reviewing the data from my student's conduct cards, I realized that there were some factors that affected the outcome of my research. I conducted this research during the last part of the school year. My students had only one break during my research, which was spring break. They were very tired and started to get a little antsy.

The data from the conduct cards showed that some students, like student 4 on the graph, maintained the same number of misbehaviors throughout the research time. Other students like numbers 6, 10, 11, and 19 showed a definite increase in misbehaviors. Student numbers 3, 14, and 20 show decreases in misbehaviors. Some misbehavior increased or decreased during the intervention and then either continued to increase or decrease afterward.

The data from the pretest and posttest showed 5 to 50 point gains. Three students scored a 5-point gain. One had a 10-point gain and five had a 15-point gain. One had a 20-point gain and four had a 30-point gain. Two had a 35-point gain, one 40 and one 50-point gain. One child refused to take the second part of the test and he showed a -5-point gain.

The Action Plan that has emerged from this research is to try the implementation of the Second Step program at the beginning of the school year and teach it for a longer period of time to see if it has a more lasting affect on my students.

My reaction to doing this research project is that I learned how to get answers to questions that I might have about how to help my students learn. I still don't know to what extent the intervention affected misbehavior without the factor of any days off because of hurricane make-up days.

My reaction to the networking tools and other opportunities that are available to me through the MURMSI project is that I thought the meetings and the networking team were very helpful in getting the research put together. It's nice to know that there are other people out there willing to help with my research and the technology that goes with it. The website and the blog together helped me to keep in touch and share my research with others.

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

Behavior Graph

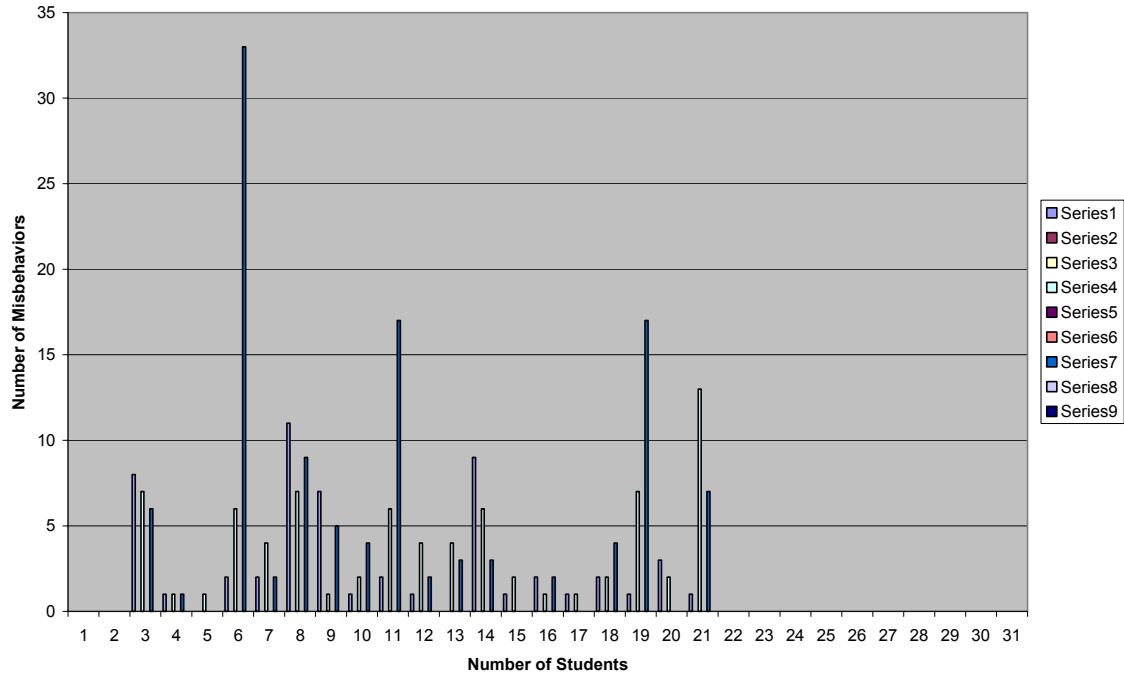


Figure 1. Spring behavior

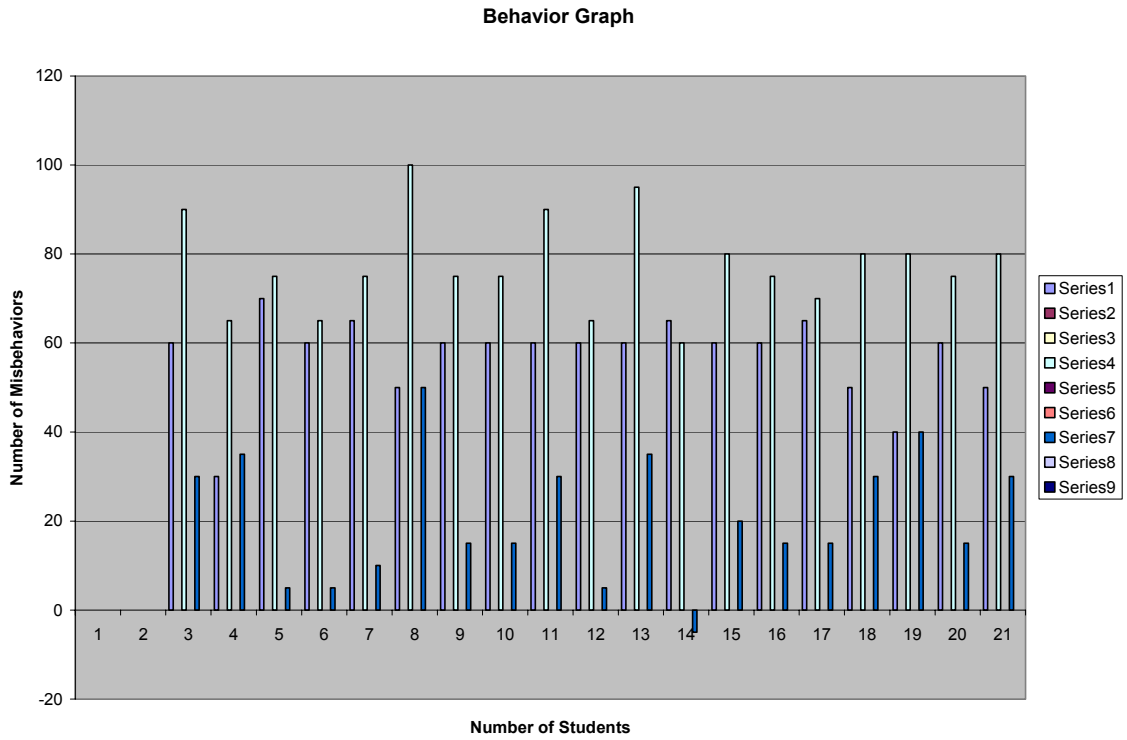


Figure 2. Fall behavior

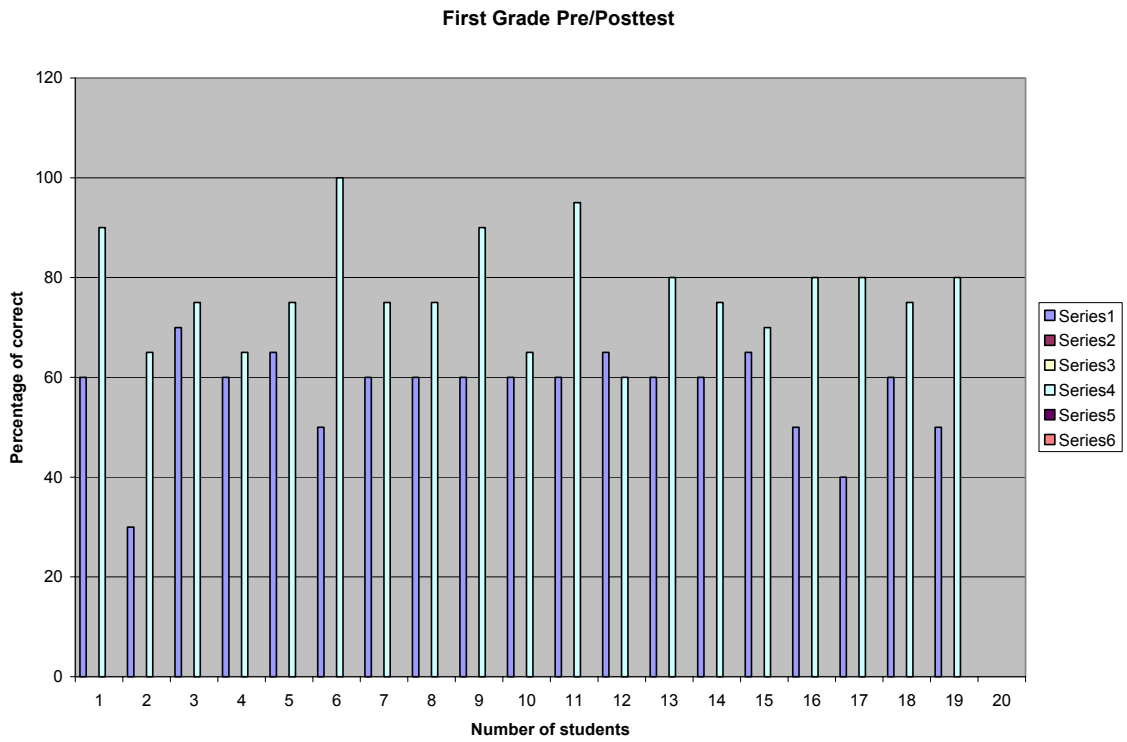


Figure 3. Pre/Posttest