

Fall 12-16-2021

## Disciplinary Measures in Primary Classrooms

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Disciplinary Measures in Primary Classrooms

A Quantitative Research Methods Proposal

A project presented to the graduate faculty of Minnesota State University, Moorhead

By

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ED 603

Methods of Research

Masters of Science of Curriculum and Instruction

December 2021

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### **Abstract**

The experiment done by the researcher analyzed the effectiveness of each of the research-based disciplinary strategies commonly used in elementary classrooms. These strategies include positive reinforcement, increased movement in the classroom during instructional time, increased parent communication, and reinforcement of the classroom rules/expectations. The strategies' effectiveness were tracked through behavioral charts kept by each of the students and marked by the classroom teacher throughout the day. Comprehensive data was sent back to parents on a weekly basis to update them on student behavior. The effectiveness on the charts were proven by the number of interruptions throughout each class period. An interruption was categorized by any time the mainstream teacher needed to stop academic instruction due to a disruption by a peer. By the end of the study, it was concluded that positive reinforcement and increased parent communication were most successful with decreasing the amount of interruptions during class time. When positive reinforcement was the strategy of focus, the culture of the classroom was notably better as well. All students were motivated to be chosen as positive role models and wanted to succeed.

Keywords: discipline, positive reinforcement, COVID, rapport, interruption

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Introduction**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, students' steady routines and scheduling has changed dramatically. Often times, this researcher, in the mainstream classroom noticed common trends. One of these trends is that students have periodically come into the room and abruptly left, sometimes days within coming back to school. As distance learning models have changed throughout the school year, some students have seemed to enjoy learning from home, while other students have been longing for normalcy again being back in the physical school building. Many students and families rely on these routines in the classroom and at home. At a young age, students have been exposed to illness, financial struggles, seclusion from friends and family, and mental health of family members and friends. Some of these circumstances may be new and frightening for them. Nick Triggles wrote an article in 2021 with BBC News explaining, "They are not likely to get seriously ill with Covid and there have been very few deaths. But children are still the victims of the virus - and our response to it - in many other ways" (para 1). Naturally, the negative affects of COVID have had a negative affect on some students in the classroom.

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While students learned from home, teachers have struggled immensely with engagement from students and increased discipline. It is up to the classroom teacher to ensure all of the students (online or in person) are taken care of and, of course, follow rules and expectations. This is not an easy task for teachers. Discipline itself has many perspectives to it as far as proper approaches and techniques to use in the classroom. There is so much research and opinions on the topic of keeping behaviors in check in the classroom that teachers may feel conflicted and

overwhelmed. Each classroom teacher and administrator has their own beliefs when it comes to preventing disciplinary issues in the classroom and taking action when negative behaviors arrive. Since each student comes to school with their own unique experiences, their behaviors vary. What disciplinary approaches work for some students, may not work as well for others. Teachers must develop rapport with students and understand the best ways for working with them early on. This way, when it comes to dealing with behaviors, the teacher can properly act upon difficult situations.

### **Brief Literature Review**

Many researchers have concluded that aside from a student's home life, there are many factors that affect a student's behavior in the classroom. One of these important factors is communication. Two types of communication are necessary to set up students for success, the first being communication between student and teacher. "Whenever possible, make the effort to connect with each student individually. One supportive adult can help a student overcome a very difficult home situation and shield them from resultant anxiety" (Minahan, 2020, p. 22). Not only is this relationship building going to reduce anxiety, but alleviate the likelihood of a negative behavior taking place as well. All students need that lifeline support throughout the day to keep encouraging them and motivating them to be the best version of themselves.

The other form of communication necessary is between the classroom teacher and parents. Similarly to student-teacher communication, teachers must also build a relationship with the family as well. It should be looked as a team effort in order to best support students. "Various studies claim that teachers can use a variety of communication formats and channels in order to promote parental involvement in building a sense of community between home and school" (Harris, para 1) as well as improving a child's learning environment. Consistency is key.

Rather than dwelling on negative behaviors, research has suggested positive reinforcement to be successful in schools as well as incorporating movements to keep students from disciplinary concerns.

According to research, a caring and well- managed classroom is integral to the achievement of struggling learners. Furthermore, brain-based researcher Jensen wrote, ‘teachers who smile, use humor, have a joyful demeanor, and take genuine pleasure in their work generally have high-performing learners’. (Paciotti, 2010, p. 12)

It’s safe to say students are positively affected by praise from the teacher, so it does not seem logical to use phrases that could crush their spirits. It’s okay to stray from the traditional classroom setting in order to help students feel better while they are learning. Along with positive reinforcement, movement within the walls of the classroom benefits students as well.

Movement breaks can occur either within or between lessons. For example, at the midpoint of an English Language Arts lesson, the teacher might have students take a quick wiggle break by their desks or show a GoNoodle video for students to follow. (Moon & Webster, 2019, p. 43)

Brain breaks do not need to take away from academic time, but rather enhance it. Seeing students move around the room and learn with excitement caused by the movement makes it all worthwhile.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research analyzed the different strategies used by classroom teachers related to discipline in the mainstream classroom. The researcher defined disciplinary issues as instances where academic learning time is interrupted due to something being done by a student.



Throughout the study the researcher used strategies including communication, positive reinforcement, movement, and setting expectations throughout the study. These strategies will be used on all students in the classroom throughout the year; however, the focus is on students who have had behavioral issues in the past. This group of students has used behavioral charts in the past that will be continued this school year. Documentation will take place and check-ins will be done with family members as well as with the dean of students. Both positive and negative behaviors are documented.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to incorporate various disciplinary related strategies within a classroom of primary aged students in order to improve the overall learning environment of the classroom. This will ultimately help individuals surround themselves with positive peer role models encouraging one another to do their best. At this age, students are learning the expectations of the classroom setting and are setting the precedent of how they will learn in future classrooms as well. The researcher was working in a first grade classroom with students who have had a combination of learning models throughout the past two school years. Students in this class have spent an equal amount of time out of the building learning as they have within the classroom. Because of this, students will require more guidance and support related to behaviors in order to succeed academically.

### **Research Questions**

When looking at disciplinary strategies, which strategy do students respond best to?

Which strategy results in the least amount of interruptions during academic time?

How are disciplinary strategies best incorporated in order to decrease the amount of academic time lost?

### **Definition of Variables**

Variable A: The independent variable is the disciplinary strategies being used with the students in first grade (communication, movement, positive reinforcement, and explaining expectations/review of rules). The researcher will be documenting how students grouped by behaviors respond to the strategies (positive reinforcement, increased communication, movement, and thorough explanation of rules and expectations) throughout class time.

Variable B: The documentation that is taken each day during the study will vary as student behaviors change throughout the day due to things happening around them and in their life. The dependent variable is the students' behavior. The documentation is the tool by which the varied behavior will be recorded.

### **Significance of the Study**

As education continues to evolve, educators and school leaders do as well. Each year a new group of individuals enter the classroom and it is up to the teacher to immediately start building the relationship even before the first day begins. Once the school year has started, rules and expectations need to be set so students understand the tone of the room and overall importance of learning in a safe, positive, and welcoming setting. Especially in primary grades, this is what also sets the tone for students' learning for years to come.

Often times when administrators are entering a classroom during observation, they look to classroom management and disciplinary strategies being used. Classroom management is important, as learning cannot take place when there is not set expectations and disciplinary

strategies being used consistently. The researcher believes that proper disciplinary strategies used will lead to better routine, positive behaviors, and more time spent on academic learning. These variables will also better prepare students for a growth mindset in the future. Families also may notice positive differences in their student(s) at home as a result of a more structured routine at school.

## **Research Ethics**

### ***Permission and IRB Approval***

In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study will be sought from the school district where the research project will be take place.

### ***Informed Consent***

Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participant minors will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix on page 33) that the researcher will read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants will be aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's Master Degree Program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understood and agreed, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both verbally and in writing.

## **Limitations**

Being in a first grade classroom always brings unexpected experiences. Some students may be taken on or off of a behavioral plan due to parent requests, special education qualifications or modifications, or personal requests. If a situation like this arises at any time during the study, the researcher will honor the request of others.

As learned this past school year, illness or learning model changes can also take place at any time changing the timeline of the study being conducted. If absences or school plans change, the timeline of the research taking place will also need to be adapted.

Since this group of students was new to the researcher and the classroom, the grouping of students could change based on positive or negative behaviors of students in the room. For example, a student struggling with behaviors in the classroom who has not previously been identified as a student in need of behavior interventions may need to be added to the group involved in the study.

## **Conclusions**

Many factors contribute to how a student behaves in the classroom. Teachers this year are facing more troubles related to discipline as previous years. A large part of this is due to the amount of time spent out on the classroom setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers, students, and family members rely on the routines and strategies taught in the elementary setting to set up students for academic success. Without proper strategies being incorporated, teachers and peers may face an increased amount of academic interruptions throughout the school year. In chapter two the researcher explains how some of the most common disciplinary strategies used and their affects in the classroom.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Without classroom structure and routine, learning cannot take place. Within the first few days of school, students often learn what is expected of them and what is not tolerated. Teachers work hard to establish rapport and expectations early on. Discipline issues are obstacles towards childhood learning in elementary school settings (Alsubaie, 2015). In order for a classroom of children to succeed, the teacher must first create a healthy classroom-learning environment. In order to provide students with a healthy learning environment, teachers must first establish classroom rules and expectations together as a class with guidance. When the expectations are established on day one of school, others may observe teachers beginning to build rapport with students. Of course, all of this is communicated with parents at the start of the year and continuously throughout. Positive reinforcement and movement are also among many factors that lead to positive behaviors and more academic success as well. Regardless of class size, it is important for a teacher to know each student well and understand his or her needs in the classroom.

#### **Body of the Review**

##### **Context**

When hearing the word ‘discipline’ in the classroom, one’s mind might jump to consequences or getting into trouble. Discipline itself, however, does not need to be a negative word. “The master’s definition of discipline is: the adjustment of unacceptable behavior to acceptable behavior according to our individual standards and measures” (Logan, 2003, p. 3). Adjustments can be positive, light, and discreetly managed. Many factors affect any given student’s behavior in the classroom. It is the teacher, however, who controls the environment of

the classroom. Based upon experiences witnessed by the researcher, when students enter a room and see the positive and comfortable learning environment, they are more likely to start learning more quickly and easily. It all ties back to rapport before academics can take place.

### **Communication**

The learning climate that classroom teachers strive for starts with communication. When discussing communication in relation to discipline in the classroom, there are two major parts to think about: student-teacher communication and parent-teacher communication. First impressions and communication with the classroom teacher kick off each school year around the time of Open House. At this point, students and parents learn who their teacher is and often times are provided a sneak peak into what the school year will entail. “At the beginning of each instructional term, skilled teachers know that one of their first and most important tasks is to establish a learning climate that allows them to teach effectively” (Bowman, 1983, p. 116). “Room setting is a powerful nonverbal variable that can be manipulated to establish an effective learning environment and teacher-to-student communication. It can affect discipline, interest, and the degree of orderliness in the instructional setting” (Grubaugh & Houston, 1990, para 1). First impressions are an important part of building communication and rapport at the start of the year. This is when the tone is set for the rest of the school year. The first few months of the year school consist of explanations for simple tasks with more discussion and model based learning rather than telling the simple do’s and don’ts of the classroom. Often times it feels repetitive, but classroom teachers may often find that with primary grades their focus may be to guide students rather than give a consequence.

Not only does communication between teacher and student increase positive behaviors, it also builds relationships necessary for learning to take place. In the evolving world of education,

one thing remains constant: Success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students.

Moving from a focus on discipline to a focus on relationships has implications for all stakeholders. For students, it clearly sends the message, *You belong here*. Students will not be given an easy way out; they will be expected to learn and to achieve—and will be supported in their efforts to do so. Teachers will see that a strong classroom community is the cornerstone to success. For parents, the implications are enhanced communication and a greater focus on their student as an individual. And for school and district leaders, this approach means closely attending to the structures that are required to reach the whole child. With a renewed focus on relationships, our students will indeed realize that they belong in school. (Sterrett, 2012, p. 74)

Teachers often times observe students to be more willing to learn when rapport between teacher-to-student is established. Teachers like to have that same level of rapport with parents, as it will assist the student throughout their academic career as well. “Parents also need to be part of the school’s positive vision. Teachers and principals can bank important capital by calling parents early in the year to check in, introduce themselves, and share one specific and positive insight about their child” (Sterrett, p. 74, 2012). As discussed earlier, parents are also making first impressions from the first time they communicate with the homeroom teacher. Before the school year begins, classroom teachers often times like to make contact with each parent providing expectations, guidelines, and ways to communicate throughout the year.

### **Positive Reinforcement**

Traditionally, the common response to negative behavior in schools around the world has been imposition of some type of punishment (Oxley & Holden, 2021, p. 71). When leading a large class of primary age students, various issues occur throughout the day. Naturally, one of adults' first instincts is to say "no," or "stop" to whatever it is that a student is doing that the teacher doesn't approve it. "The use of positive reinforcement sometimes gets lost in translation because educators forget the importance of acknowledging good behaviors" (Garcia & Hoang, 2015, p. 1). It's quicker to point out the don'ts rather than take the time to praise students for what they are doing properly. Simply calling out what a student is doing that is wrong is quick and easy, though, does not make it best practice. It should be a continuous cycle of praise rather than what not to do.

As education has continued to evolve overtime, teachers have learned new ways to reinforce positive behaviors in the classroom. Not only does positive reinforcement reward students for doing their job, but also corrects others that may be off task or mislead from classroom rules and expectations. Especially with students in the primary grades, this sets the baseline for their learning environment in the future. With the help of technology in classrooms today, teachers often times will incorporate programs like Class Dojo (<https://www.classdojo.com>) to assist them with providing positive reinforcement in the classroom. The three major goals of programs like Class Dojo is to improve behavior, share data, and save time (Garcia & Hoang, 2015, p. 3). The goals related to Class Dojo tie back to the communication aspect of disciplinary strategies as well. Parents, students, and the classroom teacher are able to track daily behavior in the classroom by providing students with the accountability aspect.

## **Movement**



Research has suggested that the use of effective instructional strategies could be increased through direct intervention (Mesa, 2005, p. 3). From experiences that the researcher has seen, interventions usually consist of sit time, small group work, or taking extra amounts of time. Luckily, there are strategies, like movement breaks, to help students maintain their level of focus without getting into trouble in the classroom. Classroom teachers and observers have experienced moments when they realized their students are starting to go stir-crazy in their desks and are in need of a brain break. The purposes of these brain breaks are to get students up and moving. As heard before, action organizes the mind! Most elementary age students have a minimum of twenty minutes of recess time per day; however, some might question whether this involves enough movement for the eight-hour school day. At times, recess time is withheld from students due to behavioral concerns in the classroom. “Studies suggest that as many as 40 percent of schools nationwide have cut recess—citing lack of time, supervision, and resources” (Millner, 2010, para 10). In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics released a statement that said, “Recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child's development and, as such, it should not be withheld for punitive or academic reasons” (as cited in Dunlap, 2007, para 1). As these two articles suggested, what is happening overall in school in comparison to what research indicates, it’s quite conflicting. If research shows students need more movement, they need more movement. This also does not take into account the social benefits of recess and play time throughout the day. If students are not being given adequate time for movement, the behavioral cycle tied to loss of recess time will continue.

### **Classroom Rules and Expectations**

The first few days of instruction are critical for establishing disciplinary policies in the classroom. This is the honeymoon, the trial period when teacher and students are becoming

acquainted with each other. During this time, the instructor should strive to establish rules and shape an overall attitude that will govern the classroom (Grubaugh & Houston, 1990). Various strategies are used by teachers including creating charts with classroom rules together, modeling/acting out positive and negative behaviors, and taking the time to explain why rules are set in place.

When mapping out classroom rules with students, there are a few important factors to take into account. It's best to be short and clear.

Because children need to remember the rules, keep them short, meaningful, and logical 'Water stays in the tub.' Instead of initially creating a long list of rules, make up additional rules only as they become necessary. And remember, the rules for last year's class may not apply to the current group. (Miller, 2004)

The rules discussed between teacher and student should be positive as well, pointing out what students should do rather than what not to do. The rules are designed for the entire year and meant to be revisited regularly. Since the rules are meant to carry through the year, teachers need to be trained prior and properly equipped with materials guiding children in their learning environment. Often times students aren't given adequate time to have rules explained past the first few weeks of school.

Children should be involved in the creation of the rules by which they will be governed (Malone, 2000, p. 2). When students are involved in the process, they are actively thinking and collaborating with peers to differentiate what some of the 'dos' are in the classroom. Students are also more likely to remember the expectations when they take part in the creation. Upon

completion, the rules should be posted clearly and revisited throughout the year. Students need self-control rather than being controlled by rewards and consequences (Malone, 2000). This comes from adequate dialogue between student and teacher. The students should understand the expectations and buy into what it is that is expected of them. If they do not believe in the system, negative behaviors will occur.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Behaviorism in the classroom is the observable actions of students based on their environment, guidance, and support. McLeod explains in *Behaviorist Approach* that behaviorism is a theory of learning, which states all behaviors are learned through interaction with the environment through a process called conditioning (McLeod, para 1). When discussing discussing variable related the study, behaviorism is used as the observable actions students demonstrate throughout the day. This is related to the way students have been taught and continue to practice throughout the school day. McLeod also explains that the behavior is the way students act as a stimulus. In related to the study, students response is recorded based on the redirection that was provided to them by the researcher. Positive or negative, the behavior of each individual is monitored closely, and is added to a report card quarterly. In order to keep behaviors positive in the classroom, teacher utilize reinforcement strategies to cut down on the number of interruption leading to more academic time for students. This can be measured on behavior charts, behavior referrals, or through verbal reminders. The goal of teachers is to best guide students to academic success through positive reinforcement, adequate communication, and effectively teaching classroom expectations. When these areas are executed properly, the number of disruptions should decline or be eliminated.

## **Questions**

When looking at disciplinary strategies, which strategy do students respond best to?

Which strategy results in the least amount of interruptions during academic time?

## **Conclusions**

Many factors contribute to how students perform in the classroom. Some of these include classroom environment, supports from home, and management techniques used by classroom teachers. Most importantly, students need to feel cared for, valued, and safe in their learning environment. Once rapport is built between teacher and students, school leaders encourage classroom teachers to incorporate various classroom strategies to avoid negative behaviors. Communication is important as parents and students both need guidance throughout the school year. Often times positive reinforcement can be used to indirectly fix any misbehaviors and reward proper behavior in the classroom. Of course, kids are kids! They need movement, playtime, and brain breaks. When implementing these disciplinary strategies, teachers are able to avoid the don'ts of classroom behaviors and focus on the positives leading students to their full potential.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

As routines in the classroom change from year to year, new behaviors often arise as students are adapting to classroom rules and expectations. One major change, COVID-19, took a toll on many students in many ways (Triggle, 2021, para 1). The changes in routine left a negative affect on a number of student behaviors in the classroom. At a young age, students are beginning to learn to sit, listen, and grow academically for hours each day. "Elementary students

who show externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggressive, disruptive, defiant), internalizing behaviors (e.g., sad, anxious, withdrawn), or academic disengagement are highly concerning to educators” (Griggs et al., 2016, p. 690). In order to avoid unnecessary distractions from academic time, classroom teachers work hard to ensure students have adequate time to learn classroom expectations, communicate with teachers and peers, and are provided ample amount of movement throughout the day. Without some of these common disciplinary strategies, students are more likely to misbehave throughout the day. Strategies used to keep behaviors in check set the tone of learning behaviors for students throughout the rest of their time in school. Instilling the value of learning and classroom respect will increase the amount of time spent on academics resulting more academic and social growth for students at a young age.

The study being conducted examined the affects of the following strategies used with students who have a history of disciplinary struggles in the classroom: positive reinforcement, increased communication between teacher-student and teacher- parent, movement breaks, and routine review of expectations and classroom rules. All students in the general education classroom encounter these strategies on a day-to-day basis; however, the researcher is analyzing how each of the strategies directly correlates to each students’ behavior involved in the study. There are about five students involved in this small group study.

The research done is important as teachers continue to look for ways to improve their practices in the classroom. Teachers, behavioral specialists, and administrators continue to support each other and rely on each other in order to provide services to students with best practice and researched based approaches.

### **Research Question(s)**

When looking at disciplinary strategies, which strategy do students respond best to?

Which strategy results in the least amount of interruptions during academic time?

### **Research Design**

This experimental design was to track student behaviors through a chart utilized by select students and the classroom teacher throughout the year. The students involved in the study have been previously identified as students with behavioral concern and use a chart each day. The design was chosen to monitor students' behaviors linked to the reinforcement strategies used by the classroom teacher. The study being done analyzed different strategies used by teachers in relation to discipline in the mainstream classroom. The research being done is mostly qualitative as it is based on the day-to-day behaviors and experiences the researcher observes. Although it is opinion based, both positive and negative behaviors are tracked for each participant.

Interruptions are categorized as any point in time where the classroom teacher needed to pause instruction due to a distraction or negative behavior from a peer.

### **Setting**

The researcher is examining a small group of students in a first grade mainstream classroom setting. The city is a small town located about an hour from the Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN area. The population of the community is just under 200. There is a large immigration population and is a large farming community. There are a few factories in town and in a neighboring small town that bring many workers to the area. The school itself has preschool through 12th grade all in one building with 481 students enrolled. Of these students, 78.6% are White, 19.1% Hispanic, and less than 3% belonging to other groups. As the data shows, majority of the students involved in the research are either Hispanic or white. Because of the high immigrant population in the community, just fewer than 10% of students are English language

learners. The district as a whole contains 14.4% special education population and 23.7% have free/reduced lunch. With enrollment under five hundred, the elementary school is known for small class sizes and close relationships with the tight knit community. Families work well together and give the school the school support in many ways including funding, boosters club, hands on learning around the community, high parent involvement/guests in the classroom, and high turnout at all sporting events. With the small town feeling, it seems as though everyone is family in one way or another.

### **Participants**

Participants in the study include a small group of first grade students who are six and seven years in age. The three students involved are students involved in the group have had behavioral concerns in the past and work with a team consisting of the classroom teacher, Dean of Students, and parents. One of the three students of the group receives special education services as well and has behavioral check-ins with the special education teacher and/or assigned paraprofessional. Often times, students who work with the classroom teacher on a behavioral plan have a split family situation and are looking for routine and structure or some type of similar traumatic experiences. The behavioral charts created by the researcher used in the study are especially helpful to students who go from one parent to another as it provides details from the week and is documented regularly. The chart provides parents and the student with a clear information of how their student's day was in relation to their behavior.

### ***Sampling***

Students involved in the study are those that have previously been identified by a group of professionals as having behavioral issues in the classroom. Therefore, this is a purposive

sampling method. These students are on a chart based behavioral plan and have check-ins at the end of each day. Therefore, the group being examined is not random and had been preselected at the beginning of the school year. All students in this group use the same behavioral chart.

Documentation of the charts are taken at the end of each day and sent home for parents to see along with their student. Weekly reports are also given to parents and documented. Students are on the behavioral plan for the school year.

### **Instrumentation**

“The master’s definition of discipline is: ‘the adjustment of unacceptable behavior to acceptable behavior according to our individual standards and measures’ (Logan, 2003). In the mainstream classroom, teachers face obstacles each day throughout their lesson, passing times, and everything between. Disciplinary actions may be categorized and the instances in which the teacher needs to take the focus aside from the overall class and instruction to address the student and his/her actions.

The researcher used a behavioral chart throughout the research term with the students. The chart has been designed and altered by the researcher to best fit the group of students in the first grade setting. The chart is broken down by each change in schedule throughout the day, starting with morning meeting and ending with packing up for the day. Each part of the day is broken down into four categories ranging from “Great Day” to “Needs improvement.” Smiley faces are also linked to each category to create visuals for the student. Each of the four categories on the chart are linked to a number. These numbers represent the amount of interruptions/times a student has needed direct instruction or redirection separate from the whole group. A “Great Day” has zero to one whereas the category “Needs improvement” has more than five times of redirection during that class period. These behavior charts will be tracked daily for the term of



the research. At the end of each week, students will receive a summary to send home. Each student's daily behavior will be graphed to comparisons of the various strategies being used.

The daily behavior chart and summary page provide students and parents with direct feedback including the visual, journaling with evidence and examples, as well as room for feedback from the parents. This aligns with the research question as it provides numerous opportunities throughout the day for students to react to the strategy being used. Since each day differs for students, having a group of students in the research will allow the researcher to look at average affects for each strategy being focused on.

### ***Data Collection***

Each week the researcher will focus on one research based strategy. After each of the strategies have been used, the data will be analyzed to compare the effectiveness of the strategies for the group of students in the first grade room. Although the research strategies will change focuses throughout the weeks of research, all strategies are used periodically throughout the school day with all students in the classroom. Marks will be made consistently throughout each week based upon the same interruption policy: any point in time where the classroom teacher needed to pause instruction due to a distraction or negative behavior from a peer.

### **Data Analysis.**

Data is qualitative meaning student behavior will be observed by the researcher. The results of the daily behaviors chart will be marked on a document by the researcher at the end of each day. (For example, three points for a "Great Day," two points for a "Good Day," and one point for "Needs Improvement.") These numbers will be tracked for each student. After each week of data has been observed and documented, the researcher will be able to compare the affects of the disciplinary strategies in relation to student behavior.

### Research Questions and System Alignment

Table 3.1. provides a description of the alignment between the study Research Questions and the methods used in this study to ensure that all variables of study’s have been accounted for adequately.

**Table 3.1.**

*Research Questions Alignment*

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
R Q1: When looking at disciplinary strategies, which are most effective?	DV: The student behaviors is the dependent variable. The documentation taken place is the tracking tool.  IV:Disciplinary strategies being focused and executed used by the researcher in the classroom	Experimental Research Design	Daily Behavioral Chart and weekly summary documentation	All students are documented on their daily behaviors in the classroom. Students used the same behavioral chart system along with the weekly summary . Both are sent home for parent review and signed at the end of the	Techniques used include research based disciplinary strategies. Documentation is based on classroom observation throughout the day.	Students on the behavioral plan have previously been identified as needing behavioral interventions from the previous school year.

week.

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## **Procedures**

Throughout the first week of the study, the researcher will focus on increased communication between students-teacher and parents-teacher. This will occur through journaling in planners, note taking on behavior charts, and emails. These types of communication occur about one to two times a week, but will take place each day for this portion of the study. Week two will focus on positive reinforcement. Throughout this time the teacher will spend more time pointing out positive behaviors, often times using peer role models, positive tones, and class rewards. It may seem repetitive at times or stressing positives too often, but for the sake of the study, the researcher needs to see the direct affects upon behaviors related to this strategy. The third week will focus on more brain breaks and movement in the classroom. This occurs through walks outside, using the GoNoodle application, various brain break classroom games, and desk yoga. This brain break will occur at least once per class period (at least seven to eight times per day). Week four will wrap up the research with explanation of classroom rules and expectations. For example, rather than telling a student to not talk in the hallway, the researcher might remind the student there is no talking in the hallways, but also provide guidance and explanation at that time to ensure the student has adequate knowledge of that classroom expectation. At the end of each day, each participant will review his or her behavior chart with the classroom teacher during clean up time at the end of the day. Each student's overall numbers will be recorded on a spreadsheet by the researcher. After the recording is done, the daily chart will be taken home. At the end of the week, each participant's family will receive a weekly summary.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Considerations of the students in the group as well as though in the general education classroom are all being given adequate attention and care throughout the research. Students in the group are confidential, no names or academic information is shared throughout the research. Parents/guardians of the students involved have given signature approval before beginning the research and are in support of the behavior charts used. The researcher puts the best interests of each student first. Regardless of documentation and strategies used, each student knows that the researcher cares for them and knows the goal is to help them reach their full potential.

### **Conclusions**

Chapter three explains the process of the research being collected throughout the term. The researcher's goal is to analyze student behavior from the group of preselected individuals as a result of the strategies being used. These strategies include communication, positive reinforcement, movement, and revisiting/repetition and explanations of classroom rules and expectations. Although each week of research will have a focus where each skill is being stressed, all students in the classroom will encounter these strategies throughout the day as needed. Data will routinely be collected throughout the study and each week will be compared at the end of the study to determine the effectiveness of each strategy used by the researcher.

Chapter four includes results from the research described in chapter three.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

With the COVID-19 pandemic taking students away from the traditional classroom setting, primary age students have shown regression related to classroom behaviors. When starting the new school year, teachers spent the first few weeks establishing routines and setting boundaries with the help of various disciplinary strategies. Now that students are entering the in-person again, teachers have put disciplinary strategies at the forefront of learning. Positive reinforcement is often used to both correct inappropriate behaviors as well as reward positive behaviors. Rather than calling students out by name, a teacher might praise other students who are setting a good example. Students require more activity in order to keep learning and brain breaks are becoming part of the daily schedule. With gaps in achievement from the change in learning models, parents are searching for more data and communication about what their students are able to do. Teachers create, explain, and post classroom rules and expectations that are referenced often as a class. These are a few of the strategies teachers utilize daily to keep behaviors in check so learning can continue to happen. The purpose of the study was to analyze each of the commonly used disciplinary strategies in primary grades and determine which best keeps students' behaviors on track in order to help them reach their full potential academically.

#### **Data Collection**

For the study being done, daily behavior charts were used to track students' behaviors broken down by each class period. The students had the opportunity to earn a smiley face ('great day'), okay face, or sad face ('needs improvement'). There were a total of eight class periods allowing each student to earn a total of eight smiley faces on the chart. Students used their chart

in the classroom as well as in specialists and interventionist classrooms. Each of the students like the accountability of the chart and was motivated to do their best in order to earn smiley faces.

Each day's results were put into a weekly tracker and were sent home at the end of the week. The time the research was conducted was broken down into four areas in relation to disciplinary strategies: positive reinforcement, increased movement, increased parent communication, and classroom rules/expectations. Each area of focus was used throughout five full school days. The total time it took to conduct the research was five weeks. Throughout the research, students were able to see their charts and had the responsibility of taking the chart with them wherever they went throughout the day. At the end of the five weeks, each of the weekly summaries were analyzed to determine which strategy was most successful at keeping behaviors to a minimum.

## **Results**

***RQ 1: When looking at disciplinary strategies, which strategy do students respond best to? Which strategy results in the least amount of interruptions during academic time?***

Each of the four disciplinary strategies were focused on for a total of five full school days. A rewards system is in place in the classroom where the research study took place. As a reward, students are able to earn a ticket when demonstrating good behavior. Often times throughout the study, students involved were also using the ticket system in addition to the individual behavior charts. Each subject area on the behavior chart showed the number of interruptions through tallies. These tallies then proved which face the student earned at the end of each class period. Table 1 displays the number of smiley faces that were earned by each student broken down by the days. There were a total of eight subject areas allowing students to earn a total of eight smiley faces.

**Positive Reinforcement**

When students involved in the study were off task, forms of positive reinforcement were used to get student redirected again. For example, when a student would blurt, one of my redirections consisted of telling another student that I appreciated their hand raising and rewarded them. The purpose of this positive reinforce was to lead the student making the interruption to follow the positive example set by their peer. As the Table 1 shows, this was often times successful for not only the students involved in the study, but the class as a whole.

**Table 1**

*Student Behavior :inked to Positive Reinforcement*

Student	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	8/8	3/8	7/8	8/8	7/8
B	7/8	6/8	7/8	8/8	8/8
C	8/8	7/8	7/8	7/8	8/8

Positive reinforcement worked particularly well for Student A. Student A does not like his name to be used in the whole group class setting, therefore rewarding others to get the attention away from him is something he showed appreciation for. His responses were often corrected with just one or two positive reinforcements. Of the five days that positive reinforcement was the focus, four of the days he had earned seven or more smiley faces. This was something that he was rewarded for by interventionists, his family, and the researcher.

### **Increased movement/Brain breaks**

Movement breaks in the whole group classroom setting consist of two to three minute dance breaks on GoNoodle or YouTube or various games around the room. Students have the opportunity to move from their desk to another area in the room to stretch their bodies, use the bathroom, get a drink, and socialize for a brief amount of time. There are on average two to three brain break activities used throughout the day in the classroom in which the study was done. In addition to the brain breaks that are already in place for the whole group, students involved in the study were able to take additional breaks as reinforcement to interruptions. The breaks used throughout this five day focus consisted of a walk down the hall with a trusted adult, timed work leading to a break (five minutes of work, then a one minute break), and breathing and stretching exercises during academic work. When students involved in the study interrupted during the time of the increased movement focus, they were given one of the movement options to complete. All three students utilized each of the three options.

Throughout the week, each student was able to use a walking break separately when interruptions were happening. The researcher told the student they needed to take a break and think about what their actions have looked like and how it has affected others around them during learning time. In order to do this, the researcher or classroom aid would take their hand and walk to the end of the hallway and back while discussing the interruptions that had taken place and how to better handle the situation going forward. The walking breaks last about one minute each time then students returned to their work.

Student A, B, and C were also given timed work options in attempt to stop interruptions and get students back on track with academic work. This consisted of telling the student they would need to work for a full five minutes (a timer was set by them). When the timer went off,



they were able to take a one-minute break at their desk. During this break they could sit and relax, stand, or walk in place.

A third option for a brain break consisted of breathing and/or stretching exercises in order to increase student focus and eliminate interruptions. When the researcher used this method as a brain break, students were coached on taking deep breaths for approximately one minute. During this minute of breathing, students were also prompted to sit up straight, stretch out arms or legs, bend, and twist. When this short break was complete, students were guided back to their academic work. Of the three options, there did not appear to be a distinguished difference amongst the students overall, but Student A seemed to work best when arriving back in the room from a walk down the hall with a trusted adult.

**Table 2**

*Student Behavior Linked to Increased Movement/Brain Breaks*

Student	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	5/8	6/8	6/8	7/8	6/8
B	6/8	5/8	6/8	6/8	5/8
C	4/8	5/8	5/8	4/8	6/8

**Increased parent communication**

When communicating with first grade families, a few practices are used on a weekly basis, as it is vital in leading students to success. Teamwork is key at this age. Students carry a planner in their daily binders that is signed by the teacher and parents each morning and night. This is where small notes, updates, and questions are put. If a note is longer or more serious,

emails and phone calls are done. In addition to the emails and planners, weekly newsletters are sent home each Friday updating parents on academic focuses as well as classroom news and reminders. The class is also on the app, SeeSaw ([www.web.seesaw.me](http://www.web.seesaw.me)) to display academic work to families.

On average, students may receive one note home in their planners a week. Certain positive or negative experiences in the classroom increase the number of notes. During the time of increased parent communication study, the amount of notes sent home had increased to daily.

**Table 3**

*Student Behavior Link to Increased Parent Communication*

Student	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	6/8	7/8	7/8	8/8	7/8
B	7/8	5/8	6/8	7/8	6/8
C	7/8	8/8	8/8	8/8	8/8

The notes in the planner consisted of positive notes sent home and updates of any negative behaviors. For example, when each of the students had eight smiley faces for the day, a note was written in the planner that said, “All 8 smiley faces today! I am so proud of you!” If there was a rough day, notes were, “Oops! Today didn’t go very well. Please see the behavior chart.” All three of the students’ families received phone-call updates (or a voicemail) on Day 3 of the study focusing on communication.

**Rules/Expectations**

At the start of the school year, the classroom teacher and first grade students created a list of rules and expectations to follow throughout the school year. These rules were made into a poster and are displayed in the front of the classroom. It portrays positive behaviors as well as visuals so students are able to understand it as well as continue to reference it throughout the year. During the five day period when rules and expectations were referenced, students were to look back at the poster and think about their actions in comparison to what our poster explains. Common redirections throughout this time consisted of short, private conversations amongst the teacher and student. These conversations lasted for less than a minute, throughout these conversations, the teacher would ask the students to redirect their attention to the poster and reread parts of it that had pertained to their behavior. For example, when Student C had interrupted another classmate during math instruction on day one, the expectation that was referenced was, “I can be a positive role model by using full body listening.” Another that was frequently referenced was, “I can respect others around me.” When students’ attention was redirected to this rule, conversations that took place revolved around the importance of listening so others are able to do the same.

**Table 4**

*Student Behavior Linked to Rules/Expectations*

Student	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	5/8	6/8	6/8	7/8	7/8
B	6/8	5/8	7/8	7/7	8/8
C	6/8	6/8	5/8	7/8	7/8

The results above show that the strategy improved students' behavior over the course of the five days. Although students responded well to the rules and expectations, it was not considered to be one of the most effective disciplinary strategies used.

### **Data Analysis**

When working with children in a first grade setting, it is important to note that every day brings a new adventure. Students arrive to school each day with things in their “invisible backpack” meaning they have ideas/behaviors/emotions from the day before or that morning that affect how their day may go. As the researcher, it isn't always known what students are bringing with them to school each day. Although the disciplinary strategies are useful ways to get students focused on academic work, it won't always correct what underlying issues students may be dealing with on a particular day. Because of this, it is important to note that the disciplinary strategies are successful when helping students, but teachers must do more to help students outside of academic time to make ensure students are comfortable, heard, fed, emotionally stable, etc. This may be before school, during specialist times, lunch or after school. Teachers do what they can during the school day to ensure students are ready to learn.

The tool used to document each of the disciplinary strategies was the behavior chart kept by each of the participating students. The tool accurately tracked the number of interruptions to academic time and made documentation of behaviors quick and fairly easy. Tallies made to the chart were discrete allowing only the student involved to be made aware of the documenting taking place. Since Student A, B, and C were given a new page each day; they were able to take it home at the end of the day to show their parents updates daily. Parents and specialists were made clear of how their day was and were also able to add to the daily behavior charts as well.

This clear communication allowed all supporting adults to be on the same page throughout the study and, most importantly, throughout the school year.

When students did not do how they had anticipated on the chart, it affected their mood. When both Student A and Student C did not earn a smiley face in a certain class period, it took encouragement through side conversation to get the students back to their usual happy mood and working hard on their school work again. Their next two to three subject areas were often affected as well. Student A had one notable tough day when focusing on positive reinforcement (strategy 1- day 2). There are a few important factors to note regarding this behavior. On that day, it was noted on his behavior chart that he was not present for the class's morning meeting portion of the morning. His absence resulted in him missing out on hearing the outline for the day. When he arrived, he was scared to come into the room and have the attention on him. From his point on, Student A had a hard time getting into the daily routine and accomplishing academic tasks throughout the day. This is common behavior for students that rely heavily on routines and schedules. Occasionally one small change can affect how the day goes. Unfortunately, this was one notable factor in him only earning three smiley faces for the day. Because of situations such as these, behaviors can be unpredictable and more challenging. This is not a direct tie to the strategy that was being used. Instead it was related to his "invisible backpack" mentioned earlier.

## **Table 5**

*Weekly Totals Broken Down By Student*

Student	Total smiles Positive Reinforcement	Total smiles Increased movement/brain breaks	Total smiles Parent Communication	Total smiles Reference to classroom rules/expectations
A	34/40	30/40	35/40	31/40
B	36/40	28/40	31/40	33/40
C	37/40	24/40	39/40	31/40

Table 5 shows the overall success of each strategy broken down by the three students involved. Highlighted parts show the highest smiley faces reached overall throughout the study. Student A does not like to move a lot and his results reflected that idea when using increased movement as a way to eliminate interruptions. His best behaviors happened when parent communication was increased and positive reinforcement was used. He seemed to appreciate not having his name being called out in order to fix a behavior. Student C responded best to increased parent communication as well, as did his parents. They have been very involved and appreciative of his behavior chart. Lastly, Student B responded best to positive reinforcement. This student sees a variety of interventionists throughout the day that were also seeing similar results. He enjoys praise and being used as a positive role model during class time.

Results were as expected overall. Students seemed to respond best to positive reinforcement. Not only did this strategy work for students participating in the study, but the class overall. The culture of the room seemed better as students were responsive to what directions and rewards were being shown around them. From past experiences, parent communication is a go-to strategy to eliminate negative behaviors from happening in the future.

Although parent communication was successful for Student A and Student C, it did not positively affect the behaviors of Student B. Student B's parents did not sign the planner on two of the five days. There was also a voicemail left on the day phone calls were made since there was no answer. Because of this, it was unknown how much information the parents were seeing. As a result, Student B may not have gotten the same redirections, consequences, or conversations as home. Therefore, parent communication was not the most successful strategy for him.

Data collection was one of the most simplistic aspects of the research. Students involved in the study were aware that documentation was taking place and they were able to see the visual throughout each day of the study. When students moved to different specialists, students knew that their instructors were following the same guidelines and strategies that were being used in the classroom. These instructors were aware of the strategies being used and incorporated them into their academic time as well. This created consistency for the students and a line of communication among staff.

### **Conclusion**

When analyzing each of the four disciplinary strategies, students responded well to all four. Parents, specialists, students, and interventionists worked together to help students succeed not only academically, but to improve behaviors as well. Students' behaviors were documented analyzed to eliminate the number of classroom interruptions during academic times, but also to better understand which strategies work well for each individual student. This better helps adults working with each student to best support them in the classroom setting as well as around the school. Ultimately this will lead the student to success by allowing them to reach their full potential in an environment where they feel understood and comfortable.

## Chapter 5

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In primary grades, classroom teachers utilize disciplinary strategies in order to create a calm environment in order for learning to take place. These strategies differ based on the lesson being taught, the students involved, and the culture of the classroom. Strategies often used to eliminate negative behaviors in the classroom include positive reinforcement, brain breaks, parent communication, and setting classroom rules and expectations. The purpose of the study was to utilize these common strategies and determine which were most effective. The effectiveness was measured on individual behavior charts for students who are identified as needing a behavioral plan. Students' behavior was tracked by counting interruptions during learning times. When an interruption took place, the focused strategy for that point in time was used to eliminate more interruptions.

#### Action Plan

Throughout the study, both myself as the classroom teacher and my students have maintained healthy relationships that positively affects their behaviors and learning throughout the day. Students involved in the study are aware of what I expect from them on a day-to-day basis, as are their family members and other students in the room. When the different strategies were being demonstrated with students to eliminate behaviors, they were familiar with strategies and phrases being used. Because of this, students reacted positively to the redirections.

Throughout the study I have learned that although all of the following strategies are useful in certain situations, students differ, as do their behaviors and attitudes. Results showed that positive reinforcement and parent communication were most effective when attempting to cut down on the number of interruptions. However, this was not the case for each student individually. I also noted that the overall culture of the classroom changed when positive



reinforcement was used on the students involved in the study. For example, rewarding a student for raising their hand rather than blurting didn't just change the behavior of the student using the behavior chart, but others in the class as well. The atmosphere of the room was most comforting, positive, and relaxed. Other students caught on to the strategy and were trying to be positive role models throughout the day. I also noted that class participation increased during this time.

The strategies used in the study will be used throughout my teaching practice in the classroom in the future, but mixed throughout the day amongst all students. I think best practice is to incorporate all of the strategies together. Knowing my students better each day will also improve overall behavior. This allows me to understand where my students are coming from and helps them express themselves in another way that doesn't involve cutting into academic time.

The behavior chart used in the study is still being used and will be throughout the school year. Other teachers have copied it and added their own touches to it to use in their rooms with their students. It's rewarding to know the tools used in the study can better support others as well.

### **Plan for Sharing**

As far as changing practice, I will continue to be conscious of the strategies I am using to better support each student and will continue to look into new ways of providing positive reinforcement to students each day. The results from the study have been shared with my coteachers as well as in a professional development committee I am a part of. I believe this is part of a larger shift in practice. Our practice is making large changes to the PBIS program and how disciplinary issues are handled in the school. The research done and readings will continue to drive better practices moving forward.

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## Appendix

September 17, 2021

131 Hickory Street North

Lester Prairie, MN 55354

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a study examining various disciplinary related strategies within a classroom in order to improve the overall learning environment. This will ultimately help individuals surround each other with positive peer role models encouraging one another to do their best.

Your child was selected because he/she is in my regular elementary education classroom. If you decide to participate, please understand that your child will see following strategies listed below and data will be taken on how they react to each of the strategies. The purpose of the study is to examine the positive affects of the research based strategies used in the classroom. These are typical classroom strategies used in relation to positive behavior in the mainstream classroom and are no risk to your first grader.

1. Positive reinforcement (applauding positive behaviors rather than drawing attention to negative ones)
2. Increased communication between student-teacher and parent-teacher
3. Incorporating more movement during academic time
4. Frequent learning and review of classroom expectations

Although the administrators, Mike Lee and Dr. Melissa Radeke have granted me permission to conduct this study, since this information is being used to help me complete my mater's degree at Minnesota State University Moorhead, I need to have parental consent to use this information in my final paper that I am required to do as part of my degree. If I didn't need this information to complete my master's degree, I would be conducting the same type of research in my normal everyday lessons and would not need signatures. If you sign this form, you are giving me consent to use the information I gather. All information that is used is confidential, no names are used. Please also note that your child can choose not to participate at any time without any consequences.

Please contact me here at school if you have any questions

[willems@lp.k12.mn.us](mailto:willems@lp.k12.mn.us)

You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Michael Coquyt

[michael.coquyt@mnstate.edu](mailto:michael.coquyt@mnstate.edu)

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Signature of Parent or Guardian

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Date

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Signature of Investigator

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Date

## Student A's Daily Behavior Record

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Morning Meeting</b>		Comments:
<b>Reading/ Mr. M</b>		Comments:
<b>Daily 5</b>		Comments:
<b>Math</b>		Comments:
<b>Math Centers</b>		Comments:
<b>Writing</b>		Comments:
<b>Specialists (Music, PE, Art)</b>		Comments:
<b>Science/Social Studies</b>		Comments:
	Total Smiley Faces:	
<b><u>Teacher/Parent Communication:</u></b>		



CITI Training



Completion Date 27-May-2021  
Expiration Date 26-May-2024  
Record ID 42746792

This is to certify that:

**Anna Willems**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher**  
(Curriculum Group)  
**Social & Behavioral Research**  
(Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course**  
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Minnesota State University Moorhead**

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w4506adb3-1c4c-419d-85aa-cfe811b1c122-42746792](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w4506adb3-1c4c-419d-85aa-cfe811b1c122-42746792)