THE USE OF VISUAL-PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK AND ITS EFFECT ON BEHAVIOR-SPECIFIC POSITIVE PRAISE IN A SELF-CONTAINED BEHAVIOR CLASSROOM

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The present study aimed to understand the relationship between the use of visual-performance feedback and its effects on behavior-specific positive praise in classrooms for students who exhibit behavioral challenges. The current study included 15 children being served by four teachers in elementary self-contained behavior classrooms. Data collection and instrumentation included (a) a pre-service training for all four teachers, (b) two weeks of baseline data on behavior-specific positive praise, (c) eight weeks of data collection in which visual-performance feedback was reported to all four teachers, (d) one consultation session, and (e) two weeks of additional data collection. Observational data attempted to determine the functional relationship between visual-performance feedback, behavior-specific positive praise, and student outcomes using a mixed methods research model. Analysis revealed identified patterns in the relationship between visual-performance feedback, the amount of behavior-specific positive praise, and student behavioral and academic outcomes. These patterns are displayed through both quantitative results taken from the observational data as well as qualitative information given by teachers. Conclusions surrounding the positive outcomes for students were derived from the strongest correlations of between behavior-specific positive praise and visual-representation feedback. Implications drawn from the study were: (a) behavior-specific positive praise training should be a standard for teachers in behavior classrooms, and (b) group consultation should be an important part of monitoring behavior-specific positive praise for classroom teachers.
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By

Matthew Gibbins
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I would like to acknowledge my parents, Craig and Roena Gibbins, for their unending lifetime of encouragement regardless of my responsiveness to it. This paper and degree are an accumulation of their many parental frustrations and victories but I am thankful for their influence in every situation both good and bad. I love both of you very much. Mom, I miss you every day. To my lovely bride Sarah, thank you for your patience and support. This was truly a team effort and I am deeply humbled and frequently amazed at your love and dedication towards me. Thank you my love. I would also like to share my appreciation towards the G-Boys. Keiser, Jameson and Roen, this long document, that you will most likely never read, is a testament to hard work, prayer, and commitment. All three of those attributes are so important in becoming a man of distinction. I hope that you saw those attributes in me throughout this whole process and more importantly continue to see them in my everyday life. Work hard and stay humble boys. To Dr. Bullock thank you for the unwavering high expectations and the massive amounts of yellow sticky notes that accompanied them. Lastly, to the many friends and family who supported me along the way, thank you. Your behavior-specific positive praise was just what I needed at exactly the right time!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Dumb. Stupid. Retarded. Lazy. Psycho. Ignorant. Idiotic. Dysfunctional. These are all words that most have heard at one time or another. These words can invoke many negative emotions and connotations when communicated and heard. Many can remember the circumstances in which these words were used toward them personally or toward others. In fact, historically speaking, these words, or those similar in their intent, have broken the human spirit in such a way that generations have been lead to believe that they were worth nothing and deserved nothing. Why do we punish others with our words? Why do we, as humans, think that negative comments can get us what we want? What are the alternatives to negative words or negative behavior towards others? These and similar questions are examined and addressed throughout this study.

Beautiful. Intelligent. Talented. Precious. Unique. Creative. Ambitious. In context, these words are filled with emotions of potential, positivity and the power to achieve many things throughout life. These words have possibly encouraged someone to reach goals they never dreamed to be achieved. At some point a praise statement toward a friend, coworker, student, or spouse has been the perfect motivation in the quest to either achieve a goal or create a new outcome that was never imagined. Praise is powerful and can create long lasting positive outcomes when used in the appropriate way.

When speaking specifically on the education of young people, it is important for professionals to create a positive and conducive atmosphere in their classroom. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010); Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, and Martin (2007), and Sawka-Miller and Miller (2007) tell us that learning occurs best in a positive environment – one that contains positive
interpersonal relationships and interactions, along with comfort and order. In addition, the atmosphere in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated facilitates learning. Educators are deemed with the responsibility of increasing a student’s academic abilities, confidence, behavioral skills, and appropriate social interactions (Reinke et al., 2007; Sutherland, Wheby, & Copeland, 2000). More specifically, this responsibility is even greater for teachers of students with emotional or behavioral disorders (E/BD). Students with E/BD often display an inability to control their emotions over an extended amount of time as well as produce various challenges in social settings (Sutherland et al., 2000). These factors may make using positive comments, more specifically positive praise, an intervention worth using and evaluating. Conversely, teachers of students with E/BD should exercise extreme caution when relying on punishment as a common form of disciplinary classroom management (Moffat, 2011; Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004). The review of the literature explains how forms of punishment such as zero tolerance policies have created, in some cases, situations in which students are given consequences that can seem inappropriate and extreme in nature.

Why do teachers use punishment? Do they see no other alternatives? Do they know alternatives exist? Educators often use different types of punishment and consequences that have perceived positive effects on students. Most teachers want to improve student performance but struggle with how to do it. Recognition of things students have done well, as opposed to discipline of the actions in which they fail, is one way to make improvements to classroom management. Sawka-Miller et al. (2007) tell us that the creation of positive institutions and classrooms is largely the result of creating a positive climate. A positive climate is primarily accomplished through the creation of encouraging interactions between and among individuals in an institution. The authors also clarify that the most effective method for creating more
productive interactions between groups of individuals in an institution is to increase the level of verbal praise that is given and received. Despite its proven effectiveness, positive praise is still not used regularly within self-contained behavior classrooms. For example, Shores et al. (1993) and Sutherland et al. (2000) indicate that rates of positive praise in self-contained behavior classrooms were well below the average that has been recorded in general education classes, some tracking as low as one per hour. Moreover, within the area of positive praise lies the even more explicit intervention of behavior-specific positive praise. Literature from Flora (2000) and Lago-Delello (1998) show students in self-contained behavior classes receive more reprimands and even fewer specific praises than their general education peers. The neglect of positive praise within a self-contained behavior classroom is one of the variables examined in this study.

The concept of behavior-specific positive praise is well founded in its success for students and has an apparent lack of application in classrooms. There was a need to examine how teachers can be prepared to use behavior-specific positive praise and as well as how teachers successfully implement behavior-specific positive praise into practice.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual underpinnings for this study included various theorists in the field of behavioral psychology. Although this reference list is not exclusive, the idea of behavior-specific positive praise traces some of its perspective and foundational concepts on the writings and research of B.F. Skinner (Lingual Links, 1999) as well as complimentary significance within Carol Dweck’s work with self-theories (Dweck, 2000; 2006).

B.F. Skinner called his brand of behaviorism “Radical” behaviorism (Lingual Links, 1999). Dr. Skinner evaluated the science of behavior with the philosophical understanding that
pleasant experiences, such as rewards or praise, are positive reinforcers that can cause learners to make desired connections between stimuli and responses. Students can associate the good things that happen at school in a way that excites them in all areas of education, not just one individual caveat. Also within his theory of radical behaviorism, Skinner identified that unpleasant experiences, such as punishment, are negative reinforcers that can cause the learner to avoid undesirable responses to stimuli. From the theory of radical behaviorism, one can surmise that appropriate behavior-specific positive praise can be categorized as a positive reinforcer within a student’s classroom experiences. Teachers and education professionals must realize that unpleasant stimuli may hinder students in a way that could enhance the probability of an overall negative school experience. Students, who are routinely punished at school, may begin to alleviate negative experiences that occur during the school day by sporadically attending school. Excessive absences contribute to students dropping out of the public school program. Thus, the need for positive praise to occur within the campus environment can contribute to continued attendance and may lead to positive outcomes such as graduation completion.

Dweck (2006) described that when teachers talk to students about their performance and work products, it affects their self-theories. Included in these self-theories are concepts of the growth and fixed mindset. Different mindsets can have a tremendous impact on the way teachers talk and interact with their students. Dweck contends the growth mindset, or incremental theory, is a concept that supports the idea that all students can increase their intellectual capacity in some way. More specifically, when students believe that intelligence can be increased through their own hard work or determination, it leads to increased effort and the desire to seek out challenges. The growth mindset is associated with the progression of attributes such as self-efficacy and resiliency (Dweck, 2000). In fact, Dweck (2006) and her colleagues (Dweck & Molden, 2005;
Kamins & Dweck, 1999) found that mindset theories are susceptible to change with relatively simple interventions, such as how praise is given for learning outcomes. Positive praise delivered the correct way from teachers to students can enable children to change the way they view their intelligence and capabilities. The American Psychological Association (2012) shares recommendations to enhance the growth mindset or incremental theory: (a) notice student’s good efforts and praise them; (b) be specific about the praised behaviors and reinforce the behaviors with feedback; and (c) use praise to link the outcomes of an assignment to student efforts.

In contrast, Dweck (2000), Dweck and Molden (2005), Kamins and Dweck (1999) have shown that when students hold the belief that intelligence is unchangeable or fixed, it can lead to withdrawal of effort and avoidance of challenges. These types of behaviors may lead children to believe that they have no chance of success. Students with a fixed mindset or entity theory of self are more likely to exhibit academic withdrawal and alienation, and decreased engagement with learning, all of which lead to lower achievement (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Moffat, 2011; Sawka-Miller & Miller, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Developing productive classroom management techniques and interventions play an important role in student success. Poor classroom management has been linked to long-term negative academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for students (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998; National Research Council, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002). One intervention associated with effective classroom management is behavior-specific positive praise. Although this intervention has proven successful, very few teachers actually implement it (Shores et al., 1993; Moffat, 2011). More specifically, data on students in self-contained behavior classrooms
indicate teachers use low amounts of behavior-specific positive praise (Flora, 2000; Lago-Delello, 1998; Reinke et al. 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of present study was to evaluate and provide outcome data on the use of visual-performance feedback and its effect on the teacher delivery of behavior-specific positive praise in four self-contained behavior classrooms. Data collection served the purpose of delineating the correlation of behavior-specific positive praise and visual-performance feedback implementation.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent did the implementation of visual-performance feedback influence the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting?

2. What correlations, if any, were found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom?

3. To what extent did teacher behavior show a significant increase or decrease within behavior-specific positive praise data delivered via visual-performance feedback?

4. To what extent did the independent variable of group consultation affect the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase?

Limitations of the Study

Limitations for this study encompass three main areas: classroom consistency, teacher responsiveness, and relevance of the data to classrooms and students other than those receiving a majority of their instruction in a self-contained behavior classroom.
Limitations in classroom consistency were prevalent due to only four classrooms being observed for data collection. Student absences, schedule changes, and various campus requirements lead to some challenges in consistency of data collection. Another study limitation was the submission of any required data collection from the involved teachers. Since there were only four teachers involved, flexibility for reliance on more than four teacher participants was not available for the study itself.

Another limitation for this study was the transference of results toward any classroom or teacher other than those who work with students with behavioral disorders, also those teachers who work within a self-contained behavior classroom. Although the main determinants of data include areas such as increased positive praise and decreases in behavioral challenges that may have occurred, data collection was compiled using a relatively small population of students served within the public sector. This may limit the studies relevance toward larger, more mainstream populations.

Definition of Key Terms

The terms provided are meant to bring clarity to or enhance the understanding of the reader. These frequently used terms were defined in relationship to their importance within the study as well as their prominence of use throughout the study.

- Behavior-specific positive praise: Positive praise that explicitly identifies to the student the behavior for which he or she is being praised (Reinke et al., 2007).
- Emotional disturbance: According to IDEA (2004), emotional disturbance is a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: (a) an inability to
learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

- **Praise**: To express a favorable judgment (M. Webster, 2012).
- **Punishment**: Retribution for an offense, an exclusionary act by which students are removed from the opportunity to learn; it is harm inflicted by an external agent as a mechanism through which outside regulation becomes internalized subjectivity (Yang, 2009).
- **Self-contained behavior classroom**: a separate, full-time class for special education students that segregates them from their non-disabled peers for behavioral purposes only (the academic curriculum may or may not be modified). This setting provides intensive behavioral modification programming as well as the instruction of social and intrapersonal skills (Young, 2005).
- **Visual performance feedback**: The provision of data-based objective feedback on current performance of targeted behaviors (Reinke et al., 2007).
- **Zero tolerance**: A method primarily intended as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor (Skiba, 2000).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature for this study, it was important for the reader to develop a clear understanding of classroom management on many different levels. In order for this understanding to occur, one must acquire a sense of what classroom management is, why it is essential, how it is developed by teachers and implemented in successful and unsuccessful ways for students. For this review of literature, several topics relevant to this study were examined: (a) needs and outcomes of students with behavioral challenges, (b) classroom management, (c) punishment as related to classroom management, (d) zero tolerance, (e) positive praise, (f) behavior-specific positive praise, and (g) intervention of visual-performance feedback. Research strategy references revolved around databases including behavior modification studies, school psychology forums, dissertations on classroom management, and emotional and behavioral disorder handbooks. These data references varied in years ranging from 1968-2011.

Needs and Outcomes of Students with Behavior Challenges

Students with behavioral needs can begin to require meaningful and productive interventions at an early age. Data indicate if successful interventions are not implemented, students run a greater risk of dropping out of school.

Early Childhood Behavioral Foundations

Behavior problems often begin at an early age, in some cases before entering preschool (Campbell, 1995). Early childhood settings, as well as elementary school, can be vital in the formation and foundation of positive behavior. On many occasions, preschool students who
exhibit challenging behaviors are not given the proper interventions to support positive changes. Moffat (2011) states that after an early onset, it is not uncommon for behavior problems to remain stable over time. Kauffman (2005) suggests that if behavior problems persist after age 8 or so, the problem may become lifelong. In many cases, students with behavior problems do not receive intervention early enough to forestall problem behavior patterns from developing. Once a student’s behavior patterns are developed, they may become increasingly difficult to correct. For every academic year that passes, students have the potential for a more difficult experience (Reinke et al., 2007; Sawka-Miller et al., 2007). This may be caused by their challenging behavior becoming the normal protocol within their school day.

**High School Behavior Challenges and Drop Outs**

As students enter high school, the chance for graduation may become increasingly difficult if challenging behaviors are not met with an effective intervention. These interventions might include efforts to check in with the student informally, developing a point sheet to monitor progress, goal setting or tutoring. Specific interventions must, in turn, create a reciprocated effort by the high school students involved in order for successful outcomes to occur. Unfortunately, school absenteeism and dropout rates remain alarmingly high, with school dropouts rating their school climate significantly lower than graduates (Sawka-Miller et al., 2007). Effective interventions can help increase the sense of belonging for students within the school. In the year 2000, there were more than 3.8 million young adults, or approximately 10.9%, who were either not enrolled in a high school program or who have not completed high school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000). As of 2009, that percent had decreased to 8.1% (U.S.)
Department of Education, 2011). Despite the drop in percentage, the challenge still remains to keep every student in school and for them to receive a diploma.

Classroom Management

Classroom management can be pivotal for the success of all students and even more so for students who have emotional or behavior challenges. Public school teachers are responsible for working with many different students from different backgrounds. These varied backgrounds may include those students who will present challenges to the teacher with their behavior. Good classroom management techniques create benefits for the teacher and students. Major themes for good classroom management consider elements of organization, anticipation of upcoming events, and positive interactions with students. Differentiated instruction may lead to improved classroom management. Improvement in classroom management may be due to the intense classroom lesson preparation needed for successful differentiated instruction to occur.

A Challenge for All Teachers

Managing students’ disruptive classroom behaviors can be a consuming task that reduces the amount of time teachers can spend on instruction (Reinke et al., 2007). Disruptive classroom behavior takes time away from the overall learning process and ultimately leads to students walking away from school. Behavior challenges are not exclusive to one type of student or educational setting. Teachers’ responses to children’s appropriate and inappropriate behavior help set the tone of the classroom environment (Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, Al-Hendawi, & Vo, 2009). Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) tell us it is important to note that virtually all teachers, at any given time, teach some students whose deprivation, anger, discouragement, disillusionment,
alienation, frustration, or trauma are so great that it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to exhibit sustained contributions to a classroom community. Working with only a few of these students can be extremely challenging. Therefore, when a school or class is heavily populated with students whose lives are markedly off-course in one or more ways, the challenge is massive.

Benefits of Good Classroom Management

To help curtail issues such as student dropouts, teachers often look for useful techniques in which disruptive behavior can be significantly eliminated. Magg (2001) states that teachers can experience frustration because of the inadequate ways they are prepared for managing the increasingly challenging behaviors of students that attend public school. Student behaviors can become very intensive when traditional approaches to manage them have failed. Classroom management has been found to directly affect classroom behaviors. Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell (2008) tell us that classroom management is directly tied to levels of student involvement and academic achievement, making it an important component of teaching. Reinke et al. (2008) state that effective classroom management helps decrease disruptive classroom behaviors and increase student engagement in academic tasks. Further, poor classroom management has been linked to long-term negative academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for students. Some students have serious emotional or behavior problems which require specific, systematic interventions; however, many of the problems which plague regular or special education teachers may be prevented through effective classroom management and a positive classroom environment (Conroy et al., 2009). Targeting the classroom functionality as a way to increase effective classroom management practices delivered to all students is more efficient
than targeting individual students because it is likely to reduce current student behavioral difficulties as well as prevent future student problems on a broader scale (Reinke et al., 2008).

**Major Themes within Classroom Management**

As with many educational ideals, there are experts in the field that help define what major themes or elements are critical to the successful completion or implementation of that ideal or philosophy. Although a number of factors are related to a positive classroom atmosphere such as classroom management techniques and instructional pacing, one important factor is how teachers attend or respond to children’s behavior (Conroy et al., 2009). In the specific area of effective classroom management, Cafferata (2003) suggests certain areas serve as key elements of effective classroom management: (a) organizational management of classroom elements and learning environments, (b) anticipation of re-direction of student behavior in the classroom and transitions, and (c) positive, encouraging interactions and communications with students.

Classroom elements can consist of layout and design of the physical space, routines, and classroom rules. The layout of the desks in relationship to the teacher station, door, restroom, or windows is an important consideration when evaluating the organizational management of classroom elements (Cafferata, 2003). Also, the classroom schedule should be consistent and predictable from day to day and targeted students should have individual schedules, which include each major daily transition and strategies for effective feedback on those transitions (Cafferata, 2003; Conroy, 2009).

Another important consideration is classroom rules. Descriptors such as manageable, consistent, reasonable, and collaborative are all useful when designing classroom rules for students of any age. Classroom rules regarding behavior expectations are posted, taught,
reviewed, and reinforced on a regular basis (Cafferatta, 2003). Students must have the ability to understand the importance of adhering to these rules as well as having ownership with their part in the creation of the rules. Many students can flourish within a classroom that provides open communication in regard to the class management, rules, and consequences. If teachers provide corrective feedback to children about their behavior in a positive manner and help them learn alternative behaviors that will gain them positive teacher attention, teachers may more likely have positive reactions from children (Conroy et al., 2003).

By studying what happened in 80 classrooms, Jacob Kounin (1970) was able to identify specific techniques of group management that were associated with high levels of task involvement and minimal student misbehavior. Kounin’s findings did not suggest specific strategies to deal with individual discipline problems; rather his focus was on lesson management techniques that contributed to overall classroom success. Lesson plans designed by teachers should include both academic and behavioral components. If both are prevalent and consistently implemented, there are fewer opportunities for behavior challenges to exist. Results from descriptive research indicate that school environments, typically classrooms, are not supportive of appropriate behaviors for students who have been identified to exhibit problem behaviors irrespective of disability status or educational setting and may actually promote inappropriate behavior (Magg, 1999; Perkins, 2006; Miller & Sawka-Miller, 2008). Teachers may not often realize the classroom management plan that is in place, or lack thereof, may actually be producing more damage to students than good when addressing student behavior challenges.
**Differentiated Instruction and Classroom Management**

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) speak to the idea of effective classroom management under the umbrella of differentiated instruction. They remind us that investing heavily in the cause of student misbehavior is a necessity in producing classroom lessons and instruction in a successful way. Greene (2008) tells us that we do not need a diagnosis to address maladaptive behavior because a diagnosis does not yield strategies for moving ahead. He points out that understanding the world from the student’s point of view, however, can be immensely useful in helping teachers determine what beneficial next steps should be taken to address the problem and develop a long lasting solution. A nationwide survey of teachers across all grade levels indicated that teachers felt a strong need for additional training and support in classroom management (Coalition for Psychology in Schools for Education, 2006).

**Punishment as Related to Classroom Management**

When teachers use punishment as a classroom management technique, it can bring about positive outcomes. This is the reasoning behind punishment’s prominent use in education. Data suggest that educators should have a keen awareness of the use of punishment when it comes to the negative climate it can produce within a school.

**Reasons for Punishment’s Prominent Use**

One of the most commonly used forms of classroom management that may prove to harbor negative effects toward student behavior outcomes are punishment and zero tolerance. Many teachers use punishment as a classroom management technique. The definition of punishment is the infliction or imposition of a penalty as retribution for an offense. Morrison &
D’Incau (2000) tell us that typical responses from educators to students with externalizing behavior problems have frequently involved punishment and exclusion. Teachers may feel it is appropriate to inflict a penalty on a student in response to not fulfilling classroom expectations. One possible reason behind the prominent use of punishment can be traced back to its high rates of perceived effectiveness. Maag (1999) states that punishment continues to be used because it works for 95% of the students attending public schools. In many ways, statistics and research show us that what teachers define as a successful intervention may be a surface change with no real positive impact on some students. The perceived effectiveness of punishment could assist in the continuance of discipline plans that are regulated and designed under the umbrella of punishment by schools and their staff. Latham (1999) and Conroy et al. (2009) suggested school discipline plans that use harsh or combative teacher responses are often ineffective because they focus on punishment for inappropriate behavior.

**Punishment Outcomes**

Many schools have strict enforcement of 1st, 2nd and 3rd infraction occurrences regardless of a student’s particular need or challenge. Consequently, the strict enforcement of these infractions can create a coercive environment from which students want to escape. Other infraction outcomes can result in students being expelled for inappropriate or violent behavior; these inappropriate or violent behaviors can also be reinforcement as students attempt to escape the coercive environments (Johnston et al., 2004). Schweikert-Cattin & Taylor (2000) state that students cannot be expected to learn and produce quality work in an unfriendly, adversarial environment. Teachers should be cognizant of students’ perceptions of their classroom. If it is viewed as a negative place in regard to discipline and punishment, then the students may go to
any length to avoid those situations. The same reflection of students’ perceptions should be carefully considered and evaluated by administrators as well. Maag (2001) tells us that punishment can be a vicious cycle for teachers when they are negatively reinforced for punishing students which, in turn, increases the use of punishment, which then reinforces teachers for using it. Punishment as a classroom management technique can be attributed to unproductive school environments.

According to Sawka-Miller and Miller (2007), schools often appear to be characterized by negative climates resulting in negative outcomes such as increased student behavior problems, drop outs and low rates of student and teacher engagement and satisfaction. The negative school climates are reflected in Perkins (2006) data that indicate 24% of urban adolescents reported not trusting their teachers and not looking forward to attending school. When students do not develop meaningful relationships with school staff, it can lead to students dropping out. It is estimated that more than 50% of students who drop out leave by the tenth grade, and 20% by eighth grade. (Johnston et al., 2004). Although, currently, poverty is the number one predictor of dropout rates, additional factors such as truancy, absenteeism, tardiness, suspension and behavioral difficulties also effect successful school completion (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998).

Zero Tolerance

Discipline management techniques such as zero tolerance have been created in an effort to increase the perceived positive outcomes of punishment. Zero tolerance brings along with it some controversial decisions and results for children.
Zero Tolerance by Definition

Zero tolerance policies have come under criticism. The definition of zero tolerance is any policy that allows no exception. Zero tolerance policy adoption was derived from the federal Gun–Free School Act of 1994, which the Clinton administration signed into law (U.S Department of Education, 1995). The Gun-Free School Act mandated a one-year calendar expulsion for any student who brings a firearm to school, referral of law-violating students to criminal or juvenile justice system, and the provision that state law must authorize the chief administration officer of each local school district to modify such expulsions on a case-by-case basis (Reinke et al., 2008). Since the passage of the Gun-Free School Act, some form of zero tolerance policy appears to have become common in public schools. Local school districts have broadened the mandate of zero tolerance beyond the federal mandates of weapons, to drugs and alcohol, fighting, threats, or swearing (Reinke et al., 2008). According to Nash-Wood (2011), a report in 2011 from The National Center on Education Statistics, Violence in America’s Public Schools: USA Today, found that 94% of all schools have zero tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, 87% for alcohol, while 79% report mandatory suspensions or expulsions for violence or tobacco. Some states have made minor adjustments to the Gun-Free School Act. Simmons (2005) cites an example is Pennsylvania where Act 26 was passed. Act 26 requires a minimum one-year expulsion for students found with weapons, and provides a broad list of what the state means by weapon, including guns, knives, and “any cutting tool”. In Louisiana, according to Nash-Wood (2011), additional laws require principals to immediately suspend a student found to be in possession of a firearm, certain knives, or any controlled substance and may, but is not required to recommend the student for expulsion.
Zero Tolerance Controversy and Manifestations

The controversy of zero tolerance policy seems to involve the practice of punishing or giving substantial consequences to minor incidents in an extreme manner. Skiba & Peterson (1999) documented some of these seemingly minor incidents and the extraordinary consequences that were put into place: (a) in February, 1999, Glendale, Arizona: Seventh-grader David Silverstein, inspired by the movie October Sky, brought a homemade rocket made from a potato chip canister to school. School officials, classifying the rocket as a weapon, suspended him for the remainder of the term. Later, David was invited as a special guest to Space Adventures’ Annual Rocketry Workshop in Washington, D. C.; (b) in November, 1998, at Curtisville Elementary School in Deer Lakes, Pennsylvania, a five year old Jordan Locke was suspended for wearing a five-inch plastic ax as part of his firefighter’s costume to a Halloween party in his classroom. After firefighters around the country contacted school officials complaining about the incident, school officials composed an “Open Letter to Firemen Across the Country” stating that they never intended to offend firefighters by referring to the ax as a weapon, but still defending the zero tolerance policy against weapons as fair; (c) in November, 1999, Ponder, Texas: A 13-year old wrote a Halloween story for class that involved getting high on Freon, opening fire on a suspected intruder, and finally shooting his teacher and several classmates. The boy was ordered to be held in a juvenile detention facility for ten days (released after five days). Denton County District Attorney noted that the decision was based on a review of records indicating that the boy had been a persistent discipline problem for this school, and the administrators there were legitimately concerned (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Many believe that zero tolerance policies communicate the wrong message about discipline and the consequences given. These negative messages can be noted in an editorial that
Zero tolerance policies are inherently unjust and irrational because they conflate harms. Accepting a cup of sangria for a good-bye toast is punished as severely as a student who gets drunk on school property. Bringing a butter knife to school to cut an apple for lunch carries the same expulsion as toting a loaded magnum. Those harms are not equivalent, and if they are punished with equal severity, the system looks both unfair and nonsensical. (Skiba, 2000)

Positive Praise

Creating positive interactions between teachers and students is an important way to help build a positive classroom environment (Conroy et al., 2009). Data indicate that one way to improve academics and behavior within a classroom is the use of positive praise. These benefits have been seen in all age group of students as well as many different areas of behavior.

Positive Praise Benefits

One behavior management technique found to be a productive reinforcer for correcting negative behaviors is that of positive praise. To praise is “to comment on the worth of or to express approval or admiration” (Brophy, 1981). Teachers who deliver a high amount of praise typically experience lower off-task or disruptive behaviors from their students (Espin & Yell, 1994). Positive praise can be a two-fold intervention in both academic and social areas when applied to a classroom. Hall, Lund and Jackson (1968) state that praise has been shown to both increase appropriate behavior of disruptive students and increase academic engagement of students in general education. Walker, Colvin & Ramsey (1999) and Lampi, Fenty & Beaunae (2005) have argued that the use of praise promotes a more positive relationship between teachers and students. More productive relationships between students and teachers can help promote the advancement of both the academic and behavioral challenges students may have. Tomlinson and
Imbeau (2010) talk about praise under the construct of remembering to save time for closure at the end of the school day. The idea is to recognize the humanity of those that share the classroom. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) give examples of this type of praise:

> I felt good that that each of you was able to make a dent in the assignment given today. Two things contributed to that. The first is that you are getting really good at listening to directions in a way that helps you get right into your work. The second is that you’ve gotten quite skilled at helping one another become unstuck when you have a problem. (Chapter 5, sec. 4)

Praising students for their appropriate behavior and study skills directly correlates with forming positive relationships. Positive praise can affect more than a select group of children. Across age groups and irrespective of disability, teachers’ use of contingent praise effectively reinforced or increased a variety of appropriate student behaviors and academic skills, including following directions, engagement in instruction, on task behavior, correct academic responding, and work accuracy and completion (Partin, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver & Wehby, 2010). Brophy (1971) argued that children like it when adults recognize their efforts, particularly in their early childhood years. Moffat (2011) solidifies that argument by telling us that recent research continues to report that praise increased appropriate behaviors and decreased antisocial behavior in early childhood settings. Teachers who instruct at any grade level should consider their current usage of positive praise and examine ways to increase their use of positive praise. Lampi et al. (2005) tell us that researchers investigating disruptive behaviors such as noise making, blurting out answers, noncompliance, disrespect, and aggression found overwhelming evidence that these behaviors can be reduced through appropriate use of praise. Praise consists of verbal or written statements that acknowledge desired student behavior and are manifested in different ways, including making positive statements about a person or an idea a person has come up with either privately or publically (Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009).
Behavior-Specific Positive Praise

Positive praise has been found to be effective when it specifically addresses the behavior at hand (Reinke et al., 2008). Behavior-specific positive praise can result in fewer teacher reprimands as well as decrease aggressive behavior (Moffatt, 2011; Walker et al., 1999). Even though it has proven effectiveness, behavior-specific positive praise has a lack of use in classrooms. Although data show students with EBD benefit greatly from behavior-specific positive praise, its usage has been shown to be less than that of general education students (Sutherland et al., 2000).

Effectiveness of Behavior-Specific Positive Praise

Positive praise is not one dimensional with its delivery. Within positive praise, the most beneficial results on classroom management are derived from behavior-specific positive praise (Brophy, 1983). Researchers have examined the use of behavior-specific positive praise and have found it to be very effective (Feldman, 2003; Reinke et al., 2007). Behavior-specific praise has the teacher explicitly state a positive comment toward a student’s specific behavior. Addressing students’ individual actions tend to increase behavioral productivity in classrooms that have been observed. Moffat (2011) indicated that an increase in the teacher’s use of behavior-specific praise statements resulted in a decrease in aggressive behavior and an increase in pro-social behaviors for students. Fewer teacher reprimands towards students and increased positive praise statements can create a more positive and supportive learning environment (Walker et al., 1999).

The Use of Behavior-Specific Positive Praise

Even with its many positive outcomes, behavior-specific positive praise has not been
found to be adequately used as a behavior management intervention. Flora (2000) and Kallis, Vanness & Parker (2007) tell us that despite praise’s free cost, easy access, and proven effectiveness, it is severely underutilized and that specific praise is not commonly practiced in the classroom despite its effectiveness. In fact, Lago-Delello (1998) concluded that students with behavior problems encounter a high rate of teacher commands and receive more reprimands from their teachers for inappropriate behaviors while little attention was given to their appropriate behaviors. Research has shown that as little as five percent of teacher praise statements are behavior-specific (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979; Reinke et al., 2008). Based on the low percentage, teachers should be encouraged to use this evidence-based practice in helping students with their behavior problems.

*Positive Praise Interventions and Students with EBD*

In examining research on students with EBD, the data on positive praise indicate that it is underutilized (Partin et al., 2010; Sutherland et al., 2000). Although the effectiveness of praise in managing and improving the behavior of students has been demonstrated, teachers of students with EBD rarely use praise in their classroom (Sutherland et al., 2000). Direct observations of classroom interactions reveal that students identified as having or being at risk for EBD encounter higher rates of negative or neutral interactions with their teachers and receive high rates of teacher commands (Partin et al., 2010). Teachers find it increasingly difficult to maintain positive praise when faced with the ever-changing atmosphere and dynamics often found within a classroom of students with EBD. Gable, Hendrickson, Young, Shores, & Stowitschek (1983) found that the rate of teacher praise in classrooms for students with learning disabilities and EBD was 4.4 praises per hour. In classrooms designed for students with EBD, the rates of praise were
found to be even lower. Shores et al. (1993) found rates as low as one positive praise statement per hour. The low ratio data suggest that positive praise rates in classrooms for students with EBD are alarmingly low, and if reflective of general education student data, its use is even lower with behavior-specific positive praise. Similar to research of positive praise, Sawka-Miller et al. (2007) inform us that increasing teacher delivery of behavior-specific praise to students with behavior disorders has been associated with increased levels of academic engagement and decreased disruptive classroom behavior. These findings were consistent with earlier conclusions that behavior-specific praise is highly effective in reducing antisocial behavior (Feldman, 2003).

**Intervention of Visual Performance Feedback**

Visual-performance feedback has been found to be a useful tool when examining behavior-specific positive praise (Reinke et al., 2007; Sutherland et al., 2000). Visual performance feedback can be an alternative to the traditional face-to-face consultation model. Visual depiction of the amount or lack thereof, of behavior-specific positive praise by a teacher may be used as a way to increase teacher awareness and, thus, affect the use of the intervention within the classroom.

**Research as an Effective Tool**

One method of assisting teachers with the implementation of behavior-specific positive praise is to offer visual-performance feedback. Performance feedback, or the provision of data-based objective feedback on current performance of targeted behaviors, may be an efficient and useful tool for increasing teacher use of behavior-specific praise (Reinke et al., 2007). Reinke et al. (2008) state that performance feedback is among the most promising methods for increasing
the implementation of evidence-based practices. Numerous studies (Noell et al., 2005; Reinke et al., 2007; Reinke et al., 2008; Sutherland et al., 2000;) have documented the overall effectiveness of performance-based feedback on behavior of students and teachers. Sutherland et al. (2000) examined the effects of a performance-based feedback intervention. The study evaluated the rate of a teacher’s behavior-specific praise of students with EBD. The intervention consisted of a single classroom evaluator who met with the assigned teacher and provided verbal feedback on the rate of observed behavior-specific praise. Data were collected during a social skills lesson. Sutherland et al. (2000) found on-task behavior increased from 49% to 86% in reflection of behavior-specific praise increasing in the classroom. Noell et al. (2005) investigated teacher implementation of treatment plans following consultations and found that performance feedback resulted in superior treatment implementation and student outcomes. Reinke et al. (2007) revealed that the introduction of visual-performance feedback, delivered through a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, resulted in an increased level of behavior-specific praise for all teachers involved. Participants were provided the daily visual performance feedback (Reinke et al., 2007). Reinke et al. (2008) tells us that performance feedback has shown to improve the fidelity of intervention implementation and can be used in combination with consultation to create positive change. When speaking specifically to the visual component of performance feedback, it may assist with the challenge of the consultant and the teacher finding a meaningful time to review the data observed by the consultant in the classroom with the teacher.

An Alternative to Traditional Consultation

When attempting to create meaningful change in teacher behavior, as well as student success, the use of performance feedback can be a vital part of the process. Reinke et al. (2007)
tells us that many of the studies using performance feedback have included individual meetings with a consultant, a review of the intervention, and a visual depiction of current implementation. As was mentioned earlier, this type of procedure can meet with some difficulty in regard to scheduling of weekly or daily consultative meetings to review performance. Informational feedback is still a vital piece to the improvement of the teacher but problems may arise within this consultatively based communication. Reinke et al. (2008) had the purpose of expanding the amount of performance feedback literature by devising a plan for delivery of performance data through visual representation feedback only. The delivery plan for performance data eliminated the use of any type of consultative model. To negate any type of face-to-face interaction, participants received a daily depiction of their use of behavior-specific positive praise. No consultative interaction occurred in relation to the delivery of the visual-performance feedback. In Reinke’s study, daily visual performance feedback was provided to the participating teacher in the form of a graph that displayed the observed use of the behavior-specific praise provided to the identified students. Reinke’s hypothesis for the outcomes were to (a) increase in teacher use of behavior-specific praise and (b) increase the overall use of teacher praise with identified students. The initial baseline data results indicated that the three teacher participants had low and inconsistent use of behavior-specific positive praise. These teachers were provided with daily visual representation feedback and while it showed initial effectiveness, the novelty of the intervention may have lead to the decrease over time, which produced fewer significant outcomes. Noell et al. (2005) suggest that future research is needed to assess the impact of less frequent visual-performance feedback (e.g., a weekly delivery schedule). Reinke et al. (2007) and Sutherland et al. (2000) indicate a need to accrue data on the use of visual-performance
feedback and its effect on behavior-specific positive praise in a self-contained behavior classroom.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter three presents the (a) rationale on which the study was based, (b) problem addressed in the study, (c) purpose of the study, (d) research questions guiding the study, (e) detailed procedures that were followed, and (f) data analysis.

Rationale

Reinke et al. (2007), Sawka-Miller and Miller (2007), and Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) tell us that learning occurs best in a positive environment, one that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, along with comfort and order. A positive environment has even greater importance for students with emotional and behavior disorders (EBD). The concept of behavior-specific positive praise is well founded in its success for students with EBD. Sawka-Miller et al. (2007) tell us that the creation of positive institutions and classrooms is largely the result of creating a positive climate. A positive climate is primarily accomplished through the creation of encouraging interactions between and among individuals in an institution. Further, authors clarify that perhaps the most effective method for creating more productive interactions between groups of individuals in an institution is to increase the level of verbal praise that is given and received. Despite documentation on the effectiveness of positive praise, it is still not used regularly within self-contained behavior classrooms.

Problem

Developing productive classroom management techniques and interventions play an important role in student success. Poor classroom management has been linked to long-term
negative academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for students (Kellam et al., 1998; National Research Council, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002). One intervention associated with effective classroom management is behavior-specific positive praise. Although this intervention has proven successful, very few teachers actually implement it (Moffat, 2011; Shores et al., 1993). More specifically, data on students in self-contained behavior classrooms indicate teachers use low amounts of behavior-specific positive praise (Flora, 2000; Lago-Delello, 1998; Reinke et al. 2007).

**Purpose**

The purpose of present study was to evaluate and provide outcome data on the use of visual-performance feedback and its effect on the teacher delivery of behavior-specific positive praise in four self-contained behavior classrooms. Data collection served the purpose of delineating the correlation of behavior-specific positive praise and visual-performance feedback implementation.

**Research Questions**

Four research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent did the implementation of visual-performance feedback influence the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting?

2. What correlations, if any, were found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom?

3. To what extent did teacher behavior show a significant increase or decrease within behavior-specific positive praise data delivered via visual-performance feedback?

4. To what extent did the independent variable of group consultation affect the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase?
Procedures

The present study focused on data collection of visual-performance feedback and the correlation with the amount of behavior-specific positive praise given by four teachers in self-contained behavior classrooms. Flora (2000), Lago-Delello (1998), Reinke et al. (2007), Moffat, (2011), and Sawka-Miller et al. (2007) show through various studies that there is a need for behavior-specific positive praise to occur by teachers toward all students. They also make special points to clarify the need for an increased focus on students with EBD. Reinke et al. (2007) indicate that using visual-performance feedback is a proven intervention that produces increased amounts of behavior-specific positive praise from teachers and, thus, increased academic and behavior results from students.

Procedures followed for this study consisted of (a) participants and the setting, (b) data collection and instrumentation used, and (c) data analysis.

Participants and Setting

Four self-contained elementary school teachers of students with EBD were the subjects in this study. These teachers were serving approximately fifteen children at two elementary schools in North Central Texas. The particular campuses involved house two self-contained behavior classrooms each, a primary and intermediate: The primary classrooms (Classroom A and Classroom C) had combined class rosters of nine students ranging from kindergarten to second grade. The intermediate classrooms (Classroom B and Classroom D) had combined class rosters of five students ranging from third to sixth grade. The largest concentration of students was in Classroom A with a total of six while the smallest roster of observable students was in Classroom B with a total of two. An Admission Review and Dismissal Committee had placed all
students represented in the sample into this more restrictive environment in response to their challenging behaviors. Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) were in place for all students as well as a token economy system that enables students to achieve rewards for appropriate behavior and academic performance. Student colors were earned in each of the four classrooms. Three colors were used in each of the four classrooms. The colors were red, yellow and green and each student had the opportunity to earn points toward their behavior goals. The color red indicated the lowest level of compliance and points earned for the day. The color yellow indicated students earned enough points to have various freedoms within the classroom but still some restrictions based on their behavior. The color green indicated students earned enough points throughout the day to receive all classroom privileges and rewards.

The ethnicity make up for the primary classes (Classroom A and Classroom C) was five African American and four Anglo males. The ethnic makeup of the intermediate classrooms (Classroom B and Classroom D) was three African American males, one Hispanic male and one African American female. The four classroom teachers are responsible for the behavior management and instruction of these students. The teacher in Classroom A has a degree in Motor Behavior as well as her alternative teaching certification. She had five years of experience teaching in this specific EBD classroom as well as previous experience working for an occupational therapist servicing pre-school children with Autism. The teacher in Classroom B had eight years of experience teaching, six in this particular classroom and two at a different campus. This teacher also has worked in Extended School Year programming for students with Autism, Down Syndrome, and EBD in a neighboring district for seven summers. The teacher in Classroom C has three years of experience teaching children with EBD at a private school in another state and was in her second year in the public sector as a self-contained teacher for
students with EBD. This teacher also had a M.A. in Movement Therapy and Counseling and was currently in graduate school pursuing her MEd. The teacher in Classroom D had 6 years of experience in teaching special education, ranging from resource, inclusion, and behavior. Specific teacher preparation was approximately 12 hours of behavior/special education training through their current district. The training included sessions on curriculum modifications, BIPs, crisis prevention institute training, and positive behavior supports. Three of the four teachers are Anglo females and one is an African American female. All four teachers have one paraprofessional assigned to each classroom for support. Paraprofessionals receive a minimum of six hours training in basic classroom management, positive communication strategies and non-violent crisis intervention.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data collection and instrumentation required approximately thirteen weeks and included (a) a pre-service training for all four teachers on the basics of behavior-specific positive praise, (b) two weeks of baseline data on behavior-specific positive praise without the intervention of visual-performance feedback being provided to any of the four teachers, (c) eight weeks of data collection in which visual-performance feedback was reported to all four teachers, and (d) one consultation session to differentiate between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and general praise. In addition to assisting both teachers in gaining an understanding of visual-performance feedback results during the eight-week data collection phase, there were two weeks of data collection without the intervention of visual-performance feedback being provided to the teachers.
The pre-service training was delivered in a face-to-face format. The pre-service training briefly described the definition of behavior-specific positive praise and was presented by the observer. The pre-service training communicated the potential benefits of behavior-specific positive praise for students and was presented to all four teachers at the same time.

The first two weeks of data collection consisted of two 30-minute sessions for each class. All four classrooms had separate times for observations. Data gathering took place using a Praise Feedback data collection form created by the Devereux Center for Effective Schools (Sawka-Miller et al., 2007; see Appendix A). The Praise Feedback form was adjusted to track the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise as compared to basic praise comments and warnings/negative comments. The baseline data collected was not shared with the teachers until the visual-performance feedback phase began.

Next, data on behavior-specific positive praise were collected for eight consecutive weeks. Data collection for all four classrooms consisted of eight 30-minute sessions and used the same data collection form as in the baseline data collection phase. The data on the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise collected during the eight consecutive weeks was shared the day following each observation with all four teachers using visual-performance feedback. Visual-performance feedback was an email sent directly to the teacher. The email included a PDF document in which observational data for the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise was shown for the particular classroom. The visual-representation feedback showed behavior-specific positive praise data for each of the prior observations of that teacher only. All four teachers were able to visually track their ratios in regard to increases or decreases from the previous weekly observations, including the two weeks in which no visual-performance feedback was shared. For one session, the trained observers switched classrooms observation locations in order to maintain
inter-rater reliability in regard to observations and data collection. The observers were the author of the study and a central office special education behavior specialist with the professional responsibilities of monitoring the academic and behavioral progress of students in classrooms for students with EBD.

One face-to-face consultation meeting was held with the observer and the four classroom teachers for a thirty-minute session during the eight-week data collection phase. The focus of the consultation meetings was to differentiate between the use of behavior-specific praise and general praise. Another focus was to assist teachers in gaining an understanding of visual-performance feedback.

Data collection for the final two weeks followed the same pattern as used in the initial observation period. The data collected during the final two weeks was not shared with the four teachers during this time.

All four classrooms had teacher assistants present during the observation sessions and each classroom received visual-performance feedback in weekly intervals as determined by the scheduled observational session.

Data Analysis

Observational data were used to determine the functional relationship between visual-performance feedback and behavior-specific positive praise using a mixed methods research model (Creswell 2003). The functional relationship was exposed through analysis procedures that support each research question. To assist in this delineation, quantitative data for each classroom was collected and disseminated in various graphs and charts while qualitative data, such as teacher responses, is displayed as a summary section highlighting various points of
specific teacher response information. Data identified to (a) what extent the implementation of visual-performance feedback influenced the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting, (b) what correlations, if any, were found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom, (c) the extent teacher behavior showed a significant increase or decrease within behavior-specific positive praise data delivered via visual-performance feedback, and (d) what extent did the independent variable of group consultation affect the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase.

The extent the implementation of visual-performance feedback influenced the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting was analyzed by evaluating both the strength of the positive or negative correlation between the rate of behavior-specific positive praise given by teachers in comparison to visual-performance feedback delivery. The strength will be anywhere between 0 and ± 1.00. The correlation coefficient determined the extent to which the two variables (i.e., behavior-specific positive praise and visual-performance feedback) were related. In addition, 3 six weeks of report cards given during the observed sessions were examined for each student to assist in analyzing the increase or decrease in acceptable grades completed by the students during the study.

Any correlations found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom was evaluated by graphing the comparison of the average number of daily points earned for the observed session on each individual student’s behavior point sheets in both classroom and the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise given during the observed session.
The extent to which teacher behavior showed a significant increase or decrease while behavior-specific positive data were delivered via visual–performance feedback was evaluated using a brief Teacher Feedback Form developed by the observer (see Appendix B). The Teacher Feedback Form was be completed by the four teachers during the last two weeks of the study and gathered information using a 5 point rating scale (i.e., 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = very often, 5 = always) on the students’ overall ability to respond appropriately to teacher directives, making productive choices during instruction and any significant behavioral changes that may have taken place during the data collection phase. Appropriate response to teacher directives included student compliance with teacher redirection of off-task behavior. Making productive choices during instruction would include students’ ability to seek clarification from the teacher appropriately when there is a question on an assignment or concept. The Teacher Feedback Form also sought clarification on teacher behavior by gathering information on the teachers’ perception of behavior-specific positive praise toward the class. In addition, the Teacher Feedback Form allowed the opportunity for open-ended responses in regard to the use of visual representation feedback being used as a communication tool for the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise.

The extent the independent variable of group consultation affected the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase was evaluated by analyzing both the strength of the positive or negative correlation between the rate of behavior-specific positive praise given by teachers in comparison to visual-performance feedback delivery both immediately before and after the group consultations had occurred.

Significant outcomes from the study are summarized by identifying patterns in the relationship between the amount of behavior-specific positive praise and visual-representation
feedback. These patterns are shown through both the quantitative results taken from the observational data as well as the qualitative information given by teachers. Quantitative data reflect the correlation or strength anywhere between 0 and ± 1.00. Conclusions are derived from the strongest correlations of data in order for recommendations for future research to be developed.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The present study aimed to understand the value in the use of visual-performance feedback and its effects on behavior-specific positive praise in four self-contained behavior classrooms. Chapter 4 presents the data accrued on four classrooms (i.e., A, B, C, D) in the areas of behavior-specific positive praise ratios, color ratings for each individual student in each classroom, and grade progression or regression throughout the relevant six weeks grading periods. These findings are represented in various tables representing each classroom. The four research questions guiding the study outcomes were as follows:

1. To what extent did the implementation of visual-performance feedback influence the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting?

2. What correlations, if any, were found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom?

3. To what extent did teacher behavior show a significant increase or decrease within behavior-specific positive praise data delivered via visual performance feedback?

4. To what extent did the independent variable of group consultation affect the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase?

Data analysis, and its findings, will be reported, explained and summarized in the following chapter.

Results

In this portion of the chapter the results of the study by each classroom followed by a summary of the findings in all four classrooms are presented. In each of the classroom sections of the chapter, the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise to general praise and negative comments are presented first along with information on statistically significant changes from
week to week. Next, the student color information is presented. Student colors were earned in each of the four classrooms. Three colors were used in each of the four classrooms. The colors were red, yellow and green and each student had the opportunity to earn points toward their behavior goals. The color red indicated the lowest level of compliance and points earned for the day. The color yellow indicated students earned enough points to have various freedoms within the classroom but still some restrictions based on their behavior. The color green indicated students earned enough points throughout the day to receive all classroom privileges and rewards.

Student’s grades in the four domains of reading, language arts, math, and science were also collected. Graphs indicate a vertical progression of 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4. These are clarified at the bottom of the graphs by deliniating the average percentage each number reflects (i.e., 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Classroom A

The teacher in Classroom A had a degree in Motor Behavior as well as an alternative teaching certification. This teacher had five years of experience teaching in this specific EBD classroom as well as previous experience working for an occupational therapist servicing preschool students with Autism. Classroom A had six students observed at one given time with students’ grade levels ranging from Kindergarten through 3rd grade.

Praise Ratio

The praise ratio was calculated as the proportion of occurrences of behavior-specific
praise to the sum of general praise and negative comments for each week of the study. These proportions were tested for change from each week to the subsequent week using a Z-test of Difference in Proportions test (see Figure 1). A significant decrease in the praise ratio was seen from Week 7 to Week 8, \( p < .05 \).

In Classroom A, the amount of behavior-specific praise given by the teacher fluctuated little over time. The highest level of behavior-specific praise was seen in Week 9, which is the week after the consultation session. The number of generally positive or negative statements produced was lower than the behavior-specific praise in every comparison suggesting the teacher implemented the training learned, however, the teacher gave minimal feedback to students, behavior-specific or otherwise.

**Figure 1.** Ratio of behavior-specific praise to sum of general positive and negative statements by week for Classroom A. *Note.* * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session. A significant decrease in the praise ratio was seen from Week 7 to Week 8, \( p < .05 \).
Student Colors

The student color data was recorded for each day and coded such that 1 = Green, 2 = Yellow, and 3 = Red. For each student the daily scores were averaged to get a weekly color score. As shown in Figure 2, it appears that the students in Classroom A were well behaved overall, as seen by the large percentage of each week spent on green, the color that indicates good behavior. It is difficult to make any conclusions concerning the effect of behavior-specific praise based on these data as the pretest period occurred after training.

Figure 2. Ratio of student behavior colors by week for Classroom A. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.

Student Colors: Classroom A

Student Grades

Student grades were recorded at three time points. The grades for each of the six students in Classroom A are shown for reading (see Figure 3), language arts (see Figure 4), math (see Figure 5), and science (see Figure 6). The six students’ reading grades in Classroom A were consistent for two students and fluctuated for the other four students. During Weeks 4 through 8, reading grades increased and during Weeks 9 through 12, grades overall increased again. If
students were measured against the same benchmark at each time point, this trend may reflect natural increases in reading ability over time.

**Reading Grades: Classroom A**

*Figure 3. Reading grade for each student in Classroom A. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.*

In Classroom A, language arts grades appeared to stay consistent for three students and to decrease for three students. The first time the decrease is noted is at Weeks 4 through 8 and then another moderate decrease at Weeks 9 through 12, which is the opposite pattern of what was seen with their reading grades (see Figure 4). Classroom A students increased from four students to six students in Week 4.

The math grades for students in Classroom A increased between Weeks 4 through 8 and then decreased in Weeks 9 through 12. This pattern appears to be driven by two of the students (see Figure 5).
Figure 4. Language Arts grade for each student in Classroom A. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1= 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Figure 5. Math grade for each student in Classroom A. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1= 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.
Science grades in Classroom A are predominately consistent over time. The only changes noted are a one point decrease in grade and appear to happen for only one student (see Figure 6).

**Science Grades: Classroom A**

*Figure 6. Science grade for each student in Classroom A. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1= 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.*

Classroom B

The teacher in Classroom B had eight years of experience teaching, six in this particular classroom and two at a different campus. This teacher also has worked in Extended School Year programming for students with Autism, Down syndrome and EBD in a neighboring district for seven summers. Classroom B consisted of two sixth grade students and was the smallest group observed for the study.
Praise Ratio

As in Classroom A, the proportions were tested for change from each week to the subsequent week using a difference in proportions test (see Figure 7). There were no significant differences in praise ratios from week to week for Classroom B.

In Classroom B, the amount of behavior-specific praise given by the teacher was minimal and did not increase or decrease much over time. The highest level of behavior-specific praise was seen in Week 2, which is before visual-representation feedback began. The number of generally positive or negative statements produced was much higher than the behavior-specific praise in every comparison suggesting the teacher was not implementing the training learned.

Praise Ratio: Classroom B

![Figure 7. Ratio of behavior-specific praise to sum of general positive and negative statements by week for Classroom B. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.](image)

Student Colors

As shown in Figure 8, it appears that the students in Classroom B were mostly well
behaved as the largest amounts of time of each week were spent on green, the color that indicates the most acceptable behavior. It is difficult to make any conclusions concerning the effect of behavior-specific praise based on these data as the pretest period occurred after training. Visual-representation feedback started at Week 3 and there were no students on red in Weeks 3 and 4. It is worth noting that the only week in which red, the color that indicates the most significant behavior, exceeds green is Week 5, however, there was no remarkable changes in the ratio of behavior-specific feedback to general feedback in this week. In-person feedback was provided in Week 8, again, no red behavior was seen in Weeks 8, 9, 10, or 12.

**Student Colors: Classroom B**

*Figure 8. Ratio of student behavior colors by week for Classroom B. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.*

**Student Grades**

The grades for each of the two students in Classroom B are shown for reading (see Figure 9), language arts (see Figure 10), math (see Figure 11), and science (see Figure 12). The reading grades for Classroom B appear consistent over time with an exception of one student’s reading grade decreased in Weeks 9 through 12.
Classroom B language grades followed a consistent pattern until Weeks 9 through 12 when they made a sharp increase for both students (see Figure 10). Classroom B math grades followed a consistent pattern in Weeks 1 through 3, and then decreased. While one student remained consistent in reading grades from Weeks 4 through 12, the second student increased at Week 9 (see Figure 11). The grades in Classroom B science were fairly consistent over time. In Weeks 9 through 12, however, the grade for one of the two students decreased (see Figure 12).
Figure 10. Language Arts grade for each student in Classroom B. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Figure 11. Math grade for each student in Classroom B. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.
Science Grades: Classroom B

Figure 12. Science grade for each student in Classroom B. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Classroom C

The teacher in Classroom C had three years of experience teaching students with EBD at a private school in another state and was in her second year in the public sector as a self-contained teacher for students with EBD. This teacher also had a M.A. in Movement Therapy and Counseling and was currently in graduate school pursuing an MEd. Classroom C had four students observed that ranged from 1st grade through 3rd grade.

Praise Ratio

As in Classrooms A and B, the proportions were tested for change from each week to the subsequent week using a difference in proportions test. There was no significant difference in praise ratios from week to week for Classroom C. In Classroom C, the amount of behavior-
specific praise given by the teacher fluctuated somewhat over time but was generally high, suggesting the teacher implemented the training learned. It appears the teacher gave a great deal of feedback to students, behavior-specific and general. Some of the lowest levels of behavior-specific praise were seen in Weeks 9 and 10, which were the weeks after the consultation session. The number of general positive or negative statements produced dropped over time while the behavior-specific praise somewhat increased (see Figure 13).

**Praise Ratio: Classroom C**

![Graph showing Praise Ratio: Classroom C](image)

*Figure 13. Ratio of behavior-specific praise to sum of general positive and negative statements by week for Classroom C. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.*

**Student Colors**

As seen in the previous two classrooms, students in Classroom C demonstrated overall good behavior, spending most of their time on green, however a greater amount of yellow and red behavior was seen for Classroom C than Classrooms A and B. As before, drawing conclusions about the student’s behavior and the teacher’s implementing of behavior-specific praise based on these data is difficult and inconclusive (see Figure 14).
Student Colors: Classroom C

![Graph showing student colors by week for Classroom C.](image)

*Note.* *No feedback given; **Consultation Session.*

**Student Grades**

Student grades were recorded at three time points. The grades for each of the four students in Classroom C are shown for reading (see Figure 15), language arts (see Figure 16), math (see Figure 17), and science (see Figure 18). Classroom C reading grades were somewhat inconsistent over time for each student, but overall showed a slight downward trend in reading performance. The language grades in Classroom C appeared to stay consistent over time. One student improved in Weeks 9 through 12. Math grades in Classroom C followed the same general pattern as language grades with the exception of one student’s scores decreased in Weeks 4 through 8. Science grades in Classroom C were consistent over time with the exception of one student who performed better during Weeks 4 through 8, and then decreased over Weeks 9 through 12. Students from Classroom C increased from three to four in Week 4.
Figure 15. Reading grade for each student in Classroom C. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Figure 16. Language Arts grade for each student in Classroom C. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.
Figure 17. Math grade for each student in Classroom C. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Figure 18. Science grade for each student in Classroom C. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.
Classroom D

The teacher in Classroom D had 6 years of experience in teaching special education, including resource, inclusion, and behavior. This was her first year on this particular elementary campus. Classroom D consisted of three students ranging from 4th grade though 6th grade.

Praise Ratio

As in Classrooms A, B, and C, the proportions were tested for change from each week to the subsequent week using a of difference in proportions test (see Figure 19). There were no significant differences in praise ratios from week to week for Classroom D. The highest level of behavior-specific praise was seen in Week 1, which is the week after the initial training session. The number of generally positive or negative statements produced was higher than the behavior-specific praise in every comparison except for the first week, suggesting the teacher did not implement the training learned. The amount of feedback the teacher gave was also minimal overall.

Student Colors

As shows in Figure 20, the pattern of behavior seen in classroom D is similar to that of the first three classrooms with the exception of the amount of time spent on a color other than green. This good behavior is difficult to link to changes in behavior-specific praise given by the teacher, as it occurs consistently across time, regardless of the teacher’s level of behavior-specific positive feedback.
Figure 19. Ratio of behavior-specific praise to sum of general positive and negative statements by week for Classroom D. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.

Figure 20. Ratio of student behavior colors by week for Classroom D. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.
Student Grades

Student grades were recorded at three time points. The grades for each of the three students in classroom D are shown for reading (see Figure 21), language arts (see Figure 22), math (see Figure 23), and science (see Figure 24). In classroom D, reading grades appeared to decrease for all students. The changes appear to occur after three weeks and after eight weeks.

**Reading Grades: Classroom D**

![Reading Grades: Classroom D](image)

*Figure 21. Reading grade for each student in Classroom D. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1= 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.*

The language arts grades in Classroom D showed an overall declining trend. The only exception was one student who improved during Weeks 4 through 8 and then declined again (see Figure 22). In Classroom D, math grades remained consistent and then declined for two of the three students during Weeks 9 through 12. The third student remained consistent over all time points (see Figure 23).
Figure 22. Language Arts grade for each student in Classroom D. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.

Figure 23. Math grade for each student in Classroom D. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1 = 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.
The science grades in Classroom D were more inconsistent over time compared to other subjects. Each student had periods of increase and decrease over the time points. Overall, the trend is one of decrease over time (see Figure 24).

**Science Grades: Classroom D**

![Graph showing science grades for Classroom D over 12 weeks, with academic grades ranging from 0 to 4. D1, D2, and D3 are represented for each week.]

*Figure 24. Science grade for each student in Classroom D. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session; *** 0 = 59% average or below, 1= 60% - 69% average, 2 = 70% - 79% average, 3 = 80% - 89% average, 4 = 90% - 100% average.*

Summary of Teachers

Teachers’ use of praise was measured through observation using the Praise Feedback data collection form created by the Devereux Center for Effective Schools (Sawka-Miller et al., 2007; see Appendix A). The Praise Feedback form was adjusted to track the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise as compared to basic praise comments and warnings/negative comments. Data on behavior-specific positive praise were collected for eight consecutive weeks.
When considering behavior-specific praise exclusively, overall it appears that teachers B and D implemented the training least while teachers A and B implemented the behavior-specific training most. This cannot be stated conclusively, however, due to the lack of baseline measures occurring before the training. It is possible that teachers A and C were using more behavior-specific praise before the training, but this seems less likely.

**Teacher Use of Behavior-Specific Praise Over Time**

![Graph showing teacher use of behavior-specific praise over time](image)

*Figure 25. Number of behavior-specific praised used during each major phase of the study by Teacher. Note. PRE = weeks: 1, 2 (the weeks before first feedback was given); DURING = Weeks: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (the weeks after visual-representation feedback was given, before consultation session); FACE = Week: 9 (the week immediately after consultation session); DURING2 = Weeks: 10, 11 (the weeks after visual-representation feedback was given that occur after the consultation session); POST = Week: 12 (the last week; no visual-representation feedback was given about the previous week)*

The percentage of behavior-specific positive praise was calculated for each teacher. As shown in Figure 26, Teacher C had a low percentage of behavior-specific praise week to week relative to the other teachers. Teachers A and B tended to follow a similar pattern of increases
and decreases over the 12 weeks with Teacher A having a greater percentage of behavior-specific praise until Week 8, when Teacher A and Teacher B became relatively equal. The trend for Teacher D was opposite from Teachers A and B, for all weeks except 8 and 9, which is where the consultation session took place.

**Percent Behavior Praise by Teacher**

![Graph showing the percent behavior praise by teacher over weeks.](image)

*Figure 26. Percent of behavior-specific praise each week by Teacher. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.*

As stated in Figure 27, the total percentage of all four teacher classrooms stayed on "green" throughout the week, which followed the same pattern as the amount of behavior-specific praise the all teachers were giving during that week, indicating that as the amount of behavior-specific increases or decreases, the percentage of green classroom behavior also increases or decreases, respectively. Similarly, the same trend followed for Teachers A, B, and C, and somewhat for Teacher D (see Figure 28).
In review, the analysis of data chapter aimed to understand the value in the use of visual representation feedback and its effect on behavior-specific positive praise in four self-contained behavior classrooms. The accrued data was presented in various data tables representing each classroom (i.e., A, B, C, D) in the areas of behavior-specific positive praise ratios, color ratings for each individual student in each classroom and grade progression or regression throughout each relevant six weeks grading period.

Figure 27. Percent of Green class behavior and amount of behavior-specific praise. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.
Figure 28. Percent of Green class behavior and amount of behavior-specific praise by Teacher. Note. * No feedback given; ** Consultation Session.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 includes five sections designed to assist the reader in developing an understanding of the findings, conclusions, implications and future research suggestions of the study. The first section is a brief summary of the study and revisits various components of previous chapters. Next, the findings section reviews all presented statistical analysis and data. Thirdly, the conclusions section addresses the research questions using the data findings. Next, the implications section covers practical suggestions for addressing challenges raised in the research. Lastly, the rationale for future research discusses the importance of areas where research may expand the current study in productive ways.

Summary of Study

Developing productive classroom management techniques and interventions play an important role in student success. Poor classroom management has been linked to long-term negative academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for students (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998; National Research Council, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002). One intervention associated with effective classroom management is behavior-specific positive praise. Although this intervention has proven successful, very few teachers implement it (Shores et al., 1993; Moffat, 2011). More specifically, data on students in self-contained behavior classrooms indicate teachers use low amounts of behavior-specific positive praise (Flora, 2000; Lago-Delello, 1998; Reinke et al., 2007).

The purpose of present study was to evaluate and provide outcome data on the use of visual-performance feedback and its effect on the teacher delivery of behavior-specific positive
praise in four self-contained behavior classrooms. Data collection served the purpose of delineating the correlation of behavior-specific positive praise and visual-performance feedback implementation.

Four research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent did the implementation of visual-performance feedback influence the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting?

2. What correlations, if any, were found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom?

3. To what extent did teacher behavior show a significant increase or decrease within behavior-specific positive praise data delivered via visual-performance feedback?

4. To what extent did the independent variable of group consultation affect the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase?

In reviewing the literature for this study, it was important for the reader to develop a clear understanding of classroom management on many different levels. In order for this understanding to occur, one should acquire a sense of what classroom management is, why it is essential, and appropriate teacher implementation. Several topics relevant to the research study were examined in the review of literature: (a) needs and outcomes of students with behavioral challenges, (b) classroom management, (c) punishment as related to classroom management, (d) zero tolerance, (e) positive praise, (f) behavior-specific positive praise, and (g) intervention of visual-performance feedback. Research strategies revolved around databases including behavior modification studies, school psychology forums, dissertations on classroom management, and emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD) handbooks. Data references varied in years ranging from 1968-2011.

Findings

The present study aimed to understand the value in the use of visual-performance
feedback and its effects on behavior-specific positive praise in four self-contained behavior classrooms. The data findings on four classrooms (i.e., A, B, C, D) included the areas of behavior-specific positive praise ratios, color ratings for each individual student in each classroom, and grade progression or regression throughout the relevant six weeks grading periods. These findings were represented in separate tables for each classroom.

The data of the project are summarized for each classroom followed by a review of findings of all four classrooms combined. The classroom praise ratios were tested for change from each week to the subsequent week using a difference in proportions test. For each of the classrooms, the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise to general praise + negative comments are presented first along with information on statistically significant changes from week to week (see Figures 1, 7, 13, 19). Also, Figures 25 and 26 show both the use of behavior-specific praise over time as well as the increase or decrease in the percentage of behavior-specific praise given by the teachers. Next, student color information was presented by the percentage of students who earned each color (red, yellow, or green) for each week (see Figures 2, 8, 14, 20). Also, student grades were evaluated for each classroom in four domains: reading, language arts, math, and science. Patterns in improvement or regression were evaluated for each of the four subject areas for each student in all classrooms (see Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24). Lastly, Figures 27 and 28 track the overall percentage of the classroom students who earned green compared to the amount of behavior-specific positive praise delivered by each of the four teachers. Figure 27 presents combined data of all four classrooms while Figure 28 breaks down the percentages by each classroom.

Conclusions

The conclusions portion of this study summarizes each of the four research questions.
This includes discussions of all four classroom teachers both individually, the specific classrooms (i.e., A, B, C, D), as well as the collective grouping of all study participants.

The first research question asked: To what extent did the implementation of visual-performance feedback influence the positive outcomes for students in a self-contained behavior setting?

Positive outcomes for students were defined in different ways. Variables used to define positive outcomes were student earned colors and grade progression or regression. Student colors (i.e., red, yellow and green) were earned in each of the four classrooms. Each teacher had a similar method for evaluating color for each student. Evaluation of student color included giving each student the opportunity to earn points toward behavior goals at various times throughout the day. Points were typically evaluated and disseminated every hour. The color red indicated the lowest level of compliance and points earned for the day. Red included a loss of privileges such as recess time with peers and the ability to travel to “out” classes. Earning the color red meant a student earned a minimal amount of points available to them. The color yellow indicated that students earned enough points to have various freedoms within the classroom but still some restrictions based on their behavior. Earning yellow meant that the student was sufficient for the school day but missed some opportunities to earn the full potential of points. The color green indicated that students earned enough points throughout the day to receive all classroom privileges and rewards. Earning the color green indicated that students were producing some positive outcomes for the day both behaviorally and academically. The assignment of consequences based on the color earned, in most cases, was implemented the following day. The only variation occurred when a student displayed a behavior that relegated them to an “automatic
red zone”. These types of behaviors could include fighting, profanity toward an adult, or destruction of property. Consequences were given immediately after the behavior occurred.

It is inconclusive if the positive outcome of an increased number of students earning the color green was based on the implementation of visual-performance feedback. Reasons for this include: Classroom A data showing the amount of behavior-specific positive praise fluctuated little over time despite the introduction of visual-performance feedback in Week 3 (Figure 1). Also, Classroom B amounts of behavior-specific positive praise were minimal throughout the entire study regardless if visual-performance feedback was given. The teacher for Classroom C, however, showed an increase in the percentage of behavior-specific positive praise from Weeks 5 through 9. The teacher stated she valued the visual-representation feedback sent to her each week and used the information to not only self-reflect on her teaching style and mannerisms toward students, but also to evaluate how often she gave behavior-specific praise to her class at times other than when the observations was taking place. The teacher requested that the actual observation form used by the observer to track be sent to teachers in addition to the summarized document so they could see direct documentation examples of not only behavior-specific positive praise (e.g., “Great job listening to the directions first time”) but general and redirection comments as well.

During the consultation sessions performed in Week 8, teachers for all four classrooms reported they valued the information presented in the visual-representation feedback form. Although the teachers did receive the visual-representation feedback in Weeks 3 through 10, data on student colors earned and overall grade progression or regression did not show a strong correlation toward the weekly delivery of visual-representation feedback (Figures 1, 7, 13, 19).
The second research question asked: What correlations, if any, were found between the use of behavior-specific positive praise and student behavioral performance in the self-contained behavior classroom? Figure 27 (see Chapter 4) show the direct correlation of the percentage of students who earned green throughout the week with the amount of behavior-specific positive praise. Greater amounts of behavior-specific positive praise given by the teacher resulted in more students receiving the color green. As stated earlier, earning green in a self-contained behavior classroom may indicate students are making appropriate decisions in regard to their behavior. Data are important when evaluating the use of behavior-specific positive praise and its application for student success. The data indicate that if teachers are given their ratios of behavior-specific positive praise and make the effort to increase their percentage of usage, students will benefit through improved or consistently appropriate behavior. The correlation of behavior-specific positive praise amounts and students achieving the color green, helps to further solidify that the classroom management technique of behavior-specific positive praise should be a valued intervention for classroom teachers (Shores et al., 1993; Moffatt, 2011; Reinke et al. 2007).

The third research question asked the following: To what extent did teacher behavior show a significant increase or decrease within behavior-specific positive praise data delivered via visual-performance feedback? While observations were occurring, teacher behavior toward the study itself remained consistently positive. All four teachers came into the study with slightly different backgrounds and experiences. A review session took place before official observations began. In this initial session the ideas of both behavior-specific positive praise and the usage of visual-representation feedback was discussed. All four teachers expressed their excitement about
the opportunity to both be a part of the research and to evaluate their usage of behavior-specific positive praise within their classrooms.

Classroom teacher A shared with the author they were already using a consistent amount of behavior-specific positive praise within the classroom prior to start of the study. The consistent amount of behavior-specific positive praise proved to be similar with what was observed in this classroom over the twelve weeks of observations. Teacher A’s ability to implement behavior-specific positive praise even when students were in crisis seemed to increase throughout the study. One particular example was in Week 3 of the observations when a room clear was required due to a student’s disruptive behavior. As seen in Figure 1, the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise did not fluctuate greatly despite the crisis situation in the classroom at that time. Also, Teacher A was recognized by campus peers and administration as an outstanding teacher. Recognition was accomplished by the campus recommendation to be in the running for a district “STAR” teacher award. The teacher for Classroom A implemented productive strategies including behavior-specific positive praise for some time prior to the study and others had recognized those efforts on the campus. When completing the reflection form, and asked about her overall perception of behavior-specific positive praise, the teacher for Classroom A stated, “I think behavior-specific positive praise helps give attention seeking students the attention that they are craving. It also helps the other students in the class realize what they should be doing without having to give them a direct reminder. I think it is even more beneficial when it is paired with an occasional tangible reward.”

Classroom teacher B overall experienced the least amount of growth with behavior-specific positive praise ratios. Teacher B’s application of taking specific information in regard to behavior-specific positive praise was minimal. Throughout the observations though, there was
the effort to compliment the students in her class, with the general praise statements such as “good job” and “awesome” but behavior-specific positive praise was not used with much frequency. During the consultation sessions, Teacher B did state the students she worked with did not want too much behavior-specific positive praise due to their age. A response from the teacher for Classroom B feedback form solidifies this belief with the statement, “Positive praise, even just a smile, to the student can change their attitude in class. I tend to not overly praise because I have seen the reverse happen when the student is overly praised.” Teacher B did have the reputation of productively supporting the academics of students with EBD. The author saw this first hand in the area of phonemic awareness for sight words. Each week the students sat in front of the teacher and were timed on their completion of getting though approximately one hundred words. Throughout the twelve weeks the completion time for this activity reduced significantly. While the students were reading through words the teacher would compliment the students repeatedly, but not in a way that was specific to their behavior of reading the word correctly. It is important to note that the students did make academic progress on their ability to recall sight words by the end of the study observation regardless of the low implementation of behavior-specific positive praise.

The teacher for Classroom C saw the most change of all four classroom teachers when looking at her application of behavior-specific positive praise. The ratio of behavior-specific positive praise given by the teacher of Classroom C fluctuated somewhat over time but was generally high, which may suggest that the teacher did implement the training on praise that took place prior to the beginning of the study and the visual-representation feedback data was not only looked through but also used to develop a different and more positive intervention used in the classroom. One statement from the teacher feedback form confirms that the teacher for
Classroom C had an overall good impression of behavior-specific positive praise by stating, “My class reacts very favorably to behavior-specific positive praise. When one child is praised the others tend to demonstrate the praised behavior.” This response may be why there was such a high usage of specific praise in this classroom. The teacher saw positive results from not only the student who was receiving the praise but also the other students in the class. Although all the teachers within the study had a productive attitude and a willingness to take in the information, the behavior showed the most increase for the teacher of Classroom C in the context of not only absorbing the information but also transferring it to the current classroom situation.

The teacher for Classroom D had interesting results in regard to the input of behavior-specific positive praise within the classroom. As noted in Chapter Four, the highest level of behavior-specific positive praise was observed in Week 1 of the twelve-week study. Data indicate the actual observations did not affect Teacher D in the way that the pre-study learning session and the consultation session in Week 8 on behavior-specific positive praise did. In fact, during the consultation session Teacher D indicated that while the observation was happening she was more aware of the idea of praise and the need to focus on behavior-specific positive praise but when the observation concluded that idea did not hold as much importance as it did when the observations were happening. The teacher for Classroom D noted in the reflections form that, “Behavior-specific positive praise has a great intent to improve students’ behavior, however, I have not observed any significant improvements to student behavior in reference to the study.”

The fourth research question asked: To what extent did the independent variable of group consultation affect the use of behavior-specific positive praise during the data collection phase? Behavior-specific positive praise ratios saw an increase in three of the four classrooms after the
consultation session in Week 8. Classroom A increased from 1.10 to 2.60; Classroom B decreased from .10 to .07; Classroom C increased from 1.21 to 2.00, and Classroom D increased .57 to 1.33. The consultation session was slated as a time to review the concept of behavior-specific positive praise, visual-representation feedback and to answer any questions for the teachers. These sessions were approximately 30-minutes in length, and as data show, was overall a beneficial exercise, which saw gains in positive praise ratios in 75 % of the classrooms participating in the study.

Implications

Two implications can be drawn from this study based on both the quantitative and qualitative results: (a) behavior-specific positive training should be a standard for teachers in behavior classrooms, and (b) group consultation should be an important part of monitoring behavior-specific positive praise ratios for behavior classroom teachers.

Behavior-specific positive praise training should be implemented in both the pre-service training for teachers new to the profession as well as those teachers with experience. The pre-service training should be incorporated into the beginning of the year review for behavior teachers, be an hour in length and cover the productive benefits associated with behavior-specific positive praise, the expectations for classroom implementation and monitoring techniques which include observations, visual-representation feedback and consultation sessions. If behavior-specific positive praise is implemented as an intervention and used throughout the school day, based on the correlation data in this study, students will maintain a higher ratio of green behavior, which reflects a successful classroom management system and positive student outcomes.
In this present study group consultation had a direct impact on the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise given by teachers in their classrooms. When the aforementioned training is being developed there must be a component for either central special education district staff or campus administration to observe teachers using the behavior-specific praise, recording the ratios and then scheduling a consultation session with teachers to offer feedback, review data, and allow time for teachers to ask questions. Visual-representation feedback does have its advantages when discussing ways in which data can be sent to teachers. It allows observational data to be evaluated by both the observer and the teacher, but occasional group consultation is a powerful partner of visual-representation feedback and should be included in the general process for training and implementation. As noted earlier in this chapter, behavior-specific positive praise ratios increased in three of the four classrooms after the consultation session in Week 8. Classroom A increased from 1.10 to 2.60; Classroom C increased from 1.21 to 2.00, and Classroom D increased .57 to 1.33.

Future Research

When discussing future research, it would be important to examine the academic outcomes of students in more detail. In this present study, after data were compiled for each of the academic areas it was difficult to make statistical correlations for academic gains or regression based on the information collected from report cards. One possible avenue of research would be to concentrate on one academic area, perhaps an area of overall weakness for a majority of students within a classroom, and focus on using behavior-specific positive praise in similar ways as in this study. Concentrating on one particular subject area as opposed to four, as well as defining the parameters of two grading periods, would possibly gain some greater
statistical clarity on the academic effects of behavior-specific positive praise and visual-representation feedback. In the current era of state assessment and high federal standards, it would be helpful to concentrate on a particular subject area of student weakness, apply similar trainings, observations and a form of visual-representation feedback, and collect outcome data on academic success, including state assessments results.
APPENDIX A

PRAISE FEEDBACK FORM
Targeted Ratio of Behavior-Specific Positive Praise Statements to Positive and Negative: 4:1

Praise ratio = Ratio of A to (B + C)

Praise ratio: ___ behavior-specific praise statements to every ___ praise and negative statements (4:1 goal).

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APPENDIX B

TEACHER FEEDBACK FORM
Teacher Name:      Date:
Student Name:

Using a standard ten point rating scale, 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, please rate each of your students;

Responds appropriately to teacher directives;
1 Never           2 Sometimes               3 Often                 4 Very Often               5 Always

Makes productive choices during instruction;
1 Never           2 Sometimes               3 Often                 4 Very Often               5 Always

Any significant behavioral changes that may have taken place during the data collection phase of this study;
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Please complete the following section one time only

What has been your overall perception of behavior-specific positive praise toward your class?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What is your opinion of visual representation feedback being used as a communication tool for the ratio of behavior-specific positive praise?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
REFERENCES


