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# The Effects of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in the Elementary Classroom

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# The Effects of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in the Elementary Classroom

An Action Research Report
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Classroom

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Abstract

The benefits of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are being

recognized in education for helping reduce misbehaviors.  This paper includes research

from three primary classrooms: kindergarten, first grade music, and second grade.  Data

was collected over the course of six weeks.  Teachers recorded the number of times each

student received a warning, consequence for misbehavior, positive behavior slip, or

demonstrated a misbehavior using individual student tracking sheets, tally sheets, and a

reflection journal.  Throughout the six weeks, students were given a check-in sheet to

record their understanding and learning of the behavior system.  Students recorded a

much greater understanding of behavior expectations and intervention strategies over the

course of the research.  The results showed a slight decrease in misbehaviors.  Teachers

suggested beginning the behavioral intervention at the beginning of the year and

implementing PBIS for a longer period of time to note more positive changes in

behaviors.

*Keywords: behavior intervention, elementary, PBIS, misbehavior*

Over the past few years of teaching, we have noticed a rising trend in misbehaviors in the elementary classroom setting that not only detract from the learning of other students, but hinder the ability of a positive classroom climate to be created. Behaviors we have noted have ranged from small distractions, such as talking out of turn and moving around the classroom without permission, to large scale behaviors, such as physical outbursts or inappropriate language. In our work within our classrooms, we have tried various models of behavior intervention strategies of our own creation with varied success. The growing needs of our students coupled with the difficulty of managing these behaviors on a daily basis, as well as teaching appropriate behavioral responses to our students, have left us wondering if implementing a research-based behavioral intervention model would help with our classroom environments. One school-wide and classroom model for approaching the process of guiding behavioral change is PBIS, or Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems (Hill & Flores, 2013). With its rising popularity in classrooms within our elementary buildings, we are compelled to ask: what effect will PBIS interventions have on student behavior in the elementary classroom?

Our action research took place in three different elementary school classrooms in three different schools during a six week period of time. The first is a Kindergarten general education classroom consisting of 20 students: 10 boys and 10 girls. The second is a general music education specialist classroom of first grade students consisting of 19 students: 13 boys and six girls. The third is a second grade general education classroom consisting of 25 students: 15 boys and 10 girls. The age range of all participants in this action research study was between five and eight years old.

**Review of Literature**

Teachers of elementary students see misbehavior and off-task behavior daily in their classrooms. Common minor misbehaviors or disruptive behaviors include defiance, disrespectful actions towards the teacher and peers, disruptive talking, avoiding work, and having a bad attitude (Sun & Shek, 2011). Other minor misbehaviors are showing disrespect of property, off-task behaviors, talking during lessons, being tardy and not prepared, small acts of aggression, teasing and bullying, shouting out answers or talking out of turn, stealing, making inappropriate noises or making noises at inappropriate times, and using rude language (Huger-Marsh, 2014). These disruptive behaviors can range from violent to minor. Violent behaviors involve stealing, assaulting others, and using weapons.

These misbehaviors may be a result of a variety of discipline issues in the lives of students with their experiences at home. Discipline issues at home are cited as having a direct impact on the behavior patterns of children in their early elementary experiences (Snyder, Kramer, Afrank, & Patterson, 2005). Students enter their elementary experience with a foundation of skills often taught mostly in their home environment. The way that their parents or caregivers have provided social interaction through praise, punishment, prompting, instructing, and modeling will influence the way that the student will respond to the same social interactions with their teacher (Herring & Wahler, 2003). It has been reported that 74% of the variance of student responsiveness to teacher and school discipline is a direct result of the responsiveness to discipline shown in the home environment (Herring & Wahler, 2003). Conduct problems at home are most likely

carried into the school environment due to hostile and ineffective discipline procedures practiced in the home environment (Snyder et al., 2005).

Because the behaviors of these students often result in the isolation of the misbehaving student from their peers, they become further entrenched in the negative pattern of misbehaving. The powerful effect of peer rejection and disassociation further aids in the cycle (Snyder, et. al, 2005). Children take on a large role of responsibility when it comes to their own socialization with their peers. When misbehavior gets in the way of children making connections with their peers, their social responsiveness lacks opportunity for development, causing the negative cycle of misbehavior to continue (Herring & Wahler, 2003). In one study, first and third grade students were asked why they misbehaved. Students reported they were likely to misbehave if they had negative home environments or came to school in a bad mood. They did agree, however, that the teacher had the greatest influence over the students deciding to behave or misbehave (Crowder, 2008).

Another facet of understanding misbehavior comes from investigating students who are gifted and also those who are diagnosed with learning disabilities. Often misbehaviors stand in the way of these students realizing their full potential in the school setting. Simonsen, Little, and Fairbanks (2010) identified gifted students with behavior issues as sometimes not being challenged. These students, in some cases, are less likely to qualify for or receive appropriate educational services due to their behavior issues and could benefit from differentiated or enrichment programs (Simonsen et al., 2010). On the other end of the spectrum, in a study Kloots (2003) indicated that over a quarter of students with learning disabilities exhibit social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties.

These students exhibited both internalized and externalized behaviors. Externalized

behaviors are those where students act out and are not in control of themselves.

Internalized behaviors are those where students are over-controlled, shy, and reserved.

Often these behaviors are misinterpreted because they can resemble Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or Conduct Disorders (Kloots,

2003).

     Misbehaviors have a negative effect on the social and academic development of

students. Students who exhibited challenging behaviors often experienced low-

acceptance by their peers, often caused by the low self-confidence and aggressive

behaviors (Kloots, 2003). Huger-Marsh (2012) wrote about minor misbehaviors being

partly to blame for disturbing the learning of students, frequent absence from school,

greater rates of dropping out, concerns for the safety of all students, low grades, and a

higher incidence of remediation and tutoring. In more serious cases of misbehavior,

students can be given detention, suspension, and expulsion. In the future, these children

were more likely to enter the workforce unprepared, struggle with unemployment,

poverty, homelessness, and crime (Huger-Marsh, 2012).

     Disruptive, off-task behavior also holds significant influence over other students,

the teacher, and the school climate. Huger-Marsh wrote about a study investigating

whether parents, elementary students, and teachers had similar perspectives on discipline

and misbehaviors. This study included 300 volunteers; 100 parents, 100 students, and

100 teachers. One out of ten students in this study reported feeling unsafe at school

(Huger-Marsh, 2012). Every month between one and three percent of students and

teachers are injured or robbed, with about 40% of crimes committed by young adults

occurring in the school environment (Hunger-Marsh, 2012).  Because of this, many

teachers choose to leave the field of education because they feel unsafe, disrespected,

unrecognized, or ineffective.  Nearly half of all teachers resign after five years, with 80

percent of teachers rating behavior as the main reason they are leaving education (Huger-

Marsh, 2012).  In one research study, Sun and Shek (2012) reported that across the world

the most commonly disruptive behavior is talking out of turn or when the teacher is

giving directions.  Teachers reported that this was the most frequent misbehavior to

hinder teaching and learning.  The loss of these educators is costly to school districts,

which are placed in the position of recruiting and training new teachers (Huger-Marsh,

2012).

Because the challenges that arise with misbehaviors are frequent and recurring,

school systems must evaluate what discipline systems they have in place to aid in

creating an environment more conducive to learning.  As Safran and Oswald said, "if

teachers and administrators are prepared for behavioral challenges, students, faculty, and

staff weather behavioral storms in a healthier more productive manner" (2003, p. 371).

Many schools across the United States are feeling an increased pressure to prevent

disruptive and violent behaviors and they are turning to behavioral models such as

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to accomplish that task.  Positive

Behavior Interventions and Supports, also commonly referred to as PBIS, is "a proactive

approach to school-wide discipline, usually applied at the student level and designed for

use by all adults within a school" (Hill & Flores, 2013, p. 93).  This approach includes

preventing disruptive behaviors through the teaching and training of expected social

behaviors and continual reinforcement of those behaviors.  According to research done

by Hill and Flores in 2014, "the use of school wide PBIS improves the likelihood that students will engage in a behavior that is effective, efficient, relevant, functional, and socially appropriate" (p. 94).

The PBIS model is a three tiered level support system for students. The three tiers consist of the primary supports for the entire school, secondary supports which are targeted interventions for groups of students who show a greater need for support, and the third tier is known as the tertiary supports, which is an intensive support for individual students (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008). Collaboration amongst staff is a key aspect in the implementation and success of this multi-tiered behavior model (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Teachers, administrators, and all adults working within the school setting need to be supportive and committed to this model to ensure success. Strong administrative leadership and buy in from all school staff are also essential details in this behavioral model (Bradshaw et al., 2008).

The recommended integration of this model begins with training for all staff members within a school or district. According to a study done by Bradshaw and her colleagues in 2008, schools without formal training in PBIS will more than likely implement components of the model that are consistent with traditional discipline approaches and less likely to teach positive behavioral expectations. This study also showed that with proper review of office referrals, behavior reports, and current discipline practices, training can be geared toward the specific needs of a school, increasing its effectiveness.

The implementation of PBIS in schools and classrooms has demonstrated positive outcomes for students time and again in the area of growth in behavioral management

(Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2009).  Two key problems standing in the way of student success include off-task and negative behaviors, which are cornerstones in the PBIS model and are entrenched in many of the studies done on the effectiveness of this system within elementary settings.  In a study conducted by Ward and Gersten (2013), PBIS was implemented in several classrooms for the first time.  The effects of the PBIS model showed extremely positive trends, even within just the first year of implementation. There was a reported 32% decrease in frequent bullying, a 67% decrease in widespread classroom disorder, and a 21% decrease in staff-perceived defiance among their students (Ward & Gersten, 2013).  In another study of a 182 K-12 schools newly implementing the PBIS process, Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf (2009), found similar results.  These schools reported a significant reduction in students reported for both major and minor outbursts in the classroom, including a decrease of referrals by 43% at the elementary level alone (Bradshaw et al., 2009).  This study also goes on to show that this may be due to the fact that teachers were more able to handle off-task and distractible behavior in their own room in addition to the occurrence of fewer overall incidents in the classroom (Bradshaw et al., 2009).

Another benefit of PBIS as a classroom and school-wide model comes in the gain of time spent on academics in the classroom because fewer office discipline referrals are needed.  In a report done with one Maryland public school system, office discipline referrals dropped by nearly 43% during the school day, when compared to the national average, in the year that the PBIS model was introduced as a discipline system (Barrett, Bradshaw, & Lewis-Palmer, 2008).  Similar results were also shown in a study by Denise Yvonne Pavlovich (2008), in which schools were able to drop their office discipline

referrals by 38.36% within the first year of implementing a PBIS system.  Furthermore, during the second consecutive year of implementation, referrals dropped an additional 29.73%, resulting in total average drops ranging between 62% and 75% across the classrooms included in the study (Pavlovich, 2008).

The more serious consequence of a suspension due to negative behaviors within the school also shows a dramatic dip when a PBIS system is implemented.  In one trial, schools experienced a 17% decline in student suspensions during the first year of PBIS implementation, with an additional gain of nearly 10% in the second year of the discipline model (Ward & Gersten, 2013).  Another trial in the Maryland Public Schools further affirms the fact that PBIS positively affects suspension rates, showing a significant reduction within just one year of implementation (Barrett et al., 2008).

After completing our research on the topic of PBIS as an effective discipline system, it is clear this strategy has successful roots in positively influencing student behavioral choices and enhancing the classroom learning environment.  With many school districts in the beginning phases of implementing this system, or something similar, PBIS has gained a stronghold in building a positive school climate.  As educators immersed in the beginning stages of this implementation, this leads us to question, "What effect will PBIS interventions have on misbehaviors in the elementary classroom?"  The next section will describe our research process for gathering data surrounding this question.

## Methodology

The implementation of the PBIS techniques for our action research project took place over the course of six weeks in January and February of 2015. The process began immediately upon the return of the students to school following winter break. Because this new behavior management system would be replacing the old systems in our respective classrooms, we took one week at the beginning of the study to review and practice the expectations and consequences that align with our action research plan. Several of the students in this study also have special needs or are English Language Learners, making this learning and practicing process even more important. In the music classroom, three of the 21 participants qualify for Special Education services, four of the 21 qualify for English Language Learner pull-out services, and six students are on a behavior list for the building. Of the 19 students in the kindergarten classroom, seven students qualify for special education services. Of the 25 students in the second grade class, three qualify for special education services and one receives English Language Learner services. Before our research began, we also had to work with a co-worker in each of our buildings to establish a buddy break classroom for our students to use throughout the course of the study. These buddy break classrooms needed to be very close in proximity to our classrooms and have a designated space for our students to sit during their break.

During the first week of our study, students reviewed the classroom expectations that we have deemed to be most important to collect to this study: on-task behavior, appropriate participation, remaining in assigned seating, cooperative interaction with peers, and self-control with noises and actions. Furthermore, students reviewed

classroom and school-wide expectations for behavior in and outside of class.  In the case of all three of our buildings, the expectation of self-control with noises and actions is also a building-wide expectation, especially when moving through the hallways. This was already incorporated into our study, so before the data collection began, students practiced that behavior expectation throughout the building as well as in our classrooms.

Students also took time in the first week of the study to practice and review the consequences that align with a PBIS management system: a warning, taking a break, taking a break in a buddy classroom, and spending time in the office.  Each step in the management system was explained thoroughly as well as demonstrated to students.  We found it essential for students to practice the procedures for moving to the designated location to take a break in the classroom so they can see and hear what is being done with the whole group, but are able to have some space and time to gain control of themselves and cool down.  Meanwhile the rest of the class was able to practice continuing their work without disturbing the student needing a break.   Students were also taught the procedures for taking a break in the buddy room when they needed to be removed from the classroom because they refused to take a break or their behavior escalated.  Finally, students reviewed how and where to go when their behavior was severe and they were sent to the office.

During the first week of the study, students were also taught calming strategies to employ while taking a break, being in the buddy room, or being sent to the office. Students practiced breathing techniques and counting strategies to calm down.  They identified the feeling they were having and were provided with steps that they could follow to reflect on their misbehaviors.  These steps included reflecting on the

misbehavior they demonstrated, what triggered the misbehavior, and how they could fix the misbehavior and rejoin the class successfully. Students were given several opportunities to practice and review these calming strategies. They also practiced the procedure of raising their hands to signify that they were ready to rejoin the class.

In this study, we felt that it was important to put the focus on teaching and rewarding positive student behavior instead of focusing on the misbehaviors of our students. We chose to implement a positive behavior recognition system in our classrooms to further promote good choices made by our students. When students were caught demonstrating excellent behavior or exceeded our expectations, such as ignoring a student who was purposefully trying to distract them, they were individually rewarded with a positive behavior slip. This was used not only as a means to recognize students who continually demonstrate appropriate classroom behaviors, but also to motivate students who struggle with misbehaviors. Upon the collection of a pre-determined amount of positive behavior slips, students could trade them in for classroom-determined rewards, such as lunch with the teacher, a pencil, iPad time, or being at the front of the line in the hallway. Once students were introduced to the classroom and school-wide rules, expectations, consequences, reflection strategies, and rewards, the implementation of our action research data sources began.

The first data source we used in our study was a student check-in (Appendix A) which was given three times during the six week study. Students were asked to fill in a smiley face (for yes), a straight face (for unsure), or a sad face (for no) on six statements based on our study. The students in our classrooms were given this check-in in the first week of our implementation to provide baseline information for the study. During week

three of the study, students were given the check-in again.  Through reviewing their second set of responses, we became aware of what areas of our PBIS implementation needed re-teaching and practice.  Finally, the students completed the check-in a third time during the sixth week of our study.

After collecting the initial check-in responses of our students, our action research team began the full implementation of the PBIS strategies and tracking student behaviors daily. Because our team teaches in three different types of classrooms within the elementary school setting (Music, Kindergarten, and Second Grade), we did not use common classes or times within our research.  Instead, we chose to note the pre-selected misbehaviors for one part of our day where students have shown the most challenging behaviors. These behaviors included blurting out/making noises, walking around the room, ignoring instruction/not paying attention, unwilling to follow directions, complaining, being off task, and disturbing others.

The second data source that we used as a personal means of tracking was a tally chart used daily to note student behavior throughout the six weeks (Appendix B).  The behaviors tallied on this sheet included blurting, walking around the room, ignoring instruction, unwillingness to follow directions, complaining, off-task behaviors, disturbing others, and any other off-task behaviors displayed by individual students. During our class periods, we made note of each time students exhibited one of these undesirable behaviors.

In addition to the data collected on these daily tally charts, we also used individual student tracking sheets (Appendix C).  Each student's initials were written down and next to their names we recorded the amount of warnings, breaks, visits to the

buddy room, or times sent to the office within the one class period. We also recorded how many positive behavior slips each student received. This was completed on a daily basis for all students in the classroom for the class period.

The final source of data collection was a teacher reflective journal (Appendix D) which was used after each class period throughout the six weeks. After reviewing the tally chart and individual tracking sheet, we used the journal to record observations about the classroom climate that day, what types of interventions were used, and the amount of academic work accomplished based on behaviors or misbehaviors of students. In our respective journals, we were also able to note what activities were included in our lesson plans for the day and what misbehaviors were demonstrated during those activities. The next portion of our paper will discuss the results of our action research data collection and the conclusions drawn from this information.

## Analysis of Data

The data collected during our action research project consisted of information gathered from both the teachers and students involved in this process. Before beginning our action research implementation of the PBIS behavior system, it was important for us to gather a baseline idea of what our students knew about the new behavioral system in place. To do this, we administered a check-in sheet to all students so that we could gain insight into their initial understanding of the discipline system. Students were able to reflect their understanding of each question by circling a smiling, straight, or frowning face (Appendix A). This check-in was administered three times over the course of the action research implementation. Our first check-in sheet was given the first week of the action research implementation and contained six questions for students to answer.

In our classrooms, results were varied during the initial check-in after teaching the basics of the PBIS discipline system.  The questions that yielded the strongest smiling face responses from students had to do with personal and concrete things.  In Figures 1 and 2, students felt most confident identifying the spaces in the classroom reserved to take a break and naming positive behaviors or misbehaviors that would elicit an appropriate teacher response.  Student responses to the second and third question showed that when it came to things that were not as straight-forward, they felt less confident. Students responded mostly with frowning faces when it came to naming strategies to calm themselves down while taking a break and also when it came to identifying with confidence where they were to go in the buddy classroom to take a break.
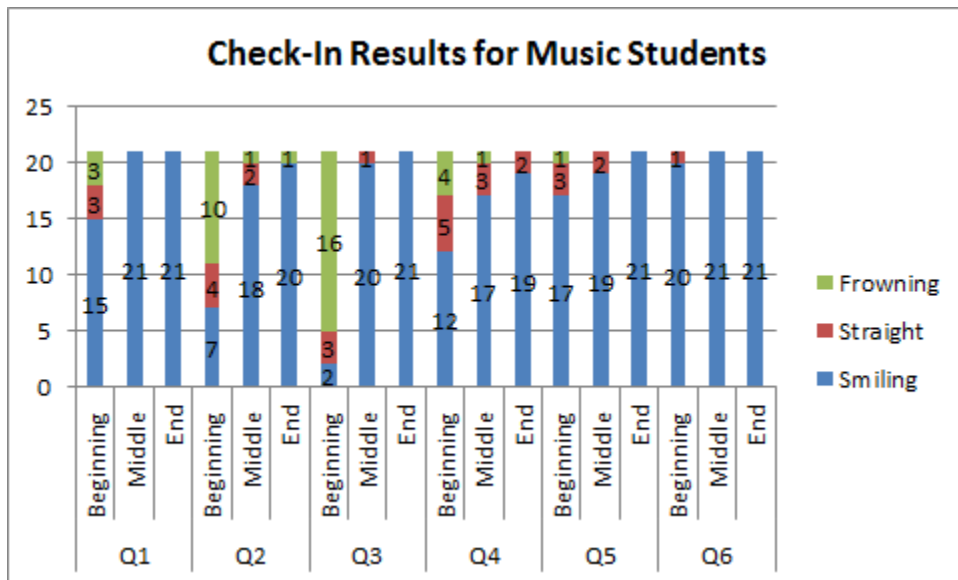


*Figure 1*. Check-In Results. This graph shows the results for each question given on the check-in at the beginning, middle, and end of the study.

Figure 3 shows the results from the second grade classroom in which students felt most confident in how to earn and use positive behavior slips and naming misbehaviors that may earn them a warning.  Students had less understanding in what to do and ways to

calm themselves during a break.  They had the least understanding in where to go for the buddy room.

The second check-in was administered about three weeks into the action research process.  Students in the kindergarten and second grade classroom had the opportunity to practice the new behavior system daily, however, the students in the music classroom only come to music every other day and needed more time to practice and experience the new PBIS behavior system.

By this point, several students had experienced a warning, take a break, or positive behavior slip associated with our action research plan, so they felt more confident in their abilities when completing the check-in sheet.  As evidenced in Figures 1, 2, and 3, many more students responded that they felt comfortable with all aspects of the new PBIS system in the classroom.  This is most notable in questions one, two and three of the student check-in sheet, which address students' understanding of taking breaks, ways to calm themselves during breaks, and where to go when asked to go to the buddy room.

 The highest number of straight face and frowning face responses remained with the more abstract concepts within the discipline system having to do with personal calming techniques and how to demonstrate positive behaviors.  In the music classroom, three students responded that they were still unsure how to earn a positive behavior slip from the teacher, indicating that perhaps these students had not yet earned this recognition or felt unsure what to show the teacher to catch their attention and earn a reward.  In going back and reflecting on the teaching journal for this particular week, it should be noted that two of these three students had not yet earned a positive behavior

slip for their choices in music class. Due to these responses, all students received

additional instruction on the positive behaviors looked for in the classroom and all

students were able to practice these expectations over the course of the next two class
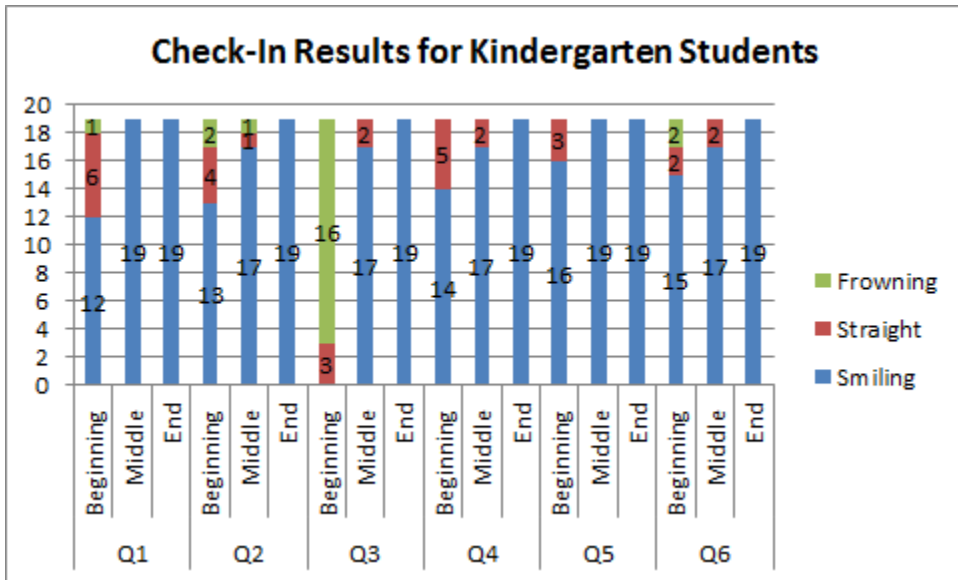
periods.



*Figure 2*. Check-In Results. This graph shows the results for each question given on the

check-in at the beginning, middle, and end of the study.

      In the kindergarten classroom the same two students responded with straight

faces, meaning they were unsure of where to go for the buddy room, how to use the

positive slip from the teacher, and were uncertain about naming misbehaviors that would

earn a warning from the teacher. In a review of the teacher journal for that week it was

noted that the teacher went back and re-instructed the whole group on those areas. One

of the students needed additional instruction on the buddy room and was given the

opportunity to practice using this area again to further enhance his understanding of this
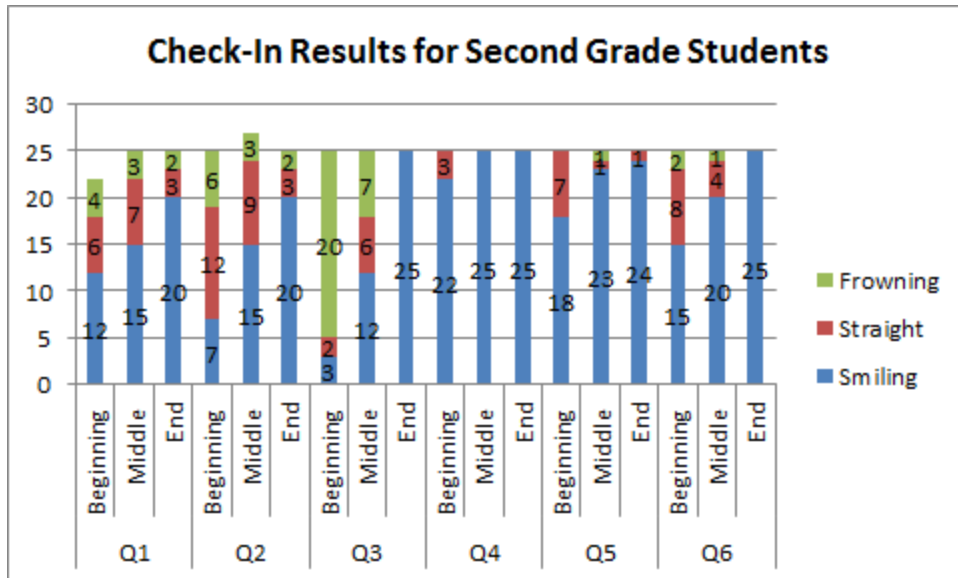
part of the new behavioral system.

*Figure 3.* Check-In Results. This graph shows the results for each question given on the check-in at the beginning, middle, and end of the study.

Figure 3 shows several students in the second grade classroom indicated they still did not completely understand what to do when they were asked to take a break, ways to calm themselves, and where to go when asked to go to the buddy room. When looking back at the tracking sheets for individual students, it was noted that the majority of students in the class had received a warning and positive behavior slips, however, few students had taken a break or been sent to the buddy room. They had been taught about how to take a break and use the buddy room, but had never experienced this consequence.

The final check-in that took place was conducted during the last week of the study. By this point, all students in our study had earned at least one positive behavior recognition slip and many had taken a break for misbehaviors or off-task behavior. In the music classroom, shown in Figure 1, only one response in the entire check-in contained a frowning face, which was for the skill of knowing and naming strategies to calm oneself

during a take a break.  From the beginning of the implementation of this action research

project, this has shown to be the concept that most students have struggled to identify.  In

the music and kindergarten classes, students had gotten to a point where they felt

comfortable with what to do when asked to pause and reflect on their misbehaviors.

Students knew what to do and how to calm themselves when they took a break.  The

results also show that many more students were able to name and demonstrate at least

three positive and negative behaviors that fall within the outlined expectations of the

classroom.

By this point in the study the students in the kindergarten class, shown in Figure

2, were all able to confidently respond with a smiley face for their responses to the check-

in.  Five second grade students, as shown in Figure 3, still did not fully understand what

to do when they were asked to take a break.  It appears that some of the confusion about

taking a break shown in these responses may have stemmed from the expectation that

students practice calming strategies in the take a break, as four students also answered

that they could not list two ways to calm themselves during a break.  One student could

not name three good behaviors that would earn a behavior slip.  All students responded

that they knew where to go for the buddy room, how to use positive behavior slips, and

could name three misbehaviors that might earn them a warning.

The second piece of data gathered during this project was a tally sheet containing

the number of times students received warnings, take a breaks, buddy room visits, and

office visits throughout the implementation of the PBIS system (Appendix B).  Figure 4

below shows the number of students in the music classroom who received these

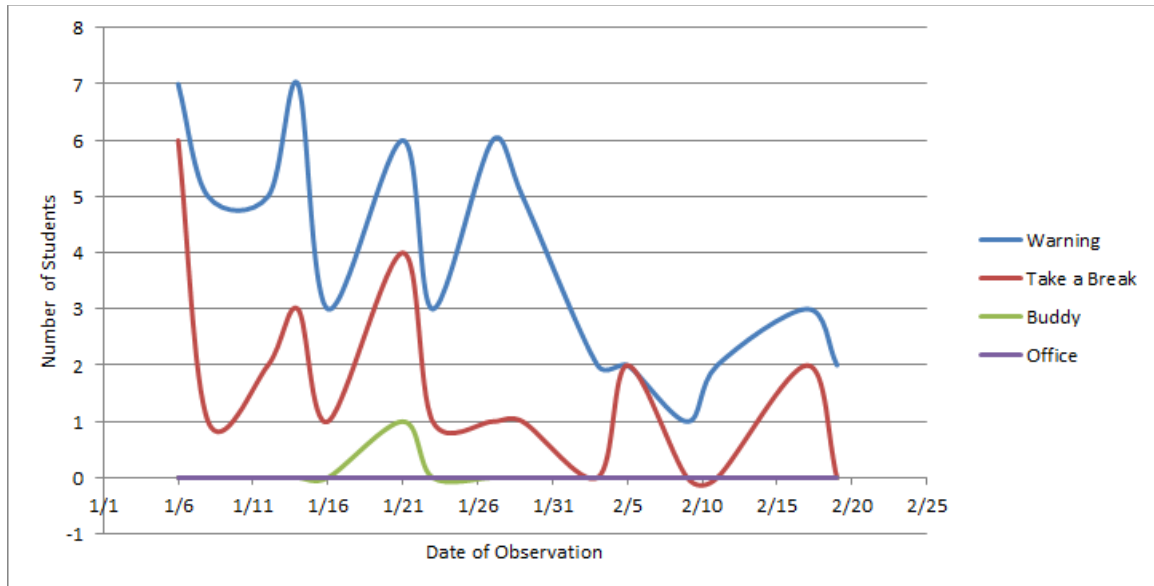consequences and the dates on which these consequences occurred.

*Figure 4.* Warnings and Consequences in the Music Classroom. The graph above shows

the number of students who received a warning, take a break, buddy room break, or

office referral as well as which date these consequences occurred.

As evidenced in Figure 4 above, there was a downward trend in the number of

consequences given to students throughout the project.  Interestingly, when looking at the

data, it appears that students struggled to reacquaint themselves with the rules and

expectations after a weekend or a few days away from the classroom.  This may be due to

the fact that students only attend music for 30 minutes every other day and sometimes

can go three days without coming to the music classroom.  Individual student absences

also played a role in the reacquaintance period, especially early in the study, where three

students went five days between music classroom periods.  As the graph shows, however,

this reacquaintance process was alleviated over time and students were able to more

consistently remember the behaviors expected from them in the music classroom. When

looking through the teacher reflection journals (Appendix C) for the days where

behaviors spiked, the behaviors usually aligned with there being a substitute teacher in

their regular classroom, the day coinciding with the first day back after a break or weekend, or a change in the daily schedule. Incidentally, when reviewing the individual student behavior sheets (Appendix D), the same four students consistently received warnings or take a breaks on days where overall class behavior was poor.

During week three of the study, the music teacher noted in her observation journal that following the collection of data from the second check-in given to students, she spent additional time reviewing the rules and expectations at the beginning of class for three class periods. Although there were still days when the number of warnings and breaks increased, there was an overall decrease in these consequences toward the end of the six weeks of data collection. The teacher also noted on the individual behavior sheets that students she consistently identified as frequently needing warnings and breaks at the beginning of the data collection were not consistent at the end of the study. As the data collection continued and students grew to understand the behavior system more deeply, the individual behavior tracking sheets showed that the students who needed a warning or break during class varied more greatly.

Figure 5 shows the same information from the tally sheet containing the number of times students received warnings, take a breaks, buddy room visits, and office visits throughout the implementation of the PBIS system for the kindergarten classroom in this study. This data was recorded weekly and the number of warnings given and the number of breaks needed was beginning to show a slight decrease towards the end of the study.
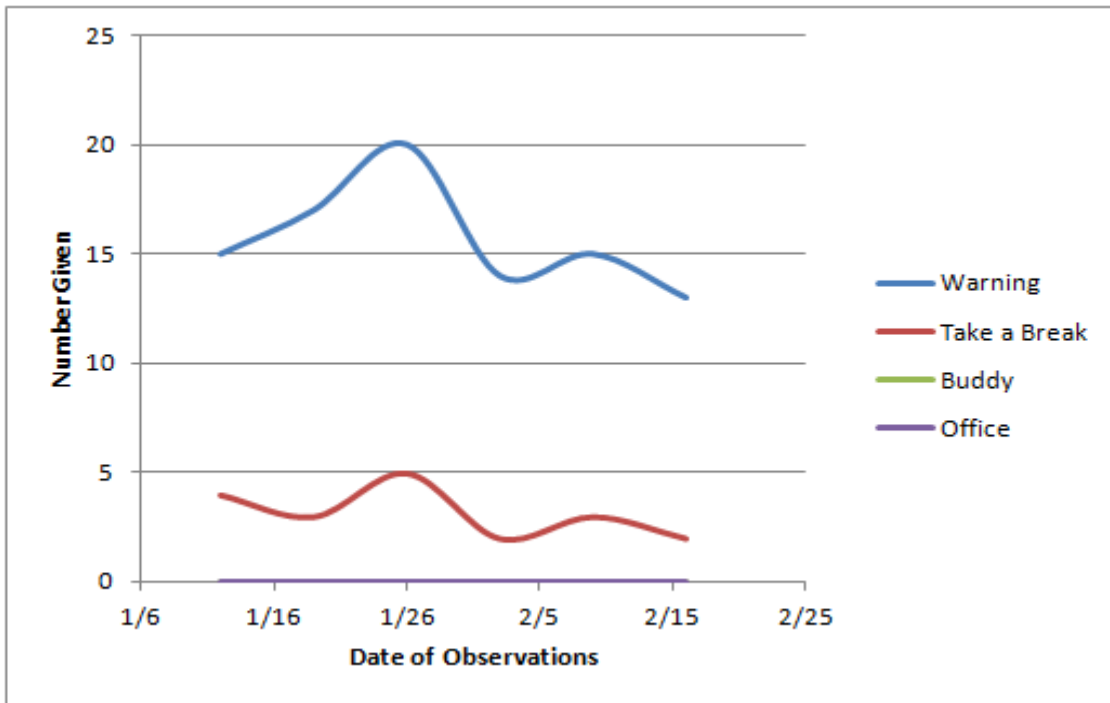
*Figure 5.* Warnings and Consequences in the Kindergarten Classroom. The graph above shows the number of students who received a warning, take a break, buddy room break, or office referral as well as which date these consequences occurred.

In review of the remaining data sources for this study, the kindergarten teacher's journal and the individual student tracking sheet showed an evident relationship between the higher number of warnings and the student behaviors that occurred each week.  In the third week of this study there were three kindergarten students in particular that struggled with blurting out, not paying attention to instruction, and displaying off task behaviors. As noted in the teacher's reflection journal for this week, the teacher spent additional time that week reinforcing the classroom rules and expectations with the whole class. The teacher also noted that she made an attempt to recognize any and all positive behaviors displayed by those three children during that week and each student was able to earn a positive behavior slip by the end of the week.  During week four of the study, those three kindergarten students were again able to earn a positive behavior slip from the

teacher and their disruptive, off task behaviors decreased from the prior week. The

teacher noted that students in this classroom did not have issues with their willingness to

follow directions, very few struggled with staying in their seats, and did not complain

during their reading block when data was collected. She also noted that during this six

week study there were not any behaviors in the kindergarten classroom that required the

use of the office or buddy room.
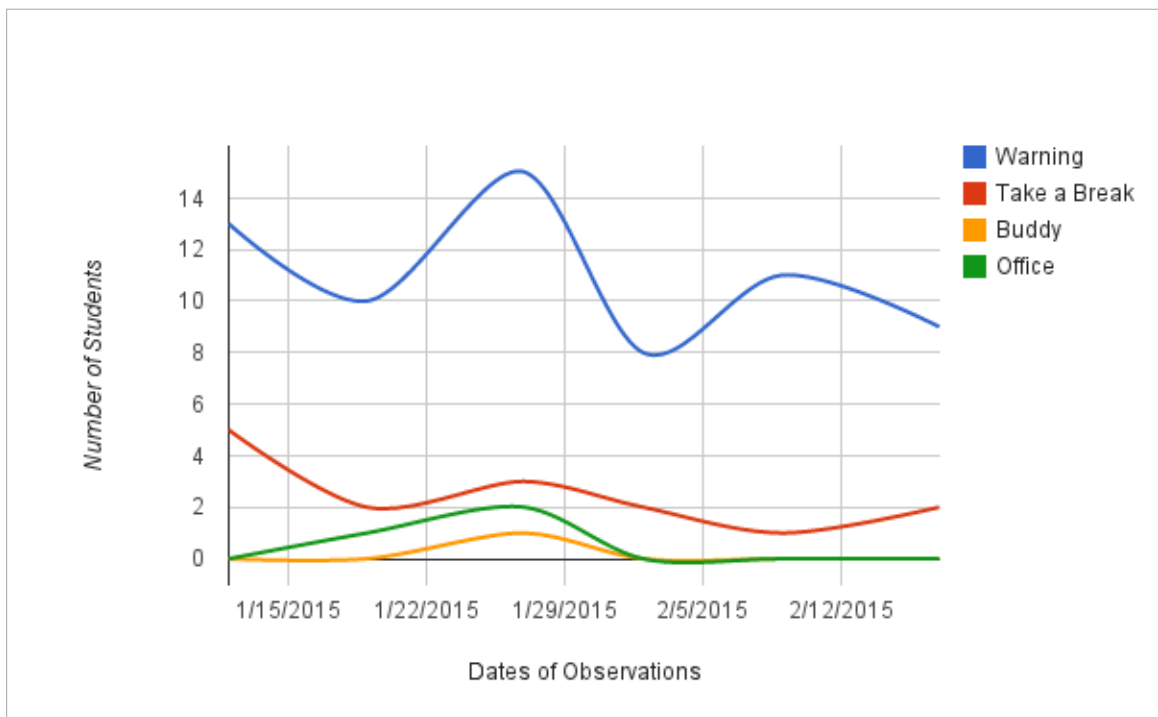


*Figure 6.* Warnings and Consequences in the Second Grade Classroom. The graph above

shows the number of students who received a warning, take a break, buddy room break,

or office referral as well as which date these consequences occurred.

Figure 6 shows the data from the tally sheets containing the number of times

students received warnings, breaks, buddy room breaks, and office visits throughout the

six weeks of data collection in the second grade classroom. There was a slight overall

downward trend of warnings throughout the six weeks, but the results do not show marked change.

In further review of other data collection sources such as the reflection journal and the individual student tracking sheets, a few correlations became evident. First of all, it was noted that off-task behaviors and ignoring instruction increased during periods where new subject matter was being introduced. Students were generally asked to sit and listen for longer periods of time during these lessons. Furthermore, the number of warnings given increased during these lessons. The final section of our action research report will include an action plan for further study of the effects of PBIS in the elementary classroom.

**Action Plan**

The students in kindergarten, first grade music, and second grade that were a part of this study were able to learn and apply the implemented aspects of the PBIS system within a six week period of time. This was made apparent by compiling the results of our student check-in. By the end of the implementation of this system, students had made great strides in identifying the aspects of the PBIS behavioral system that helped them earn positive rewards and in identifying misbehaviors that would have a consequence. Students also increased their understanding of calming techniques used to diffuse negative emotions when misbehaviors were identified. Despite these positive results, at the end of our six week study, the overall impact of this behavioral system was not apparent in terms of significant decrease in misbehaviors across all three classrooms.

Despite the downfalls or lack of results our team noted in the overall impact of the study, there were a few things that encouraged us that this might be a behavioral system

worth pursuing further.  In the first grade music classroom, students showed decreases in the amount of consequences and reminders needed.  Though this trend was becoming more consistent toward the end of the data collection process, more time would be needed to determine whether or not this has been a completely successful behavioral intervention.  However, it can be noted that students in this class have been vocally expressing their desire to earn positive behavior slips on a daily basis in the last three weeks of the study, showing the teacher that the desire for positive behaviors has increased within many students.  In the second grade classroom, students were also motivated and expressed positive emotions because of the positive behaviors slips.  The teacher noted that when one slip was given to a student, it immediately changed the behavior of the majority of students.  They expressed a desire to be noticed for their positive behavior as well by changing negative behaviors such as off-task behavior or talking during a lesson and replacing them with more positive behaviors such as listening and completing their work. Students in the kindergarten classroom were also very motivated by the positive behavior slips and by the end of the study, more positive slips were being awarded to coincide with the increase in positive behaviors. When a positive behavior was recognized and awarded in the kindergarten classroom it stopped other negative or off task behaviors that were taking place. The students were very excited to share their notes with other building staff as well as with their families at home.

Another point of growth noted in the music classroom came through the use of the buddy room as a secondary space to take a break.  Though the kindergarten and second grade classrooms struggled with the use of the buddy room in the way our action research team intended, the first grade music students did well in their understanding that this was

a place for calming down, not fun. Students did not view the change of classrooms as a reward and were often visibly disappointed when asked to go to the buddy room. To the benefit of the music teacher in this study, the buddy room is the adjacent music classroom where a colleague teaches the upper elementary grade levels. Because there were sixth graders receiving music instruction during the same time period as the first graders in this study, the first grade students did not feel as compelled to act out or try to misbehave in a way that would purposefully lead them to the buddy room. These positive results lead us to believe that it could be beneficial, if possible, to have a buddy classroom be that of a different grade level. By doing this, students would not have close friendship connections with the students in the buddy classroom and would likely not have familiarity with the teacher of that classroom.

The amount of instructional time in each classroom was also positively impacted throughout the course of this study as students were more able to attend to the classroom tasks required of them. Our team noted in our reflection journals that the amount of time spent managing small behaviors decreased over time and left us feeling more confident in our ability to impart meaningful instructional time. Because misbehaviors decreased during the time of this study, we also noted that lesson plans were going more smoothly and students were able to rejoin class activities after a taking a break or an emotional shut down due to their new calming strategies. In the music classroom, the teacher's reflection journal noted that prior to the six week study, she was unable to complete an entire lesson with her first graders because of off-task behaviors and disruptions. During the last three weeks of the study, she was able to complete a full lesson every single class period. Our team feels that the increase in instructional and musical productivity in the

classroom is in direct relationship with the consistency provided by the PBIS behavioral system. The kindergarten teacher in this study also noted that the time spent praising positive behaviors instead of managing misbehaviors was time far better spent, as it led to more on-task behavior and a learning climate that fostered appropriate classroom choices.

Three concerns arose when our team began to process our information and think toward the overall benefits of the PBIS system in elementary school classrooms. The first concern arose with the final student check-in results. This third check-in showed us that a combined total of five students from the three classes still showed uncertainty in the areas of knowing what it meant to take a break and how to calm themselves during a break. Our goal for the end of this six-week study was for all students to have at least a straight face when answering the check-in questions. The uncertainty of some of our students in reflecting on PBIS leads us to question whether some of the chosen aspects of PBIS for this study were quite developmentally appropriate, especially in the younger classrooms or whether we had given enough time to teach all the aspects of the behavioral interventions.

Our team's second concern centered on the fact that these check-in results might not accurately reflect the knowledge our students truly had of the PBIS system. Because some students in our classrooms had learning disabilities, attention deficits, or were ELL students some students may not have fully understood the questions they were being asked in the survey or may not have given it their full attention and effort. Given the opportunity to use this student check-in with future classes, it may be beneficial to administer the check-in in small groups or individually for students. Approximately 20% of the students in the study are receiving special education services and five students are

receiving services for ELLs.  In the second grade classroom, several students gave very

little attention or time to the check-in and finished it in less than a minute.  They didn't

understand the importance of the check-in and wanted to move on to their other work.  It

is difficult to ascertain what level of understanding students had or how much attention

they gave when the last check-in was given.  For future action research, it may be

beneficial to give the student check-in sheets one question at a time or complete as a class

at the same time.  This would help students more attentively focus on the work with

teacher guidance.

Our third concern arose with the use of the buddy classroom as a tool for

managing misbehaviors.  At the kindergarten level, it was hard for some of the students

in this study to comprehend the use of a buddy room. Based on comments and reactions

of the kindergarten students, many seemed to view it more as a reward, as they were able

to spend time in another teacher's classroom, away from the tasks in their own room. The

kindergarten teacher in this study also expressed conflicted emotions about the benefits of

sending a student to another room who was receiving this consequence for blurting and

making noise.  It was felt that this could be a distraction in the buddy classroom if the

behaviors continued after the students were excused to leave.  The music teacher in this

study had implemented the policy that the teacher in the buddy classroom had the

authority to send the student to the office if they were misbehaving in the buddy

classroom during their break.  For future action research, our team would implement this

policy across the board to help alleviate any feelings of uncertainty when sending a

student out of the classroom.

In further discussion about the use of the buddy classroom in the PBIS model, the second grade teacher felt it may have been more effective if it was implemented at the beginning of the year.  Through the use of additional time and the consistency of the buddy room as a discipline tool, students would have grown used to this model more easily.  Because it was a big change in behavioral interventions for both classrooms and not used often, students became very distracted by having another student in their classroom even if that student observed quietly.  Our team felt that, perhaps with more data collection, time, or training, the use of a buddy classroom could be effective by this time in the school year.

When thinking about the whole picture of this six week study, our team feels that PBIS is a behavioral system worth pursuing within our own classrooms, albeit with a few changes.  Our current teaching practices will be influenced by this study in a variety of ways.  In the kindergarten, music, and second grade classrooms, the use of positive behavior slips has been impactful in enhancing change in student behaviors and positive feelings.  Our team would like to think of more rewards for these slips, other than just toys or trinkets, to keep the intrinsic motivation going within our students for a longer period of time.  Some ideas include earning a positive phone call home from the principal, a letter home from the teacher, positive wristbands for students to wear as a leader in the class, getting to sit in a special seat, and a photo or email home during the day showing positive behavior.

Another change that would be beneficial in implementing this behavior system would be the presence of other classrooms within the grade level or school that are also practicing the same steps in behavior management.  We feel that the culture of PBIS

would be more widespread and permeate the entire learning environment, including the hallways. This would also alleviate some of the confusion in our students about using the buddy classroom as a space to calm down away from their peers. In the second grade teacher's school, the entire school uses positive behavior slips. Students can be given these slips from other teachers when they are not directly being supervised by their teacher. Students initially had a good understanding of how to earn and use these slips. This promotes positive behaviors in other situations such as during recess or in hallways.

Finally, the most important change would come through starting the PBIS system the first day of the school year. If this system was in place and was the only classroom behavioral system the students had known with us as their teacher, we feel that they would be more successful at managing both the misbehaviors demonstrated and taking a break. Parents could be taught about the system during parent meetings in the fall and be more equipped to support the teacher and their student. Due to the natural easing-in and procedural training period that occurs at the beginning of the school year, it would be a perfect time to spend a few weeks practicing how to take a break, go to the buddy room, and learning the classroom expectations. With the changes outlined in the action plan above coupled with an immediate implementation on the first day of school in the fall, our action research team supports PBIS as a system that can benefit the classroom climate and behaviors of all elementary students.

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I understand what to do when I am asked to take a break.

I can think of two things to calm myself during a take a break.

I understand where to go when I am asked to go to the Buddy Room.

I understand how I can use my positive slip from my teacher.

I can name three good behaviors that might earn me a positive slip.

I can name three misbehaviors that would earn me a warning from my teacher.

# Appendix B
## Student Behavior Tally Sheet

| Student | Warning | Take a Break | Buddy Room | Office | Positive Behavior Slip |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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Individual Student Behavior Tracking Sheet

NAME:

DATE:

| | |
|---|---|
| Blurting Out/Making Noises | |
| Walking Around the Room | |
| Ignoring Instruction/ Not Paying Attention | |
| Unwilling to Follow Directions | |
| Complaining | |
| Off-Task | |
| Disturbing Others | |
| Other | |

Appendix D
Teacher Reflection Journal

**Date:** _____

**Time Observed:** _____

**Class/Subject Observed:**
_____


**<u>Description of Activities:</u>**




**<u>General Notes About Behavior:</u>**




**<u>What went well today?</u>**




**<u>What could have gone more smoothly?</u>**