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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS TO REDUCE STUDENT ELOPEMENT

by

Melanie McGlone

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Special Education
at
Rowan University
October 7, 2018

Thesis Chair: S. Jay Kuder, Ed. D.

Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to Jeffrey, my family, and anyone else who has supported me during my journey. Thank you for believing in me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the guidance of Professor, S. Jay Kuder for his help and support throughout this thesis. I would like to thank my district and students for allowing me to conduct this research.

Abstract

Melanie McGlone
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS TO REDUCE
STUDENT ELOPEMENT
2018-2019
S. Jay Kuder, Ed. D.
Master of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of this study was to implement positive behavior supports to reduce student elopement. The participant of this study was a female fifth grade student who is diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability and has had documented chronic elopement issues. The experimental design was used in this study. First, a baseline period occurred where data was collected on the frequency of the student's elopement behavior. Then, the positive behavior support of a small tangible daily classroom reward was earned by the student when she did not elope. Next, a reversal period occurred where the student did not receive any positive behavior supports. Finally, the second positive behavior support was implemented and the student received positive praise for not eloping throughout the school day. The independent variables for this study were the positive behavior supports of a small tangible reward and positive praise. The dependent variable was the number of elopements throughout the day. Both positive behavior supports of a small tangible reward and positive praise reduced the number of times the student eloped. A small tangible reward was the most effective strategy implemented to reduce this student from eloping.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Students of all ages walk out of classrooms without a pass every day. Why does this happen? Research has shown that students walk out of classrooms for a variety of reasons. The student may be upset about something going on in the classroom. The student may want to go somewhere else in the building. The student may want attention, or it could even be a combination of two of the reasons listed or even all three (Shore 2018). Students engage in "escape motivated behavior" when they are trying to find an escape from a person, task, situation, or a demand given (Rappaport & Minahan 2012).

Research Problem

In order to address the issue of why a particular student is walking out of a classroom without a pass, the student's motivation for doing so must be determined. Is this student engaging in the behavior to avoid a person, task, demand, or a situation? Is this student upset about something going on in the classroom? Is the student engaging in the behavior because they would rather go somewhere else in the building or are they simply seeking attention by walking out? When a student participates in the behavior of walking out the teacher should record when it is occurring, the time, what the student is doing or supposed to be doing, and where the student went when they walked out when possible (Shore, 2018).

When a student walks out of a classroom it is a problem for the student walking out, the teacher, and other students in the classroom. Walking out of the classroom is a problem for the student who is doing the behavior of walking out because if they are not

in the classroom they are not learning. One of the primary purposes of attending school is to learn and if the student is not in the classroom they aren't learning. Walking out of class is also a problem for the student because it is a safety issue. If the student is not in their assigned area they could get hurt and the hurt student could go unnoticed because they are out of supervision of the adult in charge. This is a problem for the teacher as well because the teacher can't leave a classroom or a group of students to chase after one student who chooses to break the rules and walk out. When a teacher has to address the behavior and follow the school protocol of alerting the main office that a student walked out of their assigned location, the teacher has to stop teaching, and this takes away from students in the classroom learning. This, in turn, effects the other students because their education is getting interrupted because of one student's poor choices.

Once the teacher is able to determine the function of the behavior or the why of the behavior is determined then they can decide what they will do next to intercede on the behavior (Rappaport & Minahan, 2012). There are a variety of strategies that can be applied to help a student or students that are walking out of the classroom. The strategies include providing rewards to students when they don't engage in the behavior, changing the curriculum, a short break for the student to cool down in the classroom, replacement behaviors, choice activities, negative consequences that do not reinforce the walk out behavior, positive verbal reinforcement, minimal attention given to the problem behavior, self -monitoring, teaching the student how to voice how they are feeling, and so on.

Significance of the Study

In this study I examined how to prevent a student, who I call Jamie Johnson, from walking out of the classroom. According to Jamie Johnson's records, she has been walking out of the classroom since she was in third grade and she is now in fifth grade. Jamie Johnson's records and her behaviorist indicate that Jamie walks out of the classroom for two reasons: to seek attention and or to avoid doing her classwork. The research question was; Can a positive behavior support method reduce or eliminate student elopement?

For this study I implemented a single subject experimental model to see if Jamie Johnson's behavior of walking out can be prevented and reduced. First, I obtained a baseline of the elopement behavior over several weeks. Then, I implemented the first method/strategy for several weeks and recorded my results. Next, I reverted back to the baseline with no interventions. Finally, I implemented the second method/strategy for several weeks and recorded my results.

The first research strategy that I implemented to prevent Jamie Johnson from walking out of the classroom was a proactive strategy. The proactive strategy that I implemented was to have Jamie Johnson obtain or earn items throughout the day when she does not walk out of the class. I predicted that this strategy will work because it is a research based strategy and has been proven to help students who are trying to "escape" or "avoid" a given situation (Hineman, 2015). I have also been informed that when Jamie Johnson was in third grade she stopped walking out of class when she was rewarded with Shopkins (a small plastic toy) for staying in the classroom because she really liked

Shopkins. So, I allowed Jamie to say what she would like to choose for staying in the classroom.

The second research strategy that I implemented to prevent Jamie Johnson from walking out of class is the strategy of replacement behaviors (Hineman 2015). I will teach Jamie Johnson that there are other ways to get attention rather than walking out of the classroom. If Jamie Johnson doesn't want to do a given assignment in the moment she doesn't need to run out of the room to escape it. She will instead learn appropriate social skills and how to handle uncomfortable situations in a positive way, rather than running from them. I will give her a lot of positive praise when she is doing the right thing. I predict that this strategy will work for Jamie Johnson because she will gain attention when doing the right thing. From my observations and written records on Jamie Johnson it is clear that she loves attention, whether it is positive or negative. Jamie Johnson will also learn valuable life and coping skills on how to handle uncomfortable situations rather than running from them.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There are many strategies used in classrooms in order to change a behavior that a student or students may possess that interferes with the student's success and or interferes with a successful learning environment as a whole (Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2005, p.60). Positive behavior supports are used universally in classrooms throughout the country. According to Hieneman (2015) individual positive behavior support is a system that intertwines evidence-based practices using applied behavior analysis and other disciplines in order to solve behavior problems. The overall goal for the using positive supports is so that the individual can advance in independence, participation, and develop positive life skills so that they are successful in life.

When challenging behaviors are caught early in life, research has shown that it is easier to correct the problem behaviors. It is easier to correct the problem behaviors when caught early in life or right when they occur because the individual has not been engaging in them for a long time, making it easier to change because the behaviors have not been engrained in the individual yet. Early intervention is key when trying to correct challenging behaviors. (Park & Lynch, 2014).

Classroom Rules

In order for a classroom to be successful, the classroom needs rules. Students need to know the classroom rules and know what is expected of them. Teachers should explain the rules and post the rules in the classroom so that they are visible. Students

should take part in the process of constructing the classroom rules so that they feel part of the creation process.

A teacher can create the classroom rules with students, have discussions about the rules with students, and even post the rules in the classroom. While this is true there are still going to be students who test the limits and break the rules. Most students are deterred by consequences, unfortunately this is not the case for all students. Instead some students thrive on attention even if it is negative attention (Rappaport & Minahan, 2012).

Elopement Issues

Students walk out of classrooms (elopement) without permission on a daily basis. Why do students do this even though they know that it is against classroom rules? According to Shore (2018) students do this for one of three reasons: they are bored and want to go to somewhere else that appeals to them; they try to escape the current situation; or they are looking for attention. If a student continuously elopes from the classroom, a teacher may want to conduct a functional behavior assessment.

A functional behavior assessment is done to determine the function of the behavior. The questions of why the student is engaging in the behavior and what are they getting out of it can be determined by conducting a functional behavior assessment (Rappaport & Minahan, 2012). A functional behavior assessment will determine the patterns of the student's behavior, the root causes of the behavior. Then, the teacher can determine how to intervene in order to reduce the negative behavior. After conducting a functional behavior assessment over a period of time and once the function of the behavior is determined, the teacher can then create a behavior intervention plan for the

student which will result in a reduction or overall extinction of the negative behavior that the student is engaging in (Polloway et al., 2005, p.66-69).

Once a functional behavior assessment has been conducted and it has been determined why a student is engaging in a negative behavior, we can then work on the how, meaning how do we change or correct the behavior. One approach that can be used and has been highly effective over many years of research is implementing positive behavior supports that will help reduce or eliminate the student's elopement. Positive behavior supports can be implemented by using single subject, experimental research. The purpose of the experimental model is to hypothesize what will solve the problem, implement, and then investigate to actually see if the hypothesized solution worked (Beavers, Iwata, & Lerman, 2013).

Positive Behavior Supports

There are many positive and proactive ways a teacher can change a maladaptive behavior (Hieneman, 2015). In the information below, you will read about different studies where positive behavior supports were implemented and the results indicated successes.

One study conducted used Reward Systems to produce positive behaviors. Rewards Systems have been used at Thames Elementary School for years. The way the Rewards Systems work at Thames Elementary School are: first, rules are set; next, students are taught proper behavior; finally, logical consequences are put into place for students who don't abide by the rules and rewards are also put into place for students who

do abide. Students are in a sense trained over a period of time of how they should behave in a given situation to ensure they understand and know what is expected of them. Consequences are imposed on students who don't abide by rules; but, more importantly, rewards are given to students who do abide. Students who did abide by the rules were given tickets where they could cash them in for tangible prizes in the classroom. After this system was put into place, student write ups dropped significantly from 169 to 29 in a single year. This study shows that rewards or prizes will motivate students to follow the rules (Curriculum Review, 2014).

In a seventh grade social studies urban classroom setting, Hollingshead, Kroeger, Altus, & Trytten, (2016) conducted a study that involved 25 students. The study used positive behavior supports to increase positive student behavior. The study started first with students creating the classroom rules. Over a 3- month period the teacher stopped implementing teacher reprimand (TR's) for rule breaking and off task behavior. Instead, the teacher focused on positive praise and acknowledged students who were doing the right thing and were engaging in on task behavior by giving it positive attention. Students were no longer being acknowledged for doing the wrong thing; instead, they were being acknowledged and praised for doing the right thing. Results from the study indicate that students engaged in more on task behavior than off task behavior. In this study, the data shows that, rather than reprimanding students and giving them negative attention for breaking rules, it was better to ignore them, and give positive praise and attention to students who were following the rules. In the end, results yielded more on task behavior rather than off task behavior (Hollingshead, Kroeger, Altus, & Trytten, 2016).

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A study by Misiowiec (2006) centered on four female students who were not achieving academically. The strategy that the researcher used was that of positive praise. The researcher gave the students verbal positive praise as well as written positive praise. The researcher stated that she tried to provide multiple approaches to her positive praise and she tried not say or write the same thing to each student. She stated, when grading her papers, she would find something positive to write on each paper and tried to make it unique to that particular student. The researcher also had a period of time where she did not provide praise, written or verbal, to the students. Her results showed that the students' grades went up during the positive praise period. The students' grades went down during the period of time that students were not praised. The researcher concluded that the students should be given positive praise in the moment for the specific behavior to be reinforced (Misiowiec, 2006).

Replacement behaviors were used in the case of a student named Esperanza who liked to engage in classroom elopement. When Esperanza had to transition for music class, she would run away instead of complying in transition. First, Esperanza would run out of the classroom; next, the teacher would chase Esperanza down the hallway; then, the teacher would catch Esperanza and hug her and, finally, the teacher would bring Esperanza to the classroom, rather than her music class. Esperanza was gaining a hug from her teacher and escaping music class when she was engaging in elopement behavior. A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) was created for Esperanza to address her elopement issues and in her BIP the team decided to use Replacement Behaviors to teach Esperanza how to appropriately transition to music class. Esperanza was given choices

with her Replacement Behaviors, such as would you like to walk or skip with Ms. Adkins to music class in order for it to be more appealing to Esperanza. After implementing Esperanza's BIP and using the Replacement Behaviors approach, Esperanza's elopement issues significantly decreased (Stockall & Dennis, 2015).

Positive praise and attention motivated a student, named Jackson, to stop engaging in elopement behavior. Jackson was a seven-year-old African American male who engaged in elopement behavior. A functional behavior assessment was done on Jackson and it was determined that he engaged in elopement behavior to seek attention. The attention he gained from the elopement behavior was negative; but, it didn't matter to Jackson whether the attention was negative or positive because it was attention. The teachers decided to ignore Jackson when he engaged in elopement behaviors; so, Jackson was no longer getting the negative attention anymore. Instead, they gave Jackson attention when he was doing the right thing. He was given positive praise and attention for doing the right thing. This motivated Jackson to do the right thing and his elopement behaviors significantly reduced over time (Pennington, Strange, Stenhoff, Delano, & Ferguson, 2012).

A study concerning tangible rewords as a reinforcement was done. Students were in a disadvantaged school and the participants were in the sixth grade. There were two groups and the groups were labeled A and B. Group A earned a tangible reward of money for achievement and Group B did not earn a tangible reward for achievement. Results from the study indicated that Group A achieved higher than Group B. It was suggested that this occurred because of the tangible reward of money and that the money motivated

students to achieve. Students surveyed in the study indicated that the tangible reward of money was a high motivator. Parents were also surveyed and indicated that their child's enthusiasm for learning went up once the study started and their child was earning a reward. Results from this study indicate that tangible rewards can be a motivator for students to achieve (McMillan, 1973).

A study involving 1100 students ranging from age 11-18 was done. Results indicated that rewards and positive praise motivated students to achieve and do the right thing. In the study, students filled out a questionnaire to find out what motivates them and deters them. Rewards motivated students to do the right thing universally. This school used trips as rewards and was highly effective in encouraging students to do the right thing. The questionnaire results indicated that positive praise and positive phone calls home motivated most students to do the right thing (Payne, 2015).

A study was done that involved 35 special education teachers. The special education teachers were observed over a period of time and data was collected to determine how they motivated their students. All teachers used positive reinforcement and a few used negative reinforcement as well. The number one positive reinforcement strategy that teachers were observed using was positive verbal praise. Teachers stated that they use positive verbal praise because it motivates students and it works. Another observed strategy that teachers used were rewards. The rewards varied from teacher to teacher. The reward may have been tangible or an earned choice time reward for the student. Whether the reward was tangible or intangible, it still motivated students to do what they were supposed to do (Dovey, Francis, Corbett, & Dibb, 2017).

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After reading and reviewing numerous sources on the topic of positive behavior supports, I have hypothesized two ways to change the problem behavior of elopement. The two ways that will be utilized in this study are: the student will earn or obtain something for not engaging in the negative behavior and the student will be taught replacement behaviors. Research has shown and proved that implementing these two strategies can be an effective way of changing student behavior (Hieneman, 2015).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Setting and Participants

This study took place in a self-contained classroom for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students with mild to moderate learning and language disabilities in a school in New Jersey. The classroom has a total of 13 students. One female student participated in the study.

The student chosen to participate in the study I will refer to as "Jamie Johnson". Jamie Johnson is an eleven-year-old female who is classified as having Specific Learning Disability. Jamie is currently in the fifth grade and she has been eloping since third grade.

Procedure

The purpose of this study was to reduce or prevent the student behavior of walking out of the classroom without permission (elopement). First, the frequency of the elopement behavior over several weeks was recorded. The elopement behavior was occurring, on average, three times a day. The elopement behavior would occur because the student was trying to seek attention and or escape work. The student even stated at one point that the hallway is more appealing to her. Then, the first method/strategy for reducing/eliminating that behavior was implemented. Next, I reverted back to the baseline with no interventions. Finally, the second method/strategy was implemented for several weeks and results were recorded.

The first research strategy that was implemented to prevent the student from walking out of the classroom was a proactive strategy. The proactive strategy that was implemented was to have the student obtain or earn items throughout the day when she did not walk out of the class. I predicted that this strategy would work because it is a research-based strategy and has been shown to help students who are trying to "escape" or "avoid" a situations (Shore, 2018). I have also been informed that, when the student in the study was in third grade, she stopped walking out of class when she was rewarded for staying in the classroom. I allowed the student to say what she would like to earn for staying in the classroom.

The second research strategy that was implemented to prevent the student from walking out of class was the strategy of replacement behaviors. The student was taught that there are other ways to get attention rather than walking out of the classroom. If the student does not want to do a given assignment in the moment, she doesn't need to run out of the room to escape it. She, instead, learned appropriate social skills and how to handle uncomfortable situations in a positive way, rather than running from them. I gave her a lot of positive praise when she was doing the right thing. I predicted that this strategy would work for the student because she gained attention when doing the right thing. From my observations and written records on the student, it is clear that she loves attention, whether it is positive or negative. The student also learned valuable life and coping skills on how to handle uncomfortable situations rather than running from them.

Date were tracked by keeping a data tracking sheet of when the student walked out of the classroom without permission. I was able to do this while the student was with

me. I was not able to do this during special area time or lunch because the student was not with me during this time. Data were tracked during the baseline periods, strategy one implementation period, and strategy two implementation period. The results were compared to determine which worked best for the student.

Variables

The independent variables for this study were the two strategies implemented to change the student's behavior. The first independent variable was a rewards system. The second independent variable was replacement behaviors. The dependent variable was the number of elopements from class of the female fifth grade student, Jamie Johnson.

Chapter 4

Results

In this single subject, experimental research design, the goal was to investigate if there was a way to prevent or reduce student elopement behavior throughout the day. Two students were invited to participate in the study because they met the eligibility requirements, which were to have documented elopement issues over multiple years. In the end, only one student chose to participate. Jamie Johnson is a student who has been displaying elopement behaviors since third grade and she is now in fifth grade. The research question for this study was: How can student elopement be prevented or reduced?

Results of Study

The results of the study are found in figure 1. The study started with a baseline of the elopement behavior before any intervention was implemented. Over the five-day period of data tracking, the student eloped a total of seventeen times. The elopement behavior occurred at different times throughout the school day. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the elopement behavior after the first intervention was implemented. The positive behavior intervention that was implemented was earning a small tangible classroom reward for not eloping each day. The rewards earned were a food item of the student's choice each day from the classroom treasure chest. The student was made aware and given a verbal reminder daily that, in order to earn an item from the treasure chest at the end of the day, she had to stay in the classroom and not elope. Data was tracked for nine days during the first intervention period and the student eloped a total of two times

over nine days. Seven out of nine days she earned an item from the classroom treasure chest.

Next, figure 1 shows the result for the frequency of the elopement behavior after intervention one was completed, but before intervention two was implemented. Over the five-day period of data tracking, the student eloped a total of two times. During this time, the student did not receive any interventions. The student, however, would make comments such as she can't walk out because her mother would be mad and she signed that paper stating that she would not walk out.

Finally, figure 1 shows the frequency of the elopement behavior after the second intervention was implemented. The positive behavior intervention that was implemented was positive praise for doing the right thing throughout the day. Data was tracked for nine days during the second intervention period and the student eloped a total of seven times over nine days. Five out of nine days she did not elope at all. Four out of nine days the student eloped sometimes multiple times throughout the day.
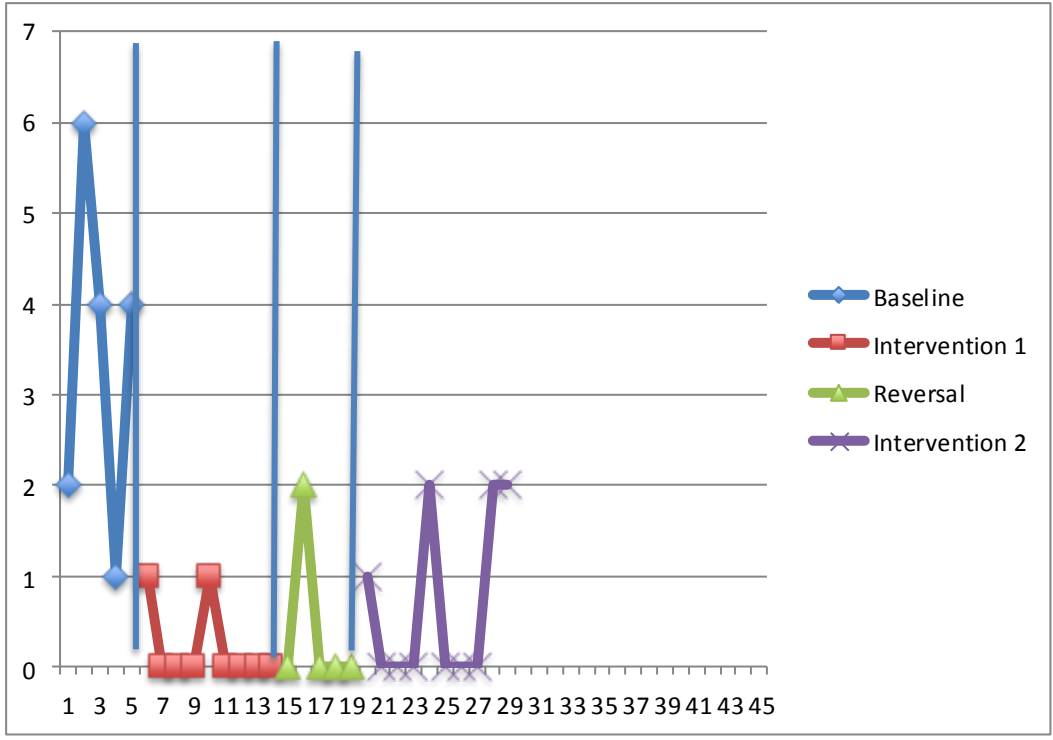
Figure 1. Frequency of elopement during each phase

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study examined ways to reduce or prevent the behavior of elopement by an eleven-year-old female student who is classified with Specific Learning Disability. A single subject model was used and two different positive behavior strategies were implemented at different times to see if student elopement could be reduced or prevented.

The study started with a five-day baseline period. During the baseline period, the student eloped seventeen times. Next, over a nine-day period, the first positive behavior intervention was implemented. The intervention that was implemented was a daily classroom reward. The student was able to choose a reward from the classroom treasure chest if the student did not elope throughout the day. During the first intervention period, the student's elopement rate drastically dropped down to only two elopements total. Then, over the next five days, or reversal phase, there were no interventions in place for the student. During this time, she eloped two times. The student did make comments during this time that she was thinking about leaving the classroom but didn't because she signed the paper saying she wouldn't. However, the student didn't sign a paper saying she wouldn't elope. She signed a paper saying that she would participate in the study. Finally, over the final nine-day period, the second positive behavior intervention was implemented. The intervention that was implemented was positive praise. The student received positive praise throughout the day. During this time, the student didn't elope five out of nine days, but she did elope seven times during four out of nine days.

The positive behavior supports did help to reduce the student's elopement behavior. The positive behavior support of the classroom reward motivated the student to stay in the classroom more than positive praise. While this is true, positive praise did work for the student as well because there was a decrease in her elopement behavior during this intervention.

Previous Research

I implemented two positive behavior supports that previous research deemed to be effective when dealing with student behavior issues. The first positive behavior support that I implemented was a reward system. While reviewing the research on this topic, I read various articles about how reward systems were effective. An article that really stuck out to me came from Thames Elementary School where a reward system was implemented to promote positive student behavior. Student misbehavior dropped significantly after a reward system was implemented because prizes motivated students to behave (Curriculum Review, 2014). The second positive behavior support that I implemented was positive praise. Various articles have found that positive praise can be used to change student behavior. One study was done in a seventh grade classroom. The teacher stopped reprimanding the students when doing the wrong thing; instead, the students were acknowledged and received positive praise when they did the right thing. Student behavior started to go from negative to positive over time because the negative behavior was no longer receiving the attention previously given. Instead, positive behavior was receiving the attention and students were praised for doing the right thing (Hollingshead, et al., 2016).

Limitations and Future Studies

During this study only one student participated. Data was collected on just one individual. In future studies, it would be beneficial to implement the strategies on a large group of students with elopement issues and see if they are effective in reducing student elopement behaviors.

This study was conducted during a twenty-eight-day period. In future studies, it would be beneficial to collect data over a longer period of time to see if the positive behavior supports are effective.

Practical Implications

In this study, the researcher learned that implementing positive behavior supports for a student with elopement issues is an effective way to reduce student elopement. The researcher also learned that having the student and the student's parent involved in addressing the issue was important as well. The student would make comments that she and her mother signed that paper saying she wouldn't walk out. It was observed that, when the student would make these comments to her peers, she didn't walk out even though her peers did.

The student's elopement behavior was reduced when positive behavior strategies were implemented. The strategy of earning a small classroom reward, rather than positive praise, was more effective for this student. It is important to figure out what positive behavior support will motivate the student to stop them from engaging in the behavior you want to change.

If a teacher is dealing with elopement behavior in his or her classroom, this study suggests that addressing the behavior would help. Jamie Johnson's behaviorist suggested ignoring the behavior and that, over time, the student's elopement behavior would become extinct. However, this did not work and is essentially why I chose to do this study. Addressing the behavior with the student worked. First, we talked about it; then, we implemented two different positive behavior supports. This study suggests that positive behavior supports should be implemented when dealing with elopement behavior. The most effective positive behavior support to implement is earning a small tangible daily reward when the student does not engage in elopement behavior throughout the day.

Conclusion

The study sought to develop a way to reduce or prevent the student behavior of walking out of the classroom without permission (elopement). The data collected indicated that implementing positive behavior supports is an effective strategy to reduce student elopement. There are many positive behavior strategies that can be implemented to help decrease a student from engaging in a negative behavior. Is it is important to figure out what positive behavior support will work with the student and to implement it.

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