

THE IMPACT OF THE POSITIVE ACTION PROGRAM ON FOURTH-
GRADE STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT AND BEHAVIOR.

ABSTRACT OF APPLIED PROJECT

An applied project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Education Specialist at Morehead State University

by

Jennifer McCoy

Committee Chair: Dr. Beverly Klecker

Professor of Education

Morehead, Kentucky

2013

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Director of Applied Project: Beverly Klecker

Positive Action Program is a program designed to improved student behaviors by focusing on positive rewards with core content embedding in the lessons. Positive Actions is based on positive reinforcement. The findings from this experiment were the students had a 2-15 point increase in the positive action subtopics.

Accepted by: Beverly Klecker Chair

Lynn Spradlin

Wanda Staley

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Jennifer McCoy, M.A. in Counseling P-12

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Accepted by the graduate faculty of the College of Education,
Morehead State University, in
Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Education Specialist Degree in Counseling

Beverly Klecker

Director of Applied Project

Applied Project Committee:

Beverly Klecker, Chair

Lynn Spradlin

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10/25/2013

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Teachers are faced with discipline problems every day in the classroom. Many of these discipline problems interfere with students' education. Webb (2004) suggested that if students are guided with character education programs and taught what is right early on they will change their social behaviors in future years. Character education programs are geared to help teachers become better classroom managers. Character education is designed to help teachers keep students on task with less interruptions to improve academic success..

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the applied research project is to determine whether or not implementing the character education program called Positive Actions (2007) can cause an increase acceptable behaviors measured through student communications, social interactions, with other students, and self-direction, and can cause an increase student reading and mathematics achievement in fourth-grade school students in a high-poverty Kentucky school district. A quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group was used to examine cause and effect between the Positive Action Program and student behavior.

In this study students were taught character education skills and the program embedded material that goes along with Kentucky's core content. Students

were assessed by the Measures of Academic Progress in Reading and Mathematics (MAP) (Curriculum, 2010) test and the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS) (Western Psychological Services, 2010) test to see if the character education program increased good behaviors and increases MAP scores in Reading and Math as measured by pretest and posttests of both the MAP and ABAS.

Significance of the Study

Kentucky Department of Education (2006) core content embedded in this program may increase academic success on the (MAP). The outcome of this study will determine whether or not the Positive Actions Program (2007) is effective in creating positive behaviors such as decrease in bullying, respect for teachers and classmates and increase academics in the population of students studied in this research project.

Hypotheses

Research Hypotheses 1:

Fourth-grade students who receive the Positive Actions Program will show more improvement in Reading achievement than fourth-grade students who do not receive the Positive Action Program.

Research Hypotheses 2:

Fourth-grade students who receive the Positive Actions Program

will show more improvement in classroom behavior than fourth-grade students who do not receive the Positive Action Program.

Null Hypotheses 1:

There will be no difference in improvements in Reading between fourth-grade students who received the Positive Actions Program and fourth-grade students who do not.

Null Hypotheses 2:

There will be no difference in classroom behavior improvements between fourth-grade students who received the Positive Actions Program and fourth-grade students who do not receive Positive Actions Program.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Character Education

According to Character Education Partnership (2008),

Character education is on the rise in many school districts. Educators are learning that character education can play an important role in the development of students morally and academics. Character education plays central role in helping schools improve students' academic achievement, promote an ethic of excellence, reduce dropouts, and prepare a competent responsible workforce. There have been many studies done to show the contribution of performance character to human development and achievement (p.12).

Character Education Partnership (2008) cited a landmark study of 90,000 middle and high school students and found that students who felt connected to school, as measured by the quality of their relationships with teachers and schoolmates, were more likely to be motivated to learn and have heightened academic aspirations and achievement. According to this research, this character education program has incorporated ways to increase academics and decrease negative behaviors. When a child was interested in learning he or she demonstrated better behaviors in class and when a student behaves appropriately in a classroom they can focus on academics.

The U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2006) presented positive reviews of the Positive Actions Program. The lessons use role-play, games, songs, and worksheets that deal with bullying, drugs, being a good friend, conflict resolution, and with all of these lessons core content is added in through reading comprehension and math building skills. The WWC (2007) evaluated the program, Positive Action as having a moderate to large success for behavior (bullying, drug use, school insentient, and fighting) and for academic achievement. The WWC rated intervention as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness took into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of the difference between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison condition, and the consistency in findings across studies (Positive Action, Revised, 2007).

Positive Action, Revised (2007) cited two studies that had been carried out in 56 elementary schools in Florida and Hawaii. Both studies examined results on students' behavior and academic achievement. One study met WWC (2007) evidence standards, and one study met standards with reservations. Both studies assessed elementary school student outcomes in the behavior and academic achievement domains. When the WWC (2007) aggregated the results in each of these domains, the average effect sizes were statistically significant. So the WWC

(2007) rated the program as having positive effects on both behavior and academic achievement (Positive Action, Revised, 2007).

In recent years the state education departments, parents, and schools have been looking for ways to effectively incorporate character education. Anderson (2000) stated that school systems can allow students to grow with character and morals, but only if educators provide a learning environment that incorporates a common core of character traits such as: respect, responsibility, fairness, and hard work. Some areas that character development target are risky behavior, pro-social competencies, and school-based outcomes. Berkowitz (2005) stated that the following areas of character education had been researched and linked to character education programs:

Sexual Behavior (91%, 10 significant effects, out of 11 tested) 2.Character Knowledge (87%, n=13 out of 15) 3.Socio-moral Cognition (74%, n=82 out of 111) 4.Problem-solving Skills (64%, n=54 out of 84). Emotional Competency (64%, n=31 out of 49) 6.Relationships (62%, 8 out of 13), 7.Attachment to School (61%, n=19 out of 32) 8.Academic Achievement (59%, n=31 out of 52) (p 23).

The U.S Department of Education's What Works in Character Education (2007) was designed to help practitioners be more effective in fostering the development of students' character through the Positive Actions program. Character education, done early appears to put students on a path toward successful

life outcomes. Using character education early on is an approach to primary prevention.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) states that the full measure of a successful school includes educating all students to realize their full potential by helping them to develop their unique talents and abilities, and by inspiring their growth intellectually, ethically, socially, and emotionally. Positive Actions (2006) research suggested that comprehensive, high quality character education is not only effective at promoting the development of good character, but is a promising approach to the prevention of a wide range of contemporary problems. These include aggressive and antisocial behaviors, drug use, precocious sexual activity, criminal activities, academic under-achievement, and school failure. Each of these problems, individually, has been addressed through a variety of approaches, and some of these approaches have been found to be reasonably effective, although many have not.

According to Dovre (2007):

The Positive Action program was created and first implemented in four school sites in Idaho from 1979–81. Positive Action was founded in 1982. Since then, more than 11,000 schools in 2,500 school districts and 2,000 community groups and agencies in all 50 states have adopted the program. The WWC (2006) review of character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and

values; and academic achievement. In the domain of behavior significant differences favoring the intervention groups on students' suspension rates, use of alcohol, being drunk, and use of tobacco and illegal drugs. The study also reported statistically significant differences favoring the intervention group on serious violence among boys but not among girls. The average effect size across all behavior outcomes in this study was statistically significant (p.38).

Williams (2006) stated, that in many schools character education is left up to the guidance counselor. In the counseling profession many counselors strive to aid P-12 youth in developing academic skills and also to assist in the development of values, character, self-directed behavior, generosity, equality and respect.

Summary

Character education has been around for many years. In the last few years more educators and guidance counselors are making character education a part of school curricula. With programs such as Positive Actions (2007) embedding core content in the character education program it makes it easier for teachers to teach character education without going away from school curricula. Most character education programs start at kindergarten and go through high school. In the studies done with students who receive character education at an early age were in less trouble in school, less violent occurs, less teenage pregnancy, and better academic achieve.

Definitions of Terms

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) (2010) stated:

MAP is a test that presents students with engaging, age-appropriate content. As a student responds to questions, the test responds to the student, adjusting up or down in difficulty. The result is a rewarding experience for the student, and a wealth of detailed information for teachers, parents and administrators (p.12).

Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS) is a behavior rating scale that measures daily living skills such as communication, school living, functional academics, health and safety, self care, and self direction (Western Psychological Services, 2010).

Character Education- is a phrase generally used to explain the coaching of children in a approach that will help them create variously as moral, social, good, respectful, served, non-bullying, healthy, significant, effective, conventional, certified and/ or culturally satisfactory creatures (Education Korner, 2009).

Positive Action Program- is a program that teaches students' positive behaviors and how to deal with everyday situations (Positive Actions, 2006).

Core Content (2006)- as stated by the Kentucky Department of Education, the four principal academic subject areas that constitute a student's fundamental education: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Hypotheses:

Research Hypotheses 1:

Fourth-grade students who receive the Positive Actions Program will show more improvement in Reading achievement than fourth-grade students who do not receive the Positive Action Program.

Research Hypotheses 2:

Fourth-grade students who receive the Positive Actions Program show more improvement in classroom behavior than fourth-grade students who do not receive the Positive Action Program.

Null Hypotheses 1:

There will be no difference in improvements in Reading between fourth- grade students who received the Positive Actions Program and fourth-grade students who do not.

Null Hypotheses 2:

There will be no difference in classroom behavior between fourth-grade students who received the Positive Actions Program and fourth-grade students who do not receive Positive Actions Program.

Chapter 4

Results

Type of Research Study:

This is a quasi-experimental research study. Colorado State University (2006) defined quasi-research as: A quasi-experimenter treats a given situation as an experiment even though it is not wholly by design. The researcher may not manipulate the independent variable, treatment and control groups may not be randomized or matched, or there may be no control group. The researcher is limited in what he or she can say conclusively. The significant element of both experiments and quasi-experiments is the measure of the dependent variable, which it allows for comparison. Some data is quite straightforward, but other measures, such as level of self-confidence in writing ability, increase in creativity or in reading comprehension are inescapably subjective. In such cases, quasi-experimentation often involves a number of strategies to compare subjectivity, such as rating data, testing, surveying, and content analysis (p.58).

Randomly selected students in the fourth-grade took a pre-test (MAP and ABAS) then after the Positive Actions Program was taught they received a post-test (MAP and ABAS). Randomly selected students in the fourth-grade who had not been exposed to the Positive Action program took the same pre and post-test and then after the experiment time period data was collected from each group and were

described and statistically analyzed. A decision was made about the Null Hypothesis based on statistical analyses.

Informed Consent:

Informed consent was obtained from Mr. Mike Cassidy, principal at Inez Elementary. Informed consent was sent home to parents (see Appendix). The informed consent stated that parents would either give permission to collect data on their child or that they did not want their child to be in the study. In the informed consent the researcher informed parents if they signed the permission form for their child to participate in the study that all information would be confidential and all data would only be used in my research study and information would only be shared with my Education Specialist Committee at Morehead State University and possible for publication.

Population and Sampling:

The participants for this study were purposively selected from the population of fourth-grade students at Inez Elementary School. Total participants for this study were 10 fourth-grade students who were randomly assigned to receive the program. These 10 fourth-grade students comprised the experimental group. Ten fourth-grade students were randomly assigned to the control group. The control group did not receive treatment.

Instrumentation:

The instrument that was used in this test was the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) test for achievement and Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS) for behavior. The MAP and ABAS was given before the Positive Actions material was presented and then the MAP and ABAS was given after the Positive Actions program was completed. Harrison & Oakland (2003) stated the following for the ABAS test:

Reliability and Validity: The ABAS-II manual provides extensive reliability and validity data that are impressive in both scope and quality. Estimates of reliability are provided for internal consistency, test-retest, and cross-form consistency. Coefficients are provided according to the different forms and for each age grouping. Further, estimates were also provided for levels of performance such as average and below average. Generally speaking, coefficients for the GAC exceeded .90, except for children less than 1 year old, and the domain scores were also near, at, or exceeded .90. Thus, those scores can be used with confidence. Some variance in coefficients occurred for the individual skill areas, which implied that interpretation of those scores should be done cautiously. Interrater reliability estimates were lower, but generally exceeded .80, and cross-responder coefficients generally exceeded .70. Although

these scores are lower than desired standards, they still considerably exceed similar estimates with other scales (p.16).

Cizek, (2005) in a review of the MAP test stated:

Reliability. Three types of reliability evidence are reported. A procedure called marginal reliability (Samejima, 1994) yielded reliability estimates for total scores ranging from .92 to .96 across Grades 2-10 in each subject area. Data for these reliability estimates are based on the varying numbers of students across the grade levels (ranging from approximately 1,600 at 10th grade to approximately 40,000 at 5th grade) and were collected as part of the 1999 MAP norming study. Test-retest reliabilities are also reported based on data collection from 2002. Because the time points for data collection were fall-to-spring or spring-to-spring, the design essentially compared pre- and post instruction scores. Across all grades and subjects, stability estimates were never lower than .77 (Grade 2 Mathematics) and were as high as .94 (Grade 7 Mathematics) and generally increased across the grades. Finally, conditional standard errors of measurement (CSEMs) are reported in RIT units; the CSEMs are generally small across most of the effective range of the RIT scale. Overall, it would appear that users could count on MAP scores to be quite reliable. Validity evidence

for MAP score interpretations comes from two primary sources. First, the comprehensive test development and administration procedures and documentation support conclusions that MAP scores differentiate between students' levels of ability in tested subjects. Although lacking details about the specific content standards, curricula, or alignment processes used, the MAP technical manual indicates that 'the manner in which the goals and objectives for each test are developed promotes a high degree of alignment between the curriculum and the test content' (NWEA, 2005a, p. 52). Indeed, because the content of MAP tests results from extensive input on the part of users, it is likely that customized MAP test specifications reflect the curricular goals and objectives of the districts involved and, thus, enhances validity vis those outcomes (p.15).

Procedure:

The researcher obtained permission from the school administrator and all parents/guardians of the fourth grade students. Permission was obtained by informed consent (see Appendix). All students received a pre-test Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS). They completed the test before any material was presented. The presenter gave students handouts and other materials daily and taught a lesson for fifteen minutes a day or seventy-five minutes weekly. Student's listened to the lessons, sang songs,

went over posters for each lesson, role-played, completed worksheets, and then participated in class discussions. At the end of the program students took the same Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS) test.

Each day followed the same pattern with different materials. First five minutes students sang positive songs and discuss how they can take bad situations and make them positive. The next five minutes students went over positive actions posters that have saying that show students how to have good character. Students had time to ask questions and had an open discussion forum on character topics. The next five minutes students were given worksheets that had situations that they had to choose the right response. Each day covered different material on different character topics such as honestly, good citizenship, positive behaviors, being a good friend, and within each topic students are learning basic skills that they need every day in reading and math.

Assumptions:

This study investigated the Positive Actions Program (2007) to see whether or not it would increase positive behavior and academic success. Many students at Inez Elementary receive free or reduced lunch and receive special education service through 504 plans. Conducting this study in a school that is considered a poverty school by the state, meaning that 85% or more of the students receive free lunch, could affect the study by means of student progress.

Limitations of Study:

The limitations of the study were that the programs were designed to be used for one year. The data were limited to one school semester. Some parents did not sign permission for their child to participate. The study was done in one school in the district.

Data Analysis:

All students completed a pre-test and a post-test. All students took the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test and the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS) test.

Experimental and Control Group Pretest and Posttest Testing Procedures

The Experimental Group was given the Positive Actions Program for eight weeks and The Control Group did not receive the Positive Actions Program but they took the Measures of Academic Progress test (MAP) and Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS). All students (experimental and control group) took the MAP test September 9, 2012. All students (experimental and control group) took the ABAS test September 11, 2012. All students retook the MAP test again November 10, 2012 and ABAS test November 12, 2012. Scores were collected for Reading and Math from the MAP test and scores were collected from the ten categories from the ABAS test.

Chapter 5

Results

Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics for the Experimental Group and the Control Group for the Adaptive Behavior Assessment (ABAS) Pretest scores

Table 1 ABAS Pretest Scores for Experimental Group and Control Group

	Experimental Group (N=10)		Control Group (N=10)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Communication	54.5	1.7	56.7	2.7
Social	55.6	2.1	59.3	3.1
Self-direction	45.5	2.3	57.8	2.5

On the Communication subscale, the pretest mean for the Experimental Group was lower (M=54.5) than the pretest mean for the Control Group (M=56.7). On the Social subscale, the pretest mean for the Experimental Group was lower (M=55.6) than the pretest mean for the Control Group (59.3). On the Self-direction subscale, the pretest mean for the Experimental Group (M=45.5) was lower than the mean for the Control Group (M=57.8).

Table 2 below presents the results of the ABAS posttest for the Experimental Group and the Control Group.

Table 2 ABAS Posttest Scores for the Experimental Group and Control Group

	Experimental Group (N=10)		Control Group (N=10)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Communication	56.7	2.7	60.2	2.9
Social	58.3	2.2	59.9	3.0
Self-direction	59.3	3.2	54.5	3.1

On the Communication subscale, the posttest mean for the Experimental Group was lower (M=56.7) than the mean for the Control Group (M=60.2). On the Social subscale, the posttest mean for the Experimental Group was lower (M=58.3) than the mean for the Control Group (59.9). On the Self-direction subscale, the posttest mean for the Experimental Group (M=59.3) was lower than the mean for the Control Group (M=54.5).

Table 3 below presents the change scores (differences between Pretest and Posttest scores for the Experimental Group and the Control Group.

Table 3 ABAS Change Scores for the Experimental Group and Control Group

Change	Experimental Group (N=10)			Control Group (N=10)	
	Pretest	Posttest	Change	Pretest	Posttest
	Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean
Communication	54.5	56.7	2.2	56.7	60.2
Social	55.6	59.3	3.7	58.3	59.9
Self-direction	45.5	57.8	12.3	59.3	54.5

Experiment group had a +2.2 increase in communication skills and control group had a +3.5 increase. In social skills the experiment group had a +3.7 increase and the control group had a + 1.6 increase. In self-direction the experimental group had a +12.3 increase and the control group had a +4.8 increase.

Table 4 Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Pretest Scores for Experimental and Control Group

	Experimental Group (N=10)		Control Group (N=10)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Reading	199.4	3.9	197.1	6.3

The control and experimental group took the Measures of Academic Progress test at the beginning of the school year. The results were a mean of 201.2. Students' scores were average for students around the United States being in the fourth grade.

Table 5 Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Post-test

	Experimental		Control	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Reading	201.2	3.0	206.8	3.9

After taking the Measures of Academic Progress the results show that the Positive Actions program did not improve reading scores. Student's scores were slightly higher in the experimental group and control group. The control group's scores

increased 9.7 points and the experimental groups scored increased 1.8. The control group has more of an increase than the experimental group.

Measures of Academic Progress have a subscale of below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. Students who score in the range of 195 or below are below grade level by 1 grade or below, students who score 196-206 are at grade level and students who score 207 or above are above grade level.

Findings from research the experimental group that received the Positive Action program had a 20 point increase from pre to post test in communication skills, 18 point increase in social skills, and a 2-point increase in self direction. The control group had an 8-point increase in communication, 2-point increase in social skills, and a 1-point increase in self-direction. Finding from the MAP test, the experimental group had an 18 point increase from pre to post test and the control group had a 13 point increase from pre and post test. Even though both groups had an increase in each area the experimental group increase almost doubled the control group in all areas of the ABAS form. In the communication part of the ABAS test the experimental groups pre-test students had a mean of 54.5, mode 60, median 54, and a standard deviation of 1.7, social mean 55.6, mode 62, median 55 and standard deviation 2.1, self-direction mean 45.5, mode 55, median, 2.3. On the post-test the experimental groups post-test in communication had a mean of 56.7, mode 64, median 56, and a standard deviation of 2.7, social mean 58.3, mode 60, median 55,

standard deviation 2.2, self direction mean 59.3, mode 62, median 53, standard deviation 3.2. The control groups pre-test from ABAS from communication, mean 56.7, mode 56, median 56, standard deviation 2.7, social mean 59.3, mode 68, median 59, standard deviation 3.1, self direction mean, 57.8, mode 66, median 52, standard deviation 2.5. The control groups post-test from ABAS communication, mean 60.2, mode 61, median 54, standard deviation 2.7, social mean 59.9, mode 59, median 58, standard deviation 3.0, self direction, mean 54.5, mode 52, median 58, standard deviation 3.1. The experimental groups pre-test from MAP test students mean was 201.2, mode 216, median 203 and standard deviation 6.1. Post-test the experimental groups from MAP test, mean 199.4, mode 202, median 199 and standard deviation 3.0. Pre-test from MAP the control groups mean 206.8, median 205, mode 220 and standard deviation is 3.9. The control groups post-test from MAP, mean 197.1, mode 189, median 205, and standard deviation 6.3.

Discussion:

When using the Positive Actions Program for achievement the program did not show any difference in achievement for the experimental and control group. The experimental and control group showed an increase on the MAP test. When using the Positive Actions Program the experimental group showed an increase on the three areas of the ABAS form. The control group showed mental increase in all ten areas. The experimental group had an overall increase and the control group had an overall increase on the ABAS.

Recommendations:

Based on the results of this study, I would recommend the Positive Actions Program for behavior but I would not recommend it for achievement. The results did not show enough increase in achievement to recommend this program for achievement. I would recommend this program for behavior purposes. There was an improvement in all areas of the ABAS form after eight weeks of the Positive Actions Program.

Timeline:

March-May 2012: Write Applied Project Proposal

August 2012: Select Committee

August: Submit Applied Project Proposal to Committee for feedback.

August 2012: Meet with Applied Project Committee at Morehead State University

August 2012: Submit Applied Project Proposal to Morehead State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

August 2012: After IRB approval, obtain approval from school administrator and parents/guardians of students.

September 2012: Begin study following procedure.

December 2012: End study and perform data analysis.

June 2013: Submit completed Applied project to Committee members for approval.

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Appendix

Dear Parents,

I am working on my Education Specialist Degree in Guidance Counseling through Morehead State University. I will be putting together a research project working with fourth grade students at Inez Elementary for the next few months. The information that I will be gathering from your child will be through surveys, pre and post-test and classroom activities. Your child's information will not be shared with anyone except my Education Specialist Committee at Morehead State University. This project will not affect your child's grades in anyway. The information will only be used to gather information on my project and carry out a research project to complete my Education Specialist Degree.

Thank You,

Mrs. McCoy

I give you permission to collect data on my child for your research project.

X_____

I do not give you permission to collect data on my child for your research project.

X_____

I give Mrs. McCoy permission to carry out a research project for her Education Specialist Degree.

X_____