

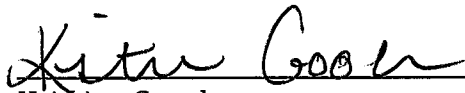
Positive and Negative Reinforcement Related to Student Behavior in a Classroom
Setting

Senior Project

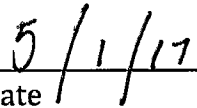
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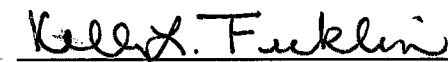
By

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March 29, 2017




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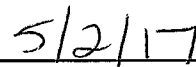


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Abstract

Classroom management is one of the greatest obstacles for educators. There are many theories and state mandates about the proper way a teacher should handle student misbehavior. The most common forms of classroom management are assertive discipline and cooperative discipline. Assertive discipline is the most commonly used management style in the United States, but it is unknown if it is the most effective. This study will compare and contrast assertive and cooperative discipline through literary research and through observations in a second grade classroom. This research focuses on three sample students with various levels of behavioral issues ranging from mild, moderate and severe. Students were observed and recorded using an assertive discipline approach for 1 week and a cooperative discipline approach for 1 week.

Positive and Negative Reinforcement Related to Student Behavior in a Classroom Setting

Introduction

Classroom management is among the most challenging parts of teaching for educators, especially for beginning teachers (Gordon, 2001). Subsequently, disruptive behavior is a primary reason teachers leave the profession (Thangarajathi & Joel, 2010). In addition to classroom management, a teacher is responsible for classroom setting and decorations, classroom arrangement, responses to students, developing rules, and communicating those rules (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). Although Thangarajathi and Joel found “sound behavior management” does not guarantee effective instruction, it provides the layout for productive teaching (Thangarajathi & Joel, 2010 p. 11).

There are different levels of student misbehavior. The first level is a minor disturbance. Minor disturbances include holding hands, playing with classroom equipment, and gum chewing. The second level includes more difficult problems or moderate behaviors such as tattling, talking, crying and inappropriate touching. The third category is considered very difficult problems and includes crude language, obscene gestures, extremely disruptive behaviors, complete lack of participation, and sexually explicit comments. The most difficult category involves physical violence and weapons (Gordon, 2001). These problems are also subcategorized into aggressive behavior, dependent behavior, or academic behavior. Aggressive behavior consists of physical actions. For example, if one student pushes another student, or if a student gets frustrated and throws their homework across the room. Dependent behavior includes distractions (eg., loud gum chewing), inattentiveness

or crying. If a student does not turn in a homework assignment or fails to work on classwork, it is an example of academic misbehavior (Smith 1978).

Because there are multiple types of classroom behaviors, there are many ways to react to the situation. Many educators will not challenge certain behaviors because they tend to not be egregious. Other teachers may also feel they are to blame for the bad behavior, therefore are hesitant to deal with disruptions. Some researchers suggest that in almost all cases, there should be a teacher reaction. In other words, never ignore the bad behavior. The longer the bad behavior is ignored, the longer it will continue and it will be harder to stop in the future (Thangarajathi & Joel, 2010). Research has shown there are specific solutions to classroom behavior problems. Gordon suggests that level one behaviors can be solved with physical proximity to the student.

The teacher must move toward the student, make eye contact and intervene quickly. This way the class flow is not interrupted for minor disturbances but the problem is still handled. Level 2 problems can be solved with physical proximity, short admonitions, diverting positive attention to other students, encouraging students to express discomfort, or pointing out inappropriate behavior accordingly (Gordon, 2001). Level 3 disturbances could be solved with confronting students directly, moving students, quick interventions, and directing students to think about their actions. Students who are fighting or carrying a weapon should be removed from the classroom immediately to ensure the safety of other students. A school administrator should be notified, as well as the school counselor (Gordon, 2001). There are basic management strategies used by teachers, but styles of discipline are

separated into two distinct categories: assertive discipline and cooperative discipline.

Assertive Discipline

The assertive discipline style, created by Lee and Marlene Cantor in 1976, is the most commonly used form of discipline in the United States. Assertive discipline places the teacher in a take-charge, authority role. Daily procedures are teacher oriented and the teacher creates all rules. As a result, the teacher chooses negative consequences, punishments, positive consequences, and rewards. Lee Cantor explains assertive teachers' need to establish clear rules for the classroom, communicate those rules to the students, and then teach the students how to follow them (Cantor, 1989). Cantor believes positive reinforcement should be used at least once a day. In addition, firm and consistent negative consequences should occur after a student “chooses” to break the rules.

Cantor explains there should be a systematic, clear discipline plan in place for students. The teacher should explain these rules to the students at the beginning of the year and be consistent while implementing those rules. Cantor argues that without a discipline plan teachers are inconsistent and ineffective (Cantor, 1989).

Cantor argues that his discipline style has been interpreted differently than intended. For example, many educators believe after every misbehavior there should be a negative consequence (check marks, name on the board, etc.). However Cantor asserts that negative reinforcement should be used as a last resort (Cantor, 1989). However, Cantor suggests teachers have a pre-made list of five consequences for student misbehavior. For example, Cantor suggests the first time a

student breaks the rules “the student is warned”, the second time “ten minute time-out”, the third time “15 minute time out”, the fourth time “the parent is called” and the fifth time “the student goes to the principal office” (Cantor, 1989 p. 59). Cantor believes the discipline should be age appropriate and never degrading or physical. Cantor originally suggested writing names on the board, but after parent disapproval or “misinterpretation” he claims it is not a necessary part of his discipline system. Cantor feels parents and teachers have misconstrued assertive discipline. Cantor believes the assertive discipline model is effective based on research but opponents of assertive discipline claim there is no evidence of the effectiveness of the approach (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989). In 1989, 500,000 teachers were trained in assertive discipline. In the fourteen years since it was created until 1989, only 16 studies were conducted on assertive discipline. Out of those studies, none investigated the effectiveness of the model against any other discipline style. Therefore, Render, Padilla, and Krank found the research was unsophisticated and limited (Render et al, 1989). They argue they can “find no evidence that assertive discipline is an effective approach deserving school wide or district wide adoption” (Render et al, 1989 p. 75).

Parents, educators, and researchers scrutinized Cantor’s plan; therefore, he redefines assertive discipline. He explains that in order to have well behaved students, teachers must teach specific classroom behaviors. Students are not expected to know how to act without specific direction beforehand. Second, teachers must use “positive repetition” to ensure students follow directions. Teachers should focus on positive behaviors instead of negative ones. Third, if a

student constantly misbehaves then the teacher should use the pre-stated negative consequences (Cantor, 1989). Cantor writes he wishes teachers did not need to use negative consequences but finds it necessary because not all students come to school motivated to learn.

Cooperative Discipline

Cooperative discipline is also called person-centered management. Dr. Carl Rogers is credited with creating the concept in 1969 with his book *Freedom to Learn*. The third edition of the book was written in 1994 and co-authored by Jerome Freiberg. Cooperative discipline focuses on the wants of the teacher and the needs of the student (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009). The cooperative model allows the class to work together to accomplish the same goals. Person-centered management focuses on the individual by building trust and shared responsibility for behavior. Person-centered management has four pro-social dimensions: social-emotional, school connections, safety, and self-discipline.

A teacher must care for students' emotional and social needs. Freiberg claims teaching is about building relationships. A successful relationship will positively affect students' academic, social, and emotional lives. Freiberg claims, "person-centered teachers extend their roles to become encouragers, facilitators, and connectors of learning" (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009 p. 102). Second, person-centered management focuses on school connections. The teachers should ensure their students feel a sense of belonging in their school, classroom, and peer group. Shared responsibility, whether it is classroom duties or shared leadership, helps students feel a sense of belonging and importance. Third, the teacher should ensure their

students feel safe in the school and classroom. The teacher should emphasize the importance of a positive classroom environment. For example, bullying and teasing should not be tolerated. Freiburg and Lamb claim, "When students feel safe, they are more apt to demonstrate creativity, intellectual curiosity, and higher-level thinking" (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009 p. 103). Lastly, the teacher should promote self-discipline. Students will learn responsibility through selected consequences. Freiburg and Lamb argue that the assertive discipline approach (names on the board, checks, etc.) punishes the behavior, but doesn't offer the student any time to reflect on their behavior. Through reflection, students learn to be responsible and think about how their actions affect themselves and others. Students will learn time management as well as goal setting skills (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009).

Friedberg defines self-discipline as "knowledge about yourself and the ability to determine the appropriate actions needed to grow and develop as a person, without someone monitoring you" (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009 p. 100). Ronald Abrell, a professor and former classroom teacher, claims self-discipline is fundamental in the success for a classroom teacher. The teacher must emphasize the importance of discipline and support the students in achieving self-discipline (Abrell, 1976). Abrell argues the cooperative model is more effective than the assertive discipline approach. He states punitive measures often produce "undesirable" results in students. Assertive discipline places the teacher in the authority role while person centered-management allows students to take control of their own behavior. Subsequently, Abrell finds the cooperative model more appealing.

There are concrete differences and similarities between the assertive and cooperative discipline models. For example, both plans suggest offering positive reinforcement for expected behavior, although cooperative discipline tends to emphasize this more frequently. Both models suggest using a set of structured rules with set expectations. The teacher creates the assertive discipline model's rules and the class as a whole creates the cooperative discipline model's rules. Both models expect students to follow the rules and maintain a respectful classroom environment (Cantor, 1989).

However, the teacher is the head authority in an assertive discipline model while the leadership is shared in a cooperative discipline approach. Also, the teacher has a few classroom helpers in an assertive classroom, but leadership is open to every student in a cooperative classroom. Discipline comes from the teacher in an assertive classroom but a cooperative classroom focuses on self-discipline. In addition, most rewards in an assertive system are extrinsic while rewards in a person-centered classroom are intrinsic (Freiburg & Lamb, 2009).

Assertive discipline uses a misbehavior approach, which focuses on the teacher maintaining control of the educational environment. The teacher controls the students' behavior by positive or negative reinforcement. Successful punishment strategies include time-outs, fines, and removal of privileges. Successful rewards are token systems, free days, and special privileges (Erbes, 1986). The cooperative discipline plan is a humanistic and social/democratic approach. A humanistic approach focuses on individual student differences and emotions. It relies on classroom communication, harmony, and group problem solving. The teacher must

look deeper into student misbehavior and find the root of the problem (frustration, insecurity, etc.). The cooperative model also uses parts of a social/ democratic approach. The social/democratic approach recognizes a student needs to feel important in the classroom and amongst their peers. The cooperative model gives students responsibility and jobs in order to fill these needs (Erbes, 1986).

School Background

This research was conducted in a school system under the state mandated Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) management system. PBIS aims to solve classroom management issues with preventative and responsive approaches to student misconduct. The strategies used in PBIS strive to eliminate classroom disruptions, increase instructional time, and improve student outcomes. There are three tiers in the PBIS management system (Positive Behavioral Intervention, n.d.).

Tier one is universal and aims to prevent new problems by implementing a high quality-learning environment for students. The teacher should create engaging and worthwhile lessons that keep every student interested. By creating an active and engaging atmosphere mild behavior problems will occur less frequently. Tier two is a targeted approach, which focuses on students with recurring problem behaviors who are not responding to tier one intervention. These students need focused and frequent interventions in small group settings. Tier three is intensive intervention. This tier focuses on students who continue to exhibit problem behavior and have not responded to tier 1 or tier two interventions. At this tier intervention is individual and targets the individual's needs and reasons for misbehavior (Positive Behavioral Intervention, n.d.).

PBIS encourages positive reinforcement and reward systems for good behavior. However there should also be clear consequences for bad behavior. For example, a phone calls home, an office slip, or no reward (Positive Behavioral Intervention, n.d.). In one way, PBIS combines the two approaches. PBIS recognizes the importance of positive reinforcement, but also enforces consequences for misbehavior. However, PBIS uses cooperative learning strategies during intervention. The teacher, student, and parents work together to solve students' misbehavior and try to solve these problems with self-discipline techniques.

Classroom Research

The research was conducted in a second grade classroom. There are 10 boys and 8 girls in the class. Out of the 18 students, 15 students are Native American, 2 students are Hispanic, and 1 student is African American.

Three students were observed for this research. The students are labeled Student A, Student B, and Student C, based on the severity of the behavior issue. I recorded the number of each student's behavior incidents under the regular PBIS management system to obtain a daily average in order to rank the students into one of the three behavior categories. A behavior issue is any unnecessary distractions such as getting out of seat repeatedly, constant talking, interrupting teacher and students, upsetting other students, intentional refusal to complete classroom work, or physical harm to himself or others. Student A shows mild behavior problems. A mild behavior problem means the student shows low-level behavior problems per (1-6 incidents per week). Student B shows moderate behavior problems which means this student shows more severity in her behavior and acts out more

frequently (7-15 incidents per week). Student C has severe behavioral problems. This means this student shows even more severity in his behavior problems and acts out even more frequently (10-20 incidents per week). These students were observed and recorded for two consecutive weeks. The students' behavior was recorded and the teacher modifications were noted. If the child continued to repeat the same behavior or acted out differently, that behavior was also recorded. An assertive discipline model was applied for one week of observation and a cooperative discipline model was applied for one week of observation. Data was recorded on a spreadsheet and formatted into a table and bar graph. The purpose of the study is to compare which discipline model the students reacted to more positively.

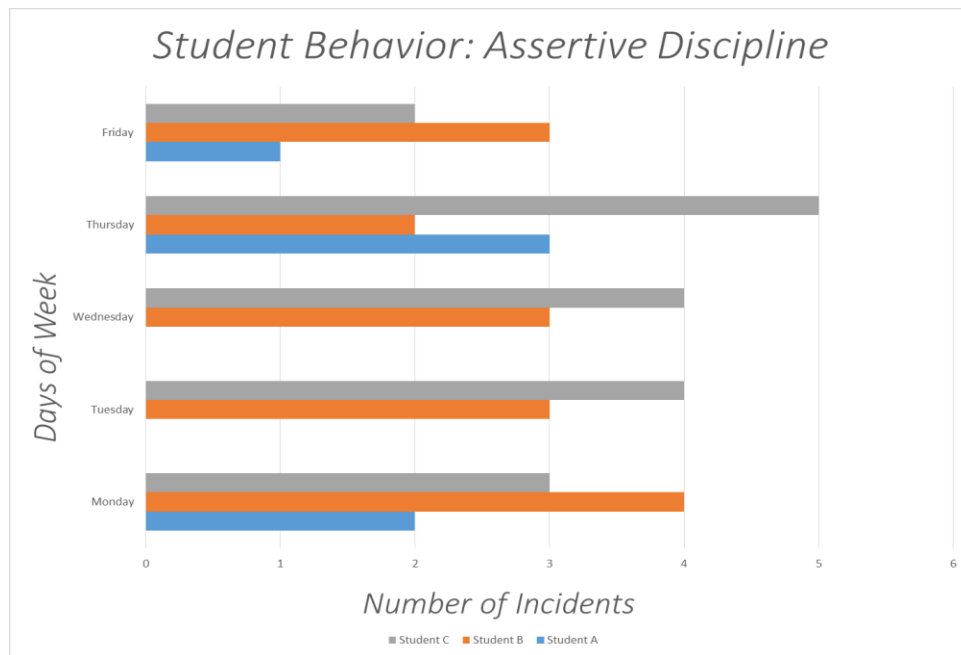
While I implemented assertive discipline I modified my behavior to reflect the current definition created by Lee Cantor. I was the sole authority in the classroom. I implemented an immediate, fair consequence for bad behavior. I established clear expectations and rules. I communicated with parents. I stayed constant and persistent while I responded to inappropriate behavior. I followed through on everything said, and I communicated my disapproval followed by a statement of what I wanted the student to do. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the number of misbehaviors the students committed each day.

Table 1

Student Behavior: Assertive Discipline

	Student A	Student B	Student C
Monday	2	4	3
Tuesday	0	3	4
Wednesday	0	3	4
Thursday	3	2	5
Friday	1	3	2
Total	6	15	18

Figure 1



During the cooperative model week, I set up an inviting learning environment. The students and I worked together and solved discipline problems. I promoted self-discipline in the students. I fostered an “I can belief” and I encouraged student participation. I stated class activities are important and I provided steps for sharing power with the students (assigning class jobs, creating learning group

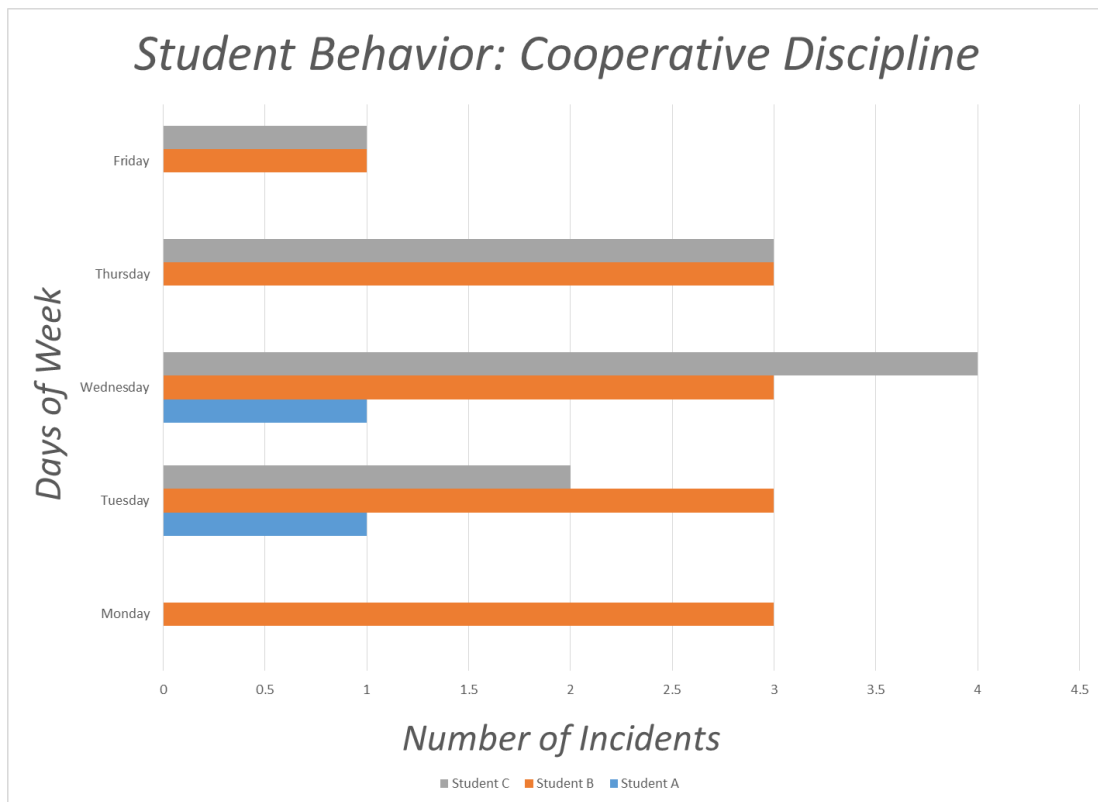
leaders). I immediately rewarded positive behavior (bee bucks) while I tended to ignore bad behavior. Table 2 and Figure 2 show the number of misbehaviors the students committed each day.

Table 2

Student Behavior: Cooperative Discipline

	Student A	Student B	Student C
Monday	0	3	0
Tuesday	1	3	2
Wednesday	1	3	4
Thursday	0	3	3
Friday	0	1	1
Total	2	13	10

Figure 2



Student A reacted positively to cooperative discipline and negatively to assertive discipline at a ratio of 6:2 incidents. Student B reacted positively to cooperative discipline but at a much smaller ratio of 13:15 incidents. Student C reacted positively to cooperative discipline by a ratio of 10:18 incidents. Even though the sample size and time frame was small this study concluded cooperative discipline is more effective in stopping some behavioral problems. Over the course of time, the number of incidents should lower more dramatically.

Based on research and classroom observations it can be concurred that cooperative discipline, when implemented correctly, can be more successful than assertive discipline in deterring problem behavior in students. It could be argued students reacted well to cooperative discipline because they are accustomed to PBIS. However, based on firsthand experience and recorded data, cooperative discipline showed to be more effective than assertive discipline for this particular second grade classroom.

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