




SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Teacher behavioral classroom management strategies and disruptive behavior in the classroom: An observation study of elementary classrooms

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Serious and persistent disruptive behaviors in schools are associated with problems in socialization, school adjustment, and vocational adaptation into adulthood. Children who exhibit disruptive behavior during the early school years are also at significant risk for later antisocial behavior. Disruptive classroom behaviors also create problems for teachers' effectiveness, student learning, and classroom functioning as a whole. Fortunately, there are effective methods for managing disruptive behavior in classroom settings. Behavioral classroom management strategies have been long established as an effective model for producing behavior change and preventing the development of maladaptive behavior.

We sought to examine the relationships between elementary students' disruptive classroom behaviors and teachers' use of behavioral management strategies to manage and respond to those behaviors through classroom observations of 198 elementary school teachers in 14 urban, high-risk schools over 2 years involved in a randomized evaluation of a comprehensive behavior management program.

Very low correlations (between .01 and .08) were noted between teachers' reports on their use and effectiveness of strategies and observed teacher use of strategies. Classrooms averaged approximately 1.5 disruptive behaviors per minute during the observation period – a surprisingly high rate of disruptive behavior. Of these, 67.55% occurred within view of teachers, indicating that the majority of behaviors were overtly perpetrated, where teachers were able to intervene and respond. Teachers' responses to observed rule violations indicated that on average, teachers used appropriate strategies 94.29% of the time, indicating that harsh, demeaning or belittling responses were very infrequent. However, the range for this variable was wide, with some teachers using appropriate acknowledgment as much as 100% of the time, while others as infrequently as 5%. Predictors of classroom disruption included school size, lower school achievement, more frequent use of teacher commands, and lower rates of teachers' use of appropriate (versus harsh) discipline strategies. Analyses examining time over the course of the year documented significant increases in rates of disruptive behavior over the course of the academic year, with peaks in the start of the winter semester. Findings highlight opportunities for improving classroom management approaches and strategies for elementary school teachers.

The results have important implications for the implementation and improvement of school-based prevention approaches in high-risk, elementary school settings.