Using Teacher-Written Praise Notes to Decrease Tardiness in Elementary School Students

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Original Publication Citation
Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, HI. (January 211)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Caldarella, Paul; Christensen, Lynnette; and Young, K. Richard, "Using Teacher-Written Praise Notes to Decrease Tardiness in Elementary School Students" (2011). Faculty Publications. 16.  
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/16

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Introduction
- Principals and teachers consider student tardiness to be a serious issue.
- Especially challenging with elementary children often dependent on an adult to get to school on time.
- Frustration that late students disrupt instruction and require re-teaching.
- Tardiness is widespread and associated with:
  - Lower academic achievement
  - Use of drugs/alcohol in secondary school
  - Employment difficulties later in life
- School policies often punitive, but ineffective.
- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) interventions may help.
- Teacher praise is a positive strategy shown to be effective for problem behavior.

Method
Setting
- Urban K-6 elementary school
  - 646 students: 80% Caucasian, 25% low SES, 18% mobility, 9% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 5% Other

Participants
- Each teacher selected a student exhibiting moderate to severe tardiness

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Mobility</th>
<th>Tardy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design
- Multiple baseline across students

Purpose
To evaluate the effect of teacher written praise notes on elementary school student on-time behavior.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severe Tardy Students</th>
<th>Moderate Tardy Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independent Variable
- Principal letter to parents
- Teachers wrote praise notes for students arriving on time

Dependent Variable
- Number of minutes late per week

Recommendations
- Important to select students who show a pattern of being late over several recent weeks.
- Reasons for tardiness and whether this would be an appropriate intervention should be discussed.
- To be implemented effectively, praise notes should:
  - Include specific statements about being on time
  - Be written consistently
  - Be used with reminders or reinforcers to help teachers be more consistent
- Other interventions (e.g., punishment) should be removed to decide if notes cause improvement.
- More research is needed in elementary schools.

*This study will soon be published in the journal Intervention in School and Clinic.*