Running head: LOWERING THE FREQUENCY AND SEVERITY OF DISTRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS IN A HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Lowering the Frequency and Severity of Disruptive Behaviors in a High School Classroom

Teresa J. Drawdy

University of Phoenix

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Chapter I: Introduction

*Problem Statement*

The problem is that many students in a high school classroom with a history of low school performance, high absenteeism, and low standardized test scores are disruptive in the class.

*Purpose*

The purpose of this study is to determine if proactive measures such as relating the concepts to real life situations, incorporating peer tutoring, and inquiry-based lessons will lessen the frequency, duration, and severity of disruptions in the class over the course of a semester.

*Description of the Community*

Kelsey Unified School is located in Northwestern Valley in the city of Kelsey. Kelsey was incorporated in 1932, though a community has been located there since at least 1901. The community has grown from 901 residents in the first census in 1901 to 53,000 in 2005 (City Profile, 2008). The population growth has been slow throughout its history except during the decade of 1970-1980 when the population jumped 56%. This small city’s economy is based upon agriculture. The members of the city have a history of being self-sufficient people.

The district has a student population of about 3,250 and is comprised of one elementary, middle, and high school (Kelsey Unified School District, 2008). The high school, which is the focus of this study, has a student population of 2000.

The school district is focused on academic excellence for all students. Their mission statement summarized their stance as follows. “The Kelsey Unified School District is committed to working in partnership with the community to provide broad, comprehensive opportunities and a superior quality academic curriculum, individualized to allow students to realize their highest potential and gain a lifelong love for learning” (Kelsey Unified School District, 2008). They are committed to excellence in the core subjects of reading, language, and mathematics (Kelsey Unified School District, 2008). They believe students will have a better life through service (Kelsey Unified School District, 2008).

*Description of Work Setting*

The current study was conducted in Kelsey High School. Twenty-five students in one 9th grade classroom were the participants. The district in which Kelsey High school is located educates approximately 3,250 students with approximately 2000 of those students being in the high school (Kelsey High School, 2008). The classroom is comprised of 13 male students and 13 female students. The control data was data collected from this same class over the previous semester. The teacher was the researcher and implemented several proactive measures in addition to current classroom management strategies. The results were analyzed to determine if the severity, duration, and frequency of classroom disruptions had lessened.

*Writer’s Role*

The role of the writer at Kelsey High school is that of the Algebra teacher for 9th grade students. The writer is responsible for teaching Algebra and other state standards in mathematics. The writer holds a Bachelor’s of Science in Secondary Education with emphases in Mathematics and Science. She has New York State Initial Certification to teach mathematics for grades 7-12.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

*Problem Description*

The problem is that many students in a high school classroom with a history of low school performance, high absenteeism, and low standardized test scores are disruptive in the class. The disruptive students have a wide range of disruptive behaviors. Some of the observed behaviors include the following. The students yell to talk to one another across the room. They leave their desks at inappropriate times such as when a classmate is speaking. In a few instances some students chase others around the room. Some common behaviors are ignoring the teacher, refusal to work, and cursing at the teacher or other students.

Many of the disruptive students are students who would ordinarily by their age be in the 11th or 12 grades. Based upon their failure to earn the math credits these students were placed in the writer’s Algebra I classroom. These students test below grade level on standardized tests. Each of the students placed in the Algebra I class who are of age and grade standing as 11th or 12th grades have take the Algebra I class at least once prior to entering this class.

*Literature Review*

Why should educators minimize classroom disruptions? After all, most educators have adequate techniques for dealing with classroom management issues, correct? Effective teachers can deal with students with no time lost to disruptions. At least this is the commonly held thought even within the educational community. From the numbers of teachers leaving the field, the number of drop-outs, and the numbers of students scoring low on tests and failing classes, other factors appear to be involved. Classroom disruptions are one of these factors. To lower stress on students, teachers, and the community lowering disruptions in the classroom is necessary.

To gain an understanding of classroom disruptions questions such as why students disrupt classes, who the disruptions affect, and why educators need to do something about disruptions need to be examined to help allow all students to succeed in school. If classroom disruptions are not stymied and students helped then teachers (especially new teachers) will continue to leave the field. In addition, drop-out rates will continue to rise and test scores will continue to fall. Why student disruptions need to be lessened, why students disrupt, along with how and why disruptions affect the parties involved were examined, therefore, to allow the researcher to understand the problem and find alternatives to relieve disruptions in the classroom.

Disruptions negatively affect teachers, the disruptive student, the non-disruptive students, community members, and all of the people in our country. Disruptions lead to suspensions and other negative consequences for the disruptive student. In many cases, the disruptions can lead to the disruptive student dropping out of school. Beyond the problems disruptions cause with the disruptive students, disruptions cause concerns to the community due to increases in violence, less time on task for the non-disruptive students, and emotional distress to all parties. The violence in schools, in fact, is increasing and becoming harsher.

The first question, then, to be examined is why students are disruptive. Just about as many reasons exist for class disruption as students in classes all of which cannot be examined here. The researcher will focus on a few reasons research has shown to be relevant. Because so many reasons exist for behavioral issues, one of the cornerstones of the 1997 amendment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to be proactive and assess the reasons for the behaviors with students with disabilities (Packenham, Shute, and Reid, 2004; Powers, 2005). Assessing reasons for behavior even on a less formal level for all disruptive students is beneficial to teachers.

One reason for poor behavior is that physical needs are not met. Malnutrition, lack of sleep, and abuse are some of the physical reasons students may disrupt class (Setzer, 2003). According to Maslow, one cannot look to satisfy higher needs before lower needs are satisfied (O’Connor, 2008). Physical needs not being met inhibits a student from attending properly to instruction and incites the student to disrupt the class to draw attention away from his or her own deficits. In fact, many of the factors which influence disruptive behavior are done in an effort to draw attention away from their real or perceived deficits (Setzer, 2003; Trautwein, 2003)

Behavioral and conceptual tendencies of students increase disruptive behavior. Low self-concept has been linked to disruptive behavior (Trautwein, 2003; Deacon, 2004). If a student has a lower vision of themselves, he or she will act out to help improve his or her vision of himself or herself. Popular students are often reported to be aggressive (Meisinger, Blake, Lease, Palardy, and Olejnik, 2007). Popular students may have good self-concept, but they are aggressive to other students in an out of the classroom. Aggressive students are striving for social dominance (Kiefer and Ryan, 2008).

Perceived or actual academic deficiencies motivate students to act out in a disruptive manner in schools. Students with low literacy skills sometimes have behavioral problems to redirect attention or to compensate for the lack in front of their peers (Brown, 2004). Students do not wish to appear deficient in front of their peers and so will act out to keep peers from knowing the extent of their real or perceived deficiencies. Disruptive behavior affects more than just the student being disruptive or society if or when they drop out of school. Disruptive behavior affects other students’ quality of education and quality of teachers’ work environment (Setzer, 2003). For teachers, behavioral issues are one of the top reasons for leaving the field (McKinney, Campbell-Whately, and Kea, 2005; Weiner, 2003; Obenchain and Taylor, 2005). Teachers need to be able to learn to deal with disruptive behavior in a productive way that will not create burnout and send them out of the field of teaching. For non-disruptive students the disruptive students cause them to have a loss in educational time which puts their education at risk (Setzer, 2003). The teacher is focused upon the disruptive student trying to get them on task.

Classroom disruptions, therefore, cause many issues with the educational attainment of all students and the work quality of teachers. The fact that disruptions are sometimes (and increasingly) violent brings further concerns about the disruptions and controlling the disruptions. Parents, teacher, students, and the communities involved all want safer and more productive schools. The full extent of the problem, however, is oftentimes overlooked.

The public perceives a problem to exist in the schools. In each of the last seven years the Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools has shown lack of discipline to be the 2nd biggest problem in public schools from 2000 to 2007, with the exception of 2005 and 2006 where it was listed at number three (Rose and Gallup, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). Not only do teachers and schools feel a problem exists (Flanagain, 2007) but the public does as well.

The problem of disruptions in schools is not one that has suddenly appeared. The problem has been present for hundreds of years (Setzer, 2003). A difference in the severity and frequency of the problem exists, however. Marc Epstein gives a glimpse of this gradual transition of increasing violence in his paper, “Security Detail” (2003). During the 1960s Jamaica High school had a school population of 5,000. The school had so many students triple sessions had to be run. At this time, the school had three deans and one security officer. This scenario is contrasted with the number of deans and security people present in 2003. As of 2003 when this paper was written, the school had a population of 2,500 with “eight deans…; an assistant principal for security; two secretaries, one part time, one full time and a school aid assigned just to the dean’s office” (Epstein, 2003, pg. 29). Ten security officers were also employed. As can be seen this school needed significantly more security per student in 2003. This school is not alone in the increase in security needs.

More violence exists in schools than many people are aware. The reason for this is that the amount of violence in schools is often underreported. One survey listed in “Creating Safe Schools” of school resource officers, suggests that school crimes were underreported (Bucher and Manning, 2005). A report put out by the New York State Comptroller’s Office shows that many violent episodes in New York schools (the state in which this researcher lives) are underreported (Office of New York State Comptroller, 2005). The reasons for violence being underreported vary from school to school. The schools and other agencies underreport violence in schools (Bucher and Manning, 2005; Office of New York State Comptroller, 2005). In one school in New York, the school officials were allowed to revise incident data to show less of a problem (Office of New York State Comptroller, 2005, pg. 3). The data was not checked or verified to ensure accuracy (of New York State Comptroller, 2005, pg. 3). Sometimes information presented to officials is “inconsistent or inaccurate” (of New York State Comptroller, 2005, pg. 5). In some schools a significant number (80%) of incidents were not reported (New York State Comptroller, 2005). The comptroller’s office did a sample of 15 school districts and in most districts incidents were underreported or inaccurately reported. In White Plains during the 2003-2004 school-years 22 violent incidents were reported, but school records show 311. In Albany, 144 were reported, but school records show 924. The statistics presented here are just statistics about violent incidents from two high schools in different areas of New York. Underreporting occurs throughout the country. If schools and school districts are willing to try to alter facts about such violent activities lesser classroom disruptions have little chance of being reported and solutions found.

Violence in the classroom leads to the next group that classroom disruptions affect. Neither minor nor major classroom disruptions are reported. The main reason for this appears to be the correlation between classroom management skills and perceived effectiveness of the teacher. Teachers do not want to report disruptions for fear of being judged harshly about their teaching skills and thus endanger their positions. In their paper “Behavior management: Making it work in middle and secondary schools,” Kathryn Obenchain and Shannon Taylor (2005) claim that behavior management skills are an indicator of a successful teacher. Teachers are judged by the management of their classroom (Setzer, 2003). Because of these fears, teachers are hesitant to admit to a problem in the classroom. This fear of showing lack of classroom management skills is detrimental to the teacher’s mental and emotional health, thus leading to burnout and the teacher leaving the field. The problem is only intensified when the fact that the more disruptive the classroom, the more likely the school is to assign a new or inexperienced teacher the disruptive classroom.

The group most negatively affected by disruptions, surprisingly enough, is the disruptive students themselves. Disruptive students are at a greater risk of dropping out of school which causes them and society a lifetime of problems. In the US, the graduation rate hovers around 75% (Warren, 2007; IES, 2008). Even with all the innovations and changes in our schooling system over the last 20 years, the graduation rate has stayed relatively stable (Warren, 2007). The figures for Hispanics and Blacks graduating is even lower, around 50% (Warren, 2007; Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morrison, 2006). One question asked with regard to these figures is what are some reasons students drop out of high school?

Students drop out for a number of reasons, some of which have nothing to do with school. In a recent report for the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, the authors interviewed high school drop-outs to learn why they dropped out (Bridgeland, et al, 2006). The top five reasons given were; classes not interesting, missed too many days and could not catch up, spent time with people who were not interested in school, too much freedom, and failing school (Bridgeland, et al, 2006). Some other reasons given were low expectations adults had of the students and real life getting in the way of education (Bridgeland, et al, 2006). Some of these real life situations are ones that could be overcome to allow the students to gain a diploma. A few of these real life situations involve having to get a job to support family, having a child, and helping family members (Bridgeland, et al, 2006).

Not only is dropping out of high school costly to the student dropping out is costly to taxpayers as well. The cost is figured in lost income from dropouts to social services and healthcare that taxpayers have to support for those who cannot afford it. In 2005, high school dropouts earned an average of $9,634 less than a high school graduate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). These figures represent lost tax revenues to support our nation. In the same vein, high school dropouts are more likely to need social services and healthcare provided by the state or federal government, further increasing the cost of these lost educational years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Another cost to society for the lack of high school graduation is an increase in the crime rate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). It behooves us, then as a society to try to increase the graduation rates of our youth.

Serious behavior problems and academic failure are connected (Mayer, Patriarca, 2007). No matter which comes first the behavior problem or the academic failure the result is that one feeds off the other. The more a student exhibits problem behaviors the more that student fails academically. This failure may well not be from any lack of ability, but stem from many suspensions. The more a student is suspended the further they fall behind in school where they are more likely to drop out (Flanagain, 2007; Setzer, 2003; McCart, 2003).

More indicators exist for a risk of dropping out of school than high suspension rates. As mentioned earlier in this paper, failing school was one of the top five reason students dropped out of school when polled for “The Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland, et al, 2006). One reason for this academic failure in school is due to low teacher efficacy (Weiner, 2003; McCart, 2003). Teachers who feel they are able to make a difference will “continue working with students that are struggling and are less critical of students” (McCart, 2003, pg. 1). Other indicators of poor academic achievement include “poor self-regulation attention or emotions, poor social skills and decision-making skills, and depression (Fleming, Haggerty, Catalano, Harachi, Mazza, and Gruman, 2005, pg. 342). Poor self-concept has been linked to disruptive behavior (Deacon, 2004). This disruptive behavior results in a lack of time on task and potentially poor academic achievement.

When researching this paper to develop strategies and to identify the problem clearly, the author noted the preponderance of studies done were qualitative studies. Based upon the qualitative nature of the studies the dominant form for data collection was centered on observations, questionnaires, and interviewing. Twenty-one studies were evaluated in this study. Two of the studies used surveys. Five of the studies used interviews. Nine observed participants. Five used questionnaires. Two analyzed behavioral referrals. The qualitative nature of previous studies and its effectiveness when dealing with human behaviors and emotions led the researcher to choose a qualitative study to help reduce the severity and frequency of disruptive behaviors. The researcher chose to use teacher (the researcher) and peer observations to analyze the effectiveness of the research.

Attempting to lessen the severity and frequency of disruptive behavior benefits all parties. The disruptive student benefits in a number of ways. First, by lessening the frequency and severity of disruptions, the teacher has time to find the reasons why the student is disruptive and help the student. Help from the teacher, whether it be just making the class more interesting or to getting them good meals, can keep a student from dropping out of school. With the lessening of behavioral disruptions the disruptive and non-disruptive students have more time on task and are thus able to be more successful and productive in school. The disruptive students can potentially gain an understanding of the fact the teacher cares about them and wants to help. Non-disruptive students gain by being able to share in their teacher’s time and more time on task to learn. Teachers benefit by reducing stress and relieving a potential source for burnout.

Disruptive behavior is harmful to all. Disruptive behavior that results in school violence is especially harmful. Parents and students alike want students to be able to attend safe schools where students will not be victimized. Parents trust schools to keep their children safe and sound. Schools do not want to betray that trust and have students physically or mentally hurt while in school. With the rise in certain types of school violence and the lack of consequences to these acts of violence schools need to find alternative ways to stop or reduce disruptive behavior, especially disruptive behavior which results in violence.

*Causative Analysis*

Based upon the studies, articles, and the researcher’s own observations many reasons exist for disruptions in the classroom. The reasons range from teacher efficacy to student self-concepts. The disruptions can be mild or severe depending upon whether or not the goal of the student was accomplished or how the student was used to acting.

Teachers with low self-efficacy make a great deal of choices about the education of their students based upon their own feelings of being able to control the situation or effect change. In her paper, Holly Jones analyzes the positive and negative effects of teacher efficacy on the classroom (2004). When teachers feel they can effect change and make a positive contribution to the classroom several behaviors emerge that help students. The teacher is more likely to continue working with struggling students. The teacher is less critical of errors. He or she is more willing to experiment with teaching methods and solution strategies. The teacher is proactive in improving his or her own teaching. Finally, the teacher plans and organizes more. He or she has more enthusiasm for teaching.

Many reasons exist for students to become disruptive in class. Some other reasons for disruptive behavior are because the student is naturally aggressive (Smith, Lochman, and Daunic, 2005). The school system, including the teacher’s educational practices set students up for failure (Weiner, 2003). Teachers have an overreliance on reactive measures (Lannie et al, 2007). Teachers are poorly prepared (Lannie et al, 2007). Teachers have low expectations of students (Brown, 2004; Brenner and Mistry, 2007). Sometimes students are trying to dominate their peers (Kiefer and Ryan, 2008). On other occasions disruptiveness is equated to being popular (Lindstrom et al, 2007). Finally, the disruptive behavior is sometimes caused by low self-concept (Deacon, 2004).

Other reasons for disruptive behavior can be seen in Timothy Setzer’s thesis (2003). Students can be malnourished, be abused, or watch too much television. They can be from dysfunctional families or have a need to compensate for a perceived lack of love and support. The students can feel too controlled. In some cases they may feel they are not controlled enough (Bridgeland et al, 2006). The students can be disruptive due to peer pressure from gangs or just friends. The disruption can be caused by a teacher’s lack of classroom management skills. The teacher can put too much restraint on the student and stifle individuality.

In this researcher’s observations as a teacher in Alaska and Las Vegas and a substitute in the Capital Region of New York, this researcher has ideas about why students are disruptive. One reason is due to the fact some students are bored and act out to relieve the boredom. The boredom may be a result of not being challenged sufficiently or from the work being too hard for the student’s ability (real or perceived) level. Sometimes students have failures which have built up over the years which results in the students having a lack of motivation to try anymore.

Regardless of the cause of the behavior the teacher needs to attempt to reduce or eliminate it so all students can learn. Many of the reasons for disruptive behavior boil down to needing someone to set limits, be consistent, reason with them as to why they need to learn, and to acknowledge their positive and negative behavior in a productive manner. Because many of the reasons boil down to a few needs, this researcher has focused solution strategies on these needs.

Chapter III: Outcomes and Analysis

*Goals (Expectations)*

The majority of students in high school Algebra class with a history of low school performance, high absenteeism, and low standardized test scores will disrupt the class with less frequency and severity. The teacher and students have found alternatives to disruptive behaviors that resulted in more productive work and more time on task behavior.

*Expected Outcomes*

Specific outcomes to be achieved by the Algebra students were expected.

1. At least 10 of the 25 students will be disruptive less than 40% of the time.
2. Of the potential 10 disruptive students, half will be disruptive no more than 15 to 20% of the time.
3. Of the potential 10 disruptive students, half will be disruptive less than 15% of the time.

*Measurement of the Outcomes*

To measure the outcomes of the study peer and teacher evaluations in the forms of daily logs and weekly evaluations were completed and analyzed. Observations from all parties helped to determine if the solutions were working and were effective. Peer evaluations were completed weekly to determine their perceived level of disruptions. Peer evaluations were helpful to the teacher (researcher) to see if measures were being implemented correctly and efficiently in the manner to which the researcher intended. The evaluations included daily checklists of the severity and duration of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. At the end of the semester, students reflected upon the disruptiveness of the classroom using the evaluations to recall information.

The teacher kept a log of the number, severity, and duration of disrupting events in the classroom. This log was a simple checklist that was completed during the instructional time. Any additional notes were added after instructional time. In this way, keeping the log did not interfere with the instruction of the class.

Keeping observations on a daily basis allowed the observer to reduce bias in assessment. Students had inherent biases in their observations based upon factors such as the disruptor being a friend, themselves, someone they don’t like, someone they were afraid or intimidated by, or simply disinterest. The instructor listening to the students, acting upon observations in a positive manner, and showing they cared helped to reduce some of this bias. Observations made on a daily basis reduced unintentional bias such as forgetting the number and severity of incidents.

Teachers have many students throughout the day. Keeping a running log, therefore, was vital in keeping accurate records. The researcher needed to have more than anecdotal and more fallible observations to base results on the effectiveness of the interventions. The running log helped the teacher reduce intentional and unintentional biases and errors.

*Analysis of Results*

The daily logs and weekly reports were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the intervention strategies. The daily logs and weekly reports of the students were analyzed to determine if they perceive any increases or decreases of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The log was analyzed in reference to two categories. The categories were analyzed for the severity of the disruption and the frequency of disruptions. The results were charted to determine the effects of intervention strategies. The weekly evaluations were analyzed to determine if the students perceive any change in the severity or frequency of disruptions. The results of both the logs and evaluations were then matched to see if the students’ daily perceptions correlated to their perceptions.

The teacher’s daily logs were charted and analyzed for severity and frequency of disruptions. These results were matched with the students to determine correlations. The teacher’s logs were analyzed to determine if a reduction in severity and frequency was observed by the teacher. The teacher’s weekly summary was correlated to the daily logs to determine the teacher’s perception of disruptions.

In addition to analyzing the teacher and student logs, the grades of all students in the class were evaluated before, during, and after the semester. They were analyzed to determine if grades increased, decreased, or remained the same during the intervention. The grades were correlated with the student and teacher logs to determine if grades fluctuated during times of high disruption frequency and severity or low disruption frequency and severity.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

*Problem Statement*

The problem is that many students in a high school classroom with a history of low school performance, high absenteeism, and low standardized test scores are disruptive in the class.

*Discussion*

When determining an effective solution strategy, this researcher analyzed the solution strategies in 15 non-study papers which described possible strategies to lower the severity or duration of disruptive behavior in the classroom. This researcher then analyzed 12 studies which described possible strategies. Of the 27 articles, this researcher found 44 possible interventions. Thirty five of these measures were proactive measures to limit the onset of the behavior or to lessen the behavior if it does present. Nine of the strategies involved reactive measures.

One of the top measures for decreasing disruptive behavior was to find reasons for the behavior and work toward removing them ((Packenham, et. al., 2004; Oswald, et. al. 2005; Ford, 2004; Christ and Christ, 2006; McCart, 2006; Smith, et. al. 2006; Powers, 2005; Witt, et. al. 2004). Determining reasons for the behavior is one of the functions of the functional behavioral assessment (Powers, 2005; Packenham et al, 2004). This assessment is prescribed for students with disabilities according to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Packenham et al, 2004).

The teacher and the school need to have high expectations for the students (Benner and Mistry, 2007; Bridgeland et al, 2006). Sixty-nine percent of students surveyed about their reasons for dropping out said they did not feel their teacher or school had high enough expectations of them (Brideland et al, 2006). If teachers have high expectations and express these expectations to students, they would then have more motivation to work well.

While the majority of strategies analyzed involved being proactive, some of the articles expressly emphasize this as a method of intervention (Henninger and Coleman, 2008; Mitchem, 2005; Lannie and McCurdy, 2007). Being proactive in trying to prevent disruptions has the benefit of not losing time on task and of preventing incidents from happening. It lessens the stress on the teachers and students. In her article, Katherine Mitchem summarizes many of the effective strategies teachers can use to be proactive (2005). Many of these strategies coincide with strategies suggested in other articles and studies.

Teachers need to build relationships with their students which do not involve the academic setting (Mitchem, 2005; Bucher and Manning, 2005; Gable, Hester, Hester, Hendrickson, and Sze, 2005; Weiner, 2003; Henninger and Coleman, 2008; Setzer, 2003). If teachers build relationships with their students, students can come to an understanding that teachers care about them and are interested in helping them to succeed. Building relationships in turn helps the teacher to show and earn respect (Henninger and Coleman, 2008).

Other proactive strategies are praise, establish routines, give opportunities to respond, teach self-management, collaboration, replacement behaviors, and individualizing instruction (Mitchem, 2005). Teachers need to praise students to let them know they are doing the good (Mitchem, 2005; Lannie and McCurdy, 2007). Establishing routines help to give students stability and structure around which to base their learning. Routines help to give balance to education and create a springboard for safe learning (Mitchem, 2005; Witt, VanDerHeyden, and Gilbertson, 2004). Teaching self-management skills help the student to monitor his or her own behavior (Mitchem, 2005; McCart, 2003; Powers, 2005; Gable et al, 2005). Teaching self-management skills teaches students potential replacement behaviors to be more successful in their dealings with teachers and peers.

One of the most common strategies incorporates many of these smaller strategies into a larger meta-strategy. This strategy is called positive behavior support. In some cases the positive behavior support is done by the single classroom, but most often positive behavior support is incorporated school-wide. Positive behavior support incorporates assessing reasons for the behavior, redesigning the environment for better learning, person centered planning, teaching new social or behavioral skills and embedding interventions into the curriculum (McCart, 2003; Oswald, Safran, and Johanson, 2005; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, and Feinberg, 2005).

Cooperative learning and peer tutoring, by necessity, incorporates many of these strategies to be successful. Cooperative learning helps students to learn and work together (Ford, 2004). Peer tutoring allows students to learn from one another and to teach one another (Tournaki and Crisitiello, 2003). To be successful in these endeavors students need to be respectful of each other and the teacher. They need to have appropriate social and behavior management skills to work effectively. Respect is required to listen to and cooperate with one another. Giving choices to students allows them freedom to problem-solve effectively when working in a peer-tutoring and cooperative learning environment. Choices empower students to take ownership of their learning (Witt et al, 2004; Setzer, 2003).

This researcher decided to use the incorporation of peer-tutoring, inquiry learning, relevance to real life, and praise as strategies to lessen the severity and duration of disruptive behavior. This researcher chose these strategies because they are proactive and because in themselves they incorporate many other strategies to be effective. The ability to work in teams and groups to problem-solve is important in life for students. In their careers, they were required to work together cooperatively to accomplish tasks and problem-solve to find solutions to problems.

*Description of Selected Solutions/Calendar Plan*

Cooperative learning and inquiry-based group learning was the backbone of the solution strategies to reduce the severity and frequency of disruptive behavior. Peer tutoring was introduced and used. In addition to this strategy the teacher set rules with the students and enforced them consistently. The teacher incorporated many of the positive behavior support strategies consistently throughout the study time. Finally, the teacher incorporated real-life relevance to the mathematical concepts studied. Usually, this last occurred during and inquiry learning.

The cooperative groups and inquiry learning was accomplished by the following technique. The teacher distributed the students into cooperative groups of varying ability levels. The levels of students varied but not to extreme degrees. If students of exceptionally different ability levels are grouped together learning would be retarded. The teacher designed and implemented such a lesson at least once a week for the first six weeks of the semester. During the remainder of the semester, the teacher designed and implemented at least two such lesson during the week.

The teacher and students worked cooperatively to set classroom rules and consequences conducive to learning. These rules were enforced fairly and consistently throughout the semester. Consistently enforced rules help students to know what is expected of them and gives them boundaries for behavior.

The teacher incorporated positive behavior strategies during the semester. She acknowledged good behavior at least two times per class for every admonishment given during the semester. When the teacher praises more than punishes the atmosphere of the classroom becomes more relaxed and open with the students trusting and respecting the teacher. The teacher has a chance to focus on good behavior and in turn learns to trust and respect students.

Although much has been said about benefits and problems of extrinsic rewards, this researcher believes they provide an incentive to reduce negative behavior at least in the beginning of a solution strategy. During the first six weeks of the semester the teacher had a reward system in place to reward positive behavior. During the second half of the semester, the teacher gradually phased out the reward system. In this way, those students who needed to have an extrinsic reward to incite good behavior were drawn into the program.

Incorporated into the learning environment the teacher introduced the uses for the concepts in non-academic settings. During the first six weeks of the semester this was done at least 25% of the time. During the second half of the semester the teacher incorporated this relevance at least 50% of the time. Showing how concepts are used in the “real world” and completing “real world” tasks with the mathematical concepts to be learned helps the student to know the purpose of mathematics. Many times students are reluctant to learn mathematics because they do not find connections with their lives. By incorporating real life scenarios in the classroom students become more motivated.

Chapter V: Results and Recommendations

*Problem Statement*

The problem is that many students in a high school classroom with a history of low school performance, high absenteeism, and low standardized test scores are disruptive in the class.

*Goals (Expectations)*

The majority of students in high school Algebra class with a history of low school performance, high absenteeism, and low standardized test scores will disrupt the class with less frequency and severity. The teacher and students have found alternatives to disruptive behaviors that resulted in more productive work and more time on task behavior.

*Expected Outcomes*

Specific outcomes to be achieved by the Algebra students were expected.

1. At least 10 of the 25 students will be disruptive less than 40% of the time.
2. Of the potential 10 disruptive students, half will be disruptive no more than 15 to 20% of the time.
3. Of the potential 10 disruptive students, half will be disruptive less than 15% of the time.

*Findings*

Results in the semester-long study to reduce the severity and number of disruptions in an Algebra class are given in the following section. During the semester, the teacher made checklists of the number of disruptions, the duration of the disruptions, and severity of the disruptions. These were then coded for analysis. The teacher and students submitted weekly surveys to chart the progress of perceptions of the teacher and students with regard to disruptions and the results of strategies to reduce disruptions. These results were then coded for analysis.

The students and teachers were asked to fill out an eight question survey each week for 17 weeks in one semester. Examples of survey statements asked students include; “I feel the classroom is too disruptive to learn,” “The classroom is disrupted for more than 10 minutes of the class,” and my instructor praises good behavior more than she punished bad behavior.” The purpose of the survey was to chart changes in student and teacher attitudes. Survey statements asked of the teacher include many of the same statements as the students. The results of these surveys were compared with the results of the charted numbers, durations, and severity of disruptions over the course of the 17 weeks. The results are shown in the following charts.

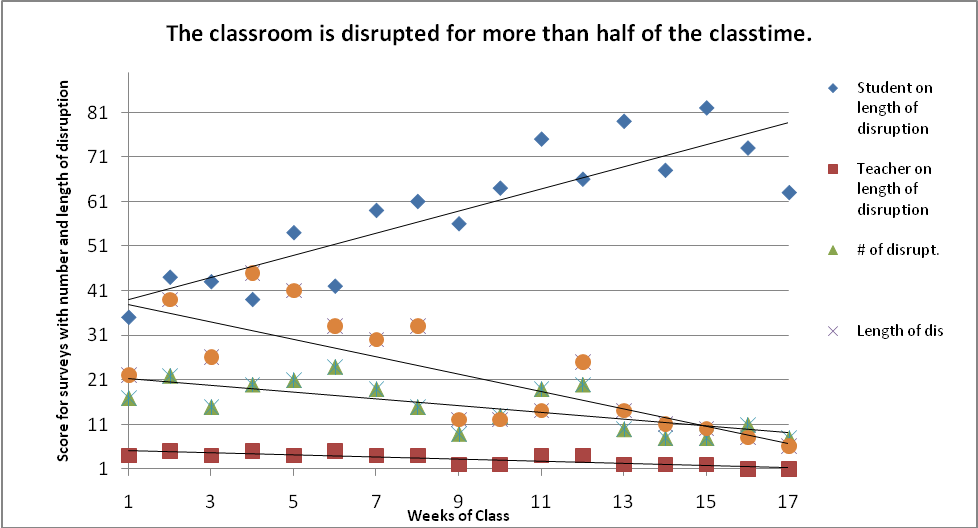


Figure : A comparison of student and teachers perceptions of the length of time of classroom disruptions with the recorded length and number of disruptions.

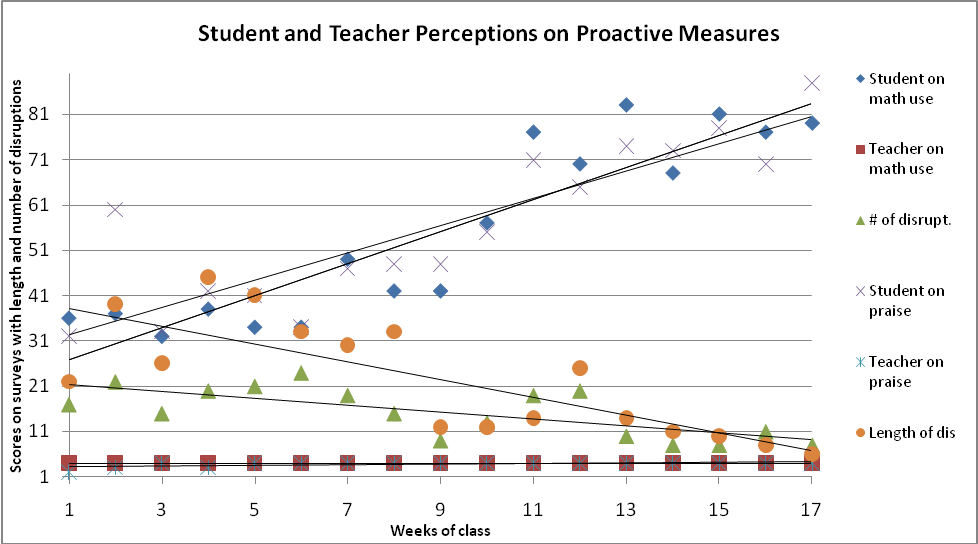


Figure : Student and teachers perceptions of two proactive measures taken in the classroom. The blue diamonds represent student views of the incorporation of real life uses of math. The red squares represent the same for teachers. The star and x represent the teacher and students, respectively, on praise being used in the classroom.

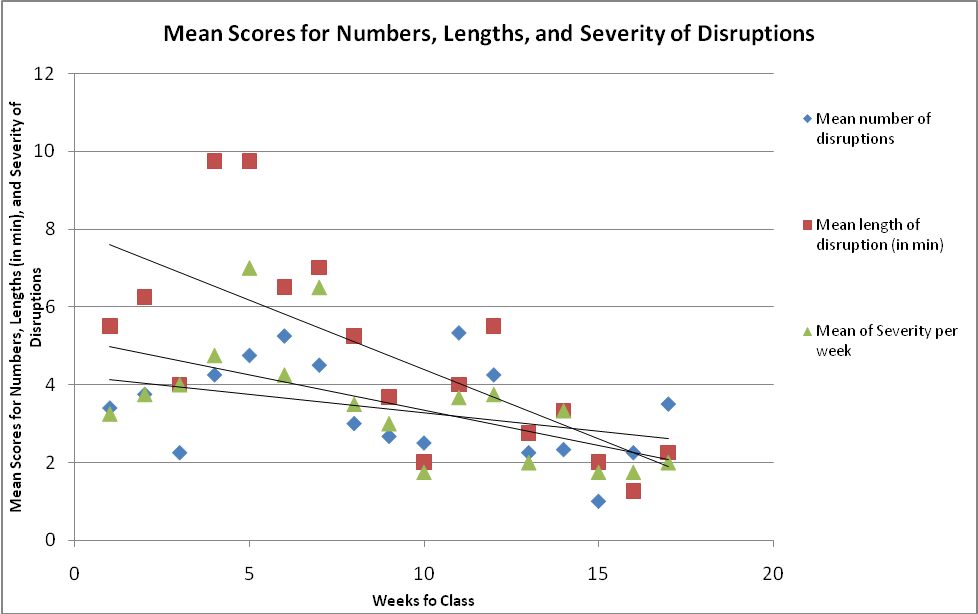


Figure : Mean daily scores for numbers, lengths, and severity of disruptions.

The objectives in this semester were moderately stated, as a large amount of change in attitude and perceptions was not expected. The objectives, though, were met in this semester. The number of disruptions was reduced during the course of the semester. Sporadic points show this reduction was not consistent. Some days, even at the end of the semester, students disrupted the class. The nature of the disruptions changed, however, from severe to mild disruptions. For example, rather than having disruptions such as yelling and cursing, more of the disruptions at the end of the semester were for getting up without permission. The length of each disruption was reduced over the course of the semester. The results here are generalized as some cases of more disruptions of moderate or severe natures did occur. The general trend, however, was a reduction in the numbers, lengths, and severity of disruptions.

Students changed in their perceptions of the levels of the disruptions and perceptions of the teacher over the course of the semester. At the beginning of the semester students reported that they perceived the classroom to be disrupted over half of the time (the survey statement was “the classroom is disrupted more than half of the time” with a Likert-type rating scale of 1 as strongly agree and 5 as strongly disagree). A lower score indicates the students perceived more of a problem, whereas a higher score indicates they believe this to be less true. Therefore, in the graph, the slope is positive. The graph shows a lower score at the beginning of the semester and a higher one at the end. The number of disruptions observed by the teachers corresponds to this finding.

Students reported an increase in the use of proactive measures employed during this study. The students reported an increase in the number the use of examples of mathematics used in the real world. The students reported an increase in the teacher using praise more than punishment in the classroom. These two proactive measure increases are correlated to a lowering of the number and length of disruptions in the classroom.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Student survey question | Correlation Coefficient |  | Teacher survey questions | Correlation coefficient |
| The classroom is disrupted for more than half of the class time. | 0.84 |  | The classroom is disrupted for more than half of the class time. | 0.82 |
| The classroom is disrupted for more than 10 minutes of the class. | 0.62 |  | The classroom is disrupted for more than 10 minutes of the class. | 0.81 |
| I feel the classroom is too disruptive to learn. | 0.84 |  | More than 1/2 of the students are disruptive. | 0.82 |
| My instructor teaches about how math is used in real life. | 0.91 |  | More than 1/4 of the students are disruptive. | 0.83 |
| My instructor praises good behavior more than she punishes bad behavior. | 0.85 |  |  |  |
| I respect my instructor. | 0.46 |  |  |  |
| My instructor cares about my education. | 0.91 |  |  |  |
| My instructor cares about me. | 0.91 |  |  |  |

Figure : Correlation coefficients between teacher and student surveys and weeks of class.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Correlations | Correlation coefficient |
| Number of Disruptions and Number of Days | 0.30 |
| Length of Disruptions and Days | 0.49 |
| Severity of Disruption and Day | 0.37 |
| Number of Disruptions and Severity | 0.69 |
| Length of Disruption and Severity | 0.82 |

Figure : Correlations between numbers of disruptions, length of disruptions, severity of disruptions, and the numbers of days involved. To determine if a correlation exists between the numbers of days and the number of disruptions, length of disruptions and severity of disruptions and between each of these factors.

Regression analysis of student and teacher survey results reflect a strong positive correlation between the survey results for the students and teachers compared to the number of weeks of the study. Regression analysis shows more moderate results for comparing the numbers of disruptions, lengths of disruptions, and severity of disruptions between themselves and the number of weeks in the study. Only a week positive correlation exists between the number of disruptions and the number of days in the trial. As can be seen on the graph, however, as the semester progresses, the number of disruptions goes down, the length of each disruption goes down, and the severity of each disruption goes down.

In the study, student test score were raised by a small amount. The degree of improvement was not large or even statistically relevant. Students were given the yearly Terra Nova tests as the pre-test and the following year for the post-test. Looking at this data, one would say the objectives of this study were not met.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Test** | **Mean test score** |
| Pre-test | 76.69231 |
| Post-test | 77.4 |

Figure : Standardized test scores. The scores represent the average score of the students on standardized tests before and after the study.

*Discussion*

The goals and expectations in this study were met at modest levels. The attitudes of the students did not turn around 180° in one semester. Gains were made, however, both in their perceptions of the teacher, the teacher’s goals, and in the number, duration, and severity of disruptions. Students reported gains in all areas studied. Disruptions went down in their numbers, duration, and severity.

The data for the student’s perceptions of changes in the classroom environment showed that the objectives of the study worked and that continuing along the same lines in research would be productive. Not only were changes seen through a checklist kept by the instructor on a daily basis, but changes were seen in the perceptions of the students and of the teachers. The gains were not large but were meaningful. But, one would not expect to be able to make monumental changes in one semester.

Many at-risk students at the high school level have been through years of disappointment and failure in the school environment. The students have come to believe they cannot succeed in the school and that teachers do not care about them. They tend to believe, for one reason or another, that school is a hostile place. When students have spent so many years believing that they are failures or that school has failed them, one semester of change will not completely alleviate or change those beliefs. The unexpected result, however, is the gains that were made.

The gains made in this study were noticeable even in the surveys turned in during the week. At the beginning of the semester many students did not turn in the surveys and if they did, they left the survey blank or with vulgarities written instead of answers. Some surveys were turned in with answers that were not real and that were made into designs on the survey. As the semester continued, however, students started answering the questions and answering them in meaningful ways.

While the researcher does not know whether the proactive measures were responsible for the changes, if the fact that they realized the instructor was concerned about their education, or if some other reason was involved, the results reflect a marked reduction in the number, duration, and severity of disruptions in the classroom. The researcher saw a change in the way students communicated with her and with each other during the course of the semester. Students became more polite, paid greater attention to class work and were more respectful of each other and the instructor.

The researcher’s results reflected more constant results than the students’ results. The reason for this is the fact that the researcher based her weekly surveys on the daily observation checklist. Over the course of the semester, the researcher did not see the trend quite as much. The reason for this is because the changes were not consistent throughout the semester. At the end of the semester when the researcher was compiling the data the picture the data showed became apparent. The researcher had seen the differences in the students’ attitudes, but the magnitude of the changes were only made apparent during the analysis of the data.

The data indicates that small proactive changes in teaching methods and teachers’ attitudes toward students can have noticeable positive effects on students. The researcher started with making a few changes the teaching method. Peer tutoring, using cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, incorporating relevance to real life, and more praise than admonishments were techniques used to effect changes. When students see that the teacher does care about them and their education and cares about their success, students tend to begin caring about others and their own education. The students are politer to each other and to the teacher. The students try in their work when they know that connections exist between what they are doing in school and what they will be doing in the real world.

Students’ attitudes are improved when the atmosphere of the class is changed by virtue of the praising more than being negative with students and punishing behaviors. The attitude of the students and the teacher improve because the atmosphere is not hostile to learning. The situation becomes a ball rolling downhill, but in a positive way. Proactive steps taken to reduce negative behaviors reduce the amount of stress in the classroom, thus allowing students and the teacher to concentrate on working. The positive effects of a more positive classroom are some of the most important results of this study.

In this study, the pre-test scores and the post-test scores were not statistically different. The reason for the small change in the test scores can be speculated about. One reason is for the small change is that the post-test was a second Terra Nova test the following year. Between the end of the semester and the post-test another semester had passed. The changes in the test scores, therefore, could not be known to be a result of the changes in the study or due to chance.

Some changes to the study would have made the study more productive. Some changes would have also made it easier to track results of the study. The study would have entailed more attempts to find the causes for the disruptions of the students in an effort to help them and reduce disruptions in this way. The researcher would have changed the surveys given to ascertain student perceptions of the changes and his or her beliefs about the changes. The statement, “I respect my instructor,” would not have been used. While this would help to identify changing perceptions of the students about the instructor, most students would not answer this truthfully. Students would be afraid of repercussions by the instructor for a response that did not fit in with what the student felt the instructor wanted.

The researcher would not use Terra Nova or any other yearly test as the pre-test and post-test in subsequent studies unless the study was a year-long study. If the study is one semester, too much time elapses between the end of the study and the test. When so much time elapses, the researcher cannot be sure of the changes that the research effects on the students. In this case, however, due to the results of the other aspects of the study, the researcher could find determine were due to the changes.

In summary, changes in the students’ attitudes were noted as a result of the study. Students became more at ease in the class due to more praise and less punishments and a more positive manner in the teacher. Students professed the teacher to be incorporating a greater number of real life applications to the mathematics learned in class. While the researcher would have made changes to the research, the research done does show what changes proactive measures can accomplish in the classroom. Students should not be asked questions which they feel they cannot answer without negative repercussions. Pre-tests and post-tests should be given in closer proximity to one another nearer the end of the study.

*Recommendations and plans for dissemination*

The topic of reducing the severity and duration of classroom disruptions is a necessary topic for study. When students are disruptive all parties are negatively affected. The party with the more permanent repercussions is the disruptive student. The disruptive student is more apt to continue to fail in classes and eventually drop out of school. This costs the student and taxpayers a great deal of money over the course of that persons’ life. Reducing disruptions, therefore, can be a step toward preventing students from dropping out of high school.

Other researchers need to continue studying this question as well as other causes for students dropping out of high school. Some reasons are the student’s perceived abilities in academics, real abilities, feelings of education being worthwhile, boredom in class, and many other reasons. In fact, more reasons for students dropping out need to be found and studied.

Researchers need to study aspects of disruptions in the classroom and why they continue. Teachers’ beliefs about looking for help need to be examined. Teachers often do not look for help because they feel they will lose their job or be ostracized by the educational community for not being able to “handle” their classes. In fact, however, teacher education programs do not place enough emphasis upon classroom management. The schools do not train teachers to find solutions to classroom management issues. Teachers are expected to figure this out by themselves. The teachers then go into classroom situations as new teachers with little training in this area. The school the new teacher obtains a teaching position in then places the teacher in a situation with classes of the more disruptive students. This, in turn, leads to the teacher burning out and quitting and a poor education for the students in the classroom. Researchers, therefore, need to study how new teachers are taught and placed in disruptive classrooms. Researchers need to study the negative connotations of poor classroom management skills and find ways to help teachers improve in this area.

The research in this study can help provide support for positive proactive changes in a classroom to help students improve their education and reduce disruptions. Once disruptions are reduced, then learning can take place. This researcher recommends the following for solutions found in this study.

1. Teachers need to praise good behavior and help keep the classroom atmosphere positive. Keeping the atmosphere of the class positive allows the students to concentrate on learning. Stress caused by a negative classroom environment inhibits students from learning in a meaningful way.

2. Teachers need to relate mathematics to real life situations and other subject areas. Students are not motivated to learn and to take time to study a subject they do not feel is connected to anything else in their world. If connections are made, students become more motivated to learn.

3. Teachers need to be explicitly taught classroom management skills. If teachers do not know how to address situations or take proactive measures to reduce or eliminate the situations in the classroom, disruptions will continue. Teachers need a toolbox of possible solutions to scenarios they may encounter in the classroom so they can resolve the issues.

The researcher would share the results of this study in the school employed in or through publication in a professional journal. If the researcher worked in a school with a large amount of disruptive behaviors, she would share the results of my study with other teachers to help them find solutions to the disruptions in their own classrooms. To further add to the body of literature on the nature of disruptive behaviors in the classroom and ways to be able to reduce the behaviors, the researcher would publish the results in a professional journal. Other teachers looking to help their students and themselves would be able to see the results of this study and see possible solutions.

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