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# Can We Motivate Student Behavior in a First Grade Classroom? Reward System vs. Conventional Teaching Discipline Plan

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## Abstract

What effect does a reward system have on first grade student behavior? Is there anyway to have my students behave better than they are currently? There is plenty of research that has been conducted on different types of distracting behavior as well as different types of systems and programs that try to influence that behavior. Three first grade classes were selected, observed, and data was recorded on any disruptive or unwanted behavior for three consecutive weeks. For the first three weeks, a reward system was implanted for each class. Each class was given the opportunity to earn a "free day" in physical education class by decreasing their disruptive behavior during class. Only two of the classes were able to earn their free day.

## Introduction

If there were no rules in life, there would be chaos. The same applies for schools all over the world. Children in school need structured rules and regulations to maintain peace and order within school. In addition, schools have a system of regulation, rules, and disciplinary actions for those who break those rules.

One step below the school rules are the classroom rules that a teacher puts into place the first day of school. These rules set the tone for the school year, which allow the teacher to control the classroom and prevent chaos from erupting during class. However, time and time again, we see the younger aged students misbehave and break the rules forcing the teacher to discipline them over and over.

The purpose of this study is to examine the current student discipline model for a Physical Education class as well as test, examine, and measure the implementation of a reward system discipline model at the first grade level.

This reward system has all three classes participating as an individual class but as a team of students within the class. In simpler terms, every class is for themselves.

## Methods

**Setting-** Middle class, Midwestern neighborhood school. Students were predominantly middle class Caucasian children, however, there were few participants that had African and Hispanic decent. The overall ratio for participant decent was roughly 4:1:1 respectively.

### Participants-

- Three 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes.
- 72 Total Students combined
- 42 or 58% of the students were males.
- 30 or 42% were female.
- Mean age, of the students was 6 years olds.

## Methods

### Study Design-

This study was a Quasi research experiment, which uses observation and data collection to measure effectiveness of an intervention placed.

Two 3-week periods were created to observe, and collect data prior and post an application of a positive reinforcement discipline model or reward system.

The data observed, recorded and tallied was individual and group disruptive behaviors that the student demonstrated in the classroom (not following directions, not following the rules, acting out, talking back to the instructor, and etc.).

After 3 weeks, the reward system would be introduced. Every class will start out with a set amount of stickers (ex: 12), and every time the class misbehaves or a certain amount of students misbehaves, a strike will be given. 3 Strikes equal 1 sticker removed.

In order to receive the reward, the students will have to have a certain amount of stickers (ex: 8 stickers) by the end of the second 3 week period.

The prize is a free activity day where the students can select any activity they want from a list of activates that they played before.

### Measures-

**Journal/Log-**used to mark down who was disruptive, what they were doing and what class they were in, and to keep track of strikes given during class.

**Tally Sheet-** A tabled attendance sheet that was used for tallying how many times a student in class was disruptive as well as estimating the overall disruptiveness of a particular class.

## Goal of Reinforcement "Reward System"

The overall goal is to decrease disruptive behavior while increasing desired behavior by rewarding proper student behavior.

## Hypothesis

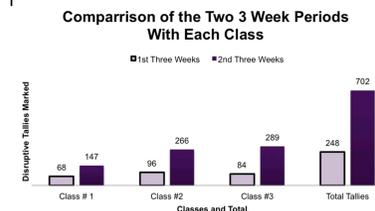
It is hypothesized that first grade student behavior will be positively affected by a positive reinforcement system of discipline.

## Results

When comparing the results of the 1<sup>st</sup> three-week period with the results of the second 3-week period, there are three factors to look at.

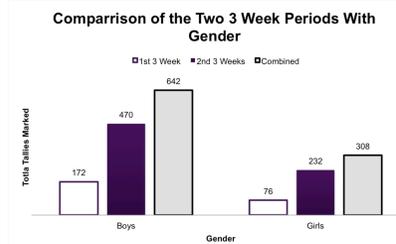
First, the difference in the amount of tallies before and after the reward system was put into play. According to **Figure 1**, each class increased. Class #1 by 79 tallies. Class #2 tallies by 170, and Class #3 tallies by 205. All together the amount of tallies more than doubled from 248 to 702, which is a 454-tally difference.

Figure 1



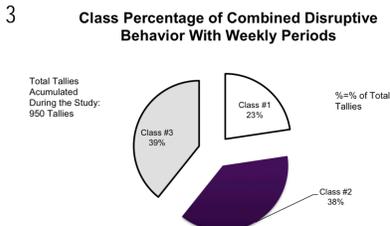
The second comparison is the difference during the 3 week periods made by the genders. According to **Figure 2**, the boys increased from 172 tallies to 470 tallies, which is a 298-tally increase. The girls also increased from 76 tallies to 232 tallies, which is an increase of 156 tallies. The boys represented 642 of the disruptive behaviors over the 6 week study while the girls represented only 308 disruptive behavior observed and recorded of the 6 week study.

Figure 2



The third comparison is the percentage of class responsibility during the 6-week span. There were a total of 950 disruptive behaviors during this study. According to **Figure 3**, Class #1 class was responsible 23% of those disruptive behaviors, while Class # 2 and Class #3 were responsible for 38% and 39% respectively.

Figure 3



## Discussion

The results of the six-week study showed significant factors that should be addressed. If one were to look at the amount of strikes that the classes obtained, the study looks like it proved the reward system discipline model was success for 2 of the 3 classes (Picture of board not available for confidentiality purposes).

However, when one takes a closer look at the results, it shows contradicting information. Looking at the graphs, it is evident that the disruptive outbursts doubled. The boys were responsible for most of these outbursts, and the two classes that received the reward were actually responsible for a significant amount of the disruptive behaviors.

The results show that student behavior was not positively affected by the reward system. Yes, two classes earned the reward, but all of the disruptive behaviors of all the classes doubled which was not the designed affect of the reward system. A reward system was established to decrease the amount of undesired and disrupting behavior but instead it increased it. The reward system worked by decreasing individual disruptive behaviors because no student wanted to be the individual to obtain a strike for their class. The reward system did not work on group behaviors, which cost the class to gain strikes and tallies for the students.

## Implications and Future research

Due to the split schedule of the researcher, this study was conducted early during the tenure at the institution. Six weeks is not an ample amount of time to conduct a full study in a classroom, especially when the researcher is with the students for only forty minutes once a week. Circumstances such as a student removal and days where school was not in session also played a factor.

Future researchers should make a point to provide ample time to conduct this study. They should also focus on a particular type of disruptive behavior either an individual student or a class entirely.

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"I have neither given nor received nor have I tolerated others use of unauthorized aid". - Nicholas Strzelecki

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