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ABSTRACT

This study used a classroom interaction system to code three 20-minute episodes in each of 40 elementary classrooms. The procedure was followed in October and again in May. An analysis was made to investigate the relationships between aspects of teacher praise and student participation in classroom discussions. Findings indicated that (a) praise has a differential effect across children, (b) specific praise has a greater positive effect than stereotyped praise, (c) the effect of praise drops as the year progresses, and (d) the effect of mild criticism increases as the year progresses.  
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## Praise and Criticism - A Sticky Issue

The relationship of praise and criticism to student behavior has many facets. Teacher educators should be aware of these relationships and should not fall into the simplistic trap of over generalizing about their effect on children.

Kennedy and Wilcutt (1964) concluded after a review of the literature that "praise is a reasonably stable incentive from study to study, contributing and incremental effect upon the performance and learning of school children." However, Rosenshine and Furst (1973) concluded after a review of classroom interaction studies that praise did not show a significant or consistent relationship with student achievement.

One possible way to bring clarity to the issue is to analyze the component parts--to examine different facets of praise. Kennedy and Willcut (1964) found that praise had a differential effect across children. They noted that "introverts score better when praised, extroverts do better when blamed." Another factor studied has been timing. (i.e., after which student responses does a teacher praise.) Amidon and Giammatteo (1967) compared the behavior of superior teachers to a normative group. They reported that "...statements of praise and encouragement were used about equally by both groups, but the superior teachers used more praise after student-initiated ideas." They also reported that superior teachers gave specific reasons for their praise more often than the normative group. Dollin (1960) conducted an experiment where fourth grade teachers carefully controlled the amount of praise they gave to students and concluded that praise helped pupil adjustment but did not affect arithmetic achievement.

The indication that timing is important, that degree of specificity is a

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key, and that praise has a differential effect across students led to a further attempt to clarify relationships between praise and student behavior.

#### Procedure

A classroom interaction system (modified Flanders having multiple categories for teacher responses and teacher questioning) was used to code three twenty minute episodes in each of forty elementary classrooms (K - 6). This procedure was followed in October and again in May. Each time a set of 20 tapes was collected, coded, and analyzed.

#### Results

An analysis was made to investigate the relationships between aspects of teacher praise and student participation in classroom discussions (Shepardson, 1972). The findings indicated that:

1. Time of year had a differential effect. There was a significantly higher correlation between teacher praise and student participation at the beginning of the year ( $r=.60$ ) than at the end of the school year ( $r=.15$ ).
2. Degree of specificity was a definite factor. A distinction was made between specific praise and stereotyped praise. The determinant for classifying a comment as specific praise was whether or not the teacher gave a reason for her positive remark. Example: "Good, that shows you're thinking." "Mary, I'm glad you knew that."

Specific praise had a correlation of .60 with student participation at the beginning of the school year; whereas, stereotyped praise had a negative correlation of  $-.15$ . At the end of the year when the correlation between specific praise and student participation had

dropped to .15, stereotyped praise was still negatively correlated ( $r=-.10$ ) with student participation.

In October teacher praise represented approximately 20 percent of all teacher response behaviors. This can be compared in Table I to the frequency of other teacher responses.

TABLE I

Comparative Frequency of Teacher Response Behaviors	
Praise-----	20%
Criticism-----	13%
Judgmental (right/wrong)-----	34%
Probe-----	6%
Echo-----	25%
Other-----	2%

The most frequent response was a judgmental one indicating whether the student's answer was right or wrong. Consistent with Bellack's (1966) findings, approximately 80 percent of all judgmental remarks were affirmative.

The echo was the second most common response. The teacher merely repeated what the child said. Often this could be interpreted as an affirmative judgmental response, but its frequency is worthy of note.

The teacher reacted to the students comments with mild criticism 13 percent of the time. It should be emphasized that harsh criticism was rarely employed. The following examples are typical of the mild criticism recorded:

"Freddy, your book should be open to page 4."

"Diane, I asked you to raise your hand."

This lack of harsh criticism was also reported by Goodlad (1970) in his

analysis of 150 elementary classrooms.

Mild criticism is also effected by time. The correlation between mild criticism and student participation was positive at the beginning of the year ( $r=.26$ ), but dropped significantly ( $r=-.44$ ) by the end of the year. It was hypothesized that time is probably a very important factor in how students perceive a teacher's remark. What appears as a mild reprimand in September may have a much different effect as the year wears on. The effect of a mild reprimand may be magnified by the accumulation of classroom events. Example:

John may try to tell the teacher about his pet, but the teacher corrects: "John, I told you to raise your hand." What was once a reminder may now be perceived by John as further painful evidence that he is a failure, that he is always getting picked on, and that the teacher doesn't like him. John knows this as a fact because "Mary didn't raise her hand and the teacher didn't yell at her." The whole impact of a reprimand may change since perceptions change with experience.

The significant difference between the correlation recorded in October and those recorded in May was an interesting finding. The negative correlation between mild criticism and student participation is not consistent with Rosenshine and Furst's (1973) conclusion:

"In no study was there a significant correlation between mild forms of criticism or control and student achievement. Such mild forms include telling a student that his answer was incorrect or providing academic directions. Thus there is no evidence to support a claim that teachers should avoid telling a student he was wrong or should avoid giving academic directions."

The differential effect of time on praise seems consistent with the differential effect of time on mild criticism. It seems reasonable that once the students have "sized-up" their teacher and once "cabin fever" sets in, glittering words of praise will appear a little tarnished and worn around the edges and a gentle reminder will blare out its condemnation.

Thus, time could create a credibility gap with respect to praise and could have a magnifying or an accumulation effect on criticism.

Praise and criticism are sticky issues. The professional should be aware of the many facets of praise and criticism and not fall into the simplistic trap of treating them as stable units.

1. Praise has a differential effect across children.
2. Specific praise has a greater positive effect than stereotyped praise.
3. The effect of praise drops as the year progresses.
4. The effect of mild criticism increases as the year progresses.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>E. Amidon and M. Giammatteo, 1967. "The Verbal Behavior of Superior Elementary Teachers." In E. J. Amidon and J. B. Hough (Eds.), Interaction Analysis: Theory, Research, and Application. (Palo Alto: Addison Wesley Publishing Company) p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>A. A. Bellack, H. M. Kliebard, R. T. Human and F. L. Smith, 1966. The Language of the Classroom. (New York City: Teachers College Press).

<sup>3</sup>J. G. Dollin and others, 1960. "With Words of Praise," Elementary School Journal. 60. pp. 446-450.

<sup>4</sup>J. I. Goodlad, M. F. Klein and Associates, 1970. Behind the Classroom Door. (Worthington: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company).

<sup>5</sup>W. A. Kennedy and H. D. Wilcutt, 1964. "Praise and Blame as Incentives," Psychological Bulletin, 62, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup>B. Rosenshine and N. Furst, 1973. "Research of Teacher Performance Criteria," in B. O. Smith (Ed.), Research in Teacher Education, a Symposium. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.) p. 55.

<sup>7</sup>R. D. Shepardson, 1972. "An Analysis of Teacher Questioning and Response Behaviors and Their Influence on Student Participation During Classroom Discussion." (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin) p. 82.