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AUTHOR Kulekowskis, Jennifer
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ABSTRACT

A study explored the relationship between student behavior ("troubling" versus "non-troubling") and reading achievement among second-grade students. Of the 128 students enrolled in regular education classrooms at Paul Revere Elementary School (a public school in a southern suburb of Chicago), 30 were randomly selected to be a sub-population representing "troubling" students and 30 were randomly selected to be a sub-population representing "non-troubling" students. Students identified as having troubling behavior could not be dually classified as "Behavior Disordered" nor "Learning Disabled," but were, like their non-troubling peers, enrolled in regular education classrooms. The norm-referenced Metropolitan Achievement Test 7 indicated that students who were classified as non-troubling had significantly higher reading achievement scores than students who were classified as troubling. (Contains 23 references and 1 table of data.) (Author/RS)

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THE EFFECT OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR

ON THE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF SECOND GRADE STUDENTS

Jennifer Kulekowskis

There are many students in the public school system who do not demonstrate proper behavior, yet have not been diagnosed or labeled as "Behavior Disordered" or "Emotionally Disturbed." Their teachers have a daily struggle keeping these challenging children on task and an even more difficult struggle helping these children achieve in school.

At the present time, teachers seem very concerned about behavior in their classrooms; students with poor behavior are not getting the support they need from staff nor administration. This, then, leads to the questioning of the achievement of these students. How can teachers and parents be sure that their children are learning when their achievement scores are slipping?

The issue of behavior in school often causes controversy. Is poor behavior the cause of poor achievement scores? Or, does a student's sense of his poor achievement spark the defensive behavior? Who is responsible for the behavior and subsequent achievement of these students? Many teachers believe that the students need to take responsibility for their own actions, and the job of the teacher is to teach, not baby-sit.

Amid the controversy, the questions regarding student achievement surface over and over again. Parents are concerned that their children are not learning. Teachers are concerned that their students are not behaving. Administrators are concerned that their desks are cluttered with files containing behavior write-ups. Student behavior is a concern of everyone involved in education.

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Education has long been a discipline saturated with "buzz words." Terms that are thrown around staff lounges and elementary school hallways seem like a foreign language to those who are not directly involved in education. Among the initials (BD for Behavior Disordered, EMH for Educable Mentally Handicapped, for example) and labels (noisy, gifted, or artistic--to only name a few) educators sometimes have a way of shortchanging their students.

Today, teachers have more and more responsibilities placed on their shoulders while parents seem to be expecting more and more from the public school system. Teachers are expected to not only educate, but, are increasingly called upon to instill moral codes, nurture underprivileged kids, and reprimand improper behavior. What was once the responsibility of the parents is increasingly the responsibility of the public school system; teachers very often have to start at the beginning to teach students what type of behavior is acceptable and not acceptable in the school setting.

The causes for poor behavior of school-aged children vary greatly. Reasons range from single-parent homes to two working parents, poverty to spoiled, wealthy children. With so many labels and terms currently used in education, it has been difficult to decide on one term to describe these students who cannot or will not behave according to the rules and paradigms set up according to the classroom teacher's or school's rules. According to Cambone (1994), these students who do not fit into the defined labels of Emotionally Disturbed or Behavior Disordered are labeled as "troubled," or more aptly "troubling."

McNamara and Moreton (1995) point out that "many of these children have difficulties at school because they have to conform to the rules of that environment" (p. 52). The concern that many teachers and parents have is

that there are rules for every type of environment, so these children will grow up to be adults who are not able to adjust and cope with the expectations of different environments.

In addition to social adjustment problems, students who are considered "troubling" often have academic concerns, as well. As Caspari discussed in 1976, there is a "particularly important problem when a child is intelligent enough to do adequate work," (p. 74) but then chooses to demonstrate poor behavior, and subsequently perform at an academic level far below his potential capabilities. Caspari also points out that parents are accepting the rather low standard of work that their misbehaving children display. Parents, therefore, continue to accept this low academic level of achievement and perpetuate the low standards which are affecting society's negative view of education, in general (1976).

"Disruptive classroom behavior has received considerable attention from educators and researchers, alike," according to Finn, Pannozzo, and Voelkl (1995, p.424). Most of this attention has been questioning the reasons for troubling behavior. In addition, the achievement of troubling students has come under fire recently, as well.

This study focuses on the effects that behavior has on achievement--namely reading achievement. Students from two groups (those considered to have little to no behavior concerns and those considered to have serious behavior concerns, or "troubled") were compared with respect to their reading achievement scores on the MAT 7. Student behavior has long been a concern of educators and the question of how behavior is related to achievement has been at the forefront of this concern. Haskins, Walden, and Ramey have found that disruptive behavior in the elementary classroom has been associated with depressed academic performance (1983). They

observed students placed in low-ability and high-ability groupings in 19 different kindergarten and first grade classrooms. The children were similar in the amount of talk and requests for attention or information from the teacher, however, "children in the low groups were eight times [more] likely to interfere with their peers' academic work by taking their materials or hitting them" (p. 872).

What does this mean to educators and parents? According to Segal-Andrews (1994), disruptive behavior is adaptive and can, if not caught directly, have a "snowball" effect. A disruptive act by one student often leads to a second disruptive act by another student--usually the "receiver" of the first disruption (Finn, *et al*, 1995). What follows, if not immediately contained by the classroom teacher, is a contagious effect which can serve to erupt the entire group. This disruptive behavior can become a stressful situation for the elementary school teacher, as evidenced by the number of articles and classroom management texts devoted to the subject (Karlin & Berger, 1972; McIntyre, 1989; Millman, Schaefer, & Cohen, 1980; Scherer, Gersch, and Fry, 1990, just to name a few).

What about the causes of stress to the students? Could it be that they are "troubling" to the class and to the teacher because they are, in fact, troubled or worried about factors stemming from outside of school? Are they acting out because they are frustrated because they realize that they are not on the same academic level as their peers? Yes, these are possibilities, however, Lambert and Urbanski have concluded, in a 1980 study, that there is "substantial evidence that behavioral attributes contribute significantly to school achievement independently of their relationship to scholastic aptitude, [ethnicity], and social status" (p.59).

In 1977, a study by Lambert and Nicoll reported that troubling behaviors were significantly related to reading achievement and that these behaviors accounted for more variance in reading achievement scores than did measures of cognitive functioning, such as tests which measure IQ or school aptitude. This raises an important point: the attitude and behavior of a child has a direct influence on how that child performs academically. In a broader sense, a child's attitude and behavior shapes his future and who he will become as a person.

In a 1987 study, Spivack and Cianci found a significant correlation between classroom disturbance and disrespect/ defiance in kindergarten through grade three and misconduct and school disciplinary measures at ages 14 and 15. A correlation was also found between troubling behavior in kindergarten through grade three and police contacts concerning the troubling student by age 17. In addition, studies involving juvenile delinquents often record a history of disruptive school behavior in earlier years (Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981; Kaplan, 1980; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979).

The best way to avoid these probable run-ins with the police and school administrators is to find a way to work with these children to improve their educational outlook and, consequently, their behavior. While the purpose of this study is not to experiment with and determine the causes of troubled behavior, it is important to consider that the association between behavior and achievement also operates in a reverse direction. That is, poor student achievement can cause a student to act inappropriately in a classroom.

"A history of poor school performance in earlier grades can make it increasingly difficult for a student to remain well-behaved and engaged in

learning activities in later years" according to Finn *et al*, 1995 (p.432). No matter which direction the cause and effect are flowing, however, the goal of the educational system must be to interrupt this cycle of poor achievement and troubling behavior as early as possible.

Students who are considered "at risk" for developing educational problems because of their lack of proper behavior need to be identified. Also critical to correcting these problems are strategies for encouraging academic achievement among students identified as "troubling." Haskins *et al* (1983) expressed optimism that strategies for encouraging troubling students to achieve academically can be effective due to the compliance of these students--especially those placed in low-ability groups--to teacher requests. There seems to be a genuine desire to please the adult figure, even when the student is considered to be belligerent in the eyes of that adult.

The "burden of implementing these strategies, however, need not lie with the regular classroom teacher, but may be shared by teachers, aides, and other specialists available to assist in the classroom," according to Finn *et al* (p.432). Researchers can also bear part of the burden by directing studies at student achievement as it relates to student encouragement, grouping, and behavior.

For the purposes of this study, though, the focus is on behavior as it relates to the reading achievement of Second Grade students. Troubling behavior within a classroom may be a precursor to more severe behavioral problems in later years, as reported by Finn *et al*, 1995. Therefore, it would be in the best interest of those closely involved in public education and the students served by public education to explore reasons and consequences of improper, or "troubling" behavior.

The relationship between behavior and achievement can be reciprocal, as noted by Lambert and Nicoll (1977), and, on a larger scale, the "use of behavioral indicators of achievement. . . would create a more effective system of identifying children at risk in schools" (Lambert & Urbanski, 1980, p. 65). By exploring the data and using comparative studies, researchers and educators may be able to take significant steps toward the improvement of education for all students.

Perhaps, with the data from studies like these, educational improvements can be made. The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of student behavior on reading achievement scores.

Procedures

Population/ Sample:

The population for this study includes 128 second grade students who are enrolled in regular education classrooms at Paul Revere Elementary School. Paul Revere School is a public school located in Blue Island, Illinois--a southern suburb of Chicago. The population of the school is comprised of 33.6% White students, 16.4% Black students, 50.0 % Hispanic students and 49.6% of the students are considered "low income" by the state of Illinois.

From the 128 Second Graders, school records showed that 51 students were described as having "troubling behavior" by their teachers and 77 were described as having "good behavior." Thirty students were randomly selected from each of these sub-populations.

Each spring, the MAT 7 is administered to all second grade students who are enrolled in regular education classrooms. Also, teachers are asked to rate the students in terms of behavior. Each student is assigned a number

grade ranging from 1-10. For the purposes of this study, students who received a score of 6 or higher were considered for the "troubled" group and students who scored 5 and below were considered for the "non-troubled" group. The posttest only control group design will be used.

The findings will be tabulated in terms of means and standard deviations. The t test will be employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between the mean scores on the reading achievement subtests.

Findings of the Study

The sample in this study included second grade students at Paul Revere Elementary School in Blue Island, Illinois. Each spring, the regular division students take the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT). From these students, two groups were selected--one group considered to be "troubling" and another considered to have proper behavior for a school setting. Using a table of random numbers, thirty students were randomly selected from each group.

Results from the students' spring, 1996 MAT 7 reading achievement subtest were used to determine "reading achievement" and the scores recorded on school records (1-10, with 10 being the most troublesome students) were used. A t test ($p < .05$) for independent samples was done on these sets of scores to determine if there was a statistically significant correlation between student department and reading achievement. Table 1 summarizes the statistical analysis.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Tests for the "Troubling" and "Non-troubling" Groups for Reading Achievement:

Reading Achievement Test	"Troubling" Behavior Group	"Non-troubling" Behavior Group	t
Mean (M)	23.27	63.81	
Standard Deviation (SD)	20.87	24.92	
Number (N)	30	30	
			*6.84

* significant at the .05 level

df = 58

p at .05 = 2.000

2.000 < 6.84

Examination of the 1996 reading achievement scores indicate that the "troubling" and "non-troubling" groups are significantly different with respect to scores at the .05 level of confidence. They are also significantly different at the .01 and .001 levels of confidence. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected; student behavior does have an effect on student reading achievement.

The results of this research study indicate that troubled student behavior has a negative effect on student achievement. The review of the literature on the subject of student behavior and reading achievement indicate that there are links between the two. Effects of behavior have also been linked to math achievement, language achievement, and general achievement.

The findings of this study appear to be consistent with the research of Haskins, Walden, and Ramey, who, in 1983, published a study which associated disruptive classroom behavior with depressed academic

performance. Furthermore, a previous study by Lambert and Nicoll reported that troubling behaviors were significantly related to reading achievement (1977). This 1977 study also pointed out that poor behavior accounted for more variance in reading achievement scores than did other measures of cognitive functioning, such as IQ tests or school aptitude tests.

Also, a 1987 study by Spivack and Cianci found a significant correlation between troubling behavior in the elementary grades and severe school disciplinary measures by age 14 or 15. In addition, several studies which involve the histories of juvenile delinquents reflect that their disruptive behavior often began with troubling behavior in earlier school years (Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981; Kaplan, 1980; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979).

The results of this study suggest that, perhaps, one way to avoid probable future run-ins with police and school administrators is to find a way to work with children who are considered at-risk for troubling behavior. Perhaps, if children learn to improve their outlook on education, and, consequently, their self-concept, their behavior will improve.

The purpose of this study was not to experiment with nor determine the possible causes of troubled behavior; but to determine the effect of student behavior on student achievement. It is important to consider, also, that the association between behavior and achievement can be reciprocal, as well. In other words, student achievement can have an effect on student behavior. More research concerning the interruption of the negative aspects of this cycle is necessary to improve the education of all students.

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Abstract

In this study, the relationship between student behavior ("troubling" versus "non-troubling") and reading achievement among second grade students is explored. Of the 128 students in the *ex post facto* study, 30 were randomly selected to be a sub-population representing troubling students and 30 were randomly selected to be a sub-population representing non-troubling students. Students identified as having "troubling" behavior could not be dually classified as "Behavior Disordered" nor "Learning Disabled," but were, like their "non-troubling" peers, enrolled in regular education classrooms. The norm-referenced MAT 7 Test indicated that students who were classified as "non-troubling" had significantly higher reading achievement scores than students who were classified as "troubling."