Journal of Classroom Interaction, ISSN 0749-4025. © 2014, Vol 49.2, pages 22-32

Exploring the Social Validity of Teacher Praise Notes in Elementary School

Angela Howell
Paul Caldarella
Bryan Korth
K. Richard Young
Brigham Young University, USA

ABSTRACT

The use of teacher-written praise notes has the potential to positively influence student classroom behavior and relationships. However, few studies have examined the social validity of praise in schools. The purpose of this study was to evaluate student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school-wide praise note intervention implemented by teachers at a Title I elementary school. Social validity surveys were completed by 23 teachers, 203 parents, and 203 students at the end of the school year. Results indicated that participants believed praise notes helped improve classroom behavior, relationships, and home-school communication. Results also suggested that praise notes were sustainable and had a good level of teacher buy-in, though suggestions for improvement were noted. Implications and limitations of this study are addressed.

Keywords: elementary school, praise, teacher attitudes, positive behavior support

INTRODUCTION

Schools can play an important role in working with families to address student problem behavior (Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker, & Kaufman, 1996). Reactionary methods such as punishment have traditionally been used (Maag, 2001), but alternatives are available, including positive behavior support (PBS). With PBS, behavioral interventions are implemented to produce socially significant behavior change (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hieneman, Lewis, & Nelson, 1999). The term positive behavior support can be separated into two parts (Carr, Dunlap, Horner, Koegel, Turnbull, & Sailor, 2002). Positive behavior refers to the goal of PBS: to increase students' success and satisfaction through improved behavior and social skills. Support refers to the methods used to help students, including educational methods, behavioral interventions, and environmental redesign.

Walker and colleagues (1996) discussed a three-tiered PBS approach to help achieve socially significant behavior change in students. The primary tier focuses on prevention: establishing school-wide expectations, reinforcing students who exhibit socially appropriate behaviors, and analyzing school data. The secondary tier, which includes students who are at risk, typically provides specialized group interventions. The tertiary tier, consisting of students with the most intense behavior problems, involves the most individualized interventions. Praise can be used as a PBS intervention at any of these tiers.

Praise

Definitions of praise vary, but most agree that it is an expression of approval (Brophy, 1981; Chalk & Bizo, 2004). Praise is also considered a form of reinforcement, intended

to increase the probability or frequency of the behavior it follows (Brophy, 1981; Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Maag, 2001). Several characteristics of effective praise have been identified, including that it should be contingent, frequent, and specific (Marchant & Young, 2001). Praise must follow the targeted behavior so that students know why they are being reinforced. In addition to being contingent, praise must be frequent, or its effects are weakened. Specific praise is also more effective than general praise. A specific statement such as "I like the strategy you used to solve the word problem" would be more effective than a vague statement such as "good job." With specific praise the student is told exactly what he or she has done well.

The use of praise in schools has generated some debate, particularly concerning its influence on student motivation (Dweck, 1999). Motivation is important to consider because of its relevance to student learning (Ames, 1990). Motivation can be conceptualized as intrinsic (students motivated to do something by the activity itself) or extrinsic (students motivated for an external reason, such as praise or rewards). Some have noted that praise may weaken intrinsic motivation, if students perform for the praise alone (Ryan & Deci, 2000) potentially making students more dependent on teachers and passive about learning (Dweck, 1999). Kohn (2001) has noted that praise might also lead to reduced academic achievement.

Others have argued that praising students for behaviors they can control is less likely to inhibit intrinsic motivation and achievement (Zentall & Morris, 2010). For example, if teachers praise students for uncontrollable factors, such as ability or intelligence (e.g. "You are a great writer!"), this might cause students to focus more on the label praise provides rather than on their effort in performing a task. On the other hand, if students are praised for controllable factors (e.g. "You worked so hard on that story!") they may be more likely to perform the behavior again because they enjoyed the process rather than because they anticipated being praised (Zentall & Morris, 2010). As noted by Dweck (1999, p. 3) "We can praise [students]…but we should wax enthusiastic about their strategies, not about how their performance reveals an attribute they are likely to view as innate…"

Despite the debate, praise has been associated with a variety of positive outcomes in schools: for example, increased on-task behavior (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000). Gable and colleagues (2009) suggested that praise can improve teacher–student relationships. Burnett and Mandel (2010) found that students who reported having good relationships with their teachers also reported that their teachers provided more positive feedback.

Most of the research in this area relates to verbal praise. Praise notes can also be used to deliver praise (Caldarella, Christensen, Young, & Densely, 2011). Positive statements are written in notes, which can be given to students and shared with parents. Praise notes, like verbal praise, are cost effective and nonintrusive. Writing a praise statement may take more time than delivering a verbal statement, but praise notes can have additional reinforcing qualities. For example, students may receive additional reinforcement from their parents when they bring praise notes home. As praise notes are tangible and can be kept and read again at a later time, students may repeatedly receive reinforcement long after the initial interaction with the teacher.

Relatively few studies have been specifically conducted on praise notes, but the results are encouraging. Studies have associated written praise with decreases in maladaptive student behavior, including social withdrawal (Nelson, Caldarella, Young, & Webb, 2008), office discipline referrals (Nelson et al., 2009), tardiness (Caldarella et al., 2011), and disruptive behavior in the lunchroom (Wheatley, West, Charlton, Sanders, Smith, & Taylor, 2009). While such studies have demonstrated positive results, the relative effects of praise notes are difficult to determine, as these studies have included components such as direct instruction and rewards (Nelson et al., 2009; Wheatley et al., 2009). Thus evidence supports the conclusion that praise note systems have been associated with positive results. In addition to considering the effectiveness of praise notes, it is also important to consider their social validity.

Social Validity

Many teachers do not use interventions that research has shown to be effective, resulting in a research-to-practice gap (Walker et al., 1996). Researchers are often confused when effective interventions are rejected. As noted by Marchant, Heath, and Miramontes (2013, p. 221), "In the current climate of evidenced-based intervention, we often lose sight that it is not solely the proposed intervention that leads to desired change, it is the buy-in of stakeholders." By examining acceptability, social validity assessment can provide information about why research-based interventions are not utilized.

Definitions of social validity have changed over time, but they include assessment of the social acceptability of interventions (Gresham & Lopez, 1996; Kazdin, 1977; Schwartz & Baer, 1991; Wolf, 1978). Several domains should be evaluated, including the intervention's goals, procedures, and outcomes (Kazdin, 1977). When teachers consider a program to be acceptable they are more likely to implement and use it.

Social validity data can be used to improve interventions so that teachers will continue to use them, thus helping to sustain programs over time. Repeated social validity assessments also provide information on how perceptions may change over time (e.g. if teachers no longer found

praise to be acceptable because of its influence on student motivation). Others have also noted that the benefits of social validity assessments include the gathering of information regarding how interventions can be improved and increased sustainability of interventions (Marchant et al., 2013).

Social validity can be examined through social comparison and subjective evaluation (Kazdin, 1977). Social comparison determines significant change by comparing the behavior of a targeted student to that of his or her peers. Subjective evaluation involves asking consumer judges about their perceptions of an intervention, through methods including interviews, rating scales, and direct observations (Finn & Sladeczek, 2001).

Because positive behavior support (PBS) is collaborative system and depends on stakeholder fidelity, it is important to assess social validity of PBS interventions. This information is useful for educators, who want to know how the program was accepted and used in addition to how the program was effective. Most publications on behavioral interventions, however, do not report social validity data. Researchers must do a better job with social validity assessment, and there has been a call for more social validity studies (Marchant et al., 2013).

Elwell and Tiberio (1994) administered surveys to secondary school students to evaluate student perceptions of teachers' verbal praise and found that students viewed praise positively. Burnett and Mandel (2010) found that elementary school students reported positive reactions to teachers' verbal praise, including that praise made them feel good. Another study (Marchant & Anderson, 2012) showed that teachers believed praise improved relationships and motivated students to learn. Pillet-Shore (2012) found that parents also view teacher praise positively, interpreting such praise of their child as a compliment to themselves. Nelson and colleagues (2008) implemented a peer-to-peer praise note intervention, after which they surveyed students for their perceptions. Students' perceptions were positive, and they noted that they would like praise notes in other classes.

Research Purpose

Written praise appears to have much potential as an intervention; however, use of praise notes is not widely researched and may not occur as frequently as might be desirable in schools. As the effectiveness of praise notes continues to be researched, it is important to examine social validity, to help avoid research-to-practice gaps by enabling improvements based on stakeholder suggestions. Responding to the call for more social validity studies (Marchant et al., 2012), the purpose of this study was to examine student, parent, and teacher perceptions of a school-wide praise note intervention implemented as part of PBS at an elementary school. This is the first study to examine parent, teacher, and student perceptions of teacher-written praise notes.

METHOD

Participants and Setting

Participants were associated with a Title I elementary school in the United States Intermountain West. The school enrollment was 348 students in grades K–6. Students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch made up 81% of the student population, and 53% were English language learners. Participants in the study included 23 teachers, 203 parents, and 203 students. Teacher ethnicities consisted of 78% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, and 5% other. Parent ethnicities were 19% Caucasian, 29% Hispanic, and 4% other. Student ethnicities were 19% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, and 6% other. All teachers, 56% of parents, and 73% of students responded to English forms of the surveys, the remainder of parents and students responded to Spanish forms.

Measures

Separate surveys were designed, one for each stakeholder group (teachers, parents, and students) based on a similar survey by Adams, Womack, Shatzer, and Caldarella (2008). Each survey presented 13 items; some of them appeared on all three surveys, but others were specific to a stakeholder group. The last two questions were open-ended, requesting all participants to provide comments about what they liked and disliked about the praise note intervention. All surveys were administered anonymously to encourage honest responding. Participants rated each item using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree). Students in grades K–2 received surveys with a 5-point pictorial scale depicting sad and happy faces, in the pattern of others who have used pictorial scales as valid measures for younger children (Harter & Pike, 1984). Because of the school's large Hispanic population, the parent and student surveys were also translated into Spanish.

Surveys were pilot tested with participants familiar with the target school. Teacher surveys were tested with two teacher education students and one teacher who had completed a practicum at the elementary school. The student surveys were pilot tested with five students in grades K–2 and three students in grades 3–6. Parent surveys were pilot tested with five native Spanish-speaking parents at a school

parent meeting. Minor changes, such as slight wording alterations, were made to the survey items based on feedback obtained.

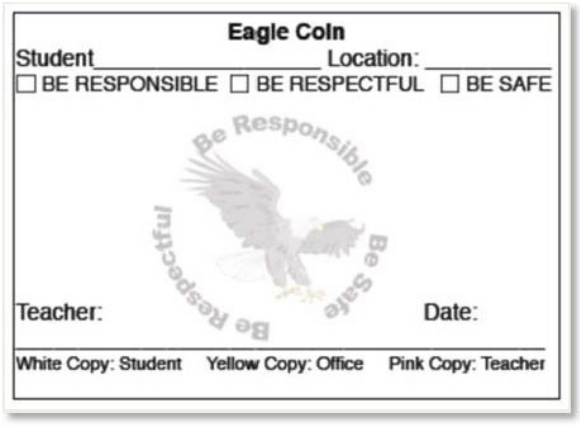
Procedure

As part of school-wide positive behavior support (PBS), the school implemented praise notes called eagle coins, which were small forms intended for teachers to write praise to their students (see Figure 1). Eagle coins were printed on three-part NCR (no carbon required) paper; after the note was written, the office received one copy, the teacher kept another, and the student received the third. The office copies were entered into a prize drawing and tracked in a school database. Prizes (e.g., candy, coupons) were given weekly to 10 students in the prize drawing.

While praise notes had been among the PBS activities at the school since the school year began in August, they were reviewed in December at a training meeting led by personnel from the partnering university. Teachers were presented with the eagle coin format and trained on delivering effective praise. Potential benefits of praise were also described. Teachers were encouraged to use more praise and write more eagle coins. The number of praise notes written increased significantly after the training, increasing the frequency of praise. Praise also became less general. For example, a common praise note before the training read "On task"; after training, notes contained more specific phrases such as "On task - offering to help in classroom" and "Pulled out a book when he finished his assignment, so others could concentrate." Thus both the quality and quantity of praise improved after training.

At the end of the school year in May teachers, parents, and students received consent forms and the social validity surveys. Teachers completed the survey at a faculty meeting. Parents and students received surveys in an envelope brought home by the child, and both groups responded to the surveys at home. Students and parents returned surveys to the teachers. Given that the social validity survey was administered at the end of the school year, it was assumed stakeholders were rating the new praise note form.

Figure 1. Eagle Coin



Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize perceptions of the praise note intervention and calculate the percentage of respondents who agreed with each survey item. Agreement was defined as a response of 4 or 5 on the 5-point Likert scale. Overlapping survey questions allowed for an analysis of differences between the groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences among participants (i.e., teachers, students, parents). Each individual stakeholder group was also analyzed separately.

The open-ended comments were analyzed qualitatively, following the methods of Corbin and Strauss (2007) and Miles and Huberman (1994). The primary researcher (a Caucasian school psychology graduate student) worked with a Hispanic senior undergraduate student majoring in psychology to code the responses. They independently reviewed the open-ended responses and identified themes. A list of common themes was compiled based on their findings. They grouped comments according to these themes and calculated the percentage of participants whose comments fit the themes. After completing these individual analyses, they examined the results of each group and compared for similarities or differences across groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All teachers and approximately 58% of parents and students completed surveys. A total of 66% of participants responded to the open-ended questions regarding what they liked about the praise notes, and 32% responded with comments regarding what they disliked. The positive to negative comment ratio was approximately 4:1 for parents, and 3:1 for students, and 1:1 for teachers. Positive results from the surveys' quantitative and qualitative sections suggest that the social validity of praise notes was high.

Participants' Positive Perceptions

Nearly all participants agreed that students should be praised at school and that students liked receiving praise notes (see Table 1). This finding is similar to the results of other research studies: for example, Elwell and Tiberio (1994) found that students viewed praise positively, while Nelson and colleagues (2008) found that students liked praise notes. In open-ended comments (see Table 2), parents described the emotions that students expressed after receiving praise notes.

Table 1

Percentage of participants who agreed on praise note survey items

Items	% of teachers (n=23)	% of parents (n=203)	% of students (n=203)
Students should be praised for appropriate classroom behavior.	100.0	93.1	98.5
Students like receiving praise notes.	100.0	92.6	94.0
Praise notes should continue to be used next year.	81.8	93.1	92.2
Parents like it when their children receive praise notes.	39.1	94.6	92.5
Praise notes help students improve their classroom behavior.	81.8	82.3	88.7
Students would like praise notes even if the school stopped giving prizes.	39.1	61.8	64.9
Students should receive at least one praise note each week.	73.9	67.0	-
Praise notes are an important part of teacher communication with parents.	30.4	69.5	-
Praise notes are an important way of communicating teacher expectations to students.	65.2	-	91.5
Praise notes help strengthen teachers' relationships with students.	65.2	-	76.2
Praise notes helped parents and children talk to each other about school.	-	79.2	65.3
Students received enough praise notes.	-	72.2	65.3
Teachers like the praise note part of their school programming.	65.2	-	-
Tracking praise notes is easy for teachers to manage.	45.5	-	-
Praise notes take too much time.	39.1	-	-
Parents praise their child when he/she brings praise notes home.	-	95.0	-
It is important for parents to know that their child is being praised at school.	-	92.6	-
Praise notes have improved parents' relationship with their child's teacher.	-	61.9	-
Students try to get praise notes at school.	-	-	64.5
Students try to get praise notes at school.	-	-	90.6
Praise notes help students know what they're supposed to do in school.	-	-	82.6

For example, one parent wrote, "I like that my daughter feels good. . . . they make her feel important." Many teachers and parents liked the intervention because students had this positive reaction to the praise notes.

A high majority of parents indicated that they liked the praise note intervention, a finding supported by students' agreement that their parents felt positively about the praise notes. Teachers, however, seemed unaware of parents' perceptions, as only 39% agreed that parents liked the praise notes. This difference in perception is significant, especially in considering the sustainability of praise notes. As the group implementing the intervention, teachers should know that their efforts are appreciated. This gap in perception suggests that opportunities should be found for parents and teachers to communicate about the importance of praise notes.

Results indicated substantial buy-in for the praise note intervention, as a high majority of participants agreed that praise notes should be used the following year. Despite this level of agreement, some teachers indicated that some students stopped caring or became "bored" with the praise notes (see Table 3). One teacher wrote, "After a couple of weeks of giving an increase of coins, I feel like they completely lost their effectiveness—my students don't care about them as much."

Other survey responses suggested that students were still motivated to earn praise notes. For example, almost all

Table 2

What was most liked about praise notes and percentage of participant comments included in each theme

Theme	% of teachers (n=15)	% of parents (n=138)	% of students (n=131)
Child's appropriate behavior is reinforced.	46.7	56.5	32.1
Teachers like the form.	26.7	-	-
Students like eagle coins.	20.0	-	-
Child feels positive emotions.	-	21.0	-
Child receives prizes.	-	-	37.4

students agreed that they tried to earn praise notes at school. As the survey was administered at the end of the school year, this finding suggests that students continued to find praise notes motivating. One student wrote, "What I don't like about the eagle coins is that they don't give them to us when we do good things, and that doesn't seem cool to me." Thus students noted frustration when they did not receive a deserved praise note, suggesting they still found praise notes motivating.

Also regarding motivation, few participants mentioned concerns that praise notes inhibited intrinsic motivation, though this question was not a focus of this study. It is important to consider effects on intrinsic motivation, as this could lead to negative outcomes (Dweck, 1999). One teacher did note, "I think that the Eagle Coins being our focal behavioral strategy diminished the students' enthusiasm." In general, however, participants were positive about praise notes' influence on student motivation.

Teacher perceptions of effectiveness are tied to treatment fidelity (Gresham & Lopez, 1996), as teachers were the group implementing the intervention, and their buy-in was particularly important. Despite some comments about praise notes losing effectiveness, the majority of teachers were supportive of the intervention; this is significant since the teachers did most of the work of writing and distributing the notes. One reason for teachers' acceptance might be that they observed the impact of praise notes on improved student behavior, which other research has also demonstrated (see e.g., Caldarella et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2008).

Impact of Praise Notes on Student Classroom Behavior

Participants agreed that praise notes helped improve student behavior, though students felt more strongly about this than did teachers (see Table 4). Perhaps students noticed slight improvements in their behavior and counted these as more significant. Or perhaps teachers had a more accurate perception, as they were the group delivering praise notes. Also teachers may have expected more improvement, as they were the ones putting in the most effort writing praise notes. Despite this difference, the majority of teachers agreed that praise notes had positive effects on student behavior. Participants also liked that praise notes reinforced appropriate student behavior, the only qualitative theme found for teachers, students, and parents. For example, one parent wrote, "I like that they focus on the good the students are doing and [let] the student know their good behavior is noticed." The fact that this was the only qualitative theme teachers, students, and parents had in common shows the importance of praise notes in emphasizing positive behavior.

Table 3

What was most disliked about praise notes and percentage of participant comments included in each theme

Theme	% of teachers (n=15)	% of parents (n=138)	% of students (n=131)
Eagle coins take time.	41.7	-	-
Teachers dislike the procedure.	33.3	-	-
Eagle coins are losing effectiveness.	25.0	-	-
Child should receive more eagle coins.	-	20.0	22.0
Child wants more prizes.	-	-	22.0
Child did not receive eagle coins when deserved.	-	-	20.0

Table 4

Stakeholder differences for overlapping survey items (N=429)

Item	Teacher *M (SD)*	Parent *M (SD)*	Student *M (SD)*	F
Praise notes help students improve their classroom behavior.	4.09 (0.68)	4.19 (0.84)	4.39 (0.86)	3.52*
Parents like it when their children receive praise notes.	3.52 (0.85)	4.57 (0.70)	4.62 (0.73)	24.43***
Students should be praised for appropriate classroom behavior.	4.83 (0.39)	4.59 (0.67)	4.73 (0.56)	10.90***
Praise notes are an important part of communication with parents.	3.09 (1.13)	3.92 (1.01)	-	13.52***
Praise notes are an important way of communicating teacher expectations to students.	4.00 (0.85)	-	4.59 (0.68)	14.64***
Students received enough praise notes this year.	-	3.99 (0.98)	3.75 (1.26)	4.31*

Note: *p<.05, ***p<.001.

This finding was also similar to other research which has found that positive interventions are more likely to be accepted by teachers than methods focusing on problem behavior (Bowen et al., 2004).

Relationships Between Teachers, Parents, and Students

Improving student-teacher, teacher-parent, and parent-student relationships is associated with better outcomes at school (Mapp, 2003; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). The majority of students and teachers agreed that praise notes helped improve student-teacher relationships. Many have claimed that praise helps improve these relationships because it causes teachers to focus on the positive qualities of students (Brophy, 1981; Gable et al., 2009).

Parents and students agreed that praise notes helped them talk to each other about school. A parent wrote, "I talk to my kid more." Students agreed that they enjoyed bringing praise notes home, possibly because, as parents indicated, they praised their child after he or she received a praise note. It appeared that praise notes gave parents opportunities to interact with their children positively concerning school. Research has shown that parent reinforcement of appropriate school behavior can help students improve their behavior more efficiently (Barth, 1979) and that children tend to have better school outcomes when their parents are involved (Mapp, 2003).

Most parents agreed that praise notes helped improve their relationship with their child's teacher. Praise notes may demonstrate to parents that the teacher knows their child and has recognized the same good qualities in their child that they have. For some, praise notes may also help validate their parenting efforts. Perhaps for these reasons, nearly all parents indicated a desire to know that their child was being praised at school.

Communication Between Teachers, Parents, and Students

The majority of parents agreed that praise notes were an important part of teacher-parent communication. Praise notes can give parents information about what is going on at school (including teacher expectations and feedback on their student's behavior). Because schools have traditionally focused on negative behavior (Walker et al., 1996), parents may be accustomed to hearing from the school only when their child misbehaves. When teacher communication is infrequent, parents may assume that any communication means bad news (Cameron & Lee, 1997). Praise notes, however, are a positive form of teacher-parent communication.

Other research has shown that parents have more favorable attitudes when schools attempt to increase school-to-home communication (Adams et al., 2008). However, only 30% of teachers agreed that praise notes were an important part of their communication to parents, while 70% of parents agreed: This suggests that praise notes were much more important to parents than teachers realized. Praise notes appear to be a valuable way for teachers to share information with parents about positive student behaviors, in addition to good news phone calls and discussion about students' strengths.

Praise notes also appear to reinforce and communicate expectations to students. The majority of teachers and students agreed that praise notes were an important way of

communicating teacher expectations. Also most students agreed that praise notes helped them know how they were supposed to behave in school. These results align with the work of Brophy (1981), who noted that when praise is specific and contingent, students know what they are being praised for and can later replicate those behaviors.

While the majority of teachers and students agreed that praise notes communicated behavioral expectations, the difference between groups was significant: Students agreed much more than teachers. This difference suggests that teachers may underestimate the importance of praise notes for communicating behavioral expectations. Research has shown that decreases in negative behavior are associated with establishing clear expectations (Fairbanks et al., 2007). Praise notes could also help parents learn what the teacher expects from students. When parents reinforce the same behavior as teachers, student behavior improves more quickly (Barth, 1979).

Time and Procedure

As time-efficient interventions are more likely to be accepted (Mitchem & Young, 2001), this should be considered in social validity assessment. On the quantitative items, only a minority of teachers indicated that praise notes took too much time; however, time was the most common qualitative dislike for teachers, as shown in comments such as "The time it takes to write during class time can be challenging". Also some teachers liked the praise note form though others did not. The praise note form seemed to be acceptable to most, although improvements could still be made to make it quicker and simpler to complete.

Part of the praise note procedure included weekly prize drawings. Although most parents and students agreed that students would like praise notes without prize drawings, teachers rated this item significantly lower. Also the most common qualitative theme for students was that praise notes helped them win prizes: for example, "I can win prizes" and "I get prizes for being good." One of the most common student suggestions was that they wanted more prizes. Few parents and no teachers mentioned prizes in their comments, perhaps because students were the ones more directly reinforced by prizes. Prizes are a common element of school-wide praise note interventions, and other studies have not separated praise notes from prizes (Nelson et al., 2009; Wheatley et al., 2009). Such rewards may be appropriate as long as they have effective characteristics of reinforcement (Cameron & Pierce, 1994).

Recommendations

Assessing social validity and making subsequent adjustments can be an important part of program vitality (Schwartz & Baer, 1991). This social validity assessment demonstrates clearly that participants accepted the praise note intervention but that improvements can be made. This section will discuss trends and offer recommendations based on the findings.

Though parents were extremely positive about praise notes, teachers seemed unaware of this. Teachers would benefit from knowing that their praise note efforts have been appreciated, including what the notes contribute in the children's homes. Teacher training meetings might be good settings for discussing these parent perceptions. Perhaps groups such as the Parent Teacher Association could encourage parents to express appreciation to the teachers for writing praise notes in order to help teachers become more aware of the value parents place on the praise notes their children receive. Teachers should also remember that they are writing praise notes not only to the student, but also to the parent. If teachers are looking for ways to strengthen parent-child relationships, then praise notes is a strategy that should be considered, especially given that parental support is associated with students' academic achievement (Annear & Yates, 2010).

The open-ended responses showed that the most difficult part for teachers was the challenge involved in writing praise notes immediately after an appropriate behavior occurred; some teachers noted that they worked around the problem by pre-writing praise notes and filling in the name after the behavior occurred. Other teachers asked students to pick up their praise notes after class, rather than writing them in the moment. While these ideas save time, they may weaken reinforcement if praise is too general or delayed. Praise needs to be specific and timely, even if time-saving strategies are used. Praise note forms should be simplified as much as possible to minimize time and effort for teachers.

According to quantitative and qualitative findings, prize drawings could be an important aspect of the praise note procedure. Although teachers were doubtful whether students would be enthusiastic for praise notes without prizes, the majority of students and parents agreed that students would still like praise notes without prizes. Thus schools could try using only praise notes school wide, with prizes reserved for use with more at-risk students.

Limitations and Future Research

Survey results provided information about participants' positive perceptions of the praise note intervention, as well as suggestions for improvement, but limitations must be acknowledged. One limitation was that the survey was administered in only one elementary school, where just over half of students and parents completed surveys. Future

researchers should attempt to survey a more complete and representative population sample. Also the survey was not tested for psychometric properties, and its validity and reliability are unknown.

The survey examined the participants' perceptions of behavior, and not students' actual behavior or direct effects on student motivation. While participants' perceptions of student behavior change align with previous research (Caldarella et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2008; Nelson et al., 2009), future research should study both perceptions and more direct behavioral outcomes. For example, participants were unsure if students would like praise notes without the prizes; a future study could implement the praise note intervention without prizes to see how students would respond. Also future studies could research perceptions in more depth, including effects on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation.

Despite these limitations, praise notes appear to be a socially valid, positive intervention with the potential to improve student behavior, school communication, and relationships among stakeholder groups. It will be important to continue social validity assessment of praise notes to modify the intervention in ways that are acceptable to those involved, particularly if teachers or parents have concerns about intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. More research in this area could help further the use of praise notes in schools.

Conclusion

Past studies have shown that praise note systems are effective in changing student behavior. This was the first study to examine parent, teacher, and student perceptions of teacher-written praise notes. The results of the current study demonstrated that praise notes were viewed as socially valid by the groups who used them. Because interventions depend on stakeholder fidelity, it is important to know how stakeholders perceive them. For the praise note intervention, participants had overall positive perceptions, including that the notes helped improve student behavior, relationships, and communication. It also appeared that praise notes had a good level of buy-in and potential for sustainability. Because past and current research suggests that praise notes are effective and socially valid, they have the potential to be a valuable intervention in school classrooms. Social validity assessment of praise notes should continue to increase utility and sustainability of this positive behavior support intervention.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Paul Caldarella at Brigham Young University, USA. Email may be sent to paul_caldarella@byu.edu