

Praising Students in a Classroom Setting Has a Big Impact on Their Behavior

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Teachers who praise good behavior get good results, say the authors of a study of students' on-task behavior and teachers' habits of praising and reprimanding students.

Researchers from Brigham Young University, the University of Kansas, and Vanderbilt University have found that if teachers focus on praising their students for appropriate classroom behavior rather than reprimanding them for being disruptive, students'

behavior in class improves. Or, in the words of the researchers, the higher the teachers' praise-to-reprimand ratio (PRR), the higher the students' on-task behavior percentage.

"Even if teachers praised as much as they reprimanded, students' on-task behavior reached 60 percent," said Paul Caldarella, a professor at BYU's McKay School of Education and lead author of the study. "However, if teachers could increase their praise-to-reprimand ratio to 2:1 or higher, they would see even more improvements in the classroom."

Researchers spent three years observing 2,536 students—from kindergarten through sixth grade (5 to 12 years of age). The research team sat in 151 classes at 19 elementary schools in Missouri, Tennessee, and Utah.

The team observed the frequency with which teachers praised and reprimanded the students in each classroom.

The difference was so pronounced that children in classes in which the praise-to-reprimand ratio was highest spent 20 to 30 percent longer focusing on the teacher or task compared to those in classes in which the PRR was lowest.

The paper suggests teachers can use these findings to help improve students' behavior in the classroom and to keep kids focused on the task at hand.



“Behavior that is reinforced tends to increase, so if teachers are praising students for good behavior—such as attending to the teacher, asking for help appropriately, etc.—it stands to reason that this behavior will increase and learning will improve,” Caldarella said.

The study was published in *Educational Psychology*. BYU assistant professor Ross Larsen, research staff member Leslie Williams, and graduate student Kade Downs coauthored the paper.