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## Implementing Behavior Specific Praise to Increase Student Academic and Behavioral Success

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**Implementing Behavior Specific Praise to Increase Student Academic and Behavioral  
Success**

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Master of Arts in Education - Differentiated Instruction

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### **Dedication**

To my family: Thank you for supporting me and cheering me on at every stage in life. I am so grateful for you all and all that you have done for me! I would not be where I am without all of you.

To my students: Thank you for always believing in me and bringing a smile to my face! I am so grateful to be a part of such a caring, loving, and encouraging classroom.

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyzed current research on the positive student impacts of the classroom management strategy of behavior specific praise. This topic is discussed through research findings regarding behavior specific praise and its' impact on student behavior, academic engagement, and possible strategies to implement to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise. The research indicated behavior specific praise can have a positive impact on student behavior and academic engagement. The research also identified the possible strategies to be implemented by school districts and teachers to increase their use of the evidence-based strategy. While the research studies suggested behavior specific praise is a positive indicator of student behavior and academic engagement, behavior specific praise must be explicitly taught to teachers for effective use of the strategy. Teachers should also sustain and monitor their use of behavior specific for it to maintain its' effectiveness. Behavior specific praise must also be consistent, immediate, and targeted in its' use.

*Keywords:* behavior specific praise, reprimands, academic engagement, classroom management, performance feedback

## Implementing Behavior Specific Praise to Increase Student Academic and Behavioral Success

### Chapter One: Introduction

As a student, there was no better feeling than seeing a gold star, a sticker with an affirmation, or a big letter “A” on work that you were proud of. That compliment from a teacher was equally motivating and affirming. This little sticker or marking on a piece of paper was the reminder that your work mattered. That feeling does not even compare to the feeling of hearing a teacher say, “I’m proud of you” or “You’re doing a great job”. Those simple words from a trusted adult can mean the world. Words of praise from a teacher make a student feel loved, seen, and appreciated. Most people can think of a time when a teacher’s kind words have had a lasting impact on them. If praise has such a lasting impact on the hearts of students, teachers should be intentionally incorporating praise into their everyday teaching practice.

Building a caring and supportive classroom community starts with positive teacher-student relationships and classroom management techniques. One strategy that promotes a positive classroom community is behavior specific praise. Behavior specific praise is specific and intentional student feedback that positively reinforces a target behavior (Markelz & Riden, 2019, p. 2). In every classroom, there is a variety of learning needs, interests, and strengths. With the many needs in any classroom, teachers also are expected to manage and understand student behavior. A proactive approach to student behavior includes the use of behavior specific praise to encourage positive student behavior. Differentiated instruction aims to reach every student where they are and provide them with next steps to elevate their learning. Highly effective teachers differentiate core instruction, as well as behavior management. Behavior specific praise is a catalyst to support teachers in acknowledging student strengths and planning instruction that is

the best fit for their students. When implemented with fidelity, behavior specific praise can have a positive impact on student behavior, academic engagement, and positive teacher behaviors.

### **Importance of the Topic**

Teachers are motivated to support their students' success academically, socially, and emotionally. The academic and behavioral aspects of a students' schooling journey are equally crucial to their success. In order to meet the needs of students, teachers must prepare intentional and highly engaging instruction, as well as effective and meaningful classroom management techniques. In any classroom, challenging or unexpected student behavior will occur. Teachers must be proactive and intentional in their approach to behavior management. One proactive and thoughtful approach to student behavior is behavior specific praise. Behavior specific praise is motivational and intentional in recognizing positive student behavior and the teachers' approval of that behavior (Floress et al., 2018, p. 411)

As teaching evolves, teachers face new challenges each year. A challenge that has been highly discussed by teachers is the seeming increase in disruptive student behavior. The students that display the undesirable behaviors often hear more reprimand statements than affirmations, which can lead to a toxic learning environment (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 2). This student may even continue the undesired behavior because of the negative attention they are receiving from their teacher. Behavior specific praise is a strategy to increase positive student behavior and foster a positive classroom environment. Challenging behaviors are prevalent in every classroom, and may disrupt teaching and consume more than 80% of instructional time if an intervention is not in place (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 34). With the increasing number of disruptive or undesired behaviors in the classroom, teachers must increase their use of behavior specific praise to proactively monitor and encourage student progress and learning. Although praise has

been found to be successful, teachers' use of praise has been found to be inconsistent and infrequent (Eaves, et. al., 2020, p. 228). The following research is intended to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise to foster a positive and caring learning environment. The implementation of behavior specific praise in a classroom could contribute to student academic and behavioral success.

### **Scope of Research**

The research examines qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies focused on the effectiveness of behavior specific praise in the educational setting. This research explores three distinct themes in relation to behavior specific praise. The first theme analyzed is the impact of behavior specific praise on student behavior. The second theme examined the positive relationship between behavior specific praise and student academic engagement. The first two themes look deeply into the effects of behavior specific praise on positive social and academic behaviors in the classroom. The third theme highlighted the strategies teachers can implement to increase their use of behavior specific praise in their classrooms. This section of research aims to provide teachers with sustainable and efficient ways to incorporate behavior specific praise into their classroom more regularly. The research included one research study from the secondary setting. Most of the research was conducted in the elementary setting. In future research on behavior specific praise, a higher amount of studies conducted in the secondary setting should be included.

### **Research Question**

In light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how might teachers leverage and differentiate their use of behavior specific praise to increase positive student behavior and academic engagement of their students? The first theme of research delved into the impact of



behavior specific praise on positive student behavior. This section of research looked closely at how behavior specific praise has the power to increase positive student behaviors, while simultaneously decreasing off-task behaviors. The second theme analyzed the effectiveness of behavior specific praise on students' academic engagement. The last theme of research analyzed was the strategies that teachers may implement into their practice to increase their use of behavior specific praise. This research aimed to shed light on Concordia University, St. Paul's Differentiated Instruction Program's Essential Question: "In light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how shall professional educators effectively teach each student?". Effective and meaningful differentiated instruction begins with meeting the needs of students at their current level and providing them with the tools to grow. Just as academic instruction should be differentiated in a classroom, the same is true for behavior management. Behavior specific praise is a way to reach all students and can be differentiated to meet their needs. The research in this paper showed the implementation of behavior specific praise should be differentiated based on teaching style, student needs, and classroom setting.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Behavior Specific Praise*** is an affirmative statement that identifies and highlights a desirable behavior (Markelz & Riden, 2019, p. 2).

***Reprimands*** are verbal statements to individuals indicating disapproval of a behavior or a desire that a specific behavior be stopped (Downs et al., 2019, p. 139).

***Disruptive Student Behavior*** is observed as voluntary inappropriate physical or behavior displayed by a student that serve a function for the student and may detract from the learning of peers (Downs et al., 2019, p. 139).

*Academic Engagement* is specific and desirable academic behaviors that show that the student is engaging with the instructional material (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 273).

## **Summary**

Disruptive or challenging student behavior occurs in every classroom across all educational settings. Teachers must be proactive and intentional in their classroom and behavior management. Behavior specific praise is an evidence-based classroom management strategy for teachers to implement in their classrooms. This chapter identified behavior specific praise as a powerful classroom management tool and highlighted the need to differentiate the use of behavior specific praise. With this knowledge, this paper analyzed the impact of behavior specific praise on student behavior and academic engagement. Strategies for schools or teachers to implement to increase their use of behavior specific praise is also explored. The review of literature will aim to identify the many student benefits of behavior specific praise and strategies to increase teacher use of the strategy.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

A strong classroom management system is the driving and sustaining force for a successful classroom environment. Behavior specific praise is an evidence-based practice to increase positive student social and academic behaviors. This review of literature sought to analyze the benefits of behavior specific praise on student behavior, academic engagement, and how to increase teachers' use of the strategy. The research analyzed resulted in three themes connecting to the research question of, how might teachers leverage and differentiate their use of behavior specific praise to increase positive student behavior and academic engagement of their students? The first theme of research examined the positive impacts of behavior specific praise on student behavior. The second theme considered how academic engagement of students is altered by behavior specific praise. The third theme of research looked at strategies that schools and teachers can implement to increase their use of behavior specific praise.

The first theme involved four studies by Floress et al. (2018), Lastrapes et al. (2018), Moffat (2011), and Allday et al. (2012). These studies researched how an increase in a teachers' use of behavior specific praise led to positive student behaviors. This theme looked closely at behavior specific praise's effect on on-task student behaviors in the general education and special education settings. These studies all found the implementation of consistent behavior specific praise led to an increase of positive student behaviors and a decrease in disruptive behaviors.

The second theme consisted of four studies by Niwayama et al. (2020), Lown et al. (2021), Rathel et al. (2014), and Downs et al. (2019). This theme analyzed the impact of behavior specific praise on student academic engagement. The second theme of research looked at the relationship between a teachers' use of behavior specific praise and the academically

engaged behavior of their students. This theme of research proved an increase in behavior specific praise led to higher levels of academic engagement in the classroom.

The third theme included the research of seven studies by Drogan et al. (2023), Rila et al. (2022), Gage et al. (2018), Knochel et al. (2022), Neef et al. (2022), Markelz & Riden (2019), and Eaves et al. (2020). This section of research analyzed the different possible strategies to be implemented to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise. The research found performance feedback, targeted professional development, differential reinforcement, teacher reflections, tactile prompting, and group contingencies are all successful strategies to increase teachers use of behavior specific praise. This theme of research highlighted the importance of teacher training, feedback, and reflection on their implementation of behavior specific praise.

### **Behavior Specific Praise on Student Behavior**

Effective classroom management is crucial to a successfully run classroom. Although implementing management strategies is critical to teacher and student success, many teachers report disruptive student behavior and lack of training in behavior management is a major factor in teacher burnout or job-related stress (Lastrapes, et al., 2018 p. 420). This proves teachers may feel unequipped or inadequately trained to manage challenging behaviors. In every classroom, challenging or unexpected behaviors will occur, and are a form of communication. Teachers must be educated on successful management strategies to best meet the needs of their students. One researched strategy to improve classroom management in behavior specific praise. When implemented with fidelity, behavior specific praise can increase positive student social and academic behavior, positive teacher behavior, and an increase in academic engagement. The first theme will highlight the research by Floress et al. (2018), Lastrapes et al. (2018), Moffat (2011),

and Allday et al. (2012). The following studies examine the influence of behavior specific praise on student behavior.

A highly effective classroom is run with intentional and effective classroom management techniques. One helpful strategy for teachers in management of student behavior is behavior specific praise. While many teachers may feel they naturally use high amounts of praise, this praise is often general praise. General praise is defined as a broad statement of approval with the use of a verbal statement of gesture (Floress et al., 2018, p. 411). Behavior specific praise differs from general praise in that behavior specific praise explicitly describes the desired student behavior and the approval of that behavior (Floress et al., 2018, p. 411). Behavior specific praise is more effective than general praise because children learn what specific behaviors earned the teachers' approval (Floress et al., 2018, p. 411). Behavior specific praise allows for the student to identify, determine, and reflect on which specific conditions provoke praise (Floress et al., 2018, p. 411). Although behavior specific praise is found to be an extremely effective classroom management tool, many students who display behavior problems receive fewer teacher praise statements and more reprimands (Floress et al., 2018, p. 412). By receiving many reprimands and few praise statements, students may continue to be inclined towards disruptive or off-task behavior. Floress et al. (2018) worked to examine teachers' natural use of praise in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. The conducted study analyzed the average rate of praise in the general education setting, the differences in praise rates throughout the grade levels, whether more behavior specific or general praise was used, and the relation between teachers' natural use of praise and student disruptive or off-task behavior (Floress et al., 2018, p. 412). The study included twenty-eight general education teachers across five school districts in Central Illinois (Floress et al., 2018, p. 412). It was found that teachers on average provided 34.2 total praise

statements per hour or about 1 praise statement every two minutes (Floress et al., 2018, p. 418). The findings showed that kindergarten teachers had the highest level of natural praise, and the rates of praise decreased throughout the grade levels (Floress et al., 2018, p. 418). This study also found that classrooms with higher rates of behavior specific praise were correlated with lower levels of off-task behavior (Floress et al., 2018, p. 418). This research highlighted the effectiveness of behavior specific praise as a successful classroom management tool. The study also proved general praise is more common in classrooms than behavior specific, despite behavior specific praise being linked to a decrease in off-task behavior.

Incorporating competitions in the classroom setting can prove to be exciting for teachers and students alike. Lastrapes et al. (2018) analyzed the effectiveness of the teacher versus students' game in increasing teachers' rates of praise while increasing positive student behaviors. The research study sought to analyze if the teacher versus students' game increased teachers' use of behavior specific praise, decreased corrective statements, and affected their general praise statements (Lastrapes, et al., 2018, p. 421). An identified secondary purpose was to examine students off task behaviors during the game (Lastrapes, et al., 2018, p. 421). The participants of this study included five teachers and fifteen students across fourth and fifth grade general education classrooms (Lastrapes, et al., 2018, p. 419). The students were identified by teachers as engaging in frequent off task behaviors. Students were observed during ten-minute sessions, during a direct instruction time. The baseline for all five teachers showed that their rates of behavior specific praise were low to zero (Lastrapes, et al., 2018, p. 426). The teacher versus students' game increased each teachers' use of behavior specific praise and significantly decreased rates of student off task behavior (Lastrapes, et al., 2018, p. 427). The teachers identified the game as promoting teamwork, serving as a reminder to praise, and students were

focused on the task at hand (Lastrapes, et al., 2018, p. 429). This classroom management tool provided the teachers and students with the opportunity to do their part in the creation of a positive and caring classroom community. Just as the teacher was reminded to implement behavior specific praise, the students were also encouraged to engage in positive behaviors.

Every teacher will encounter students with displayed challenging or unexpected behaviors. Behavior specific praise has proven to be an effective intervention strategy for students that display difficult behaviors. Many cases show students with high behavior needs do not receive intervention early enough to prevent problem patterns from developing (Moffat, 2011, p. 51). Praise has been found to reduce disruptive behavior, such as noise-making, blurting out, noncompliance, disrespect, and aggression (Moffat, 2011, p. 51). In order for the praise to have the desired results, it must immediately follow the target behavior, which will make the student more likely to engage the positive behavior in the future (Moffat, 2011, p. 52). While behavior specific praise is proven to be helpful in the classroom, teachers still tend to lean on more general praise for students (Moffat, 2011, p. 52). The study conducted by Moffat (2011) sought to understand the relationship between behavior specific praise and positive social behaviors. The study followed one teacher with more than twenty years of teaching experience in the early childhood sector (Moffat, 2011, p. 52). The target student in the study was three years old and displayed aggressive behavior tendencies, such as pushing, punching, or hitting. The baseline showed the teacher frequently reprimanded the children and rarely used praise (Moffat, 2011, p. 53). It was also found when the student engaged in positive social behaviors, the teacher did not respond with praise (Moffat, 2011, p. 53). The teacher was encouraged by the research team to use at least six behavior specific praise statements in a twenty-minute session (Moffat, 2011, p. 54). The teacher used reprimands only once in the first week of the intervention, and this

decreased to zero in weeks two and three (Moffat, 2011, p. 54). The teachers' rates of behavior specific praise increased from zero praise statements per twenty-minutes in the baseline to six per twenty-minutes in week three (Moffat, 2011, p. 55). The target students' behavior also dramatically changed throughout the intervention. With the increase in behavior specific praise statements, the displayed aggressive behaviors decreased substantially (Moffat, 2011, p. 55). The findings of the above study prove behavior specific praise enhanced positive social behaviors exhibited, while antisocial or aggressive behaviors decreased (Moffat, 2011, p. 55). The study conducted by Moffat further exemplifies behavior specific praise as an effective strategy to create a positive classroom environment while decreasing disruptive behaviors.

Based on the available literature, there is evidence to suggest teachers may feel overwhelmed by the behavioral and academic needs of their students. As stated, disruptive or challenging behaviors can lead to teacher burnout or stress (Lastrapes, et al., 2018 p. 420). This can also be compounded with the feeling of unpreparedness for meeting the needs of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Students diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disabilities (EBD) are confirmed to have behavioral challenges, which could affect teacher confidence in behavior management (Allday et al., 2012, p. 87). The study conducted by Allday et al. (2012) focused in on the population of students diagnosed with EBD and posed three research questions. The first question focused on the effectiveness of targeted staff training on behavior specific praise and its' impact on teacher use of the strategy. The second goal of the study was to find the levels of on-task behavior of students with or at risk of EBD with increases in behavior specific praise. The final research question examined the relationship between increased rates of teacher praise with the number of correction statements made to all students (Allday et al., 2012, p. 89). The study's participants were one teacher-student dyad (one teacher



and one student) and three student-teacher triads (one teacher and two students). The teachers and students involved in the study were in the general education setting in two elementary schools in the Southwestern United States and one middle school in the Midwestern United States (Allday et al., 2012, p. 89). The research consisted of thirty-minute observation periods and data collection. Data on students on-task behavior and off-task behavior were collected in the observations (Allday et al., 2012, p. 91). Following the baseline data collection, teachers were provided with a thirty-minute training on behavior specific praise (Allday et al., 2012, p. 91). Teachers were asked to apply their learning about behavior specific praise in their classrooms. The study found higher rates of behavior specific praise had a positive impact on the levels of on-task behavior of students with or at risk of EBD (Allday et al., 2012, p. 95). Each of the participating students exhibited gains in their on-task behavior. These findings suggest a positive relationship between rates of behavior specific praise and on-task student behavior. When implemented with fidelity, all students can benefit from their teachers' use of behavior specific praise.

The above studies by Floress et al. (2018), Lastrapes et al. (2018), Moffat (2011), and Allday et al. (2012) prove behavior specific praise positively influences the behavior of all students. The research showed behavior specific praise is linked to students' engagement in positive social behaviors. Behavior specific praise has also been found to decrease students' off-task or disruptive behavior. This evidence-based strategy can be utilized and differentiated to meet the needs of all students. Behavior specific praise is a powerful tool for positive student behavior, which leads to a more positive learning environment. Since behavior specific praise has proven to be an effective tool for student social behavior, the academic classroom behaviors

must also be explored. The next theme of research will analyze the effects of behavior specific praise on students' academic engagement.

### **Behavior Specific Praise on Academic Engagement**

Academic engagement is a huge indicator of student academic success. When students are actively engaged in the learning, they are more likely to retain that information and maintain motivation to keep learning. A classroom in which students exhibit high academic engagement must have strong classroom management systems in place. Behavior specific praise is an example of a highly effective classroom management tool which leads to positive student behavior as well as an increase in academic engagement. This theme will look closely at how an increase in teacher use of behavior specific praise encourages an engaged classroom dynamic for all students. The studies by Niwayama et al. (2020), Lown et al. (2021), Rathel, et al. (2014), and Downs et al. (2019) explore the impact of behavior specific praise on student academic engagement.

Niwayama et al. (2020) used the literature surrounding academic engagement to drive the following research. Various studies have shown the effect of academic engagement on student academic success. Social behavior, including behavior specific praise, is a powerful reinforcer for many students and will likely increase students' appropriate academic behaviors when it is implemented with fidelity (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 271). Niwayama et al. (2020) aimed to find the effects of an increased use of behavior specific praise on academic engagement after a targeted intervention for teachers on the appropriate uses of behavior specific praise. The study took place in a Japanese elementary school in two general education classrooms (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 273). Both of the participating teachers were male educators with less than five years of teaching experience and were nominated for the study due to classroom management

difficulties (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 273). The observer collected data on the number of behavior specific praise statements, the academic engagement of the students, and the social validity of the intervention (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 273). Before the intervention, teachers were given training on behavior specific praise's benefits in the classroom along with examples. The participating teachers were also encouraged to praise children contingent upon their academic engagement and focus on students with particularly low engagement (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 274). During the intervention, both teachers increased their use of behavior specific praise and maintained higher amounts of praise (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 275). Academic engagement improved substantially in both classes after the intervention (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 275). The two classrooms both saw academic engagement levels higher than eighty percent after the intervention (Niwayama et al., 2020, p. 277). These results show the increase in behavior specific praise statements increased the percentage of academically engaged students.

Teachers have many roles and responsibilities in their daily classroom routine. One of the teachers' responsibilities is behavior management. It is essential to have efficient and effective behavior supports that address both student behaviors and teacher requirements. The study by Lown et al. (2021) was designed to examine the effect of an increase of behavior specific praise on student academic engagement. The study took place in a Head Start program in the Southeastern United States (Lown et al., 2021, p. 806). The participating teachers were referred based on needing additional support with classroom management. In order for a teacher to qualify for the study, the teachers were required to demonstrate fewer than twenty behavior specific praise statements per twenty-minute period (Lown et al., 2021, p. 808). Observers collected data on the behavior specific praise statements, reprimands, and academic engagement. During the intervention, it was found that academic engagement increased substantially and

remained stable (Lown et al., 2021, p. 808). With behavior specific praise statements demonstrated to be beneficial to increasing academic engagement, teachers must be aware of their amount of praise statements. The below study by Rathel et al. (2014) analyzed teachers' praise to reprimand ratios' impact on academic engagement.

Teachers of students in each setting face increasing challenges in relation to effective instruction and management of their students (Rathel, et al., 2014). In order to increase positive student-teacher interactions, teachers should increase their use of behavior specific praise. Students displaying behavioral needs often hear more negative teacher statements and fewer statements of praise. Rathel et al. (2014) suggest for teachers to implement a three to one ratio for positive to corrective student communication. While three to one is the suggested ratio for students, a five to one ratio of positive to corrective student communication is recommended for students that are diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, mild intellectual disabilities, and developmental disabilities (Rathel, et al., 2014). Rathel and the research team (2014) sought to find out the effect of performance feedback, intervention, and reflection on teachers' ratios of positive to negative student communication, the effect of performance feedback on teachers' use of behavior specific praise, and the relationship between increased positive to negative communication and student engagement. The study was conducted in four special education classrooms that served students with emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, mild intellectual disabilities, and developmental disabilities in a rural county in the southeastern United States (Rathel et al., 2014). The five participating teachers were nominated by the special education director because of past difficulty with classroom management (Rathel et al., 2014). All participating teachers were in their first three

years of teaching, served students with mild disabilities, and had a positive to negative feedback ratio lower than three to one (Rathel et al., 2014).

Prior to observations, the research team defined positive and negative communication behaviors. Positive communication behaviors were decided to be any verbal or nonverbal gesture that indicated approval of the students' academic or social behavior (Rathel et al., 2014). The specific features of positive communication that were analyzed in observations were behavior specific praise for academic behavior, behavior specific praise for social behavior, and general praise (Rathel et al., 2014). Negative communications were defined as any verbal or nonverbal gesture that indicated disapproval, with observed specific teacher behavior of verbal corrections for academic or social behavior, and nonverbal gestures signifying disapproval (Rathel et al., 2014). The research team also sought to study patterns in student task engagement. Task engagement was defined as the orientation of a student toward the appropriate object of person with specific student behaviors of direction following, active listening, and on task work (Rathel et al., 2014). The intervention consisted of meetings with the participating teachers, observations, performance feedback, and reflection (Rathel et al., 2014). Each teacher was asked to aim for a positive to negative communication ratio of five to one in five consecutive sessions (Rathel et al., 2014). In the baseline, each teacher had ratios of positive to negative teacher communication that fell below the goal of five to one (Rathel et al., 2014). Throughout the study, the subjects use of behavior specific praise increased, while reprimands decreased. The data showed teachers utilized behavior specific praise for academic behaviors more than social behaviors (Rathel et al., 2014). When teachers' positive to negative communication ratios increased, students' levels of task engagement increased (Rathel et al., 2014). Teachers must be mindful of the type and

number of praise statements they are giving to their students. The above study shows the positive impact of behavior specific praise on academic engagement.

Every student has unique strengths, learning styles, and needs to be successful in the classroom. Teachers must work to ensure each student feels valued, cared for, and comfortable in their learning environment. Students exhibiting behavior needs often face more obstacles and challenges in the classroom. The following study conducted by Downs et al. (2019) aimed to understand the differential relationship between naturally occurring rates of teacher praise of students who are at risk and students who are not at risk of emotional behavioral disorders. The study had sixty-five participating teachers throughout the elementary general education and special education settings (Downs et al., 2019, p. 137). Of the 239 participating students, 130 were identified as at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (Downs et al., 2019, p. 137). Higher rates of teacher praise were found to be in direct relation to increased engagement of students at risk, whereas engagement of students not at risk remained stable. These findings may show students at risk also receive low rates of praise at home or in the community, resulting in few positive interactions with adults (Downs et al., 2019, p. 143). With this information, the students identified as at risk could have viewed praise as more notable to them than their peers (Downs et al., 2019, p. 143). This study paved the way to understand the importance of teacher praise for all students. As the study by Allday et al. (2012) in the first theme proved that behavior specific praise positively impacted the social behaviors of students with EBD, Downs et al. (2019) show the academic behaviors of students are positively impacted by behavior specific praise as well.

This theme sought to examine the relationship between behavior specific praise and academic engagement. The studies by Niwayama et al. (2020), Lown et al. (2021), Rathel et al.

(2014), and Downs et al. (2019) all highlight the undeniable relationship between a teachers' use of behavior specific praise on academic engagement. When a teacher is intentional about praising students for academic behaviors, their engagement will increase. With the understanding of behavior specific praise as a beneficial tool for positive behaviors and increased academic engagement, teachers must work to increase their use of behavior specific praise. The third theme is focused around strategies to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise in their classroom.

### **Strategies to Increase Teachers' Use of Behavior Specific Praise**

Since behavior specific praise is a strategy that has proven to be successful for behavior management, teachers need to be intentional with their use. The research from the above themes showed the positive impact of behavior specific praise on student behavior and academic engagement. These findings highlight the need for teachers to incorporate behavior specific praise into their everyday vernacular. This theme is focused on strategies to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise to impact their students. This theme analyzed research in which proven strategies are shared to increase teacher use of behavior specific praise. The study conducted by Drogan et al. (2023) highlights the need for targeted training for preservice teachers on the implementation of behavior specific praise. The studies by Rila et al. (2022), Gage et al. (2018), and Knochel et al. (2022) take a closer look at performance feedback's impact on teachers' use of behavior specific praise and what can be paired with performance feedback to increase effectiveness. Neef et al. (2022) tested the effects of differential reinforcement with teacher questionnaires on behavior specific praise. Markelz & Riden (2019) encouraged teachers to use tactile prompting to build the habit of behavior specific praise. The final study of the

theme by Eaves et al. (2020) analyzed group contingencies and their ability to increase teachers' use of praise and decrease teachers' use of reprimands.

Before a teacher begins their career in the classroom, they must have purposeful and intentional preservice training. Many novice teachers often see challenging behaviors as a major hurdle and feel unprepared (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 34). To adequately prepare preservice teachers, effective and sustainable classroom management strategies must be explicitly taught. In order to successfully implement behavior specific praise as a classroom management strategy, the teacher must receive targeted training, teacher reflection, and feedback (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 35). This training, reflection, and feedback are often needed for teachers to acquire the skill and use it fluently (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 35). Drogan et al. (2023) created and analyzed a training process on behavior specific praise for preservice teachers. The training process consisted of an implementation checklist, a virtual training module, the establishment of a coaching process, and reflection and goal setting. The preservice teachers were encouraged to increase their ratio of praise to correction to four to one. This study followed two pre-service teachers pursuing dual certification in Special Education PK-12 and Early Childhood Education (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 38). In the initial observation, one preservice teacher gave nineteen praise statements to twenty-five corrections (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 39). After video reflection, the preservice teacher achieved a four to one ratio in the second observation in which fifty-five praise statements were given to nine correction statements (Drogan et al., 2023, p. 39). These findings show the use of video monitoring and goal setting increased awareness of appropriate behavior specific praise use. In order to utilize behavior specific praise, teachers must be explicitly taught about effective implementation in conjunction with feedback (Drogan et al.,



2023, p. 40). The above study also highlighted the importance of reflection on the implementation of the management strategy.

As shown throughout the review of literature, behavior specific praise is a simple and effective practice for strong classroom management. However, teachers underuse behavior specific praise and deliver more reprimands to students in their classrooms (Rila et al., 2022, p. 53). Many schools still rely on the use of exclusionary discipline practices, a student being removed from the classroom due to an unwanted behavior, causing the student to miss critical instruction and can lead to reduced achievement (Rila et al., 2022, p. 54). Behavior specific praise is an effective way to acknowledge appropriate student behavior. Rila et al. (2022) aimed to examine the impact of performance feedback on teachers' use of behavior specific praise. Performance feedback was defined as a strategy to change and monitor teacher behaviors through the use of observation and timely feedback (Rila et al., 2022, p. 54). The study was conducted in a Midwestern high school with forty percent of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch (Rila et al., 2022, p. 57). The study was conducted in four general education classrooms and data was collected on the frequency of praise and reprimands in fifteen-minute observations (Rila et al., 2022, p. 57). The teachers received visual performance feedback regarding their use of behavior specific praise after the observation (Rila et al., 2022, p. 59). The baseline observation noted low rates of praise statements and high rates of reprimands (Rila et al., 2022, p. 71). Visual performance feedback was found to lead to an increase in behavior specific praise statements and a decrease in reprimands (Rila et al., 2022, p. 71). The above study conducted by Rila et al. (2022) established performance feedback as an effective strategy to increase teachers' rates of behavior specific praise.

Performance feedback was found by Rila et al. (2022) to be beneficial in increasing teachers' usage of behavior specific praise. School districts must be mindful when implementing models to train and monitor their teachers use of classroom management strategies. Gage et al. (2018) conducted a study to analyze the impact of performance feedback paired with professional development on behavior specific praise. This study had four early career teacher participants at a title one elementary school in a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States (Gage et al., 2018, p. 268). The professional development model consisted of didactic instruction, self-monitoring, and performance feedback. In the universal phase, the professional development is delivered to all teachers using didactic instruction and self-monitoring (Gage et al., 2018, p. 266). If a teacher was still not implementing the classroom management skill, the teacher received targeted professional development and the use of regular performance feedback. The data for the study was collected in fifteen minutes of direct observations of each teacher (Gage et al., 2018, p. 268). The study found after the targeted professional development, brief one-on-one training, and visual performance feedback, all four teachers immediately increased their use of behavior specific praise (Gage et al., 2018, p. 270). During the baseline, the average amount of behavior specific praise was 4.4 per 15-minute observations (Gage et al., 2018, p. 270). The targeted professional development phase increased the teachers use of behavior specific praise to 9.7 per 15-minute observations (Gage et al., 2018, p. 270). This study demonstrated that performance feedback and targeted professional development is an effective tool to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise.

With the proven benefits of behavior specific praise on student behavior and academic engagement, teacher must use this strategy equitably. Research has found exclusionary discipline practices are much more common for students of color to experience in comparison to their

Caucasian peers (Rila et al., 2022, p. 54). With this known disparity, teachers must be aware of their implicit biases and proactive in their response to disruptive student behavior. Knochel et al. (2022) aimed to find a way to increase equity in teachers' use of behavior specific praise. Knochel et al. (2022) designed a study to examine the impact of teacher self-monitoring and equity-focused performance feedback on teachers' specific praise to corrective feedback ratios. The research study took place in a public elementary school in a suburban Southeastern U.S. school serving six hundred eighty-six students of varying racial backgrounds (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 19). Teachers were found eligible for the study if they delivered less than one behavior specific praise statement per minute to students, had limited experience with self-monitoring, and were willing to receive feedback on their implementation (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 19). All four participants were white female teachers, with varied levels of experience in the education field (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 19). The participants were asked to use a clicker to keep track of their behavior specific praise statements, while observers collected data on behavior specific praise statements and reprimands used by the teachers. The racial group of the student receiving the praise was also noted in the data collection (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 20). The data proved self-monitoring and performance feedback were effective in increasing behavior specific praise (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 28). There were disparities with students with Black and Latinx backgrounds receiving lower levels of praise and higher rates of reprimands during the first phase (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 28). After implementation of equity-based performance feedback, these disparities were reduced across participants (Knochel et. al., 2022, p. 28). This data point proves further research is necessary to examine teacher implicit bias relating to classroom management. Teachers must be aware of implicit biases they may hold in order to equitably and effectively manage their classrooms.

While performance feedback has proven to be successful in increasing teachers' use of behavior specific praise, the study conducted by Neef et al. (2022) examined the effect of teacher questionnaires and differential reinforcement on the use of behavior specific praise. The study included three general education teachers in a low-income urban elementary school. The participating teachers were referred to join the study based on low levels of praise statements and positive interactions with students (Neef et al., 2022, p. 347). Each teacher was asked to fill out a questionnaire with all the different things that are said or done in their classroom when a student gave a correct answer, an incorrect answer, as well as when a student followed the classroom rules or did not follow the classroom rules (Neef et al., 2022, p. 347). The teachers received differential reinforcement of their responses on the questionnaire. The experimenter shared a positive comment if the statement was behavior specific, and did not leave a comment if it was general praise (Neef et al., 2022, p. 348). The experimenter also questioned general praise statements to challenge the teacher to transform the statement into behavior specific praise. The results found the differential reinforcement of questionnaire statements of behavior specific praise was successful and was accompanied by an increased use of behavior specific praise for all teachers. The study by Neef et al. (2022) exhibits the importance of teacher reflection and dialogue about use of behavior specific praise. The differential reinforcement of behavior specific praise with the use of a questionnaire was found to be an additional strategy to increase praise statements in the classroom.

Behavior specific praise is an evidence-based strategy which can promote positive behavior, relationships, and engagement. Even with these benefits, some teachers continue to use low rates of praise with the frequent student disruptions and off-task behaviors in the classroom (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 1). Instead of using reactive measures in an attempt to reduce

undesirable behaviors, proactive measures increase desirable behaviors (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 2). Behavior specific praise allows teachers to specifically target student behaviors in which reinforcement is needed (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 3). To actively recognize desired behaviors, a teacher must proactively seek them out and make a point to incorporate praise (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 3). One strategy to increase behavior specific praise is tactile prompting. Markelz and Riden (2019) recommended using an Apple Watch or worn device that will vibrate on a time schedule prompting the teacher to deliver behavior specific praise. When implementing this intervention, there are many things to consider in order to implement with fidelity. The intervention is recommended to begin with one or two target students who display disruptive behavior (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 5). The praise must be varied because effectiveness is reduced when students realize the praise is repetitive (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 5). The behavior specific praise should be sincere and immediate, meaning the praise should occur immediately after the desired behavior occurs (Markelz and Riden, 2019, p. 5). Tactile prompting acts as a visual reminder for teachers to implement behavior specific praise in their classroom regularly and consistently. With the many decisions and responsibilities teachers are tasked with each day, tactile prompting is a great tool for increased accountability for this effective evidence-based strategy.

The above studies validate performance feedback, targeted professional development, differential reinforcement, tactile prompting, and self-monitoring as effective strategies for increasing teacher behavior specific praise. Another strategy to improve behavior specific praise in the classroom is group contingencies for teacher behavior. Even with this abundance of research showing the effectiveness of behavior specific praise, its use in the classroom is often inconsistent and infrequent. The study conducted by Eaves et al. (2020) compared the

effectiveness of independent and interdependent group contingencies on teachers' use of praise (Eaves et. al., 2020, p. 229). In independent contingencies, the individuals are reinforced based on an individual meeting criterion, while interdependent contingencies provide reinforcement to all members of a group contingent on each member meeting this criterion (Eaves et. al., 2020, p. 228). The study took place in an urban elementary school in the Southeastern region of the United States with ninety-three percent of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch (Eaves et. al., 2020, p. 229). Four elementary teachers were referred for the study based on high rates of reprimands in the classroom or they were needing support for disruptive behavior (Eaves et. al., 2020, p. 229). The data was collected in twenty-minute increments and data was collected on the number of behavior specific praise statements, general praise statements, behavior specific reprimands, and general reprimands (Eaves et al. 2020, p. 230). Teachers were informed if they were working individually or with a partner. Teachers working individually were expected to deliver ten behavior specific praise statements per twenty minutes (Eaves,et. al., 2020, p. 230). Interdependent partnerships were required to deliver twenty behavior specific praise statements per twenty-minutes (Eaves, et. al., 2020, p. 230). The data showed both contingency plans showed increases in behavior specific praise statements by each teacher (Eaves, et. al., 2020, p. 235). Rates of behavior specific reprimand and general reprimand decreased in all participating classrooms (Eaves, et. al., 2020, p. 235). The data showed little to no differentiation between the two contingency plans (Eaves, et. al., 2020, p. 241). Both independent and interdependent reinforcement contingencies were effective in increasing teachers' use of behavior specific praise (Eaves, et. al., 2020, p. 244). The use of group or individual contingencies to alter teacher behavior and increase behavior specific praise were proved to be effective.

This theme focused on the many effective strategies to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise in their classrooms. The studies conducted by Drogan et al. (2023), Rila et al. (2022), Gage et al. (2022), Knochel et al. (2022), Neef et al. (2022), Markelz & Riden (2019), and Eaves et al. (2020) highlight many action plans for districts and teachers to take in order to increase their use of behavior specific praise. Some of the proven strategies to increased behavior specific praise included performance feedback, targeted professional development, differential reinforcement, teacher reflections, tactile prompting, and group contingencies. Since behavior specific praise is incredibly powerful in increasing positive student behaviors and academic engagement, districts must be mindful about how they encourage their teachers to use this evidence-based strategy. Depending on the needs of the teachers and students, districts should differentiate their training and use of behavior specific praise to best meet the needs of their student population.

### **Review Proposed Problem**

In light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how might teachers leverage and differentiate their use of behavior specific praise to increase positive student behavior and academic engagement of their students? The above research focused on three themes to identify the need for behavior specific praise in the classroom and how teachers can increase their use of behavior specific praise. The first theme identified the benefits of behavior specific praise on student disruptive behavior. The second theme analyzed the relationship between an increase in behavior specific praise and student academic engagement. The third theme looked closer at different strategies to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise. This research provided insight for teachers into the benefits of behavior specific praise and how they could implement with fidelity to better meet the needs of all students.

**Review Importance of Topic**

Classroom management is a critical aspect of the teaching practice. Strong and effective teachers must put strong behavior management systems and strategies in place. One of the effective and evidence-based strategies is behavior specific praise. Behavior specific praise is proven to lead to positive outcomes for all students. Behavior specific praise can help to increase positive social and academic behaviors, increase academic engagement, and decrease disruptive or off-task behavior. With the benefits of behavior specific praise, districts, schools, and teachers should be intentional of how they can implement this strategy with fidelity. Teachers are responsible for differentiating their instruction to meet the needs of their students, just as teachers are responsible for differentiating their behavior management. Behavior specific praise is able to foster a positive learning environment by being intentional in acknowledging the successes of students.

**Summary of Findings**

In the studies conducted by Floress et al. (2018), Lastrapes et al. (2018), Moffat (2011), and Allday et al. (2012), the findings showed the positive impacts of behavior specific praise on student behavior. The authors of these studies noted an increase in teacher behavior specific praise led to a decrease in disruptive or off-task student behavior. The research believed in the need for teachers to increase their use of behavior specific praise in order to notice an improvement in their students on-task behavior and positive social behaviors. The research findings by Allday et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between behavior specific praise and the behavior of students diagnosed with or at risk of emotional or behavioral disabilities. Since behavior specific praise has been found to increase positive student behavior while



simultaneously preventing negative or disruptive behaviors further proves this evidence-based strategy is an effective tool for behavior management.

The studies conducted by Rathel et al. (2014), Downs et al. (2019), Niwayama et al. (2020), and Lown et al. (2022) highlighted the positive relationship between behavior specific praise and student academic engagement. The researchers defined and identified what student engagement looked like in the classroom setting and analyzed the relationship between behavior specific praise and engagement. Rathel et al. (2014) believed behavior specific praise is a strategy to be explicitly taught to preservice teachers and found increased academic engagement after implementation. Downs et al. (2019) found behavior specific praise as a way to increase academic engagement in students at risk of emotional and behavioral disorders.

The first two themes analyzed the impacts of behavior specific praise on students, while the third theme looked for strategies for schools and teachers to increase their use of behavior specific praise. In the research conducted by Drogan et al. (2023), Rila et al. (2022), Gage et al. (2018), Knochel et al. (2022), Neef et al. (2022), Markelz & Riden (2019), and Eaves et al. (2020), strategies were identified to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise. The research found some of the effective ways to increase teacher implementation of behavior specific praise were performance feedback, reflection, differential reinforcement, tactile prompting, group contingencies, and professional development. The authors had a common understanding in which behavior specific praise should be implemented in each classroom setting in order to benefit students.

## **Conclusion**

In order to identify the benefits of behavior specific praise when implemented with fidelity, fifteen sources were reviewed and sorted into three distinct themes. The three above

themes highlight the importance of behavior specific praise as a way to mitigate disruptive student behavior, engage students in academics, and build a strong foundation for teacher classroom management. When implementing behavior specific praise, teachers must be mindful of their current use, the needs of their students, and how to implement effectively. The above research points to many reasons why behavior specific praise is a powerful tool for behavior management, as well as many strategies to increase teachers' use of the tool. The following chapter will discuss insights gained from the research, application of the research, and future studies to be conducted.

### **Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies**

This chapter will consider the research analyzed in the literature review and what insights are gained from the research on behavior specific praise. The examined research's insights focus on the importance of teachers' consistent use of behavior specific praise, explicit training on the benefits of behavior specific praise, and the significance of behavior specific praise as a proactive approach to student behavior. This chapter will also highlight the applications to be drawn from the research on behavior specific praise within classrooms and school districts. While the research on behavior specific praise has shown the impact on student and teacher behavior, three possible future studies are identified and outlined in this chapter to add to the breadth of knowledge on the topic.

#### **Insights Gained from the Research**

In the review of the research, there was a commonality found in behavior specific praise's role as an effective behavior management tool for teachers to implement. The first insight gained from the research is the effect of teacher language on student behavior and engagement. Many of the research studies' baseline data established teachers were using more reprimand or corrective statements to behavior specific praise or general praise. Reprimands were found to be connected to higher rates of challenging or disruptive student behavior. When the participating teachers in the studies intentionally increased their use of behavior specific praise, positive student behavior increased and disruptive or off task behavior decreased. These findings show just how much students are motivated and impacted by their teachers' word choices. When positive behaviors are actively praised, many students notice and modify their behavior to match the expectations of the teacher. While teachers may revert to reprimands often as a reactive response to student behavior, behavior specific praise is a proactive approach to identify and reinforce positive

student behaviors. By increasing teacher use of behavior specific praise, student social and academic behaviors are positively impacted.

Another insight gained from the research is the need for explicit training and education on behavior specific praise must be done for teachers to implement correctly and sustain their implementation. The research showed many teachers believed their rate of praise was sufficient. The studies showed teachers often relied more heavily on general praise rather than behavior specific praise. This highlights the need for increased teacher training on the evidence-based strategy in order to implement in their classroom and continue their use over time. The reviewed research identified many strategies for training on behavior specific praise with reflection and feedback embedded for accountability.

The last insight gained from the research is the importance of targeted and equitable use of the strategy. The research proved behavior specific praise can be an indicator of positive student behavior. Researchers have also found behavior specific praise as a positive strategy for students with emotional and behavior disorders or students displaying aggressive behaviors. With this knowledge, teachers must be cognizant of their use of behavior specific praise. Behavior specific praise can be differentiated to meet the needs of students and can also act as a behavior intervention strategy for students exhibit challenging behaviors.

The analyzed research gave insights into how students are positively impacted by behavior specific praise and how teachers can increase their use of behavior specific praise. Behavior specific praise is a proactive approach to student behavior. By implementing with fidelity, teachers may notice an increase in positive student behavior. The research shows teachers must be trained on the benefits of behavior specific praise and how to effectively implement behavior specific praise. The review of literature found behavior specific to be a

successful strategy for teachers to implement to positively impact the social and academic behaviors of students. The above insights gained from the research translate into three applications schools and teachers could implement.

### **Application of Research**

In the research, behavior specific praise was found to be positively correlated with positive student behavior and academic engagement. The research examined the ratios in which teachers used behavior specific praise statements to reprimand statements. Baseline data often showed teachers were using higher rates of reprimands than praise statements. Researchers recommend three to five behavior specific praise statements to each reprimand statement. To apply this research, teachers must be aware of their praise to reprimand ratios. If a teacher is finding their use of behavior specific praise is low, the teacher can implement strategies like tactile prompting or self-monitoring in order to increase their rates of praise. The research has shown student behavior is positively impacted by high rates of behavior specific praise compared to reprimands. Teachers should be conscious of their use of praise in the classroom to ensure their classroom environment is caring, safe, and comfortable for all students.

Schools and teachers may implement strategies to increase their teachers' use of behavior specific praise. The research highlighted the importance of explicit training for teachers on the defining features of behavior specific praise and the benefits of implementation in the classroom. This process could begin with professional development on the strategy with regular performance feedback and teacher check ins after the learning. A school can also start by educating teachers with lower praise to reprimand ratios first before professional development. With the findings pointing to behavior specific praise as a powerful tool for student behavior, schools must be strategic in how they will educate their teachers and monitor their progress.

Teachers are responsible for working to meet the needs of their students academically and behaviorally. The research shows behavior specific praise is a beneficial strategy for positive social and academic behaviors of students. Behavior specific praise can be used proactively and its use can be differentiated based on student need. When beginning to implement behavior specific praise, teachers can be strategic about what students may benefit from it as an early intervention to behavior. Identifying a few target students to use behavior specific praise with can be an effective way to begin implementation.

The findings surrounding behavior specific praise can be applied in schools and classrooms to benefit their student populations. To implement behavior specific praise with fidelity, teachers must be cognizant of their praise to reprimand ratios and actively work to improve it with self-monitoring or tactile prompting. The next application provided insight into how schools may train and monitor their staff on behavior specific praise as a management technique. Teachers may also differentiate their use of behavior specific praise to meet the needs of their students. Teachers can use behavior specific praise as an early intervention strategy to proactively approach student behavior.

### **Future Studies**

A few future studies could be identified to research in relation to behavior specific praise and its impact on student academic and social behavior. An additional study could be conducted to analyze the effect of behavior specific praise on students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The data could be collected during observations of one teacher and one student. The observers could collect data on the number of behavior specific praise statements and the behaviors exhibited by the student. The review of literature examined the impacts of behavior specific in the general education and special education settings. Further researched centered

around the student population diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder would provide educators with more information on how to better support their students in the classroom.

Another study that could be conducted would be the effects of behavior specific praise over a full school year. Many of the research studies included in the review of literature were conducted with a section of the school year. It would be beneficial to see how the implementation at the beginning of the school year would impact student behavior throughout the nine-month school year. In order to do this, the research would have to be conducted with participating teachers that could sustain their increased use of behavior specific praise throughout the year. The researchers could begin the training on behavior specific praise at the beginning of the year. Then, the participating teachers could be observed monthly to collect data on behavior specific praise statements and student behavior. This study would provide educators with the impacts of behavior specific praise throughout the full year time span.

Lastly, there is another future beneficial study to the research on behavior specific praise on student social and academic behavior. A large amount of research of the impact of behavior specific praise on student behavior and academic engagement is in the elementary setting. A future study could be a comparative study between the impact of behavior specific praise on academic engagement in the elementary level compared to the secondary level. The data could be collected identically in both settings using observational methods. The researchers could work to collect data on the behavior specific praise statements by the teacher in relation to the students' academically engaged behavior. This would provide educators with information on how behavior specific praise's impact changes or stays consistent throughout the elementary and secondary settings.

These future studies may provide educators with more information on how behavior specific praise impacts student behavior and academic engagement in various educational settings. The first future research may help to increase positive student behavior of students with autism spectrum disorder. The second possible study would provide educators with more information of the impact of sustained behavior specific praise on student behavior. The final potential future study would help to see the similarities or differences on the impacts of behavior specific praise on elementary students compared to secondary students.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review analyzed the evidence-based strategy of behavior specific praise and its' impact on student and teacher behavior. The research looked at the relationship between an increase of behavior specific praise throughout multiple educational settings. Three distinct themes emerged from the research with a focus on behavior specific praise's impact on student behavior, behavior specific praise's impact on academic engagement, and strategies to increase teachers' use of behavior specific praise. The research suggests behavior specific praise is a strategy underused by many teachers. Behavior specific praise has been found to be an effective strategy to increase positive students' social and academic behaviors, while concurrently decreasing challenging or disruptive student behaviors. This research suggests teachers must increase their use of behavior specific praise to positively impact the behavior and academic engagement of their students. In order for behavior specific praise to be effective, it is necessary the praise statements are consistent, immediate, and specific to the targeted behavior. Without proper training and support from school districts, teachers will not be able to implement this strategy with fidelity. Teachers are responsible for working to meet the needs of their students



academically and behaviorally. Behavior specific praise is a proactive and evidence-based approach to student behavior and has the power to make a lasting impact.

Words are powerful and have the chance to uplift, encourage, and empower others. In the classroom, teachers act as educators, role models, leaders, and supporters for their students. With the increase in disruptive behavior, teachers have the opportunity to intervene and support their students' behavior through the use of behavior specific praise. As a student, hearing an affirmation from a teacher or seeing a gold star on your paper most likely led to pride and a feeling of success. An increase in classroom behavior specific praise would provide students with the same confident feeling whenever they walk through the school doors. This research provides optimism for educators to ensure their use of behavior specific praise meets the needs of their students while the teacher grows in their comfortability with strategy. The research shows with support from their school districts, teachers can increase their use of behavior specific praise to positively impact the behavior and academic engagement displayed by their students. A student should feel seen, heard, and appreciated in their classroom every single day. Behavior specific praise is a way to ensure every student knows they matter and they belong in their school community.

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