

**Specific Praise Improves On-task Behavior and Numeracy Enjoyment:  
A study of year four pupils engaged in the numeracy hour**

**Description:** The effects of praise on student on-task behavior, academic self-concept, and numeracy enjoyment were investigated in this study. Four classes participated in the study. Two classes were instructed to use specific praise and two classes were instructed to use positive praise. Positive praise is an expression of positive affect or approval about behavior. Specific praise is an expression of positive affect but also contextualizes behavior. Specific praise increased on-task behavior and their academic self-concept significantly over positive praise. There was no significant increase on numeracy enjoyment with either type of praise.

**Participants:**

-There were 109 pupils (4 classes) between the ages of eight and nine, and four teachers (3 female and 1 male). Two classes were assigned to the specific praise group and 2 were assigned to positive praise.

**Materials:**

- Observing Pupils and Teachers in Classrooms (OPTIC) was used to record on-task behavior.
- “Myself-As-Learner” Scale (MALS) was used to assess academic self-concept.
- A single-item rating scale was used to rate enjoyment of numeracy lessons.
- Tally sheet for teachers to record types of praise used and to rate on-task behavior.

**Preparation:**

- Make the rating scale from 1(“I don’t like them”), to 5(“They’re ok”), to 10(“I really like them”).
- Create tally sheet for teacher.
- Teachers received a 45 minute briefing over the definition of positive or specific praise, depending on the group they were assigned to, and clear examples of the type of praise.
  - Specific-praise teachers were instructed to link praise to pupils for social and academic behavior, strategy or effort put in by the pupil, making praise more specific and informational
  - Positive-praise teachers were instructed to praise for social and academic behavior but were given no instruction on content of praise.

**Implementing the Intervention:**

- An initial observation using OPTIC was done to assess if the classes were appropriate for intervention.
  - To administer OPTIC the observer divided the class into three approximately equal groups, paying attention to each group for one minute, and each student in a group for 4 seconds, to decide on-task behavior.
- A second observation using OPTIC was done to gain a baseline for on-task behavior.
- Teacher’s academic and social responses to pupils were measured before and after intervention using OPTIC.
- MALS and the rating scale were done before and after intervention. They were read aloud to the students, in case a child had a reading problem, and students were told to circle the answer they agreed with.

-Teachers implemented their praise type during numeracy lessons. At the end of each lesson teachers completed a tally sheet.

-Teachers were encouraged to praise groups and individuals, and to praise both social and academic behaviors.

-Three teaching sessions were observed using OPTIC after intervention began (one to observe the teacher and two to observe the students).

-Each session lasted 15 to 20 minutes.

**Notes:**

-Praise, in general, has been linked to increased on-task behavior.

**References:**

Chalk, K., & Bizo, L. (2004, December). Specific Praise Improves On-task Behaviour and Numeracy Enjoyment: A study of year four pupils engaged in the numeracy hour. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 20(4), 335-351.