

THE USE OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY TECHNIQUES TO AUGMENT TRADITIONAL BEHAVIORAL SKILLS TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS IMPLEMENTING BEHAVIOR SPECIFIC PRAISE STATEMENTS IN THE CLASSROOM SETTING



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Introduction

- A 2006 survey by American Psychology Association's Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education revealed:
 - PK-12 teachers rated classroom management as a high priority professional development need (ranked first by 25% of respondents), second only to instructional skills (ranked first by 35% of respondents).
 - 29% of PK-5 teachers ranked classroom management as their highest professional development need.
 - 52% among first year teachers.
- High levels of classroom management skills among teachers are associated with better behavioral and academic outcomes for students, and the lack of effective classroom management is detrimental to students, in both the short and long term, across educational and social dimensions (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Jalongo, 1998; National Research Council, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002).
- Pre-service teacher education programs routinely do not provide substantial training in evidence-based behavior management practices (Freeman, Simonsen, Briere, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014).
- The use of classroom-level consultation holds promise as an efficient way to proactively address both teacher professional development needs and individual student support needs (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008).
 - The resource-intensive nature of consultation and ongoing teacher performance feedback can be a barrier to implementation in applied settings.
- Behavior specific praise (BSP) has been identified as a High Leverage Practice (McLeskey et al., 2017).
 - Criterion of 6 BSP statements per 15-minute instructional session (Gage et al., 2017).
- Important features of successful staff training include the use of behavioral skills training (BST) and ongoing supervisor involvement/feedback (Parsons, Rollyson, & Reid, 2012).
- BST involves systematic instruction using the following steps:
 - Step 1: Trainer describes the target skill, including mastery criteria
 - Step 2: Trainer provides a succinct written description of the skill
 - Step 3: Trainer demonstrates the target skill
 - Step 4: Learner practices the target skill
 - Step 5: Trainer provides in-vivo feedback, and steps 4 and 5 are repeated until mastery.
- Although BST and performance feedback have clearly emerged as evidence-based practices, they remain mainly concerned with direct instruction, and include minimal consideration of what B. F. Skinner called "private events" in their approach to behavior change.
 - Interventions implemented by staff often do not immediately result in naturally-occurring reinforcement.
 - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy/Training (ACT) considers "historical and contextual" variables in encouraging individuals to mindfully accept cognitions/emotions and commit to value-driven actions.
 - Hypothesizes that temporally distant emotional/cognitive factors influencing overt behavior in the workplace can be better understood, planned for, and leveraged for optimal performance (Bond, Hayes, and Barnes-Holmes, 2006).

Methods

Participants and Setting

- Four elementary classroom teachers (grades K, 4th, 5th, and 5th).
- General education classroom instruction.

Design

- Multiple baseline across participants.

Dependent Measures

- Rate of behavior specific praise statements (15-minute intervals).

Baseline

- Participant use of behavior specific praise, nonspecific praise, specific corrective feedback, and nonspecific corrective feedback.

BST

- Individual didactic instruction, video models, and practice using specific praise with sample classroom videos.
- Participants coached to identify times/behaviors within their own classrooms that would be particularly suitable for implementation of BSP statements.
- Approximately 35 minutes per participant/training session.
- No performance feedback provided outside of individual intervention sessions.

ACT

- Individual didactic instruction in principles of mindfulness, defusion, personal values, and value-driven action.
 - Researcher modeled use of the ACT matrix to promote value-based behavior.
- Card sort value clarification activity to top 3 most deeply held professional values.
- Participants coached to complete an ACT matrix centered around their individual values and the implementation of behavior specific praise statements within their classrooms.
- Approximately 25 minutes per participant/training session.
- No performance feedback provided outside of individual intervention sessions.

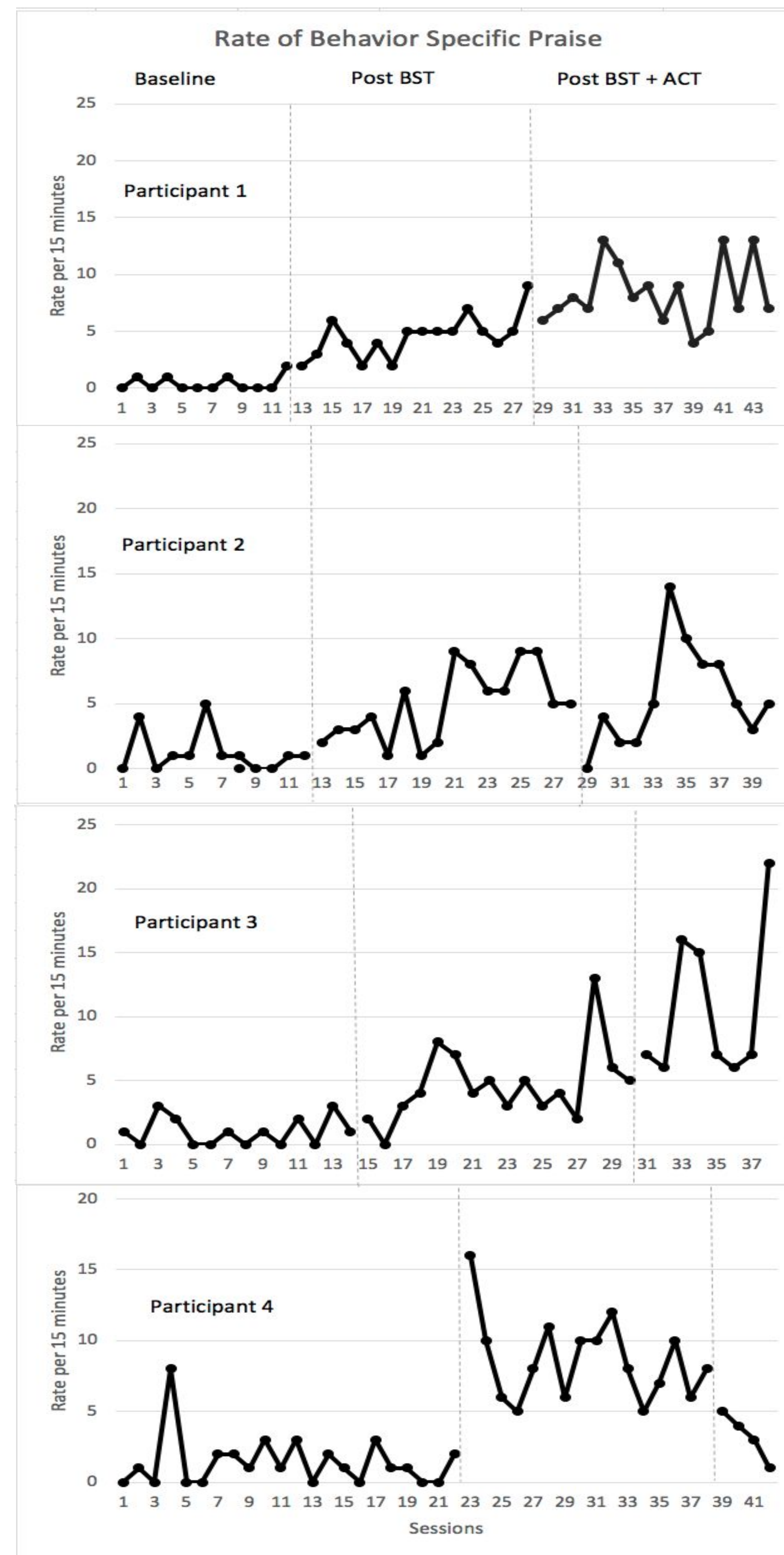


Figure 1: Rate of Behavior Specific Praise Statements

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Results

- **Participant One**
 - Increased use of praise following BST and again following ACT.
 - Maintained at above baseline (and above criterion) levels for all but two sessions following implementation of ACT training.
- **Participant Two**
 - Dip in responding reminiscent of baseline levels immediately following ACT intervention.
 - Remained below criterion for eight out of the twelve post-ACT sessions.
 - Hypothesized that the exercise of identifying and acting upon personally held values may have primarily served to increase the value of other teaching behaviors more associated with a self directed learning philosophy.
- **Participant Three**
 - Increased use of praise from baseline following BST.
 - Stayed at or above criterion during all data collection sessions only with addition of ACT intervention.
- **Participant Four**
 - Responded immediately to BST.
 - Return to baseline levels following the implementation of ACT.
 - Post BST+ACT session occurred on the last full day of the school year (involved contingencies not usually present in the instructional setting).

Acceptability Survey Items	Mean Response 1 = Not At All 5 = Very Much
Given student behaviors, how acceptable do you find behavior specific praise as a universal proactive intervention?	5.00
How willing are you to implement behavior specific praise in your classroom?	5.00
To what extent do you feel there are disadvantages in using the behavior specific praise intervention over others?	1.00
To what extent do you agree with this statement? "Using behavior specific praise takes up too much time."	1.25
To what extent do you agree with this statement? "Using behavior specific praise makes my classroom a more welcoming place for students."	5.00
How likely is behavior specific praise to make permanent improvements to student behavior?	3.75
How disruptive is it to implement behavior specific praise in your classroom?	1.25
How much do you like to use behavior specific praise?	4.75
How willing are you to help other educators with using behavior specific praise?	4.25
How well does behavior specific praise fit into your daily routine?	5.00
How effective is behavior specific praise in teaching students appropriate behavior?	4.50
How well do the goals of behavior specific praise match with the goals of your classroom?	5.00
How effective was behavioral skills training in supporting your use of praise in the classroom?	4.75
How effective was acceptance and commitment therapy/training in supporting your use of praise in the classroom?	4.75
How well do the goals of acceptance and commitment therapy/training match with your professional growth goals?	4.75
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My students' behavior improved as a result of using behavior specific praise?"	3.5

Figure 2: Results of Acceptability Survey Across All Four Participants

Discussion

- Rate of behavior specific praise statements used by all four participants increased following BST intervention.
 - Level of experimental control not clear; rates did not immediately increase from the first post-BST session for first three participants.
- Impact of ACT as augment to BST variable between participants.
 - 2 of 4 participants increased use of praise following ACT beyond post-BST levels.
 - Variables related to participants' prior exposure to values-based practice was not controlled for.
- High ratings of acceptability from all participants.
 - All indicated the goals of ACT "mostly" or "very much" matched their professional growth goals and supported use of praise in the classroom.
- Future directions:
 - Allowing teachers to formulate their own value driven actions might increase buy-in and follow through with implementation.
 - Group or team-based ACT interventions would constitute an added level of efficiency in busy school environments.
 - Pairing ACT with brief performance feedback or self management protocols might increase its impact.