

# **ABC Project**

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## **Problem Identification**

James is a five-year-old in my full-day Kindergarten class and he has multiple challenging behaviors in which he exhibits. I would describe James as a low-achieving student as he has great difficulty following directions and completing work and is also progressing slowly. His behavior makes him appear to be a failure syndrome student as he is VERY easily frustrated, gives up almost immediately, and is constantly saying he can't do things. I feel that he is not a true failure syndrome student as his home life allows him very little independence because mom or his older brothers do things for him and there are very low expectations for his behavior and academics (as he behaves the same way at home and most homework is not completed). Brophy writes, "Some teachers working in kindergarten and first grade also mentioned that certain students superficially appear to have failure syndrome problems...they are merely seeking more attention from the teacher or are unaccustomed to having demands made on them because they have been babied at home." (Brophy, 1996, p. 105). I do feel there is a relation between his achievement level and behavior problems but I also feel that he is capable of much more than he puts forth.

For this project, I will be focusing on James's attention seeking behaviors, specifically those behaviors he exhibits during seatwork time as they are the most disruptive and take up much of my time. These behaviors include shouting out noises, refusing to try work independently, throwing crayons and pencils, and turning around to bother others while they are working (by drawing on their work, taking their materials, etc.). His most problematic behavior

is making loud noises for reasons such as when his work is difficult, when he doesn't want to do his work, when he is not called on or given a turn right away, and when he is told he cannot do nor have something he wants. The majority of these behaviors is seen every day and multiple times a day and detracts from the time I can help other students and hold small groups as well as make for a very distractible classroom environment. It is my belief that these behaviors are both attention-seeking (wanting both peer and teacher attention) and due to the fact that he is immature and struggles with much of the academic work we do. In addition to having a lower skill set than most of my students, James experiences difficulty with fine motor tasks which feeds his feelings of low self esteem and encourages his belief that he is incapable of doing the work independently and at the same level as his peers. James also has poor social skills and struggles with both asking for help and solving problems with his peers.

Working with James towards the beginning of the school year was very difficult for me as he was not a very pleasant child to be around in my opinion. I had a very hard time finding things I enjoyed about his personality and making positive connections with him. It was also difficult for me to find things to praise James for as he did not have any obvious strength. In order to stay calm and collected around him, I often avoided working with him for more than a minute or two. I am generally a very patient person but because of his persistent challenging behaviors, my patience towards him had grown shorter and shorter over time. Brophy states that effective socializers have ego strength and are able to remain calm in a crisis and listen actively without becoming defensive. (Brophy, 1996, p. 22). I feel that when I was around James that I was able to remain calm and maintain a problem solving orientation only for so long; I was tired of his behavior controlling the classroom climate. Often, my frustrations would lead me to begin responding to him in an argumentative fashion, which was not effective. Another of Brophy's

effective attributes is showing an enjoyment of being with your students and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship. (Brophy, 1996, p. 22). Creating a positive relationship with James was more difficult than with most students. To be honest, James portrayed so much resistance when I worked with him and our interactions were often filled with negative reprimands that I knew very little about neither him nor his interests. When I asked him about what he liked to do at home and school, it was generally during a learning task and he was so focused on the fact that he couldn't do it that we wouldn't get very far.

Throughout my observations over the past weeks, I have noticed that I slip away from working effectively with James for a few reasons and in a few situations. Firstly, I find that I tend not to interact as effectively with James when I am physically tired and/or when I have something else on my mind from home or work. During these times, I am distracted, less patient with him, and break to frustration much more quickly. I find that when I commit to giving myself time each night to do something for myself, such as take a bubble bath or read a book solely for pleasure and get a good night's sleep, I have much more energy and a higher tolerance for the challenging behaviors he exhibits each day. During the day, when I have felt that I am beginning towards a negative stance towards James, I ask one of my Kindergarten teammates if James can take a break in their room for a few minutes so I can ease my frustration and get back to using effective management with him. Secondly, I have noticed that when James comes into my classroom in the morning and from the very start of our day is showing defiant behaviors, I find it hard to cope with my bombarding feelings that we've started another whole day of *THIS*. To begin to have a more positive and effective professional stance when working with James, I know I need to make an effort to change how I approach working with him.

As a result of working with James in the beginning half of the year, I realized that I needed to make a better effort to get to know him and his interests. Another area that I focused on improving was portraying to my challenging students, such as James, that I accepted them as individuals but that I didn't accept all of their behavior choices. (Brophy, 1996, p. 23). I tended to get caught up in the frustrations of these students' behaviors and lose sight of the fact that they were just five year old children that still needed to feel cared for and accepted by their teacher. To go along with this, I wanted to work on projecting positive expectations for these students. I had a hard time separating myself from the situation and I often begin to think the student was portraying these challenging behaviors for the sole reason of frustrating me, even though logically I knew there are many more factors that contributed to their behavior. It is hard to remember that some of them have not been taught at home how to behave appropriately nor come with any school experience, so that is part of my job as Kindergarten teacher. Jere Brophy wrote that when teachers don't project positive expectations and instead make comments such as "I don't know why you can't sit still", we fail to provide positive guidance and imply that we don't expect the student's behavior to change. (Brophy, 1996, p. 23). I needed to focus on using "I messages" to state my needs and expectations and praise James's efforts more frequently by using meaningful and specific teacher praise. I liked the reference Brophy provides on page 30 of his book *Teaching Problem Students* because it outlines the guidelines for effective and ineffective praise; this would be a good tool for me as I interacted with James.

### **Understanding the Problem**

As part of a method of home-to-school communication, James had been on a behavior plan since November, which lists his 3 goals (staying on task during work time, listening at the

carpet, and using a quiet voice in the classroom), displayed visuals to remind him of his goals, and provided a place for me to reinforce his good choices with stickers. This behavior plan is very similar to the Homenotes strategy in our *Best Practices* text (Jenson & Reavis, 1996, p. 29-39) and was used to support positive and productive communication between home and school, but was also a method of data collection. There was not consistent follow through at home with rewards and consequences so I knew that my intervention plan must be solely at school, yet I felt that a method of communicating about behavior to his mom needed to be in place.

Before beginning to systematically track data on his behaviors, I did a lot of informal observations and these were some of my findings. During times where James was engaged, on task, and focused on doing his best rather than bothering others, there were few if any problems with James's behavior. There were some common factors during these times. Firstly, when I or a parent helper was working with him individually on his class work, he was able to remain on task and did not display problematic attention seeking behavior. Secondly, when he felt confident that he was capable of completing the work, he was able to work independently with few problems. Thirdly, when I gave him some power in the classroom such as a specific job, when it was time to begin his work, he got started quicker and stayed on task for a longer time. For example, he enjoyed helping to pass out supplies or bringing something to another teacher. This also helped me be able to get everyone else started on the task and then allowed me to focus on helping James get started on the work once he finished his job. In addition, he did not have problems when he was involved in activities that were purely his choice, such as outdoor recess, free choice centers in the classroom, etc. (yet those were earned privileges in our classroom). Brophy writes about the benefit of giving these students as much autonomy as possible in the classroom by giving them choice options which will therefore give them less reason to resent

you as an authority figure. (Brophy, 1996, p. 208). Lastly, James responded with cooperation most of the time when I used “I” messages with instead of “you” messages. Brophy writes this about the effectiveness of “I” messages, ““I” messages reveal feelings and vulnerabilities but in ways that pay off by fostering intimacy and describing the problem without imputing malevolent motives to the student.” (Brophy, 1996, p. 42). Using “I” messages empowers me because I am stating my needs for the behavior to change and it is said in a way that does not put down the child and once I had established a caring relationship with James, he was more likely to want to please me by doing what I had asked.

I also began to track data on his attention seeking behaviors in short time increments and during differing daily activities. I had observed that most disruptive attention seeking behaviors, such as making noises and doing unsafe things (climbing on chairs, throwing materials, etc.) occurred when he was off task during independent seatwork time, so I wanted to collect data to determine the frequency and settings in which James was not staying on task, which would mean that he was not doing his work for more than 10 seconds during a 30 second time interval. I kept track of the number of times these behaviors occurred in 10 minutes of differing activities and during differing times of day throughout the week, such as during independent work time, working with a partner, working with me, etc. My goal was to determine during which activities and/or times of the day James was off task for longer lengths of time and during which activities he was better able to remain on task in order to determine the best strategy for James to increase his time on task and decrease disruptions to the rest of the class. See data tables 1-5.

James was off task most often during independent seatwork activities when he had no teacher or peer help. During these times, he often commented, “I don’t know how to do school” and displaying overt frustration by throwing materials, making noises, and often refusing to even

try. Even during times when he had to work at his seat but I was in close proximity, he was unable to stay on task. The behavior occurred less frequently when he was working one-on-one with an adult, teacher, or older peer. For example, he displayed very little off task behavior when working with his 4th grade buddy or when partner reading with me. He also did well working when I asked a peer to work with him for the last few minutes of an assignment. Although this was not a good long term strategy as it enabled James because he often times would act helpless so the other student did the work for him. There was really no difference in the frequency of his off task behavior in reference to the time of day; it really seemed to depend solely on how much individual attention he was getting during the task.

I knew that I was unable to sit with James every time students worked at their seats on a task and I felt he was academically capable of completing small portions of his academic work independently if given clear directions and expectations before hand. I felt that he lacked the self confidence and attention to stick with challenging and longer tasks, therefore I wanted to focus on breaking tasks into smaller parts and giving him a reward for completing small portions with independence and without disruptions to the class. I used this as my focus for his intervention strategy in order to help him gain confidence in his abilities and get immediate feedback from me for meeting teacher expectations, which was very important to James. Brophy's research states, "Hyperactive students appear to require response cost approaches that include punishment for misbehavior in addition to rewards for desired behavior...You may also find it necessary to deliver consequences more immediately and frequently to hyperactive students, because they may not respond as well as their classmates to delayed rewards or partial reinforcement schedules." (Brophy, 1996, p. 269). There needed to be something else in place that was a

powerful incentive to finish his work in a timely manner (therefore limiting disruptive off task behaviors).

### **Plan Development and Implementation**

The goal of the intervention strategy was to increase time on task and work completion while at the same time decrease disruptive noises and actions. My intervention involved breaking down activities into smaller tasks and then rewarding his completion of these tasks. Brophy writes that one way to meet the needs of low-achieving students is by “individualizing these students’ activities or assignments by downgrading the difficulty of the task.” (Brophy, 1996, p. 66). James was unable to focus for long periods of time, so I wanted to reward him for small amounts of time where he was showing attentive behaviors to hopefully increase his productivity and motivation over time. Brophy writes about the importance of student motivation in the following quote, “You can socialize students to the value elements of the motivation-to-learn schema by modeling interest in learning, encouraging your students to develop positive concepts of themselves as learners, and helping them to appreciate that growth in knowledge and skills is empowering (it enables you to do more without relying on others) and life-enhancing.” (Brophy, 1996, p. 167). To motivate him, each time James completed a task or portion of a long task, he received a three minute timed break with materials of his choice. I prepared a basket of materials that he could use at his desk for these breaks, such as Play Doh, toy cars, stamps, markers and paper, etc. I set a timer and when the timer went off, he knew he must clean up immediately and return to the next part of the task or start his new task. Before each assignment, I would talk with him about my expectations for how much work he needed to complete and what I wanted it to look like (quality of work). This provided him with a sure way



to please me (because he was aware of my expectations) and he knew what he had to do to earn something he wanted (his reward = the break). There were also consequences in place if James did not do his part. If James refused to clean up after the three minutes, his next break would get shorter by fifteen seconds and would not return to three minutes until he cleaned up on time after a break. I also told James that if during the task, he was making noises, disrupting others, etc. that he would lose the break and have to try to earn it for the next task. It was my hope that by focusing on rewarding short spurts of on task time that this would eliminate or at least lessen the disruptive behavior which he uses to seek attention when not working. Once he was accustomed to focusing on staying on task and was gaining confidence in his abilities, I would be able to address higher expectations for quality work and really seek to discover his full capabilities.

I realized that there may be other things I needed to do to help this plan be successful. Research from Brophy's book states, "Teachers (can) guarantee that these students experience success (by seeing that they know what to do before asking them to do it independently, providing immediate feedback to their responses, and making sure that they know the criteria by which their learning will be evaluated); encouraging their learning efforts (by giving recognition for real effort, showing appreciation for progress, and projecting positive expectations)." (Brophy, 1996, p. 89). Depending on the task, I knew that I may need to make some accommodations by shortening the length of his work or provide him with an easier version to help him feel successful. I also tried having James repeat directions back to me before he started a task.

In addition to this classroom intervention strategy, through our school's PBIS program, James would also received a male teacher as a mentor. I felt this would benefit James as he did not have a father figure in his life and no other significant male role models. Unfortunately, this

part of my intervention plan was not able to be implemented until just a week before CEP 832 ended, so I was not able to see the long term effects of this strategy. I began having James check in one to two times a day with his mentor and he could bring his sticker chart to him at the end of each day to get a reward or a pep talk depending on his choices that day. It was my hope that by rewarding his efforts to stay on task and complete work without disrupting others as well as providing James with one-on-one time with me and another teacher mentor, that he would begin to gain confidence in himself and his abilities and want to do things to help himself and others be successful at school.

### **Plan Evaluation**

I feel that overall my strategy intervention plan was successful. It did not completely diminish all of James's troublesome behaviors but it greatly lessened the frequency of them. James enjoyed the breaks and often asked for them or reminded me when it was time for him to get a break by bringing me his completed work. By using the breaks, James completed much more work, did work with greater quality, and disrupted his classmates with less frequency. I was also better able to work with other students and hold small groups, not just having to work with him to maintain an environment conducive to learning. Our school's PBIS program requires us to keep track of the number of "card flips" each student has each day for the entire school year, so this was a data collection method I used to help determine the effectiveness of this strategy. Students all start on the green card and if they receive two warnings they flip to yellow. They then have the opportunity to flip back to green if they change their mistakes or if they continue to make poor choices they flip to orange. The blue and red cards are next if they continue with the same poor choices throughout the day. The red card means they go to the

office with a discipline referral form. Table 6 shows a record of James's card flips each month and how many days he ended on each color. He began the school year (in September and October) with less flips as the academic expectations were much easier and he was not experiencing as much difficulty. As time went on his card flips increased and he was going to the office because of a red card flip a few times each month. Then February and March show the effects of my intervention strategy; it has decreased the number of card flips greatly and they are much less severe (less blue and red cards).

Some of the things I feel I did well include remaining consistent with rewards and consequences, by providing James a break or talking with him about why he hadn't earned one after each task. I feel I did well adapting my classroom practices to best meet James's needs. For example, I have tried to incorporate more peer interaction and partner activities as James was on task for greater amounts of times, less disruptive, and showed more enjoyment when working with another student for short periods of time. In addition, by needing to provide James with clear academic goals and expectations in order to receive his break, I have begun to improve upon providing short but clear expectations when giving directions to the whole class. I was most successful when I gave him non-verbal cues to redirect or praise his behavior without singling him out in front of the group. For instance, he would smile when I gave him a thumbs up for remembering to raise his hand to talk and then soon afterwards, I saw the same behavior (raising his hand) because he liked the positive feedback. This worked much better than when I would redirect through reprimands or threats, which would often just bring about defiant behavior in James. This has affected how I address the behavior issues and needed redirection of many of my students as now I try to do it either nonverbally or in private as to not single them out in front of the group, which has shown to have positive effects. Next time, I hope to have a

greater parent component to my strategy intervention but this would require parent agreement and consistency.

### **Professional Stance**

As for my stance towards James now, I am better able to remain calm and patient with him because he is displaying more appropriate classroom behavior for longer periods of time now and I have begun to create a personal relationship with him. I can honestly say now that I enjoy working with him most of the time, which is a huge improvement. He is no longer saying that he hates school or that he doesn't know how to do school because he knows I care about him and his work (because I act like it and I tell him verbally each day) and therefore he is feeling a sense of success in the classroom. This makes me feel more positively towards James, but I also feel a greater sense of success and a higher belief in myself and my management skills. In addition, I have worked hard to help James create a positive rapport with one of my Kindergarten colleagues so if I am feeling frustrated, I send him to her classroom for a while and he helps her with a job or he can do his work with her for a minute, so that when he returns I am able to remain effective when working with him.

I worked on giving more praise to him for specific things I liked about his work or behavior and projecting clear and high expectations for him. Brophy states that it is so important to project clear expectations for these students' behavior. (Brophy, 1996, p. 23). I worked on spending more time with James that was focused on getting to know him and his interests. I began seeing the effect of creating relationships with my students in building a classroom community where students care about each other and can start to understand that their choices have an effect on those around them. James saw me taking a greater interest in him and our

relationship has improved. He responded positively, showed greater respect towards me, and we were able to joke and laugh together while learning instead of me reprimanding while he argued back. This has improved my professional stance with my students and has also encouraged me to share more about my life and interests with my students. My students are much more engaged and I am now less anxious about student behavior, more relaxed, and feel and show more enjoyment for teaching, which has made me a more effective teacher and manager of student behavior. (Brophy, 1996, p. 22).

### **References**

1. Brophy, Jere. (1996). *Teaching Problem Students*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
2. Jenson & Reavis. (1996). *Best Practices: Homenotes to Improve Motivation*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

**Tables**

**Table 1:** Time Off Task During 4th Grade Reading Buddies Activity (9:20 - 9:30AM)

(min)	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
(seconds)	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Target Student	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Comparison Peer	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N

Target Student: 5% Yes 95% No

Comparison Peer: 10% Yes 90% No

**Table 2:** Time Off Task During Cut & Paste Independent Seatwork Activity (2:00-2:10 PM)

(min)	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
(seconds)	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Target Student	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Comparison Peer	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Target Student: 60% Yes 40% No

Comparison Peer: 10% Yes 90% No

**Table 3:** Time Off Task During Whole Group Seatwork (10:10 - 10:20AM)

(min)	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
(seconds)	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Target Student	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N
Comparison Peer	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N

Target Student: 45% Yes 55% No

Comparison Peer: 15% Yes 85% No

**Table 4:** Time Off Task During Partner Reading (with a same age peer) (12:30 - 12:40PM)

(min)	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
(seconds)	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Target Student	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N

Comparison Peer	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
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Target Student: 55% Yes 45% No

Comparison Peer: 20% Yes 80% No

**Table 5:** Time Off Task During Partner Reading (with the teacher) (12:30 - 12:40PM)

(min)	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
(seconds)	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Target Student	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Comparison Peer	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Target Student: 0% Yes 100% No

Comparison Peer: 10% Yes 90% No

**Table 6:** Card Flip Data

Month	Number of Card Flips Per Month	Number of Days On Each Color Card (Red Card Flips Indicate an Office Referral)
September	11	Green=8 Blue=0 Yellow=9 Red=0 Orange=1
October	18	Green=13 Blue=1 Yellow=3 Red=0 Orange=6
November	35	Green=6 Blue=2 Yellow=1 Red=7 Orange=0
December	29	Green=3 Blue=3 Yellow=2 Red=3 Orange=3
January	22	Green=7 Blue=3 Yellow=3 Red=1 Orange=3
February	20	Green=4 Blue=1 Yellow=5 Red=0 Orange=6
March	9	Green=7 Blue=0 Yellow=5 Red=0 Orange=2