Implementing Blurt Charts to Increase Instructional Time

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This study was focused on minimizing disruption in a third grade classroom. A blurt chart was implemented in order to create an environment in which learning can occur and instructional time is maximized. A blurt is when a student gives an answer at an inappropriate time interrupting the instructor or other classmates. A behavior system allows students to understand expectations, consequences, and rewards of their actions.

This action research study took place in a rural public school in a southeastern state of the United States. It is a public elementary school in a county school system with grades ranging from third to fifth grade. The school population consisted of 538 students with 25 full time teachers on staff. This third grade classroom enrolled 24 students. There were 14 male students and ten female students in the class. Among the students, 11 students were African American, and nine students were Caucasian. There also was one Chinese student, one Middle Eastern student, one African student, and one Hispanic student. Two students had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for speech services, and one student was in the process of testing for special education services. Eight students had been identified as gifted learners, and two were being tested for the gifted program.
The structure of this classroom was self-contained, with instruction mainly whole group. The students participated in rotating centers for reading each day. They sat in groups of four or five students for collaboration purposes. Since the instruction mainly took place in a whole group format, there was little instructional support during students’ time in centers. This time was used for students to perfect reading and writing skills. The teacher also used this time to pull out small groups and work with students according to their current reading abilities.

Problem

During my time spent in this third grade classroom, I consistently noticed a problem with the students blurt out comments during lessons. This became a serious problem, because it was distracting to the other students and interrupted instructional time. The teacher tried to combat this issue by taking away a letter from the word “RECESS” whenever the students misbehave. If they lose all of the letters, then the whole class cannot participate in recess. Once they have lost “RECESS”, then she repeated the process with the word “SNACK”. This worked to a certain extent, but the students continued to blurt out during lessons. This consequence did not adequately solve the problem. I watched the teacher pause instruction over and over to have conversations about student misbehavior concerning blurt out to the class. My perspective was, if the students did not blurt out as much, then instructional time would be more valuable to them, and they would be able to hear directions and engage in lessons more successfully. The question investigated by my action research study, then, was “How does the use of blurt charts impact preservation of instructional time and keep students focused on learning goals?”

Review of Literature

Research has been conducted on the effects of classroom management in the classroom setting. This research literature finds teachers with an effective classroom management plan and implementation have classrooms of successful students. Disruptions in the classroom are the most common misbehavior leading to loss of instructional time, however, there are methods that teachers can use in order to address these challenges.

Why is classroom management important?

Effective classroom management has been identified as a key predictor of student success because the focus remains on instruction instead of behavior (Marquez, Vincent, Marquez, Pennefather, Smolkowski, & Sprague, 2016). Many highly qualified teachers struggle with classroom management issues due to a lack of expectations or systems in place to address the problems that could occur. Of teachers, 80% rate behavior as the main reason they would leave education (Beard, Moe, & Wieczorek, 2015). Classroom management can be difficult. The teacher, however, is responsible for creating an effective classroom atmosphere and highly engaging lessons, so learning occurs in the most productive manner (Akin, Yildirim, & Goodwin, 2016).

Specifically looking at disruptions in the classroom, research has shown these disturbances are most frequently hinder teaching and learning (Beard, et all, 2015). When a student disrupts instruction, or “blurs out”, it could cause a variety of challenges for everyone in the classroom. Other students may follow this behavior, causing noise, which could lead to confusion. Some students may not be able to clearly hear directions or content material presented. In a survey by
the American Federation of Teachers, 1% of the teachers responding indicated their class had lost four or more hours of instruction per week due to disruptive students. In addition, 19% of classes had lost two to three hours per week (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). This lost time could have been used for academic purposes if there were a workable system in place to combat the problem.

Well-managed classrooms are more likely to have students who are academically engaged. These students also are seen to have fewer behavioral problems and obtain higher academic achievement (Marquez, et al, 2016). These results are considered to be due to the techniques, systems, and procedures the teacher has created within the classroom. Such management is a critical component of a teachers’ sense of professional efficacy (Tran, 2015). Students who are well behaved have the opportunity to listen to instruction and learn from the material presented to them. Students are able to participate in meaningful tasks fundamental to their learning gains (Akin, et al, 2016).

**Addressing Disruptions in the Classroom**

A variety of methods can be used to avoid student disruptions during instructional time. The teacher must find what works best for his or her students. After much research, it has been concluded that establishing a classroom management system and then maintaining the system is the key to this success (Akin, et all, 2016). The educator must establish clear rules and proactively teach appropriate behavior. In addition, the teacher should respond quickly and effectively to misbehavior to prevent other students from following the action (Marquez, et all, 2016).

Having a specific consequence for an action deemed as misbehavior allows students to better be able to understand what is expected. They will also have a clear understanding of the consequence that will occur if the disruption is made during instruction. In *The Effects of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in the Elementary Classroom* (Beard, et al, 2015), it is encouraged that teachers explicitly review expectations before implementing a new system or consequence. Students should have time to review the consequences aligned with the management system (Beard, et all, 2015). Teachers must set clear rules and expectations for the students’ to follow. Clarity is an important aspect of both their academic and social behaviors. Students need to know what is acceptable and not acceptable behavior (Akin, et all, 2016). Following through with the established consequence is critical in order for the behavior system to be successful.

**Method**

In order to address disruption, I implemented a blurt chart in my third grade placement classroom to see if it encouraged students to avoid calling out during instructional time. The students had been struggling with interrupting the teacher and each other. This caused a loss of instructional time and confusion during lessons. The plan for this action research investigation was to give students a visual consequence when they blurt out. Data were collected for five days prior to implementation. The blurt chart was implemented for the following ten days and data were collected to determine the success of the chart.

The data first were collected in the form of tally marks over a five-day period. Each tally mark represented one blurt out during instruction. After the five day collection period, the blurt chart
was introduced to the students. The chart included each student’s name and three “blurt cards” beside it. A “blurt” occurred when a student interrupted, did not raise his or her hand, made unnecessary noises, or talked too loudly. Once a student blurted out, he or she pulled one blurt card off of the chart. If this event occurred three times, the student had to move his or her behavior clip down one level. Three more blurt cards were to be added back beside the student’s name, and the process began again. The total number of blurt cards was calculated at the end of each day. A reward system also was put in place to motivate students to avoid blurtting out. The class received this reward on Fridays if they had less blurt outs than the set goal established at the beginning of the week by the teacher. This goal decreased each week in order to encourage the students to blurt out less.

I chose to implement a blurt chart because it aligned with the research literature’s recommendations on classroom management. A blurt chart gave the students a clear consequence to the problem of disruption. Students should understand expectations for how their behavior during instruction. The blurt chart might enhance the learning environment and ultimately maximize instructional time. In addition, the chart could aid in relieving teacher frustration and student confusion if disruptions were reduced. Blurt data were collected for five days prior to implementation during all instructional times throughout the day.

Day 1: Explain and implement blurt chart. Create a class goal to reach by the end of the week.

Day 2-3: Enforce blurt chart and record data. Reward students if they meet the set goal.

Day 4: Continue blurt chart. Set a goal for the week that is less than the previous.

Day 5-6: Enforce blurt chart and record data. Reward students if they meet the set goal.

Day 7: Continue blurt chart. Set a goal for the week that is less than the previous. Collect data.

Day 8-10: Set a goal for the week. Enforce blurt chart and record data. Reward students if they meet the set goal.

Day 11-15: Measure effectiveness of blurt chart by removing the system from the class. Collect data.

Results

The data collected prior to instruction were in the form of tally marks recorded throughout instruction. During this time, observations of consistent blurt outs and loss of instructional time were noted. Loss of time occurred when the teacher would pause the lesson to have a talk with the students about not blurtting out instead of raising their hands. The data in Figure 1 show an average of 113 blurt outs per day.
After the blurt chart was implemented, there was a change in data collected. The students were aware of the expectations and consequences of disrupting instruction. It was noted that students became more engaged, and encouraged each other not to blurt out. Instructional time became of more value while utilizing the blurt chart. Instruction never had to be paused to discuss disruptions, therefore maximizing critical time for learning to occur. The data show the average amount of blurt outs while using the blurt chart was 33 per day (see Figure 2).

As seen in Figure 2, there was a change in the amount of disruption within this third grade classroom after a blurt chart was implemented. As figure 1 indicates, before the blurt chart implementation, students disrupted by blurtng out the most on pre-data collection Day 4. On this day, the teacher had to stop twice during one 40-minute instructional time to discuss this issue. On Day 2 and Day 5, there was a definite drop in the amount of blurt outs. On Day 2, eight of the students were out of the classroom for half of the day due to gifted education purposes. On Day 5, the students went to the library during a normal time of instruction and they also watched a movie at the end of the day. These factors appeared to have created a shift within the data.

The data remained consistent throughout the ten-day period with the exception of Days 2, 3, and 9. On Day 2 and Day 9, the students who were in the gifted program were not in the classroom for half of the day, therefore significantly reducing the number of students who could blurt out. Day 3 involved a craft activity during a portion of the mathematics instructional time. The students were excited about this craft and seemed to forget about the blurt chart more easily. When comparing the data for each day, a 71% decrease in blurt outs is found.

Figure 1. Total pre-study blurt-outs per day

![Blurt Out Data](image)
**Figure 2.** Total number of blurt-outs per day during data collection.

**Conclusions**

After conducting this action research study, I conclude there is value in implementing a behavior management system, setting clear expectations, and following through with consequences and rewards. The data supported the effectiveness of utilizing a blurt chart in this third grade classroom in order to maximize instructional time and decrease disruptions. Due to the effectiveness of the blurt chart in this action research study, I would definitely consider using this method in my future classroom. If blurtling out becomes an issue in my future classroom, a blurt chart will be implemented because of the positive change seen in this study. Instead of a ten-day period, the blurt chart would continue to be implemented throughout the school year. I would use this approach for managing disruptions, however, instead of rewarding the students with a treat on Friday, I would allow other rewards such as free-time, extra recess time, or no homework for the weekend. I recommend this method of classroom management to an educator experiencing problems with disruptions during instruction.
References


