Reducing disruptive behavior in an urban school cafeteria: An extension of the Good Behavior Game

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Abstract

Non-classroom settings are often the most violence-prone areas within a school. This study investigated the impact of an interdependent group contingency on the disruptive behaviors of students in grades K–6 in an urban school cafeteria. Nine female noontime aides and National School and Community Corps staff members implemented the Lunchroom Behavior Game (LBG), a modification of the Good Behavior Game (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969), within a multiple-baseline design across three lunch periods. Results showed a decrease in the level of disruptive behaviors following the implementation of the LBG in each lunch period and a decreasing trend for two of the three lunch periods. Discussion focuses on the use of the LBG in preventing antisocial behavior and role expansion for school psychologists interested in promoting school-based pre-vention strategies.
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In recent years a number of researchers have noted an increase in the number of youth with serious and chronic antisocial behaviors (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2003/2004). The situation is particularly evident in urban areas where there is increased exposure to associated risk factors (McCurdy, Mannella, & Eldridge, 2003; Wagner, Kutash,

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Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). The result is that in some school settings, particularly those with less structure and adult presence, the level of disruptive behavior may be critically unsafe.

Nonclassroom settings, including hallways, the playground, and the cafeteria are often the most violence-prone areas in the school (Astor & Meyer, 2001; Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001). It is reported that about 50% of problem behaviors in a given school occur in non-classroom settings (Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997; Nelson & Colvin, 1996). For example, Craig, Pepler, and Atlas (2000) employed naturalistic observations of children on the playground and in the classroom and found, not surprisingly, that higher frequencies of aggression occurred on the playground than in the classroom. More recently, Fabiano, Pelham, Karmazin, Panahon, and Carlson (2008) documented an average daily frequency of about 0.5 rule violations per student, or one per every two students, in their study conducted in an elementary school cafeteria. Clearly, examples such as these provide compelling evidence for the need for intervention in non-classroom settings.

Compounding the issue of elevated rates of problem behavior in non-classroom settings, there are inherent difficulties that contribute to the problem of managing behavior in such settings (Colvin et al., 1997). A prescribed curriculum and effective instruction serve to minimize problem behavior in the classroom setting (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000; Sutherland, Wehby, & Yoder, 2002) whereas in the non-classroom setting the emphasis is primarily on the supervision of student behavior. Without an instructional focus, supervisors in non-classroom settings rely on students to self-manage their behavior. Moreover, in many non-classroom settings supervisors are more likely to be of classified, rather than certified, status. In urban schools, for example, the cafeteria and the playground are often times staffed by non-professionals hired directly from the community with little or no training in managing student behavior (Astor & Meyer, 2001; Astor et al., 2001).

Recognizing the contribution of non-classroom settings to the escalation of problem behavior across the school, advocates of schoolwide positive behavior support (SW-PBS) promote the use of active supervision to maintain low levels of problem behavior (Colvin, Sugai, & Patching, 1993; Lewis et al., 2000; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998). Active supervision refers to specific behaviors (i.e., scanning, moving, and interacting) utilized by supervising adults to prevent problem behavior and promote rule-following among students (Colvin et al., 1997). Applications of active supervision and precorrection have been incorporated within a school-wide model of positive behavior support with very promising results, including decreased frequencies of problem behavior across transition areas in the school as well as during recess (Colvin et al., 1997; Jeffrey & Horner, 2008; Lewis et al., 2000). However, despite the evidence in support of active supervision, the difficulty with improving active supervision duties by adults suggests that treatment fidelity may be compromised (Lewis et al., 2000).

As is often the case in non-classroom settings such as the cafeteria, when adult presence is insufficient to monitor and reward student displays of rule-following, competing behaviors are likely to be reinforced by peers (Snyder, 2002; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Cushing, Horner, and Barrier (2003), for example, found that the probability of elementary school peers providing social positives to students engaged in moderately intense disruptive behaviors, including taunting and teasing, verbal and physical disruption, profanity and inappropriate affection, ranged from 0.54 to 0.97 ($M=0.77$; SD$=0.11$). In other words, on