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Use of Encouragement in the Classroom to Help Students Succeed

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SUNY Cortland

EDU 657: Elementary School Practicum and Culminating Project Seminar I

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Abstract

This case study is based on a one student study that used a mixed methods approach seeing the effects of encouragement in the classroom and how it might help a student socially and emotionally. Data was collected throughout a 12-week period based around the findings of field notes and a survey that was implemented into the classroom. Preliminary findings are inconclusive based on students having more difficulties that affect them in different ways. This paper will provided information about how to use encouragement in the classroom

Teachers are always trying to find new methods to help their students. Dedicated to their craft, they leave no stone unturned in this quest. From table groups, to peer tutoring, to movement breaks, and beyond, the extensive number of strategies that teachers implement for their students can be overwhelming. Because of the current slow decline in social-emotional behaviors and academics, this effort is even more critical. Students are struggling, whether it be due to the rise in social media or the COVID-19 pandemic. If teachers do not start doing something to help their students, this decline may continue. Researchers have begun to look for methods that are easy to implement to help students quickly in the classroom. One of the methods is encouragement. Encouragement is the act of building someone up and making sure that they are supported in the environment that they are in. From writing encouragement on papers to verbalizing their encouragement, researchers find that students are growing more when they are encouraged by their teachers. What this action research project is here to prove is the questions: Does encouragement in the classroom help students social, emotionally and academically?

Literature Review

The articles described in this review are divided into two themes according to their approaches based on encouragement in the classroom. The first will examine how encouragement affects students academically. This is measured by how the students grow with their grades. Most of the articles are investigating different types of grades, some are midterm grades, others are looking at how grades have changed throughout the course as a whole. These articles look particularly at the correspondence between encouragement and growth in academic ability. The second theme looks into social-emotional changes in the students, including assessing student attitude towards school. These sources also look into how students treat one

another. The sources this theme will show how students are growing socially and emotionally due to the encouragement that they receive in the classroom. The difference between the two themes is that one focuses solely on the academics that are occurring in the classroom, whether they are growing with their grades or not, whereas the second theme is seeing how the students grow with their own emotions towards school. These two themes will cover the two important goals of our educational system: academics and social emotional growth.

Encouragement Academically

In a qualitative study, Droe examines the relationship between the purpose of verbal encouragement and whether it will positively affect students' lives or not. Droe's work is modeled after an 87 person study done by Muller and Dweick, which tests the ideas of verbal encouragement on fourth-grade students. Students were asked to tap out a simple rhythm and, in response, were given a large amount of praise (Droe, 2012, p. 67). While they were given praise, they were also asked to have a performance goal in mind while completing the task. The groups were split into three different groups. In one group, students were given verbal praise for the effort they provided, another was given verbal praise for their talent, and the last received no praise. The study found students who were praised more often were able to complete the task more quickly and correctly than the students who were offered no praise (Droe, 2012, p. 71). This study suggests that teachers should consider praise and how it might help students in their classrooms

In a similar study done by Speights (2008) based on Alfred Adler's psychological idea of encouragement, the author suggests that students in community college need more encouragement than one might think (Speights, 2008, p. 14). Survey results in the study indicated that students are in desperate need of encouragement and validation, even when they

are of college age (Speights, 2008, p. 88). Though the study was inconclusive on a larger scale due to the small size of the study group, they were unable to see a linear relationship between encouragement and validation in grades and course persistents (Speights, 2008, p. 105).

In a similar qualitative study based on encouragement in middle school classrooms, the researchers Keller and Szakal, asked the question “how can we forge the connection between encouragement in the classroom and academics with students” (Keller & Szakal, 2021 p. 2). The researchers carried out a large-scale study with the intention of giving students small amounts of praise distributed through their electronic devices. This allowed them to receive more immediate feedback. The study used end of semester grades as their primary source of analysis. They were also able to study the effect of social and test anxiety to determine how it impacted students in long term results. They found that when they provided encouragement before their first test and did not do so before the second test, there was no significant difference between the two grades (Keller & Szakal, 2021 p. 21).

Encouragement and Social and Emotional Well Being

The transition from elementary school to middle school is a challenging one for students. . Because of this, teachers have been trying to find methods to help children adjust to the new routines of middle school more easily. The purpose of Garcia’s study in 2005 was to help teachers find effective ways of communication and encouragement with students (Garcia, 2005, p. 5). The study took place over a middle school’s 6-8th grade students. Over 1,000 students were given a survey that asked them questions based on their perceptions of teacher assertiveness, communication, and encouragement (Garcia, 2005, p. 18). The study found that students were able to see positive results in their interpersonal relationships in the classroom with their teachers (Garcia, 2005, p. 124).

Umstead (1974) conducted a similar study to determine the effects of the Aldering Concept. This is a theory based on the idea that people should feel validated, loved, and unique to themselves (p. 4). This study investigated three questions. The first, “is there a functional relationship between teacher encouragement and the number of arithmetic problems completed per minute by a third grade child?” (Umstead, 1974, p. 25). The second, “is there a functional relationship between teacher encouragement and the number of correct arithmetic answers per minute by the same third grade child?” (Umstead, 1974, p. 25). And finally, the third, “will the consultation process effect an increase in the number of the teacher's encouraging behaviors per minute toward all other children in the same third grade classroom?” (1974, p. 25). The study took place over 18 days. 3 days were used to determine a baseline, 5 days were for treatment, 7 days of reversal encouragement and 3 more days of follow up treatment (Umstead, 1974, p. 37). One of the days was removed due to the student being absent. The results of the study were inconclusive in student encouragement being a direct correlation to increase grades (Umstead, 1974, p. 47). However, there were conclusive findings showing that if the teacher had a consultation process before the encouragement begins, there would be an increase in the amount of mathematical equations done by the students (Umstead, 1974, p. 65).

Summary

The goal of this literature review was to understand what people have studied about encouragement in the classroom. The review covered two themes, academic growth and social and emotional growth. . The first theme being encouragement academically. Some studies showed that when we are encouraged in the classroom, we see a direct correlation to encouragement academically (Droe, 2012, p. 71). The second theme allowed for us to see a correlation between both encouragement and growth between social and emotional behavior.

Although social emotional learning was not my original intention when starting this study, because of the discovery of this theme, it will have a direct correlation in my future research and implementing it into the classroom as a study point. . In conclusion, Some studies have shown that not only is encouragement beneficial for academic aspects of school, but it is enforced and encourages students to be more social and emotional. Through the ability to really connect with students and encourage them when they need it, it is possible to help students continue to grow in a positive direction.

Methods

Setting

This study took place in an intermediate school in a fourth-grade classroom, located in the Central New York Region. The town has many community resources, including proximity to adjoining towns and cities for additional resources.

The demographics for the school district are not racially diverse. In the school district there are 935 male and 848 female students . White students make up 93% of the population, while 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and 3 % Multiracial students. One percent of the population are English Language Learners, 10% are students with disabilities, 44% of the school population is Economically Disadvantaged, and 1 % of the population are homeless. ()

In the Intermediate School where this study took place, the demographics are somewhat different. There are 187 male and 172 female students White students make up 91% of the population, , 1% is Black or African American, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, 1% are Asian or Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander, and 4% are Multiracial. One percent of the school are

English Language learners, 10% are Students with Disabilities, and 47% are Economically Disadvantaged. (2021, Homer)

Participants

The subject of this study is one student, age 10. This student was monitored throughout the day and encouraged as they participated in classroom activities. This student has trauma based around women in power. This student was one that would shut down when asked repeatedly to do things. When 'tattled' on by other students this student had trouble accepting this as well. They also were adopted by their aunt whom they live with now with their 4 other siblings. This student struggled with violent outbursts throughout the day when things would not go their way. Other participants in the study were the school principal, the subject's fourth grade teacher, the school social worker and the school psychologist as a result of their participation in problem solving meetings involving the subject. The subject's teacher has undergraduate and graduate degrees from SUNY Cortland. The study was conducted by the author who was assigned as a student teacher in the subject's fourth grade classroom as part of the Master of Science in Teaching at SUNY Cortland.

Materials

Three different data collection tools were used in this study: student surveys, student work samples, and field notes regarding the student. The field notes were used to help monitor how the student was doing during the day and record when specific challenges were presented. The students' responses to the survey questions (see Appendix 1) were used to gauge what the child was thinking and feeling in regard to encouragement in the classroom and to allow adjustments

to the encouragement provided. Student work samples were used to monitor the student benefit from encouragement.

A student survey was given to the student once. They were asked what type of validations or encouragements that are being produced in the classroom that they like. This aspect of the study was very challenging. The student did not want to answer the survey that was given to them. It took prompting to get them to read it and after that, it was difficult to know if the students' answers were genuine versus done just to put it down for the sake of putting something down.

Student Work samples helped gauge if the student was improving based on everything that was occurring in their life, with the help of encouragement. While implementing encouragement into the room, it was unclear that the encouragement was helpful since other factors in the students life were also having an effect. The data did, however, help indicate “good” or “bad” days for the student. Days that were good were specifically derived by seeing how much of the day's percentage was good. By viewing the notes, if more than half the notes were of a positive note or we were able to turn our day around, I would note it as a positive day. If there were 50-50, I would note as a neutral day and on days that were more negative or we weren't able to turn our day around then I would note as a negative or bad day.

For field notes, they were also unhelpful due to, they were only showing how the student was reacting day to day not with the help of knowing if the encouragement was helping the student or not. There was no real way to know if this student was benefiting from the encouragement in the classroom, not at first. As the data came in, from the bigger picture we were able to see the growth or decline that could possibly happen during the course of the study.

Procedures

When I was first introduced into the classroom, it was observed that one student in particular was struggling with emotional regulation in their body. With the help of the host teacher it was possible to take the time to get to know more about this student and who they were. It was decided that this student might benefit from more encouragement in the classroom. I started first by implementing a survey into the classroom to get a general idea of the feeling. The questionnaire was based around ideas with my students that were looking for on their paper. This was to support them in terms of building up their confidence in their work regardless of the grade that they got on the work itself. Another part of the survey was the verbal encouragement that was being said to each student. By knowing this, I was able to implement it into the classroom. This survey was given to the students once at the beginning of the study to be used throughout the study and once at the end of the study to see if their ideas of encouragement had shifted. The purpose of this was for me to understand what the students, and in particular what my one student was looking for and how they would respond to encouragement in the classroom. Once the survey was completed, I was able to start taking notes on how my student was responding in the classroom due to the implication of encouragement in the classroom. This allowed me to study trends that were happening in our day to day life with one another. It also allowed me to notice how the student was responding to me as well. My last form of data that I collected was student work samples. This allowed me to notice if there was gradual effects in grades and effort in the work that was provided to them. For this, I noted grades on the students exit tickets over a period of time. Noting the effort given when looking at those exit tickets from said student. It was clear on certain days when the student was given their all and on days when the student was not wanting to do the work that was in front of them.

For my phases of the study, I broke it up into three sections. The first section was my observation of the student. This took place during September to December placement in the classroom. This allowed me to collect observational data and understand who the student was as a whole. From there I was able to start phase II which was implementing the data into the classroom. The data allowed me to see how they would respond to the encouragement in the classroom. From there, I had one last phase which was phase III. Phase III is where I took the notes about how my student was responding to encouragement and because of this, how it was affecting them socially, emotionally and academically.

Phases	Dates	Description
Phase I	September to December 2021	I collected my data by observing what the student needed and how the student was acting as a whole before the encouragement was implemented. I also took the time to get to know the student as a person and not just someone as part of my study to have a better understanding of who they were.
Phase II	January to February 2022	I started implementing my data and encouragement into the classroom. I also started taking notes and making note of triggers that would happen during the day and seeing how I could add encouragement into the classroom.
Phase III	February to March 2022	For my third phase I took the data and notes that I had collected and took a look at

		them to see what the data told me about the student and how the encouragement was beneficial or not.
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Type of Research

The study that I am doing is a mixed methods study. The qualitative part of the study is looking at how the student will grow emotionally and socially. This will be noted in my field notes and my survey. The quantitative part is based on the academic growth based on the student work samples that were provided.

Timeline

This case study took place over the course of approximately three weeks. It took place every day about 1 hour for five days in each week, implementing encouragement at least once throughout the day.

Limitation

In completing my study, I found a few limitations. The first being, student attendance. There were a few snow days and a few sick days between me and the student, that allowed for us not to complete the encouragement for the day. Something that I didn't foresee originally was that the student would have difficulties that were unrelated to the encouragement in the classroom. This student specifically is one that has challenges, such as mentioned in the participants part of this paper, and because of that, shuts down and does not want to be able to be around other students, the teacher, and I. This added to the limitations of completing the case study. The other limitation that I found was being a graduate student and this being my very first research based project that I am implementing in the classroom. This allows for mistakes to be made and figuring out things as they go.

Analysis

When completing my case study, I used three different methods of data collection. By the end of the study, I differentiated what appeared to work and from what appeared to be ineffective. I did this first by looking through my field notes that I documented below in Appendix B of my study. . I was able to see how this student was doing on various types of days in comparison to how much encouragement they were given. When I completed field note analysis, I provided students with a survey asking them what they thought of encouragement and if they liked it when it is used in the classroom. From there, I was able to look at the case study student's data and analyze their original answers. The way in which I was looking at the data was the ability in which I was to see how they responded. It was a qualitative based survey. Lastly, when looking at the student's academic work, I was able to compare any differences noticed from the beginning of the study and the end.

Findings

Introduction

Encouragement in the classroom is important. It allows for students to be supported and feel confidence in the classroom. When implementing this into the classroom with one student in particular it was clear what they did in response. The findings of my data is that encouragement in the classroom builds that social and emotional connection with teachers and with other students more than it will encourage them to have students do well on their academics.

Qualitative data

When analyzing qualitative data it was clear that the student was more emotionally and socially impacted by the encouragement in the classroom. The student was an academically mid range student. This means that that student was neither meeting grade level in the classroom.

Due to this the trends that followed in their work was normal for them. From there though looking through the field notes it was clear that the student started to build a connection with me. When looking at the beginning of the field notes, the student has reserve for me. As the time moved on and by the end of the field notes, the student was following me around the classroom wanting and seeking help from me. They were also looking to help other students with things in the classroom as well. When looking back at the field notes in Appendix B, it is clear that we can see the student starts not knowing who I was as a teacher. The student did not open up and was particularly not wanting to be close to me at all at the beginning of our relationship. This student in particular has trauma with women in power so it was clear that it would take some time to warm up to the student. This student also had triggers that would occur throughout the day making it difficult for the student to really see me as an ally and someone that is willing to help. Once the encouragement started being introduced, it was clear that the way that this student viewed me changed a bit. This student was more ready for walks to calm themselves down, was willing to talk to me when things were going on and was willing to work through the problems that were on their mind. By the end of the field notes, you can see in appendix b that this student was following me around and staying close to me. The change from the beginning of the study to the end of the study is transformative.

Discussion

Findings One: Encouragement in the classroom brings growth in social and emotional awareness

In the findings that were analyzed above, it is clear that encouragement in the classroom brings growth of both emotional and social aspects in the classroom. The way in which this

finding was determined was based on the field notes that were taken by myself during the study.

In Appendix B, it is important to note the growth of the student throughout the process. When starting to work with the student, it was clear that the student wasn't going to open up to me immediately. From there I started implementing encouragement systematically throughout my time in the classroom. In the data that I collected from the encouragement noted in the Field Notes below in Appendix B, I found that by doing this, it not only built the confidence of the student, but I also found that it brought us closer together.

Day	Notes	Type of Day
February 28th, 2022	Student was responsive all day. We had some moments in which there was some throwing of things but overall was able to self regulate	Good day
March 3rd, 2022	Students struggled today. Was accused of doing something. Did not like being accused. Slammed the door and left without telling us where they were going.	Okay day
March 4th, 2022	Student focused well and was able to do good work with us today. The student wanted to work and got a good amount of work done. Still not as responsive to me as the other students are	Good day
March 7th, 2022	The Student had a relatively good day. Student was focused most of the day until something happened during lunch. Student then was off and not responsive to me or the host teacher throughout the rest of the day.	Okay day
March 8th 2022	The Student had a good day. Was quiet but did good work and worked well with	Good day

	response to checking in with them.	
March 14th 2022	Student would not leave me today. Was an extra helper and helped me around the classroom as I taught and such.	Good day
March 15th 2022	Student was next to me all day while working. Wanted to do work and wanted to help pass papers out. Helped throughout the day.	Good day
March 16th, 2022	Students had a day today. They were more naughty than normal. Was acting out with another student and wasn't able to calm body down. Kept hitting fidgets during class and wasn't able to keep calm.	Okay day
March 18th, 2022	Today was my last day in the classroom. Student did not show emotion but did not leave my side all day. Was a little wild by the end of the day which is normal for them.	Good/sad day for all

The confidence in which I found was them making new friends, helping hand out paperwork and being able to self regulate when it came to emotional outburst. The student took the time to learn how to do things in the classroom and there was a stark change from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. We can also see in the appendices that they became close to me. As mentioned in the participants' part of my paper, the student has trauma with women in power, making it difficult originally to see if the student and I would bond. By the end of the study, both the student and I were getting along, going on walks to self regulate and being able to do deep

breathing exercises to calm down. This was documented in the field notes below.

	response to checking in with them.	
March 14th 2022	Student would not leave me today. Was an extra helper and helped me around the classroom as I taught and such.	Good day
March 15th 2022	Student was next to me all day while working. Wanted to do work and wanted to help pass papers out. Helped throughout the day.	Good day
March 16th, 2022	Students had a day today. They were more naughty than normal. Was acting out with another student and wasn't able to calm body down. Kept hitting fidgets during class and wasn't able to keep calm.	Okay day
March 18th, 2022	Today was my last day in the classroom. Student did not show emotion but did not leave my side all day. Was a little wild by the end of the day which is normal for them.	Good/sad day for all

Finding Two: Student had no academic growth due to encouragement in the

Pre-study	Grade
11/22	3
11/29	2
12/6	3
1/28	3
2/8	2
Post Study	Grade
2/14	3
2/21	2
2/28	2
3/4	2

classroom

Another finding based on my data that I collected was there was no academic growth during this period of time that the study was conducted. It is important to note that the student is a grade level student and in the data that was collected, the student stays the same throughout. Encouragement has the potential to be positive in the classroom academically, but we can potentially only see this when it is added into the classroom, for long periods of time. The reason for this is because first you have to build the encouragement into a daily routine and allow for it

to build the confidence of the student by taking root in their mind. Once that has happened, then possibly we might be able to see that type of growth in the classroom. It is with this type of continuous promotion of encouragement that we can see the student begin to grow and flourish in the way that we want them to.

Conclusion

Based on the data that was represented in this paper, it is clear that there are two true themes. The first of them being that encouragement in the classroom has the ability to bring growth in both emotional and social situations in the classroom. The reason this happens is because of consistent encouragement from the teacher throughout the day. Not only will they build their own confidence because of this but the ability in which the students are able to grow on their own is great to see in the data for emotional growth. The second theme which was constant through this paper is that there was no stark change in academics. The student that the study was based around had no real show of growth in the classroom due to encouragement that was implemented. What we as teachers want is for our students to grow and flourish. What was found can help our students grow as humans both socially and emotionally as they move through their school years and to the future.

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Appendix A

Circle the statements that you feel best describe you.

1. I like it when I get stickers on my paper
2. I like it when my teacher tells me I did a good job
3. I like it when I have a 'c' on my paper
4. I like it when my teacher praises me
5. I like it when my teacher acknowledges that I did a good job on something
6. I like when my teacher tells me what I did specifically did good job on
7. I like it when my teacher takes time out of the day to encourage me on a paper

Appendix B

Day	Notes	Type of Day
February 28th, 2022	Student was responsive all day. We had some moments in which there was some throwing of things but overall was able to self regulate	Good day
March 3rd, 2022	Students struggled today. Was accused of doing something. Did not like being accused. Slammed the door and left without telling us where they were going.	Okay day
March 4th, 2022	Student focused well and was able to do good work with us today. The student wanted to work and got a good amount of work done. Still not as responsive to me as the other students are	Good day
March 7th, 2022	The Student had a relatively good day. Student was focused most of the day until something happened during lunch. Student then was off and not responsive to me or the host teacher throughout the rest of the day.	Okay day
March 8th 2022	The Student had a good day. Was quiet but did good work and worked well with students throughout the day	Good day
March 9th, 2022	Student was disruptive throughout the day. Went into the hallway and banged their head over and over against the locker. Was unresponsive to anytype of speaking. I got	Bad day

	another teacher to help me with the student.	
March 10th 2022	Student was better today. The student was quiet and not really interactive with other students and teachers. Went on a walk with me today in response to checking in with them.	Good day
March 14th 2022	Student would not leave me today. Was an extra helper and helped me around the classroom as I taught and such.	Good day
March 15th 2022	Student was next to me all day while working. Wanted to do work and wanted to help pass papers out. Helped throughout the day.	Good day
March 16th, 2022	Students had a day today. They were more naughty then normal. Was acting out with another student and wasn't able to calm body down. Kept hitting fidgets during class and wasn't able to keep calm.	Okay day
March 18th, 2022	Today was my last day in the classroom. Student did not show emotion but did not leave my side all day. Was a little wild by the end of the day which is normal for them.	Good/sad day for all

Appendix C

Pre-study	Grade
11/22	3
11/29	2
12/6	3
1/28	3
2/8	2
Post Study	Grade
2/14	3
2/21	2
2/28	2
3/4	2

The data is based on standard exit tickets that were implemented at different points of the study.