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The effects of a contingency contract on disruptive and off-task behavior in a sixth grade Saturday academy class

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ABSTRACT
SOCIAL WORK

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THE EFFECTS OF A CONTINGENCY CONTRACT ON DISRUPTIVE
AND OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR IN A SIXTH GRADE
SATURDAY ACADEMY CLASS

Advisor: Melvin Williams, Ph.D.

Thesis dated May, 1993

This study examined the effects of a contingency contract on the behavior of a sixth grade class in The Saturday Academy Program. Disruptive and off-task behavior was monitored and charted according to the frequency of occurrences that took place within the sixth grade classroom. Results showed that the frequency of occurrences in disruptive and off-task behavior decreased dramatically. Teachers within The Saturday Academy Program stated that the behavior of the sixth grade students had improved.
THE EFFECTS OF A CONTINGENCY CONTRACT ON DISRUPTIVE
AND OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR IN A SIXTH GRADE
SATURDAY ACADEMY CLASS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
TODD ANDRE’ WOMACK

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1993
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I wish to acknowledge the Creator, the All Mighty God who makes everything possible. I secondly would like to acknowledge the human manifestation of the Creator in its finest and purest sense, my mother who bore me and made life as I know it possible. My father who fertilized the seed of life, my life which I give thanks for every day. Not only did they bring me into this world but they guided, taught, nurtured, protected, and made me the person who I am today. To all my kinfolk, friends, educators, and acquaintances who have touched me in a special way, I want to say thank you. To Dr. Williams who supported me, guided me and taught me everything I know about research. Last but not least I want to give a special "shout out" to all my peoples in the hood, better known as Flint, Michigan. I made it and I didn't forget where I came from. I’ll forever be a part of you. Once a Flintstone always a Flintstone. Peace!
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We as human beings live in a world, a world that surrounds all things great and small. Within this vast world of ours people evolve and also societies develop. The behavior of those human beings living within these developed societies is by and large determined by the rules are commonly defined as societal is regulated by these norms. Behavior displayed outside the bounds of the societal norms are deemed inappropriate and is subject to disciplinary actions.

Inappropriate behavior is often used synonymous with the term disruptive behavior. Disruptive behavior may be easily be defined as behavior that tends to bread up the order of or progress of any activity or event taking place. More often this term is used by educators, counselors, psychologist, psychiatrist, social workers and adults in general who view the behavior of children as atrocious or unpleasant. The children who are owners of such behavior are swiftly reprimanded by those offended adults or helping professionals.

Within the school setting, disruptive behavior can be quite burdensome to the teacher and may also detrimental to the learning process of all students including the identified nor breakers. The school teacher who is inexperienced and not properly trained in how to address disruptive classroom problems may spend a great deal of classroom time attempting

to manage behaviors. Managing these problems very likely detracts from the primary mission of secondary schools, to educate youngsters and to prepare them for future citizenship, careers, and/or college. One may inquiry that if a large amount of time in the classroom is spent on managing disruptive behavior, what amount of time is left for the teacher to properly and effectively educate her/his students? Does under-education take place, meaning that students are not progressing to their next grade level due to not being adequately prepared by the teacher? The same teacher who spends most of his/her class time managing disruptive and off-task behavior. Is a system being created or perpetuated where youth are dropping out of school in response to an environment where off-task and disruptive behavior takes place daily due to the teacher's inability to adequately enforce classroom norms?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Discipline problems in the public schools continue to be a major concern to parents, teachers, administrators, and to students themselves. In most cases disorder in a classroom interrupts the learning process. What once was a learning atmosphere in the classroom, turns into a chaotic combat zone.

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for teachers and students. Teachers begin to spend enormous amounts of time disciplining disruptive and off-task behavior. When this takes place on a daily bases frustration and apathy on the behalf of those battle fatigued teachers usually sets in. Conditions in the classroom become so overwhelming for some teachers that they eventually give up on students, in particular those students who they have labeled disruptive and problem children.

Once labeled these children are viewed negatively by teachers and expectations of these identified students are highly unfavorable. Unknowingly these teachers have created a self-fulfilling prophecy which stigmatizes the child and often times stigmatizes children who may have similar demographics. A stereotype by the teacher has been formed and those children who fit that certain cliche are sucked into a funnel of descent which is manifested as a statistic in the media under the categories of dropouts, unemployment, obituaries and the impoverished.

In 1988 33.1 percent of all black families in the United States were below the poverty level. In 1990 46.4 percent of all black men under the age of 18 were poverty stricken. 'Undoubtedly young men who dropout of school are ill equipped to compete in the labor market. With no access to gainful employment these youth are faced with the grim reality of

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being impoverished. A reality based on the values of immediate gratification and a reality where low value is placed on human life. A reality that victimizes one out of every twenty-nine black males who die as a victim of homicide. "We argue that homicide is positively related to poor economic conditions. . ."5 A victim who was unmotivated due to an unconcerned and insensitive teacher. For every student inspired by a teacher, too often there is another turned off by a teacher unequipped to deal with the needs of disadvantaged children.6

In observations conducted staff have witnessed on occasions in a classroom setting teachers spending fifty of the fifty-five minutes allocated for class attempting to bring order to the room. No time was spent on teaching, just on governing behavior. When the researcher would approach a teacher and question as to what was taking place in the classroom his/her response would be that "these children are 'badder' that when I was growing up." It is interesting to not that many teachers share the common belief that inappropriate behavior is worse today than was the case years ago. In a study conducted by Brown and Payne in 1986, more that fifty percent of 219 teachers polled felt that overall


school discipline is 'slightly' or 'much' worse that ten years ago. It is not totally clear but one might question if higher levels of intensity in discipline problems has an effect on the rate of dropouts in the United States. In reviewing the data an interesting pattern is identifiable when the two variables are contrasted. From the time interval of 1985 to 1990 the change in the number of high school graduates was -2.4. In Georgia alone the figure was a dismal -1.9. In addition an alarming fact uncovered is that 61 percent of ninth graders in the state of Georgia do not complete high school.

It would be totally ludicrous to assume that these frightening statistics could solely be attributed to students lack of intellectual capacity. Psychological, biological, and social factors all impact on a child and how they adjust to the classroom milieu. One must take a holistic view in attempting to discover circumstances that result in high student dropout rates. Furthermore interventions that may ameliorate discipline problems in the classroom milieu need be ascertained and implemented in order to increase school retention rates.

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8Angela D. Tuck, "Georgia Ranks," 1(A) and 2(A).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Low income, black, inner-city, and public housing are indicators often used in association with Afrikan-American youth categorized as "high risk". Children with such characteristic are at a higher risk of some define outcome determined by society. In this exemplar it will state this outcome as school dropout. Youth who are categorized as "high risk" are expected to manifest certain behaviors that place them at greater chance of becoming a dropout statistic. Once a dropout the black adolescent is confronted with the likelihood of being underemployed and impoverished. Statistics show that 32.7% of black individuals who have eight years of education fall below the poverty level. The mean income of these black families are approximately $12,164.¹

Doomed to the realm of the underclass the black youth will eventually mature into a young adult if he/she does not become a homicide casualty of the inner-city. Stigmatized based on skin color, economic status, and social class, the black youth will suffer a life full of hardships. Prospects for employment are limited for the black youth. Due to lack of education and training many black youth do not have access to the primary labor market, where competitive wages raise your chances of not falling into poverty. For Afrikan-

Americans who do not complete high school, their earnings are a dismal $513 dollars a month. Faced with this reality many youth turn to a life of crime and drug distribution. Hard work sometimes categorized as blue collar work was once valued highly in the labor market. This value was manifested in the high wages many workers would receive in compensation for their long hours of sweat and strain. No longer is high value placed on blue collar work. If viewed from a radical perspective, we note that Afrikan-Americans were brought over to America for the purpose of mass labor to increase the wealth of this nation. Now that Afrikan-Americans have built up the wealth of this nation, blue collar work which is still equated in this day and age as slave labor is impractical.² Laborers who have no labor must ultimately face the reality of poverty.

Youth who drop out of school are ill equipped for society. One may ask what causes a youth to drop out of the educational system. The etiology of youth dropout may be traced to the classroom setting, the teacher, the students social environment, or to the student. Ultimately indicators of at risk Afrikan-American youth will surface in the behavior of students within the classroom setting.

Discipline problems in the schools often simply mirror the basic state of adult society at that particular point in

time. If this statement holds true then children who display disruptive and off-task behavior and are stigmatized due to their behavior, very likely image adults in society who also display inappropriate behavior. To reiterate a statement made earlier in this exemplar, this study has clearly defined any behavior displayed outside the bounds of the societal norm as inappropriate. Henceforth inappropriate behavior within this study is synonymous with disruptive behavior. In connection with stigmatization of Afrikan-American youth one may hypothesize once an Afrikan-American youth is labeled and stigmatized as disruptive he or she will inevitably remain stigmatized throughout adulthood. Pestello’s view of an individual is once stigmatized, one is less likely to escape future encounters untarnished. For the stigmatized individual a dead end road to poverty is inevitable.

As one examines now more closely disruptive and off-task behavior and the stigmatized child. From the view point of many teachers polled, many have expressed how conditions in the school are different today than when they were in school. Clearly, children are growing up differently from the way many of their teachers did. These statements by responding

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educators are largely drawn from their own personal childhood experiences. Those past experiences surface typically when educators are deliberating with their colleagues on how to address inappropriate behavior in their school system. Rather than utilizing a particular approach grounded in a specific theoretical framework, many teachers instead will utilize subjective non-scientific knowledge. The danger with teachers who are ethnocentric is that they are only able to view behavior dependent upon their values, culture and norms. Studies conducted by several researchers found in part at least, how teacher-student cultural differences contribute to classroom misbehavior, and how teacher ethnocentrism prevents an understanding of the reasons for the behaviors (often perceived as misbehavior) exhibited by students in urban classrooms. Due to their rigid point of view any behavior displayed in contradiction to their value system is deemed unacceptable and inappropriate. This leaves a great margin of error to take place in the classroom setting in addressing what one teacher may view as disruptive or off-task behavior.

In reference to the child it is apparent that numerous and dissimilar cultures are operating simultaneously within the classroom environment. Several functioning from students and one functioning from the teaching. Adjustments of belief

systems based on separate cultures in what is appropriate classroom behavior must take place form both students and the teacher. If this mismatch is handled insensitively, the child comes to see himself as bad or school as bad. In either case, he/she is likely to feel "turned off" by school. The inner-city streets are over flowing with drop out or forced out youth who have been "turned off" by pseudonymous teachers who refer to themselves as educators. What you have currently taking place in the educational system is that middle class teachers are working with underclass or lower class children. Students in urban milieus exhibit many coping behaviors (behaviors they consider necessary and appropriate) which tend to be antithetical to the values of teachers. Teachers perceive such behaviors, however, in terms of their own, largely middle-class value systems. This mismatch of values produces conflict within the classroom. In response students within the classroom setting may display behavior that often times is labeled due to no goodness of fit between teacher and student values, as off-task and disruptive behavior.

If school problems reflect those problems that are occurring presently in society, it may be safe to say that the institution of school itself must reflect the institution of society at large. One may view the functions of the school

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system as a microcosm of what is exercised in the larger society as a whole. Society at large is infested and diseased with the crippling virus of white supremacy, which is practiced in the form of institutional racism. That means that the school system also embraces the construct of white supremacy. The public schools often represent an integration of society's most crippling diseases indifference, injustice and inequity.  

Children not quite of age to know the intricacies of racism yet perceive the effects of its oppressive acts. Not only do these youth witness the frustrations that are expressed by their parents failures and limited access to gainful employment but they too begin to experience their own frustrations due to racism. They begin to realize that America and how it was structured did not consider Afrikan-Americans as having access like there childhood counter parts who are of European decent. Within the classroom teachers perpetuate this ideology by not educating students who may be Afrikan-American and from a low socio-economic community. School Achievement is correlated with type of community, which reflects the social class of persons who reside there. Some teachers are undereducating students in the class by not

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setting high academic expectations of those inner-city children. Maeroff found that the atmosphere in such schools often unsupportive of education and the demands and expectations low.\(^\text{11}\)

Appalling as it may sound, as previously indicated these behaviors from those teachers display a surrendering type of attitude. They succumb, and reframe from performing their professional mission which is to teach and educate all children in spite of social class and race. What is most troublesome is that many teachers are unaware of how detrimental to the child it is when they have given up on educating the child. Many times the teacher finds fault in the child and comes to the conclusion that their is no hope for the child. Unknowingly the teacher is setting the child up for repetitive academic failures. Repiticious academic failure starts to take its toll on the child and his/her level of motivation and determination begins to depreciate. Evidence suggest that it is failure and frustration with academic performance that leads to misbehavior in school.\(^\text{12}\)

An environment is created that ignites the chain reaction of teacher apathy, student failure, student frustration, student disruptive/off-task behavior and student dropout.

Various studies conducted discuss the importance of a conducive learning atmosphere within the classroom setting in

\(^{11}\)Gene I. Maeroff, "Stillborn Dreams," 634.

\(^{12}\)Frances G. Pestello, "Misbehavior In High School," 291.
relation to minimizing classroom disruptive and off-task behavior. Lasley hypothesized that students participate in disruptive and off-task behavior due largely in response to low classroom stimuli. Lasley, determined that students would engage in coping behaviors that he labeled as maintaining and relieving behaviors. Maintaining behaviors seemed to be exhibited by students to engender peer acceptance while relieving behavior occurred when a student felt emotionally or intellectually separated from the classroom environment.¹³ Such behavior may be manifested in the form of verbal and physical aggression, sarcastic remarks, teasing, daydreaming, 'janken' (which is degrading remarks), or banging on school equipment. All of these behaviors were do in response to the classroom milieu that the students were present in. If the students environment had a low amount of stimulus they were more apt to be disengaged and to participate in off-task and disruptive behavior. Evertson and Harris examined educational content within the classroom setting in relation to the engagement levels of students. They believed that certain activities within the classroom produced different levels of student engagement. In studies that Evertson and Harris reviewed, they found that frequent seat work results in lower on-task behavior.¹⁴

¹³Thomas J. Lasley, "Classroom Misbehavior," 142.

Classroom management may be the term utilized in reference to what is being discussed currently in this paper. Within the context of this research classroom management may be viewed as a preventive and proactive discussion. Therefore developing preplanned strategies and conducting ongoing assessments enables the teacher to create a trouble free classroom. It is assumed that in addressing disruptive and off-task behavior one must do more than just merely reacting to incidents of inappropriate behaviors displayed by students. Teachers now are required to structure their classroom in ways that will minimize disruptive and off-task behavior while simultaneously increasing student academic performance.15

Grubaugh and Houston looked at how teachers could establish a classroom environment that improved student behavior. Variables identified ranged from physical setting of classroom, seating arrangement within the classroom, classroom leaders in reference to students, first impressions and teacher appearance. Grubaugh and Houston found that the first perception of the teacher and the classroom environment is indelibly etched in the mind of each student and becomes a variable that can be adjusted to achieve better discipline and control.16

Shrigley further stressed the importance of teachers in

15Ibid., 74-78.

developing preplanned strategies to best effectively address predictive and potential disruptive or off-task student behavior. He labels these strategies as coping skills which he stressed that all teachers should develop in order to deter disruptive and off-task student behavior.\textsuperscript{17} Evertson and Harris found that teachers who utilized classroom management strategies experienced in their classrooms lower amounts of inappropriate behavior and greater academic achievement. Evidence demonstrates the importance and effectiveness of teachers utilizing classroom management strategies to ameliorate inappropriate classroom behavior.\textsuperscript{18}

In understanding and addressing disruptive and off-task behavior in the classroom, teachers need to also take into account the effects that a child’s social environment has on the behavior of that student. Many educators fail to include in classroom management strategies the students social and living environment. One must realize the overwhelming influence that the environment has on shaping the behavior of children. In addressing Afrikan-American adolescents who may reside in the impoverished inner-city public housing projects, it is extremely critical to assess the behavior of these adolescents in the context of their environment to intervene most effectively. Adolescents who live in the urban cities


\textsuperscript{18}Evertson and Harris, "What We Know," 74-78.
display behavior that may be characterized as aggressive. Physical aggression is an integral part of these children's live. It permeates almost every aspect of their experiences outside the classroom, and consequently is a major element in their expression of themselves. To address this behavior as a separate and isolated occurrence may lead to teacher apathy and eventually student disengagement.

Lasley found that ritual fighting within the classroom was quite representative in the lives of adolescent males residing within the inner-city. This type of fighting takes place in the lives of black male adolescents on a daily basis inside and outside of the classroom. It is an activity to establish clique or peer group domination by one individual. This process may begin with verbal exchanges between adolescents which if neither adolescent backs down, escalates to physical aggression.

Hawkins found in the inner-city children she studied that physical aggression was an intricate thread woven into the daily lives of the children. Physical aggression for these adolescents was a vehicle to obtain dominance and superiority. Hawkins contends that the aggressive behavior demonstrated in the classroom is an imitation of events within the child's inner-city milieu. The adolescent who displays disruptive

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20Thomas J. Lasley, "Classroom Misbehavior," 146.
behavior in the classroom is mirroring disruptive behavior that undoubtedly takes place in his/her environment. Congers supports this in his study that states youth from what he called toxic environments tend to display aggressive behavior 2 to 1 in comparison to the child from the non toxic environment.

Cengers defines toxic environments as those environments that contain negative stimulus/input (ie. drug distribution, homicide, prostitution, gang activity, robbery, assault and battery).

Contracts are not a new phenomenon utilized within the social sciences. Contracts are utilized between the helping professional and client to bring about a desired change in the client system. The contract may be written or verbal but it must be a mutual agreement that each person will be responsible for conducting a specific task within a certain period of time. Contingency contracts with students are an extension from the traditional mutual contract. Typically, it involves a precise delineation of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate student behavior, and the provision of back-up reinforcement such as grades and/or free time for point earnings.

A study utilizing contingency contracts versus


proclamations was conducted by Arwood, Williams and Long. Their study looked at the effects of contingency contracts on the behavior of a classroom of middle-class suburban students. Within this class four of the most disruptive students were chosen for observation. Conclusions showed that contingency contracts increased classroom appropriate behavior in comparison to proclamations. In addition to the increase of classroom appropriate behavior, the academic performance level of these students also improved. It can be assumed that student input in relation to the contract enhanced the effectiveness of the contract.23

Herman and Tramontana studied two groups of Head Start children who displayed disruptive behavior. A group and individual reinforcement technique utilizing tokens to modify behavior of students was implemented during the intervention phase of the study. Instructions were also given to students to inform them of what behaviors would earn points in order to obtain tokens. Findings showed that the combination of instructions and reinforcement is much more effective than either one of them alone. In addition the group reinforcement technique, which as much more easily implemented, was a least as effective as individual reinforcement.24

Nevin, Johnson and Johnson studied the effects of individual and group contingencies on the academic performance and social relations of handicapped students. Three separate studies were conducted within the broader study. The second study focused on low academic achievement, disruptive behavior and poor study habits. A group of eleven students were divided into four sub-groups. Groups were rewarded points as a whole based on the groups ability to reach the stated criteria level of appropriate behavior, good study habits and academic achievement. The study utilized and A-B-A design and during the first A phase, on-task classroom behavior was at 50 percent. During the intervention phase on-task behavior rose to 75 percent. Finally during the withdrawal phase on-task behavior dropped to 65 percent. 25

Kazdin observed attentive behavior of adjacent peers of students who were being exposed to positive reinforcement. The subjects were four moderately retarded elementary school children within a class of fourteen children. The reinforcement utilized within the class was in the form of verbal praise. Behaviors observed were titled either attentive or inattentive. Kazdin concluded that reinforcement of attentive or inattentive behavior in the target subjects

increased attentive behavior in the adjacent peers. This study supports previous studies that claim that vicarious reinforcement is effective in relation to altering the behavior of peers of a subject who is being exposed to a contingency contract.

Studies reviewed within this exemplar affirm the importance of classroom management strategies in addressing inappropriate student behavior. An acute awareness of elements that exist within the classroom setting and within the students immediate living environment is imperative in managing academic classrooms. Addressing those factors becomes the critical responsibility of the teacher whose main concern is to facilitate an environment that is conducive to student learning. Literature indicates that when attention is given to classroom management issues, there is a greater likelihood that a high standard of student achievement is maintained.

OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The theoretical orientation upon which the present study is built is applied behavior analysis largely derived from the works of B.F. Skinner. Skinner’s analysis of behavior focuses on overt behavior and its observable environmental, social, and physiological determinants as opposed to inferred


constructs such as drives, needs, motives, and cognitions. In Skinner's "science of behavior" the independent variables are seen as environmental stimuli, more specifically, contingencies of reinforcement and punishment, analyzed as determinants of response occurrence according to the natural event sequence of antecedent-behavior-consequences, referred to as the ABC model of behavior analysis. These assumptions of behavior analysis originate from operant learning theory. According to operant theory, the different responses of an individual to environmental stimuli will result in different consequences. Some responses will result in positive reinforcement, some will bring about punishing consequences and some will be ignored. As the individual repeatedly puts forth behavior the individual will tend to eliminate those responses that are ignored or that result in punishing consequences and instead respond in a manner that result in rewarding consequences.

The ABC conceptualization is sometimes referred to as "behavioral engineering". Behavioral engineering is an approach toward behavior change which focuses on arranging the environment so as to increase the probability of desired behaviors and decrease the probability of undesired behaviors. An understanding of those students who do and do not participate in off-task and disruptive behavior can be

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enhanced by a behavioral analysis of the antecedents and consequences associated with engaging in off-task and disruptive behavior.

Contingency reinforcement operates when behavior exhibited by an individual is reinforced by a reward contingent on the individual meeting an expected level of behavior. In utilizing a contingency contract with The Saturday Academy sixth grade class one can view the ABC model of behavior analysis in the following manner. The antecedent or (A) within the study is the classroom setting and all that is encompassed in that environment. The behavior or (B) under observation and to be addressed is that of the sixth grade students. The intervention is attempting to decrease disruptive and off-task behavior and in doing so it is assumed that on-task and appropriate behavior will be modified. Thus the contingency contract operating off of reinforcements in relation to the sixth graders class behavior may be positive or negative. If the students display appropriate behavior then they will be rewarded points which eventually reach the point total goal that will allow the class to participate on a field trip. However, the contingency contract may be a negative reinforcement if it is viewed by the students in a negative manner due to previous experiences with other behavior modification programs. Students may feel that they won’t be rewarded for their appropriate behavior due to the fact that other teachers did not reward behavior that was
appropriate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study investigated the effects of a contingency contract on disruptive and off-task behavior of a sixth grade class of students within the Saturday Academy Program. The classroom environment had become so chaotic to the extent that the teachers were spending a majority of class time disciplining and redirecting off-task and disruptive student behavior. Due to the expressed concern on the part of the teachers, it was imperative and critical that the issue be addressed in order to prevent apathy amongst the teachers and disengagement in the students which could lead to the discontinuance of the program.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

SETTING

As part of an initiative with the Atlanta Housing Authority, Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work developed and implemented a program to address the needs of families in the nearby public housing projects. The program is titled Partners In A Planned Community and its goals are to empower the families and to connect the families with the necessary resources to become self sufficient. Employment and education are key indexes within the Partners In A Planned Community Program to determine if the goals of the program are being obtained.

Within the overall Partners In A Planned Community Program is a sub program labeled the Saturday Academy Program. The Saturday Academy Program addresses the needs of parents and children who live in the nearby public housing projects. The children attend classes within the program which are in the areas of math/computers, science and communications. Students in the program are in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades and approximately 55 to 60 children attend the program. Each class averages about 15 to 20 children and time spent in each class is approximately one hour in duration. The mission of this program is to bring about an interest from the children in the math and sciences and to increase the overall pool of minorities employed in those two areas.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE CASE

The class of sixth grade students came from W.L. Park and J.F. Kennedy middle schools. The class had an even ratio of boys to girls, all of which were of Afrikan-American descent. As stated previously, the students resided in the nearby public housing projects. They attended the program on Saturday mornings from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The students attended three classes throughout the morning, the first of which began at 9:00 a.m. Before class the students would assemble in the cafeteria at 8:30 a.m. to eat breakfast. The students attended classes regularly and the sixth grade class had the most number of children enrolled within The Saturday Academy Program.

Soon after the program commenced, classroom behavior became an issue that staff began to deliberate on how to address it. Many of the classroom teachers began to complain about the numerous problem children in their classes. The teachers would state that these children were disrupting the class and hindering other students from benefiting for the lesson being taught. Many other complaints came from volunteering staff who stated that students were not being attentive in class and were often times looking out the classroom window or just looking around in general. Teachers on many occasions would inform the Director of The Saturday Academy Program that students were being disrespectful to them by not following classroom instructions and instead were just
ignoring them.

Teachers began to label children who were displaying off-task and disruptive behavior as unruly or just 'bad kids'. Strategies to address this issue began to revolve around banning those identified children from The Saturday Academy Program all together. It was evident that these children were not being engaged within the classroom due to their displayed behavior.

TREATMENT HYPOTHESIS

From observations by this researcher it was noted that the students received more feedback in the form of negative feedback from the teachers and volunteers in response to their off-task and disruptive behavior. Much of this negative reinforcement that originated from teachers and volunteers came in the form of shouting, verbal reprimands, ultimatums, scorning and shaming. All of these discipline tactics were in response to the inappropriate behavior displayed by the children labeled as disruptive and off-task.

Therefore, it was hypothesized that a point system would decrease disruptive behavior and increase on-task behavior in a sixth grade class in the Saturday Academy Program.

INTERVENTION STRATEGY

The intervention plan utilized with the sixth grade class consisted of a contingency contract which would reinforce positive behavior. The sixth grade class earned points for appropriate behavior which was charted on a scale displayed in
the classroom. The sixth grade class had a goal set at 3600 points. Once the class obtained the goal they were rewarded with a field trip which would take place at the end of the Saturday Academy Program.

The children were instructed every Saturday morning on how the contingency contract operated. The sixth grade class was also updated on how many points they had obtained to date and how far from the overall goal they were. The class was instructed that they were earning points not just for themselves but for the class as a whole. Each student had to earn a minimum amount of points for themselves in order for the class as a whole to receive points. A minimum of 6 points accumulated between all four designated time periods was necessary to obtain the full twenty points that could be earned for the class during that certain class. In addition the adolescents were informed on what behavior did not earn points. The trained observers kept a tally of points that were reported to the researcher at the end of the class day. These seven behaviors are subdivided into off-task and disruptive behavior and are defined as follows. Off-task behaviors consisted of looking around; non academic talk; unrelated academic behavior and non compliance with teachers’ task request. Disruptive behaviors consisted of vocal outburst unrelated to an ongoing activity; physical aggression defined as hitting, kicking, spitting or throwing and noise producing activity conducted with equipment that is annoying
to students and teacher.

INSTRUMENT

A chart was utilized to monitor the total number of occurrences of disruptive and off-task behavior displayed by the sixth grade class during the class period. Three first year graduate social work students were used to monitor only one of the three classes that the sixth graders attended. Therefore one observer monitored math/computer class, another observer monitored science class, and the third observer monitored the communication class. These observers were all given operational definitions of off-task and disruptive behavior that was typed and handed out to them on each Saturday morning before class.

The observers were instructed to monitor the class for a hour duration but only to take frequency counts at the designated time periods. The four time periods were 5 minutes after the hour, 20 minutes after the hour, 25 minutes before the hour and 10 minutes of the hour. Therefore the time that elapsed between frequency counts was 15 minutes in duration. During the designated time the observer would conduct a visual scan of the classroom and document occurrences of disruptive or/and off-task behavior displayed by the children. This was represented by a "D" meaning disruptive behavior and an "O" representing off-task behavior. See attached appendix for a copy of the observation instrument utilized to conduct frequency counts.
Social validity was obtained by utilizing a questionnaire which consisted of a pre-test and post-test to obtain teacher satisfaction in reference to the effectiveness of the contingency contract introduced to the sixth grade class. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in attached appendix.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The A-B research design was chosen as the study design utilized in assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of the contingency contract. It was most attractive due to its easy implementation and that is the most basic and simplest design that will allow the researcher to determine if changes took place after the intervention was introduced.

Utilizing an A-B design, disruptive and off-task behavior was charted for a total of twelve consecutive weeks. A concurrent baseline which lasted over a six week time period was conducted during the A phase to collect a baserate. This baserate consisted of six data points which constituted the baseline period. The occurrences of off-task and disruptive behavior were the two dependant variables being measured within this study.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The results of this research study are presented within this chapter.

Figure 1, represents the occurrences of disruptive and off-task behavior and the number of weekly sessions that the dependent variables were measured and charted. During the baseline phase which continued for six weekly sessions disruptive behavior ranged in frequency from 4 to 36 with a mean of 11.8 and a standard deviation (s.d. = .08). Off-task behavior ranged in frequency form 5 to 19 with a mean of 8.7 and standard deviation (s.d. = .08).

The intervention phase of the research study covered five weekly sessions. During the intervention phase after the contingency contract was introduce to the sixth grade class, off-task behavior ranged in frequency from 0 to 8 with a mean of 2.2 and a standard deviation (s.d. = 0). Disruptive behavior was completedly reduced to 0.

Visual analysis of the data demonstrated that the point system did produce change. The desired outcome of decreasing disruptive and off-task behavior was achieved in utilizing the contingency contract.

The pattern of data within the intervention phase reveals an improvement that has remained steady in relation to disruptive and off-task behavior. In addition the trend of data within the baseline phase increased then decreased and
Figure 1. Frequency of Disruptive and Off-Task Behavior Displayed Within the Classroom
finally stabilized to a flat trend for both dependent variables.

Comparison of data from the baseline phase and the intervention phase was calculated in terms of absolute decrease and relative decrease. The results demonstrated that the introduction of the point system was able to generate and absolute decrease in disruptive behavior by a mean of 11.8, which was a relative decrease of 100% below the mean baseline. The intervention also generated an absolute decrease in off-task behavior by a mean of 6.5, which was a relative decrease of 75% below the mean baseline.

Teachers expressed an improvement of behavior within their classrooms. Table 1 and Table 2 exhibits the pre and post test percentages of responses from three Saturday Academy teachers relative to disruptive and off-task behavior of the sixth grade students. The rating chart was utilized to gage social validity. Table 1 in comparison to Table 2 shows a slight favorable difference of percentage scores. For example in comparing the teachers pre and post test response for non academic talk, results show that the teachers sensed that there was a decrease in non academic talk within the classroom. For the pre test 67% of the teachers responded by marking the ‘moderate category’ while 33% marked the ‘quite a lot’ category. In the post test 67% of the teachers responded by marking the ‘very little’ category while 33% marked the ‘moderate’ category. Additional comparison of pre and post
For each misconduct listed below, how often have you as the teacher witnessed in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misconduct</th>
<th>none</th>
<th>very little</th>
<th>moderate</th>
<th>quite a lot</th>
<th>extreme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking around</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonacademic talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated academic behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncompliance with teachers task request</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal outburst unrelated to an ongoing activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical aggression defined as hitting, kicking, spitting or throwing objects</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise producing activity conducted with equipment that is annoying to students and teacher</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1:** PRE TEST EVALUATION OF DISRUPTIVE AND OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR BY CLASSROOM TEACHERS
For each misconduct listed below, how often have you as the teacher witnessed in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>none</th>
<th>very little</th>
<th>moderate</th>
<th>quite a lot</th>
<th>extreme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking around</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonacademic talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated academic behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncompliance with teachers</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>task request</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal outburst unrelated to an</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ongoing activity</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical aggression defined as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hitting, kicking, spitting or</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throwing objects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise producing activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducted with equipment that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is annoying to students and</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2:** POST TEST EVALUATION OF DISRUPTIVE AND OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR BY CLASSROOM TEACHERS
test responses affirm that the teachers sensed a decrease in disruptive and off-task behavior.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, the point system was found to apparently produce an absolute decrease in disruptive behavior by a mean of 11.8. It also was able to produce an absolute decrease in off-task behavior by a mean of 6.5. All though the quasi-experimental nature of the A-B design does not usually permit causal inferences, visual inspection of the data suggests that it was the reward system which produced the change in disruptive and off-task behavior.

Many students today within the school system are in class environments that are detrimental to their educational advancement. Due to numerous negative factors that may be present within the class milieu, many students may withdraw from the academic environment and possibly drop out of school. Teachers who instruct within chaotic classrooms may eventually become apathetic, fatigued and unconcerned with providing students the necessary academic skills that are crucial in reducing the risk of a student eventually becoming underemployed and impoverished.

The sixth grade students within The Saturday Academy were displaying disruptive and off-task behavior that the teachers sensed was inappropriate and "bad". In response to the labeled student behavior a contingency contract was developed and implemented within the classroom environment.

Observations made validate that a change in disruptive
and off-task behavior did occur. Disruptive and off-task behavior of the sixth grade class did in fact decrease substantially. It was observed during the intervention phase that students began to take pride in displaying appropriate behavior. Often times students would inquire if they were being monitored and would also question as to how many points they had accumulated for the class period.

It is assumed that the students will obtain their total point goal if they maintain their current pace and will be allowed to partake in a recreational field trip. The students have devised a list of places they wish to visit, once they have reached their goal. Out of the devised list the students will choose a place to visit as their field trip reward.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Limitations in the present study include sole reliance upon data obtained by one observer in the absence of reliability checks and the unlikely possibility that some unknown concurrent historical variable was responsible for the observed decrease in off-task and disruptive behavior.

In addition fluctuations in the class size between phases leads one to question whether a smaller class size will display fewer occurrences of disruptive and off-task behavior. However one cannot make such an assumption due to the fact that fewer students may in fact display greater occurrences of disruptive behavior in comparison to many students within the classroom setting.
In addition, the importance of addressing disruptive and off-task behavior need be expressed to all staff working in collaboration with The Saturday Academy Program in order to retain students and to continue to provide to students what appears to be a beneficial program. Without the commitment from staff to improve classroom conditions the program is at risk of being discontinued due to low student participation.

**SUGGESTED RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

A replication of this study need be undertaken to further strengthen the hypothesis that a contingency contract reduces the occurrence of disruptive and off-task behavior. Within the replicated study an additional observer should be utilized to obtain inter rater reliability in relation to observing the dependent variables. In addition a follow up phase may be utilized to ascertain if irreversible or reversible changes took place after the intervention was withdrawn. Also a multiple baseline design across systems may be utilized to rule out threats to internal validity and carry-over effects which would demonstrate a stronger causal relationship between independent and dependent variables. Finally there is a need for future research to delve into the dynamics that occur between students and teachers and the role that their individual value systems play in that process.
CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

An increase of current research studies on classroom student behavior and inner-city public housing students need be undertaken. More importantly studies addressing ethnocentric values of teachers and studies looking at the toxic environments of inner-city students and the effects those environments have on the dynamics that take place within the classroom milieu need to be also researched. The relationship and interpersonal exchange between student and teacher within the classroom setting is a significant one, one that needs to be brought under a microscope.

When students withdraw from the educational setting and possibly end up dropping out of school there is a greater chance of the student falling into the welfare or legal system. Addressing the individual and assessing his or her needs, must take on a proactive stance. The profession of Social Work must commit to moving from just providing "band aid" services to providing preventive services.

Contingency contracts are not 100% preventive services, however, it is not an intervention that falls on the lowered level of reactive services often described and tertiary services. In fact contingency contracts are viewed as a secondary type of service delivery which seeks to focus on intervening at the institutional level which has been the targeted level within this study.
Many causal factors may occur such as white racism are affecting many Afrikan-American communities throughout the nation. Those societal injustices that stem from such an ideology such as underemployment, unemployment, the illegal economy and toxic environments affects the behavior of students within the classroom and also within the students living environment. Social Workers addressing these problems must realize that intervention needs to be done at many levels, such as at the primary/societal level, secondary/institutional level, and the tertiary/individual level. To change the ills of society overnight is quite an utopian endeavor. However to change school policies, classroom environments, and teacher perceptions of behavior seems to be a more practical task.

RELEVANCE TO THE AGENCY

Within this study a contingency contract was utilized and it proved to have had great success. The results of this study provides a strategy for teachers that can be put into their repertoire to reduce disruptive and off-task behavior of students within the classroom. The reward system may used in addition with other existing class management techniques such as proximity control or seating arrangements within the classroom. Teachers and administrators alike may benefit greatly by utilizing the reward system that was shown to be effective within this study. With the increase pressure in the educational arena for teachers to effectively teach our
children you may infer from the results of this study that by incorporating the reward system more time may be utilized in educating students as opposed to disciplining them. Thus more information is being dispersed within the classroom setting which provides more opportunities for students to absorb and retain pertinent growth producing knowledge.

However research should not halt at the results of just this study. A better understanding of student behavior is needed within The Saturday Academy, in order to upgrade The Saturday Academy program and in addition classroom settings throughout the nation.
APPENDICES
For each misconduct listed below, how often have you as the teacher witnessed in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>none</th>
<th>very little</th>
<th>moderate</th>
<th>quite a lot</th>
<th>extreme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR**

Looking around ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

Nonacademic talk ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

Unrelated academic behavior ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

Noncompliance with teachers task request ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

**DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR**

Vocal outburst unrelated to an ongoing activity ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

Physical aggression defined as hitting, kicking, spitting or throwing objects ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

Noise producing activity conducted with equipment that is annoying to students and teacher ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

**TABLE:** Pre & Post Test Evaluation of Disruptive and Off-Task Behavior by Classroom Teachers
DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AND OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR

OBSERVATIONAL CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT NAME</th>
<th>TIME 1</th>
<th>TIME 2</th>
<th>TIME 3</th>
<th>TIME 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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