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## **The Impact Positive Verbal Praise has on Violent Behaviors among Students in a Federal Setting IV Special Education Placement**

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The Impact Positive Verbal Praise has on Violent Behaviors among Students in a Federal Setting  
IV Special Education Placement

A Project Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University, Moorhead

By

Chad Tauer

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how positive verbal praise impacts the prevalence and frequency of violent behaviors among chosen students receiving special education services at Federal Setting IV sites. This study was conducted over the course of four months, three phases (baseline phase, implementation phase, and termination phase). The subjects of this study are students under the various special education disability classifications of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD), Developmental Cognitive Delays (DCD), Physically Impaired (PI), Other Health Disabilities (OHD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Severely Multiply Impaired (SMI). Students are chosen at random, and the trained educational staff would have came in the form of licensed teachers and educational support professionals. Positive verbal affirmations would have been used after desirable behaviors, or when the maladaptive behavior that is exhibited by students is less severe than anticipated, all to be implemented during the implementation phase. Data collected is collected in the form of affect level charts that are measured from each student. Overall data would observe the frequency of violent behaviors during the implementation phase. The hypothesis statement for this research is “Utilizing positive verbal praise in a student’s educational routine and setting will decrease the prevalence and frequency of violent behaviors by the student.”

Due to school closures occurring from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the action research was not able to be properly implemented. Because of this, an Auto-Ethnography and a Content Analysis of journal by Chad Tauer based on his experiences as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher and a DAPE Teacher was written in this Action Research instead.

**Keywords:**

COVID-19

Positive Verbal Affirmations

Distance Learning

DAPE (Developmental Adapted Physical Education)

## Chapter One, Introduction

### General Problem/Issue

The problem that was going to be identified are aggressive behaviors within the schools that I work at. To give a little more context, the schools I work at are considered federal setting IV special education sites, where 50 percent of a student's school day or more is spent away from a mainstream school. All of the students I am referring to that exhibit aggressive behaviors were receiving special education services. The reason for choosing this problem is because aggressive behaviors impact the students' educational growth and progress. My role was during this time is a Physical and Health Disabilities Teacher, which is a special education teaching position that mainly provides consultation to members of a student's IEP team in regards to how their medical diagnosis impacts their educational progress and growth, and a Developmental Adapted Physical Education Teacher. Aggressive behaviors can also be resulted from their medical diagnosis. Moving onto narrowing the problem, I wanted to focus on the specific aggressive behavior of violence towards students and staff, conducted by students whose primary disability may either be: Physically Impaired, Other Health Disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injury, Developmental Cognitive Delay, Severely Multiply Impaired, Emotional/Behavioral Disorder, and Autism Spectrum Disorders. As one would imagine, behavior interventions were already set in place, and implemented by those student's classroom teacher and staff. The one behavior intervention I wanted to focus on is positive verbal affirmation, as given by staff who work with the students, as a means to reduce violent behaviors. This is a good problem because it is interesting to educators who work with similar students, it is researchable, and it is significant to this student population's educational growth and impact. So, the research problem that was going to be studied is the effect of positive verbal affirmation had on reducing violent behaviors with

students whose primary disability may be: Physically Impaired, Other Health Disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injury, Developmental Cognitive Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, and Severely Multiply Impaired. I want to point out that I also point out that even though I was also filling the role as a Developmental Adapted Physical Education Teacher, I only used the students I serve as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher as research participants. I asked my research question, which is: How does implementing positive verbal affirmation impact violent behaviors in students in setting IV special education services?

### **Background Information**

To provide context as to what I did at the time, my current position is a Physical and Health Disabilities Teacher and Developmental Adapted Physical Education Teacher at Intermediate District 287. Intermediate District 287 is a cooperative that provides itinerant special education and related services to the member districts that make up Intermediate District 287. One other important aspect of Intermediate District 287 is that it had 4 school buildings that house setting IV special education programs, with those programs servicing students under the special education classifications of Developmental Cognitive Delays, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional or Behavioral Disorders, Physically Impaired, Other Health Disabilities, and Traumatic Brain Injury. The primary reason as to why the students attended these setting IV schools is because of the prevalence and frequency of aggressive behaviors they exhibited. A large focus was for students to be in the least-restrictive environment (LRE) for their educational setting, and at these setting IV schools, students were restricted from mainstream public schools due to the severity of their behaviors. According to IDEA 2004 “the State must have in effect policies and procedures to ensure that public agencies in the State meet the LRE requirements.” (IDEA, 2004). With that being said, the students were only placed at these schools after

extensive behavior data tracking at their mainstream schools. Even after leaving their mainstream schools and then attending setting IV schools, the majority of these students still exhibit physical aggressive behaviors that can be considered violent behaviors. As part of my job responsibilities at the time, I serviced Physically Impaired, Other Health Disabilities, and Traumatic Brain Injury special education services to students who attend these schools. Many behavioral interventions were employed, such as social stories, token economy intervention from a school-wide Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS), but there has been a prominent push to start energizing positive behaviors. Although there were a number of ways to energize positive behaviors, the most accessible way for educators at these schools to energize these positive behaviors is through verbal communication. Since there was no specific data tracking between the relationship of energizing positive behaviors and the prevalence of violent behaviors, this research study would have examined just that. As mentioned before, the most accessible way for educators at these setting IV schools to energize positive behaviors is through verbal communication, this study was going to focus specifically on implementing positive verbal affirmation. Given trainings on how to implement positive verbal affirmation and behavior data tracking, the educators at these schools were going to implement positive verbal affirmation, and collect data as a result of implementing this strategy. I, as the co-investigator to this study, was then going to analyze the data collected to determine any impact or suggestions as a result of this study. This study is to be implemented from the months of March 2020 through June 2020.

## **Purpose of the Study**

With the prevalence of aggression and violence in our mainstream Minnesota Public Schools, our Federal Setting IV schools experienced much more violence and aggression amongst our students. In Minnesota, Federal Setting IV is “Public day-school student receives special-education services in a separate school more than 50 percent of the school day” (Karen, 2017). One can safely make an inference that the reason why violent behaviors and aggression occurred so frequently in our schools is due to many reasons that are both internalizing and externalizing. When it came to internal reasons, it may be due to the child’s brain, neurological, cognitive, and emotional development. When it came to external reasons, it may be as a result of school-life, community-life, or home-living. With us educators, we can largely impact, but not completely control, an individual student’s school-life. When a student would exhibit violent and aggressive behaviors, behavior interventions were implemented, and data is collected based on how the student responds to such behaviors. Prior to working on this study, I had sought out research articles relating to the Nurtured Heart Approach, a positive behavior reinforcement intervention, only to find very limited information on the effectiveness of the intervention. The purpose of this study was to provide information relating to how reinforcing, or energizing, positive behaviors among students in Federal Setting IV placements, and to analyze or recognize how energizing positive behaviors could impact the prevalence and frequency of violent behaviors.

**Rationale**

The reason why I believed this proposed action research was worthwhile is that it would have provided a specific perspective as to how energizing and reinforcing positive behaviors impacts on the frequency of violence or aggressive behaviors, and, in my belief, would provide more research on a specific topic that is not well-researched.

**Hypothesis**

My proposed hypothesis was that implementing positive verbal praise in a student's daily routine would decrease the prevalence of violent behaviors that are exhibited by them.

**Subjects and Setting**

The first part of identifying the research participants for this study was to first identify the population. The population that this study was going to be conducted on were students placed in Federal Setting IV special education services, and could be identified by their primary disabilities of: Developmental Cognitive Delays, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional or Behavioral Disorders, Severely Multiply Impaired, Physically Impaired, Other Health Disabilities, or Traumatic Brain Injury. When determining the participants of this study, they would be students from the Federal Setting IV schools that I attend work at and must have one of those 7 primary disability criteria, all be listed, regardless of school or program, and there would have been 8 students randomly selected.

**Description of Subjects**

The subjects for this action research study were to be students, grades 4-11, who all were receiving special education services in a Federal Setting IV placement. The students that were selected have one of these 7 primary disabilities: Developmental Cognitive Delays, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional or Behavioral Disorders, Severely Multiply Impaired, Physically

Impaired, Other Health Disabilities, or Traumatic Brain Injury. All of these students must have had a history of aggression and violent behaviors, as documented on their previous IEPs and progress reports. 2 classrooms, both with students ranging from grades 7-11, were selected to be the experimental group that would implement Positive Verbal Affirmations, recording the number of times Positive Verbal Affirmations were used and recording the affect levels for all participating students. The other two classrooms were selected to be the control groups, who were to only have their affect charts measured. Each classroom had 4 students, so in total, 16 students were selected.

### **Selection Criteria**

Students were selected because they attended one of Intermediate District 287's Federal Setting IV Programs, where the program serves students under the primary disabilities of Autism Spectrum Disorders, Developmental Cognitive Delays, Severely Multiply Impaired, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, Physically Impaired, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Other Health Disabilities. Students were selected based on which classrooms they were in, and which teachers and classroom staff were available to help carry out the data collection process of the Action Research.

### **Description of Setting**

The setting that these students were to be in is considered a Federal Setting IV placement, which is considered a non-mainstream school setting. To provide further detail about this setting, classrooms were the average size of any other classroom, while class sizes were significantly smaller, providing more attention to each individual student from the classroom teacher. Not only did students receive more adult attention from their teacher, there was an average range of

2-4 Education Support Professionals (ESPs) in each classroom, all trained to help students in the academic, functional, and behavioral growth.

### **Research Ethics**

This next area covers the area of research ethics. In this section, I discussed permissions, informed consent, and IRB approval.

#### **Permissions**

I had received permission to conduct this study from the Superintendent of Intermediate District 287, Sandra Lewandowski, to conduct research on students at 2 schools within the district. In addition to the Superintendent's permission, I had also received consent from both of those schools building principals.

#### **Informed Consent**

Students and their families were to be given informed consent to this action research through a letter sent home to students. The letter clearly stated that the student's personal information beyond their primary disability diagnosis would not be revealed, such as their name, age, race, and address. In addition, I, as the co-investigator, explained to these students that their parents or guardians have given me consent to conduct this research.

#### **IRB Approval**

I had obtained permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University, Moorhead, to conduct this research.

## **Chapter Two, Review of Literature**

In this chapter, I highlighted the various research studies and sources that I have found related to the subjects of behavior intervention, prevalence of violence among students, and positive verbal affirmation. I compiled information from each source and explain how it is related to this study.

### **Behavior Intervention**

In order to make the most effective use of a particular behavior intervention, it is most beneficial if all staff at a school are aware and practice that behavior intervention. In the area of special education, when general education teachers are provided “provided with the skills to manage disruptive behavior, they referred fewer students for special education.” (Polirstok, Gottlieb, 2006). This could also apply to what Federal Setting special education level students are referred to, and can be a determining factor as to if those students are put into a higher-restrictive setting. Another article that I read elaborates on this by stating that students who demonstrated externalizing undesirable behaviors can benefit from primary level behavior intervention at behavior intervention results in having “significant moderate effect on reducing problem behaviors.” (Benner, Nelson, Sanders, Ralston, 2012). Lastly, the argument I wanted to put forth when talking about the benefit of behavior interventions is that students not only reduced their undesirable behaviors and increase their on-task behaviors, but teachers also naturally implement praise at a higher frequency when an effective behavior intervention is employed. Research authors Weeden, Wills, Kottwitz, and Kamps found that teacher satisfaction with behavior interventions, when properly implemented, is high after having experience using them.

### **Prevalence of Violence among Students**

When giving context of the students that I worked with, many of the students are from, or lived at the time in an urban environment. The quote I want to point out is “Exposure to trauma is associated with illness behaviors” (Hart, Hodgkinson, Belcher, Hyman, Cooley-Strickland, 2013). Those illness behaviors could include prevalence of violence. Often times, students living in urban environment face environmental stressors that come from their peers, families, and their community, all which can expose these children to trauma. There are many educational implications when violence, aggression, and restrictive educational placements are prevalent in schools. Among those implications is high school graduation as there is a 78% high school non-completion rate (Powers, Bierman, Coffman, 2016). That means that students who were placed in a Federal Setting IV placement or higher have that implication working against them. With efforts in reducing the prevalence of violence among students in Federal Setting IV placement, I wanted to assert that would allow the student to be in a less restrictive placement, such as Federal Setting III or Federal Setting II, and not having that educational implication working against them.

### **Positive Verbal Affirmation**

One reason as to why I proposed this research is that in a previous study, when given praise, the results “found significant positive correlations between praise and compliance in nonclinical samples” (Owen, Slep, Heyman, 2012). Not only does praise correlate with higher compliance, but it could have other implications such as academic success. During this research, I wanted the staff who would be implementing Positive Verbal Affirmation to not only praise the task completed, but also praise the process of completing or attempting to complete a task. The implications may not be apparent, but after a time period, it may allow significant growth in the

child's academic and behavioral success. This can be further exemplified with the quote on page 14 "a greater proportion of caregivers' praise that emphasized process (e.g., "good job working hard") predicted the child's incremental motivational framework 5 years later, which, in turn, predicted the child's achievement 2 years after that." I believe that not only reduce the number of violent behaviors that are exhibited by students can be as a result of implementing positive verbal praise, but praise can also be a determining factor in a student's academic success.

## Chapter Three, Data Collection

### Research Question

Since I was going to train both teachers and ESPs how to implement this positive verbal affirmation, and collect data on this project, there were a couple of questions that come to mind in regards to this research. First and foremost, I must explain the method of data research. Both teachers and ESPs were to be given a brief verbal training by me as the co-investigator on how to provide positive verbal affirmation throughout a student's school routine. In addition, each staff were to be given a script of how to respond in certain situations with positive verbal affirmation. Data was going to be collected through behavior affect charts, with the behaviors being ranked from 1-5, and each behavior criteria specific to each student. Data was going to be collected during 30 minute increments, and there would have been a yes/no checkbox next to each 30 minute increment that would indicate if positive verbal affirmation was intentionally implemented. With this background information, the research question I want to ask is:

“What is the effect Positive Verbal Affirmations have on student’s challenging behaviors?”

### Methods

The staff (Teachers and Education Support Professionals) were going to be trained on how to implement positive verbal affirmation praise, along with given a written script on how to implement positive verbal affirmation in specific situations. The situations in which staff were to implement praise was: when a student does not exhibit aggressive, refusal, or otherwise other maladaptive behaviors when being faced with an antecedent that would have caused a behavior; when completing a task; when exhibiting personal expression that does not cause any harm in any way; when a student behaves in a particular way that may be undesirable, but not deemed as

severe as previous times when they have exhibited similar behavior. Staff would record the effects of implementing positive behavior support by stating if affirmation was implemented, and what affect level the student exhibited based out of a range of 1-5.

### **Data Collection**

Students each spend 6 hours and 30 minutes a day during a normal school day. The 30 minutes is set aside for their lunch break, but during the 6 hour period, they are receiving special education instruction. Data collection was going to consist of a daily spread sheet for each student, consisting of 12 rows, and 3 columns. The 12 rows represent 30 minute increments throughout their school day, while the 3 columns would indicate: the specific 30 minute increment, a column indicating what their affect level was, and the last column indicating yes or no if positive behavior affirmation was implemented. Each day the student attends school is a day where data was to be collected. After all of the spreadsheets were collected at the end of the study, the data would be graphed with bar graphs, with a notable bar graph example being the times a student reached a level of 4 or 5, and if affirmation was or was not implemented during those times. Closing discussion of this study would consist of informal interviews with the staff, explaining their thoughts on the study and implementation of positive behavior praise and affirmation. The dates where data would be collected were from March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

### **Ethical Issues**

A possible ethical issue was that the staff implementing positive behavior praise and affirmation may feel that it is not effective to utilize in their position, and may switch to alternative behavior interventions in lieu of positive behavior affirmation.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This study was not to implement any use of punishment or the use of repercussions. If punishment and/or repercussions occur as a result of undesirable behaviors, that is due to the staff's own discretion. The student's information would not be released to anyone else participating in the study, and in the report, the only information that would be notified is the disability diagnosis, gender, and the school that they attend.

**Researcher Bias**

The bias that I may exhibit as a co-investigator to this study is the lack of consideration of negative consequences and punishment that the subject students may be exposed to. This study was to examine the impact and effects of using positive behavior supports, and in turn, did not consider punishment as a factor that may be implemented by the staff on the subject students.

**Terminology**

**Least-Restrictive Environment:** Environment provided to students with disabilities that attempt to include them in the mainstream educational setting as effective as possible.

**IDEA 2004:** Law that mandates equity, accountability, and excellence among students with disabilities in education.

**Positive Behavior Intervention Systems:** Behavior interventions that award students' desirable behaviors through the use of a token economy.

### **Change in Methodology**

On Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Intermediate District 287 closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was planning on implementing my action research at my Intermediate District 287 schools on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. Because of the school closures, I, and all other teachers in Minnesota, had to change our method of teaching to all online, and it also made it impossible for me to implement my action research.

To give an explanation of the methodology that I conducted in lieu of the data collection I had originally planned on implementing, I explained what an auto-ethnography is. An auto-ethnography “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)”. In my results and discussion section of my action research, I have conducted an auto-ethnography of what it means to be a teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing the distance learning model. The way I conducted this auto-ethnography was by journaling my experiences during distance learning.

For my data collection, I conducted a qualitative content analysis based on the journals I made during distance learning. “Qualitative content analysis is commonly used for analyzing qualitative data.” (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, Kyngäs, 2014) In most cases, qualitative content analysis is transcribing texts from interviews. Instead of interviews, I used my experiences as both a DAPE and a P/HD Teacher during distance learning that I have documented in my professional journal. In my qualitative content analysis, I identify themes, their situational occurrences, and further analyzing each theme.

## Chapter Four, Results

### Data Collection

My research question when beginning this study was “How does implementing positive verbal affirmation impact violent behaviors in students in setting IV special education services?” Since schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to implement my action research. When the schools closed down and we as educators and students switched to distance learning, I began taking notes and keeping journal records of my experiences as an educator during this time. I had two roles, teaching as a Physical/Health Disabilities (P/HD) Teacher, and as a Developmental Adapted Physical Education (DAPE) Teacher. Because I served these roles and not as a case manager, I did not have direct contact with most of my students, unless given permission by the case manager of the individual students.

On Monday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, I began to journal my daily experiences as a PH/D and DAPE Teacher during distance learning. On Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, I switched to journaling my experiences 3 times a week. I continued to keep up with my journaling experiences until Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup>. After analyzing my experiences, a number of themes were recurring during distance learning: utilizing Google Apps for delivering instruction and keeping track of data, classroom team meetings, tentative individualized learning plans for students receiving special education services, evaluation due process during distance learning, direct and indirect student instruction.

**Table 1**

Recurring themes found in journal entries and the incidences recorded

Themes	Occurrences throughout the Study
Utilizing Google Apps for delivering instruction, connecting with teams, and keeping track of data	24
Virtual Meetings	61
Tentative individualized learning plans for students receiving special education services	5
Evaluation due process during distance learning	11

### **Utilizing Google Apps for delivering instruction, connecting with teams, and keeping track of data:**

The first common theme I wanted to identify in my study was in regards to distance learning was how I use Google Apps to deliver instruction, connect with members of students' IEP teams, and to keep track of student data. Given that Google Apps has multiple functions in an educational setting, I identified which apps were used and how I used them. During my time teaching during distance learning, I used Google Classroom to place lessons and learning materials, I used Google Docs to document student learning plans, I used Google Forms to track student data, I used Google Hangouts to connect with others, and I used Google Slides as a means of delivering instruction.

**Table 2**

Instances of using various Google Apps within my journal entries.

Utilizing Google Apps for delivering instruction, connecting with teams, and keeping track of data	Occurrences throughout the study
Google Classroom to place lessons and learning materials	9
Google Docs to create student learning plans	2
Google Forms to track student data	5
Google Hangouts to connect with others	7
Google Slides to deliver instruction	1

**Instance of using Google Classroom to place lessons and learning materials:**

*Right when we closed schools but before we implemented distance learning, we had to compile lessons and learning resources for student into Google Classroom. I mostly utilized Google Classroom for my DAPE responsibilities, and what it entailed was having the case managers of the students I serve as a DAPE Teacher sharing the Google Classroom with me. Case managers would give me teacher responsibilities in Google Classroom, so I would be able to see all students on their caseload, but I would only interact with the students I serve. The resources I put into Google Classroom were things such as: physical activities to do at home, a monthly DAPE Bingo Card, DAPE Slideshows, and a link to a YouTube video that I created for my students. The video was me performing exercises that I believed would be appropriate for the majority of my students I serve.*

*I had little success with Google Classroom, as there was no accountability to be held, and there was no way that I could guide students to correctly perform the tasked exercises.*

*Unless given explicit permission from case managers, I would not be the one who would contact students or their families. What this meant was that the case managers were the ones responsible for holding students accountable with the resources we gave them, which more often than not was not successful.*

*Even though I like how Google Classroom is set up, I believe that students need to have the ability to navigate through the Google Classroom App in order to be successful in receiving and completing the instruction that is given to them. Seeing as most of my students I serve as a DAPE teacher do not have these skills, the use of Google Classroom was not beneficial at all for them.*

**Instances of using Google Docs to create student learning plans:**

*In both instances where I Google Docs was mentioned in my journal, I found that they were both Google Docs documents that were student learning plans, and on both occasions, I asked for permission to edit. The reason why I asked to edit was to add my DAPE service information for during distance learning.*

**Instances of using Google Forms to track student data:**

*Right away when we went to distance learning, we were presented with a sample Google Form template to use to track our service delivery with students. My fellow Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher colleagues and I met via Google Hangouts on April 9<sup>th</sup>, where we further discussed how we would format our Google Forms documents. One of my colleagues presented hers as an example, with questions such as: Did the student complete their homework that day? What did they learn? What is going well? One week later, on the 16<sup>th</sup>, our supervisor emailed out to all of us the Google Form template they wanted us to use in order to track student service data. Our supervisors were technically the ones who own the Google Form document, and the only thing we had permission to do is to submit responses on this Google Form document. All of the responses would be emailed and tracked to our supervisor, with an administrative assistant emailing out to each of us our weekly student data that we submitted. In the last week of the*

*school year, I took the time to convert some checklists that we, as Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers, use to complete evaluations.*

### **Instances of using Google Hangouts to connect with others:**

*Even though I only explicitly mentioned using Google Hangouts a few times in my journal entries, I can say that I used Google hangouts every time to connect with teams within my school district, Intermediate District 287. For my roles a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher, I also worked with two other school Districts: Osseo Area Public Schools and Brooklyn Center Community Schools. Both of those other school districts exclusively used Zoom to connect with students and for team meetings. As distance learning went on, I would participate in weekly team meetings as a DAPE teacher, brainstorming and getting updates on student progress during distance learning. I should mention that for most of the students I served as a DAPE Teacher, I was not allowed by the case managers to have direct contact with. Instead, I provided my DAPE resources to the case managers on each students individualized distance learning plan, and attended these weekly meetings in order to listen to their updates on how the students were doing. It wasn't until later when one teacher, who was confused on how to help her students that have DAPE services engage in physical activities, that I finally had permission to provide direct service to some students. What this teacher and I did, in mid-April, was we created a lesson plan and co-taught a DAPE class to the students that are on her caseload and have DAPE services. This is when I utilized a particular tool in Google Hangouts, screen sharing. What I did is I screen shared a YouTube video of classroom Tabata video, while I was also able to configure viewing the students and myself all participating in the tasked physical activities from the video. The other instances I want to point out where I used Google Hangouts were IEP and evaluation share meetings. The big takeaway from using Google Hangouts I learned is that if you are not speaking, turn your mic off. The reason why is because this may make feedback unbearable for others.*

### **Instance of using Google Slides to deliver instruction**

*The one instance where I used Google Slides is when I helped my student create an "All About Me!" presentation with Google Slides. This student suffers from Sickle-Cell Anemia, and we created a presentation based on what his needs are in order to be successful in school. This instance was on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020, I was scheduled to do the same thing with another student of mine, but she did not show up the virtual meeting.*

**Virtual Meetings:** The second theme I want to analyze is how I was engaged in many virtual meetings throughout the entire time we implemented distance learning. For the most part when engaging in virtual meetings, I used Google Hangouts, as it worked well for the school personnel

that I collaborated with who had a school Gmail account. For other instances, such as working with the educators at the Osseo Area Public School District, we utilized Zoom for virtual meetings. The other time we used Zoom was during our professional development days so that we could be put into different “rooms” for us as educators to collaborate. I want to also mention that one tool that turned out to be useful was the Google Meet Grid View. This is a Google Chrome extension, that allowed users of Google Hangouts to view everyone in the meeting in a neatly organized grid. This also worked well when one user was screen sharing, as they were also able to see the others while screen sharing.

**Table 3**

Instance of the various virtual meetings I attended.

Virtual Meetings	Occurrences throughout the study
Collaboration with Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers or DAPE Teachers	10
Student IEP Meetings	9
Student Evaluation Meetings	7
Classroom Team Meetings	9
Student Intake Meetings	16
Professional Development Meetings	4
Direct Instruction-Related Meetings	6

### **Instances of collaborating with Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers or DAPE Teachers**

*Right when I started journaling, I had more frequent meetings with my Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers who I work with, and the DAPE Teachers I work with. With us Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers, we meet once a month for 3 hours, and that did not change with distance learning, although we met more often. As Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers, we would collaborate on how we can provide our services effectively. The things we discussed given our unpredictable circumstances were data tracking, collecting online educational tools and resources and how to distribute them appropriately, and asking case managers for permission to reach out to students in regards to creating self-advocacy projects with them. Also during our meetings, we would update and trade student information sheets based on us changing students around on our caseloads for the next school year. I want to also mention that I also would talk about my struggles of feeling a loss of motivation as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher during distance learning, because I felt that I was not*

*making an impact at all on the students I work with while we were in distance learning. Many of my colleagues shared that same feeling.*

### **Instances of virtually meeting for student IEP meetings**

*During distance learning, I attended IEP meetings as both a DAPE Teacher and as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher, and in one meeting, as an educator serving both roles. These meetings were a bit odd because when speaking in them as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher, I always said I can provide some assistive technology when school starts back up for in-person learning. The issue is that we don't know when we will be back in school. As a DAPE Teacher, my role in each meeting largely stayed the same. During distance learning, I had learned that the school I served as a DAPE Teacher hired a new one for the next school year. With that knowledge, I basically gave updates to the parents on their student's progress for DAPE prior to schools closing, and for most IEPs, I proposed goals that centered on students following DAPE routine. The reason why I proposed those goals is because many of them were coming into the school year from a different school in our district that had limited DAPE services. Because of that, they did not receive the proper instruction that they needed. For those students I directly worked with as a DAPE Teacher this school year, I proposed goals based on their current progress, or in the event of completing an evaluation, their most recent evaluation results. I also explained to parents who were unfamiliar with the school about the facilities in the school that will help their student in the DAPE instruction, along with the equipment that is there as well.*

### **Instances of virtually meeting for student evaluation meetings**

*There were a number of instances when I attended evaluation meetings for students. For all of my meetings, none of them were initial meetings, but all re-evaluation meetings. For most of them, they were evaluations that were already signed-off and in progress prior to school closures. I did have a few instances where I was able to partake and complete assessments for one evaluation that started after we went to distance learning. We received further guidance from Minnesota Department of Education when it came to completing these evaluations, with their COVID-19 Updates webpage stating "If an evaluation of a student with a disability requires a face-to-face assessment or observation that cannot occur during distance learning, the evaluation would need to be delayed until school reopens." (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020) That being said, I was able to observe this student as he checked in to his online school using Blackboard Collaborate. For the most part, completing my assessments revolved around contacting either case managers, teachers, or parents of students to conduct interviews, complete checklists, or to get an updated medical history. With my students who I served as a DAPE Teacher, they already had their assessments that completed, so I was able to properly inform the rest of the team if they qualified or not and where their present levels were.*

### **Instances of classroom team meetings**

*Several times throughout distance learning, I would engage in virtual meetings that involved classroom team meetings. All of these team meetings involved me in my role as a DAPE teacher, where we would listen to the case manager of the specific classroom being discuss detail student progress for each of the students. This was a good time that I could communicate with my students I serve via their case manager. For the most part, the case managers did not know how to engage the students with the DAPE resources, so I would use these classroom team meetings to clarify expectations with the case managers. Also what would happen is I would just attend the meetings without needing to contribute anything, just answer questions.*

### **Instances of virtually meeting for student intake meetings**

*I attended several intake meetings for students coming in to the school I teach DAPE at, Ann Bremer Education Center. Most of these students were going to this school as they were transitioning from one of our other schools in our school district to Ann Bremer. I happened to have been the DAPE Teacher for many of these students, and had prior knowledge to them. In these intake meetings, I was tasked with changing their service minutes, if need be, or what type of service delivery they would be receiving. I also would talk about their current DAPE goal and objectives and how they would be implemented and measured at Ann Bremer Education Center. There were a two intake meetings I had as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher, one with a student leaving Brooklyn Center Community Schools and going to attend Ann Bremer Education Center, and another student leaving Brooklyn Center Community Schools and attending Robbinsdale Area School District, where she would no longer receive my Physical/Health Disability services. At the intake meeting where one student was leaving Brooklyn Center and going to Ann Bremer, I sat in on that intake meeting serving as both the Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher and as the DAPE Teacher.*

### **Professional Development Meetings**

*I attended two professional development days at my school district. On my first day, I attended two sessions, and on the second professional development day, I attended two more sessions. All of these sessions were hosted via Zoom so that we could break out into smaller groups in these sessions. The content of these sessions were about: social/emotional learning, converting low-level questions into higher-level questions, how to connect with students and families during distance learning, and distance learning ideas. All of these sessions did not feel meaningful at all, and I think the reason why that is because none of us were expecting something like sudden school closures to happen the way they did.*

### **Instances of Direct Instruction-Related Meetings**

*There were two instances where I provided direct instruction as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher and four instances as a DAPE Teacher. Even though I provide indirect instruction for all of my students I serve as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher, I received permission from both case managers of both students that I provided direct instruction to. For both students, I tasked them with creating an “All About Me!” self-advocacy project, utilizing Google Slides.*

*One of the students, a middle school student whose primary disability is Other Health Disabilities, met with me at the pre-set meeting time and completed his project. The other student, a high school senior, did not meet with me even though we set up the time. The instances where I provided direct instruction as a DAPE Teacher was within the last four weeks of school. With collaboration from a case manager I collaborate with as a DAPE Teacher, we co-taught four weekly DAPE classes. My role in this class was to check our zones of regulation both before and after our workout, and I also led the workout. The workout itself was a tabata exercise video, and I screen shared the video while I was able to still have the camera on me, and was able to watch students exercising as well. All of my students I serve directly as a DAPE Teacher were invited, but attendance was very inconsistent. The ones who did show up had a family member assist the student in completing the exercises with me.*

#### **Tentative individualized learning plans for students receiving special education services:**

Prior to implementing distance learning, the teachers I work with were tasked with creating and sharing Individualized Distant Learning Plans (IDLP) for students. I was involved in most of my students' IDLPs prior to recording my experiences of being an educator during distance learning on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The few times I was still involved are recorded in the table below.

**Table 4**

Instances where I helped create tentative individualized learning plans for students.

<b>Tentative individualized learning plans for students receiving special education services</b>	<b>Occurrences throughout the study</b>
Distance learning plans for students I serve as a DAPE Teacher	3
Distance learning plans for students I serve as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher	2

#### **Instances of contributing distance learning plans as a DAPE Teacher**

*When I was tasked with contributing to a student's IDLP as a DAPE Teacher, I put down indirect instruction as most of the case managers I was working with indicated that they wanted to be the ones to carry out instruction, while I provide resources. The resources I provided were a DAPE Bingo card that had physical activities students could do around the home, Multiple visual aids and powerpoints for students to follow, and a YouTube video I created for my students.*

#### **Instances of contributing distance learning plans as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher**

*The times I was tasked with contributing to a student's IDLP as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher during my documented experiences was scarce, as it was only 2 times. With both of those times, I emailed the case managers to ask what I could contribute, but received no responding emails back from them. Prior to documenting my experiences, the times I did contribute as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher, I just added my indirect service minutes, along double-checking their accommodations and modifications that I had in the students' current IEPs to put in their IDLPs. Most of the case managers just transferred over those accommodations and modifications themselves, but there were a few where I had to contribute those pieces in the IDLPs.*

### **Evaluation due process during distance learning**

During distance learning, there were multiple times where I still had to work on and complete my portions of a special education evaluation, whether it was self-paced summarizing assessment information, connecting with appropriate team members to complete assessments, or using my time to optimize assessment tools. At no point at all during distance learning did I work on any initial special education evaluations, and they were all re-evaluations.

**Table 5**

Instances where I spent my time completing special education evaluation requirements.

<b>Evaluation due process during distance learning</b>	<b>Occurrences throughout the study</b>
Self-paced evaluation result write-ups	4
Using email, webcam meetings, or phone calls to connect with members of an IEP team to complete assessments	6
Time spent optimizing assessment tools.	1

### **Instances where I was writing up evaluation results**

*During distance learning, I had to write up interviews, checklists, and summaries of medical information on students as part of their evaluations. When I would summarize the assessments that I completed, I also had to summarize why they would continue to receive special education services under the label of Physically Impaired or Other Health Disabilities. I would also complete special education eligibility checklists as well, justifying why certain parts of the checklist were checked off. I did not have to do any evaluation write-ups for the students I serve as a DAPE Teacher because they were completed prior to school closures.*

### **Instances where I used email, webcam meetings, or phone calls to connect with members of an IEP team to complete assessments**

*During distance learning, there were certain times where I had to either contact a student's case manager or their parent to help complete assessments. These assessments were either a checklist based on their self-advocacy skills, or they were medical history updates. For the case managers I met with, they were very comfortable using webcams to meet, and that was beneficial as I was able to screen share my checklist. On one occasion, I had to call a student's mother to ask questions in regards to a checklist that needed to be completed for his evaluation. On one occasion, I was given teacher permission rights to an online learning tool called Blackboard Collaborate, in order to observe a student participate in class. Even though Minnesota Department of Education stated we do not need to conduct observations or face-to-face assessments, I still wanted to make the most out of my observation using Blackboard Collaborate.*

### **Instances of time spent optimizing assessment tools**

*During the last week of school, I spent time optimizing pre-existing assessment tools by converting these assessments, which were checklists used by Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers, into Google Forms, to make it easier to share and complete. These checklists are called: Early Skills Checklist, Post-Secondary Student Skills Checklist, and Responsiveness/Communication/Mobility and Work Skills Checklist.*

## Conclusions

With this strange and unforeseen predicament, all educators had to adjust their instruction, expectations, and how they would communicate with students overall. As for the teachers who worked directly with students, their challenges were overwhelming, even though they had direct contact with students. For educators who serve as related service providers, such as Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers and DAPE Teachers, the set of challenges differ because of limited opportunities to have direct contact with students during distance learning. The biggest takeaway I got from analyzing my journal entries is how accessible we can be with virtual meetings. During distance learning, I used Google Hangouts and Zoom to connect with team members, complete assessments, and provide direct instruction. If we continue distance learning or hybrid learning, we as educators should continue to use virtual meetings and further explore the possibilities within them. The issues with this is that there may be students who do not have access to the resources needed to engage in distance learning, and also general instruction and classroom management are affected when the teacher is only behind a camera.

## Chapter Five, Implications for Practice

### Action Plan

I was eager to implement and record the effects of Positive Verbal Affirmation on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, but school was closed on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Because of this, I have no data to show how effective Positive Verbal Affirmations are in reducing violent behaviors, but when I am able to effectively do so, I am going to consciously implement Positive Verbal Affirmations in my teaching practice.

After reviewing my literature in regards to Positive Verbal Affirmations, I want to first bring up the importance of behavior interventions that are commonly practiced between co-educators. When educators are properly informed and trained in a behavior intervention, and they implement the behavior intervention, they are more likely to see a reduction in undesirable behaviors and an increase in on-task behaviors. With all that in mind, teachers are also more likely to energize positive behaviors when a behavior intervention that is being employed successfully.

Since I work with many students who are placed in Federal Setting IV programs, they face a strong possibility that they may not graduate due to the reasons why they are in a Federal Setting IV placement. Often times, students placed in Federal Setting IV are there because of well-documented and prevalent violent behaviors. My students that I work with are no different in regards to the prevalence of violent behaviors they express. Reviewing the literature in regards to students placed in highly-restrictive educational placements are less likely to graduate compared to Setting III and Setting II placed students. A successful behavior intervention that is practiced among educators in Federal Setting IV placements may allow these students to be placed in a less-restrictive educational setting, or at the very least, give the students a stronger

chance to graduate. The intention of my study was to see if Positive Verbal Affirmations used a behavior intervention is successful when implemented with students receiving special education in a Federal Setting IV placement.

The last literature review I want to mention is how even though there has been minimal studies in regards to giving Positive Verbal Affirmations, it is shown that giving praise to students correlates with the students demonstrating a more frequent number of desirable behaviors. Giving these praises shows increase in measurable motivation among student for years to come. This motivation carries into both academic and behavioral success. Even though I mention academic success, I only wanted to measure if implementing Positive Verbal Affirmations is successful in reducing violent behaviors in this study.

### **Plan for Sharing**

When we are able to return to education in-person full time, I hope to implement Positive Verbal Affirmations among the students I serve who receive special education services in a Federal Setting IV placement. To make note of the effectiveness of implement Positive Verbal Affirmations, I will journal my experiences with it, and make any appropriate adjustments needed. With well-documented experiences employing Positive Verbal Affirmation, I plan on sharing my information with my colleagues. If I find that implementing Positive Verbal Affirmations is in fact, successful, I will then create workshop or presentation for my colleagues and collaborating educators about how implementing Positive Verbal Affirmations can be successful.

Due to the state-wide school shut downs from the COVID-19 pandemic, general education and special education teachers had to learn how to be flexible in providing distance learning in such short notice. Educators were given time to prepare how they would provide

educational services to their students in their delivery, their content instruction, and how they would measure progress with students. This was an unpredictable situation for both educators and students alike, as neither knew what was going to happen with distance learning and when we would return to somewhat of a normal environment like what we had before the pandemic.

For someone who is in my position, a related-service provider, we were presented with similar issues that special education teachers and case managers were facing, but we also had unique issues for ourselves. The most difficult issue for me as a related-service provider was that I was not allowed direct contact for so many of my students, so I was not able practice and refine my teaching skills during distance learning. I had to rely on case managers responding my attempts to contact them in regards to the students I serve. Because case managers are responsible with providing their own services, they were also responsible with providing the resources us related-service providers documented on students distance learning plans. One of the things I rely on heavily as an educator is adjusting my teaching style on the fly if needed in order for students to be successful. This is impossible if I do not have direct contact with students.

The last thing I want point out with this unique situation of school closures is that I struggled with knowing what was expected of me as a DAPE Teacher and as a Physical/Health Disabilities Teacher. My colleagues, more or less, felt the same way as me, and this gave us more questions than answers. When we would find solutions, they often times felt like they were not necessarily related to our roles as DAPE or Physical/Health Disabilities Teachers. Going forward, my hope is that I establish a stronger line of communication between me and students, whether that is through the case manager or not.

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**Appendix****Example Control Group Data Sheet**

Measurable Opportunity	Affect Level	Time Period	Date
1		9:00-9:30	
2		9:30-10:00	
3		10:00-10:30	
4		10:30-11:00	
5		11:00-11:30	
6		11:30-12:00	
7		12:00-12:30	
8		12:30-1:00	
9		1:00-1:30	
10		1:30-2:00	
11		2:00-2:30	
12		2:30-3:00	
13		3:00-3:30	

**Example Experimental Group Data Sheet**

Measurable Opportunity	Affect Level	Number of Positive Verbal Affirmations	Time Period	Date
1			9:00-9:30	
2			9:30-10:00	
3			10:00-10:30	
4			10:30-11:00	
5			11:00-11:30	
6			11:30-12:00	
7			12:00-12:30	
8			12:30-1:00	
9			1:00-1:30	
10			1:30-2:00	
11			2:00-2:30	
12			2:30-3:00	
13			3:00-3:30	