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FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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A Preliminary Investigation of the Revised PKATE: An Elementary Sample

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Eastern Illinois University

Specialist in School Psychology Thesis

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April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Abstract

When used correctly, praise is a simple and effective strategy that can be used by staff school-wide to improve student disruptive behavior. Unfortunately, many teachers report receiving little classroom management training and feeling unprepared to manage student problem behavior. Therefore, having an assessment tool that identifies which educators may benefit from additional training may better guide training and therefore increase educators' effective use of praise. The present study attempted to revise a previous iteration of the Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers and Educators (PKATE), examine educator's knowledge and attitudes toward praise, and determine whether there is a relation between teachers' knowledge of praise and their acceptance of the strategy. In total, 206 educators completed the PKATE and the Behavior Intervention Rating System – Praise (BIRS-P). Results indicated that despite improvements, PKATE reliability continued to fall below acceptable limits. Results suggested that the PKATE scores and BIRS-P scores were positively related. On average, educators reported that praise is an acceptable behavior management strategy but demonstrated PKATE scores that fell below expectation. In addition, results indicated a significant positive relation between participants who reported to receive praise from administrators or supervisors and those who reported positive feelings towards their work environment. Implications and future directions are discussed.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Margaret Floress, for her continuous guidance and support over the course of this project. She contributed substantially to the overall development of both my undergraduate and graduate theses, pushed me to reach further in my research, and encouraged me to present results at various state and national conventions. Her expertise in aspects of research and classroom management has been instrumental throughout data collection, analysis, and linking results to practice.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Assege HaileMariam and Dr. Anne Walk for serving as members on my thesis committee. Their careful review and detailed feedback have been an invaluable resource that aided in the successful completion of this project. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Zach Yehling for his support and assistance in the overall creation/revision of the current assessment tool (PKATE) used in this study.

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### A Preliminary Investigation of the Revised PKATE: An Elementary Sample

Managing student behavior is a stressful and complex task for teachers and educators due to the multidimensional demands of monitoring behavior while effectively teaching material (Doyle, 2006; Seiz et al., 2015). Many experts assert that efficient, evidence-based classroom management systems can alleviate some teacher stress and support successful learning by structuring the environment (Doyle, 2006; Praetorius et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many teachers report receiving little or no classroom management training (Begeny & Martens, 2006; Westling, 2010) and that they are unprepared to address challenging student behavior (Reinke et al., 2013). Although evidence-based classroom management practices are effective and teachers are expected to competently manage their students' behavior, teachers are not obligated to learn how to manage student behavior broadly and systematically (Steins et al., 2016). This means that many teachers likely deal with ongoing behavioral challenges, which is stressful (Curtis, 2012) and one reason they may leave the field (Ingersoll, 2001; Kratochwill, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative to find ways to efficiently assess teachers' use of effective classroom management strategies, like praise, so that appropriate and targeted training can be offered.

The functional relation between teacher praise and student classroom behavior has been studied for more than 5 decades (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Madsen et al., 1968). When used correctly, praise is an effective and simple strategy that can improve student disruptive behavior and increase instructional time (Reinke et al., 2013). Many studies have demonstrated that when teachers are trained to increase their use of praise, student behavior improves (Reinke et al., 2007; Sutherland et al., 2000). In their study looking at

the effect of praise on student behavior, Chalk and Bizo (2004) found that training teachers to use specific praise led to increased on-task student behavior and decreased off-task behavior. Further, the authors found that teachers' use of specific praise resulted in increased academic self-concept and confidence as learners. Unfortunately, it is unclear how knowledgeable teachers are about using praise and whether they find praise to be an acceptable and effective classroom management strategy. Because praise is a critical component in School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), a framework for preventing and addressing problem behaviors that requires the participation of all educators, it is important to assess not only teachers' knowledge of praise, but the knowledge of all educators who work within the school setting (OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2017).

Social validity, or whether the treatment being implemented is acceptable, socially relevant, and useful to the students and teachers involved in an intervention, is a vital element of any strategy (Elliot, 2017). When teachers and educators find an intervention socially valid, they are more likely to use the intervention and implement the intervention with integrity (Dart et al., 2012). After receiving praise training, many teachers report praise to be a socially valid strategy. In other words, after training, teachers report to enjoy using praise and are satisfied with the effects on student behavior (Floress, Rock et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2015; Stormont et al., 2007). Few studies have examined teachers' acceptability of praise in the absence of training.

Despite the relative simplicity and effectiveness of praise, recent research suggests that many general education teachers (not seeking consultation or training) deliver low rates of praise (Floress, Berlinghof et al., 2017). Although praise can be used

as a universal, preventative strategy, it is unclear whether teachers and educators (in the absence of training) are knowledgeable and accepting of praise. Ensuring school personnel are well trained to use universal, preventative strategies is important because when educators use these strategies, students are less likely to develop behavior problems (Conroy et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education—Office of Special Education Programs, 2010). Further, preliminary research suggests that when educators and school personnel receive more praise from supervisors, they are more likely to report collegiality and a positive workplace climate (Nelson et al., 2013; Sveinsdóttir et al., 2016). The current study examines teachers' and educators' praise knowledge and attitudes and whether there is a relation between educators' knowledge of praise and their reported social validity of this strategy. This study also assesses whether there is a relation between educators' receiving supervisor praise and higher acceptability for praise.

### **Review of the Literature**

It is important for teachers to develop a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere, because a positive classroom climate is related to student learning and the prevention of problem behaviors (Conroy et al., 2009). Using effective classroom management strategies is one way that teachers can positively impact their classroom climate. Classroom management strategies are defined as methods that establish classroom rules and routines, maintain a structured environment, encourage appropriate behavior, actively supervise and engage students, teach school-wide behavioral expectations, and reduce problem behavior (Moore et al., 2017). Examples of classroom management strategies include response cards, token economies, teacher praise, and differential reinforcement. Such strategies are deemed effective when they are evidence-

based (i.e., evaluated using sound experimental design and methodology, demonstrated to be effective, and supported by at least three empirical studies), increase instructional time, increase appropriate student behavior, and/or decrease inappropriate student behavior (Simonsen et al., 2008).

### **School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports**

School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (SWPBIS) is a multitiered system for teaching behavioral expectations, preventing problem behavior from occurring, and remediating existing problem behavior (Reinke et al., 2013; OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2017). The multitiered system consists of three tiers: in Tier I, all students receive universal supports that aid in teaching appropriate behaviors and school expectations. In Tier II, students who continue to have behavioral issues are identified and provided with additional supports such as small group interventions. Tier III consists of intensified, individualized supports reserved for students continuing to have behavioral challenges despite Tier II interventions. School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports represents “a framework for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students” (PBIS.org, 2015). According to the Office of Special Education Programs (2017), consistency from class to class and adult to adult is of utmost importance for successful implementation of SWPBIS. In keeping with this idea, it is vital that all educators, not exclusively teachers, are included when considering student behavior management systems. Training of all educators is especially important when considering that SWPBIS is intended to be implemented across all aspects of the school, including the classroom, cafeteria,

hallways, bathrooms, playground, and buses. In this paper, the term educators refers to all school personnel within the school system that have contact with students, including teachers, aides, cafeteria monitors, bus drivers, administration, and other positions.

It is important that all staff members within the school system are addressing student behavior similarly, which is one reason the SWPBIS framework lends itself to both prevention and intervention of student behavior problems. There are four components that are necessary to the SWPBIS framework: defining and teaching behavioral expectations, reinforcing prosocial behaviors, addressing problem behaviors, and evaluating the outcomes of SWPBIS implementation (Simonsen et al., 2008). The second area, reinforcing prosocial behavior, is a key element of SWPBIS that strengthens and emphasizes students performing appropriate and adaptive behaviors. In reinforcing these behaviors, SWPBIS recommends that students are systematically and frequently acknowledged for appropriate behavior (Simonsen et al., 2008). Praise is a verbal statement or gesture that goes beyond feedback for a correct response (Brophy, 1981; Reinke et al., 2008), and is an example of a strategy teachers can use to reinforce appropriate student behavior.

Historically, praise research in the schools has focused specifically on teachers' use of praise (Floress et al., 2017; Markelz et al., 2019; Reinke et al., 2007); however, it is important for all educators to implement the SWPBIS framework similarly. Therefore, it is important for all educators to be knowledgeable regarding how to implement praise effectively.

### **Praise as an Evidence-Based Strategy**

Praise is one of the simplest classroom management strategies to use and has decades of research support (Floress & Jacoby, 2017; Gable et al., 2009; Hall et al., 1968). When used effectively, students' on-task behavior, attention, and compliance increases (Epstein et al., 2008; Simonsen et al., 2008). Unfortunately, many educators are not explicitly trained to use praise effectively (Greenberg et al., 2014) and although praise is simple to use, its simplicity may also be a drawback (Brophy, 1981). Brophy warned that many teachers use praise ineffectively because it is commonly used noncontingently, infrequently, and globally rather than specifically. In concordance with this warning, Conroy and colleagues (2009) found that many teachers use praise ineffectively and infrequently, and that only 5% of teacher praise statements are behavior specific. In addition, it is necessary to consider the functional role of praise. In other words, it is imperative to examine whether praise is reinforcing (i.e., strengthening) the target behavior (Conroy et al., 2009). To use praise effectively, it is recommended that praise be specific, frequent, and tied to function.

Praise is generally broken down into two categories, general praise (GP) and behavior-specific praise (BSP). Behavior specific praise is considered a superior form of praise because students easily make the connection between teacher approval and the specific behavior that led to approval (Brophy, 1981). Behavior-specific praise is a praise statement that specifically identifies the desired student behavior, such as "Great job raising your hand to speak," or "Thank you for working quietly on your homework." General praise, on the other hand, is defined as any non-specific verbalization or gesture that expresses favorable judgement or approval (Reinke et al., 2015). General praise

examples include verbal affirmations such as “Well done!” or “Great job,” or gestures such as a thumbs up (Conroy et. al., 2009; Jenkins et al., 2015).

### ***Behavior-Specific Praise***

Behavior-specific praise is considered a superior use of praise because the teacher makes a clear connection between approval and the specific behavior that led to approval (Sutherland et al., 2000). Because of this transparency, students are more likely to recognize and repeat the desired behavior. Many researchers have studied the efficacy of BSP in managing student behavior and have found it to be highly effective in increasing appropriate behavior and decreasing disruptive behavior (Feldman, 2003; Moffat, 2011; Reinke et al., 2007). Allday et al. (2012) studied the effect of behavior specific praise specifically with students with or at risk for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). After teachers were educated on praise and trained to use BSP, a negative correlation was found indicating a relation between the increase in BSP and a decrease in student off-task behavior (Allday et al., 2012).

As previously discussed, one of the drawbacks of this strategy may be its perceived simplicity. Though teachers may believe they know how to praise, the literature suggests that teachers may need explicit instruction to maintain effective rates (Dufrene et al., 2014). Furthermore, preliminary research measuring teachers’ natural use of praise (without training) suggests that elementary teachers use praise infrequently (e.g., 34.8 praise statements per hour in K-5 classrooms; Floress et al., 2018, p. 417) and use more GP than BSP (Floress & Jenkins, 2015). Specifically identifying the behavior that is approved is a key component of effective praise delivery (Brophy, 1981; Stormont & Reinke, 2009; Sutherland et al., 2000).

### ***High Rates of Praise***

Although no study to date has experimentally manipulated variable rates of praise to determine an optimal frequency, numerous studies have established that when rates of praise increase, on-task behavior increases and off-task behavior decreases (Sutherland et al., Markelz et al. 2019). Higher praise to reprimand ratios are also recommended. For example, when implementing the SWPBIS framework, the Illinois State Board of Education (2010) is aligned with experts in the field in recommending that teachers deliver five statements of praise to every reprimand (Flora, 2000; Gottman, 1994). Floress et al. (2020) suggest that having set praise guidelines for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 levels of support will encourage appropriate rates of praise and guide schools' implementation of praise within the SWPBIS framework. After reviewing BSP intervention studies, Floress and Jenkins (2015) suggested that behavioral improvements are observed in targeted students when teachers increase their BSP rate to three to five per 10 minutes (or 18-30 per hr) with that student. Haydon and Musti-Rao (2011) found that once teachers increased their BSP rate to 18 times (or higher) per hour, significant decreases in student disruptive behavior were observed class-wide. O'Handley and colleagues (2018) examined the effects of increasing teacher BSP to two per min on student behavior and found that student appropriately engaged behavior increased and disruptive behavior decreased. Although an optimal BSP rate has not been established, high rates are related to effective praise use. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the relationship between praise frequency and student behavior.

### ***Function***

Praise should also function as a reinforcer. In other words, if praise does not strengthen the target behavior (i.e., teacher identified and approved behavior), it is not functioning as a reinforcer for that student. Applied behavior analysis is defined as the application of learning principles to improve behavior, combined with evaluation of whether the observed changes are a function of (i.e., attributable to) the procedures applied (Baer et al., 1968). Without considering the function, praise is likely to be used ineffectively or rendered unsuccessful (Brophy, 1981). For example, praise may not function as a reinforcer for all students. Some students may prefer their behavior not be approved publicly. Although most children tend to be receptive to praise, educators should not assume that *all* children will be.

Whether or not praise functions as a reinforcer (i.e., strengthens a child's behavior) may be influenced by multiple factors, such as the child's disposition, cultural background, and how praise is delivered (Conroy et al., 2009). In addition, if a child is deprived of attention, they may be more receptive to attention in the form of praise than a child who regularly receives a steady schedule of attention (Floress et al., 2020). It is important that educators not simply assume that praise will effectively reduce problem behaviors in every child. Rather, Brophy (1981) suggested that teachers examine whether their use of praise accomplished their goal (e.g., increased a target behavior). If the goal has not been accomplished, it is likely that praise is not functioning as a reinforcer for the individual (i.e., not strengthening the behavior targeted for intervention). Therefore, it is important for educators to know that praise efficacy is dependent on how it influences the behavior targeted for intervention (Iwata & Dozier, 2008).

An illustration of the importance of assessing praise is described in this example: if a shy student is publicly praised after contributing to the class discussion, he or she may find the praise unpleasant (i.e., punishing) and therefore be less likely to contribute to class discussions in the future to avoid the unpleasant attention. Alternatively, another student may be praised in the exact same way but following praise, their engagement in class discussion increases. According to Anderson and colleagues (1979), when praise functions as a reinforcer, selectivity is also important. For example, attention should be given contingent on appropriate behavior and withheld for inappropriate behavior. When teachers selectively praise appropriate behavior and strategically ignore inappropriate behavior, students are more likely to learn that appropriate behaviors led to teacher attention (e.g., praise), whereas inappropriate behaviors are ignored (Conroy et al., 2009).

### ***Prevention***

Managing student misbehavior is stressful and contributes to educators' dissatisfaction with their occupation (Curtis, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Kratochwill, 2012). While substantial resources are often allocated toward individual students exhibiting challenging behavior, less emphasis is placed on preventative interventions (Oswald et al., 2005). Additionally, preventing behavior problems is more time and cost efficient than intervening once problems have already been established (Floress, Berlinghof et al., 2017). Because of this, many U.S. schools have implemented prevention programs such as SWPBIS. School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Systems are different from traditional behavior management approaches due to the focus on preventative strategies rather than reactive or punitive strategies (e.g., discipline referrals, suspensions, Lassen et al., 2006; Sadler & Sugai, 2009; Sugai & Horner; 2002).

Praise is a preventative and evidence-based classroom management strategy. One reason praise works as a preventative strategy is likely due to its impact on classroom climate and student-teacher relationships. When students feel that they are in an encouraging and constructive classroom climate and have a positive relationship with their teacher, they are more likely to work for their approval (Agyekeum, 2019). For praise to be effective, it is important that it is applied in a safe and structured learning atmosphere, where a student feels comfortable enough to take learning and social risks that present the teacher with the ability to praise (and correct) to promote student growth (Conroy et al., 2009). As mentioned earlier, specific praise is consistent with the second component (i.e., reinforcing prosocial behaviors) of SWPBIS and is a strategy used to universally (Tier I) identify and reinforce student appropriate behavior (OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2017). When used universally (Tier I) praise is a preventative strategy, however, praise can also be used as a targeted intervention (Tier II and III).

### ***Students At-risk for an Emotional and Behavioral Disorder***

School-age children identified with behavior problems receive praise less frequently than students without behavior problems (Sutherland et al., 2000). For example, Reinke et al., (2007) found that general education teachers delivered infrequent and inconsistent behavior-specific praise to disruptive students (baseline rates ranged .9 to 12 per hour; p. 257). In self-contained classrooms with students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD), teachers also use praise infrequently. Rathel and colleagues (2008) reported ten praise statements per hour. Praise to reprimand ratios were also low (ranging from 0:1 to 1:1; p. 73). Wehby and colleagues (1995) reported praise rates as low as .02 to 1.0 praise statements per hour for students identified as low and high

aggressors in classrooms for students with EBD. Furthermore, in a study examining teacher interactions among students with high rates of disruptive and externalizing behaviors, Nelson and Roberts (2000) found that students with behavioral difficulties received six times more reprimands than their peers. These results suggest that praise rates in classrooms for students with EBD are alarmingly low, while rates of reprimand tend to be disproportionately high.

Gunter et al. (1994) posits that among students with EBD, a cycle of negative reinforcement maintains maladaptive teacher-student interactions. When students with EBD are disruptive and then an academic task is removed (e.g., the student is removed from class), the student's disruptive behavior is negatively reinforced (i.e., more likely to occur again in the future when presented with an academic task). Teachers are also negatively reinforced, when they remove the student from their class, because they no longer need to deal with the student's misbehavior. In the future, when disruptive behavior occurs again, the teacher is more likely to send the student out of the class (Gunter et al., 1994). When students with EBD have existing academic deficits, this cycle of negative reinforcement exacerbates their academic problems because they miss opportunities for effective instruction and/or intervention in the classroom (Sutherland et al., 2002).

Despite the disparity of praise delivered to students with behavior problems and their typical peers, experts maintain that students with behavior problems can greatly benefit from teacher praise. In their review of the literature, Markelz and Taylor (2016) found that when praise was used with students with EBD, disruptive behaviors decreased (Gunter & Jack, 1993; Dufrene et al., 2014) while on-task behaviors increased

(Sutherland et al., 2000). Behavior-specific praise not only provides positive attention and reinforcement, but also provides information to the student that can enhance their learning (Conroy et al., 2009). For instance, when a child is specifically told what behavior was approved, they learn what *to do*, rather than what *not to do*. When used effectively, teacher praise has a long history of contributing to positive classroom outcomes for children with learning and behavior problems (Conroy et al., 2009).

### ***Time Proximity***

For praise to be used effectively, it is important that it is delivered shortly after the behavior that is being approved (e.g., time proximity; Brophy, 1981). When a consequence (e.g., praise) occurs near the target behavior (e.g., following directions), the student is more likely to make the connection between teacher approval and the approved behavior. Willingham (2005) refers to time proximity as “contingency,” stating that a contingent praise statement is when the praise statement is provided immediately following the desired behavior. For example, if a teacher observes a student raising his or her hand before speaking, the teacher should praise the student immediately with a statement such as “Thank you for raising your hand before speaking, Ben! What is your question?” Contingent praise, or praising directly after the behavior has occurred, aids the student in making the connection between the praise and the appropriate behavior; whereas praising the student later will diminish the effectiveness of the praise (Skinner, 1969; Willingham, 2005). One of the earliest studies examined the effect of teachers’ increased use of praise on student problem behaviors found that contingent use of teacher attention, or praise, can quickly and effectively strengthen desirable classroom behavior (Hall et al., 1968). In an ABAB experimental design examining the effects of contingent

teacher attention on student behavior, Hall et al. (1968, p. 2-10) found that when teachers provided contingent praise to six students with off-task and disruptive behavior, students' on-task behavior significantly increased (baseline rates as low as 25% on-task behavior increased as high as 85% on-task behavior following intervention). Therefore, it is evident that contingency is a critical component to using praise effectively.

### **Social Validity**

Social validity, or whether the treatment being implemented is acceptable, socially relevant, and useful to those involved in the treatment (e.g., students and teachers), is important because it is related to an intervention's utility and efficacy. When an intervention is reported to have high social validity, teachers and educators are more likely to use the strategy and implement it correctly (Dart et. al., 2012). On the other hand, when strategies are demanding, ineffective, or unpopular, they are likely to be implemented improperly or abandoned entirely (Markels et al., 2019). Many teachers who have participated in praise intervention studies have rated praise to have high social validity (Floress, Rock et. al., 2017; Nguyen, 2015; Stormont et. al., 2007). This finding suggests that, once trained, many educators enjoy using praise, continue to use praise in the classroom, and see positive student behavioral changes when praise is used. This again emphasizes that with proper training, praise is an effective, simple, enjoyable, and cost-efficient classroom management strategy. However, despite evidence that teachers can train to successfully increase their use of praise and that teachers find praise acceptable, there is evidence to suggest that in the absence of training, teachers use praise infrequently (Floress & Jenkins, 2015; Jenkins, et al., 2015; Floress et al. 2018) and ineffectively, especially in classrooms with behavioral challenges (Wehby et al., 1998).

Thus, it is important that teachers are trained and educated to use socially valid and effective strategies such as praise.

### **Teacher and Educator Training**

Many teachers report receiving little or no classroom management training (Begeny & Martens, 2006; Westling, 2010) and faculty of teacher preparation programs report that teachers are least prepared in behavior management (compared to other areas, Oliver & Reschly, 2010). For example, Wagner et al. (2006) conducted a study examining teacher training and school resources by surveying teachers randomly selected from a total of 746 school districts. Among 382 general education teachers surveyed, only 22.9%, 30%, and 13.1% of elementary, middle, and high school general education teachers, respectively, strongly agreed that they had been adequately trained to manage disruptive classroom behavior (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 22). Therefore, it may not be a surprise that educators commonly identify student behavior and classroom discipline as one of the most stressful and challenging aspects of their job (Curtis, 2012). Dealing with student behavioral challenges may also be one of the reasons teachers decide to leave the field (Kratochwill, 2012). For example, Ingersoll (2001) examined reasons for teacher attrition by surveying a sample of 1,962 teachers that had decided to leave the field of education. Results indicated that 30% of surveyed teachers cited student discipline as a reason or contributing factor for their leaving the field (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 521). Further, results also showed that schools with lower levels of student discipline problems had distinctly lower rates of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001).

Recent reports have criticized teacher preparation programs for their lack of coverage of evidence-based strategies to prevent and reduce problem behaviors within

the classroom (Greenberg et. al., 2014; Moore et al., 2017; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). This information provides support to the fact that educators likely lack knowledge of classroom management strategies, such as effective praise, when entering the field. The literature offers little insight into teachers' existing knowledge of praise; however, assessing teachers' and educators' knowledge of effective praise has the potential to positively impact professional development. Furthermore, an assessment that targets various components of using praise effectively may help guide targeted training (e.g., targeting students at-risk for behavior problems). Training teachers and educators in using simple, effective, and enjoyable strategies, like praise, increases the likelihood that they can prevent behavior problems before they start, decrease inappropriate student behaviors, and ultimately help retain quality educators from leaving the field.

Considering the lack of teacher preparation and undetermined amount of knowledge teachers have regarding praise, a tiered model of training has the potential to support teachers and educators in effectively using praise. Universally screening educators' praise knowledge could serve as the first step in identifying those in need of additional praise training (Fisher et al., 2019). By identifying those in need of additional training with a praise knowledge screening tool, targeted support and training could be offered to teachers. It is also possible that teachers' use of praise is influenced by their work climate. For example, educators' use and attitudes toward praise may be influenced by how often they personally receive praise from direct supervisors and school administrators in their school district.

### **Praise in the Workplace**

Praise is a key element in creating a positive classroom environment for students in schools (Conroy et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2010). For example, using an AB design with 70 teachers and 1,809 students, Nelson et al. (2010) examined the effects of written praise notes on student office discipline referrals and school climate. Results across two school years indicated that following implementation of the praise notes, office discipline referrals decreased significantly and improved the overall school climate (Nelson et al., 2010). The positive effects of praise are likely to also apply beyond the student-teacher relationship and the classroom environment. Within school systems, it is imperative that teachers, school staff, and administrators work collaboratively to improve student learning and achieve school-wide goals (Nelson et al., 2013). Such collegiality can diminish isolation, bring career rewards and daily satisfaction, help alleviate burnout, and stimulate enthusiasm (Inger, 1993). Three types of interactions with effective school communities are identified in the literature: a) interactions that build community, b) interactions that support feelings of professional competence, and c) interactions that support individual autonomy (Irwin & Farr, 2004; Osborn & Shulte, 2001).

Praise is a key component to improving student-teacher relationships and classroom climate and may similarly strengthen the collegiality and collaboration among school professionals. Among teachers and students, praise improves social interactions, class climate, and student engagement. Praise may have similar effects when used among school personnel. Using a nonequivalent waitlist control group design, Nelson et al. (2013) investigated the effects of teacher-to-teacher written praise notes on 70 middle school teachers' perceptions of school community and collegiality (e.g., connecting with other school staff on a personal level, sharing advice, and looking for new instruction

ideas). Results from the study indicated that teachers viewed their relationships with one another and their sense of school community more positively following the intervention (Nelson et al., 2013).

In addition to receiving praise from colleagues, it is beneficial for employees to receive praise from supervisors or those in administrative positions. In a cross-sectional explorative survey design, Sveinsdóttir and colleagues (2016) examined the effect of manager praise on nurses' reported levels of job satisfaction, work climate, and organizational commitment. Results from a total of 383 nurses indicated that only 6% of participants reported to receive supervisor praise often or very often (Sveinsdóttir et al., 2016). When compared to colleagues that reported to receive praise rarely or very rarely, those who received praise more often indicated a more positive work climate and were more committed to the organization, such as being proud to work in the unit and being more willing to make an effort. Authors of this study concluded that managers should praise staff more often, as praise is cost effective, takes little time, and produces positive influences on members of the staff that may improve patient care (Sveinsdóttir et al., 2016). It should be noted that while this statistic supports the fact that supervisor praise is correlated with positive staff outcomes, it is possible that this is a bidirectional relationship in which enthusiastic, positive staff earn more frequent supervisor praise.

Though these results were seen in a medical setting, it is likely that teachers and educators would see similar benefits from receiving praise from their administrative supervisors. In their summary of survey results examining teacher attitudes towards central office administrators, Gersten and colleagues (1995) found that when principals provide assistance and feedback, recognize teacher challenges, and understand classroom

level issues, teachers felt respected and reported an environment in which they felt valued. Therefore, it is important to consider the effect of supervisor and administrator praise on teacher performance and workplace perceptions.

### **Assessing Teachers' Knowledge of Praise**

Currently, only one study has evaluated elementary teachers' knowledge of effective praise use (Fisher, n.d.). Fisher developed the Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers (PKAT), a 10-item, multiple choice assessment designed for use with elementary, general education teachers. The PKAT is scored by adding one point for each question answered correctly (range 0-10; higher scores indicate more praise knowledge). Prior to beginning the PKAT evaluation, a definition for praise and a definition for an effective classroom management tool were provided. The PKAT was created by identifying key content areas identified by the literature to be essential to effective praise. Five praise content areas were identified, including: Prevention, Function, Characteristics, Positive Outcomes, and Behavior-Specificity. Two questions were created to assess teachers' knowledge that praise can be used to prevent behavior problems and to maintain student appropriate behavior. Three questions were created to assess teachers' knowledge of function related to effective praise (i.e., the importance of observing changes in the target behavior). One question was intended to assess teachers' knowledge of effective praise characteristics (i.e., contingent, individual). Two questions were intended to assess teachers' knowledge of effective praise outcomes (i.e., improves classroom climate, improves student-teacher relationship). Two questions were intended to assess teachers' knowledge and use of behavior-specific praise. The 10 multiple-choice questions were developed by first consulting the praise literature, formulating questions

and correct answers, and sending the items to experts in the field for feedback. Revisions were made considering expert feedback.

There is little information in the literature regarding how (in the absence of training) teachers feel about praise as a classroom management strategy. Therefore, in addition to the PKAT, Fisher (n.d.) also adapted an existing scale, used to assess the social validity of behavioral interventions (i.e., the Behavioral Interventions Ratings Scale; BIRS; Elliot & Treuting, 1991), to assess praise specifically. Fisher (n.d.) modified the BIRS (Elliot & Treuting, 1991) and created the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale for Praise (BIRS-P). The original BIRS consists of 24 items, using a five-point Likert scale that assesses the acceptability of an intervention (Elliot & Treuting, 1991) and is written broadly so that it can easily be applied and adapted to various interventions. Fisher (n.d.) modified the BIRS and created a 12-item, 5-point Likert scale (1 representing “strongly disagree;” 5 representing “strongly agree”), with questions specifically asking about teachers’ acceptability of praise. The BIRS-P is scored by adding the ratings for the 12 items together (possible scores range from 12-60), with higher scores indicating higher levels of praise acceptance. Fisher (n.d.) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of (.89), indicating high internal consistency across items.

Fisher (n.d.) sought to assess teachers’ knowledge and acceptability of praise using the PKAT and the BIRS-P. Both assessments were loaded into Qualtrics. Teacher emails across the United States (approximately 100 per state) were collected from public school websites. Teachers were emailed and invited to participate in the study by clicking on the link that would allow them to complete the PKAT and BIRS-P. One hundred and forty-seven teachers (K-6<sup>th</sup> grade) from 37 states participated in the study. On average,

teachers answered 7.7 of the 10 PKAT questions correctly. Further inspection of the five content areas revealed that on average, teachers scored highest on Characteristics (96% of participants answered correctly) and Positive Outcomes categories (94% of participants answered correctly). Teachers scored lowest on the Function (78% of participants answered correctly), Prevention (68% of participants answered correctly) and Behavior Specificity (61% of participants answered correctly) categories. On average, teachers scored 54.03 of 60 possible points on the BIRS-P, indicating overall participants found praise to be socially valid and an acceptable classroom management strategy. Fisher (n.d.) calculated a Pearson's  $r$  to assess the correlation between teachers' knowledge of praise and reported acceptance of the strategy. Results indicated that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between the two measures,  $r(141) = .18, p = .02$  (one-tailed),  $r^2 = .03$  (Fisher, n.d., p. 20).

Though this study was the first to examine teacher praise and acceptability, it was not without limitations. One of the most notable limitations is the PKAT had poor internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .503$ ). Upon further analysis of individual PKAT items, some items had nearly 100% of participants answering correctly. This suggests that these questions were too easy. When questions are too easy, it is likely that they are not accurately measuring what is intended to be measured (Goodwin & Leech, 2003). According to Sener and Tas (2017), if the item difficulty index is between 0.00-0.19 the item is very difficult, if it is between 0.20-0.34 the item is difficult, if it is between 0.35-0.64 the item has medium difficulty, if it is between 0.65-0.79 the item is easy and if it is between 0.80-1.00 the item is very easy. Fisher (n.d.) found that multiple items had item difficulty indices of .90 or higher ( $n = 5$ ), indicating that items were not sufficiently

difficult. Additionally, the PKAT's binary scoring method caused limited variability in scores (possible scores ranged from 0-10; Fisher, n.d.).

Another limitation was in how the data were collected. To increase generalizability of results, Fisher (n.d.) gathered the email addresses of teachers from across the United States and invited them to participate. Fisher (n.d.) postulated that teachers who viewed praise more favorably may have been more likely to participate; however, this cannot be determined without studying the sample of teachers who decided not to participate. Employing samples in which teachers participate regardless of prior experience with praise—such as administering measures to an entire staff at a school—may yield more variability in results and therefore better assess the consistency of items. The Fisher (n.d.) sample was also small ( $n = 143$ ), homogenous, and only included teacher participants. Because praise is an integral part of the SWPBIS framework, future studies should strive to collect data from all educators that work in the school system.

### **The Current Study**

Praise is a simple and efficient strategy that, when used effectively, can decrease students' disruptive behavior (Reinke et. al., 2013). However, despite its positive attributes and demonstrated effectiveness, research suggests that many general education teachers deliver low rates of praise, especially BSP (Floress & Jenkins, 2015; Floress et al., 2018). Because many teachers report feeling unprepared to handle student misbehavior (Reinke et. al., 2013), it is important to examine educators' knowledge of current strategies, such as praise, to gain awareness of where improvement and training is needed. Awareness of educators' current, untrained knowledge and attitudes of praise could lend valuable insight regarding the overall need for praise training, the specific

aspects of praise for which educators may need additional instruction, as well as their acceptance of the strategy. Identifying educators' current knowledge of using praise as an effective behavior management strategy is a vital first step in equipping educators with the skills and strategies necessary to handle student behavior school wide.

Though there is ample existing research examining the effects of praise on student disruptive and off-task behavior (Dufrene et al., 2014; Madsen et. al., 1968), only one study to date has examined elementary teachers' knowledge and acceptance of praise as a classroom management strategy (Fisher, n.d.). Fisher (n.d.) examined general education, elementary teachers' knowledge and acceptability of praise, and although teachers reported adequate knowledge, half of the questions were not sufficiently difficult. Furthermore, the PKAT items were poorly related (i.e., poor internal consistency). The current study aims to improve upon the existing study by doing the following: a) improving interval consistency, b) collecting a larger sample, and c) collecting knowledge of both teacher and educators. Evaluating each question to eliminate items that were too easy (e.g., 70% or more of participants answered correctly) and revising how the measure is scored may further improve internal consistency. In addition, assessing whether there is a relation between educators who receive praise and their knowledge or acceptability of praise may provide support for future research on the influence of praise and school climate. Valuable implications for teachers and educators who receive praise from supervisors and administrators in their schools may shed light on the need for increased praise and feedback directed not only at students, but for school employees. The current study aims to add to the literature by examining teachers' and educators' knowledge and reported social validity of praise, improving upon numerous

limitations identified in the Fisher (n.d.) study, and expanding to a school-wide measure.

The following research questions are posed:

1. Did the changes and modifications made to the original PKAT (renamed the PKATE) result in improved reliability of the measure? Fisher (n.d.) reported poor internal consistency among items on the PKAT, however, the current study seeks to improve this limitation by making numerous modifications to the measure.
2. How knowledgeable are elementary school staff regarding their use of praise as a classroom management strategy? Because many teachers report minimal training in behavior management (Begeny & Martens, 2006; Westling, 2010), it is hypothesized that overall praise knowledge will be low.
3. Do elementary school staff find praise to be an acceptable classroom management strategy? Many teachers report praise to be an acceptable behavior management strategy and Fisher (n.d.) found that untrained, elementary teachers reported praise to be acceptable. It is hypothesized that teachers will find praise to be an acceptable strategy.
4. Is there a relation between staff knowledge of praise and their acceptability of praise? Fisher (n.d.) found a weak correlation between praise knowledge and acceptability; however, the PKAT had poor internal consistency. Assuming the PKATE has improved internal consistency, it is hypothesized that the PKATE and BIRS-P will be positively correlated to indicate a relation between praise knowledge and acceptance of the strategy.
5. Do staff members who receive praise from their supervisor or administrative team have more praise knowledge? Current research indicates that staff receive supervisor

praise infrequently despite research suggesting that supervisor praise results in increased positive feelings towards the workplace (Nelson et al., 2013).

6. Do staff members who receive praise from their supervisor or administrative team have higher praise acceptability scores? Current research indicates that staff receive supervisor praise infrequently despite research suggesting that supervisor praise results in increased positive feelings towards the workplace (Nelson et al., 2013).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants included 206 educators working in elementary schools (i.e., K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) from Illinois (86.4%), Indiana (2.4%), and Florida (11.2%). Any educator working in a school setting were invited to participate. Participants included general education teachers, special education teachers, specials teachers (i.e., music or physical education), support staff (i.e., psychologist, social worker, etc.), aides (i.e., paraprofessionals), administrators, and other school staff (see Table 1 for complete demographic information).

Most (94%) of the participants were women, Caucasian (90%) and worked in Illinois (86%). Participants had an average of 11 years of experience in education ( $SD = 9.09$ ), ranging from 6 months to 35 years. Most participants (61%) held a master's degree. General education teachers made up the largest percentage of participants (47%), with support staff and special education teachers also making up a significant percentage (18% and 12%, respectively). Of the 206 participants, 46% reported to have taken a behavior management course as part of their educational training. An incentive to be

entered into a raffle to win one of eighteen \$10 Amazon.com gift cards was offered to all participants.

### **Instruments/Measures**

Two self-report measures were used to examine educators' knowledge and attitudes towards praise. The first measure, the Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers and Educators (PKATE), is an adaption of the original PKAT created by the author and her thesis chair to assess teachers' knowledge of effective praise use. The adapted version is intended to measure all educators' praise knowledge (i.e., knowledge of various school employees, rather than teachers only). The second measure, the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale – Praise, was created to assess teachers' acceptance toward the use of praise as a classroom management strategy. This measure was adapted from an existing social validity measure called the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS; Elliot & Treuting, 1991). To reflect its use with praise, the adapted version was re-named the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale - Praise (BIRS-P).

Prior to completing the PKATE and the BIRS-P, participants were provided a definition for “praise” and “effective classroom management tool.” Definitions were provided so that all participants had the same understanding for these terms, as they were referenced throughout both measures. Praise was defined as “a verbal statement or gesture (non-physical or physical) that provides a student positive feedback for a desired behavior that goes beyond acknowledging a correct academic response.” The second term, effective classroom management tool, was defined as “a strategy used by an educator that leads to a positive change in student behavior.” Providing definitions prior

to the measures ensured that all participants would have the same understanding of these fundamental terms.

### ***Demographics Questionnaire***

Participants first completed a brief demographics questionnaire (Appendix A). Demographic items included sex, age, racial background, staff position, highest educational degree obtained, years of experience in education, and whether the participant has taken a behavior management course during their pre-service training. Teaching participants were also asked to report details of their current instruction (e.g., grade, subject). Lastly, participants were asked to describe the overall school climate where they work (i.e., positive or negative) and their feelings toward their workplace (i.e., positive or negative).

### ***The Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers and Educators (PKATE).***

The PKATE (Praise Knowledge Assessment of Teachers and Educators; see Appendix B) is a revised version of the original PKAT (Fisher, n.d.) that consists of 10 multiple-choice items but was revised in the following ways. First, the authors revised questions from the original PKAT that most participants answered correctly (i.e., 70% or more answered correctly; De Champlain, 2010). Second, the authors examined each question critically to make sure that the available answers included responses directly related to praise. For example, when asking a question regarding which is an example of effective praise, an answer choice on the original PKAT may have included an unrelated statement such as “turn the lights on and off.” Third, unlike the original measure, all questions on the PKATE were created to assess *how* to use praise. The original PKAT contained questions that asked participants to answer questions related to positive

outcomes of praise. These items yielded poor variability; thus, the revised version eliminated such questions. Fourth, all questions were revised to be scenario-based in order to better assess how much participants know about using praise effectively (in a specific situation), rather than conceptual questions akin to praise trivia. Scenarios in the PKATE are broadly written so participants of all positions in a school can envision themselves in the scenario, rather than solely teachers. In the revised PKATE, items still aim to assess the following key areas identified in the praise literature: Prevention, Function, and Behavior Specificity. However, many of the questions likely tap into not only one, but two or three key areas. Therefore, the PKATE is expected to measure overall praise knowledge and not specific domains.

Finally, while possible scores on the PKAT range from 0 to 10 (Fisher, n.d.), possible scores on the revised PKATE range from 10 to 40 to allow for more variability. Six experts (i.e., individuals who have published two or more peer reviewed, research articles on praise) were asked to rank the answer choices for each item in order of perceived correctness. Feedback indicated high levels of consistency across the experts' rankings of answers: for six items, there was 100% agreement among experts. In all cases except one item, rankings varied by less than 1 rank level (i.e., the standard deviation was less than 1). Each ranked answer was totaled to create a final numeric value for each answer choice. Each multiple-choice question is scored based on the final numeric value (e.g., choice a = 1, b = 3, c = 4, d = 2). After each of the 10 multiple-choice questions are scored, they are summed to obtain a total score for the PKATE. Scores can range from 10-40 with higher scores indicating more knowledge of effective praise use.

***The Behavior Intervention Rating Scale – Praise (BIRS-P)***

The BIRS-P is a 12 item, 5-point Likert scale (1, indicating “strongly disagree” and 5, indicating “strongly agree”) that was adapted from the 24-item BIRS (Elliot & Treuting, 1991) to specifically assess educators’ acceptance of praise as a classroom management strategy (Fisher, n.d.; Appendix C). The original BIRS has been found to be a reliable measure (Finn & Sladeczek, 2001). Fisher (n.d.) reported the BIRS-P to have a Cronbach’s alpha of .89, indicating high internal consistency across items. The BIRS-P is scored by adding the ratings for the 12 items. Scores can range from 12-60 with higher scores indicating more acceptance of praise.

### ***Supplemental Questions***

Participants also answered whether they receive praise or acknowledgement from their supervisor or administrative team. If they indicated “yes,” they were prompted to estimate how often they receive the praise or acknowledgement (see Appendix D).

### **Procedures**

This project is part of a larger research program of study that aims to develop and study the PKATE for use with educators at each level: secondary (sixth through twelfth grade), elementary (kindergarten through fifth grade), and early educators (preschool). This study specifically focused on the elementary sample. After securing Institutional Review Board approval, data collection began in the following ways.

First, elementary school administrators in Illinois were contacted via email (Appendix E) to relay the purpose of the study and ask that they forward on the Qualtrics survey link to their staff. Despite offering a school/district summary report that could guide professional development and offer insight on how well staff adhere to specific aspects of SWPBIS, few administrators were interested, and staff participation rates were

low. Researchers also recruited university lab schools in Indiana and Florida; however, overall participant numbers were still low. Considering this, the PI recruited participants via direct email invitation to Illinois educators in urban, suburban, and rural areas of each region of the state. Teacher emails were collected from public school websites. The invitation email briefly explained the purpose of the study, the incentive for participating (chance to win one of eighteen \$10 Amazon.com gift cards) and included a link to the study (using the Qualtrics survey platform).

When participants opened the survey link, they were first prompted to complete the demographics questions, the PKATE, the BIRS-P, and finally the two supplemental questions. Following completion of the survey, staff were invited to participate in the Amazon gift card raffle if they chose to provide their email. Participant emails were kept separate from survey data to preserve anonymity. Educators who participated in the raffle were updated via email regarding the progression of data collection and encouraged to forward the survey link to other educators.

### **Analytic Plan**

To answer the first research question, did the changes and modifications made to the PKATE result in improved reliability of the measure, the internal consistency of the PKATE was tested with a Cronbach's alpha analysis.

To answer the second research question, how knowledgeable are elementary school staff regarding their use of praise as a classroom management strategy, the PKATE was individually scored for each participant and entered into an excel data file. Participant scores were organized into staff categories (e.g., administrators, support staff, teachers, special education teachers, teacher aids, school security/monitors,

maintenance/custodial staff) and descriptive statistics were calculated for each category. Individual questions were also analyzed to report the percentage of participants who correctly answered each question, as well as broken down by staff categories.

To answer the third research question, do elementary school staff find praise to be an acceptable classroom management strategy, the BIRS-P was individually scored for each participant and entered into an excel data file. Participant scores were organized into staff categories (e.g., administrators, support staff, teachers, special education teachers, teacher aids, school security/monitors, maintenance/custodial staff) and descriptive statistics were calculated for each category.

To answer the fourth research question, is there a relation between staff knowledge of praise and their reported acceptability of praise, a Pearson's  $r$  was calculated using participant scores on the PKATE and BIRS-P. This calculation was executed with the entire sample.

To answer the fifth research question, was there a relation between the amount of praise staff members receive from their administrator/district office and their overall knowledge of praise as a classroom management strategy, a Pearson's  $r$  correlation was calculated using PKATE total scores and the frequency of praise that staff reported to receive from administrators and supervisors.

To answer the sixth research question, is there a difference between the amount of praise staff members receive from their administrator/district office and their overall acceptability of praise as a classroom management strategy, a Pearson's  $r$  correlation was calculated using BIRS-P total scores and the frequency of praise that staff reported to receive from administrators and supervisors.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

A total of 206 participants completed the PKATE and 203 participants completed the BIRS-P. Of the 206 participants who completed the PKATE, the average score was 32.89 (*SD* 3.76, range 22-40). Possible scores ranged from 10 (indicating the least praise knowledge) to 40 (indicating the most praise knowledge). Based on the possible range of scores that could be obtained, it was determined that a score in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher would be considered acceptable (i.e.,  $\leq 36$ ; see Table 2).

When the PKATE total scores were examined across staff categories, (e.g., administrator, support staff, general education teacher, special education teacher, teacher aide, specials teacher, or other), on average, special education teachers ( $N = 24$ ) performed the highest (average score = 33.28, range = 27-40) with scores falling in the *above expectation* range to the *significantly below expectation* range. Alternatively, staff that identified as “other” ( $N = 11$ ) performed the lowest (average score = 31.83, range = 24-39) with scores falling in the *above expectation* range to the *significantly below expectation* range. Among those who identified as “other” were positions such as office secretary, title 1 teacher, talent development specialist, paraprofessional, interventionist, office manager, instructional aide, and bus monitor. See Table 3 for average scores and classifications across each staff category.

### PKATE Internal Consistency

To answer the first research question, did the changes and modifications made to the PKATE result in improved reliability of the measure, the internal consistency of the PKATE was tested with a Cronbach’s alpha analysis. Internal consistency is defined as

the consistency of an individual's responses across items on a multiple item measure— items are considered consistent when they adequately relate to one another (Gie Yong & Pearce, 2013). A Cronbach's alpha of .80 or above is preferred, while an alpha of .70 is considered an acceptable level of reliability when measuring internal consistency. A lower alpha limits the ability to conclude that an instrument is truly measuring the intended construct. The previous iteration of the measure (i.e., PKAT) had low internal consistency with an elementary teacher sample of 143 participants ( $\alpha = .503$ ; Fisher, n.d.). Results of a Cronbach's alpha analysis indicated that the revised PKATE also has poor internal consistency across the ten items ( $\alpha = .432$ ) with the current sample of 206 educator participants. This limitation is further addressed in the discussion section.

An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine whether PKATE items loaded onto individual factors. All 10 items were factor analyzed using principle component analysis with varimax (orthogonal) rotation. The analysis yielded four factors explaining a total of 52.51% of the variance for the entire set of variables. The PKATE items loaded onto the four factors in the following way: Factor 1 included items three, seven, nine, eight, and two; Factor 2 included items six, four, and ten; Factor 3 included item five; Factor 4 included item ten and one (see Table 4). Next, Cronbach's alpha was calculated using only the items that corresponded to the largest factor (Factor 1). For Factor 1, Cronbach's alpha = .47. The internal consistency for Factor 1 (five items) was marginally higher than the internal consistency for the total instrument (all 10 items); however, both fall below the acceptable range. Because the low internal consistency limits the interpretation of the PKATE total score and underlying factors, individual PKATE items were analyzed in addition to the total score.

### **Educators' Knowledge of Praise**

To answer the second research question, how knowledgeable are elementary school educators regarding their use of praise as a behavior management strategy, each item on the PKATE was analyzed to examine the pattern of how participants answered (see Table 5). Item 6 had the largest amount of correct responses with 83% of participants providing the best response (rank of 4). Types of praise knowledge associated with item 6 included prevention and immediacy. Approximately 60-75% of participants provided the best response (rank of 4) for seven of the items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9). Types of praise knowledge associated with these items included BSP, prevention, immediacy, and function. Only 32% of participants provided the best answer (rank of 4) for item 10; praise knowledge associated with this item included prevention.

### ***Level of Education***

A t-test for independent means was also conducted to analyze whether there was a significant difference between level of education among participants and their performance on each PKATE item. Those with graduate education (e.g., master's degrees or above;  $N = 129$ ) were compared to those without graduate education (e.g., bachelor's degrees or below;  $N = 77$ ). A significant difference was found between the two groups on item 3 and item 6. On these questions, participants with graduate education performed better than those without graduate education. On item 3 (i.e., asking participants to select the superior form of praise from a list of options), those with graduate education had an average score of 3.46 out of 4 possible points, while those without had an average score of 3.23 out of 4 ( $F = 4.11, p = .04$ ). Similarly, on item 6 (i.e., asking participants how a teacher can improve student behavior problems while preserving the teacher-student

relationship), those with graduate education had an average score of 3.77 out of 4 possible points, while those without had an average score of 3.58 out of 4 ( $F = 8.31, p = .004$ ).

### ***Years of Experience***

A one-way ANOVA was also used to examine any significant differences between years of experience on each PKATE item. Participants were divided into five groups according to years of experience in the field: 0-5 years ( $N = 78$ ), 6-10 years ( $N = 33$ ), 11-15 years ( $N = 43$ ), 16-20 years ( $N = 17$ ), and 20+ years ( $N = 35$ ). Across the five groups, there were significant differences between years of experience on only two PKATE items. On item 8 (i.e., asking participants how to decrease disrespectful student behavior by responding to desirable behavior), participants with 1-5 years of experience ( $M = 3.70$ ) performed significantly higher than those with 20+ years of experience ( $M = 3.34; p = .01$ ). On item 6 (i.e., asking participants how a teacher can improve student behavior problems while preserving the teacher-student relationship), there were four groups with significant differences. Participants with 11-15 years of experience ( $M = 3.84$ ) performed significantly better than those with only 1-5 years of experience ( $M = 3.54; p = .01$ ). Participants with 16-20 years of experience ( $M = 3.92$ ) also performed significantly better than those with only 1-5 years of experience ( $M = 3.54; p = .005$ ). Similarly, participants with 20+ years of experience ( $M = 3.86$ ) performed significantly better than those with only 1-5 years of experience ( $M = 3.54; p = .01$ ). All other comparisons were insignificant.

### **Educators' Acceptability of Praise**

To answer the third research question, do elementary school educators find praise to be an acceptable classroom management strategy, BIRS-P descriptive statistics were analyzed. Of the 203 participants who completed the BIRS-P, the average score was 49.86 out of 60 possible points ( $SD = 7.85$ ; range = 40-60). The possible range of scores on the BIRS-P was 12-60, with 60 points indicating higher acceptability of praise. When BIRS-P scores were examined across staff categories (e.g., administrator, support staff, general education teacher, special education teacher, teacher aide, specials teacher, or other), on average, special education teachers had the highest acceptability of praise as a classroom management strategy ( $M = 52.00$ ,  $SD = 5.57$ , range = 41-60). Alternatively, Administration (i.e., directors, principals, assistant principals.) indicated the lowest acceptability of praise as a classroom management strategy ( $M = 47.75$ ,  $SD = 5.56$ , range = 44-56). See table 6 for average scores for each staff category.

### ***Level of Education***

A t-test for independent means was run to analyze whether there was a significant difference in acceptability of praise based on level of education. The BIRS-P total scores of participants with graduate education (e.g., master's degree or above,  $n = 129$ ) were compared to the scores of those without graduate education (e.g., bachelor's degree or below,  $n = 77$ ). While those with graduate school education performed better than those without (average score of 50.70 and 50.43, respectively), there was no significant difference between the two groups ( $t = .378$ ,  $p = .706$ ).

### ***Years of Experience***

In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to identify any possible significant difference between years of experience of participants and their total BIRS-P

score. Participants were divided up into 5-year experience increments for the following groups: 0-5 years ( $N = 78$ ), 6-10 years ( $N = 33$ ), 11-15 years ( $N = 43$ ), 16-20 years ( $N = 17$ ), and 20+ years ( $N = 35$ ). Across all groups of participant experience levels, there was a significant difference between two groups. On average, participants with 20+ years of experience had higher acceptability of praise as a classroom management strategy ( $M = 52.15$ ) than those with only 1-5 years of experience ( $M = 50.13$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and those with 16-20 years of experience ( $M = 48.58$ ,  $p = .03$ ). All other comparisons were insignificant.

### **Praise Knowledge and Praise Acceptability**

To answer the fourth research question, is there a relation between staff knowledge of praise and their reported acceptability of praise, a Pearson's  $r$  was calculated using participant scores on the PKATE and BIRS-P. This calculation was executed with the entire sample. Results suggested that the PKATE scores (praise knowledge) and BIRS-P scores (praise acceptability) were positively related,  $r(203) = .114$ ,  $p = .05$  (one-tailed),  $r^2 = 1.3\%$ . Participants with higher PKATE scores (i.e., highest possible score = 40), had higher BIRS-P scores while lower PKATE scores (i.e., lowest possible score = 10), had lower BIRS-P scores. In other words, educators with more praise knowledge (i.e., high PKATE score) had higher levels of praise acceptability (i.e., high BIRS-P score) and educators with less praise knowledge (i.e., low PKATE score) had lower levels of praise acceptability (i.e., low BIRS-P score). This relation was significant; however, the strength was small (Pearson's  $r$  of .114; coefficients of .1 to .3 considered small but positive strength of association).

Due to the poor internal reliability of the PKATE, a Pearson's  $r$  was also calculated using individual PKATE items and BIRS-P total scores. Results of the analysis

indicated that 40% of PKATE items were positively correlated with BIRS-P total scores, while 60% of PKATE items were negatively correlated with BIRS-P total scores. Among all PKATE items, three items were significantly correlated with the BIRS-P total score. Item 5, which prompted participants to identify the best way to determine the effectiveness of praise, was significantly positively correlated with the BIRS-P total score,  $r(206) = .172$ ,  $p = .01$  (one-tailed),  $r^2 = 2.9\%$ . Item 6, which prompted participants to identify a way to improve aggressive student behavior while preserving the teacher-student relationship, was also significantly positively correlated with BIRS-P total scores,  $r(206) = .129$ ,  $p = .03$  (one-tailed),  $r^2 = 1.7\%$ . Item 10, which asked participants to identify which group of students are most likely to benefit from praise, was also significantly positively correlated with BIRS-P total scores,  $r(206) = .133$ ,  $p = .03$  (one-tailed),  $r^2 = 1.8\%$ . Participants with correct answers on PKATE items 5, 6, and 10 had higher BIRS-P total scores, while those who answered those questions incorrectly had lower BIRS-P scores. In other words, educators who displayed more praise knowledge on specific PKATE items had higher levels of praise acceptability (i.e., high BIRS-P score). Items 6 and 10 had small effect sizes ( $d = .41$  and  $.42$ , respectively), while item 5 had a moderate effect size ( $d = .53$ ).

### **Praise Knowledge and Administrator Praise**

Participants were also prompted to answer two questions regarding praise received from their administrators or supervisors. When asked whether they receive praise, 78% of participants reported to receive praise from administration while 22% of participants reported not to receive praise in the workplace. On average, those who

received administrator praise reported a frequency of one praise statement every two weeks (See Table 7).

To answer the fifth research question, was there a relation between the amount of praise staff members receive from their administrator/district office and their overall knowledge of praise as a classroom management strategy, a Pearson's  $r$  correlation was calculated on the results from the PKATE and the praise ratings the staff reported to receive from administrators/supervisors. Results of a Pearson's  $r$  analysis indicated that administrator praise and total PKATE scores are positively correlated; however, the relationship is not significant,  $r = .034$ ,  $p = .31$  (one-tailed).

### **Praise Acceptability and Administrator Praise**

To answer the sixth research question, is there a difference between the amount of praise staff members receive from their administrator/district office and their overall acceptability of praise as a classroom management strategy, a Pearson's  $r$  correlation was calculated on the results from the BIRS-P and the praise ratings the staff reported to receive from administrators/supervisors. Results of a Pearson's  $r$  analysis indicated that although praise received and total BIRS-P scores are positively correlated, the relationship is not significant,  $r = .08$ ,  $p = .13$  (one-tailed). The effect size was small.

In addition, participants were asked how they felt about their school workplace (i.e., positive or negative feelings towards their workplace). An independent t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in praise received by participants with positive compared to negative workplace feelings. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in the frequency of praise received between those who reported positive workplace feelings ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ) and negative workplace

feelings ( $M = .80$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ),  $t(105) = 2.92$ ,  $p = .002$  (one-tailed). There was a large effect size, Cohen's  $d = 1.54$ . In addition, a Pearson's  $r$  correlation was conducted to further examine the relationship between frequency of praise received and reported feelings towards the workplace. Results of the Pearson's  $r$  indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between frequency of praise and positive workplace feelings,  $r = .27$ ,  $p = .002$  (one-tailed).

Additionally, participants were asked how they felt about their school's climate (i.e., positive or negative perceived school climate). An independent t-test was conducted to see whether there was a significant difference of praise received between participants who reported positive and negative school climates. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in the frequency of praise received between those who reported positive school climates ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ ) and negative school climate ( $M = .175$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ),  $t(105) = 1.81$ ,  $p = .04$  (one-tailed). There was a large effect size, Cohen's  $d = 1.02$ . In addition, a Pearson's  $r$  correlation was conducted to further examine the relationship between frequency of praise received and perceived school climate. Results of the Pearson's  $r$  indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between frequency of praise and positive school climate,  $r = .17$ ,  $p = .04$  (one-tailed).

### **Discussion**

This study examined elementary educators' knowledge and reported social validity of effective praise as a classroom management strategy. Many teachers report receiving little to no instruction on classroom management during their pre-service training, leaving them feeling unprepared and overwhelmed when facing challenging student behavior (Begeny & Martens, 2006; Reinke et al., 2013). Therefore, studying

educators' knowledge and ability to implement evidence-based behavior management strategies, such as praise, is of great importance. Praise is an effective classroom behavior management strategy that has been studied for decades (Jenkins et al., 2015; Gable et al., 2009; Hall et al., 1968). Despite ample research supporting its use as an effective strategy, it is still unclear how much knowledge educators not seeking consultation have regarding effective praise use. Because praise is a fundamental component in the commonly adopted SWPBIS framework, it is important that all educators understand how to use praise effectively.

This study contributes to the limited literature available regarding educators' knowledge and acceptance of praise as a classroom management strategy. Further, this study aimed to improve upon a previous instrument intended to measure teachers' knowledge of praise (the PKAT; Fisher, n.d.). Developing a reliable tool to measure teacher and educator praise knowledge is important as it would have the potential to guide school-wide educator training related to effectively using praise to manage student behavior. A total of 206 educators completed the PKATE and 203 completed the BIRS-P. Results from the PKATE indicate that in this sample, educators fell within the *slightly below expectation* or *below expectation* range in their knowledge of praise, as measured by the ten PKATE items. The average score across educators on the PKATE was 32.89. This score fell within the *slightly below expectation* range, consistent with the author's hypothesis. Possible scores on the PKATE range from 10 (least knowledge) to 40 (most knowledge), with the expectation that participants score at the 80th percentile or higher (i.e.,  $\leq 36$ ). Therefore, the average score (32.89) for the current sample was seven points higher than the possible median score (25), but lower than the cut-off score (36). Special

Education Teachers had the highest average PKATE score, followed by Specials Teachers, General Education Teachers, Administration, Aides, Support Staff, and Other. Little variability was observed between educator position categories; however, it should be considered that unequal group sizes may have impacted average scores across positions. All things considered, the current results suggest that certain educator groups may have marginally more praise knowledge than others. For example, special education teachers typically have specialized training and experience related to working directly with students who are at-risk for academic and behavior problems. Conversely, administrators (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and directors who manage and evaluate staff) were observed to have less knowledge of praise when compared to other groups. Considering the importance of praise knowledge in relation to student outcomes and SW-PBIS framework compliance, this potential disparity is of concern. Dufrene, Lestmau, and Zoder-Martell (2014) contend that some teachers benefit from additional praise training (beyond didactic instruction) to achieve and maintain effective praise use in the classroom. This sentiment likely applies to all educator positions, rather than exclusively teachers. Moreover, some positions that may not directly receive praise training during their education (i.e., administration), are likely to benefit from praise training so they can better evaluate staff and facilitate proper implementation of SW-PBIS. Consequently, future research should collect data across equal groups to see if real differences exist between educator positions. Unfortunately, further analysis of participants' praise knowledge using PKATE total scores was hindered by the poor internal consistency of the measure.

Educators in this sample found praise to be an acceptable strategy for managing student behavior, as indicated by the average BIRS-P score of 49.86 out of 60 possible points (83% mean acceptability). The current sample yielded acceptable BIRS-P reliability, indicating consistency with past iterations of the measure (Fisher, n.d., Yehling, n.d.). Possible total BIRS-P scores ranged from 12 (not accepting of praise) to 60 (highly accepting of praise). Across educator positions, Special Education Teachers had the highest praise acceptability scores, followed by Aides, Support Staff, General Education Teachers, Other, Specials Teachers, and Administration. Though results indicate that praise was found to be an acceptable strategy for managing student behavior, the current sample suggests lower acceptability of praise than was seen in previous iterations of the measure. In a sample of 143 elementary general education teachers, Fisher (n.d.) reported higher acceptability of praise (average of 54.03; Fisher, n.d.; pg. 34). The current study, which included educators from all positions, saw a 6% decrease in the average BIRS-P total score. Administration (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and directors who manage and evaluate staff) was the educator category with the lowest praise acceptability score, suggesting once more that administration may benefit from explicit praise training to fully understand the strategy. Research suggests that ideally, praise training and support should come from the top (e.g., administrators) and work down to educational staff using a workplace organizational framework. Because administrators are typically at the top of their organizational system, they may not receive adequate praise training themselves, therefore making them less likely to coach or train educational staff on how to use praise or use praise with their staff (i.e., educators; Gove, 2005).

Although there was a statistically significant positive correlation between PKATE total scores and BIRS-P total scores, the low internal consistency of the PKATE limits interpretation of the total score. For this reason, individual PKATE items were analyzed with BIRS-P total. Three individual PKATE items (5, 6, and 10) were significantly correlated with BIRS-P total scores, indicating that participants with better performance on specific PKATE items had higher acceptance of praise as a classroom management strategy. Educator knowledge of praise also presented a positive but negligible relationship with administrator praise (i.e., educators with higher praise knowledge reported to receive more frequent praise from their administrator or supervisor, while educators with less praise knowledge reported to receive less or no praise from their administrator/supervisor. Though positively correlated, this relation was not significant. Similar results were found with praise acceptance. Educators with higher praise acceptability reported to receive more praise from their administrators, while educators with lower praise acceptability reported to receive less or no praise from their administrators. This correlation was also not significant.

The final two experimental questions asked participants to report whether they had positive or negative feelings towards their workplace. Results indicated that participants who received more frequent administrator praise reported more positive workplace feelings. Participants were also asked to report whether their school had a positive or negative school climate. Results indicated that like the previous analysis, participants who received more frequent administrator praise reported a positive school climate. Both correlations were statistically significant. Further analyses revealed that there was a significant difference in the frequency of praise received between those who

reported positive vs negative feelings and climates. Those who indicated negative feelings and climates reported to never or rarely receive administrator praise, while those who indicated positive feelings and climates reported to receive administrator praise once every one-to-three months. These findings reiterate the importance of praise for both students *and staff*. Just as students benefit from a positive classroom climate, employees benefit from working in a positive work environment (Bradshaw et al, 2010; Fredrickson, 2000). Praise from supervisors and administrators is a critical component of creating a positive workplace that encourages productivity, improves morale, alleviates stress, and supports staff retention (Gove, 2005). In addition to creating a positive work environment, administrator praise may lead to increased teacher praise in the classroom. Research suggests that educators who receive more support and praise from administrators and coworkers are more able and willing to support and praise their students (Dickson et al., 2001).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The aim of this study was to revise and improve upon a tool intended to measure educators' knowledge of effective praise use; however, there are limitations and improvements that should be addressed in future research. First, the PKATE used in the current study lacks adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha of .43). The reliability of the PKATE fell below the minimum level to be used for reliable interpretation, thus limiting analysis of participants' praise knowledge. An exploratory factor analysis revealed a large factor containing five items; however, further analysis indicated only marginal improvement to reliability that continued to fall below the

minimum standard (Cronbach's alpha of .47). Future iterations of the PKATE should aim to improve the internal consistency among items.

The current study was among the first to assess the knowledge of all educator positions. Considering all educators are expected to implement the SWPBIS framework, it is important to include all educators when assessing praise knowledge. However, the current study produced educator groups that were grossly unequal (e.g., 96 general education teachers vs. only 4 administrators). While general education teachers are the largest educator category employed in schools and this proportion may be realistic, unequal participant categories limit the ability to make accurate comparisons across groups. For example, the Administrator category had the lowest BIRS-P score but was also the most underrepresented category with just four participants. Future research should collect data from an equal number of participants for each educator category so that accurate comparisons can be made across groups. Moreover, future research should assess equal educator categories to identify which group might benefit from praise training. For example, if future research is consistent with the current study in demonstrating that Administrators have below average praise knowledge and acceptance, targeting this group for professional development related to effective praise may be beneficial school wide. Because administrators observe, evaluate, and deliver feedback to staff, it is critical that these individuals are knowledgeable of essential educator skills such as effective praise use. With knowledge and understanding of effective praise, administrators would be better able to support and provide feedback to staff, which in turn would benefit staff and student outcomes (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Praetorius et al., 2018).

Another limitation related to the sample of the current study is the lack of diversity among participants. Most participants in the current sample were White (90%) and the second most represented was African American/Black (4%). The study was limited due to region, as nearly all participants were from the Midwest with a large majority from the state of Illinois.

An additional limitation lies in the validity of the PKATE. It has not yet been determined whether more knowledge, as measured by the PKATE, truly relates to increased educator praise use. Recommendations for how to increase teacher praise and suggested target rates exist (Floress et al., 2020; Floress & Jenkins, 2015). Furthermore, when teachers receive explicit praise training, BSP rates increase (Reinke et al., 2007; Zoder-Martell et al., 2019). To make PKATE data actionable, it would be helpful to know whether higher praise knowledge, as measured by the PKATE, translates to more praise in the classroom. If future research confirms this relation, the PKATE could be used in combination with a brief observation to widely screen for staff who may benefit from additional praise training. To determine whether there is a correlation between higher amounts of effective praise use and more praise knowledge, future studies should consider assessing educator praise knowledge with the PKATE while also collecting data on actual praise use through brief observations.

### **Implications**

Results from this study add to the research supporting the fact that praise is an acceptable strategy to manage student behavior. In addition to its high social validity and feasibility, praise is a low-cost strategy that can produce a large impact on school systems without incurring the high price tags seen in school improvement programs that require

the purchase of materials, countless staff trainings, or software. Further, praise is a strategy that will produce significant changes in student behavior without demanding significant teacher time and effort, as only a few seconds are required to acknowledge correct behavior. Considering these benefits, schools should prioritize this strategy and ensure that all educators have the knowledge and skills necessary to implement effective praise.

Despite the low cost and effort required for implementation, praise is an effective strategy. Most current and past research has demonstrated the effectiveness of praise as an individualized, Tier 3 strategy; however, there is growing support for its use as a universal, Tier 1 strategy (Zakszeski et. al., 2020). For example, Zakszeski and colleagues (2020) examined teachers' frequency of praise and class-wide on-task, student behaviors in a Tier 1 setting. Thirty-three teachers were provided direct praise training, while 24 received no training. Classrooms were observed before and after the praise trainings. Results indicated differences between trained and untrained teacher classrooms. In classrooms with trained teachers, increased teacher praise resulted in a 10% increase in class-wide on-task behavior, whereas no change was seen among untrained teachers (Zakszeski et. al., 2020). This study demonstrates the utility of praise not only as a Tier 3 strategy, but as a universal, Tier 1 strategy with all students, class wide. When educators recognize appropriate behavior across all students, this proactive approach positively impacts the on-task behavior of the class. Therefore, through implementing a low effort, time conscious strategy such as praise as a universal Tier 1 intervention, teachers can reduce their workload by decreasing their need to reprimand students and redirect off-task behavior.

Results from this study suggest that education staff receive infrequent praise from their administrators or supervisors, which was related to workplace dissatisfaction and perceptions of a negative school climate. Despite its simplicity, delivering praise may be challenging for teachers. This is likely because teaching is a complex task, and it is difficult to teach and simultaneously use praise effectively (Floress et al., 2021). Without learning to teach and use effective praise effortlessly, teachers may be more inclined to point out student misbehavior, rather than recognizing appropriate behavior.

Administrators may also be more likely to provide educational staff corrective feedback, rather than pointing out instances in which their performance was adequate or acceptable. Moreover, because administration is at the top of the school system's chain of command, they may be less likely to receive praise training themselves, which also likely impacts their ability to use praise effectively (Gove, 2005).

Nonetheless, the current results indicate that administrator praise is significantly related to employees' perceptions of a positive school climate and positive workplace feelings. Praise from supervisors and administrators is a critical component of creating a positive workplace that encourages productivity, improves morale, alleviates stress, and supports staff retention (Gove, 2005). In a study investigating the association between praise from nurse unit managers and factors related to employee job satisfaction, employees who reported to receive manager praise "*often*" described higher job satisfaction, a more positive work climate, increased commitment to the organization, and increased willingness to make effort for the unit and hospital (Sveinsdóttir et. al., 2016). Therefore, by increasing administrator praise, administrators and supervisors may be able

to improve workplace feelings and perceived school climate as well as overall staff retention and productivity.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, results from this study suggest that educators in the current sample had below average to slightly below average knowledge of effective praise use, as measured by the PKATE. Despite attempts to improve reliability from previous iterations of the measure, continued poor internal consistency limited the interpretation of total PKATE scores. Overall, educators in this sample found praise to be a highly acceptable strategy for managing student behavior. Considering benefits such as its high social validity, proven efficacy, and low-cost and time-efficient implementation, educators should prioritize praise as a behavior management strategy in their schools. In addition to adding to the research supporting praise for the purpose of improving student outcomes, the current study shines light on the importance of administrator praise received by staff. Research suggests that teachers without explicit training use praise in their classrooms infrequently; therefore, it may not be surprising that educators report to receive praise infrequently from administrators. Considering the implications for school climate and staff retention, administrator acknowledgement and approval of staff is essential. Continued research in this area is likely to assist in finding reliable and valid methods to assess and train educators use of praise with students and staff.

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Appendix A: Demographic Information

1. Please provide the name of the school or school district in which you are employed.

2. Please indicate your sex

\_\_\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_\_\_ Female

3. Please indicate your racial background

\_\_\_\_\_ American Indian/Alaska

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian American

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino American

\_\_\_\_\_ Pacific Islander/Hawaiian

\_\_\_\_\_ Black/African American

\_\_\_\_\_ Middle Eastern

\_\_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian

\_\_\_\_\_ Two or more

4. Please indicate your age \_\_\_\_\_ Age

5. Which best describes your job title

\_\_\_\_\_ Administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal, dean)

\_\_\_\_\_ Support staff (e.g., counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse)

\_\_\_\_\_ General Education Teacher (please indicate all grades you currently teach)

\_\_\_\_\_ Special Education Teacher (please indicate all grades you currently teach)

\_\_\_\_\_ Special Education Aide/Teacher Aide

\_\_\_\_\_ Specials Teacher (e.g., band, art, physical education, library, music)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other—please specify (e.g., coach, resource officer, custodian, bus monitor, lunch staff)

6. Years of experience in your position \_\_\_\_\_ Years

7. Please indicate your highest level of education

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than high school

\_\_\_\_\_ High school diploma or equivalent

\_\_\_\_\_ Some college, no degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Postsecondary non-degree award



## Appendix B: PKATE Elementary Form

Note: Praise is defined as a verbal statement or a gesture (non-physical or physical) that provides a student positive feedback for a desired behavior that goes beyond acknowledging a correct academic response. (Brophy 1981; Hester, Hendrickson, & Gable, 2009)

Note: An effective classroom management tool is defined as a strategy used by a teacher that leads to a positive change in student behavior.

-  
Open-ended questions:

1. Is praise an effective classroom management tool? (YES/NO)

If answer NO- no open-ended question.

If answer YES- Please describe or give an example of how effective praise is used with students.

Multiple choice:

Each question is intended to be a situation that could occur in an elementary school setting. When answering each question, please imagine you are faced with the scenario described (regardless of your assigned job in the school setting). Although there may be certain aspects of each answer that is correct, PLEASE SELECT THE BEST ANSWER.

1. Student A is a child who always lines up when asked, whereas Student B is an at-risk student who frequently is prompted 2-3 times before he lines up. Today, you notice that both boys line-up when asked (without any reminders). Which is an example of using praise to promote lining up when asked?

a. "Student A, thank you for lining up.")

b. "Student A and Student B, good job lining up!"

c. "Student A, nice job lining up. Student B, thank you for lining up the first time you were asked!) \*\*\*

d. Praise neither of the boys because lining up when asked is a school expectation.

2. The group of students you are supervising are more disruptive than usual. Which of the following is an example of using positive feedback to promote appropriate behavior?

- a. "I see that Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D are sitting quietly. Nice job!" \*\*\*
  - b. "Yesterday, you were all behaving. Today I see Student A and Student B are quiet, Thanks Student A and Student B!"
  - c. Stand silently in front of the group of students and wait for them to settle down, then provide praise once they quiet down.
  - d. Tell Student A and Student B (who are currently the rowdiest students) to settle down and then praise Student A and Student B when they are quiet ("Thank you, Student A and Student B).
3. Which of the following is theorized to be a superior form of praise?
- a. "excellent job"
  - b. A preferred tangible (e.g., M&Ms; gum)
  - c. "Thank you for getting out the books you need." \*\*\*
  - d. Gesture (e.g., thumbs)
4. Student A is a student who has a difficult time paying attention. Today, you notice that instead of doodling or looking out the window, the student is attentively working. Which is an example of using positive feedback to promote on-task behavior?
- a. Later that day pull Student A aside and provide positive feedback for paying attention in class.
  - b. Walk by Student A and provide positive feedback to him/her and other students nearby for working attentively.
  - c. Walk by Student A while he/she is working and quietly provide positive feedback for working attentively. \*\*\*
  - d. Provide positive feedback to all the students for paying attention, so you don't draw attention to just Student A.
5. One way to determine whether your use of praise is effective is ...
- a. To assess whether the targeted problem behavior decreased. \*\*\*
  - b. To assess whether student engagement increased.

- c. To assess whether student intrinsic motivation increased.
  - d. To assess whether student academic motivation increased.
6. Student A is a student with behavior problems. He/she is prone to physical altercations with other students, yells, and is even verbally aggressive to school staff. You want to build a better relationship with Student A, but also want his/her behavior to improve. What can you do to accomplish this?
- a. When Student A has an aggressive outburst, and successfully calms down, praise him/her for calming down.
  - b. Wait for Student A to demonstrate pro-social behaviors (e.g., behave appropriately) for the day, then praise him/her at the end of the day.
  - c. When Student A is verbally aggressive, pull him/her aside and provide support by praising his/her previous pro-social behaviors (e.g., previous times he/she has behaved appropriately).
  - d. Look for frequent opportunities to praise Student A, before he/she misbehaves. \*\*\*
7. Which of the following examples is the most effective form of praise?
- a. A fist bump (Gesture)
  - b. A note that states "You Rock!" with the student's name (Tangible)
  - c. "Nice work"
  - d. "Awesome job getting your homework in this week!" \*\*\*
8. You notice that students are more disrespectful lately (e.g., not following directions, talking back, arguing). You know that responding to desirable behaviors is one way to decrease unwanted behavior, therefore, to increase appropriate behavior you should...
- a. Spend some time explaining why talking back is disrespectful and unacceptable.
  - b. Identify and provide specific praise (e.g., thank you for following directions) to students who follow directions \*\*\*
  - c. Implement discipline (e.g., send the student to the office or "write them up," for disrespectful behavior) when they talk back.

- d. Engage with the student in a way that illustrates why they should not be disrespectful (e.g., “Do you talk to your grandma [or person who is important to you] like that?”).
9. Student A struggles academically and has reading difficulties. It is common for Student A to misbehave during reading instruction and as a result is sent out of the classroom. You wonder if Student A’s misbehavior is maintained by avoiding reading tasks, and you want to find a way to keep him/her in the classroom. Which is an example of praise that might help you accomplish this goal?
- a. Let Student A know that you want to help him/her be a better reader and therefore you will not be sending her out of the room anymore when he/she is disruptive.
- b. Have Student A read a few lines, praise him/her for working hard and let him/her take a break before prompting him/her to read again. \*\*\*
- c. Praise Student B, who is reading and sitting next to Student A, in hopes that Student A will also begin reading.
- d. Praise Student A for his/her appropriate behavior the previous day (e.g., “Student A, you did a great job engaging in our reading activity yesterday...I wish you were ready to read now.”).
10. Which students are most likely to benefit from effective praise?
- a. Students in middle and high school.
- b. Students in elementary school.
- c. Students receiving special education services
- d. Students identified with an Emotional Disturbance or Behavior Disorder.\*\*\*

Appendix C: BIRS-P

Directions: Please select the option that best describes how you feel about each statement.		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Teacher praise is an acceptable strategy for increasing student appropriate behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Teacher praise effectively reduces student problem behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I would suggest using praise to other teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Teacher praise should not only improve the students' behavior in the classroom, but also in other settings (e.g., other classrooms, home)	1	2	3	4	5
5	Teacher praise would <i>not</i> result in negative side effects for students.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I like using teacher praise.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Overall, teacher praise is beneficial to students.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Most teachers would find praise acceptable for increasing a variety of appropriate student behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Teacher praise improves the teacher/student relationship					
10	I would suggest using praise to other teachers struggling to manage student problem behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Teacher praise would improve the child's behavior to the point that it would not noticeably deviate from other classmates' behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I think it is acceptable for teachers to praise students for appropriate behavior.	1	2	3	4	5



## Appendix E: Email to School Administrators

Dear administrator,

My name is Madison Fisher and I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student in the School Psychology Graduate Program at Eastern Illinois University. For my thesis, my chair (Dr. Floress) and I have developed a tool to assess teachers' knowledge of praise. We are hopeful that this will be useful for schools in that praise is a key component of any school-wide positive behavior intervention support (SWPBIS) framework (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). Furthermore, praise is an easy, effective, and low-cost strategy that increases student appropriate and on-task behavior (Illinois PBIS, 2018). Our goal is that in the future, schools will be able to administer this 10-question measure named the Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers and Educators (PKATE) to school staff to help guide professional development needs. Research suggests that some school staff benefit from more direct feedback and support in their delivery of praise (Sutherland, Wehby, and Copeland, 2000). We hope to be able to deliver this information, so schools can target professional development to their staff in a way that is both time and cost efficient.

We are asking you to have everyone employed at your school to complete these two measures. The PKATE has 10 items and the BIRS-P, which assesses whether someone finds praise to be an acceptable strategy, has 12 items. Employees at your school will be able to answer these questions on-line and we expect it to take 5-10 minutes to complete. Your school's participation would help us further develop the PKATE for future use. In exchange for your school's participation, we can provide you a summary report on your school's performance broken down by staff categories (i.e., administrators, teachers, special education teachers, support staff, etc). We will not be able to give specific staff feedback and all data will be collected without asking staff for personal information (i.e., names). We have two versions of the PKATE, one for elementary schools (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) and another for middle and high schools (6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. We would love to follow-up with you in person to answer any questions you have. Thank you for considering your schools for participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email [mbfisher@eiu.edu](mailto:mbfisher@eiu.edu) or Dr. Floress at [mfloress@eiu.edu](mailto:mfloress@eiu.edu).

Best,

Madison Fisher  
School Psychology Graduate Student  
Eastern Illinois University

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Demographic Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Participant Sex</b>		
Female	193	94
Male	13	6
<b>Racial Background</b>		
White/Caucasian	186	90
Black/African American	9	4
Prefer not to answer	7	3
Two or more races	2	1
Asian	1	.1
American Indian	1	.1
<b>Position</b>		
General Education Teacher	96	47
Support Staff	38	18
Special Education Teacher	25	12
Specials Teacher	19	9
Aide	12	6
Other	12	6
Administration	4	2
<b>Grade</b>		
Kindergarten	42	13
First	50	15
Second	45	14
Third	46	14
Fourth	33	10
Fifth	37	11
Unspecified	73	22
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
1-5	78	38
6-10	33	16
11-15	43	21
16-20	17	8
20+	35	17
	<i>n</i>	%

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Highest Degree Obtained			
	Masters	126	61
	Bachelors	67	32
	Doctorate	3	1
	Post-secondary nondegree	2	1
	Some college, no degree	2	1
	Highschool diploma or equiv.	4	2
	Associates	2	1

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Behavioral Management Course Taken			
	Yes	94	46
	No	100	49
	Other	12	6

Table 2

*PKATE Theoretical Scoring*

PKATE Score	Score Classification	Percentile
30-10	Significantly Below Expectation	< 25%
31-32	Below Expectation	25-49%
33-35	Slightly Below Expectation	50-79%
36-37	Meeting Expectation	80-89%
38-40	Above Expectation	> 90%

*\*Expectation = score at or above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile*

Table 3

*Educators' Average PKATE Score and Knowledge Classification by Position*

Educator Category	(n = 206)	Average Score	Score Classification
General Education Teacher	96	32.64	Slightly Below Expectation
Support Staff	38	32.10	Below Expectation
Special Education Teacher	25	33.28	Slightly Below Expectation
Specials Teacher	19	32.89	Slightly Below Expectation
Aide	12	32.25	Below Expectation
Other	12	31.83	Below Expectation
Administration	4	32.25	Below Expectation

*\*Expectation = score at or below the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile*

*\*\* 80<sup>th</sup> percentile = score of 36*

Table 4

*PKATE Factor Loadings*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Item 1				.522
Item 2	.419			
Item 3	.650			
Item 4		-.425		
Item 5			.659	
Item 6		.442		
Item 7	.644			
Item 8	.467			
Item 9	.472			
Item 10		.474		.728

*Factor loadings are based on a principle components analysis with varimax (orthogonal) rotation for 10 items from the PKATE (n = 206)*

*Note. Factor loadings < .4 were suppressed.*

Table 5

*PKATE Item Breakdown*

PKATE Item	Knowledge Area	Response Ranking	Participant Responses ( <i>n</i> = 206)	% Participant Responses	Descriptive Summary
Item 1	BSP Prevention	1	5	24	65% gave best response
		2	0	0	
		3	<b>133</b>	<b>65</b>	
		4	68	33	
Item 2	BSP	1	13	63	74% gave best response
		2	28	14	
		3	12	6	
		4	<b>152</b>	<b>74</b>	
Item 3	BSP	1	25	12	70% gave best response
		2	17	8	
		3	20	10	
		4	<b>144</b>	<b>70</b>	
Item 4	BSP Prevention Immediacy	1	17	8	62% gave best response
		2	8	4	
		3	53	26	
		4	<b>128</b>	<b>62</b>	
Item 5	Function	1	37	18	59% gave best response
		2	8	4	
		3	<b>122</b>	<b>59</b>	
		4	39	19	
Item 6	Prevention Immediacy	1	13	6	83% gave best response
		2	2	1	
		3	19	9	
		4	<b>172</b>	<b>83</b>	
Item 7	BSP	1	13	7	63% gave best response
		2	56	27	
		3	7	3	
		4	<b>130</b>	<b>63</b>	
Item 8	BSP	1	0	0	70% gave best response
		2	26	13	
		3	36	17	
		4	<b>144</b>	<b>70</b>	

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Item 9					
	Function	1	34	17	
	Prevention	2	12	6	75% gave
	Immediacy	3	5	2	best response
		4	155	<b>75</b>	
Item 10					
		1	8	4	
	Prevention	2	122	<b>59</b>	32% gave
		3	10	5	best response
		4	66	32	

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*Note. PKATE response ranking of 1 indicates least correct answer; ranking of 4 indicates most correct answer*

Table 6

*Educators' Average BIRS-P Score by Position*

Educator Category	( <i>n</i> = 206)	Average Score
General Education Teacher	96	50.31
Support Staff	38	50.95
Special Education Teacher	25	52.00
Specials Teacher	19	49.42
Aide	12	51.45
Other	12	49.75
Administration	4	47.75

Table 7

*Educators' Reported Praise Received from Administrators*

Frequency of praise	N (200)	Percentage
0 – Never	45	22.5
1 – Rarely	8	4
2 – Once every 6 months	21	10.5
3 – Once a year	38	19
4 – Once every 3 months	6	3
5 – Once a month	26	13
6 – Once every 2 weeks	10	5
7 – Once a week	30	15
8 – Twice a week	11	5.5
9 – Daily	5	2.5