



## OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY  
Geoff Lindsay,  
University of Warwick, United Kingdom

\*CORRESPONDENCE  
David James Royer  
✉ david.royer@louisville.edu

RECEIVED 22 June 2025  
ACCEPTED 30 June 2025  
PUBLISHED 23 July 2025

CITATION  
Royer DJ and Ennis RP (2025) Editorial:  
Behavior-specific praise in preK-12 settings:  
expanding the knowledge base.  
*Front. Educ.* 10:1651871.  
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1651871

COPYRIGHT  
© 2025 Royer and Ennis. This is an  
open-access article distributed under the  
terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution  
License \(CC BY\)](#). The use, distribution or  
reproduction in other forums is permitted,  
provided the original author(s) and the  
copyright owner(s) are credited and that the  
original publication in this journal is cited, in  
accordance with accepted academic practice.  
No use, distribution or reproduction is  
permitted which does not comply with these  
terms.

# Editorial: Behavior-specific praise in preK-12 settings: expanding the knowledge base

David James Royer <sup>1\*</sup> and Robin Parks Ennis <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Special Education, Early Childhood, and Prevention Science, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, United States, <sup>2</sup>Department of Special Education, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, United States

## KEYWORDS

behavior-specific praise (BSP), tootling, low-intensity strategy, positive behavioral interventions and supports, challenging behavior

## Editorial on the Research Topic

Behavior-specific praise in preK-12 settings: expanding the knowledge base

Behavior-specific praise (BSP) is a low-intensity strategy that involves providing explicit acknowledgment of desired behavior. This typically serves as positive reinforcement (attention) and increases the future likelihood the recipient will display the behavior again. BSP involves providing a statement of approval (e.g., “thank you for...”) in addition to referencing a behavioral expectation (e.g., “...sharing your materials”). Thus, BSP serves as a consequence for appropriate behavior and a teaching strategy that emphasizes desired behaviors for the recipient and other students who overhear. Focusing on praising desired behaviors instead of waiting for and reprimanding misbehavior can lead to a more positive, productive, safe learning environment.

As a low-intensity strategy, BSP has been investigated in educational and psychological research since [Madsen et al. \(1968\)](#) first explored it. Numerous studies have evaluated methods (e.g., coaching, self-monitoring, bug-in-ear) to increase the rate of BSP (an *evidence-based practice*; [Ennis et al., 2020](#)). However, few studies have focused solely on the effects of BSP on student behavior (a *potentially evidence-based practice*; [Royer et al., 2019](#)). Additional studies have explored having peers praise one another, perhaps due to repeatedly finding the natural rates of teacher general praise and BSP are often close to zero (e.g., [Scott et al., 2017](#)). Therefore, the purpose of this Research Topic was to broaden the understanding of BSP and add new evidence to the research base for this low-intensity strategy.

## In this Research Topic

We were fortunate to be able to accept six articles for this Research Topic on expanding the knowledge base for BSP in preK-12 settings. Looking at the new experimental studies first, [Newton et al.](#) had second-grade co-teachers deliver BSP during literacy, which increased on-task behavior for four students with disabilities who were at high risk according to the Student Risk Screening Scale–Internalizing and Externalizing (SRSS-IE).

A functional relation was established for all, with a large between-case standardized mean difference (BC-SMD) effect size of 1.90 [95% CI (1.16, 2.63)]. Notably, the special education teacher supported her general education co-teacher with encouragement and reminders to increase BSP. Hogg et al. similarly trained a high-school automotive teacher to deliver BSP, resulting in four students at high risk on the SRSS-IE exhibiting increased on-task behavior with a large BC-SMD effect size of 0.89 [95% CI (0.08, 1.71)]; however, only two students established a functional relation. Surprisingly, the teacher delivered all BSP during the end-of-class debrief, but still had positive effects. Spurlock et al. showed 1:1 training to paraprofessionals to deliver BSP increased their confidence to support students with significant needs, with mixed results for on-task behavior, possibly due to the long 1-min partial interval recordings in the short 16-min observations, which created a ceiling effect.

Thoele and Sayeski investigated tootling, in which students praise one another on paper slips that are read aloud at the end of the day. The researchers compared student-led, teacher-led, and no-tootling conditions and found that both tootling conditions reduced all five students' disruptive behavior and increased academic engagement, albeit with some variability. Teachers and the majority of the students preferred the student-led tootling condition, demonstrating students' ability to facilitate positive classroom supports. Royer and Ennis similarly explored peer-delivered BSP in a systematic literature review with quality appraisal and meta-analysis. They determined student-delivered BSP in the form of tootling had a large effect size and was an *evidence-based practice* (Council for Exceptional Children, 2014); positive peer reporting, in which peers praised a daily "star" during designated class time, had *mixed evidence* and a small effect size; and peer praise notes required additional research studies for a complete evaluation. Perez et al. revisited past BSP literature reviews, microcoding professional learning elements. Their results revealed few BSP studies reported the fidelity of BSP training or included a check for understanding. These literature reviews, combined with lessons learned from the experimental studies in this Research Topic highlight challenges faced with applied research, further stress the need for researchers to design studies with quality indicators in mind, sufficient participant numbers, and to report fidelity data across all conditions and trainings.

## Educational implications

Each article in this Research Topic on BSP added unique contributions to our understanding of the strategy's effectiveness. For example, BSP appears to be more effective for younger students and when attention is the function of challenging behavior. Together, these articles serve as a call to future researchers and educators using this strategy: First, more research is needed on the effectiveness of teacher-delivered BSP on student outcomes, using a variety of students and contexts (e.g., different ages, abilities, school levels, classroom types). Second, researchers using a single-case research design should consider including four or more participants to protect against attrition because three are needed to contribute to the evidence base. Third, while BSP has the potential to reinforce desired behavior, it is likely to be most

effective when the behavioral function involves seeking attention. This was possibly evidenced when some students responded more dramatically to BSP than other students in the same study (e.g., Newton et al.; Hogg et al.). Future researchers should explore performing brief functional analyses to determine whether BSP attention would be reinforcing for participants. If not, they should consider adding low-intensity strategies to create a packaged intervention (Lane et al., 2018).

Fourth, to ensure studies contribute to the evidence base in a methodologically sound way, we strongly encourage researchers to design studies with quality indicators in mind (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children, 2014). Fifth, as a related quality indicator, researchers should plan for, collect, and report procedural fidelity across all conditions, including baseline/control and training (Perez et al.). This confirms interventions occurred as described and allows the field to develop a clear picture of what has worked, not worked, and what has not yet been tried, thus forming future steps to investigate BSP effectiveness.

When examining BSP with students, researchers should keep in mind educators may need varying levels of support to increase praise. Similar to tiered approaches for supporting students, researchers should plan on coaching beyond the initial BSP training. Coaching may not be needed (e.g., Hogg et al.; Newton et al.; Spurlock et al. for two paraeducators), but research should be ready to provide coaching, with a phase change. Finally, given the demands placed on teachers, we remind readers students can praise each other with great success. Student-delivered BSP can take numerous forms, including student-led tootling (Thoele and Sayeski), and is supported by extensive research documenting its effectiveness (Royer and Ennis).

## Author contributions

DR: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. RE: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

## Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

## References

- Council for Exceptional Children (2014). *Council for Exceptional Children Standards for Evidence-Based Practices in Special Education*.
- Ennis, R. P., Royer, D. J., Lane, K. L., and Dunlap, K. D. (2020). The impact of coaching on teacher-delivered behavior-specific praise in preK-12 settings: a systematic review. *Behav. Disord.* 45, 148–166. doi: 10.1177/0198742919839221
- Lane, K. L., Menzies, H. M., Ennis, R. P., and Oakes, W. P. (2018). Effective low-intensity strategies to enhance school success: what every educator needs to know. *Beyond Behav.* 27, 128–133. doi: 10.1177/1074295618799044
- Madsen, C. H., Becker, W. C., and Thomas, D. R. (1968). Rules, praise, and ignoring: elements of elementary classroom control. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* 1, 139–150. doi: 10.1901/jaba.1968.1-139
- Royer, D. J., Lane, K. L., Dunlap, K. D., and Ennis, R. P. (2019). A systematic review of teacher-delivered behavior-specific praise on K-12 student performance. *Remedial Spec. Educ.* 40, 112–128. doi: 10.1177/0741932517751054
- Scott, T. M., Hirn, R. G., and Cooper, J. T. (2017). *Teacher and Student Behaviors: Keys to Success in Classroom Instruction*. Rowman and Littlefield.