

Case Study: Low Achieving & Hostile Aggressive Student

In the beginning of November I was hired for a position as a 2nd grade teacher. During my first week I had a new boy, Kurt, enter my classroom from a different school. He seemed very sweet, hard working, and thankfully not a behavior problem in the classroom. Kurt was very low academically and hard to understand when he spoke. During the first parent teacher conference with Kurt's mother she was surprised by all of the positive things I had shared with her about her son. Kurt's mother told me that he was kicked out of his last school due to his behavior. I was very surprised by everything that she shared with me including his violence towards others, loud disruptions, and defiance towards authority. She warned me that one day he will display these behaviors and to be ready for them.

Frequency of Problem

In the months of November and December Kurt only had two days where he displayed behaviors his mother had informed me of. On both of his off days he seemed like a completely different child. He was disruptive and unsafe in both incidences which led to suspensions. Both days he yelled, hit, bit, and threatened me. He started fights with other students and was very rude and disrespectful towards everyone in the school community. He tried climbing out the classroom window, left the room without permission, and finally left the school building to walk home.

Initially, I was not worried about the situation with Kurt's behavior because it was so sporadic. By the beginning of January Kurt's behavior and attitude negatively changed. Every day his behaviors resembled what I saw on the days he was previously suspended. Kurt was rude, disrespectful, violent, and created large disruptions daily. It became hard to get anything

done in the classroom because of his behavior. Kurt's unwanted behaviors quickly became a serious problem.

Severity of Problem

The problems Kurt are faced with run deep. As an infant he was abused by his mother and was later adopted. His adoptive mother adopted two of his birth sisters who were also abused physically and sexually. Although his adoptive mother has tried hard with Kurt and his sisters there are a lot of struggles raising them. Kurt is diagnosed with ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and qualifies for speech resources. He is currently on seven different medications which he only takes at home. Kurt meets with both a school social worker and therapist monthly. Unfortunately his mother has not seen either of those resources creating improvements in Kurt's behavior.

Description of Problems

Kurt has severe behavioral and academic concerns. I believe that some of his academic struggles are due to his behavior. Academically Kurt is very low and struggles in all content areas. Kurt would be classified as a Low-Achieving Student. At times he is willing to work and try hard but still has difficulty. Kurt can be described as a slow learner who is not progressing at a normal rate and thus is not keeping up with the class, (Brophy, 65). As a second grade student his ability is only at Kindergarten level. When he entered my classroom in November his DRA level was only a B and his DIBELS score was very low as well. By January he had not made any improvements in his reading fluency or comprehension. All of his test scores were low, many times he received a 0% even when I retested him individually. Kurt is not able to form a

complete thought or complete sentence when writing. His handwriting is impossible to read, I believe it is because he rushes to finish, not because he does not know how to write. Kurt is not able to take charge of his own learning, he needs assistance from me on most assignments and class work. Behaviorally Kurt can be described as a hostile-aggressive student. He is easily angered, direct, and has intense behaviors that escalate quickly. Brophy uses these characteristics to explain hostile-aggressive students, (171). Kurt causes large class disruptions preventing others from learning and working. He can be violent towards others and me by hitting, kicking, punching, throwing objects, yelling in classmate faces, and flipping desks over. He frequently leaves the room without permission and runs around the school, sometimes leaving the school building and school property. He can be rude, disrespectful, and bossy. He makes many demands to me trying to get what he wants. If I do not comply he will usually destroy the classroom or start bullying other students. Kurt is not able to work with other students because of his behavior and poor social skills. Prior to interventions Kurt noticed that students did not want to work with him anymore.

Manifested Problems in Classroom

It was very evident what caused Kurt's outbursts and violence in the classroom, as well as what kept him calm. A problem never occurred when Kurt had control of the situation. Kurt wants to make his own decisions, and does not want to be told what to do or how to do it. As long as I did not correct Kurt's behavior or academic work he was in control of his behavior and emotions. As long as he thought he was doing the work correctly he was calm. If he was able to clean and help in the class he displayed correct behaviors. During the times that problems did not occur with Kurt I had given him lots of praise, positive talk, attention, and support.

Referring to Brophy's general attributes of an effective socializer I had established a sense of social attractiveness and friendliness when working with Kurt.

When I asked Kurt to do something differently, or when he was told no, he usually became upset and his unwanted behaviors surfaced. If I told him to fix something or finish something that he thought was done he became angry at me. If Kurt did not feel confident doing an assignment he would shut down, start crying, and refuse to do the work. When he worked with others it usually created a problem. During the times that Kurt's problems were occurring I was very firm, but my patience ran out quickly.

One specific situation that caused Kurt's unwanted behavior was when I told him he could not use the bathroom at the moment he asked. I was instructing math and felt he needed to wait a few minutes until the lesson was over. Kurt then hung from tables, did flips off the tables, made very loud noises, did flips on the floor next to students, said the school was stupid and did not want to be there. In another situation I did not let him use tape because he had been previously wasting it. He was then disrespectful, yelled at other students, walked around the room, crawled under desks, scribbled on papers, then threw the papers, and again said the school was stupid. In both situations he left the room without permission.

Kurt's unwanted behaviors are most evident when he feels the work is too hard. In one example of this he started by refusing to complete his math assignment. Kurt then crawled on the floor, stomped around the room, grabbed pencils and papers out of the other student's hands, and was very loud. Kurt walked out of the room and remained in the hallway. He told me that he would not do anything I told him to do. He walked into the room and started coloring with markers because he knew he was not supposed to be doing it at that time. Kurt again made his

way around the room while he pushed students and talked in a manner that was rude and disrespectful. He walked up to random students and said, "I'm getting ready to slap you upside the head." He again left the room without permission. I sent a student to the office with Kurt's behavior referral and Kurt chased him down the hallway, jumped on him, and tried to take the referral form. Kurt's behavior continued like this all day because he thought one assignment was too hard and I was not providing him with what he felt was enough support.

Professional Stance at Beginning

When I began working with Kurt I did not have many of Brophy's systematic approaches to socialize students or general attributes of effective socializers in place. I tended to be warm and friendly or firm, the two usually did not occur at the same time. The systematic approaches that I did have in place when I started working with Kurt were positive expectations and reinforcement. I always treated Kurt as a well intentioned individual and understood the struggles he was going through. I always tried to convey my expectations in way that is a friendly reminder, not in a mean and punishing tone. I provided a lot of reinforcements through praise and material rewards. I praised him when he showed he was in control of his behaviors and made good choices. I used stickers and candy for extrinsic rewards. Evidence of social attractiveness were in place prior to the invention when I made a conscious effort to say good morning to Kurt, ask how he is doing, and asked him to show me his smile which made him laugh. I have always accepted Kurt but made it known that I do not accept all of his behaviors. When his was emotionally and behaviorally out of control I reacted in some way that showed him what he was doing was unacceptable. In many cases I calmly asked him to stop doing the behavior, if it continued I took objects away from him, removed him from the situation, and in extreme situations, I removed him from the classroom.

Description of Changes

I started out with very small changes when working with Kurt. The first change I tried to make was with my attitude towards Kurt and my overall teaching stance. I focused on really being patient, flexible, and providing many opportunities of correction before providing consequences. I tried to use more praise and less consequences or at least less severe punishments. I maintained constant communication with Kurt through discussing both the positive changes he made and the areas we still needed to focus on for changes. There were four main interventions that I implemented over the course of this case study in addition to the changes of my teaching stance. I worked on socialization with Kurt, providing extrinsic motivation and rewards, a home note behavior contract, and an academic Correction Action Plan.

When Kurt showed correct behavior I tried to spend time working on socialization skills. I focused on teaching him self-help strategies to use when his unwanted behaviors started to surface, as well as important social skills for working with others. I had to daily revisit all of the social skills I taught Kurt. I suggested that when he gets frustrated he should not take it out on others. Kurt requires a lot of support and attention. One of the things I reminded him is that he cannot always have help from the teacher the minute he wants help because there are other students that also need help. I have suggested to him that when he is feeling overwhelmed and I am not available he can do two things. He can ask his assigned buddy, she is a very helpful and kind student, or he can patiently wait until I am available to help him. The behavior I have explained to him that we want to avoid is when he becomes overwhelmed and frustrated to the point where he starts to be destructive and a disruption to the entire class. In order to provide Kurt with more support academically I taught him ways to work through a problem on his own. He was struggling with double digit math and everyday he cried over it. As soon as I handed

him counting cubes he was able to calm down and tried working on the problems. It took about a week to socialize him on taking responsibility for his own learning and going to get the cubes when he felt he needed them. Now he is able to get the counting cubes on his own before he has a meltdown. I tried socializing Kurt to avoid jumping to conclusions. Many times another student did something by accident and Kurt was very quick to yell and be rude towards them. I explained to him that accidents happen and it is important to be polite. Kurt is always checking to see who is not doing something correctly, and when he finds someone he is very quick to rudely correct them. If someone is reading the wrong book he will rip it out of their hand, shout in their face, “read a harder book,” and then throw the book. I told him that I think it is nice that he is looking out for others in his class but he needs to do it nicely. I asked him to put himself in the other persons shoes and explained that he does not always do the right thing. We discussed that he would not want someone to rudely correct his behavior therefore he should try to nicely correct others behaviors. I taught Kurt a strategy called the Turtle Technique, (Brophy, 183). I told him that it was called Turtle Time so it had a quick and fun name. This was a technique that was intended to be used when he felt that he was getting overwhelmed or was going to react in a way that was not acceptable. He was taught to imagine himself as a turtle that goes into his shell when he is angry instead of lashing out. He learned to sit down, place his head in his arms, relax physically, take time to calm down, and then think of nonaggressive ways to react to the situation.

After a few weeks of Kurt’s behavior being out of control I asked his mother to come in for a conference. I used the information about Behavior Contracts from the BEST Practices Book (65) and implemented a Behavior Contract that would be taken home daily for Kurt’s mother to see. Together his mother and I determined four goals that we thought were the most

important for him to focus on. I was most concerned with his behavior so I suggested Be Respectful and Be Safe. These are two of the schools Three Bees that are used for Positive Behavior Support. I explained to Kurt's mother that although Kurt's behavior is a major concern that needs to be dealt with immediately, we also need to pay close attention to his academic progress. I asked Kurt's mother what academic goals she would like to see her son focus on that we could include in the Behavior Contract. Kurt's mother suggested tracking his handwriting and his reading. I agreed with both of them because Kurt does struggle in those areas and it would be something that he could be successful at on his Behavior Contract. I added to the handwriting goal sentence structure because many times Kurt does not write a complete thought. As a way to track Kurt's reading I put three different reading choices for each day on his Behavior Contract, Read to Self, Read to Partner, and Read to Teacher. As long as Kurt chose to read he was showing success on his Behavior Report in one way. After discussing with Kurt's mother what the goals would be I explained to her it would be the most effective if she provided rewards and consequences at home depending on his day. For days that he mostly had stickers she should reward him with extra tv time, extra dessert, or even creating a grab bag of small prizes. I suggested to her different rewards that were mentioned in the BEST Practices book from the Home note section (34). On days that Kurt did not have stickers I suggested that she provide consequences such as no tv time and going to bed an hour early. The BEST Practices Book explained that it is important to discuss with the parent what to do if the child does not bring home the behavior contract. I explained to Kurt's mother that if he does not come home with his behavior contract assume that he had a very bad day and use the same consequences that are recommended for bad days. I told her that on days there is a substitute he should ask the substitute to complete his behavior contract. The following Monday after meeting with Kurt's

mother I sat down with Kurt and showed him his behavior contract. I explained to him how it worked, what his goals were, the importance of taking the contract home every day, and the possible rewards and consequences he could earn.

Kurt always responded well to praise and rewards. When I implemented the Behavior Contract I increased both the verbal praise and extrinsic rewards. I explained to Kurt when we started his Behavior Contract that he would be rewarded for great days, and great weeks. I told him that once he hit four cumulative weeks of perfect days I would buy him a brand new book for him to keep. The BEST Practices Book recommends using cumulative requirements because it makes it easier for the child to reach (35). I did not tell Kurt I would give him random rewards for bringing it back signed because then he would expect it and ask for it. At the end of two weeks I gave Kurt a surprise reward for being so responsible and taking his Behavior Contract home every night and bringing it back to school signed. I rewarded him the day after he had a very bad day because he still took it home and showed his mother. Daily I gave him lots of verbal praise and some extrinsic rewards like candy for being a good listener and making good choices.

The Corrective Action Plan was intervention strategy I used to focus on Kurt's academic progress. I discussed the CAP Plan with Kurt's mother the same day that she came in to discuss starting the Behavior Contract. The CAP Plan focused on what the student will do, what the parent will do, and what the teacher will do. I explained to her that his reading is very low, and he had not made any progress since entering second grade. I suggested that she have Kurt read to her every night and that she ask him lots of questions about what he reads. I suggested that she makes sure Kurt is doing his homework but also completing it with quality handwriting and accuracy. Intervention services for reading and math began for Kurt immediately after creating

the CAP Plan. I provided more small-group instruction for Kurt and even one on one instruction. I began to administer a DIBELS test every Friday to track his reading and record it on his Behavior Contract. I explained to Kurt's mother that I would put assignments in his cubby that he needed to make up or redo and that they should be completed and returned. I also recommended that he attend summer school if possible.

Intervention Effectiveness (Behavior)

Overall I have seen a lot of improvement in Kurt's behavior. The improvements and successes do not occur every day, and especially not all day, but looking at a week at a time the improvements are evident. I feel that Kurt has made more improvements behaviorally. Kurt went about five weeks without showing any direct violence towards his classmates or towards me. With time Kurt was better able to recognize when he was becoming frustrated and he was able to remove himself away from a situation. Kurt was able to bring himself back together after poor behavior and not ruin an entire day. After a few weeks of doing the Behavior Contract Kurt had his first perfect day of four stickers. He was very proud of this, so proud that he showed the principal and his bus driver when he went home. I think that it really showed him he can be successful in school when he wants to, but he has to make the choice. Overall Kurt seems to be happier in school and making better behavior choices. He has even made progress working with others in groups.

Areas Still Needing Improvement (Behavior)

There are still areas needing improvement in Kurt's behavior. We still need to practice working on not becoming frustrated over little things. Kurt needs to make the choice not to worry about others and when he does feel like correcting others he needs to do it in a polite way.

Although he is able to move himself away from situations he still needs to work on controlling his yelling and tantrums when he becomes very upset. I need to spend more time teaching him self-help strategies to cool down before he reaches a point of becoming out of control. There have been set backs in his behavior, but he is usually able to start fresh the following day. About the fifth week into using the Behavior Contract Kurt was suspended. It was just a day where from the moment he walked in he made the wrong choice. He was rude, disrespectful, yelled all day, pushed students, grabbed things from others, refused to listen to any adult, and continued to say, "Your about to get slapped upside the head." As part of his behavior contract that the social worker constructed I sent Kurt of the classroom two times to talk with the behavior specialists but there were no changes in his behavior. The breaking point was when he left the room and ran up and down the hallway yelling, screaming, and crying. Every single teacher in the hallway came out to see the problem. He ended up leaving the school building and running two blocks away from the school. He was suspended for two days.

Intervention Effectiveness (Academic)

The biggest academic improvement I have seen in Kurt is his sense of responsibility. He has always struggled with completing his homework and returning it. However he has taken his Behavior Report home everyday over the course of six weeks except for one day. I think that is a very big accomplishment especially considering that his Behavior Report did not always have great things to say. As part of his responsibility with his Behavior Report he has done an outstanding job remembering to read every day and even reminding me to complete his Behavior Report at the end of each day. Kurt has been able take corrections I give him without becoming as upset as he did before the interventions. If I tell Kurt that he needs to be doing something different he will usually put what he is doing away and begin working. Kurt will admit when his

handwriting is not his best, most times he will rewrite it, sometimes he will refuse, and other times he will break down crying. He has been able to take tests without them being administered one on one for him. Most of the time Kurt will ask for help before he reaches a point of frustration. Kurt is able to take charge of his learning and get manipulatives or supplies on his own. Kurt's DIBELS Reading Score has almost doubled since we began doing his Behavior Contract.

Areas Still Needing Improvement (Academic)

Kurt is still very low academically and needs to make a lot more improvements over the remainder of the year. His overall reading fluency and comprehension are still very low. Kurt is unable to sound out words, instead he stops reading and asks what the word is. Kurt is still not producing quality work. It does not matter what the assignment is he scribbles on the paper in two seconds then turns it in. Most of the time when I ask him to fix it he will say he already did and refuse to fix it. He has not turned in any acceptable homework. When he does turn in homework it is scribbled and not finished. I have indicated on Kurt's Behavior Contract that work needs to be redone but I never get it back. He is missing a lot of grades because he will refuse to do the assignment or will not produce quality work. His grades continue to be very low.

Critique of Intervention

There are some things that I feel went very well with the interventions I implemented. I feel that Kurt's behavior is much better. Prior to implementing the Behavior Contract Kurt was constantly a large disruption to the entire classroom. He was preventing me from teaching as well as preventing kids from learning. There are few times now where Kurt's behavior is a large

disruption like it previously was, however it does not occur as frequently. I have very good communication with Kurt's mother and she is informed everyday of his behavior so nothing is a surprise to her. I have been able to provide a lot of verbal praise and extrinsic rewards. It is almost seven weeks that Kurt will be using the Behavior Contract. When I first implemented the Behavior Contract I had no idea how long it would last and how effective it would be. Overall I feel that there have only been positive changes. Obviously all of the behavior and academic concerns have not been fixed, but at the same time there have not been new concerns arise while using the Behavior Contract. I have had a much more positive teaching stance since implanting the Behavior Contract. I have been more calm and patient without becoming over emotional.

I have been able to keep Kurt's interest in using the Behavior Contract for six full weeks now, but it is starting to wear off. With this past week I have begun to notice that it is not as effective as it used to be. This week Kurt lost control of his behavior quicker and continued to make poor choices throughout the day instead of bouncing back. At this point I believe that I need to sit down with Kurt and discuss all of the positives that have occurred thus far. I also think that this would be a good time to implement a lot of the changes that I noted during the first six weeks of his contract. I would explain to him that we are starting a new round of his Behavior Contract and compare it to starting a new football game.

The first thing that I would change is the time frame of rewards. The first goal that I made for him was unobtainable. Instead of holding out for a large reward, I would focus on smaller ones. I would determine that rewards will be awarded for mostly perfect days and mostly perfect weeks. I would sit down with Kurt and generate a list of rewards he would like and determine how long the behavior needs to occur to receive the reward (one day vs. one week). Generating this list would be similar to creating a Grab Bag like described in the BEST

Practices Book (34). I would make two bags based on the lists we created, a bag of smaller prizes for the mostly perfect days, and a bag with larger prizes for mostly perfect weeks. I would discuss with Kurt that at times there will be surprise rewards, they will mostly occur from returning the Behavior Report signed after a “bad day.” I would still like to give Kurt something big to look forward to. I believe that one week of mostly perfect behavior instead of four would be more realistic for Kurt. In the six weeks tracking his behavior there was not one perfect week but there were many mostly perfect weeks. I hope that by reminding him of his weekly reward he will become more motivated.

As time went on using the Behavior Report I began to send home work that I felt was not quality work and needed to be redone. I always indicated on the report for that day what the work was and that it needed to be redone. Unfortunately, I have not received much of the work back. As I reflect on the past six weeks and prepare to revamp this Behavior Contract I think it would be the perfect time to discuss this with Kurt. I plan on explaining to him that on days he does not produce quality work I will indicate it on his Behavior Contract and attach the work. If he fixes the work or finishes the work at home and returns quality work he will receive a reward from the “perfect day” bag. This will hopefully give him motivation to not only fix the work and return it, but to also produce the quality work at home.

Professional Stance in the End

There have been different aspects of my professional stance that have changed some consciously while others occurred more unconsciously. Referring to Brophy’s keys to a systematic approach to socialize students, (Brophy, 20), I have increased the amount of modeling I use with Kurt as well as my entire class. I have modeled to Kurt the correct behavior in

particular situations, especially on how to think aloud and how to problem solve. I have not mastered all of Brophy's general attributes of effective socializers, (Brophy, 22), but I do have most of them in place to some extent. After implanting Kurt's Behavior Contract I became very patient and determined. The use of the Behavior Contract gave Kurt the motivation to change his behavior in a way that helped eliminated so much of my time being directed at correcting Kurt's behavior. As I became more patient the aspect of Ego Strength developed. It has been much easier to remain calm knowing that I have constant communication with Kurt's mother. It was easy to avoid power struggles because a previously determined plan was in place and I had the tools to follow a problem solving orientation. The aspect of Ego Strength and Realistic Perception of Self and Student went hand and hand. When I was calm and following a plan I did not develop hostility or anxiety. The time I spent discussing Kurt's behavior contract with him gave me the opportunity to develop the attributes of Positive Expectations, Firm but Flexible Limits, and the Clarity of Roles. Every afternoon I discussed with Kurt the positives and what still needed to be worked on. I reviewed the expectations for particular situations he did not handle the best and reminded him of the behaviors that were not acceptable. As I spent more time socializing Kurt and developing a teacher-student relationship I was able to increase the attribute of Enjoyment of Students. I took time to joke with him and make sure he smiled every day.

As time went on using the intervention strategies and focusing on my teaching stance it was interesting to see how the keys to a systematic approach and general attributes of effective socializers connected. As I began to develop one attribute I found that I was also developing another attribute that was similar. When I initially read the Brophy text I thought of the

attributes as separate entities, however each attribute can be connected to all of the other attributes in some way. I feel that the attributes can be developed in any sequential order.

I have noticed a change in my attitude and thoughts as I have focused on effective socialization with Kurt. The first thing that I noticed is that I am not as exhausted by his behaviors, even on his really “bad days.” I have been able to move away from the constant catering to his needs to prevent a tantrum and I have moved towards holding him accountable for his behaviors. This has given me the opportunity to work with others in small groups, and provide help to more students in the class. I have accepted that not every day will be a great day, but we start fresh the next day. I have adjusted to the necessary reminders and repetition that Kurt requires without being hostile towards him and his actions. Overall I have a more positive, helpful, and effective teaching stance having focused on socialization with a student.