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DEVELOPING INSTRUCTIONAL PRODUCTS TO ACHIEVE BEHAVIORAL CHANGES.

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THE AIM OF THE PRODUCT RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR ADOLESCENT BOYS IS TO MAKE SCHOOL ATTRACTIVE TO STUDENTS CLOSE TO TERMINATING THEIR EDUCATION. BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT CERTAIN STRATEGIES OF EGO FUNCTIONING OR COGNITIVE STYLE UNDERLY COMPETENT CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR, THE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON THE SPECIFIC CUES THAT WILL LEAD TO SUCH BEHAVIOR, ESPECIALLY IN THOSE AREA OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY--(1) MAINTENANCE OBLIGATIONS, (2) RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS, (3) CONGRUITY WITH EXPECTATIONS, AND (4) CAPACITY FOR APPORTIONING RESOURCES. CARTOONS, IN WHICH THE MALE, ADOLESCENT PROTAGONIST MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN ENTICING INCENTIVES AND FULFILLING HIS RESPONSIBILITIES, SERVE AS STIMULUS MATERIALS. THE DATA GATHERED FROM THE PROGRAM IS NOT YET AMENABLE TO STATISTICAL ANALYSIS, BUT PRELIMINARY RESULTS LEAD TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE METHOD IS USEFUL FOR DISCRIMINATING BETWEEN THE COGNITIVE STYLES OF COMPETENT AND NONCOMPETENT STUDENTS. WHEN A SOUND DISCRIMINATION OF THIS KIND IS MADE, THE NEXT STEPS ARE--(1) TO TRAIN NONCOMPETENT PERSONS TO PERCEIVE AND RESPOND TO CLASSROOM CUES EFFECTIVELY, AND (2) TO INSURE A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL NURTURE NEWLY OBTAINED COGNITIVE STYLES AT A HIGH RATE. (RD)

DEVELOPING INSTRUCTIONAL PRODUCTS TO ACHIEVE BEHAVIORAL CHANGES[1]

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During this decade, national concern over the high-school dropout problem has increased markedly. Too many persons leave school as soon as they reach the age at which they may legally set themselves free. Spot radio exhortations and placards in subways and buses designate but one method of countering the problem. Another method would be to attack the antecedents of disinterest in school at their source. The Headstart programs, in this regard, represent praiseworthy beginnings, but to stem the endless parade of withdrawals presently occurring, programs must be developed to make school attractive to persons close to terminating their education. Toward this end, my assistants and I have worked for the past several months on a product research program for adolescent boys, and I propose to foist upon you a brief discussion of our approach.

First, however, I would like to indicate how our research is conceptualized and why I expect that product research will prove

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[1]The original title of this paper was "Developing instructional products to achieve affective behavioral changes;" however, the inclusion of the adjective "affective" is ill-advised. As the discussion reveals, the program is directed toward producing cognitive styles such that, in the presence of certain stimulus configurations, new behavioral operants will occur habitually at low affective level.

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more fruitful than counseling procedures in changing the behavior of dropouts.

Several years ago, Kelly (1955) stressed the view that behavior is determined largely by the way in which persons construe the environment. Hartman (1939) and other psychoanalytic theorists, in discoursing upon processes of ego functioning, also have emphasized that strategies of thinking play a major role in influencing adaptive and nonadaptive modes of behavior. Today, Sigel, Kagan, Gallager, among others--who describe the interlocking of cognitive and behavioral attributes in terms of cognitive style--have stirred interest in studying characteristic preferences for organizing and categorizing the external environment. These investigators led us to make the assumption that knowledge or capacity for discriminating relevance among cues is an important precondition of competent classroom behavior. This assumption does not presuppose an isomorphic relationship between thought and action. In the absence of a germane cognitive style, effective behavior is hardly likely, but even when the cognitive style is pertinent, in the face of coercion or fear, effective behavior still is highly unlikely. In the absence of constraints, however, considerable correspondence between thought and action might be expected. Indeed, McClelland and his associates have postulated that achievement-oriented affect and behavior may be instigated by certain forms of imagery.

The belief that certain strategies of ego functioning or cognitive style--the abstraction one chooses as his preferred label seems to depend upon both personal taste and vogue--underly competent classroom

behavior has exerted pervasive influence upon counseling procedures. On the matter of describing competence in the classroom, the counseling discipline has achieved nearly perfect unanimity. To reiterate briefly, the competent student reputedly distinguishes among alternatives systematically, governs his impulses, delays gratifications, anticipates future consequences, and is highly accurate in judging passages of time. He demonstrates task persistence, pursuit of high standards, and optimism. Moreover, he attends to social ammenities, is cooperative, creates a good impression, and expresses regard for the rights and feelings of others. School counselors have dedicated themselves to rehabilitating students whose cognitive styles diverge from the characteristics in this listing, but on the whole their results have been discouraging. Longstreth, Shanley, and Rice (1964), for example, showed that during a three year work-study experience, in which school assignments were devised to maximize success, stable pupil-teacher relations were established, counselors were immediately available, and afternoon jobs for pay and school credit were provided, about 60% of both the experimental and the control subjects dropped out of school. Honn (1965) reported strikingly similar results upon concluding a one year Back-to-School Project in Los Angeles. Individualized programs and close personal relations with counselors also were provided; nonetheless, 70 of 105 counselees withdrew from school. Finally, it is noteworthy that Baymur and Patterson (1960), found no differences after administering pre- and post-experimental measures of personal adjustment, study habits, attitudes, and achievement motivation to 32 high-school juniors divided into four matched groups--

each of which received either individual counseling, group counseling, a "one-session motivated experience," or nothing.

The investigations I have cited represent only a few of the published studies which suggest that traditional methods of counseling contribute little to systematic attempts to shape behavior. Why, then, should anyone be exulted over the possibility of training individuals to alter their strategies of thinking? The optimism centers on differences in approach. The counselor dutifully provides supportive encouragement and extended discussions of skills and attitudes, but all too frequently focuses upon diffuse, generalized attitudes and values. As a consequence, the noncompetent student may be charged with ambition and reform, but still be unable to discriminate and to respond to the environmental cues that would lead a more competent person to successes and rewards. Hence, in facing situations pregnant with alternatives, he procrastinates, a hapless victim of his impoverished history.

Recently, Kolb (1965), one of McClelland's associates, devised a training program in which under-achieving boys were counseled in achievement constructs by teaching them the n Ach scoring system. The subjects negotiated contracts, played racing-car games, indulged in group discussions, and made analyses of "Insight Stories." Kolb reasoned that once the boys understood how to think achievement-wise they would act accordingly. The results, after a 1-1/2 year follow-up were equivocal, but his approach is promising, for it specifies which cues are to be discriminated and learned in the training program.

In our product research program, we are treading a path which

may bring us closer to classroom reality. Rather than teaching persons to respond to cues that will arouse a vague sense of adjustment or a general need to achieve, we aim to focus on the specific cues that will lead to successful classroom performance. The stimulus configurations are centered upon social responsibility, a personality dimension which we regard as a prerequisite to effective classroom behavior. Social responsibility per se is fairly inclusive; therefore, we subdivided it into four relatively independent categories: maintenance obligations, performing tasks which must be fulfilled if institutions such as the family, school, clique, etc. are to function properly in society; respect for others' rights, exercising options which maximize the opportunities of other persons to fulfill their own desires and needs; congruity with expectations, exerting maximal effort to maintain a competitive position by first cooperating with, or conforming to, social expectations; capacity for apportioning resources, using money and time etc. effectively, i.e., making practical selections among alternatives for advancing toward goals. Within each of these categories we also designated certain contexts, for example, the family, school, and peer-group, in which social responsibility may be depicted as being expressed.

To preclude problems associated with reading difficulties and to enhance intrinsic interest, our stimulus materials are cartoons. They are being developed in sets of about five, each set of which depicts a specific category and context of social responsibility. Each cartoon in a given set presents the same protagonist, an adolescent boy, who is confronted with a temptation. The situations

conform to Miller's (1944) description of a double approach-avoidance conflict. The protagonist must choose between an enticing incentive and fulfilling a responsibility. The tempting incentive usually is held constant and the cues which suggest reasons for fulfilling the responsibility are varied in discriminable steps with the cartoons.

The five cartoons in a set are randomly displayed on a single slide and projected on a screen to groups of boys who are asked to rank the protagonist's choices from "high" to "low" responsibility. Subjects view each set for ninety seconds immediately prior to making their rankings. The slides were developed in consultation with groups of 10th grade potential dropouts and college-bound boys and are presently being pilot-tested with similar groups of boys. Eleven sets of slides already have been developed. Eventually we hope to develop slides depicting cues pertaining to responsible behavior in hundreds of specific, school-related contexts.

Our long-range goal is to develop a program which will change the motivation of individuals who find the classroom meaningless or even aversive. First, however, we must investigate differences in cognitive style between the competent and noncompetent students. We possess fair understanding of the strategies used by competent people, but we lack firm knowledge of how noncompetent persons think. Second, we must provide direct tuition to train noncompetent persons to perceive and to respond to classroom cues effectively. Finally, once the new operants become stable cognitive styles, it will be necessary to insure a nurturant school environment in order that they may be maintained at a high rate.

In conclusion, I call your attention to the handout. Here we have tried to replicate on mimeograph a set of cartoons in which the protagonist must choose among incentives for applying himself to a study task or yield to the temptation of discussing the attributes of a girl with his peers. The category represented is apportioning resources in respect to time, and the characteristics of competent behavior relate to governing impulses and delay of gratification. The five reasons, in order of responsibility for studying, are depicted as (D) part of long range plans, portrayed as graduation, (E) important to improving grades, portrayed as pride in accomplishment, (A) useful in winning the admiration of a girl, i.e., status, (C) as expedient because friends are going to study, i.e., social coercion, and (B) as necessary to avoid failure or social opprobrium.

Our initial pilot-test, in which the slide was presented to 19 college-bound boys and 26 potential dropouts, elicited distinctly different cognitive styles. Whereas cartoon D, presumably the most responsible choice, was ranked as first by slightly more college-bound Ss, 73% vs. 54%, on cartoon E, the second level of responsibility, the ratio of college-bound to dropouts making second place choices was 68% to 27%. Then, on cartoon B, depicting fear of failure--the poorest of the reasons for responsible behavior--none of the college-bound Ss rated it first and only 10% of them as second, but in marked contrast, 19% of the dropouts rated it first and 54% rated it second.

The data obviously are not yet amenable to statistical analyses, but the preliminary results are heartening. The method appears useful

for discriminating between the cognitive styles of competent and noncompetent students. Thus, we believe that we are on the track of a method which will permit us to develop systematically an instructional product for reducing discrepancies in cognitive styles and, ultimately, producing changes in classroom behavior.

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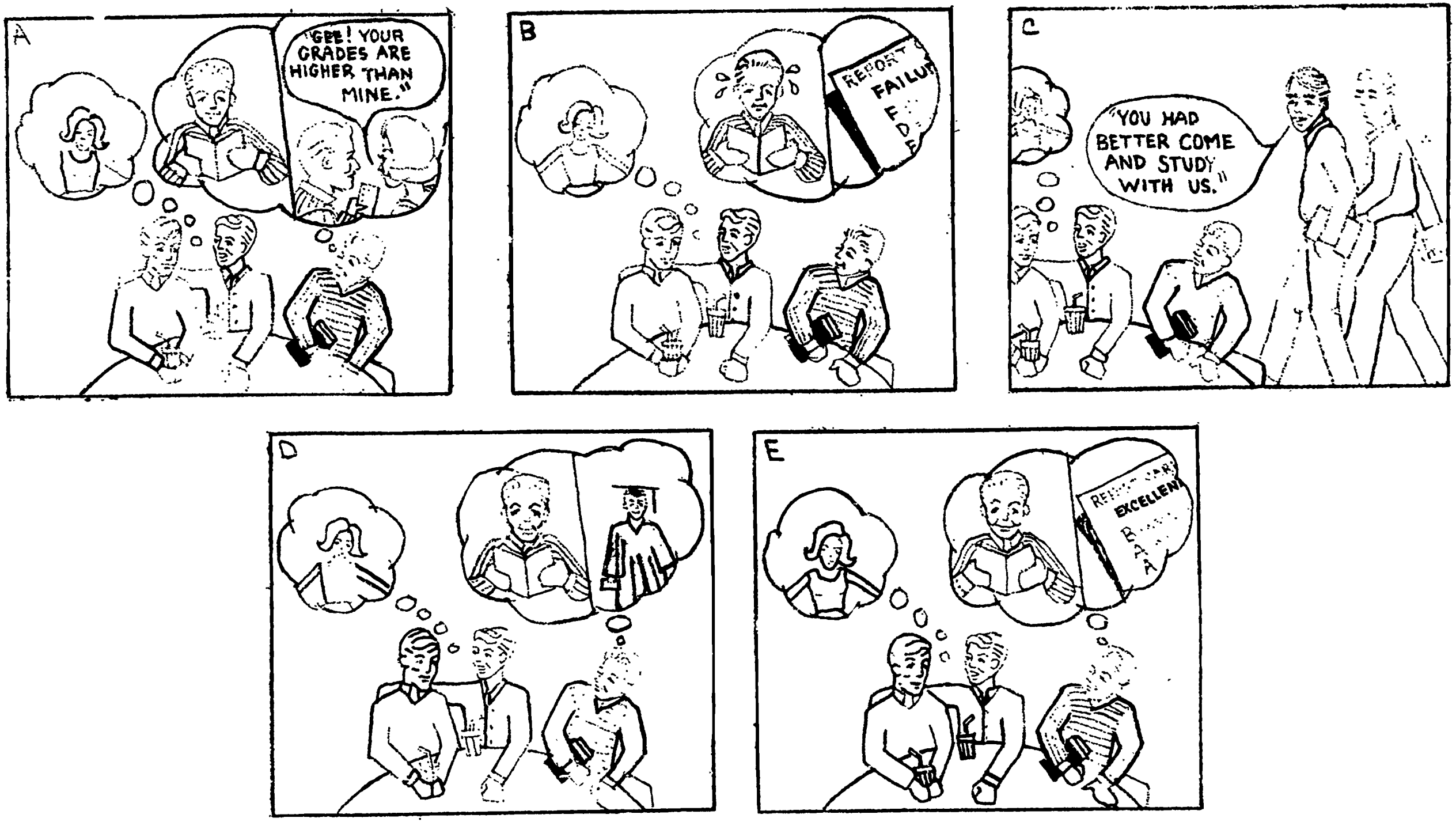
Slide 1: Boy confronted with choosing between study and discussing attributes of a girl*



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