DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 063 553 CG 007 231

AUTHOR Turner, David; Balow, Bruce
TITLE Social Learning Theory and Group Behavioral Change.
PUB DATE 68
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Change; Cooperative Planning; *Emotionally Disturbed Children; Group Activities; *Group Dynamics; Imitation; Learning Theories; *Models; Personality Tests; *Socialization

ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether collaborative and socially sensitive behaviors, necessary in group problem solving, can be taught to emotionally disturbed children in residential treatment centers. The sample consisted of 180 males ranging in age from nine through 12 years in 12 residential centers. The children were required to perform a performance-situational task of three construction type problems, to assess their skill in social relations. They were scored according to two criteria: the Planning Stage, during which a plan of action was devised, and the Operations Stage, during which the group put its plan into effect. Participation, communication, ideas, quality of the plan, involvement, autonomy, atmosphere, activity and success were all evaluated for each child. Analyses of posttest variables of the experimental group (exposed to a film modeling cooperative behaviors) and the control group (exposed to a "neutral" film) indicated that modeling of behaviors through a filmed technique can produce positive changes in the cooperative group behaviors of children identified as emotionally disturbed. (Author/KS)

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND GROUP BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

David Turner

Illinois Benedictine College

Bruce Balow

Director, Division of Training Programs
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped

Introduction

At an observable level, children who are defined as being emotionally disturbed can usually be regarded as socialization failures. If one views the disturbed child in this way, as a socialization failure, education of disturbed children might logically have as one of its chief goals the teaching of cooperative group behaviors. Indeed, research on educational programs for disturbed children typically show that socialization of the child is an important stated goal. However educational programs for the emotionally disturbed are generally built around a tutorial teaching model, a one-to-one relationship, in which the individual child's behavior is regulated and changed. The behavioral objectives are specific for each child and rarely deal with the behaviors of a group in the classroom.

If we accept the premise that the disturbed child is unsocialized and we take socialization to mean a process of social learning, then it would appear that the treatment of disturbed children should consist not only of further socialization training but also that doing so in a group might be an effective way of proceeding. The advantages of using a group teaching procedure designed to improve socialization behavior are at best twofold: 1) the efficiency of working with more than one child at a time, and 2) the development of interpersonal relationships in a situation that teaches the child the inherent reciprocity, sharing, fairness, and mutual responsibility which is the core of socialization.

Background

The social learning approach to child development is comparatively new to the theoretical schools of thought in psychology. In the tradition of the neo-Hullians like Sears, Dollard and Miller, and others, Albert Bandura and Richard H. Walters (1963) have attempted to give a more or less formal social learning theory analysis of the process of socialization. Aside from providing adequate discriminative stimuli and using appropriate types and schedules of reinforcement to change the behavior of children in

the socialized direction, the most important source of new behavior in children, according to Bandura and Walters, is the imitation of adults who (as models) display these new behaviors. Bandura and Walters say that children learn by imitation. The same argument may be taken to suggest the possibility of teaching more social behaviors to disturbed children by means of modeling the desired behaviors.

Socialization can occur to some extent in groups, especially if these groups are in situations where reinforcement will depend upon group collaboration. To the extent that such contingencies prevail, the group is a simulation of society. The subordination of individual interests to group productivity and shared satisfaction is a logical fact of life in the group. Thus it is suggested that the learning of cooperative behaviors in groups should supply behaviors, and perhaps attitudes and motives as well, that are commonly absent in emotionally disturbed children.

The present study attempts to combine these two notions to determine whether observational learning using a group model displaying collaborative and constructive social interaction will influence the degree of such collaboration subsequently demonstrated by the group observing this model, especially when the

subjects are emotionally disturbed children. In this case, the experience of group imitation of a group model is regarded as remedial or therapeutic for the disturbed child, but the context is an educational rather than a disease-treatment oriented approach.

This investigation was based on one theoretical principle contained in the broad area of social learning, namely imitation learning. Flanders (1968), gives a simple definition of imitation learning:

> An observer (O) is said to imitate a model (M) when observation of the behavior of M or of expressions attributing certain behavior to M, affect O so that O's subsequent behavior becomes more similar to the observed, or alleged, behavior of M.

While studies have shown that children often modify their behavior as a result of being exposed to a model, most of these studies have been conducted in very carefully controlled laboratory situations. The present investigation by contrast, attempts to examine imitation behavior as modeled through films and to note if behavior changes within an ecologically natural situation where the modeling technique is presented to a group.

The Problem and Design

The problem of the present investigation was 1) to assess the level of collaborative and socially sensitive behavior on a group problem solving task among selected groups of emotionally disturbed children, and 2) to determine whether exposure to a filmed performance of models who display a high level of cooperative behavior on the task will effect changes in that initial level of collaborative behavior.

The sample consisted of 180 males ranging in age from nine years through 12 years in 12 residential treatment centers for emotionally disturbed children in four midwestern states. One requirement for any center to be included in this study was that it have a minimum of 12 male subjects between the ages of nine and 12 years. In each center, staff members completed the Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay, 1967) for all subjects.

Insert Table 1 here

Subjects were then matched on the behavior characteristics scales and assigned to the experimental or control group accordingly.

Youngsters were matched as closely as possible on all four variables of the BPC, with no matched pair being more than three raw score points apart on the Conduct Problem and Personality Problem scales, or more than two raw score points apart on the inadequacy-Immaturity and Socialized Delinquency Scales. In 82 per cent of the cases there was an exact raw score match for the matched pairs on the first two scales. The Russell Sage Social Relations Test, the instrument used to test for changes in social behavior as a result of modeling, is a performance-situational task developed to assess the nature and quality of two important aspects of elementary school children's skill in social relations: cooperative group planning procedures and techniques of group action. The test was developed by the late Dora E. Damrin, a staff member of the Princeton, New Jersey based Educational Testing Service. The test, designed for children in grades three through six, originally consisted of three construction-type problems administered one after the other. The test manual

visualizes the test being given to an entire classroom of children at the same time. The instructions given to the children indicate clearly that the purpose of the test is to see how well they can work together and that there is only one score given to the group as a whole. The examiner provides each child with a number of blocks and then tells the group that they may have all the time they wish to plan how they will build the model shown but that they will have just 15 minutes for the actual construction. The examiner also explains that the score given depends upon the amount of time it takes to build the figure: the shorter the time, the higher the score.

The test, then, attempts to secure information about the children's ability to participate in group discussions of plans for future group action and the ability to regulate one's behavior in accordance with these plans so that movement toward the agreed upon goal is facilitated.

In order to measure these two aspects effectively, the test is divided into two parts: the Planning Stage, the period during which the children devise a plan of action, and the Operations Stage, the period during which the group puts its plan into effect and actually builds the model using the parts

provided by the examiner.

The recording and scoring procedures respond to the following variables in the Planning State: 1) Participation-- the extent to which individual children in the group enter actively into the planning discussion; 2) Communication-- the way in which the children exchange ideas during the discussion period; 3) Ideas-- the kinds of ideas children have about ways of organizing themselves to attack the problem; 4) Final Plan--the quality of the plan which the children eventually devise; 5) Involvement--the extent to which the children exhibit interest in and concern for the task at hand; 6) Autonomy--the extent to which children can discuss the problem and reach a point of decision without the help or restraint of the examiner.

For the Operations Stage the variables considered are: 1) Involvement--the extent to which the children exhibit interest in and concern for accomplishing the task at hand; 2) Atmosphere --the psychological tonequality of the group of children who remain in the problem field as revealed by the kinds of statements the children make and by the tone of voice in which the statements are made; 3) Activity--the kind of behavior children who have

withdrawn from the problem field engage in; 4) Success--the time necessary for the group to complete the task of building the model.

The manual gives examples of the specific behaviors which fall under each variable and the way they are recorded. For each variable, the examiner gives a score from 1 to 5 -- 1 representing the poorest score and 5 the best score. The scores are then combined to yield a single descriptive rating which provides a "meaningful picture of the group's social relations skill" (Damrin, 1959).

The experimental and control groups each were given the Russell Sage Social Relations Test as a pretest which was scored by the examiner from a video taped version of the session. After this pretest experience the experimental group was given a modeling film in which six models of the same age group performed the task to achieve the highest possible score through cooperation. The control group reviewed a film which contained the instructions and the completed design, without the modeling behavior of the models in the experimental treatment film.

After watching the film, the groups were tested again and the tests scored in the same way as in the pretest.

Analysis of the Data

Using an analysis of variance procedure, the results of the 10 variables on the RSSRT as well as the actual time in seconds were compared for the experimental and control groups on both the pretest and posttest measures. No differences were found on the pretest analyses, suggesting that the groups were comparable on the dimensions measured before being subjected to the treatment or neutral films.

The analyses of the posttest variables indicated significant differences beyond the .001 level on the following variables: Participation, Communication, Ideas, Involvement (Planning Stage), Autonomy, Atmosphere, Success, and Time in seconds. The Plan variable showed a large difference in means, but no variability within groups. Involvement (Operations Stage) and Activity produced significant results beyond the .01 level, though the absolute differences between means were small.

The pretest results for both the experimental and control groups indicated a very low level of cooperative behavior present

in emotionally disturbed children residing in treatment centers sampled. Informal observation of the subjects' behavior on the pretest produced a judgment that "mob action," wherein it was every man for himself," was the pattern even though the final goal was understood. The pretest method of solution was always an "all at once" procedure, indicating a distinct lack of skill on the part of the youngsters in the treatment centers to solve a group task by cooperative action.

Because pretest results showed none of the groups in any of the 12 schools was initially prepared to cooperate and work as a group, nor did any of the 180 individual subjects press for a planned or coordinated attack on the problem, it is reasonable to question the amount of instruction they had received which was directed at cooperative group behaviors. If these 12 schools in four states may be considered representative of residential schools for disturbed children, there is a major curriculum question here that should be attacked.

Insert Table 2 here

The results of the analyses of variance on the posttest measures indicate that modeling through a technique of filmed cooperative behaviors can produce positive changes in socialization behavior of children in residential centers for the emotionally disturbed. This finding may be viewed within the framework of the opening remarks of this paper. If it is true that the emotionally disturbed child is a socialization failure, it would seem expedient to teach children interpersonal relationships which include reciprocity, sharing, fairness, and mutual responsibility. The results of the study reported here indicate that film modeling is one technique by which disturbed children may be taught such behaviors.

Educators concerned with emotionally disturbed children, in addition to planning for achievement in academic subjects clearly must also plan for instruction in socialization skills. The filmed techniques containing socializing-cooperative behaviors as part of the everyday experience in the school setting is one way of presenting such instruction. The films, of course, would have to be well planned and contain specific behaviors. The program described in the present study would by no means be

ideal i.e., using a test device for the teaching tool. However, one might well consider short films in which "normal" youngsters act in cooperative ways in a variety of school experiences. These could include play behaviors, cooperation on group tasks in which a group goal is evident, or cooperation on a task in which each child benefits, such as each child meeting a content subject goal as a result of the cooperative work of the group.

Developing a curriculum and filmed technique materials for socialization skills would require intensive work, since it would be necessary to make a serious study of the variety of cooperative behaviors desired as part of the total education of disturbed children and to specify the behaviors necessary for such goals so that they could become part of a filmed procedure. It is important to know the specific behaviors desired and to model them accordingly.

Summary

It appears as a result of this study that children who are described as emotionally disturbed can be taught certain socialization skills necessary for group problem solving by being exposed to a film model of the desired behavior.

Table 1: Centers and Subjects in the Sample

Type	No.Cent. incl. in Study	Exp.Group	Control Group
Private, Church Sponsored	4	6 Ss each	6 Ss each
Private, Church Sponsored	1	3 groups of 6 Ss ea	3 groups of 6 Ss ea
Private, Corp. Ownership	2	6 Ss each	6 Ss each
State School for Disturbed	1	6 Ss each	6 Ss each
State Hosp. Child Psych. Unit	3	6 Ss each	6 Ss each
State Hosp. Child Psych. Unit	1	2 groups of 6 Ss ea	2 groups of 6Ss ea

Table 2: Posttest Means and Levels of Significance for Eleven Measured Variables

Variable	Exp. Mean	Control Mean	p
Participation	5.00	1.47	.001
Communication	5.00	1.33	.001
Ideas	4.67	1.47	.001
Plan	5.00	1.00	N/A *
Involvement (Planning)	5.00	3.53	.001
Autonomy	3.00	1.53	.001
Involvement (Operations)	5.00	4.60	.01
Atmosphere	4.20	1.73	.001
Activity	5.00	4.60	.01
Success	4.13	2.60	.001
Tune (in Seconds)	150.60	371.53	.001

* No random variability within groups, though differences between means exist.

REFERENCES

Bandura, Albert, and Walters, Richard H. Social Learning and Personality Development. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963.

Damrin, Dora E. "The Russell Sage Social Relations Test: A Technique for Measuring Group Problem Solving Skills in Elementary School Children." Journal of Experimental Education 28: 85-99; September 1959

Flanders, James P. "A Review of Research on Imitative Behavior." Psychological Bulletin 69: 316-337; May, 1968

Quay, Herbert C., and Peterson, Donald R. "Manual for the Behavior Problem Checklist." Champain, Illinois: Children's Research Center, University of Illinois, 1967.