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ABSTRACT

The consultant's role in training teachers to use behavior modification techniques is examined. It is explained that a combination of knowledge and guided experience with feedback and support, has been found most effective. Among typical problems cited for teachers using behavioral techniques is a lack of reinforcement. Answers to the five questions most frequently voiced by teachers, concerning such issues as symptom substitution and followup are given. (CL)

Implementing Behavior Modification in the Classroom Problems of Consultants*

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Behavior modification is widely seen as a valuable technique in the classroom, yet many questions remain about how to introduce behavioral techniques to the teachers. Working with the teacher who requires assistance in implementing behavior modification poses a number of issues. Two such issues will be addressed in this paper: first, what is the most effective method for giving instruction in the techniques of behavior modification; and second, what are the concerns and problems with which teachers confront consultants when teachers are asked to consider implementing a behavioral program in their classrooms.

Teacher Instruction in Behavioral Techniques

How much training is necessary to help teachers become skilled in behavior modification, and how can this training be most effectively offered? There are no clear answers to those two questions (Hall, 1971). There are many articles in the literature discussing the training of teachers, volunteers, and paraprofessionals to provide behavior modification (eg. Martin, 1973). Moreover, a variety of books, short courses, college courses, and even a multi-media program is available for the teacher who wishes to explore behavior modification.

Yet there are a number of issues about instruction. Franks (1975), in her review of a multi-media program to teach behavioral skills, warns of the danger that a "relatively unskilled instruc-

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tor could facilely deploy this type of programmed material without being able to see the complexities of its actual use in... schools....(p.571)" Stein (1975), responding to the demand for workshops and seminars in which behavioral approaches are taught in brief periods of time, wonders if "enough information can be disseminated in a one- or two-day,or even a one-week workshop to allow participants properly to apply the principles taught. (p.113)" He notes the difficulty in maintaining any follow-up contact in such cases, and considers the possibility of misapplication of principles.

However, it seems clear that knowledge about behavioral principles is an important aspect for the teacher who wishes to use this method. In studies of failed behavioral programs (Drabman & Tucker, 1974; Fine, Nesbitt, & Tyler, 1974; and Kupyers, Becher, & O'Leary, 1968), authors stress the need for teachers to be trained in the systematic use of behavioral principles to avoid problems. Kupyers et al (1968) insist that it is not the mechanical use of token procedures, but such factors as shaping (not expecting goal behavior immediately), timing of rewards, and the need for differential social reinforcement that play a crucial role in the success of the token system.

The question of how to teach behavior modification in the field setting to practitioners has received some study. McKeown, Adams, and Forehand (1975) compared teachers who read about behavior modification to those who were also involved in laboratory groups, in which they did a field project, attended small group discussions, and had some individual supervision. Not surprisingly, the latter group not only acquired more information but also had

classrooms in which disruptive behavior decreased. Success of the laboratory method is attributed to feedback on attempted applications, alternatives available when difficulties arose, and peer support from the group. Kazdin and Moyer (1976) support the Responsive Teaching Model, in which each student in a college course or inservice program carries out a project using behavioral techniques. One important component of this method is that it emphasizes the process of what is occurring and provides continuous evaluation, which deters teachers from mechanically implementing the techniques independently of effect (Kazdin & Moyer, 1976). Instruction alone, without practice, does not seem very effective in developing behavior modification skills.

Since it is a combination of knowledge and guided experience that seems to provide the critical elements for success, the consultant should avoid approaching the use of behavior modification in an off-hand manner. If teachers are previously untrained in these techniques, the time demands on the consultant can be considerable. Abidin (1971) found that the consultant expended 150 hours of professional time in a school year assisting a teacher in setting up a classroom token economy (planning, teaching the teacher the techniques, classroom observation, follow-ups, crisis consultation) and approximately 30 hours assisting in a program for a single child. While he also makes clear that the time demands may be cut to one-quarter with the same teachers in subsequent years, this suggests no short-cuts to effective training. Perhaps behavior modification has been oversold as simple and easy to apply; it is increasingly apparent that it takes time and skill in the applied setting, requiring careful training of

teachers and availability of consultant time.

Tomlinson (1972), on the other hand, reports considerably less time--2.4 hours for individual cases and 4.2 hours for token economies, with teachers who had no previous experience with behavioral techniques. He offers several suggestions to economize on consultant time. His first suggestion is controversial--he would remove the demand for teachers to obtain base rate data, a demand which teachers often find difficult. In cases where behavior is clearly defined and an estimate of base rate can be made, he suggests accurate baseline data is not essential. A second suggestion is the use of general staff inservice time to teach the basic principles of behavior modification, rather than providing such instruction individually to teachers who are involved in programs. To avoid arousing resistance to behavioral intervention, he recommends not using behavioral terms and emphasizing social rather than tangible reinforcers. He believes it is important to clarify with the teacher that an alternate placement is not a viable alternative, prior to exploring a treatment in which the teacher plays an important role. To further reduce consultant time, the consultant should concentrate his efforts in the early stages of the program, and anticipate with the teacher problems that commonly occur, such as normal variations in behavior that is undergoing change. Finally, he suggests the use of group consultation sessions. If the consultant is able to develop a group of teachers in a school using behavioral techniques, they can provide additional support and an immediate source of help if the consultant is not regularly in the school.

Teacher Problems and Concerns regarding Behavior Modification

What is expected of the teacher who is considering the use of behavior modification and why is resistance to behavior modification so often encountered. While behavior modification is not a mechanical procedure (if it were, all that would be required would be a textbook describing the steps to follow), there is evidence that some teachers find it difficult to implement. There are also some common conerns shared by many teachers, which need to be considered seriously by the consultant.

In what sense can behavioral methods be difficult for the teacher? There is no question that implementing a behavioral program involves not only changing the child's behavior but that of the teacher as well. It has been suggested that for a teacher to apply behavioral techniques successfully, average or above average organizational ability and mild compulsivity are helpful, whereas the nondirective, intuitive or existentially oriented teacher will find the method difficult (Abidin, 1971). The technique requires systematic and consistent application. While it is also possible that the demands of behavior modification help the less systematic teacher explore a new approach, a change in outlook and behavior for such a teacher is involved.

Along with changes in behavior, the teacher is also being asked to look at behavior in a different way than previously. Many teachers look for reasons for a child's behavior in terms of what happened at home before the child came to school, the child's intra-psychic problems, and the like. A teacher trained in behavioral methods focuses on the antecedents and consequences of the child's behavior. For example, during an inservice work-

shop, a teacher asked for help with a child who had difficulty unbuttoning his coat, causing him to linger in the coatroom in the morning. She had already tried several times to teach him to unbutton the garment more efficiently. When she was asked what happened after he left the coatroom in the morning, it became apparent that the child found his first activity unpleasant. When that activity was modified, the problem with buttons disappeared entirely. In another instance, a school psychologist was consulting with two teachers of a class of learning disabled children. The children had difficulty sitting still and paying attention during a brief group lesson time, and the psychologist was helping the teacher implement a behavioral program. However it became apparent upon analyzing the situation that the lessons themselves were part of the problem. Before implementing a behavioral program, which in this case was appropriate, the teachers found themselves rethinking the lessons they were presenting.

But there is another sense, aside from the need to examine behavior in a different way and to change one's own style of functioning, that may make the process "aversive." Abidin (1975) describes the process of conducting a behavioral intervention as requiring "focused attention and concentrated vigilance. (p. 56)" Given the complexity of the classroom (teaching has been compared in terms of amount of stimulus load to being an air-traffic controller), it is not surprising that teachers feel overwhelmed. Abidin (1975) found that teachers experience concern about their teaching effectiveness when they have to concentrate so hard on one child's behavior; the teachers reported that their perception

of the classroom was altered, with heightened sensory awareness of the behavior of the target child and some reduction of awareness of other children.

Finally, in a situation in which many teachers do not feel rewarded, it may be difficult for a teacher to reward a child. In a recent set of parent workshops, one of the parents 'jokingly' asked why the parents could not be rewarded for their work in the program as the children were for their part. It is important that the teacher feel reinforced for carrying out the behavior modification program, ie. not just for success with the program but for implementing each of the steps. We may need to prepare teachers to reward themselves, encourage supervisors or principals to do so, arrange support groups of teachers to reinforce each other, or be prepared as consultants to provide support and reinforcement.

In working with teachers most consultants become aware of a number of questions and concerns that often compose a hidden agenda. These are often legitimate questions that may not even be voiced. Some might be considered values issues, which create a barrier between the behavioral consultant and the teacher. The five questions presented here are those which this author has encountered most frequently.

1. If I eliminate one bad behavior, won't another bad behavior take its place?

While this question has been subjected to research, and little evidence found to support the concept of symptom substitution (Axelrod, 1977, p. 167), it continues to be an assumption that many teachers hold, especially if they have looked

at behavior from a psychodynamic point of view. There is a sense in which they are correct. If a child has no appropriate way to receive attention and approval, and few of us can cope with being ignored, he may well develop alternate forms of attention getting if his current method of doing so is extinguished.

Suppose, however, the question could be rephrased: if I increase the child's good behavior and attend to that, will the bad behavior still be necessary? If the teacher rewards and thus increases on task behavior, will the child still be running around the room? If you ask a group of teachers to write down behaviors they want to change, you generally get a heavy proportion of behaviors to be eliminated over ones to be increased. Careful choice of the behavior to be modified is a useful means for dealing with this concern.

2. If I give the child an external reward, will he do it for nothing after that?

In a sense, none of us work for 'nothing'. Would a teacher continue in her classroom if nobody paid her/him? The hard work that phonics requires for a six year old child who has difficulty in sitting still or in learning is not usually intrinsically rewarding. Reading a book when he acquires those phonics skills may be rewarding, but we have to get the child to the point where he can read enough words to make that possible. No one is, or should be, advocating giving a child extrinsic rewards for those things he gets internal pleasure from doing.

It is also a question about alternatives. Should the teacher wait for internal rewards to develop? How long should she wait? If we can make the task itself intrinsically rewarding,

that is a legitimate alternative. It is important to ask what alternative we have to failure for the child before we decide to eliminate external reward.

3. How will the other children in the class react?

This is a question which lends itself to study, ie. we can actually examine how children in the classroom react when one or more of them is on a behavior modification program. In a recent such study, on preschool children, Christy (1975) used tangible reinforcements which were available only to the target children, while classmates received nothing. She concluded:

> It appears that if child observers receive frequent teacher attention for desired behavior, and if their verbal requests for reward are consistently ignored, employing contingencies and tangible rewards to shape appropriate behavior with selected children may have beneficial effects on the behavior of both the target children and their classmates (p. 196).

One crucial point here is that the nonrewarded children do have access themselves to some form of teacher reinforcement.

It is important to assure the classroom teacher that there are a variety of methods available to deal with this problem. Axelrod (1977) suggests a number of specific ideas for coping with students who react negatively to observing another child receive special rewards. First, he suggests the teacher can explain to all students, in advance, that the program will begin and why, and then ask for cooperation from the class. Group rewards for cooperation can also be presented. Secondly, one can ignore the grumbling, provided the other children do understand why one child has been singled out for reward. Third, if the situation is appropriate, all the youngsters can be involved in the rewards earned by the target pupil. A fourth possible solution is to have the child receive his tangible rewards

outside the classroom; for example, the teacher might provide the parents with a report on the number of points earned, which the parents translate into reinforcement. Fifth, he suggests that when possible, social rather than tangible reinforcement be used; social reinforcers are likely to arouse less resentment and can also be easier for the teacher to provide to the other children. Finally, if more than one child has a similar problem, a group contingency can be used.

It is also possible to allow any child who wants to become involved in a program to do so, individualizing a specific contract for that child. It can be explained that the first target child is working on a behavior that is especially difficult for him, but that anyone else can come to the teacher to plan work on a problem that he or she finds important.

4. What happens when I try to stop using behavior modification with a child?

This legitimate concern requires additional instruction for the teacher in the concept of maintenance. We do know that abrupt withdrawal of a program usually does not lead to continuation of appropriate behavior, but the teacher should be assured that there are specific methods for maintenance which can be built into her program. One of the specific techniques for insuring maintenance of behavior is gradual withdrawal of reinforcement by thinning of the reinforcement schedule (giving rewards less frequently and/or less consistently). Self-control techniques are now being increasingly mentioned as a possible alternative (see McLaughlin, pp. 637-644).

However, it is also reasonable to expect that children will

take some initiative in this direction. Recently a former student in the behavior modification class came in to report that a child who had been on a behavior modification project to give up thumb sucking had simply announced to his teacher that he no longer needed any help from her with the problem. This fifth grade boy had gradually given up thumbsucking and now felt in control of this behavior. Another student in that class was concerned about a group of adolescent socially maladjusted boys who had been on a token system for six months. As she discussed her concern about ever getting them off the program, it became apparent that the boys who had originally been on a teacher controlled token economy were taking increasing and appropriate control over how the token system was implemented in that classroom. Her concern was alleviated when she realized that the boys themselves had begun to demonstrate self-control over their classroom behavior and achievement.

5. If the child has (a learning disability, hyperactivity, retardation, cerebral palsy, autism- you fill in the label), what good will behavior modification do?

There is a substantial literature showing the effectiveness of behavioral techniques on a variety of behaviors which are usually thought of as biological or psychological in origin. In the case of hyperactivity, behavior modification has been demonstrated to be not only as effective as drug therapy in controlling the behavior, but more effective in facilitating the academic learning of the hyperactive child (Ayllon, Layman, & Kandel, 1975). Yet the assumption that organic or psychodynamic causation eliminates behavior modification as a method of choice

continues to exert a strong hold on many school people. Recently a school psychologist in a behavior modification class did her project on a child with a 'math disability'; the child was very inconsistent in her ability to handle number facts, seemed to forget what she knew, and exhibited many reversals. In spite of the fact that the child's behavior seemed related to teacher attention and responded to the contingencies in the program, the psychologist continued evaluating her for placement in an L.D. class for her 'math disability'.

This concern seems particularly resistant to change. As the concept of least restrictive environment is implemented, it may be possible to project behavior modification as less restrictive, for example, than say drugs for a hyperactive child. Also, modeling may be effective here. If the consultant can demonstrate some change in the child's behavior, it might be more difficult to continue to see behavior modification as inappropriate. If one holds certain assumptions about causation, this concern is difficult to allay until success has been experienced.

Summary

The techniques of behavior modification are of potentially great value in the schools. Before this potential can be achieved, teachers need to understand behavior modification well and to engage in guided experience with the method. The brief workshop without follow-up or reading about behavior modification will usually not suffice. Consultants also need to be sensitive to the concerns and questions that teachers have regarding this method, and appreciate that the demands made upon

are not inconsequential. This paper has sought to [illegible] several such issue that relate to establishing a frame- in which behavioral consultation can be effective.

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