

**THE USE OF BEHAVIORAL COUNSELING
WITH A TEN YEAR OLD BOY**

BY

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THE USE OF BEHAVIORAL COUNSELING

WITH A TEN YEAR OLD BOY

A Research Paper

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Master of Arts

in Education

by

Alison Cutter Carmody

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Alison Cutter Carmody entitled "The Use of Behavioral Counseling with a Ten Year Old Boy." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Counseling and Guidance.

Garland E. Blair

Major Professor

The author would like to recognize Dr. Garland Blair

whose suggestions and encouragement helped her to conduct

experiment.

Similarly, the author wishes to thank her family whose

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work possible.

Accepted for the Council:

Wayne E. Stamps
Dean of the Graduate School

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Behavior modification and guidance
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Review of the Literature with Definitions of Terms

Recent publications in the field of psychology and guidance report the evolution of a new counseling technique. It is called behavioral counseling. It uses basic learning principles and reinforcement, but modifies the methods to develop a simplified application that can be used in the classroom. Its goal is to alter maladaptive behavior (Ullmann, 1965). Reinforcement may be positive reinforcement like reward, or negative reinforcement like punishment (Singer and Singer, 1969). Maladaptive behavior is defined as behavior that does not fulfill the subject's role expectation; that is, he is unable to respond to present stimuli in such a way as to gain maximum or even average positive reinforcement for his behavior. When this happens, the subject discovers that his behavior, judged by certain key figures like his teacher, falls short of what is expected of him. Behavioral counseling seeks to help him develop more appropriate behavior by adjusting the reinforcement pattern.

The theoretical basis for behavioral counseling techniques is taken from reinforcement methods, and Skinner's principles of operant conditioning. According to Skinner, an operant behavior "followed by a reinforcing stimulus is likely to be changed in frequency of emission." When our behavior provokes positive reinforcement, that reinforcement prompts us to repeat that behavior; the

probability of repeated behavior increases, given similar environmental conditions (Ullmann, 1965).

Behavioral counseling differs in several areas from therapies based upon insight. First, the program for behavioral change is developed before therapy ever commences. In the so-called traditional therapy, the counselor and the client begin therapy, each one hoping to find the behavior improved once the sessions are completed. Second, behavioral counseling deals primarily with observable behavior instead of subjective feelings stemming from unresolved problems within the subconscious. Third, behavioral counseling is based on what the client and counselor wish to accomplish together by applying basic learning principles. Insightful therapy is based on the client's problems; progress is made only as the client gains insight into his behavior (Ullmann, 1965).

There are three general reinforcement objectives: to alter maladaptive behavior, to aid in decision making, and to prevent situations from becoming problems. The goals for behavioral counseling and the methods used are designed entirely to suit the subject and the environment in which he finds himself (Krumboltz, 1966). Reported studies have been done on subjects from six years of age (Kennedy, 1967), to college students who need help with study problems. Several studies contributed to my reinforcement plan for Clarence. One study done by Meichembarin, Bowers and Ross (1968), deals with unacceptable classroom behavior among female delinquents. Money was used as a reward to reinforce therapy. In a California school district, Sanborn and Schuster (1969)

developed "card carriers" to modify behavior. Here the subjects had a card initialed by the teacher whenever their behavior was acceptable. These signatures were exchanged for the reinforcer: candy in this case.

Purpose of the Study

Clarence Watson is a fifth year student in an elementary school. He seems to be bright enough and comes to school every day, but rarely does he do any homework or apply himself in class. His teacher, Mrs. Wallace, had tried every technique she knew to increase Clarence's interest in school and his productivity of school work.

The hypothesis to be tested is that the application of behavioral counseling to Clarence for his poor school performance will effect improved school work output; and, furthermore, if Clarence's school work does improve with behavioral counseling, that this improvement will continue after the counseling is terminated.

Limitations of the Study

This study has two definite limitations.

The first one is that it is difficult to say that any one thing we did made the difference. The plan was to modify maladaptive behavior by positive reinforcement. The difficulty comes when you try to identify the specific reinforcement that did it. Humans are enormously complicated and sensitive to stimuli, and respond to any number of influences not programmed in the therapy-plan. To this degree it is not a clean-cut experi-

ment, for it is true that no procedure dealing with human reinforcement can be controlled with the accuracy of mechanical reinforcement.

The second limitation of this study is that no long-term observations were possible because school closed after the six weeks of behavioral counseling.

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Chapter II

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The general outline for behavioral counseling is to observe the subject and determine the frequency of his maladaptive behavior; next, to instate a reinforcement program for change, and to observe the subject for results.

In March, 1970, the guidance counselor at the elementary school, Mrs. Bagwell told me that Clarence Watson, a fifth year student, seems to have given up in school, as she put it. She said that Clarence had received only average and below average grades, yet he tested 115 in the Slossen IQ test administered one month before.

Next, I proceeded to his room in order to observe Clarence and talk to his teacher. Mrs. Wallace, Clarence's teacher, has thirty two students in her room, divided into fifth and sixth year students. I learned that Clarence is the only boy in her fifth year group. She has organized her classroom in such a way that the children take part in group decisions. The room has written a constitution as a basis for its government, and all the duties within the room are rotated on a weekly basis. There are class officers who are elected for the year and have assigned duties. The instruction in the classroom is geared to the ability of the students. Some unit activities are required and additional activities may be done as students complete the required ones. There is some flexibility in scheduling but students are expected to

complete the work after a reasonable time.

Mrs. Wallace was quite concerned about Clarence's lack of accomplishments during the year. At the beginning of the school year Clarence's record indicated he was below his grade level, especially in reading. Despite her efforts, he made little improvement during the year. She stated he seemed only to do school work when he felt like it and would often complain that he could not read the material. Because his scores were so low: second grade reading level, Mrs. Wallace had just gotten Clarence admitted to a special reading class which meets for an hour a day, four days a week. In spite of this extra help, she felt that Clarence could do much of the work he was neglecting. She estimated that Clarence handed in only fifty percent of the daily school assignments; the other fifty percent either were handed in late, or not at all.

I observed Clarence for one week beginning March 30, 1970. Two observations were made during the free study period in the classroom and library. Clarence twisted in his chair, played with cards behind his textbook and generally engaged in non-productive school activities. At the library he failed to complete the class activity and the librarian made Clarence stay after the library period. When he realized he would be made to remain after the class period, he began to work on the assignment. He asked three questions, and gave the impression that he did not understand the assignment. Finally, the librarian did one of the items for him; then Clarence haphazardly completed the rest and hurriedly left

the library.

Following the observations I talked with Clarence's mother, Mrs. Watson. They live on a large farm to which his father has retired recently from the U.S. Army. Clarence's main interest is horses although he does not own one of his own yet. Right now, he is interested in buying a used guitar from a classmate, and Mrs. Watson told Clarence he would have to earn the money to do this; in fact, he would have to think up a way to earn the money. Next day, Mrs. Watson and I decided to approach Clarence about earning money by doing his classroom work.

I had an opportunity to talk with Clarence about his school work. He said he did not like school very much but was quite interested when I suggested that he could earn money for school work. He told me himself about wanting to buy the guitar and needing to earn the money to do so. He needed three dollars and a half. We talked about how much his school work could be worth, and he suggested fifteen cents for each teacher, meaning Mrs. Wallace, his classroom teacher, and Mrs. Minihane his reading teacher. The terms were worked out and I wrote them down this way:

If you pass in your daily classroom work and do your assignments in class, your teacher will sign this card. Your mother will pay you fifteen cents for each signature each day after school. If you do not do your work, your teacher will not sign the card. Your payments each day depends upon whether you do your assignments.

In order to make the reinforcement effective, it was agreed to suspend Clarence's weekly allowance temporarily. The reinforcement card (one for each week in the experiment) was divided into

five school days with two blocks opposite each day for the teachers' signatures. Here each teacher put her initials in order to reinforce Clarence. Each teacher was told of the reinforcement agreement and both teachers indicated that they would cooperate with the program. The reinforcement was in effect.

Clarence achieved a hundred percent achievement the first week, a hundred percent achievement the second week, and perfect behavior the third week. In behavioral counseling, his productivity was high. He was very happy that he came to school. The slump in his achievement was due to a traumatic episode of the stolen whistle. His achievement in the final week could be attributed to the reinforcement of peer approval in the classroom. But this was not all, that his schoolroom behavior was inconsistent and unachieving; during the week he picked himself up and manifested a real effort and showed a willingness to achieve in his same classroom. In the fourth week, Clarence was accused of stealing a whistle from the teacher's car. Clarence said that he was a member of the student body for the whistle and the whistle was stolen. Even though the other students were not involved, the principal required Clarence as a member of the student body to be involved from physical education and other activities. The principal collected another boy's name and the boy was not involved. In all, the principal was not involved.

The principal was not involved in the program. The principal was not involved in the program.

Chapter III

RESULTS

The chart presents a graphic description of Clarence's performance during the six weeks the reinforcement was in effect.

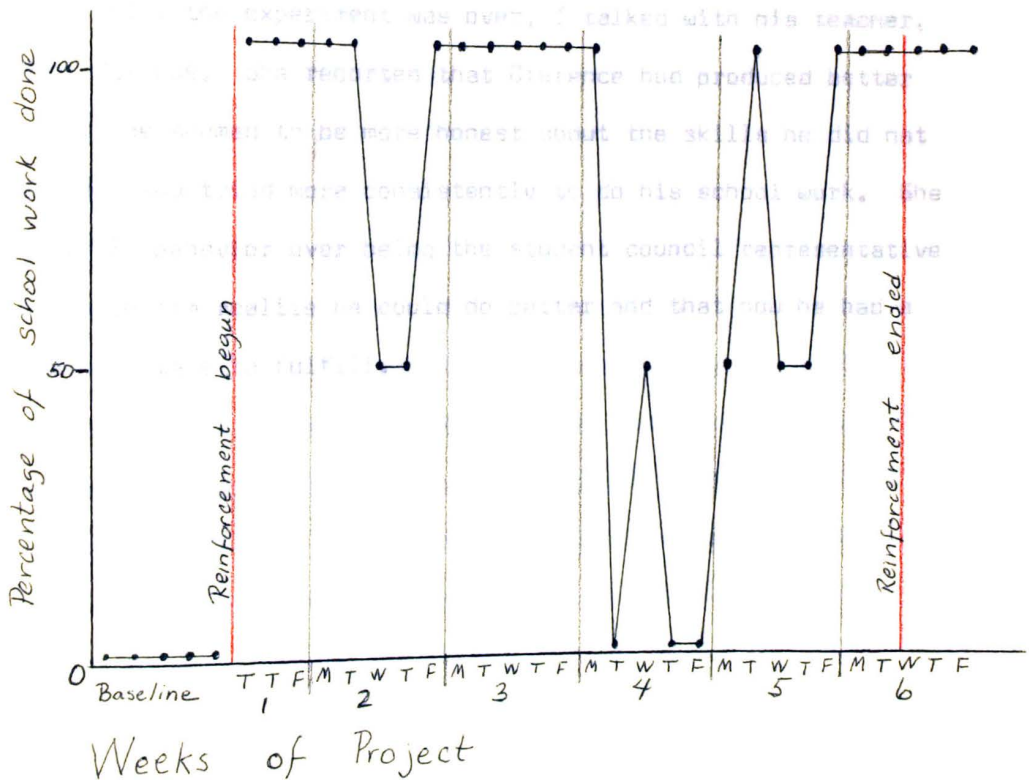
The chart shows a hundred percent achievement the first week, continued improvement the second week, and perfect behavior the third week. Prior to behavioral counseling, his productivity was near zero percent every day that he came to school. The slump in the fourth week coincides with a traumatic episode of the stolen whistle; the consistent achievement in the final week could reflect the positive reinforcement of peer approval in the classroom election. But this can be said, that his schoolroom behavior prior to therapy was inconsistent and unachieving; during therapy, he picked himself up and manifested a real effort and he demonstrated ability to achieve in his same classroom.

During the fourth week, Clarence was accused of stealing a hunting whistle from a teacher's car. Clarence said that he traded his lunchroom dessert to another student for the whistle and he did not know the whistle was stolen. Even though the other boy was punished for stealing, the principal regarded Clarence as involved in the crime and he was excluded from physical education for a week. The following week Clarence urinated on another boy's shoes. He was also restricted for this behavior, so, all in all, he had a sorry time of it that week.

On Tuesday of the final week, student council representatives

Figure 1.

A Time Line Graph Representing
Clarence's Change in Behavior
Before and After Reinforcement



for the following year were to be selected for the entire school, usually a boy and girl from each year level. These representatives are thought of as models for classmates' behavior and as having above average scholastic achievement. In Mrs. Wallace's room, Clarence was selected because he was the only fifth year boy in that room. After the selection, Mrs. Bagwell asked Clarence if he wished to say something to the class. Clarence walked to the front of the room and began to tell the class that he realized that he really did not qualify for the office but that he intended to do better in school and to make his classmates proud of him. Then, suddenly, he burst into tears and hurried back to his seat.

After the experiment was over, I talked with his teacher, Mrs. Wallace. She reported that Clarence had produced better work. He seemed to be more honest about the skills he did not possess and tried more consistently to do his school work. She felt his behavior over being the student council representative had made him realize he could do better and that now he had a goal or image to fulfill.

... were over and over with, as well as yesterday, ... over again for that ... his ... was clearly visible, ... did his work. He ...

... reinforcement ... figures ...

Chapter IV

DISCUSSION

Educators could label Clarence's school work performance as underachievement. His IQ score is 115, yet his school grades are below average or only average.

With behavioral counseling, his classroom behavior was changed. Yet it would be presumptive to say that the change in Clarence's behavior is the sole result of the reinforcement program. Underachievement behavior has a complicated psychological pattern, and in this case no one could attribute this change in this behavior to one reinforcement. A strong influence could have come from Clarence's key adults around him who were most troubled by his behavior. These adults, his teachers and his mother, were very concerned, yet they gave encouragement, expressed confidence, and stood beside him to manifest only positive reinforcement. They worked from one day to the next, and Clarence could see that he began each day with a clean slate; yesterday's failures were over and done with, as well as yesterday's successes. He had to win success all over again for that new day he was just beginning. His behavior was charted visibly, and he could see, that day, whether or not he did his work. He would no longer ignore his laxness.

The strength of the positive reinforcement from key figures just alluded to is illustrated by Clarence's verbalization before his roommates after the election. There he stood, telling

how he realized he had not done his best. Then he tried to go on with words and tears to express that he felt that others, his teachers and his schoolmates still believed he could become a capable student.

At that moment, without realizing it, Clarence was saying that he could do it himself.

The program involved the student, his mother, and his two teachers. It lasted six weeks until school recessed. The reinforcement did bring about better school performance.

The program indicates that behavioral counseling is a technique to be used by the school counselor to modify unacceptable behavior. Each program must be designed to meet the needs of the student. Careful observation and programming are necessary for success. Cooperation between the teacher, the student, and the parent will further insure a "united" effort to bring about the desired behavior. The student himself learns to control his behavior. Whether he performs well or poorly is a matter of his own choice.

The program is a difficult one to run. It is a challenge to the school counselor. It is a challenge to the teacher. It is a challenge to the parent. It is a challenge to the student. It is a challenge to the community. It is a challenge to the world.

Chapter V

SUMMARY

This research paper was conducted to illustrate the application of behavioral counseling in the classroom environment.

The problem was poor school performance in the ten year old boy with above average intelligence.

The method applied basic learning principles and positive reinforcement. It involved the student, his mother, and his two classroom teachers. It lasted six weeks until school recessed for the summer. The reinforcement did bring about better school work from the subject.

This study indicates that behavioral counseling is a technique that can be used by the school counselor to modify unacceptable behavior. Each program must be designed to meet the needs of the subject. Careful observation and programming are required to insure success. Cooperation between the teacher, counselor and parents will further insure a "united" effort to help the student. The student himself learns to control his reinforcement by his behavior. Whether he performs well or poorly depends upon his desire for the reinforcer.

The discussion deals with inherent difficulties in running a controlled experiment in behavioral counseling, especially to a child where growth and maturing factors are at work as well. Behavior usually improves as we grow up, so all things may, indeed, work together for good.

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