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A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR CONTROLLING A GROUP OF BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM

ABSTRACT: A model combining a behavioural approach with Reality Therapy was used effectively in controlling a group of behaviour problems in the classroom. A behaviour modification design similar to the token economy system was established, together with a classroom atmosphere of warmth, understanding, and helping the children recognize what they were doing and their responsibility for it. In this design the children earned and/or lost certain rewards depending on their daily classroom behaviour. The model was used successfully in one elementary classroom, and it may be practical for other group situations as well.

Some difficulties that may arise, and suggested solutions to these, are discussed.

Both teachers and counselors alike are often called upon to deal with children with behaviour problems in the classroom. Their duty is to help these children with their problems, and they may serve this function in any ethical way they find most effective. The purpose of this paper is to describe one approach which teachers and counselors may wish to examine and perhaps employ in their own particular situations. Counselors interested in trying out this approach may even hold in-service training sessions for their teachers. If the reader feels unsure of his abilities concerning the use of the model, he may be interested in Carkhuff and Berenson's (1967) observation that counseling effectiveness is much less dependent upon the counselor's theoretical orientation and technique than upon certain facilitative counselor conditions, such as genuineness, positive regard, and empathic understanding. This is interesting because it implies that the efficacy of the "counseling" process depends more on the personality of the individual counselor or teacher than on his technique. Any teacher or counselor with a sincere interest and desire to help a child has a good chance to succeed. As Dimick and Huff (1971) point out, techniques "become tools by and through which the counselor is able to extend and use his unique self in the most effective way possible to benefit the client (1971, p. 90)."

The model presented here for controlling a group of behaviour problems in the classroom combines a behavioural approach with Reality Therapy. Gronert (1970) has described the effectiveness of this combination in individual counseling situations. This author has also found it to be effective in a group situation, and as such sees some pos-

sibilities for its use in "group counseling" in most other classrooms as well. Varenhorst (1969) has suggested that behaviour modification can be applied in group classroom situations without any extensive changes from individual programs. Furthermore, it is assumed here that although differences do exist, a counselor or teacher practising Reality Therapy with one child can also do so with a group of children. Hence it is neither unrealistic nor impractical to hope for positive results using this combined approach for groups in the classroom.

Why Behaviour Modification? Pros and Cons

Gazda (1971), writing about the therapeutic treatment of groups of mental patients, points out that behaviour and attitudes can be changed "through the systematic application of learning principles in conjunction with the core conditions of a helping and healthy relationship (1971, p. 178)." Similarly, behaviour technology has much to offer in helping teachers and parents cope with a child's maladaptive and inappropriate behaviour in the classroom and in the home. Many writers (Greenberg & O'Donnell, 1972; Gronert, 1970; Johnson & Brown, 1969; Paton, 1971; Varenhorst, 1969; Warner, 1971) have successfully changed behaviour by using behaviour modification simply as a tool to help them teach children appropriate behaviour patterns. Furthermore, interest in this area appears to be growing. Goodall (1972) reports that "a good half of the 200 or so accounts of token systems published in the last decade involved classroom use, and work with teachers and parents has intensified in the last three years (p. 136)." Most of these studies have reported successful behaviour changes. Kysela (1972) offers that the behavioural approach enables the school to deal with "deviates" without the use of institutions or special schools for them. Behaviour modification contains a number of techniques which have been proven to be effective when used strategically in a systematic fashion. Improvement can be accomplished in a relatively short period of time. The techniques can be easily applied. Some of these methods are extinction, time-out, counter-conditioning, shaping, modeling, and stimulus satiation. For additional and more detailed material on behaviour modification, the reader is referred to Buckley and Walker (1970), Eysenck (1960), Hewett (1968), Krumboltz and Hosford (1967), Ullman and Krasner (1965), and Wolpe and Lazarus (1966).

Attention has also been drawn to some of the criticisms and limitations of applied behaviour in the classroom. In their reviews of the research involving behaviour modification, Pawlicki (1970) and Hanley (1970) noted many deficiencies in control techniques, description of treatment, objective observation, follow-ups, measures of reliability, and so on. Varenhorst (1969) mentions that some reinforcers (and models) work for some children, but not for all. There are no universal, consistent reinforcements. Also, systematically controlling the environmental stimuli produced by a variety of individuals makes group work in behavioural terms quite difficult. It is far easier to apply this in individual counseling, but often the counselor or teacher sees the need to work with more than one child. Dimick and Huff's (1971) main

criticism of the strict S-R behavioural approach is that, from the stand-point of the behavioural counselor, children are much like machines. "Counseling is a process providing major overhauls, minor tune-ups, and preventive maintenance for children (p. 78)." This author also criticizes this type of mechanistic, dehumanizing approach which leaves no room for the understanding of a child's feelings, attitudes, and emotions. In some instances this understanding type of approach may be superior to a strictly behavioural one. In this author's experience as a teacher of emotionally disturbed children, a calm, understanding, empathic approach in helping the children recognize what they were doing, in conjunction with behavioural modification techniques, proved to be a most effective and potent combination.

Why Reality Therapy?

It has previously been stated that any effective counseling process depends upon certain core conditions, including empathy and genuine-ness. One of several components of Reality Therapy does indeed include involvement. Yet another of its essential components is awareness of current behaviour, which ties in neatly with the behavioural approach. (Glasser does not deny the importance of feelings or emotions, but he does feel that a person cannot change his feelings without first changing his behaviour.) The child must recognize what he is doing and his responsibility for it. The teacher or counselor using Glasser's (1965) principles is primarily concerned with *what* the child is doing, not why he is doing it. Knowing "why" or gaining insight is not always enough. Muro (1970) feels this approach is also useful. The child learns to realize that he alone is responsible for his successes and failures. "Reality Therapy employs both positive and negative reinforcements for the purpose of 'administering' life's consequences, i.e. reality (Gronert, 1970, p. 104)."

From a behaviouristic viewpoint, there are similarities in the counseling goals as stated by Glasser and those presented by Krum-boltz (1966) which are sufficient and related enough to lead to a useful and practical combination of both approaches. Both Glasser and Krumboltz believe that counseling goals should be able to be stated specifically for each child, that the counselor helps alter maladaptive behaviour by using approaches based on learning principles, that he aids in the decision-making process, and that he helps to prevent prob-lems by changing existing systems (environmental and interpersonal). Both Reality Therapy and behaviour modification point out the neces-sity to determine to which behaviours the parent or teacher will at-tend. Both approaches also emphasize the present situation, leaving the past as history. The model presented here combines a method of using natural and/or logical consequences with behavioural positive and negative reinforcement. "Natural consequences express the power of the social order and not of the person (Dreikurs, 1968, p. 101)." The teacher or counselor is responsible for what is taking place, but he does not act as a powerful authority. Rather, he represents an order of things which affects everyone equally. Natural consequences

express a logical and immediate result of the transgression, not imposed on the child by an authority, but by the situation itself, by reality. Consequences are not arbitrary but self-evident. A logical consequence of being late for dinner may be no dinner. Thus, according to this model, the child does have some control over the environmental factors which determine changes in his life. The child "can choose to expose himself to various situations which will likely result in specific kinds of actions (Kysela, 1972, p. 80)." It is his choice whether to use the teacher or counselor as a means of receiving life's positive consequences or its negative ones, just as it is his choice whether to wear gloves in the winter time to keep his hands warm or discard them and allow his hands to freeze.

An Actual Experience and the Technique

One of this writer's first duties as a teacher of emotionally disturbed children was to try to control their behaviour. The technique which eventually modified their behaviour combined both the behaviour modification and Reality Therapy approaches. An interpersonal relationship characterized by understanding, empathy, and helping the children recognize what they were doing and their responsibility for it was established from the start. Together with this Reality Therapy environment, a behaviour modification system was set up whereby the children would earn and/or lose certain privileges and rewards according to their behaviour during the school day. This method is quite similar to the token economy system, wherein tokens are issued on the basis of certain behaviours being performed or withheld. It was modified and improved for use in the home situation by John Corson (1972), and further modified by this writer for use in his classroom. It is noted that for maximizing the effects of this combined approach, consistency in the technique must be applied from the start.

The actual method is quite simple. "The Chart" (graph paper) is hung on a wall in the class. As shown in Table 1, this chart is divided into a number of sections with the days of the week arranged across the top, and the names of the children down the left margin. A list of "target behaviours" (various inappropriate or undesirable behaviours) is posted near the chart with the respective initial beside each behaviour. For example, disobeying is D, teasing is T, fighting is F, and so on. These "bad marks" follow immediately upon the behaviour in question, the initial of the misbehaviour being written down in the child's box. At the end of the day, if a child has no "bad marks" in his box, he receives two stars. Each star is worth one token. If he has only one or two "bad marks," he gets one star (one token). And if he has three or more "bad marks," he gets no stars for that day. Thus, the maximum number of tokens each child can earn per week is ten. During any week, the "bad marks" are totaled, and for every five of these the child loses one token. Thus a total of eight stars minus a total of five "bad marks" yields a net gain of seven tokens. A child must have five or more "bad marks" to lose a token. If he has only four, he keeps his token.

TABLE 1

Sample Behaviour Chart with Accompanying
Target Behaviours

Behaviour Chart					Week of Jan. 13-17
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Total Tokens
David......	D R S	* *	F L *	F *	S S L	3
John........	* *	* *	* *	* *	L *	9
Ronnie.....	* *	F F S L T	T L *	T T T	* *	3
Karen......	H L *	H *	H R R R	* *	H L *	4
Wayne......	T *	D R R	* *	F T F L R R	R F R	1

Note. — One star (*) = + one token
       Five "bad marks" = − one token
Target Behaviours: D = Disobeying; R = Rudeness; S = Swearing; F = Fighting;
L = Lying; T = Teasing; H = Hitting.

Tokens can be exchanged for prizes and gifts at the end of the week. Children enjoy candies, toys, certain class privileges, etc., and it is best to ask the children what they themselves would like as rewards. In some cases, even money can be used. For example, each star earns five cents, every "bad mark" loses one cent. Finally, in an attempt to provide some immediate positive reinforcement for good behaviour, remarks such as the following are made: "You are really doing well; I am proud of you; if this sort of behaviour keeps up, you will get a star on your chart."

Some Difficulties and Suggested Solutions to These

There are some problems a teacher or counselor using this technique may encounter. First of all, once a child receives one "bad mark," he may immediately become infuriated and not care how many more "bad marks" he receives. After he has "cooled down," however, he may regret having acted so angrily. Unfortunately, he may have lost all his tokens for a moment's temper tantrum, whereas he may have shown excellent control of his behaviour all week long. Is a momentary tantrum worth the loss of a week-long victory in self-control?

This writer has found that this difficulty could be avoided by instituting a "time-out period." After a child has amassed either five different "bad marks" or three "bad marks" of the same nature, he must withdraw to a closed-off section of the classroom for five min-

utes (thus if a child is having a tantrum and consequently earns perhaps three "R" 's, he is removed from the existing situation and is allowed to "cool down" elsewhere). When the chart is first brought in, all the children are told that failure to leave the class in this circumstance (i.e. disobeying) means loss of privileges for the week and, if necessary, a visit to the principal or a call to the parent.

A second problem involves the teacher's or counselor's objective recording of the misbehaviours. Although no "chances" are permitted (i.e. "Next time you do that you get a 'bad mark.' "), often it may happen that the recorder overlooks something in the case of one pupil, yet records the same transgression in the case of another. The solution to this problem rests on the recorder's honest attempt to be fair and objective at all times (yet, no one is perfect!).

A third and final major problem deals with the case of a child who has amassed just enough "bad marks" each day that he cannot get any tokens by the end of the week. He may lose motivation and give up. If this situation persists for two successive weeks, it is suggested that this child be placed on a different chart schedule, such as loss of a token after six, seven, or even ten "bad marks" (instead of the previous five). With insight and imagination, a teacher or counselor will find a means to modify the technique so that it can work for *any* child.

Conclusions

Behaviour modification as a useful tool itself definitely has much to offer. Friesen (1972), projecting into the future, sees behaviour modification as becoming not only acceptable and tolerable in controlling behaviour, but also as being applied systematically to all children. Although it can be used effectively as a means to overcome obstacles one should not forget the teacher's and counselor's ultimate goal of helping the child recognize what he is doing and his responsibility for it. One of the main goals of education is to help the child "see" the intrinsic value of learning, so that he will continue to want to learn to satisfy his own needs and curiosity for most of his life. In behaviour technology, there may occur a distortion of this motivation to learn for the sake of learning itself. In other words, the teacher and counselor as part of the educational team must be careful not to distort the goal of learning, a goal which should evolve intrinsically and not be dependent on any external or mechanical rewards. For those children handicapped by problems in self-discipline and self-control, Reality Therapy used conscientiously in conjunction with behaviour modification offers a means of attaining this goal.

RESUME: On a utilisé avec succès auprès d'une classe d'enfants problèmes un mode d'intervention dérivé de l'approche béhaviorale et de la thérapie orientée sur la réalité ("reality therapy"). On a utilisé un système semblable à celui de la récompense au mérite à l'intérieur d'un climat de compréhension et de chaleur où l'enfant était amené à reconnaître et à assumer la responsabilité de son comportement. De cette façon l'enfant pouvait se mériter une récompense ou la perdre selon la nature de son comportement quotidien dans la classe. Ce mode d'intervention a été éprouvé avec succès dans une classe de niveau primaire. On peut supposer qu'il

pourrait avoir une valeur dans d'autres situations de groupe. On a discuté quelques unes des difficultés susceptibles de se produire et on a proposé des solutions.

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