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THE ENCOURAGEMENT PROCESS IN GUIDANCE: ITS EFFECT ON SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTENDING BEHAVIOR

ABSTRACT: This article illustrates how a counselor in his teacher-consultation role was able to model in the classroom the use of encouragement methods to improve the achievement and attending behavior of a seventh grade student. The author describes the specific procedures which were used and provides data to evaluate the result. Several significant implications for school counselors are suggested.

Guidance consultants who use educational or developmental models are often asked by teachers, "How can I stop children in my class from daydreaming, talking, playing, and engaging in other forms of non-productive, attention-getting behavior?" or "How can I stimulate the children in my class toward achievement which is consistent with their ability?" The educational or developmental oriented guidance specialist assumes that through consultation and modeling, teachers can learn effective methods of preventing disruptive behavior and stimulating productive achievement (Christensen, 1969; Dinkmeyer & Caldwell, 1970; Hillman, 1967).

The purpose of this article is to report how a guidance consultant was able to model the use of the encouragement process plus immediate corrective feedback to help one boy improve his arithmetic achievement and attending behavior in the classroom. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures used, the results of a single-subject study are reported. It is appropriate for a guidance consultant to use single-subject research designs because he is primarily concerned about learning which specific methods will work best with specific children. A technique which is appropriate for the mythical "average child" may be quite unsatisfactory for a particular child in need of behavior change.

Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (1963) have suggested that the encouragement process is one of the most effective methods available to teachers and counselors who wish to challenge children to achieve and attend appropriately in the classroom. Several procedures of encouragement have been suggested by these authors:

1. Create self-confidence by valuing the child and showing faith in him as he is rather than how he should be.
2. Recognize a job well done and give recognition for effort.
3. Use the classroom group to facilitate the child's development and integrate him into the group.
4. Develop skills sequentially and psychologically paced.
5. Focus on the child's strengths, assets, and interests.

It is unfortunate but often true that many teachers actually hinder children from high achievement and trigger inappropriate classroom behavior by relating with these children in a very discouraging way. Teachers may do this by implying that the child is not capable of good work, by giving him insincere praise, by remaining silent and implying unacceptance, by using ridicule or negative social pressure, by expecting more than the child perceives he can deliver, or any number of other negative communication signals.

The "knowledge of results" literature suggests another method of stimulating higher achievement which may have an encouraging effect. In a review of this literature, Anderson (1967) concluded that giving knowledge of the results, i.e. corrective feedback, facilitates learning. Studies by Hillman (1969, 1970) and Johnston, Maertens, and Schooley (1969) concluded that arithmetic achievement was significantly superior when corrective feedback, or knowledge of results, was given immediately after each problem was computed.

In the typical classroom situation, most children are given large units of work to complete at one time, without immediate knowledge of results or encouragement. Usually the corrected papers and any encouragement for the children is delayed until the following day or for even longer periods of time. Conversely, children are often immediately reinforced when the teacher gives attention to them for exhibiting non-attending behavior. The teacher gives discouraging attention when she continually reminds children to begin assignments, to finish their work, and to stop disruptive behavior. In this way children are actually being reinforced for unproductive learning.

The Situation Before Consultation and Modeling

John, a seventh grade student in an eight-year elementary school, was referred by his teacher to a Guidance Consultant. Although John had average intelligence as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, he seldom completed class assignments and tended to make many errors with arithmetic problems. In addition he exhibited frequent non-attending behavior. The teacher was annoyed by this behavior and she fell into the pattern of frequently reminding him to get to work or to stop playing. When he was not doing his school work, the teacher would stand close to John's desk and watch over him. He would then work for a few minutes, but as soon as his teacher left, he would again become distracted and stop doing his school work.

It was hypothesized that John's non-attending behavior and poor achievement was for the purpose of seeking the teachers' attention

(Dreikrus, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1971). She reinforced this purpose by paying attention to him immediately after he acted out in some way or was not applying himself of his school work. There was no evidence that anyone paid much attention to John when he was attending to his tasks. Most of the teacher's interaction with John was negative and discouraging.

Consultation and Modeling Procedures

The first step in the consultation process was for the teacher and Guidance Consultant to discuss the dynamics of the situation described above, including the purpose for John's behavior and how his attention-getting was reinforced by the teacher's behavior. This discussion was based on the teacher's reports and the consultant's observations in the classroom. The teacher agreed not to pay attention to John when he was unattending and to pay attention to him only when his behavior was appropriate. It was also agreed that a specific program of encouragement was needed to replace the negative interaction which was not working. The Guidance Consultant agreed to model the encouragement process for the teacher in the classroom, and the teacher permitted the consultant to evaluate the effectiveness of the program with a one-subject design study. The consultant and teacher agreed on the following encouragement program and evaluation procedures.

It was decided to use a 20-minute time block each day for 24 days to help John increase his arithmetic achievement and attending behavior. During this period of time the consultant was in the classroom to demonstrate the encouragement process for the teacher. It was felt that this type of modeling would be an effective way of helping the teacher learn a process which she could use with other children on other occasions. If the encouragement program were conducted in the Consultant's office, or if the Consultant had simply told the teacher what to do, the opportunity for much teacher learning would have been lost. On subsequent occasions the teacher could implement an encouragement program and the consultant could be available for support if needed.

Each day John was presented with a specially prepared worksheet consisting of 20 multiplication problems to compute. The problems for each worksheet were selected from a pool of multiplication problems with nine levels of complexity and 56 problems in each level. A stratified random selection process was used to insure that each work sheet had the same difficulty level. The problems were arranged in order of increasing complexity for each worksheet. The number of correct problems solved per minute was recorded.

Each day while John was doing his work sheets an independent observer recorded John's attending behavior in the classroom at 10-second intervals. Attending behavior included: looking at the assigned work sheet, working problems and recording answers, listening or talking to the teacher or Guidance Consultant, and walking from his desk to where the Guidance Consultant was sitting and back to his own desk. All other behavior was recorded as non-attending. This

procedure was used throughout the study. The reliability of the observer was checked 10 times with another observer, three times before the start of the study and seven times during the study. The results showed a 98 percent agreement between observers with a range from 95 percent to 100 percent.

The program designed for John was divided into the following four phases:

A. *Baseline* — days 1-5

During the Baseline phase, John was presented each day with a different arithmetic worksheet of 20 problems. His instructions were as follows: "Here is your arithmetic worksheet for today; you have 20 minutes to complete it; then I will collect it."

The problems were corrected and returned the following day with the number correct at the top of the page. No encouragement was given John, by either the teacher or the consultant during the 20-minute period.

B. *Treatment 1* — days 6-13

During this phase of the study John was presented each day with a different arithmetic worksheet of 20 problems. The instructions given John during this phase were as follows: "Here is your arithmetic worksheet for today; when you have completed ——— problems, bring your paper over to my desk and I will check your answers. You have 20 minutes to complete the worksheet."

John was given immediate encouragement and the correct answers each time he turned in a unit of work. Initially this involved encouragement and corrective feedback for every two problems completed. Then, the Consultant gradually increased the units of work or number of problems completed by John before giving encouragement. John was told the correct answers, but not how to work any problems or where he had made errors.

Examples of encouragement used by the consultant included the following: "Good work; excellent job; great, you got 14 right today; you missed several today, but tomorrow I bet you will do better; since you did such a good job today, it won't be necessary to have your work checked as often tomorrow; keep up the good work; you can work more problems at a time now." For the first two days of Treatment 1, (days six and seven) John was given encouragement and the correct answers each time he completed two problems. During days eight and nine the number of problems completed at one time was increased to four. Then, for days 10 and 11, the number was increased to eight. Finally, for days 12 and 13, no encouragement or correct answers were given John until he had completed 16 problems.

C. *Reversal* — days 14-19

During this phase John was given a different arithmetic worksheet of 20 problems each day with the same instructions used during Baseline.

His paper was corrected and returned the following day with the number correct at the top of the page. No encouragement or correct answers were given John by either the Consultant or the teacher.

D. *Treatment 2* — days 20-24

Each day John was given a different arithmetic worksheet of 20 problems with the same instructions used during Treatment 1. Encouragement and correct answers were also given in the same manner as in Treatment 1.

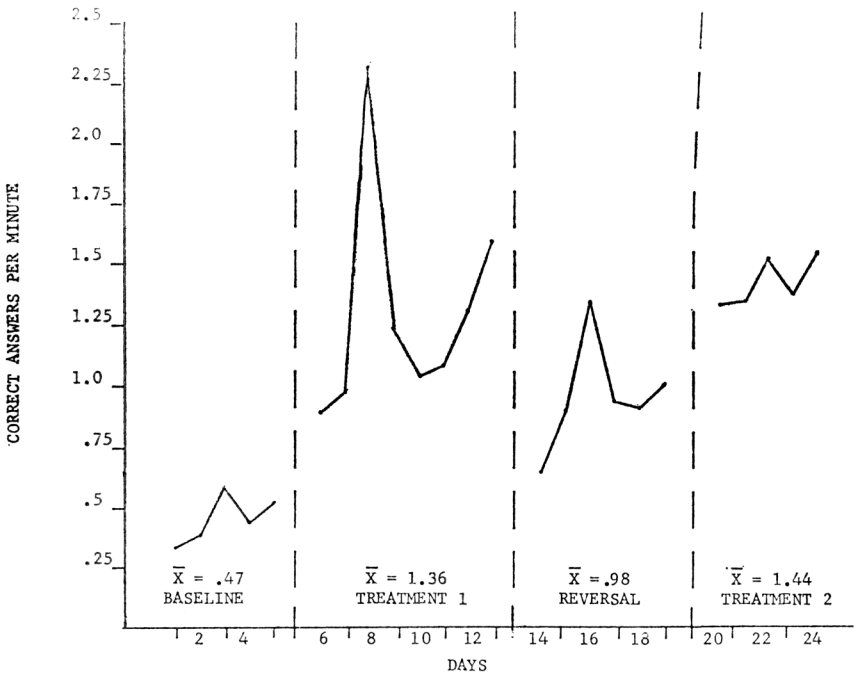
The number of problems completed by John before presenting himself to the consultant for the purpose of having his work checked was increased from five for day 20, to ten for day 21, 15 for day 22, and all 20 problems for the last two days.

Results of Modeled Encouragement and Corrective Feedback

As indicated in Figure 1, during Baseline John spent a mean of 51 percent of his 20-minute arithmetic time in attending behavior. However, during Treatment 1, when encouragement and immediate corrective feedback were given, a mean of 97 percent of his time was

FIGURE 1

Percentage of Total Time Spent in Attending Behavior



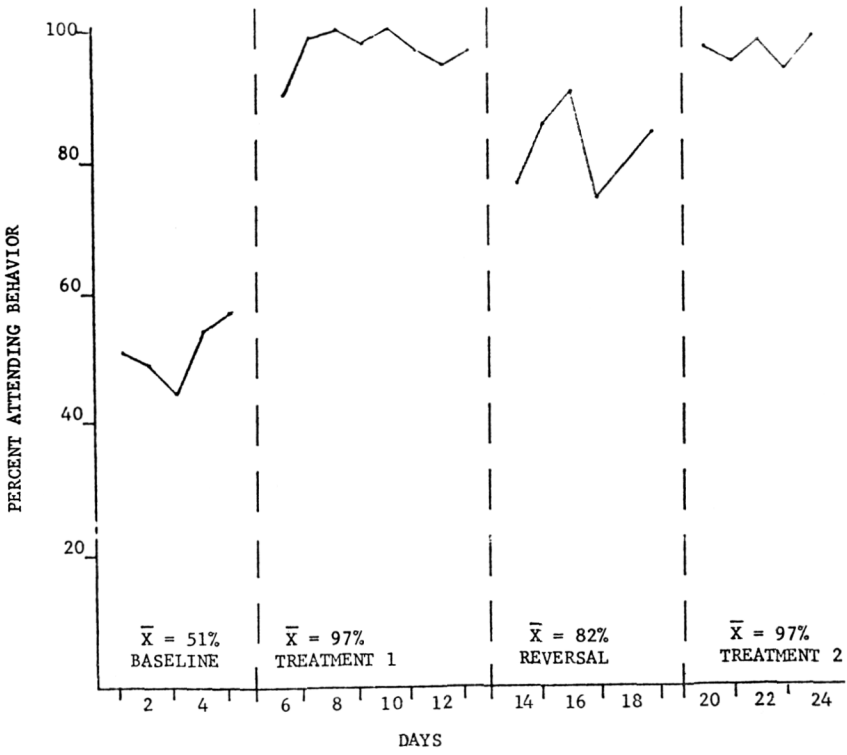
spent in attending behavior. During Reversal, when the treatment plan was discontinued, John's attending behavior dropped to a mean of 82 percent. When encouragement and feedback were reintroduced during Treatment 2, John's attending behavior returned to the 97 percent level.

Similar changes in the number of correct arithmetic answers per minute may be observed in Figure 2. During Baseline John had a mean of .47 correct arithmetic answers per minute. During Treatment 1 the rate rapidly increased to a mean of 1.36 and then declined to a mean of .98 during Reversal. The mean rate increased again to 1.44 during the reinstatement of treatment. John's behavior could not be recorded for day 18, during the Reversal period. On that day the noise level in the classroom was annoying to John and he left the classroom to complete the problems in the hallway.

The results support the effectiveness of a systematic program of encouragement and corrective feedback to increase John's attending behavior and arithmetic achievement.

FIGURE 2

Number of Correct Arithmetic Answers per Minute



It is interesting to note that as soon as treatment was initiated both attending behavior and achievement dramatically increased. When the treatment plan was discontinued during Reversal, attending behavior and achievement dropped some, but in general the effects of treatment tended to be maintained. It should also be noted that during the treatment phase, the high level of attending behavior and achievement were maintained even though larger and larger units of work were completed before encouragement and feedback were given. At the end of Treatment 2 John was able to complete all 20 arithmetic problems without seeking negative attention or receiving special encouragement or feedback. He was unable to come close to this level of performance before consultation was begun.

Implications for School Counselors

The procedures illustrated in this study have several implications for guidance specialists. First, in his role as a Guidance Consultant, the counselor can help teachers avoid their discouraging behaviors toward children and stimulate more encouraging teacher-student interactions. This study indicates that when attention-getting behavior is ignored or not reinforced, and this negative attention is replaced with encouragement at non-conflict times, it is possible for children to change dramatically. A significant by-product of the process is that by working with a Guidance Consultant the teacher as well as the child becomes more encouraged, and a more positive teacher-child relationship usually results. Teachers who themselves feel encouraged are more likely to be effective in developing similar feelings or encouragement in children.

Another implication of this study is that the Guidance Consultant may be more effective in stimulating change in teachers and children if he models his procedures in the classroom before expecting the teacher to implement his methods with other children. By watching a Guidance Consultant in action, the teacher is given a better opportunity to learn the encouragement process. The objective of this procedure is to train the teacher to be more effective in the use of encouragement when the Guidance Consultant is not present.

A potentially significant implication of the method presented here is that a Guidance Consultant can have a greater impact if through consultation and modeling he helps teachers learn procedures that can ultimately effect a change in many children. There is obviously not time for a Guidance Consultant using an Educational or Developmental model to work in a one-to-one or even a small group relationship with all the attention-getters or underachievers in a large school. He can, however, indirectly influence most of the children in a school and children who will attend the school in future years if he is successful in helping the teachers gain competence in the use of guidance methods.

Some teachers may ask "How will I find time in my busy routine to use the encouragement methods which the Guidance Consultant has suggested?" Perhaps a more important issue is whether or not

most teachers have time *not* to use the encouragement process. The question is how much teacher attention will be given, when, and for what? Typically a great deal of teacher attention is given at inappropriate times for negative behavior. An implication of this study is that it takes less time to give systematic positive attention in the form of encouragement than to give negative attention on the child's demand. Encouragement is given frequently at the beginning of the procedure but very soon little teacher or counselor time is needed to maintain a high level of achievement and attending behavior. To save even more time a teacher's aide or even another child can be trained to use encouragement and corrective feedback.

Finally, by measuring the child's progress and plotting it on a graph, the Guidance Consultant, teacher, and child have tangible evidence to indicate whether or not the plan is working. The graph itself is an excellent source of encouragement to all concerned. Another obvious advantage of plotting this kind of data is that it gives the counselor evidence when he is asked to demonstrate his professional accountability.

There is a need for multiple replications of the study presented here before any generalization can be made about the effectiveness of the treatment plan with other children. It seems clear, however, that John was able to improve his arithmetic achievement and attending behavior as a result of the encouragement and corrective feedback methods used in the study. John's teacher also learned some methods of encouragement which she was able to use in subjects other than arithmetic and with other children in her classroom. There is reason to believe that these methods of encouragement could be effective not only with 7th graders but also with other elementary and secondary school students.

RESUME: Cet article illustre comment un conseiller, dans l'exercice de son rôle d'enseignant-consultant, a pu démontrer dans la classe l'emploi de méthodes d'encouragement visant à améliorer le rendement et l'assiduité d'un élève de septième année. L'auteur décrit les procédures spécifiques qui furent utilisées et présente des données permettant d'évaluer les résultats. On dégage plusieurs implications importantes pour le conseiller scolaire.

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