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FROM VILLAIN TO CLASS HERO

ABSTRACT: Disturbed behaviors are often maintained by variables in the educational environment. An effective classroom rehabilitation program involves the alteration of the variables which maintain inappropriate behaviors. An intervention plan was designed for a ten-year-old emotionally disturbed boy which included positive feedback for academic achievement and positive social emotional feedback from the peers. The environmental variables were redesigned to promote success instead of failure and to gain acceptance instead of rejection. The intervention consisted of rewarding appropriate academic and social behaviors. Each time the subject earned a point for himself he earned a point for the class towards a desirable class event.

The results indicate that the alteration of feedback conditions resulted in alteration of behavior in the subject, the teacher, and the peers. In the changed classroom environment the frequency of maladaptive behaviors decreased.

Most practitioners dealing with emotionally disturbed children recognize the importance of the child's educational situation as a major influence on his behavior. Pathological behaviors are often the result of variables in the educational environment and the real task of rehabilitation, right within the school system, will have to deal with redesigning the class environment which maintained these inappropriate behaviors (Whelan, 1969). The quality of feedback from teacher and the peers is a major determinant of the outcome of the child's behavior (Patterson, Cobb, & Ray, 1971). If this feedback is negative, inappropriate behaviors are more likely to occur (Hall, Lund, & Jackson, 1968). However, if the classroom feedback is positive and rewarding, the behavior is more likely to recur under similar conditions (Whelan & Haring, 1966). Since lack of academic achievement and social emotional behaviors are closely interrelated, an effective classroom rehabilitation plan for an emotionally disturbed child has to weld the two aspects together (Phillips, 1967).

This study describes in detail a classroom intervention procedure which attempted to create an environment for Joey where he could function successfully and reestablish himself as a "bona-fide classmate."

Subject

You have probably met Joey. He is the scraggly, messy-looking ten-year-old no one wants to play with. Rejected by his peers, he stands alone during recess or uses the tools of aggression to establish some kind of peer interaction. For lack of better social skills, a fight ensues and he ends up in the office, blamed, lectured at, day after day after day. Contemporary teacher practices shy away from a *dunce's hat*, but Joey wears an invisible one, just the same. He is two years behind in reading, one year in arithmetic, and when he is presented with teacher expectations appropriate to the grade level, but not to his level, he is lost. His lack of performance and the wide array of inappropriate behaviors he exhibits elicit a great variety of negative responses from the teacher and the peers. Joey is late almost every morning. The staff knows him and his name spells Trouble. In one large inner city school Joey was identified as a child with problems and a program of intervention was designed and implemented.

Method

The investigator and the teacher aide observed classroom events at scattered points for three days. The following behaviors were pinpointed for observation and recording:

1. negative teacher remarks
2. negative remarks of peers in the classroom
3. negative remarks of peers in the schoolyard
4. answers correct
5. fighting in classroom or schoolyard
6. swear words
7. statements of defiance
8. lateness
9. involvement in group activity.

Definition of pinpointed behaviors:

1. Negative teacher remarks: any oral or written statement by the teacher that conveys disapproval of the subject's behavior or performance.
- 2, 3. Negative remarks of peers in the classroom or the schoolyard: any oral, signed, or written statement that conveys disapproval of the subject's behavior or performance expressed by his classmates.
4. Answers correct: any written or oral reply to questions or to assignments performed with 100% accuracy.
5. Fighting in classroom or schoolyard: any successful blow or kick delivered by the hand or hands, foot or feet causing the subject to come in collision with another person.
6. Swear words: any word said or written, classified by the teacher and teacher-aide as socially unacceptable.
7. Statements of defiance: any reply, oral or written, which expressed unwillingness to comply with directions given by the teacher.

8. Lateness: the number of minutes elapsed between 9:00 a.m. and his arrival to the classroom.
9. Involvement in group activity: minutes spent in the company of classmates playing games or talking appropriately during recess. (Maximum possible = 10 m.)

Table 1

Range and Means of Behaviors per Phase.

Behavior	Baseline		Intervention		Base ²		After	
	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean
Negative teacher remarks	9 - 15	11.9	0 - 7	1.9	10 - 10	10	3 - 7	4.5
Negative peer remarks	5 - 11	7.7	0 - 6	2.5	6 - 11	8.5	3 - 5	4.7
Correct answers	0 - 3	.9	8 - 27	18.1	2 - 4	3	5 - 7	5.8
Swear words	4 - 20	9.7	0 - 5	2.9	6 - 8	7	5 - 8	6.4
Defying statement	7 - 15	10.2	0 - 6	2.6	5 - 7	6	4 - 7	5.8
Minutes late	4 - 14	7.6	0 - 4	2.2	6 - 7	6.5	1 - 5	2.4
Involvement in group activity	0 - 1	.4	1 - 6	3.9	1 - 1	1	3 - 5	4.2

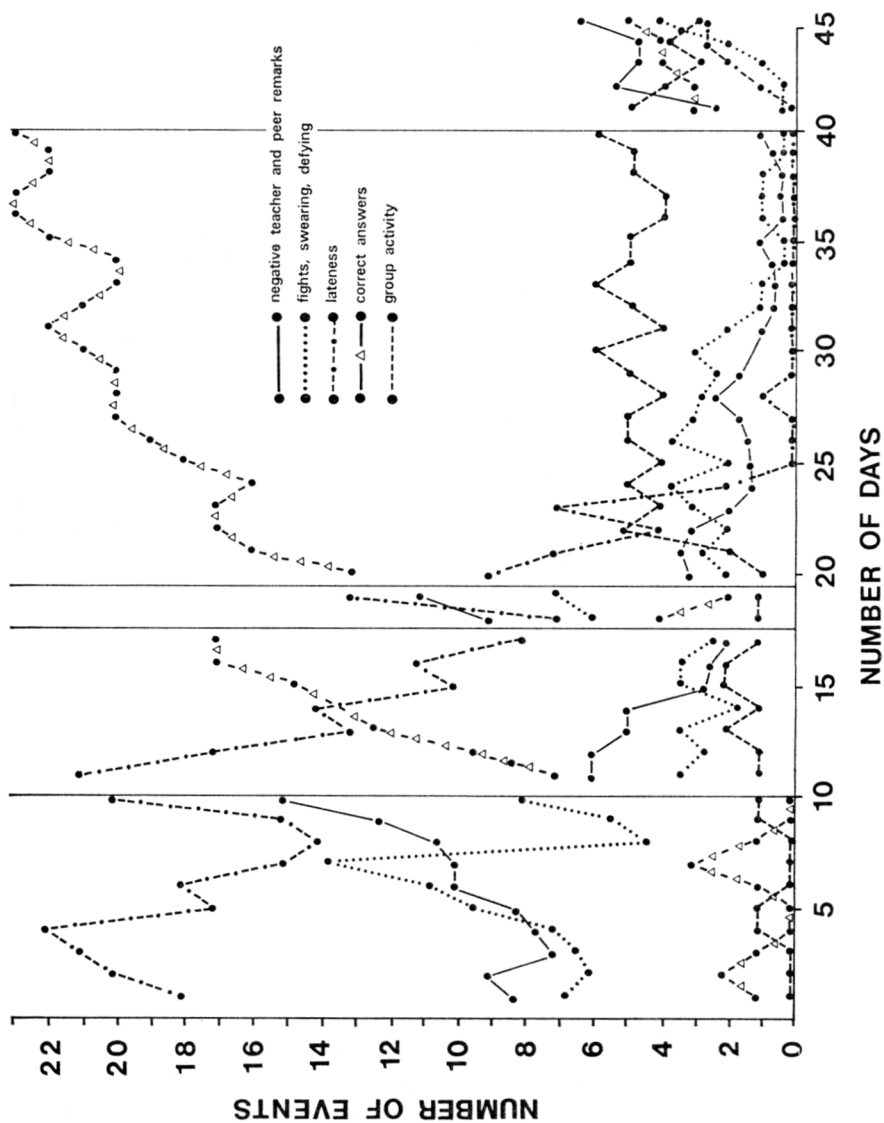
*Procedure**Phase I*

The teacher-aide observed and recorded the specified teacher, peer, and subject behaviors for 60 minutes in the classroom and for 10 minutes during recess each morning. This baseline phase lasted 10 consecutive school days.

Phase II

An intervention program was designed by the teacher, the teacher-aide, and investigator to facilitate Joey's rehabilitation. This intervention program aimed to increase Joey's academic adjustment by providing him with materials in reading, spelling, and arithmetic at his achievement level. In order to control some of his inappropriate behaviors he was rewarded for "appropriate behavior" as defined by the teacher and teacher-aide in the classroom and in the schoolyard. To increase his acceptance by the classmates the class was rewarded according to Joey's performance.

Figure 1: Daily record of specified behaviors for each phase.



Specifically:

1. Points were earned with each answer correct and for each 10 minutes of appropriate behavior.
2. Each time the subject earned a point the class earned a point towards a weekly class event (party, popcorn, movie, hike, etc.).
3. Points earned were exchangeable for a variety of trinkets, candy, etc., at the end of the school day. No individual contingencies were placed on the specified behaviors. The effect of the intervention program was observed and recorded on these specified behaviors.

During the Intervention phase of the study the specified behaviors were observed and recorded for 60 minutes in the morning in the classroom and 10 minutes in the schoolyard by the teacher-aide.

The subject worked on an individual program in reading, spelling, and arithmetic. The teacher explained the arrangement to the class. Three times during the day she would mark the number of points Joey had earned for the class on the blackboard.

This intervention phase lasted 28 consecutive school days.

Baseline 2 was established on days 8 and 9 of the Intervention phase. During these two days the intervention program was suspended and conditions were made similar to Phase I. No points were earned.

Phase III

For five days the intervention program was suspended and conditions were made similar to conditions in Phase I. Joey was given the same materials as the rest of the class and no points were earned during this phase.

Reliability

Reliability checks of the teacher-aide's scoring of specified behaviors were made at scattered points throughout the study by the teacher and the investigator.

Analysis of Data and Results

Reliability: Each observation scored by the teacher and/or the investigator was compared with the observations recorded by the teacher-aide. The total number of agreements was divided by the total number of observations and this result multiplied by 100 to obtain a percentage of agreement. The percentage of agreement between teacher-aide's scoring and the teacher's and/or the investigator's was 91 percent.

The number of occurrences of each specified behavior was recorded daily for 60 minutes in the classroom and for 10 minutes in the schoolyard each morning.

These frequency counts during the various phases of the study provide the data for analyses of the effects of the intervention procedure.

Figure 1 represents graphically the specified behaviors observed and recorded daily for each phase.

Figure 2: Daily frequency of negative teacher and peer remarks.

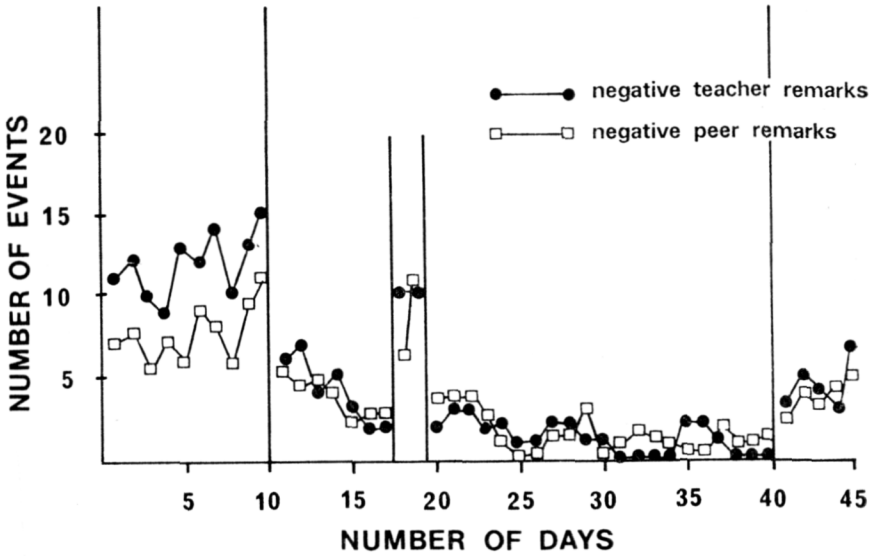


Figure 3: Daily frequency of swear words and statements of defiance.

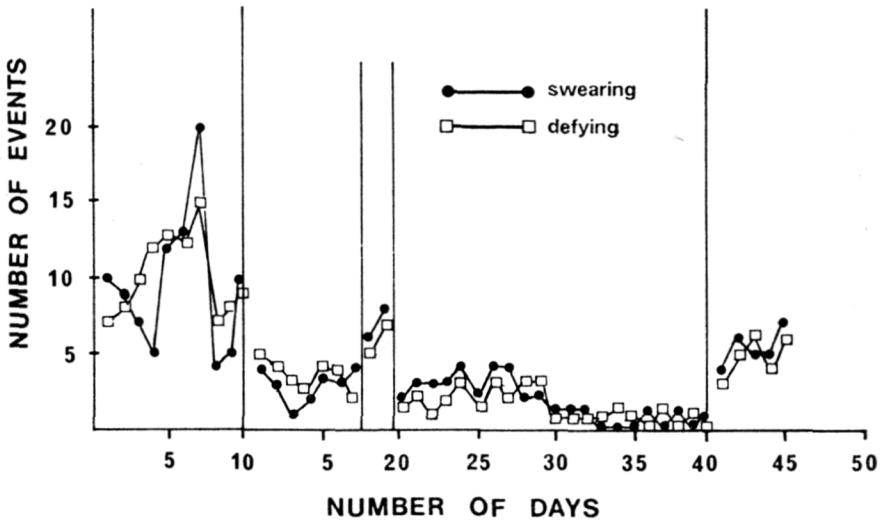


Figure 2 illustrates the daily frequency of negative teacher and peer remarks for each phase.

Figure 3 represents the frequency of swear words and statements of defiance for each day for each phase.

Figure 4: Number of correct answers and frequency of negative teacher remarks.

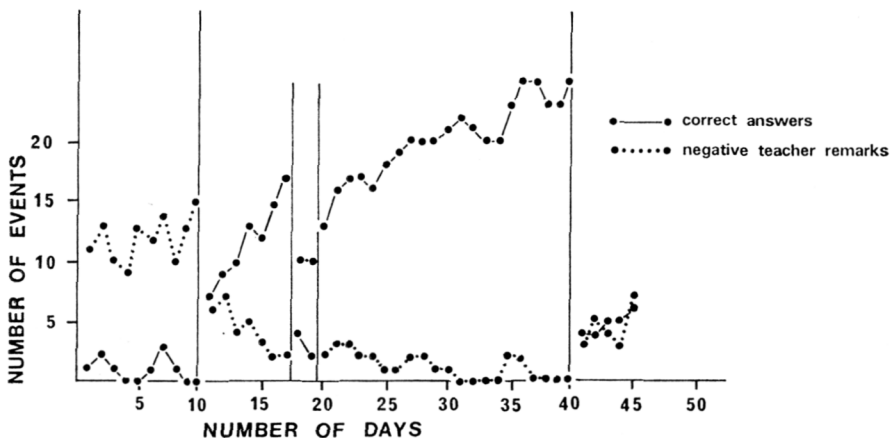


Figure 5: Number of points earned for the class, frequency of negative peer remarks, and number of minutes involved in group activity during recess.

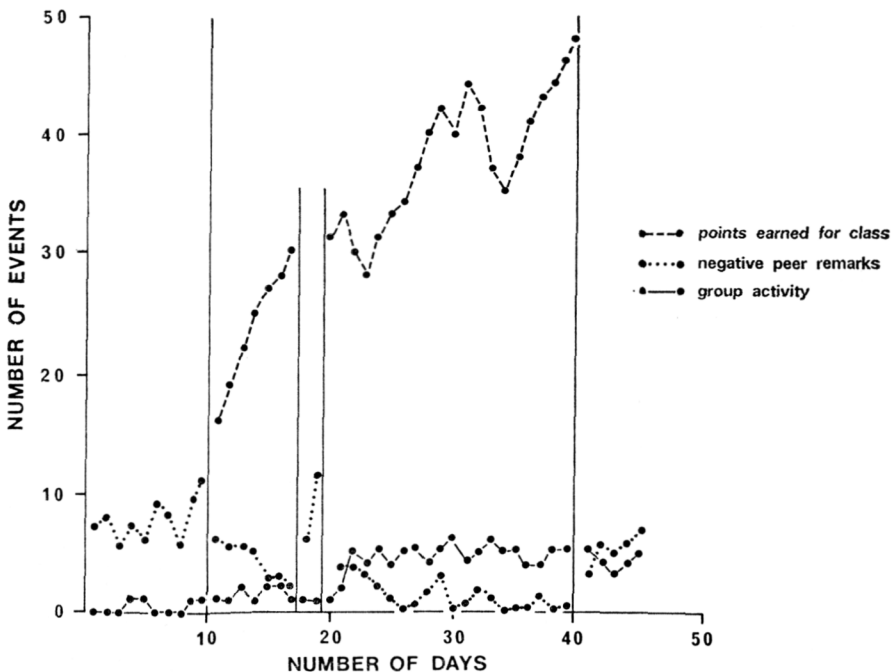


Figure 4 shows the number of answers correct and the frequency of negative teacher remarks for each phase.

Figure 5 represents the number of points the subject earned each day for the class, the frequency of negative peer remarks, and number of minutes involved in group activity during recess.

Table 1 illustrates the types of behaviors, ranges, and means for each behavior for each phase.

The table and graphs clearly indicate the effect of the intervention procedure on the specified behaviors of the subject, the teacher, and the peers.

The difference in frequency of behaviors during Phase I and Phase II clearly indicate that the intervention procedure had a decelerating effect on the specified inappropriate behaviors of teacher, peers, and the subject, and an accelerating effect on the subject's appropriate behaviors.

Each graph shows a decrease of inappropriate behaviors and an increase of appropriate behaviors after the introduction of the intervention procedure.

Figure 5 shows that as points were earned by Joey for the class the frequency of negative peer remarks decreased and his involvement in group activity increased.

Figure 4 indicates that as Joey produced more correct answers the negative teacher remarks decreased in frequency.

Discussion

On the basis of the data obtained in this investigation one may conclude that a well-designed intervention program including academic, social, and emotional variables can produce a classroom environment conducive to appropriate behaviors even for the child who has been rejected and taunted by his classmates.

With the alteration of feedback conditions attention of behavior has occurred in the teacher, the peer, and the subject. With the changed classroom environment the frequency of maladjusted behaviors had decreased. School became a more desirable place for Joey where he could achieve, learn, participate. The best evidence for this is the rapid deceleration of minutes late, once he could perform his task and an incentive was provided for him to perform. Peer taunting and teasing decreased and involvement in group activities increased. Using this intervention procedure with such low response cost on the part of the teacher, the former villain was on the best way to become a class hero.

RESUME: Certaines variables de l'environnement éducationnel sont souvent responsables de comportements inadéquats. Un programme efficace de réhabilitation à l'intérieur de la classe devrait inclure une modification de ces variables. On a élaboré un plan d'interventions auprès d'un garçon de dix ans qui souffrait de perturbations émotives. Ce plan incluait des renforcements positifs du rendement académique et des réactions positives provenant des pairs à l'endroit du comportement socio-affectif. Les variables de l'environnement ont été altérées de façon à promouvoir la réussite au lieu de l'échec et l'acceptation au lieu du rejet. Les résultats indiquent qu'une modification dans les conditions de l'environnement a produit une modification du comportement du sujet, du professeur et des pairs. Dans ce nouvel environnement, la fréquence des comportements inadaptés a diminué.

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