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Steps Before the Referral

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Referrals to the Resource Room

Paula Coolidge, as a Title I public school teacher, worked in two schools within her system: the West Elementary School which consisted of grades 1 - 3 (96 students) and the Burke Elementary School which consisted of grades K - 6 (475 students).

At the West School eight Team Meetings had been conducted with reasons for referral as follows: 5 for behavior, 2 for reading, and 1 for visual-motor difficulties. Seventeen Team Meetings had been conducted at the Burke School and the reasons for referrals were: 5 for behavior, 1 for fine motor difficulties, 4 for reading, 1 for math, and 6 for combinations of a learning disability and behavior problems.

After taking this survey it was axiomatic that the most frequent reason for referrals in both schools was for behavior problems. In talking with the resource room teachers at both schools it was noted that the teachers felt that their resource rooms were being used as a "dumping ground" for children with behavior problems. It was also their feeling that alternative methods of working with children who have behavior problems should be tried before referring a child for an evaluation.

Preventive Program for Behavior Problems

Since the affective area is more difficult to measure than the cognitive (screening, etc.) in terms of what criteria one would use in determining which children would be potential "problems," observation

and record keeping or graphing of a child's behavior in the classroom setting would be one method of determining which children have behavior problems.

It is of primary importance that classroom teachers become aware of the social and emotional development of the child and realize that the educational process should be one that involves not only training in academic areas but also in the affective domain, then become sensitive to it and make it an integral part of their program.

A preventive program for behavior problems includes:

1. Workshops. A minimum of two workshops annually directed toward behavior modification techniques for classroom teachers. The workshops should be conducted by the school guidance counselor and another specialist, such as the learning disabilities teacher. At these workshops the discussion should focus on the basics of behavior modification such as reinforcers and how to use them, ways to decrease inappropriate behavior, effective punishment procedures, ways to maintain instructional control, and how to measure and record the behavior of specific children or the class as a whole.

Suggestions should also be given to classroom teachers concerning ways to deal with disruptive children (time-out areas should be designated, for example) and role-playing can be employed as a means of demonstrating a specific behavior management technique.

An evaluation listing strengths, weaknesses, and areas for discussion at future workshops should be a part of each workshop.

One way to determine the effectiveness of these workshops is for the specialist to observe each classroom for 20 minutes per month. This practice makes it possible for the specialist to view the teachers' use of behavior management techniques and how effective they are or are becoming.

2. Affective Training in the Classroom. To help children better understand social-emotional behavior, the classroom teacher must incorporate into the daily program "mini-lessons" and activities in affective development. This can be accomplished by utilizing the following:

- (a) DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) (AGS), grades K - 3. This is a program of activities designed for use by regular classroom teachers and/or guidance counselors. The program consists of eight major themes: 1) Understanding and Accepting Self, 2) Understanding Feelings, 3) Understanding Others, 4) Understanding Independence, 5) Understanding Goals and Purposeful Behavior, 6) Understanding Mastery, Competence, and Resourcefulness, 7) Understanding Emotional Maturity, 8) Understanding Choices and Consequences.
- (b) Filmstrips - The Grasshopper Man Stories - Series 1 and Series 2, Pathescope Educational Films, Inc.
- (c) Role-Playing Activities - The acting out of specific problem situations to help the child gain insight into solutions to problems and increase decision making abilities.
- (d) Group Discussion - This should be conducted at the end of the day or week for the purpose of helping students discuss what they have learned about themselves and others and problems at school that concern them.
- (e) Art Activities - For example, "Make a drawing that shows how you are feeling today."
- (f) Music Activities - The children can listen to a song and discuss how the music makes them feel.

- (g) Proud Bulletin Board - This bulletin board is for the purpose of displaying something done well from every student in the class.

3. Parent's Discussion Night. A discussion directed toward the emotional development of the elementary school child and how it affects learning should be conducted by the school guidance counselor.

The objectives of Parent's Discussion Night are:

- (a) To develop an awareness of the emotional development of the child.
- (b) To develop a better understanding of the child's emotional needs and to learn how to deal with these needs in the home setting.
- (c) To learn how to work with the child so that he/she develops a positive self-image.
- (d) To explain the methods the school is using to educate the child in the affective domain.
- (e) To gain insight into parent's anxieties about the emotional development of their child through a question and answer period following the discussion.

As a follow up to the first Parent's Discussion Night, parents are invited to come to school one day a month to observe and perhaps participate in the affective development "mini-lessons" that are conducted by the classroom teacher. A second Parent's Discussion Night should be held at the beginning of the second semester.

4. In-Service Course. In order for elementary classroom teachers to develop an awareness of the humanistic approach to education an in-service course, "Values Clarification in the Elementary School," should be offered by the school system. It would

focus on teaching the dynamics of behavior in four major areas:

- (a) Communication.
- (b) Values.
- (c) Self-Image.
- (d) Problem Solving and Decision Making.

Evaluation of the Program

The effectiveness of this program should be evaluated by:

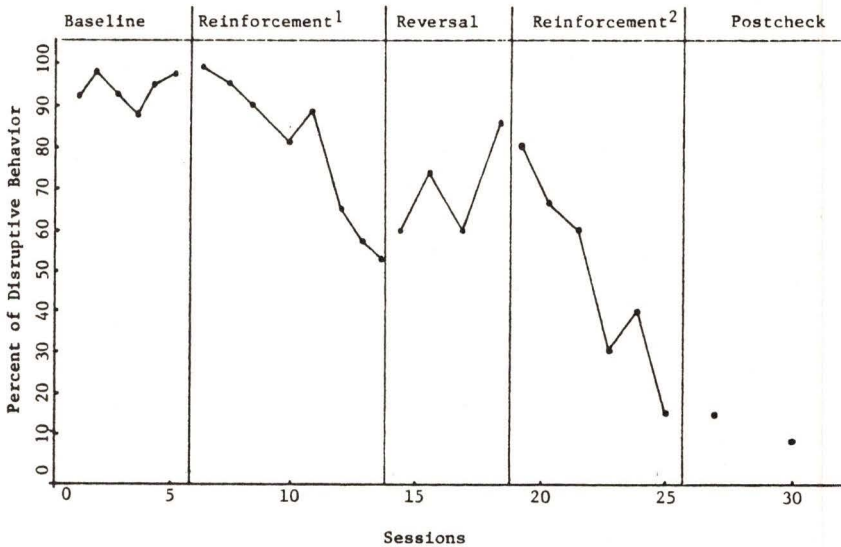
1. Record Keeping and Graphing. The classroom teacher should be instructed to measure and record the behavior of her students. (This instruction would be given at the workshops on behavior modification.)

The three most common methods of recording behavior are automatic recording, direct measurement of permanent products, and observational recording. Observational recording is the most used method because it involves simply looking at a behavior and making a record of what one sees as it occurs. Once the teacher decides how the behavior will be recorded, it must then be graphed in order to verify whether or not the procedures are responsible for changes in the student's behavior. One of the easiest ways to graph behavior is to use the Reversal Design which consists of five parts:

- (a) Baseline - This is the operant level of behavior prior to the beginning of the program.
- (b) Reinforcement 1 - This is behavior recorded once the program begins.
- (c) Reversal - Return to Baseline conditions and continue to measure and record the behavior.

- (d) Reinforcement 2 - Reinstatement the conditions of the Reinforcement 1 period and continue to record the behavior.
- (e) Postcheck - An occasional check on the behavior to see if behavior levels are being maintained.

The diagram that follows is an example of this type of graph:



2. Outside Evaluation. Another way to evaluate a program such as this would be to hire an outside consultant or evaluator to come into the schools for a semi-annual program assessment. PL 94-142 funds can be utilized to employ an outside evaluator if local funding is not available.

3. Exchange Program. The specialists from one community should invite specialists from the school systems of two other neighboring towns to come into their schools and observe parts of this program. The

specialists from the requesting community would in turn visit the other two school systems to observe their behavior programs.

All of the specialists would then meet to evaluate each other's programs and offer feedback and suggestions as an additional means of evaluation.

4. Questionnaire. The specialist should devise a questionnaire that is given to classroom teachers at the end of the year to determine how effective the program has been. It should be constructed on a SA/Strongly Agree, A/Agree, D/Disagree, and SD/Strongly Disagree format. Examples of the types of questions follow:

- (a) I feel that this program was helpful in preventing behavior problems in my classroom this year.
- (b) I believe that I presently know more about behavior modification than I did prior to this program as a result of the workshops that were given on behavior modification.
- (c) I feel that it is important for the classroom teacher to incorporate into the daily schedule activities in affective development.
- (d) I feel that this program gave parents sufficient opportunities for involvement and input.

Many other items can be included in the questionnaire but the last question should request that teachers list any suggestions they feel would be helpful for improving the program.

This program will be successful because it provides classroom teachers with alternative ways to deal with children who have behavior problems and prevents the resource room teacher from becoming "over-loaded" or a "dumping ground" for cases that are exclusively behavioral or emotional.