Education update:

Recovered autistic woman suggests channeling fixations

Temple Grandin, a young woman who has overcome most of her autistic symptoms and is now recognized internationally as an expert consultant in her field (the designing of cattle handling equipment), suggests that autistic children's fixations can form the basis for future careers.

Grandin notes that as a child, she had an obsession with being squeezed. Seeing a hydraulic cattle chute, used to hold cattle in close confinement, led Grandin to design and make a small-scale model which held her tightly. This later evolved into her interest in designing equipment for stockyards.

Citing the similar experiences of others—including an autistic boy whose compulsive counting led to a successful banking career—Grandin encourages parents and teachers to think of ways to turn negative fixations into productive activities.

For instance, she notes that a high-functioning individual's obsession with sliding glass doors could be used to encourage him to study the math, engineering, physics and electronics principles underlying the operation of such doors.

"The important thing," says Grandin—who has written a book, entitled *Emergence: Labelled Autistic*, about her own experiences—"is to use the tremendous drive created by the compulsion to motivate academic endeavors."

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"Motivating Autistic Children," Temple Grandin; *Journal of Academic Therapy*, January 1987, pp. 297-303. Address: Temple Grandin, 1401 Silver, Suite 3, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

"Time delay" technique effective

A "time delay" training procedure proved to be effective in increasing the spontaneous speech of seven autistic children participating in a study by Marjorie Charlop et al. Time delay training begins with presenting a stimulus (a cookie, for instance) and prompting the appropriate response (i.e., "I want cookie"). Once the child is able to repeat the prompted phrase, the trainer starts to delay saying the prompt phrase for a few seconds. Gradually the delay between the presentation of the stimulus (cookie) and the trainer's prompt ("I want cookie") is increased until the child spontaneously requests the cookie before the prompt occurs.

All of the children in this study were taught, using the time delay technique, to request items spontaneously. They also were able to generalize this behavior to different settings, different people, and different objects.

In a second study by Charlop and Michele Walsh, four autistic children were taught to show affection verbally (by saying "I love you" to their mothers, and "I like you" to acquaintances) using a time delay technique. The time delay procedure proved much more effective than "peer training", which involved using non-disabled children to act out the correct response for the autistic children.

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"Increasing Spontaneous Verbal Responding in Autistic Children Using a Time Delay Procedure," Marjorie H. Charlop, Marie Garrison Thibodeau and Laura Schreibman; *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 18, No. 2, summer 1985, pp. 155-166. Address: Marjorie H. Charlop, Psychology Department, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California 91711.

—and—

"Increasing Autistic Children's Spontaneous Verbalizations of Affection: An Assessment of Time Delay and Peer Modeling Procedures," Marjorie H. Charlop and Michele E. Walsh; *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1986, 19, 307-314. Address same as above.

Self-stims used as rewards

Autistic children's self-stimulating behaviors can be used as powerful reinforcers to improve learning, according to a study by George Sugai and William J. White.

In this study a 13-year-old autistic boy was allowed to have and manipulate a favorite object—a plastic letter "P"—while doing tasks, as long as he did not spend too much time off task. Each time the child engaged in task-interrupting behaviors such as arm waving or humming for more than three seconds, his trainer took away the plastic letter until the behavior stopped.

The procedure resulted in an improvement in the boy's performance on three vocational tasks, as well as a decrease in self-stimulating behaviors.

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"Effects of Using Object Self-Stimulation as a Reinforcer on the Prevocational Work Rates of an Autistic Child," George Sugai and William J. White; *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 459-471, 1986. Address: George Sugai, Room 275, College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.

Self-stimulatory behavior reduced by forcing repetition

"Negative practice" can be a very effective technique for reducing self-stimulatory behavior, according to Maryland researchers Kristin Secan and Andrew Egel.

In this study, teachers used negative practice on three students whose frequent hand-clapping interfered with their school work. Each time one of the students clapped his hands, a teacher or aide would say, "if you want to clap, you will clap", and repeat the instruction "clap" until the student clapped 60 times (either on his own or with physical guidance).

In addition the staff offered social reinforcement—e.g., "good boy, you're not clapping"—regularly during times the clapping behavior did not occur.

The researchers found that in all three cases, the students' hand-clapping decreased immediately after negative practice began and was still at a very low level when follow-up observations were made 12 weeks after the procedure was discontinued.

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"The Effects of a Negative Practice Procedure on the Self- Stimulatory Behavior of Developmentally Disabled Students," Kristin E. Secan and Andrew L. Egel; *Education and Treatment of Children*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1986. Address: Andrew L. Egel, University of Maryland, College of Education, Department of Special Education, College Park, Maryland 20742.

Random supervision produces better results

Autistic children doing independent classroom work will perform better if supervised at unpredictable intervals, according to a recent study.

The three children in the study were taught under predictable supervision (with a teacher present for the first part of the session and then absent), and unpredictable supervision (when the teacher was present on a random, intermittent basis).

All three children spent more time working and completed a greater amount of work when supervised unpredictably.

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"Increasing the Independent Responding of Autistic Children with Unpredictable Supervision," Glen Dunlap and Jean Johnson; *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 18, No. 3, pp. 227- 236, 1985. Address: Glen Dunlap, Autism Training Center, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia 25701.