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The Effects of a Teacher-Designed Classroom Management Plan on Behaviors in a High School Home Economics Class

Elizabeth Garcia
Western Michigan University

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THE EFFECTS OF A TEACHER-DESIGNED CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PLAN ON BEHAVIORS IN A HIGH SCHOOL HOME ECONOMICS CLASS

by

Elizabeth Garcia

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Psychology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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A classroom management plan designed by the teacher was implemented in three high school sewing classes and measures of off-task behaviors were taken prior to, during, and after the implementation of the plan. The teacher designed the plan as part of the requirements for a graduate class that she was enrolled in at the time. It consisted of management objectives, monitoring progress on projects and cumulative points toward grades which were given contingent on amount of progress. A gradual decrease in off-task passive and disruptive behaviors was noticed in two of the classes where the plan was implemented. When follow-up observations were conducted, the teacher had discontinued the management plan and off-task behaviors were back at baseline levels.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Howard Farris for his encouragement and advice in the development of this study. My thanks also to Dr. Wayne Fuqua and to Dr. Galen Alessi for their criticism and aid in preparing this report. Finally, I wish to thank Bill Redmon for his assistance, friendship, and good humor which were a big help in the completion of this study.

Elizabeth Garcia
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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, M.A., 1980

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INTRODUCTION

The growing knowledge about the lawful processes underlying behavior is being effectively applied in regular and special classrooms. Teachers trained in the principles and procedures of behavior modification have become behavior analysts themselves and manipulate environmental events so as to make instruction more efficient while maintaining a facilitative atmosphere in the classroom.

Knowing that behavior is caused and capable of being changed, a teacher designs reinforcement systems for individual students or establishes group contingencies for the whole class. Using behavioral techniques, teachers can handle the problems of motivation, inappropriate behaviors, instructional design, record keeping, and evaluation. Becker, Engelmann, and Thomas (1975) "are convinced that as many as 85 to 90 percent of the problems referred to psychologists, counselors and social workers can be handled in the regular classrooms by teachers who have been taught more positive ways of working with children" (p. 234).

Many teachers seem to be concerned mainly with behavior problems. They complain of having to spend too much time and energy telling the students to sit down and be quiet, trying to keep them out of the halls, and dealing with refusals to do the work or to even bring the necessary materials. This obviously results in a reduction of the time spent in actual teaching.

The preoccupation of teachers with these behaviors is usually
maintained by aversive control: the teacher's competence is judged by how much order and control he or she can maintain in the classroom. "A teacher will rarely, if ever, be called on the carpet or denied tenure because his students have not learned anything: he most certainly will be rebuked if his students are talking or moving about the classroom, or--even worse--found outside the room, and he may earn the censure of his colleagues as well" (Silberman, 1970, p. 144).

In spite of the fact that silence and immobility were considered in the past as necessary conditions for learning to occur, more recent research findings have indicated that reducing disruption does not necessarily lead to achievement. Ferritor, Buckholdt, Hamblin, and Smith (1972), for example, found that reinforcing attending behavior alone decreased disruptions and increased attending behavior but had little effect on correct work. Reinforcing correct work increased the accuracy but the amount of work stayed constant, while attending behavior dropped and disruptions increased. However, when both attending behavior and correct work were reinforced, concurrent increases were found in attending behavior, number of problems worked correctly, and percent of problems worked correctly.

McLaughlin and Malaby (1972) compared the effect on assignment completion of tokens contingent on completed assignments and other desirable behaviors, and tokens contingent on quiet behavior. They found that the number of completed assignments increased when tokens were given contingent on assignment completion and decreased when the quiet behavior condition was introduced.

These examples suggest that arranging contingencies so that amount
and quality of work are reinforced, will most likely increase achievement while reducing disruption as a side effect.

In another study to eliminate disruptive behavior of grade nine students, Main and Munro (1977) used a token system with backup reinforcers in conjunction with teacher praise and contingency contracts. The result was a decline in appropriate behavior below the mean of a previous condition in which the intervention consisted of educational structure, praise and tokens. The researchers later decreased the number of tokens gradually leaving the contracts and the teacher praise in effect. Follow up data indicated that the low level of inappropriate behavior was maintained.

Ayllon and Roberts (1974) used a point system to reinforce reading performance of fifth grade students, thus decreasing disruptive behaviors. Arwood, Williams and Long (1974) found behavior contracts effective in reducing disruptive behaviors of high school students when free time and grades were made contingent on complying with the terms of the contract.

While there is no question that the behavior modification principles and procedures are effective in classroom management, it is necessary that the teachers trained in these principles and procedures will be successful in using them, and therefore, will continue to use them.

Different teacher training approaches have been assessed in recent years. Koegel, Russo, and Rincover (1977) used a training manual and videotapes illustrating correct and incorrect use of behavior modification procedures to train teachers working with autistic
children. When the teachers put the procedures in practice, they were given feedback on the accuracy with which they implemented each procedure. After training, the teachers showed consistently high percentages in using the procedures correctly, which produced gains in the children's responding. Also, the teachers' correct use of the procedure generalized to new target behaviors and new children.

Jones and Einers (1975) used role playing to train two elementary teachers in the use of a classroom management skill package in a simulated classroom environment. The procedure enabled the teachers to reduce disruptiveness in their own classrooms which had the effect of increasing the students' academic productivity. In another study, Gardner (1972) also found role playing more effective in training proficiency skills as compared to lectures.

Ringer (1973) modeled token and verbal reinforcement for a fourth grade teacher acting as a "token helper" in the classroom. The teacher later implemented the procedure herself but even though the inappropriate behaviors decreased when she used the token system, the results suggested that the transfer of control of reinforcement program to the teacher may not have been completely successful.

Also, the effectiveness of a practicum course on classroom management for teachers was evaluated by Greenwood, Hops, Delquadri, and Guild (1974). The course included meetings with consultants to read, discuss, and role play various management procedures, and consultant visits to the classrooms to record and support the implementation of the group management procedures. A package containing rules, feedback and reinforcement was introduced cumulatively in their respective
classrooms with the largest increase of appropriate behaviors observed when the three components were in effect at the same time.

An audio cueing system was used by Van Houten and Sullivan (1975) to prompt teachers to use praise in their classrooms. The rate of praising maintained at levels higher than baseline after the auditory prompting was removed.

In the present study the teacher took a graduate course in the principles of behavior and the application of these principles to teaching. The topics covered included the use of behavior principles in the development of objectives, selection and preparation of instructional materials, instructional design and classroom management, behavior change, and behavioral contracting. The class met once a week for a lecture, a quiz on the reading materials, and small group meetings with an assistant for instructions and feedback on the projects being developed individually by students. The teacher designed a classroom management plan and implemented it in her high school sewing classes in which she had been having trouble with disruptive and non-compliant behaviors.

Typically, the amount of structure in the sewing classes was low and some talking and walking around could occur without detrimental effects on achievement. However, in two of the classes selected for study, the noise level was extremely high and progress in the sewing projects was slow. Several students did not bring any materials in the first two or three weeks of class and others never brought them at all. No contingencies had been planned for this eventuality, except for a poor grade at the end of the six weeks. The non-compliant
students were tolerated in the classroom some days and sent to the library other days. The teacher seemed to have little control over the classroom. Her expectations at the time were to design a management plan to eliminate disruptive behaviors and to accelerate progress in the sewing projects. This was to be accomplished by closely monitoring each student's progress and by making daily points contingent on behavior and amount of progress.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the amount of change in the students' behavior occurring as a function of the implementation of a new management plan.

Comparisons were made of off-task passive and disruptive behaviors prior to and during the implementation of the classroom management plan.
METHOD

Setting

The study was conducted in the Home Economics room of a high school located in a predominantly white rural community. The room was divided into two sections: a kitchen section used for cooking classes, and a sewing-lecture section where the observations were conducted. The arrangement of the sewing-lecture section was as follows: tables for tracing, cutting, and writing were arranged in a U-shape with the teacher's desk in front. Twelve sewing machines were lined up against two of the walls, and the sewing materials were kept in cabinets behind the teacher's desk. Besides the two Home Economics and one Advanced Sewing classes in which observations were conducted, the teacher was in charge of Consumer Education, and Marriage, Child Development, and Parenting classes.

Subjects

Thirty-seven female and twenty-four male high school students, ranging in age from 15 to 18, grades 9, 11 and 12, participated in the study. The students were distributed in two Home Economics classes and one Advanced Sewing class, and were all working on a sewing project. The Advanced Sewing class had only female students and was not considered by the teacher as a problem class. However, a considerable amount of off-task and disruptive behaviors, which resulted in poor quality work and in the students needing extra time to complete their
projects, had been observed in the two Home Economics classes. Both Home Economics classes had male and female students.

Response Definitions and Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected on off-task passive and disruptive behaviors in the classroom by the author. Each observation session was 48 minutes long, divided into 16 three-minute intervals. The observer used a Casio PW-80 pocket calculator with a timer that was programmed to give a signal every three minutes. Upon hearing the signal, the observer scanned the class from left to right four times, one for each behavior category, counted the students engaged in the behavior at the time, and recorded the number on the data sheet. Even though the students could hear the signal, this was not considered to have any effect on their behavior, since the points were not given contingent on on-task behaviors but on amount of progress made on the sewing projects.

The target behaviors were defined as follows: Off-task Passive: 1) walking around the room or standing without any materials in their hands, 2) sitting and staring or sitting with head lying on the table. Off-task Disruptive: 1) talking out during the time when students were to be working or listening, and 2) motor behaviors that interfere with another student's work (pushing, hitting, throwing objects, grabbing other person's materials).

Reliability

A second observer simultaneously collected data on the target
behaviors in 20% of the sessions. He was cued by the same audible signal used by the main observer, and after the first behavior category was recorded, a verbal cue was given by the main observer as to the next behavior to record, and so on until all the behavior categories had been recorded.

In each interval, the number of students engaged in each behavior category was recorded. In comparing the data from the two observers, only those instances in which both recorded the same number of students in the specific behavior category in a certain interval was considered in agreement. The number of agreements was divided by the number of disagreements plus agreements, and multiplied by 100 to yield the interobserver reliability percentages. The intervals in which both observers agreed that the behavior did not occur were excluded from the calculation.

No reliability data were collected during the follow-up sessions. The reliability observer was out of town at the time and it was not considered practical to train another observer.

**Procedure**

The effect on the students' behavior of a classroom management plan designed and implemented by the teacher was assessed under three different conditions: A) Baseline (prior to the design and implementation of the plan), B) Intervention (implementation of the plan), and C) Follow-up (data collected four weeks after the last day of the intervention phase). Observations were conducted daily during the
whole class period in which the students were engaged in a sewing project of their choice (vest, shirt, shirt, dress, or blouse).

**Experimental Conditions**

**Phase A: Baseline**

Data were collected while the teacher was in the process of writing her plan. Therefore, conditions in the classroom were the same as they had been since the beginning of the semester. The students would come in the room, pick up their materials and start working. Upon verbal request of individual students the teacher would go to them and give them directions. Shortly before the end of the hour, she would call the students' names and ask each of them if he or she had worked. Depending on whether the answer was "yes" or "no" she would give the student four or zero points for the day. Sometimes the teacher would question a student's affirmative response and not give him or her the points if she was certain that that student had been off-task during most of the class period. The points were cumulative toward grades at the end of the six weeks' period and the students were informed of how many points would give them an A, B, C, D, or F. For Group 1, Baseline was 9 days long; for Group 2, it was 15 days long; for Group 3, it was 18 days long.

**Phase B: Intervention**

The classroom management plan was implemented. This consisted of the following: 1) Management objectives and contingent points
(Appendix A), and 2) Record Keeping System (Appendix B). On the first day of intervention, the teacher distributed copies of the management objectives among the students and explained to them the record keeping system. From that time, on a daily basis, the teacher scanned the class three minutes after the bell rang and made a tally on a checklist in front of the names of the students who did not yet have their materials with them. These students lost one point from the four available for the day. Ten minutes before the end of the hour the teacher went to each student to check the progress on their projects. The teacher wrote down a short description of the progress and recorded from zero to three points according to her judgment of the progress on a Weekly Record Sheet. After a student had been checked, he or she was allowed to start cleaning up and, after putting materials away, could sit on a chair until the bell rang. When the bell rang, the teacher scanned the class again and made a tally on the checklist in front of the names of the students who were not in their seats at that time. These students lost one point from the four available for the day. This contingency was stipulated because students tended to put materials away too soon and line up by the floor or go out in the hall before the bell rang. Every Friday, the teacher transferred the information from the Weekly Record Sheets to her record book and gave each student his or her own record sheet.

Phase C: Follow-up

Observations were conducted in the three classes for four consecutive days, four weeks after the last intervention session. The
students were working on a new sewing project. The same recording
procedure was used by the observer. However, the teacher was not using
her record keeping system any more.
RESULTS

The reliability percentages were 95% for walking and/or standing, 87% for sitting, 73% for talking, and 100% for motor behaviors interfering with another student's work. Reliability for talking was difficult to obtain with the observation procedure used, since talking by individuals goes on and off instantaneously. When two people are scanning a group, it is difficult to observe the same individual at exactly the same time. For motor behaviors, reliability was perfect due to the low incidence of these behaviors.

The overall results for the three groups are shown in Figure 1. The total number of off-task passive and disruptive behaviors decreased gradually after the management plan was introduced in the two Home Economics classes. Even though a great variability was observed during Baseline and some variability during Intervention, a decreasing trend of the target behaviors is obvious in both groups. While the management plan was in effect, off-task behaviors in the two Home Economics classes decreased to the level observed in the Advanced Sewing class for the same behaviors. No considerable change was noticed in the Advanced Sewing class during the Intervention phase. The number of off-task behaviors, which was at an acceptable level from Baseline, remained stable until the end of the study.

After the management plan was discontinued, a reversal was evident in the data. The amount of passive and disruptive off-task behaviors went back to the levels observed during Baseline in the two Home
Figure 1. Total number of off-task passive and disruptive behaviors over sessions.
Figure 1

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Economics groups.

Figures 2 through 4 show the effects of the management plan on talking, walking and standing, and sitting and staring or with head on desk. A decreasing trend can be observed in these also, with walking/standing, and sitting having decreased to a lower level than talking.

Regarding grades, the trend expected was a decrease in the number of points earned at the beginning of the study as a result of making the contingencies more stringent, and then a gradual increase as the students realized that the teacher actually meant to carry out her plan. With the previous system of giving either four or zero points based on each student's verbal reports of having worked or not worked, the grades were very probably inflated. When the plan was implemented, they started to be contingent on the students' actual performance.

However, the expected trend was not obvious in the weekly average points. The average number of points during the first week of Intervention maintained at about Baseline level in the three groups. A slight decrease and then an increase followed in the two Home Economics classes (Figure 5), while no change was noticed in the Advanced Sewing class. Follow-up data were collected for three weeks during which a decrease in points was observed in the three groups.
Figure 2. Total number of talking behaviors over sessions.
Figure 3. Total number of walking/standing behaviors over sessions.
Figure 3

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Figure 4. Total number of sitting behaviors over sessions.
Figure 5. Mean weekly points obtained by each class during the time the study was conducted.
Figure 5

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DISCUSSION

The classroom management plan was effective in decreasing off-task passive and disruptive behaviors in the two Home Economics classes. When work was monitored closely and daily points were made contingent on the amount of progress and appropriate behaviors, the students spent more time on-task and complied with the teacher's instructions by beginning to work as soon as they entered the classroom and remaining seated until the bell rang at the end of the class period. The fact that the teacher went to each student's seat before the end of the class hour and filled out the Weekly Record Sheet in his or her presence seemed to have a good impact on their performance. Most students showed interest in the number of points they were getting and made efforts to demonstrate that their work was worth more points when they were not satisfied with the number of points the teacher was giving to them. Based on casual observation, the students who were off-task most of the time and got zero points during the first few days of the management plan were more on-task for the following days. Also, most of the students who had been refusing to bring their materials but who had been getting points for doing homework during the hour brought sewing materials after a few days of not getting any points.

The management plan focused on improving performance and it indirectly but effectively decreased disruption in the classroom. These results are consistent with the findings of Ayllon and Roberts (1974),
Main and Munro (1977), and Arwood, Williams, and Long (1974). Since working is incompatible with walking, talking, staring, etc., these behaviors decreased when points were given for actual progress on the sewing projects (Figure 1). The Home Economics class in which the students were mostly juniors (top of Figure 1) was the one that the teacher reported as the most difficult because of the high incidence of off-task behaviors. In the other Home Economics class (center of Figure 1), the students were mostly freshmen. Though not as disruptive, they were also found to be off-task a considerable amount of time before the Intervention. In both these groups, off-task passive and disruptive behaviors decreased when the management plan was implemented and returned to Baseline levels when it was discontinued.

In analyzing each behavior category separately, it was obvious that walking/standing (Figure 3), and sitting and staring or with head on desk (Figure 4) decreased to a lower level than talking (Figure 2). This is considered a good outcome, since talking goes on and off very rapidly and students do not necessarily get off-task while talking in a sewing class. Walking, standing, staring, or sitting with head on desk, on the other hand, are more detrimental in terms of the amount of time that it takes the students to go back on task. Very few instances of motor behaviors interfering with other students' work, such as pushing, hitting, and throwing, were observed.

Giving cumulative points toward a grade, however, may not be the most appropriate way of reducing disruptiveness for students with more serious behavior problems. There were two students who never
even brought their materials and continued to disrupt because they simply did not care about grades. With these students, more stringent contingencies would have to be arranged and it might even be necessary to involve the parents in a behavior modification program if they control more powerful contingencies than the school.

An important concern of the study was whether the management plan would have any effect on grades. Though no significant increase in points earned weekly was observed, apparently the fact that they were given immediately and contingently, controlled the students' behavior. As a group, they were not getting more points than they had in the past, but now they had to work in order to get them. A decrease in points was noticed during the Follow-up phase in the three groups. These data, however, may not be very meaningful since at the time this information was obtained, the teacher's record book was very disorganized and probably not complete.

In the Advanced Sewing class, there was no noticeable change as a result of the Intervention (Figure 1). In this class there were only female students, mostly seniors, and their number of off-task behaviors was at an acceptable level at the beginning of the study. When the classroom management plan was implemented, there was really no change in the contingencies for them, since they just continued getting good grades.

A factor that continued to contribute to the many off-task behaviors in the classroom, after the management plan was implemented, was the insufficient number of sewing tools and the poor organization.
prevailing in the classroom. The students spent much time walking around looking for scissors, tracing wheels, bobbins, etc. There were only four pairs of scissors, six or eight tracing wheels, which were generally not sufficient for the number of students in the class. The teacher said they had been stolen. Besides, while all the tools were supposed to be stored in a special cabinet, they were often kept in the teacher's desk or in the students' tote drawers, which made them difficult to find. A checkout system monitored by a student was suggested to avoid this problem in the future.

In spite of the fact that the teacher herself designed the management plan and agreed to implement it, she was, to a certain extent, reluctant to use it. She always complained about not having enough time for the paperwork involved, though this only took about seven or eight minutes for each class daily. The author had to remind her every time when she was to check progress or mark the checklists at the beginning and at the end of the class period.

When the author returned to the classroom to collect the follow-up data, the teacher was not using the management plan any more. At the time, she was calling the students' names about ten minutes after the class started and giving them four points if they were working or zero if they were not. If a student was not working but promised to start working right away, she would wait until the end of the class to mark his or her points. The number of off-task behaviors observed during the Follow-up sessions was back to the Baseline levels.

Gardner (1972) and Bowles and Nelson (1976) suggest from their findings that the behaviors learned in a graduate class are different.
from the behaviors required in the teaching situation. A course teaches mainly verbal behavior and not performance behavior. The teacher receives a grade as a reinforcer for pencil and paper behavior, but no reinforcers are arranged for applying the learned skills in the classroom. In the present study, however, the teacher demonstrated that, under supervision, she could apply the management skills learned in her graduate class. A positive change in the students' behavior occurred but apparently, the magnitude of the change occurring while the plan was implemented was not enough to maintain the teacher's behavior after the supervision ceased. Even though the data were shown to her periodically during the Intervention phase, her comments always were that she did not feel that things were much different than they were before. The change that was starting to occur was apparently too slow to reinforce her behavior. However, a longer Intervention time would be necessary for the students to learn new behavior patterns since the old ones had received so much reinforcement in the past.

An important uncontrolled intervening variable occurred during the last week of Intervention. The teacher received notice that she was not being rehired for the following school year. This, no doubt, accounted, at least in part, for the teacher's lack of interest in continuing to improve her teaching skills.

However, even if this eventuality had not occurred, it seems unlikely that the teacher would have continued applying what she learned in her class. She was trying to make some changes under pressure from the administration which expected her to improve her
teaching without setting specific objectives or standards of performance. The small changes that had started to occur and that the teacher herself did not consider very important, were less obvious to the administration. Therefore, she continued to receive criticism for her mistakes and no praise at all for her improvements. This seemed to be very discouraging for her and she even talked about quitting teaching before she was asked not to return the following year.

In order to make teacher training effective, it is necessary to get the school administration involved in it. Evaluation systems have to be designed that allow principals a more frequent and objective monitoring of teachers' performance, so as to identify specific areas of weakness. This way they will be able to give feedback to the teachers and reinforce even small changes that occur as a result of training.
APPENDICES
**Management Objectives and Consequences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Get materials and start work with 3 minutes of bell ring.</td>
<td>1) Get 1 point.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Students not on sewing machine for the day, work ditto.</td>
<td>2) When finished with ditto can work on optional activity.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Students will show their progress for the day for grading.</td>
<td>3) May get up to 3 points according to progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Students will start cleaning only after they have been graded and, after putting materials away, will go to their seats.</td>
<td>4) Lose 1 point if not sitting down when the bell rings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Students should complete sewing projects by ________________.</td>
<td>5) Will start cooking after completing the sewing project. High quality projects will be displayed in the Art Show.</td>
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*Optional Activities: Read a book, cook, do homework, talk to a friend in the kitchen, or work on a craft project.*
APPENDIX B

Sewing Weekly Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Started work on time. (+1)</th>
<th>Description of Progress</th>
<th>Progress (+3)</th>
<th>Not sitting at bell ring. (-1)</th>
<th>Total points for the day.</th>
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Total Possible Points: 20

Total Points Earned: ___
APPENDIX C

Sewing Behaviors Checklist

A = Did not start work within 3 min. of bell ring.

B = Was not sitting down when the bell rang.

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