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ABSTRACT

The newsletter describes two projects of the Teaching Research Infant and Child Center (Oregon) which are developing assessment systems for use with severely emotionally disturbed (SED) adolescents. The first project focuses on job-related social behavior while the second project addresses social behavior in community settings. An introductory section considers the definition and characteristics of adolescents with severe emotional disturbances. The second section discusses the concept of social skills and describes the Behavioral Analytic Model of Test Development, the development procedure used for both projects. The third section reviews completed activities, while the final section notes activities planned for both projects as well as related projects. Most of the completed work relates to the first project and has included interviews with 58 SED adolescents as well as 11 work trainers and 12 employers; from these questions, a list of representative social problems experienced on the job was developed. Currently, groups of professionals and employers are rating the responses in terms of their effectiveness in resolving specific social problems. The basic four-steps of the model will be replicated in developing the assessment battery for the second project. Includes 44 references. (DB)

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PREPARED BY THE STAFF OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Teaching Research, Monmouth, Oregon 97361

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The purpose of this newsletter is to share with you our activities and projects. Each issue features a different project or activity. This issue describes Assessing the Transition-Related Social Behavior of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents and was prepared by Michael Bullis.

A list of our demonstration sites and those who manage them follows:

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### **Assessing the Transition-Related Social Behavior of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents**

This newsletter describes two projects that are now being conducted by Dr. Michael Bullis and Dr. H.D. Bud Fredericks to develop assessment systems for use with seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) adolescents. The first project was funded through the 1987-1988 Field Initiated Research competition sponsored through the federal office of Special Education programs and focuses on job-related social behavior (Bullis & Fredericks, 1988). The second project was funded through the same grant competition in 1988-1989 and addresses social behavior in community settings (Bullis, 1989). Although staff at Teaching Research have worked extensively with this population for almost 10 years (eg. Fredericks & Nishioka-Evans, 1987; Nishioka-Evans, 1988), this effort has dealt predominantly with the development of exemplary service

delivery models for transition, vocational preparation, and independent living skills. Thus, these two research projects represent a distinct departure from previous work. By the same token, these investigations are complementary to our model demonstration programs, and signal important growth and expansion in this critical, and relatively unattended to, area.

The document begins with an introduction to the content area. In the second section the concept of social skills is discussed and the Behavioral Analytic Model of Test Development (Goldfield & D'Zurilla, 1969), the development procedure adopted for both projects, is described. In the third section the work completed to date is reviewed.

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The newsletter concludes with a description of activities planned for both of these investigations, as well as a discussion of related projects we hope to conduct in the future.

### Introduction

Adolescents who are considered as SED are arguably the most underserved and underresearched group in the field of special education (Bullis, Bull, & Johnson, in press; Fink & Kokaska, 1983; Nelson & Kauffman, 1977; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1985). This absence of information is indeed unfortunate, as several recent studies document that members of this population tend to drop out of school; experience a high rate of unemployment; if employed, they work at menial jobs with little hope for upward mobility; many encounter problems with the criminal justice system upon leaving school; and after leaving school few receive assistance from community agencies (eg. vocational rehabilitation) (Butler-Nalin & Padilla, 1989; Edgar & Levine, 1987; Korterling & Edgar, 1988; Neel, Meadows, Levine, & Edgar, 1988; Wagner & Shaver, 1989). Of course, as part of the federal transition initiative (Will, 1984), there has been growing attention paid to the vocational preparation of these persons (Bullis & Gaylord-Ross, in press). However, there has been virtually no research directed at the community integration and independent living skills of SED adolescents (Quay, 1989).

By definition, students who are considered as SED are socially deficient. Thus, it is not surprising that vocational and independent living problems encountered by these persons are due primarily to social interaction skill deficits (Cook, Solomon, & Mock, 1988; Griffiths, 1974, 1983; Hursh, 1983; Parker & Asher, 1987; Watts, 1978). Consequently, for secondary/transition programs for SED students to be effective, they must emphasize social skill preparation for work and community environments. To focus such interventions, it is critical that the student's social skill deficits and strengths be accurately described. To our knowledge, though, there are no psychometrically strong measures of these skills designed for SED adolescents for use by educational professionals. Further, traditional psychometric procedures (e.g., IQ, objective and projective personality instruments) yield little in the way of practical information on SED adolescent's social skills in work or independent living settings. Cohen and Anthony (1984) conducted an extensive review of the psychiatric literature (p. 86-89) on the relationship of psychometric data to rehabilitation outcomes. They concluded that:

1. Measures of psychiatric symptoms do not predict vocational rehabilitation outcome;
2. The psychiatric diagnosis does not predict vocational rehabilitation outcome;
3. Measures of psychiatric symptoms do not correlate with the psychiatrically disabled person's skills;
4. Measures of skills do predict vocational rehabilitation outcomes.

It follows that it is necessary to develop assessment instruments to structure transition training. To have true utility in the applied setting, assessment data must be directly related to the intervention process (e.g., Hayes, Nelson, Barrett, 1987; Reschley, 1988; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1987) and be anchored in the content that is to be taught (Linehan, 1980). Unless we know what specific problems to address when teaching SED students how to behave, we may not focus on issues that are, in fact, encountered and/or important (Freedman, Donahoe, Rosenthal, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978; Gaffney & McFall, 1981; McFall, 1982; Romano & Bellack, 1980; Strain, 1982). Given the absence of information on the work and community-based social behaviors of SED adolescents, it should be clear that any material development effort of this type must first delineate the content of the skills to be assessed and ultimately trained. For our new projects, then, it was essential that we first gain a handle on the exact parameters of the job-related and community-based social problems and behaviors encountered by these persons.

### Foundations of Social Skills Assessment

This section provides definitions of terms used in this newsletter and our projects, as well as a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings of social behavior. The second section reviews the Behavioral Analytic Model of test development (Goldfried & D'Zurilla, 1969) that guides the research activities.

### Definitions and Conceptual Foundation

To understand any discussion of social skills it is incumbent to first define terms used commonly in this subject area. Social Interactions or social situations are events where two or more people must interact to exchange information, solve a problem, or decide something. Social competence is described by McFall (1982, p.12) as "a general evaluative term referring to the quality or adequacy of a person's overall performance in a particular task". Further, this competence involves a general classification of the individual in that a significant other, or judge, decides whether the person is or is not competent based on some type of criteria. Social skills are discrete behaviors that allow an individual to perform competently in problematic social situations (McFall, 1982). One is viewed as competent, when some aggregate of an individual's social skills is judged by a significant other as competent. Finally, social competence for transition involves socially acceptable behavior in both work and community living settings (Halpern, 1985; Will, 1984). Given the situational determinates of behavior, it should be clear that social skills in one setting may not generalize to another. Stated otherwise, one may be socially competent at work but not in the community.

Beyond these discrete definitions, it is also necessary to have a fundamental awareness of the three "building blocks" of social behavior for SED youth. First, modern social learning theory embraces both cognitive and performance components (Bandura, 1977), a feature that has been discussed and adopted by experts on social behavior (D'Zurilla, 1986; Kelly, 1979; Meichenbaum, 1977). A necessary prerequisite on which to base estimates of social competence, is knowledge of how to behave in particular problem situations (Bellack, Hersen, & Turner, 1979; 1980). Simply, in order to emit the proper social skill in a problematic situation one must know how to behave. Thus, the starting point in the social assessment process must begin with the measurement of the person's knowledge or awareness of how to behave in social situations.

Second, while an individual must know how to behave, s/he must also emit the correct behavior or perform the correct social skill in response to the problematic situation to be judged as socially competent. To illustrate, it does little good for an individual to know what to do in a particular situation, but be unable for whatever reason to perform the appropriate social skill. As there is not a linear relationship between knowledge and performance, i.e., just because one may know how to behave does not necessarily mean he or she will be have in the correct manner, it is crucial to assess social skill performance as well as knowledge. Generally, this assessment is accomplished through the completion of a third party rating scale of the individual's behavior or competence in the area of concern by a third party who is familiar with his or her behavioral skills in the target settings (in this case vocational and community environments) (Bellack & Hersen, 1988).

A third key component of social behavior relates to the classification of behavioral problems. SED adolescents can be broadly classified into two groups: internalizers and externalizers (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1979; Gresham, 1985; Ross, 1980). Internalizing problems are focused at the individual (eg., anxiety, depression) and externalizing problems are directed outwardly (eg., conduct disorders, violence). It may well be that persons who fall into one as compared to the other of these categories will manifest different social skill profiles and patterns. It also is possible that social competence in community settings will be empirically different for these two groups of subjects, indicating that training interventions for these respective groups would vary.

From this foundation, we established four assumptions to guide the development of the measures produced in the two projects. First, in order to assess social problems faced by these individuals in community settings, it is necessary to include situational aspects of these problems. Stated differently, antecedent events and environmental stimuli associated with problematic social behavior in both work and community settings must be specified in order to measure social competence accurately. Numerous studies point to the importance of the environment in determining social behavior (e.g., Argyle & Little, 1972; McFall, 1982). Thus, brief descriptions of behavioral problems, without being placed within an environmental context (e.g., John was abusive to his roommate), are of little value in assessing social interactions. Instead, a more comprehensive description of the social situation is necessary to explicate and understand the problem (e.g., John was abusive to his roommate after his roommate stole his shirt).

Second, content information used in developing the assessment instruments should be derived directly from persons with SED whenever possible. These individuals have a unique and socially valid view of what happens to them in community settings. Input obtained from them, then, will have a high degree of realism and lead to the development of a relevant, socially valid measure. Also, involving these persons in the development of materials that ultimately will be used with them is appealing from an ethical standpoint. Such participation is analogous to having students with disabilities participate in developing IEPs.

Third, in establishing standards of correctness for a measure of social competence in work and community environments, data must be obtained from the primary judges of such behavior - secondary teachers, parents, caregivers, employers, and mental health professionals.

Fourth, instruments that are available currently are either not designed specifically for students with SED, are impractical for use by practitioners, do not focus on the community setting, or possess unacceptable psychometric characteristics (e.g., reliability and validity data). As inadequacies in these test properties can yield inaccurate and misleading results, it is imperative that the measures developed in these projects be constructed in such a way as to possess strong psychometric features and be practical for general use.

### Behavioral Analytic Model

In line with the above assumptions, we adopted the Behavioral Analytic Model of Test Construction (Goldfried & D'Zurilla, 1969) to guide the development of the measures. The approach calls for the detailed analysis of social problems and behavior in the environment of concern and the active participation of both SED adolescents and experts in the service delivery field. The Behavioral Analytic Model consists of four distinct and sequential stages that build upon one another.

1. Situational Analysis - In this phase social problems in the community environment are identified by persons with SED and professionals/service providers. In a very real sense this step is the content analysis of social problems experienced in the community by members of the target population. Problematic situations identified here may eventually become the stems of the test items in the final forms of the measures.

2. Response Enumeration - In this step, wide variety of possible behavior responses to the social problems identified in the Situational Analysis are generated by SED adolescents. These responses reflect actual behavioral responses that members of the target population could do in such problematic situations. These responses may become response options to test items in the final forms of the measures.

3. Response Evaluation - The responses to the problematic situations generated in the preceding stage are evaluated by "expert"

judges in each of the criterion settings (i.e., vocational and community-based) such as secondary teachers, work experience coordinators, caregivers, and mental health professionals, in terms of their effectiveness in resolving the respective social problem. These evaluations lead to the scaling of behavioral responses to each of the social problems. Thus, it is possible to assign a score to verbal and behavioral responses to a social problem.

4. Development of the Measures - The data from the first three steps are incorporated into two distinct assessment formats: a knowledge-based test that to be administered orally to individual SED adolescents and a rating scale to be completed by third party raters. The measures are standardized, and reliability indices and initial validity data established.

### Completed Work

At this point we are in the second year of the project on job-related social skill assessment and in the first year of the project on community-based social skill assessment. The bulk of the activities conducted thus far, then, relate to the first project and will be described here. As we are only now completing the first stage of the project on community-based social behavior (Situational Analysis) there is little to report. The reader should note that the procedures followed in the project on job-related behavior parallel those used to develop the measures of community-based social behavior.

As described above, the primary intent of the vocational project is to develop both knowledge-based and performance-based measures of job-related social behavior for SED adolescents and young adults. Thus, a major focus of the initial part of this research effort has been to identify and describe the specific social problems experienced in the work place by members of this population (the Situational Analysis stage). To gain such information it was decided to conduct extensive interviews with members of each respondent group. Accordingly, three structured interview protocols were developed to be administered to SED students, work trainers, and employers. Each protocol consisted of 16 questions representing the three broad areas of job-related social behavior noted previously (supervisor relations, co-worker relations, and disruptive behaviors). Each of the questions across interview forms were similar in content and purpose (the content focus of these questions are presented in Figure 1), but that were worded differently for each audience. The questions were posed sequentially, with all responses being recorded by the interviewer in the form of a short vignette. The interviews each took roughly 45 to 80 minutes to complete.

Fifty eight SED adolescents with competitive work experience, 11 work trainers, and 12 employers and co-workers were administered the interviews. The number of social problems generated under the questions ranged in frequency across questions from 31 to 117, with a total of over 1100 social problems generated across all 16 areas of questioning. Examples of three of the social problem vignettes that were generated are presented in Figure 2.

Next, this initial list of problems was reviewed and edited to create a representative sampling of social problems SED adolescents experience in job settings. This list forms the content foundation and blueprint for the rest of the project. Problems were examined to identify duplicates, issues that didn't fit under particular subject areas, or that were not social problems (e.g., related to work performance or work adjustment). In reviewing the social problems listed under each of the 16 questions, or content domains, it became clear that the problems in each domain could be categorized further into clusters of problems or subdomains. For each question naturally appearing subdomains of similar content were identified by project staff. After this was accomplished, each social problem on the edited list was coded by project staff according to the major domains and the subdomains. Thus, each vignette was categorized under a major area (domain) of job-related social problems and further still within a more specific-yet related-category of similar problems (subdomains). The inter-judge

1. Accepting criticism or correction from a work supervisor
2. Requesting help
3. Following instructions
4. Quitting a job
5. Taking time off
6. Working as fast as co-workers
7. Talking to a supervisor about a problem
8. Working with a co-worker to complete a job
9. Dealing with teasing or provoking from co-workers
10. Personal concerns
11. Making friends with co-workers
12. Talking with a co-worker about their behavior
13. Being talked to by a co-worker about a problem
14. Fighting
15. Stealing and lying
16. Dating

**Figure 1. Content of Interview Questions**

- Grant was hired to be a mechanic in an automobile repair shop, but all he was allowed to do was clean-up. He went in to work on his birthday hoping that on that day he would be allowed to do mechanical work. He was very disappointed when he realized he was to do clean-up again.
- Tina worked with a co-worker who continually made fun of her and called her names. Tina tried to ignore the girl, but finally had enough and asked her to please stop. The co-worker laughed and said "I won't stop, you're too much fun to give s \_ \_ \_ to."
- John worked on an assembly line with his boss. The boss was unable to finish a task so John leaned over and did it for him saying "A f \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ Idiot could do that right."

**Figure 2. Examples of Social Problems**

reliability of categorization of the social problems, based on calculation of Ebel's intraclass Correlation Coefficient for each of the 16 questions and sub domains, ranged from .70 to .90. These results indicate adequate agreement among the raters and support the notion that the initial content framework is a valid, albeit preliminary, categorization of the kinds of social problems SED adolescents experience in the vocational arena. An example of the content structure of one of the 16 questions is presented in Figure 3.

Question #3: Following instructions

- A. Incomplete training or instructions provided.
- B. Order conflicts with subject's personal plans.
- C. Several instructions given, subject can't understand or follow.
- D. Instructions given in a negative or abusive fashion by the boss.
- E. Legitimate instructions, subject does not comply.

**Figure 3. Content Structure**

The list of problems generated in the previous steps are comprehensive. However, a question that must be addressed is "Are these problems relevant only to Oregon?" To answer this issue we are in the process of surveying over 200 secondary work supervisors across the country who have experience with SED youth and who are aware of the work problems these students experience. A letter describing the study was mailed to these sites describing the study, the content matrix, and a subset of the specific social problems from the master list of social problems. Basically, respondents are asked to rate all of the content areas and the problems on two 4 point likert scales pertaining to the frequency and importance of the group of problems or the specific problems. The notion being that we want to identify those content areas and problems that are important to the work tenure of

SED adolescents and that occur with reasonable frequency. In order to be retained on the final content structure or blueprint and the final list of social problems, the problem must have an average rating of 2.5 on each of the rating scales. In other words, the problem must be one that is important to the tenure of the worker and that occurs in the work place. Problem statements that conform to this criteria will be utilized in the rest of the project.

The purpose the second step of the Behavioral Analytic model (Response Generation) is to generate a number of possible solutions or responses to each social problem from the perspective of members of the general target audience that represent a broad range of effectiveness—from very effective to very ineffective. Toward this end we again interviewed SED adolescents.

Essentially, the procedure was one in which an interviewer met individually with an SED adolescent. A job-related statement (those problems generated in the Situational Analysis) were read to the subject and the following question was asked - "If you were in a situation like this, what are all the things you could say or do?" Up to three prompts ("Is that all you could do?") were given and each response written down verbatim by the interviewers. In this activity we queried SED adolescents to identify behavioral responses that reflect the actual kinds of behaviors these students could exhibit, and some nondisabled adolescents to gain perspective on what "socially skilled persons" of this age group would do in these situations. By integrating the responses it was possible to expand the range of effectiveness of the responses to each social problem. We interviewed 24 SED/BD students and 8 nondisabled students. Stated otherwise, three SED/BD students and one nondisabled student responded to each of the problems. An example of the responses to one problem situation is provided in Figure 4.

Grant was hired to be a mechanic in an automobile repair shop, but all he was allowed to do was clean-up. He went in to work on his birthday hoping that on that day he would be allowed to do mechanical work. He was very disappointed when he realized he was to do clean-up again. "If you were Grant, and you were in a situation like this, what are all the different things you could say or do?"

- a. Walk out
- b. Talk to a co-worker about the problem
- c. Refuse to do the clean-up that day
- d. Quit
- e. Yell at the boss about his decision
- f. Talk with the boss about changing tasks
- g. Look for ways to sabotage work in the shop

**Figure 4. Example of a Problem in Response Generation**

We are just beginning the third phase of the project (Response Evaluation) to scale the responses for effectiveness. First, a group of professionals with experience in the vocational training of SED adolescents ( $n=20$ ) will rate each of the responses in terms of its effectiveness in resolving a particular problem and then rank order each of the possible solutions in terms of their respective effectiveness to the problem. Next, a national sample of 1500 competitive employers will be surveyed to evaluate responses to each problem in terms of its effectiveness in resolving the specific social problem.

Data from both efforts will be used to scale possible responses from most to least effective. For example, a student may not perform in the best possible way to a problem but may act in a fashion that is moderate in effectiveness. These data will allow us to scale all of the responses given in the Response Enumeration phase so that on the final test forms it will be possible to assess subjects according to what they say they would do in a situation (on the knowledge test) or to rate their probable performance (on the rating scale) and to assign an

appropriate score.

Two measures of job-related social skills will then be developed. The first is a knowledge test. SED adolescents will be read a social problem and asked what they would do if they were in that situation. The response will be recorded and then scored by the interviewer according to a scale supplied from the Response Evaluation phase. The second measure will be a rating scale that will be completed by a third party rater on the individual to evaluate his or her behavioral performance in work settings. The rating scale will consist of problematic situations and scaled responses similar to that of the knowledge test. Both measures will consist of 50 to 60 social problems that reflect a content valid sampling of the domain of social problems, and their respective behavioral responses. The knowledge test will take roughly 60 minutes to administer and the rating scale will take about 20 minutes to complete. Given the way the test will be constructed it will be possible to compare knowledge and actual performance (are the worker's social problems knowledge or performance based?) and to conduct profile analyses of the different content areas in which problems are manifested (does the worker have more difficulty dealing with supervisors or co-workers?). In this way a unified, complementary assessment system will be developed that will have great practical utility to appraise students social skills, guide training efforts, and document the impact of interventions.

### Future Efforts

Over the next two years we will conduct research necessary to complete both assessment projects. For the job-related assessment project this will mean finalizing the test forms and implementing studies designed to produce data on the psychometric characteristics of the measures. For the community-based social behavior project we will basically replicate the Behavioral Analytic research procedures to create a second assessment battery.

While these instruments will be unique to the field of emotional disturbances, and will be important tools for shaping effective secondary/transition programs, assessment as an end unto itself is not a worthwhile exercise. In order to have true value, assessment must be linked to intervention, serving to direct and measure the effect of the instruction provided in particular content areas. Thus, in our minds, the greatest outcome of these studies has been, and will be, the content analysis of work and community social problems.

Clearly, this information is fundamental to the purpose of the projects at hand, i.e., developing tests. The final forms of the measures will represent only a sampling of the entire range of content in these two broad areas. The taxonomy of social problems, and the individual problems and their responses not included in the tests, provide an equally strong base on which to develop social skills training packages. In this way it will ultimately be possible to assess a student to pinpoint his/her social skill deficits and strengths, tailor the social skills training effort to this unique profile, and then to re-assess the student to measure the impact of the instruction. This goal is one that will take time to achieve, but we firmly believe that it is this type of work that will be of greatest benefit in the ongoing effort to prepare seriously emotionally disturbed adolescents to work and live successfully in society.

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## MATERIALS LIST

The following is a list of materials developed by Teaching Research with prices and publishers from whom they may be purchased.

- Associated work skills: A manual. The Teaching Research Special Education Department Staff. Teaching Research Publications, Monmouth, Oregon 97361, 1984. \$10.00
- Communication with persons who have deaf/blindness. Teaching Research Publications, Monmouth, Oregon 97361:
- Play Activities and Emergent Language: Intervention Procedures for Young Children with Deaf/Blindness. \$5.25
- Research on the Communication Development of Young Children with Deaf/Blindness. \$7.00
- Augmentative Communication for Children with Deaf/Blindness: Guidelines for Decision-Making. \$5.25
- Enhancing Interactions Between Service Providers and Individuals who are Severely Multiply Disabled: Strategies for Developing Non-Symbolic Communication. \$7.00
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## RECENT WRITING AND PRESENTATIONS

- Bud Fredericks - May 3, 1990, Keynote speaker at the State Vocational Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Joyce Peters and Torry Piazza Templeman - May 25, 1990, Presentation at the Strategies for Effective Integration Conference in Alberta, Canada. The title of their presentation was "Tracking student progress in the integrated preschool: A data collection system that works."
- Bill Moore - May, 1990, Presentation at National Para-professionals Conference, Tampa, Florida. Title of presentation: "Para-professionals functioning as a group member or leader."
- Bill Moore - Received Mid-Valley Children's Guild annual award for significant contribution and leadership in improving services for children with special needs in Oregon. Last year's winner was Governor Neil Goldschmidt and the previous year was Senator Frank Roberts
- Bill Moore - April, 1990 - Oregon's Early Intervention Model Demonstration Projects: Final Report - January 1988-June 1989. Available from Teaching Research.

The Teaching Research curriculum for handicapped adolescents and adults: Dressing, clothing care and selection. Fredericks, H. D., Heyer, M., Makohon, L., Bunse, C., Buckley, J., Trecker, N., Egan, I., Johnson-Dorn, N., Miller-Case, V., Fay, M. L., Paeth, M. A., Alrick, G., & Samples, B. Teaching Research Publications, Monmouth, Oregon 97361, 1983. \$20.00

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