*THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VERBAL INSTRUCTION ON TEACHING
BEHAVIOR-MODIFICATION SKILLS TO NONPROFESSIONALS¹*

HARVEY J. SEPLER² AND SHARIE L. MYERS

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

The effectiveness of a mastery criterion, lecture-based training program for teaching behavior modification to sheltered workshop personnel was evaluated. Staff performance was assessed in terms of: (1) verbal proficiency, as determined from a pre- and posttraining written exam, and (2) application proficiency, as measured by the frequency and appropriateness of staff responses to client behaviors. A direct count was made of the number of positive, negative, and neutral statements following client appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and the number and type of client behaviors ignored. Thus, it was possible to determine the extent of generalization from classroom to applied settings, as well as the appropriateness of lectures for training specific performance skills. Lecture units introduced stimulus control procedures, shaping-chaining, and contingency management. Characteristic features of the training program were frequent testing, study objectives, immediate remediation, and contingent reinforcement. Verbal instruction was shown to be effective in improving subjects' verbal skills concerning behavior-modification principles, while only partially effective in improving application skills. There was an increase in the total number of staff-client interactions observed for all subjects, but only two of the response classes emphasized in the training program (reinforcing desirable client behavior and ignoring undesirable behavior) showed considerable improvement over pretraining levels. Despite this partial improvement, verbal instruction alone was shown to be insufficient for teaching the full range of behavior-modification skills required to function effectively in applied settings.

DESCRIPTORS: behavior modification, training, lectured instruction, generalization, observational code, recording and measurement, multiple response measures, multiple baseline, sheltered workshop staff

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²Now at the Department of Administration, Foundations, and Higher Education, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045.