

REDUCING GRABBING BY A  
PROFOUNDLY RETARDED BOY  
IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

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Overcorrection is used to reduce stereotyped, self-injurious, and disruptive behavior in severely handicapped individuals (Azrin, Kaplan and Foxx, 1973; Freeman, Graham and Ritvo, 1975). Overcorrection was developed by Foxx and Azrin (1972) as a reductive procedure to be used where extinction, reinforcement of incompatible behaviors, time-out, or intense punishment were unsuccessful or inappropriate.

In the present experiment, procedures are described which decelerated violent grabbing behavior in a profoundly retarded boy. The boy's public school special education teacher decided to use a modified overcorrection procedure for several reasons. The classroom was not equipped with a time-out room. Corporal punishment was forbidden by the school system. The teacher was encouraged by the overcorrection procedure used by Freeman, Graham and Ritvo (1975) that reduced nail picking through a one minute procedure used during only three hours per day.

The boy, Sam, was 11 years old and classified (AAMD) profoundly mentally retarded. Sam was ambulatory, but exhibited poor balance and stiff body movements. He had limited receptive language and no expressive language. Sam grasped people or objects with one or both hands and would not release his grasp voluntarily or on command. It was necessary for a staff member to leave the scheduled activity and pry Sam's fingers open. Since he often grabbed other students' hair, there was usually some screaming and crying until his grasp was broken. It was extremely disruptive to the classroom routine and upsetting to the other students. The records in Sam's cumulative folder indicated that he had been grabbing for a number of years and that previous attempts to decelerate the behavior were unsuccessful.

For overcorrection the teacher chose arm movements to discourage grabbing. The arm movements were suggested by autism reversal postures described by Azrin, Kaplan and Foxx (1973). The overcorrection procedure consisted of four steps. First, Sam's grasp was released by prying his fingers apart. Second, the teacher or other manager said, "No, don't grab! Arms out!" and held his arms straight out from his shoulders for ten seconds. The third step was to say, "Don't grab! Arms down!" while holding his arms down at his sides for ten seconds. Fourth, the manager said, "Don't grab! Arms out!" while again holding his arms straight out from his shoulders for ten seconds. All four steps were used each time Sam grabbed. When this procedure of approximately 30 seconds had been completed, Sam was returned to his previous activity.

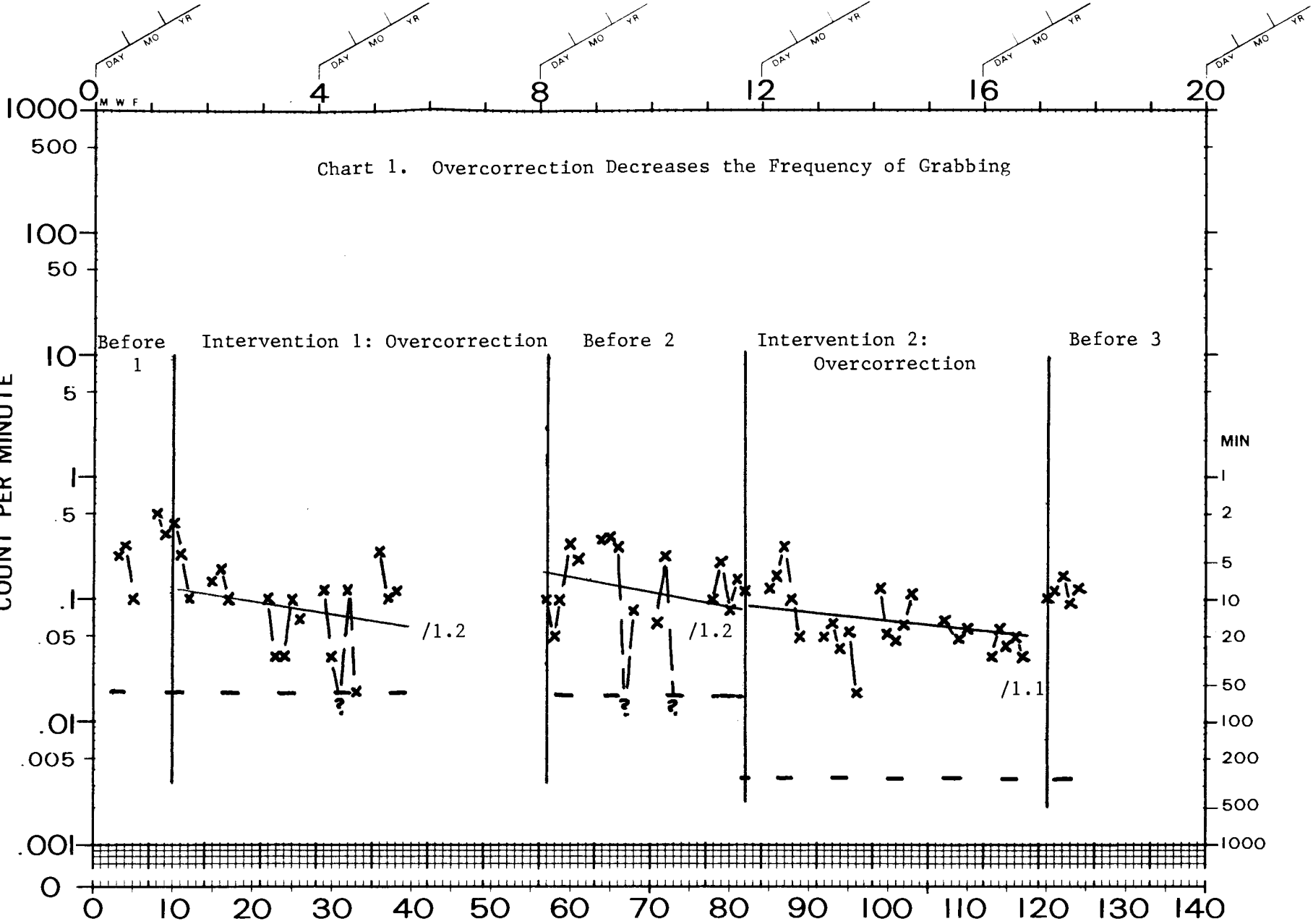
To evaluate the effects of this procedure an ABAB design (Hersen and Barlow, 1976) and Precision Teaching were used. Intervention prior to the overcorrection procedure consisted of saying, "No!" and prying Sam's fingers open. Since that had been the normal response it was continued during the before periods. It would have been inappropriate to allow him to grab someone's hair, for example, and not to intervene.

The First Before Phase indicates that Sam was grabbing at a median frequency of .28 per minute or approximately once every three minutes (see Chart 1). During the First Intervention Phase, the 30 second overcorrection procedure was used for only one hour per school day. This resulted in a deceleration multiplier (turn down) of /1.2 and a decrease in the median frequency from .28 to .10 per minute or one grab every 10 minutes. A Second Before Phase showed a slight increase in the median frequency of grabbing to .11 per minute. However, within the Second Before Phase the deceleration continued at a turn down of /1.2. During the Second Intervention Phase, the 30 second overcorrection procedure was applied for the entire school day. The median frequency dropped to .06 per minute or approximately one grab every fourteen minutes. The deceleration turn down during that all day overcorrection phase was /1.1. Toward the end of that phase the

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teacher learned that Sam would be transferred to an institution for the mentally retarded. Sam's last week in public school was spent in a return to the before conditions. During this Third Before Phase the median frequency of his grabs returned to .10 per minute. Had Sam remained in the class the teacher would have attempted to decelerate the behavior even further by continuing to use the overcorrection procedure all day.

The overall effect of the overcorrection procedure was to decelerate Sam's grabbing behavior from .28 per minute or one every 3 minutes to .06 per minute or one every 14 minutes, a frequency multiplier of /4.7.

#### REFERENCES

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This is a data story of how a book was written: *Tactics for Teaching*, a Charles E. Merrill publication. From the day I began work on the book, July 12, 1982, until I received my copy on January 9, 1984, I collected data on preparing each of the five drafts, correcting the manuscript after it was returned by the publisher, and proofing the typeset when the publisher sent it to me. I have a daily record.

This was a relatively simple book on which to collect data, since it was neatly made up of 112 tactics. Each tactic was described in four or five pages. There were 50 tactics in reading, 25 in classroom management, 25 in independence, and 12 in arithmetic. There was also a brief preface to the book, some introductory materials for each section, and a small glossary. None of that material took up much space. I collected data on only the 112 tactics.

I followed the same format for all 112 tactics. First, there was a brief rationale. That was followed by a few words about the client for whom the tactic would be most suitable. The third section was the longest: the procedures for administering the tactic. In this section I tried to include enough material so that the intelligent reader would at least have a feel for putting the plan into operation. The next section pertained to modifications. There, I described how, if certain adjustments in the approach were made, it might be arranged for different pupils than those for whom it was originally intended. Those youngsters might be older, of a different type, or in some other way dissimilar. The last section was simply a citation of the research that supported the tactic. The interested teacher could read the entire article and fill in any missing information, or clarify some parts that were not obvious when she read my condensed and paraphrased version.

About 95% of these tactics were supported by some research and had been published in an education or