opportunity to observe the ascent of their academic performance, maybe their degree of discouragement would be lessened, which in turn might encourage them to try harder to improve their performance.

Finally, an important point to consider is that the underachieving students in this study had previously received a multitude of interventions in an attempt to increase their academic performance, all of which proved to be ineffective. Educators are constantly searching for a mode of teaching that "works" with this type of student. The fact that precision teaching proved effective in increasing academic performance when nothing else "worked", is of considerable importance in and of itself. Educators should keep this in mind when they are devising programs of instruction for underachieving students.

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About PT

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Patrick McGreevy

Some of you may have thought that your last two issues of Volume VI were "consumed" by the U.S. Postal Service sorting machines, or that, perhaps, the Journal had decided to fold its tent and fade into the sunset. Neither is the case. A number of problems contributed to the delay. One of them was the lack of good manuscripts and chart-shares. WE NEED BOTH! I decided that a delay was better than issues of lesser quality. This issue, Volume VI, Number 3, was mailed at about the same time as Volume VI, Number 4, which you should receive in a few days (if you haven't already).

Volume VII, Number 1, the first issue of the next volume, will be ready for mailing shortly. To renew your subscription, simply return the pink subscription form attached to Volume VI, Number 4. I would appreciate it if you would encourage a friend or colleague to subscribe. If you return a new subscription with your renewal before 1 June 86, you can deduct $2.00 from each subscription. If your university library or school media center subscribes, you can deduct $4.00 from your subscription.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Christine Y. Mason

With this issue of the Journal of Precision Teaching a new Social Skills column is introduced. The introduction of this column represents an opportunity to encourage data-sharing regarding overt and covert behaviors, verbal and motoric responses, and social skills curricula and change in social behaviors.

The high incidence of sexual, emotional, and physical child abuse and its correlations with handicapping conditions provides even further rationale for focusing some attention on social skills development. Reports suggesting a high relationship between levels of social skills and job performance of mentally retarded persons and other reports of correlations- between social skills and

survival in mainstreamed classrooms for mildly handicapped students provide additional impetus for such a focus.

You are invited to send charts and brief narratives, or short summary reports of changes in behavior specific techniques. The first column will be devoted to providing a common framework for understanding the current literature on social skills, and possible areas for Precision Teaching exploration.

Precision Teaching and Social Skills Training: Some Possible Directions

Christine Y. Mason
Eastern Montana College

Foster and Ritchey (1979) have defined social competence as "the ability to maximize the probability of producing, maintaining, or enhancing positive effects for the interactor" (p. 632). Van Houten (1979), Arkowitz (1981) and others have developed similar definitions for social skills. According to these definitions, an individual who is socially skilled has a repertoire of behaviors which increase the likelihood of the individual being positively reinforced for his/her behaviors and decrease the likelihood of the individual being punished for social interactions. Implicit in such definitions is the need to examine the effect of the individual's behavior on the individual according to some measure of the environmental reaction.

When measuring social skills, then, the investigator can decide to measure specific behaviors or to measure interactions. In the past, many studies have measured isolated social behaviors and the influence of specific interventions on isolated skills. These studies have measured the effects of specific techniques on eye contact, talking out, verbal imitation and other behaviors. These studies have added to the general body of knowledge concerning the effectiveness of specific techniques for increasing or decreasing specific behaviors. However, as Barrett (1980) has suggested, a danger of such an approach is that we teach splinter skills and do not ultimately not assist our students, but rather spending precious hours to obtain mediocre and perhaps even nonfunctional results.

The issue which is of foremost consideration is that of social validity. Foster and Ritchey (1979) discussed social validity in terms of whether or not a behavior is critical to adaptive social functioning. Wolf (1978) is often quoted for his definition of social validity, which refers to the acceptability of treatment techniques and the magnitude of treatment effects, often measured through consumer satisfaction. Van Houten (1979) described two procedures for determining the social validity of the change in behaviors: (1) comparing the behavior to peers who did not receive treatment or need treatment or (2) comparing the treatment behavior of the individual to an optimal level of performance. Van Houten advocated the selection of appropriate target behaviors along with competency aims expressed in terms of optimal frequency, duration, and latency of response.

If Precision Teaching is to be utilized with a renewed effort to better understand how to define and measure social skills, then it appears that the social validity of our measurement should be a major concern. Whereas a monadic approach (Strain & Shores, 1977) can lead to supposition concerning the efficacy of a specific intervention, as in the case of a decrease in drooling, measurement of other events or surrounding variables is needed before definitive conclusions concerning the effects of the decrease in drooling can be made. Measurement of the approach of others, duration of contact with the subject, or inclusion in social activities may be important variables, if, in fact, the intent of the intervention was to increase social acceptability. Such measurement of concomitant variables may be one approach to insure the social validity of the intervention or even selection of a targeted behavior. Strain, Shores and Kerr (1976) suggested that one important aspect of such measurement may be the reciprocity of behaviors, whereby negative interactions are typically paired with negative interactions and positive interactions are followed by positive interactions.

A more traditional approach to the assessment of social/behavioral skills has included the use of behavioral checklists such as the Walker Behavior Problem checklist, the Behavior Problem checklist, and the A.A.M.D. Adaptive Behavior Scale. Self-concept inventories such as the Valette Self Concept Inventory also could be included in this category of approaches to assessment. Problems with the reliability and validity of these checklists (Irvin, Cromwell, and Bellamy, 1970) include the ambiguity of the items, leniency of ratings and errors of central tendency making it more likely to rate close to the mean. Despite these problems, these checklists are frequently