

THE USE OF CONTINGENT NONVERBAL TEACHER-ATTENTION TO DECREASE OUT-OF-SEAT BEHAVIOR

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Abstract: An ABAB design was used in the present study to evaluate whether contingent verbal or contingent nonverbal teacher-attention could weaken inappropriate i.e., out-of-seat, student behavior. The results indicate that nonverbal teacher-attention to inappropriate student behavior may be a more potent deceleration technique than verbal teacher-attention. Implications for teachers and researchers are discussed.

A major task in changing behavior is selecting an appropriate behavior change technique. One of the most common, perhaps because of its occurrence in natural settings, is the use of teacher-attention.

Teacher-attention, in the form of social reinforcement, has been used in maintaining appropriate student behavior (e.g., Schutte & Hopkins, 1970). Several other investigators have demonstrated the effect of verbal teacher-attention on increasing academic performance while having a concomitant effect on decreasing disruptive behavior (e.g., Ayllon & Roberts, 1974). Kazdin and Klock (1973), discussing increases in appropriate behavior, noted that the issue of whether nonverbal teacher-attention, independent of verbal teacher-attention, could be assumed to contribute to changes in behavior, remains unresolved. They did, however, find that nonverbal teacher-attention was related to an increase in appropriate student behavior. This finding may assume greater significance when one considers that as little as 15% of teacher-attention behavior may be nonverbal (Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 1968).

Verbal teacher-attention, in the form of punishment (e.g., reprimands, saying "no"), may decrease inappropriate student behavior (e.g., Hall, Axelrod, Foundopoulos, Shellman, Campbell, & Cranston, 1971). This same aversive verbal teacher-attention may result in the (a) maintenance of inappropriate behavior (e.g., Becker, Madsen, Arnold, & Thomas, 1967) or (b) increase of inappropriate behavior (e.g., Madsen, Becker, Thomas, Koser, & Plager, 1970).

Aversive verbal teacher-attention followed by aversive nonverbal teacher-attention has been shown to decrease inappropriate behavior (e.g., Doleys, Wells, Hobbs, Roberts, & Cartelli, 1976; Moore & Bailey, 1973). However, the separate effects of verbal and nonverbal teacher attention in reducing inappropriate behavior appear undetermined. The purpose of the present study was to determine whether contingent verbal or contingent nonverbal teacher-attention could weaken or decelerate inappropriate, i.e., out-of-seat, student behavior.

METHOD

A 12 year old, severely retarded male, was the subject of the study. He was attending the school program of a mid-west residential, intermediate care facility for the retarded. The subject attended school for two and

one-half hours per day, out of which data for the study were collected for the same 30 minute period each day. It was reported anecdotally that the subject responded to verbal teacher- or adult-attention with inappropriate verbalizations.

An ABAB design was employed to evaluate the relative effectiveness of verbal teacher-attention (A phases) and nonverbal teacher-attention (B phases). A baseline phase was not implemented as verbal teacher-attention had been implemented from the beginning of the school session (two weeks). It was during this two week period that pilot data were collected to determine the target behavior, that is, gets out-of-seat or remains out-of-seat after teacher attention.

Verbal teacher-attention consisted of a command to sit down followed by verbal reinforcement if the command were followed. The non-verbal teacher-attention behaviors employed were a combination of facial expression (scowl) and physical gesture (pointing to the chair) followed by verbal reinforcement if the command were followed. The use of verbal praise for appropriate responding was used in all phases to aid the subject in differentiating appropriate from inappropriate behavior. In addition, if the subject did not respond appropriately, a 30-second delay occurred before the next teacher-attention behavior.

RESULTS

Chart 1 indicates that during the first A phase (verbal teacher attention), the subject got or remained out of his seat about 6 times every 10 minutes with a tentative acceleration (5 frequencies) of $\times 1.0$. Non-verbal teacher attention (first B phase) effected a frequency step down (divide) of $/1.3$ and a acceleration turn down (divide) of $/1.6$. The second A phase resulted in a $\times 4.5$ frequency step up (multiply). Finally, the second B phase produced a $/2$ frequency step down and a tentative deceleration (4 frequencies) of $/4$, resulting in a final frequency of 1 every 10 minutes.

DISCUSSION

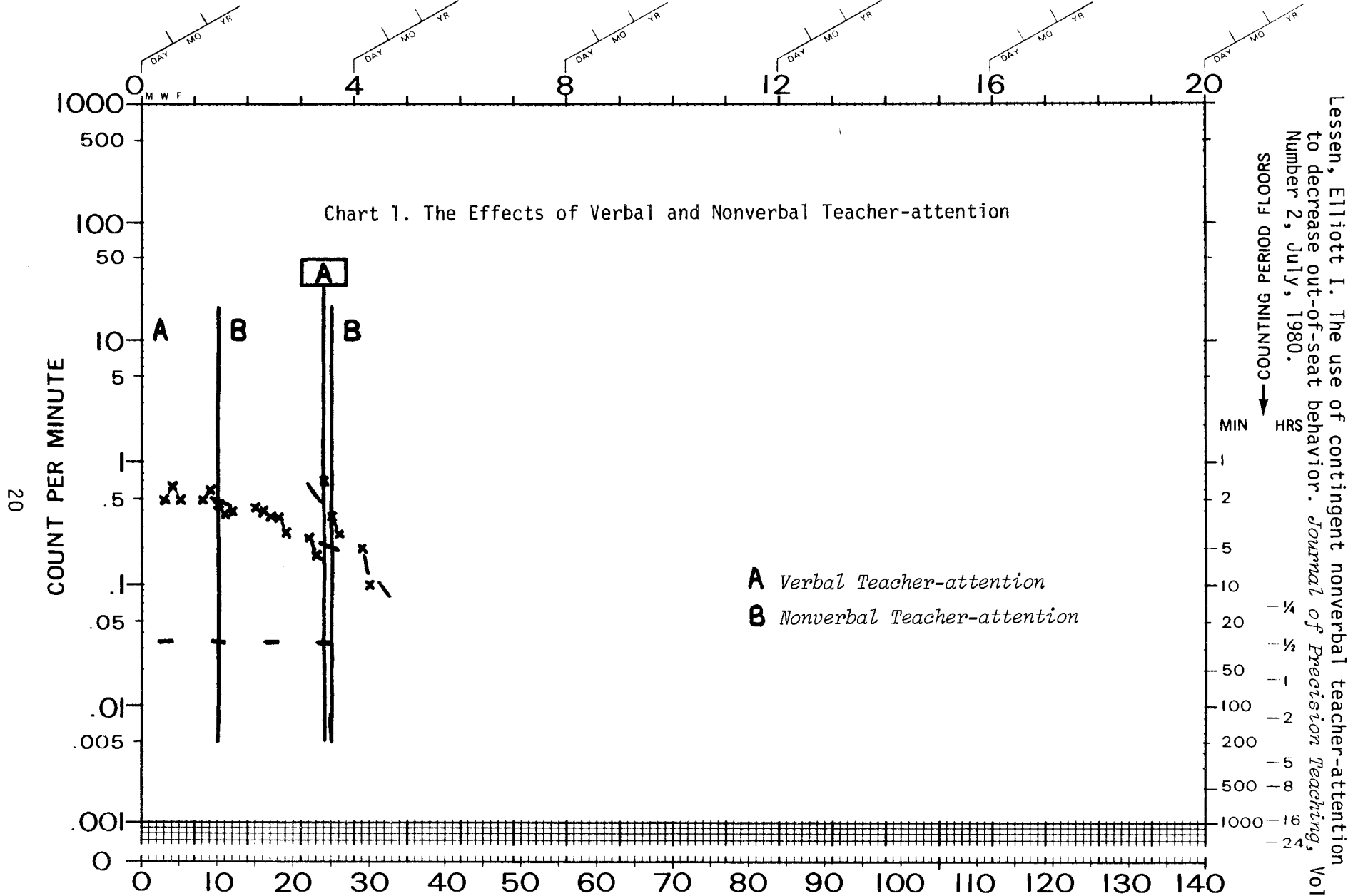
The results indicate that nonverbal teacher-attention to inappropriate student behavior may be a more potent deceleration technique than verbal teacher-attention. This technique would seem to be less disruptive and distracting to other students.

One apparent limitation of the present study was the limited length of a second A phase, i.e., one session. This was due to a marked increase in out-of-seat behavior, and consequently, disruption that limited the opportunity for learning for the subject and his classmates. It was, then, an ethical consideration which prompted the immediate return to the second B phase.

The use of verbal teacher-attention may maintain deviant behaviors due to the probability that these attentional responses from adults may be positive reinforcers of these deviant behaviors (Becker et al., 1967). Individuals for whom verbal teacher-attention may have reinforcing properties, may be considered as susceptible to the use of nonverbal teacher-attention to decrease inappropriate behavior. Contingent non-verbal teacher-attention may, then, be a more advantageous and propitious technique to employ.



CALENDAR WEEKS



Lessen, Elliott I. The use of contingent nonverbal teacher-attention to decrease out-of-seat behavior. *Journal of Precision Teaching*, Number 2, July, 1980.

SUPERVISOR			E. LESSEN			SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS			(MALE)			12			GETS OUT-OF-SEAT OR REMAINS OUT-OF-SEAT AFTER TEACHER ATTENTION		
DEPOSITOR			AGENCY			TIMER			COUNTER			CHARTER			BEHAVIOR LABEL COUNTED		

Implications of this study for researchers and teachers include: (a) employing one type of nonverbal teacher-attention per phase; (b) using nonverbal teacher attention to reduce other types of inappropriate behavior; and (c) using nonverbal teacher attention to reduce inappropriate behavior with other types of handicapped individuals.

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