

Organizing Your Special Education Classroom With Precision Teaching

by

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“How can I possibly make sure that all of these kids, with so many different needs, are going to get quality instruction every day?” This question represents one of the most significant and exciting challenges that special educators face as education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) becomes a reality. Madeline Will has suggested that placements based solely on category of handicapping condition do not comply with LRE (Will, 1986). If the placement is based on the unique educational needs of the students, it is possible for a teacher to have students with different handicapping conditions within the same classroom. It is not only possible, but also very rewarding, to serve children learning to read functional sight words and write personal data, with children learning to respond to peers and hold up their heads. Teachers respond to these challenges in many different ways, but all share a need to know if the students are receiving effective instruction and making progress. Precision Teaching allows teachers the freedom to take advantage of their own unique styles and still insure that students with a variety of needs are benefiting from their efforts.

Academic Applications

The most obvious applications of Precision Teaching techniques are in the academic areas. The progress of students at all levels of skill development can be monitored through the use of one minute timings and three cycle charts. Timings are easily done before or after instruction, and students practicing the same skills can be grouped together for timings or timed individually. An excellent way of providing feedback and reinforcement is to allow children to plot their own data. Students may also participate in making chart-based decisions when appropriate. In math, for example, students in the same class may be working on rote counting, naming numerals, and computing math facts. Instruction can be conducted in three, fifteen minute periods. The remaining fifteen minutes of a one hour math period can be devoted to timings, charting and decision making. Less time would be involved if both teacher and assistant participated in instructional activities.

Tool Skills

Through the use of suggested performance standards and effective decision making, Precision Teachers can help their students build the tool skills needed to perform more complex tasks. An excellent program for building tool skills is *Can-Do* by Betty Duvall (1979). Tasks are presented in small booklets that students can take home when they meet the minimum performance standards suggested in the manual. Tasks are presented in small sequential steps with easier skills, such as naming pictures and letters and making marks, presented first. Later booklets require more advanced reading, math and language skills.

Functional Skills

Less obvious, but equally effective applications of Precision Teaching are possible in classrooms serving children for whom academic skills are not practical. The development of skills such as sorting objects, reading survival signs, following directions, naming (or signing names of) objects can be effectively measured and recorded using Precision Teaching techniques. One minute timings are adequate and appropriate for some skills such as sorting or naming objects. Longer timings, and the use of six cycle paper, may be necessary for some other skills such as following directions, responding to greetings, and other tasks that are not appropriately measured in one minute timings. Teachers can use a variety of methods and materials for instruction and still use a consistent means of monitoring progress.

Social Skills

Often the greatest concern for teachers of students with more severe handicapping conditions is not the development of new skills, but the development of appropriate behaviors. Precision Teaching techniques are sometimes overlooked as teachers decide how best to replace inappropriate behavior with more acceptable behaviors. Hitting peers (Elrick and Maechtlen, 1983), grabbing

PRECISION TEACHING PLAN SHEET

Student (s) J. Teacher (T) _____

Pinpoint (objective) Decrease non-communication noise Goal Increased social skills

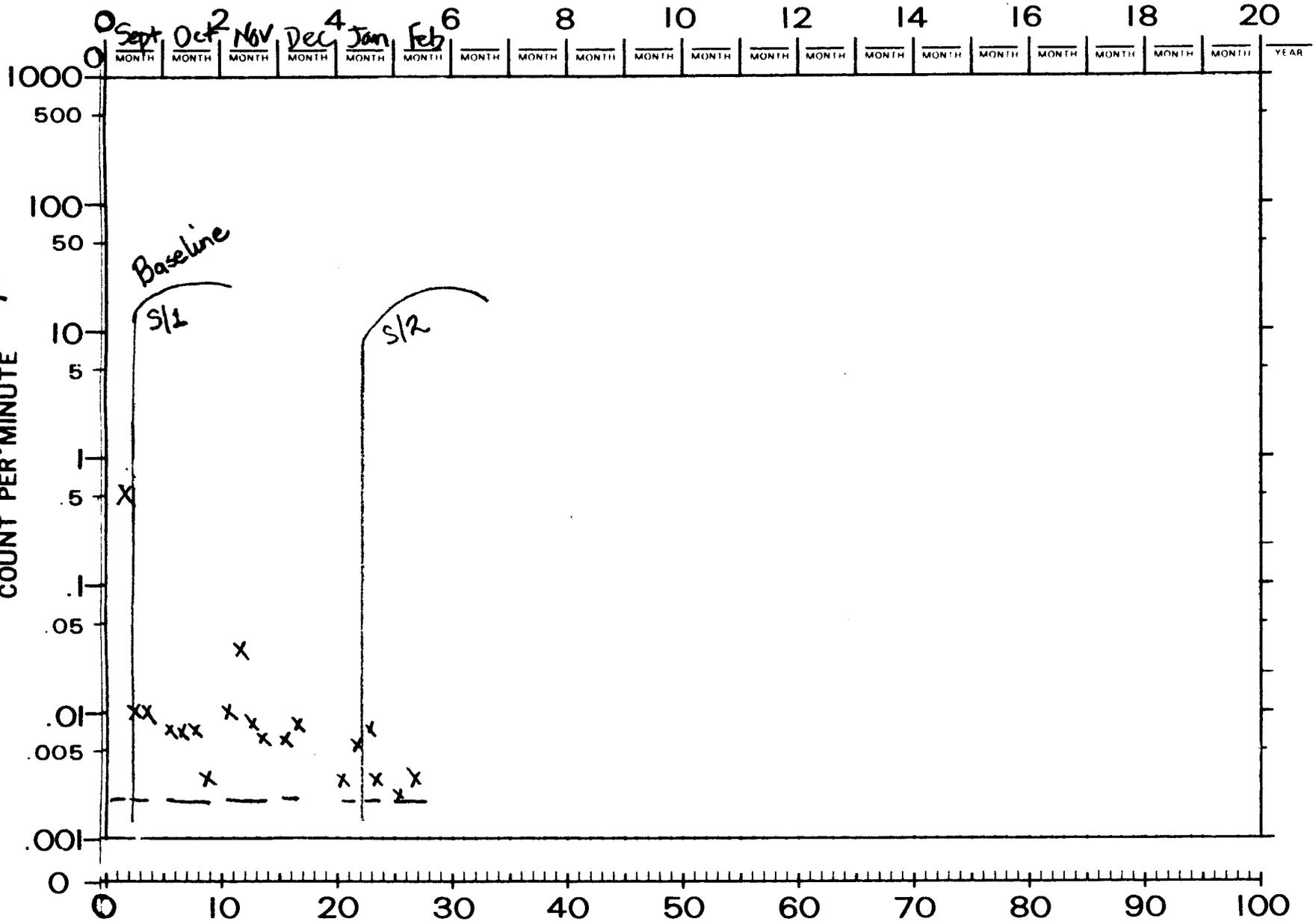
Program Step/ Materials	Decision/ Date	Program Procedure/ Timing Procedure	Behavior to Increase		Behavior to Decrease		Aim
			S Behavior	Consequence	S Behavior	Consequence	
Timer Tally Sheet Step 1	9-19	During J's regular activities Teacher says, "No noises, J." Data collection: 2-15 minute periods during the day-total number of non-communication noises	1)Intelli- gible com- munication attempts 2)Quiet mouth when working	Verbal praise plus marble in jar	Non-Com- munication noise scream, grunts, hums	Touch S's face, T. moves within 6" of S and says "No noise."	Decrease noise by half
Step 2	1-17			Verbal praise only		T holds one finger up and says "No noise" quietly	



CALENDAR MONTHS

Chart 1

36



CALENDAR WEEKS

Trott	Maehtlen	J.	9	Room 6	Noises
SUPERVISOR	ADVISER	BEHAVIOR	AGE	LABEL	COUNTED
DEPOSITOR	Albuquerque Public Schols	TIMER	COUNTER	CHARTER	
	AGENCY				

peers, (Maechtlen and McDowell, 1984) drooling (Trott and Maechtlen, 1986), and making inappropriate noises are some unacceptable behaviors that have been reduced using various means of correction and reinforcement. Charting rate per minute and using that information to make decisions has proven to be an efficient means of evaluating the effect of procedures used. An example is the use of Precision Teaching to decrease non-communicative noises made by a student with severe mental retardation. (See Figure 1 and Chart 1.)

Increasing behaviors that occur at a low rate is another area in which Precision Teaching can be easily used to evaluate progress. The progress of students who are working on increasing the time that they hold eating utensils or hold heads up can be measured by charting the decrease in rate per minute of dropping utensils or putting heads down. Completing work can be measured by charting the increase in rate per minute of work items completed.

Counting behaviors to be increased or decreased can easily be done during other activities. It requires little effort for the teacher, assistant or trained volunteer to keep a tally of behaviors during a short (10 to 15 minutes) interval once or twice during the day when it is convenient or when the behavior is of particular concern. Charting and decision making can be quickly completed later in the day. This will ensure that the correction and reinforcement procedures carried out during the rest of the day are effective.

Organization

The use of Precision Teaching automatically imposes, to a certain extent, good classroom organization. Daily activities can be organized into fifteen, thirty or forty-five minute segments. The first portion of each time period is used for instructional activities. The last few minutes are used for timing and charting. (See Figure 2.)

The instructional program is further enhanced by some additional management techniques. Bienarz and Maechtlen (1984) suggest organizing plan sheets and charts by placing every child's chart for the same goal area on the same clipboard. Another method would be to have a separate clipboard with all plan sheets and charts for each student. Children who have learned to plot their own data enjoy keeping and decorating a folder with their

own charts and plan sheets. If worksheets are to be used, they can be mounted on tagboard and laminated. Children can then mark them with grease pencil, dry erase marker or overhead pens.

Bienarz and Maechtlen (1984) further suggest limiting data collection to four or five objectives per student per day. Limiting the number of objectives makes it more likely that the teacher will be able to work with the student on each objective and collect data every day, and also prevents the frustration of not being able to get to everything. Objectives should be chosen according to what the child most needs to learn. An important point to emphasize is that the timed activity must remain consistent. The same worksheet, items to sort, etc. as well as verbal instructions, must be used for each timing. Teachers may, however, use all their creativity in planning numerous instructional activities that can and should change frequently. Timings will support the learning taking place through different instructional means. This will also facilitate the generalization of knowledge.

Precision Teaching makes a successful program in many ways. It provides an efficient vehicle for demonstrating accountability to parents, school administrators, school districts and state school boards. It allows teachers to communicate accurate information about their students at any time. It makes planning easier and fits in with any teaching style, method or material. Most importantly, it allows students to tell their teachers how they are learning and what they need. "We use a pre-post test to see how we have done. We use continuous measurement to see how we are doing. Your choice!" (Precision Teaching Project Training Manual, 1984).

References

- Bienarz, S. A. & Maechtlen, A. D. (1984). The Precision Teaching classroom. Paper presented at the International Precision Teaching Conference. Park City, Utah.
- Duvall, B. (1979). *Can-do: A program for basic tool skills development*. Great Falls, Montana: Advanced Litho Printing.
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**Precision Teaching in the Elementary Classroom
Sample Schedule**

8:30 - 9:00	Breakfast and Bathroom
9:00 - 9:30	Gross Motor Activities (Physical therapy for some, classroom exercises for others).
9:30 - 10:00	Functional Academic and Fine Motor Skills
10:00 - 10:15	Recess
10:15 - 10:45	Functional Academics and Fine Motor Skills
10:45 - 11:00	Storytime
11:00 - 11:50	Play Skills and Other Social Skills
12:00 - 12:30	Lunch
12:30 - 1:15	Rest time and Self-Help Activities (this is a perfect time for working on brushing teeth, washing hands, etc. While some are working one-to-one on these skills, the others can be resting, listening to quiet records or looking at books. This is also a time when the students can go to the bathroom or have their diapers changed, if necessary.)
1:15 - 1:45	Physical Education
1:45 - 2:30	Communication (This is the time for the formal language programs that are practiced and reinforced throughout the day.)
2:30 - 2:45	Recess or active class game
2:45 - 3:15	Special activities (This is the time for group activities such as cooking, science or dramatics).
3:15 - 3:30	Snack or closing activity

FIGURE 2

Maechtlen, A. D. & McDowell, R. L. (1984). Reducing grabbing by a profoundly retarded boy in a public school. *Journal of Precision Teaching*, 5, 1-3.

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