

Ed Psych cures nasties

This fall in Educational Psychology 457 (Remediation and Habilitation in Special Education) students are finding out first hand whether behavior-modification really works. Dr. Larry MacDonald, lecturer for the course, believes that experience in applying the principles of behavior modification is equally as important as an academic understanding of those principles.

As part of their first projects, students worked on modifying one of their own behaviors which they found to be personally undesirable. Each student decided what behavior change, defined the behavior, obtained a baseline, and set up a behavior-change program based on either reinforcement or punishment or some combination of these two techniques.

The results are in and here are some of the behavior changes that occurred.

Weight watching proved to be a popular pastime—at least a dozen students succeeded in decreasing the intake of

snacks just by putting money away for something they really wanted each time their snacking decreased to a lower level.

One frugal student found that just giving 10¢ to a roommate each time she snacked was more than enough to break the habit - she hasn't snacked once in the two weeks following the violation.

Pen biting and nail biting were annoying classroom behaviors in several students who managed to reduce these behaviors by reinforcing themselves with money for not biting or as in the case of one student by punishing herself by not smoking a cigarette for two hours each time she bit her nails - not only did this cut down her nail biting but it cut down on her smoking considerably. At last report she was happily showing off her new nails (while smoking as much as ever)

Speaking of smoking, a number of students in the class chose to quit - generally reinforcement for not smoking was money put aside for something the student really wanted - such

as a new item of clothing. One student puts the money he previously spent for cigarettes (50¢ per day) toward the purchase of show tickets. He then reinforces himself for not smoking by attending a show nearly every weekend.

Other undesirable habits such as knuckle cracking, moustache fondling, swearing, slouching, daydreaming, hair breaking, tardiness, muscle twitching, face touching, and leg swinging came under the onslaught of behavior-modification techniques. In every case, changes occurred in the desired direction.

One student, for example, felt that she swore too much - so, she decided to donate 25¢ to a much despised church each time she swore. As a result of this arrangement, she managed to reduce her swearing from about 40 to 10 times per day - of course, she doesn't talk as much now, but that's another story.

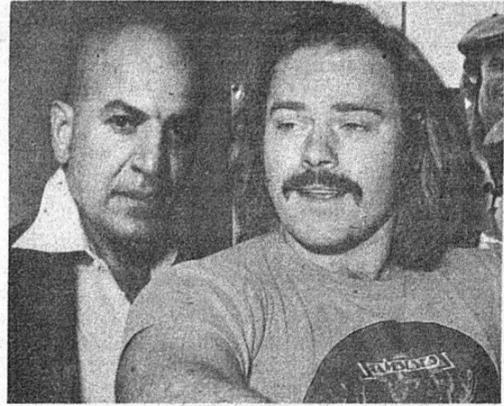
In preparation for their third project, which is modifying inappropriate behaviors of

children in classroom situations, the students are now planning programs to change someone else's behavior.

For example, one student is planning to increase the number of times her boyfriend smiles at her whenever they meet. However, for some

reason, she is a little reluctant to discuss the type of reinforcer she's planning to use. Whatever it is, her boyfriend will probably agree that this behavior-modification business isn't as bad as some people make it out to be (no pun intended!)

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