

The Effect of Intensive Human Relations Laboratory Experiences Upon Student Teacher Perception and Treatment of Behavioral Problems of Elementary School Children¹

RUSSELL DOBSON*
SUE HAWKINS
BILL BOWMAN

RESEARCH in social psychology seems to imply that student teachers experience difficulty in dealing with the behavioral problems of elementary school age children. Pupil control, the perception of pupil misbehavior, and subsequent teacher selected techniques for prevention or treatment appear to be an integral part of teaching behavior in the public elementary school. Teacher-pupil control typology may vary from custodial to humanistic as discussed by Willower, Eidell, and Hoy (1967, p. 4), who stated:

Teachers may emphasize punitive sanctions, coercion, and ridicule as well as withholding rewards to gain compliance to arbitrary standards set by the teacher or the organization. Or sensitive teachers may appeal to the indi-

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vidual's senses of right and wrong, his self-discipline in a non-punitive, understanding, and supportive manner to achieve behavior norms and role expectations.

Since appropriate pupil motivation and organizational arrangement are vital to success in teaching elementary school youngsters, educators need to determine the extent to which opportunities exist in preservice training for preparing secure, sensitive, perceptive teachers who are trained in human relations.

Within the past 10 years basic characteristics of student teachers appear to have changed. Modern student teachers have more universal attributes than did student teachers' stereotypes of a decade or so ago. Recently prepared teachers represent more nearly the total range in terms of socioeconomic background rather than being predominantly middle class. Their preparation is likely to be more thorough and complete, in that they have experienced a more bal-

* Russell Dobson, Associate Professor of Education, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater; Sue Hawkins, Associate Professor of Education, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas; and Bill Bowman, Assistant Professor of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing

anced sequence of courses in the foundations of education, methods of education, and academic preparation in the subject matter disciplines.

Though it may be concluded that teachers prepared within the past 10 years are well prepared professionally and possess desirable social perceptions, the intensity, complexity, and depth of problems which are associated with children have at the same time become more crystallized. Therefore, while modern student teachers may be better prepared to cope with behavioral problems than their more experienced counterparts, the intensity and complexity of the problems within children have increased.

In any event, both teacher and pupil variables have changed in the past decade. Such changes are worthy of new analysis. This investigation was based on the assumption that perception and subsequent teaching behavior, rooted in attitudes and beliefs, do not change adequately through the typical teacher education program and that, to develop sensitive, humanistic teachers, perceptually open to the idiosyncratic needs of pupils, student teachers need an opportunity to expose and explore their own ideas and feelings in a supportive atmosphere provided by the teacher education institution.

The Problem

The central problem of this study was to analyze the consequence of intensive human relations laboratory training on elementary school student teachers' perceptions of disciplinary problems and their proposed treatment of children who exhibit such behavioral problems. Specifically, answers to hypotheses generated from the following questions were sought:

1. Do elementary school student teachers who participate in intensive human relations laboratory experiences differ significantly from elementary school student teachers who participate only in the traditional student teaching program in their perception of pupil misbehavior?
2. Were these two groups of elementary school student teachers in substantial agree-

ment concerning proposed treatment for children who exhibit misbehavior?

3. Do student teachers' attitudes toward behavioral problems exhibited by children change significantly as a result of intensive human relations laboratory experience?

Method

Subjects. Eighty elementary school student teachers were divided randomly into two groups of 40 each. One group, the experimental group, was exposed to intensive human relations laboratory training in addition to the regular supervised student teaching program at Oklahoma State University. To control for geographic and social conditions which might intervene in this investigation, the two largest city school systems in Oklahoma were selected as cooperating school systems. Twenty of the 40 student teachers assigned to each city were randomly assigned to student teaching experience in lower socioeconomic schools and 20 were assigned to other socioeconomic schools. The experimental group from each geographic location was comprised of 10 elementary school student teachers assigned to lower socioeconomic level schools and 10 elementary school student teachers assigned to other socioeconomic schools. Thus, a total experimental group of 40 elementary student teachers was developed. The remaining 40 elementary student teachers comprised the control group.

Procedure. The independent variable was the intensive human relations laboratory experiences (in addition to the regular student teaching program). The experimental group was divided into four laboratory groups of 10 each who participated in nine two-hour sessions. The structure of the human relations laboratory experiences took the form of the following pattern:

1. The exposing (verbally and non-verbally) of an individual's ideas and feelings to other student teachers
2. Receiving feedback (interaction with other group members)
3. The exploration of an individual's beliefs, attitudes, values, and resultant behaviors

4. The examination of teaching problems which caused student teachers to initiate and generate multiple alternatives for coping with pupil misbehavior

5. A supportive atmosphere without personal threat or leader authority

6. The leader(s) offered a supportive attitude of encouragement and acceptance but did not supply "ready" answers to participants.

These experiences were to assist student teachers in recognizing individual differences, needs, and levels of awareness in themselves and in others. The participants were typical, normal student teachers, and the group focused on typical problems that arise in the student teaching experience.

Instrumentation. In order to answer the foregoing questions, it was necessary to measure the attitudes and practices of a large number of elementary school student teachers toward behavioral problems of their pupils. The selected instrument utilized for both the pretest and the post-test was the Behavioral Problems Inventory and the Behavioral Problems Treatment Sheet (Dobson, 1966). This instrument was based upon studies reported by Wickman (1928) and others who compiled and validated lists of children's acts perceived by teachers as misbehavior.

Two lines of inquiry were pursued to obtain evidence of student teacher perception and proposed treatment of behavioral problems of the elementary school children involved in the study. First, the reactions of participating student teachers to specific types of behavioral problems were measured by eliciting their judgments about the seriousness of the problems listed in the Behavioral Problems Inventory. The response categories were scored high, medium, or low. Second, the participating student teachers' attitudes toward treatment of these behavioral problems were ascertained by analyzing the Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet. The instrument was validated for structure by a jury of elementary education experts. The reliability of the instrument, as measured by the split-half method, was .70. The statistical methods used for this purpose were the Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation and the Spearman-Brown split-half correction formula (Garrett, 1947).

Results

An analysis of behavioral problems was undertaken to determine if significant change occurred between the pretest and the post-test on any specific listed behavioral problem, in case change distributed equally in

Behavioral problems	Cell A changed high to low	Cell D changed low to high	Cell B no change high	Cell C no change low	Obtained X ²	Significance level
General rudeness and inconsideration for other students	11	1	21	7	6.750*	.01
Cheating on class assignments and/or tests	17	1	18	4	12.50 *	.001
Defacing school property and/or equipment	17	2	18	3	10.32 *	.01
Habitual tardiness	11	2	15	12	4.92 *	.05
Committing petty thievery	10	0	26	4	8.10 *	.01
Masturbation	15	4	6	15	5.27 *	.05
Truancy	16	1	16	7	11.53 *	.001
Smoking	17	1	14	8	12.50 *	.001
Obscene notes, talk	14	2	16	8	7.56 *	.01
Playing with genitalia	16	0	8	16	14.06 *	.001
Interrupting	5	15	8	12	4.05 *	.05
Failure to pay attention	7	6	19	8	11.07 *	.001
Willful disobedience	13	0	20	7	11.07 *	.001
Cruelty, bullying	14	1	20	5	9.60 *	.01
Rages, temper tantrums	12	3	20	5	4.266 *	.05
Rudeness, impudence to teachers	11	1	21	7	6.75 *	.01
Shyness, timidity, withdrawing	14	2	14	10	7.56 *	.01
Unhappiness, depression	12	2	24	2	4.785*	.05
Slovenly appearance	11	3	2	24	4.57 *	.05
No interest in classwork	14	1	20	5	9.60 *	.01
Sex offense	14	0	21	5	12.07 *	.001

* Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 1. Acts from the Behavioral Problems Inventory Which Showed Significant Pretest—Post-Test Change in the Perceived Levels-of-Seriousness of Behavioral Problems for the Experimental Group

Behavioral problems	Cell A	Cell D	Cell B	Cell C	Obtained X ²	Significance level
	changed high to low	changed low to high	no change high	no change low		
Shyness, timidity, withdrawing	16	4	9	11	6.050*	.02
Unhappiness, depression	13	2	22	3	6.666*	.01
Eating candy, etc. in school	0	6	1	33	—	p = .032*
Physical attack on teacher	10	1	25	4	5.818*	.02

* Significant at .05 level of confidence.

Table 2. Acts from the Behavioral Problems Inventory Which Showed Significant Pretest—Post-Test Change in the Perceived Levels-of-Seriousness of Behavioral Problems for the Control Group

both directions had the effect of negating any total group change evidence.

Tables 1 and 2 present the data as these were analyzed by the McNemar Test for Significance of Changes for each sample group. The data are categorized in these tables as they were statistically placed in the fourfold contingency table for test, and each cell of the table is identified as to the respective contingency cell A, B, C, and D. Those behavioral problems which evidenced statistically significant change at or beyond the .05 confidence level are identified by an asterisk. The data presented in Table 1 indicate that, of the 37 behavioral problems on the B.P.I., the experimental group subjects showed significant change in level-of-seriousness perceptions between the pretest and the post-test on 22 behavioral problems. The data in Table 2 indicate a change in four of the 37 behavioral problems for the control group.

Table 3 lists all treatment selections from the Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet, for each group, and shows the itemized chi-square values or the Fisher's exact probability for each treatment item. Statistical significance between groups on each treatment is shown in the column at the right of the table by an asterisk. Chi-square obtained values and Fisher's exact probabilities are also presented in the table. Only two of the 22 treatment items showed statistical significance between the pretest and the post-test. They were item number 10, "Pupil loses some privilege," in which the experimental group increased and the control decreased on their post-tests; and item number 11, "Pupil referred to special service personnel," in which the experimental group decreased and the control group increased greatly.

Findings

The findings of this study considered to be most significant were the following:

1. The experimental group showed significant change in the perceived level-of-seriousness on 22 of the 37 behavioral problems, while the control group indicated significant perceived level-of-seriousness changes on four behavioral problems.

2. Differences in the proposed treatment of behavioral problems between the experimental group and control group were not significant.

3. The treatments "pupil-teacher conference," "parent-teacher conference," "assessment and group discussion of problems," and "acceptance of behavior as normal" were utilized greatly by both the experimental and control group.

4. Significant differences existed between the pretest and post-test for the experimental and control group on two desirable treatments—"pupil loses some privilege" and "pupil referred to special service personnel."

5. There were 13 behavioral problems listed on the B.P.I. which received a ranking between one and fourteen. This indicated a general agreement in perceived high level-of-seriousness by both the experimental and control group on both the pretest and the post-test.

These 13 behavioral problems were: committing petty thievery, defacing school property and/or equipment, sex offense, physical attack on teacher, unhappiness and depression, willful disobedience, no interest in classwork, cheating on class assignments and/or tests, general rudeness and inconsideration for other students, truancy, lying and untruthfulness, rages and temper tantrums, and cruelty and bullying. These behavioral acts were considered as of a high seriousness level by all student teachers involved in this investigation.

Conversely, behavioral acts receiving low seriousness ratings and rankings were: day-dreaming, acting smart, tattling on others, interrupting, whispering, writing notes, running in the halls, slovenly appearance, sissy or tom-boy, eating in school, and horseplay.

Conclusions

The following conclusions have been drawn from the findings of this study:

1. Since the experimental group received the treatment variable, and the perceived level-of-seriousness on 22 individual behavioral problems changed significantly, one may propose that the treatment variable did have some effect upon the experimental group of elementary school student teachers.

2. There was indication that student teacher preparation courses had influenced positive student teacher attitudes which reflected action (treatment of behavior problems), in that there was no significant difference between the control group and the experimental group and that both groups selected frequently those behavioral problems deemed desirable.

3. Student teacher attitudes that deter-

mine disciplinary action or treatment of behavioral problems are influenced in a positive manner by teacher preparation courses more than are attitudes that reflect judgment, opinion, and thought or perception of behavioral problems.

4. Student teachers in this sample seem to be cognizant of desirable procedures, as expressed in educational research literature, for treating behavioral problems of elementary school children.

Discussion

Since the experimental group's perception changed significantly on 22 of the behavioral acts listed on the Behavioral Problems Inventory, and the control group's perception changed on only four of the 37 acts listed, it seems reasonable to assume that the intensive human relations laboratory sessions did have a positive effect on the student teacher's perception of behavioral problems of elementary school children. However, data obtained from the Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet showed the experimental and control groups to be relatively

Desirable treatments	Experimental group		Control group		Obtained X ²	Fisher's exact probability
	Pretest	Post-test	Pretest	Post-test		
1. Give pupil opportunity to make contribution to class	133	80	132	84	.0339	—
3. Teacher uses a simple control (a look, nod of head, etc.)	122	117	112	146	2.6045	—
4. Parent-teacher conference	165	136	189	149	.0397	—
7. Pupil-teacher conference	335	472	416	578	.00944	—
10. Pupil loses some privilege	30	54	57	40	8.6791 *	—
11. Pupil referred to special service personnel	86	68	4	41	29.12808*	—
14. Role playing	37	39	32	35	.00330	—
15. Isolate the pupil	9	25	3	6	.00009	p = .57448
16. Emphasize good qualities of child's behavior	89	64	48	37	.01376	—
17. Accept misbehavior as normal for child to attempt to change through a positive approach	192	122	182	100	.59360	—
22. Assess and improve through group discussions	123	133	97	116	.20137	—
Undesirable treatments						
2. Pupil apologizes	58	51	62	42	.64615	—
5. Teacher lowers grade	4	7	3	2	—	p = .73074
6. Detention after school	8	4	13	3	—	p = .65502
8. Pupil temporarily suspended from room	2	11	5	5	—	p = .16034
9. Pupil temporarily suspended from school	0	1	27	0	—	p = .07142
12. Corporal punishment is used	3	4	4	7	—	p = 1.00
13. Send child to principal's office	43	47	23	33	.38528	—
18. Physical control of student	21	15	17	19	.50144	—
19. Require additional assignment	4	4	4	5	—	p = 1.00
20. Some action by fellow students	20	7	26	10	.0151	—
21. Behavior called to attention of other class members	5	13	6	23	—	p = 1.00

* Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 3. A Comparison of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on Pretest and Post-Test Responses for Each Behavioral Treatment Listed on the B.T.R.S.

in agreement as to how behavioral problems should be treated. In most instances, both groups of student teachers tended to favor the prescription of treatment of a less punitive nature.

Perception would reflect immediate or intuitive judgment based on thought and feeling derived very largely from basic beliefs or values, whereas treatment expresses an attitude of action.

Certain implications for teacher-preparation institutions would seem to grow out of the findings of a study of this nature. The increased emphasis upon an understanding of child growth and development on the part of these institutions has undoubtedly been reflected in the attitude of teachers toward treatment of behavioral problems. The differences between the groups of student teachers in their attitudes toward perception of the seriousness of certain behavioral acts, however, would indicate that college curricula are not necessarily effective in changing predetermined attitudes of thought and feeling about what constitutes misbehavior on the part of elementary school children.

There must be continued instruction of

the student teacher in the dynamics of child behavior. Knowledge of one's own value system must be made a part of the teacher's understanding and approach to child behavior.

Some student teachers with fixed attitudes undoubtedly will need reeducation in regard to the emotional and experiential factors that produce behavioral problems in children.

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