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APPROACHING RESULTS WITH THE DEAF MULTI-HANDICAPPED

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Deaf persons whose handicaps include mental retardation and/or behavioral problems present a very real challenge to vocational counselors. These clients often exhibit inappropriate social behaviors which discount their vocational skills. With these cases the counselor's role becomes one of changing dysfunctional social behaviors while developing vocational skills.

In helping the client acquire behaviors that are employable, the counselor must utilize therapeutic methods that are consistent with the client's cognitive abilities. Psychoanalytic and existential models assume the client's insight into his problem will affect a change in behavior. Application of these insight models have as yet achieved tenuous results with retarded populations.

Positive results with the retarded have, however, been achieved using behavior modification methods (Hall & Borden, 67; Eveslage & Buchmann, 73). In this model changing observable behavior precedes a concern for the client's insight into the origins of his problem. Behaviorism assumes that an individual's behavior is a function of stimulus in the environment that triggers, reinforces, and conditions behavior. The counselor's role therefore, is to identify the behavior to be changed, note the conditions under which the behavior occurs, and then select and apply a reinforcer or punisher which will affect a change in the behavior.

Regrettably, the vocational counselor's opportunities for direct observation, recording, and application of reinforcement are restricted by the nature of his position. The counselor's priorities are such that the time available for direct supervision of the client is limited. Given these constraints, in order to use behavior modification effectively, the counselor must generate methods of indirectly managing the client's environment.

As an environment manager the counselor can create a network of surrogate counselors in the client's home, work, and work settings by teaching behavior modification technics to parents, peers, and employers. The roles of each surrogate counselor can be delineated in contract form with or without the client's sanction. The contract merely states that certain rewards will be given for appropriate behaviors and that punishments will be given for inappropriate behaviors. These contracts should be of a specified duration, to be re-negotiated at regular intervals.

Managing the client's environment through contracting is but one of many strategies available to the creative counselor. As a method of intervention, environment managing extends beyond the forty-five minute counseling session and into the client's home, school, and work environments. The results of this extended

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application of behavior modification are the shaping of behaviors which maximize the client's social and vocational growth.

The following slide presentation will illustrate the behavior modification strategies utilized by counselors at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside:

Slide presentation to include:

1. Token rewards system
2. Job experience opportunities
3. Casework intervention
4. Contracting
5. Social reinforcement

REFERENCES

Eveslage, R., & Buchmann, A. The effects of consequences delivered contingent upon intelligible speech by deaf children. *American Annals of the Deaf*, June 73. pp. 446-53.

Hall, V. & Borden, M. Behavior changes in brain-injured children through social reinforcement. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, Dec. 67. pp. 463-79.