

Implementing a Cognitive Behavior Management Program

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Cognitive behavior modification (CBM) is a broad term that describes a number of specific techniques that teach self-control through increased awareness of cognitive processes and knowledge of how behavior affects academic and behavioral outcomes. In contrast to other forms of behavior management, CBM interventions emphasize student rather than teacher evaluation of performance, making this set of strategies highly desirable for busy educators. This article briefly describes three CBM procedures: (a) observational learning, (b) self-instruction, and (c) self-monitoring. It also provides specific guidelines for implementing self-instruction and self-monitoring training in the classroom.

Many students with learning and behavior problems are often characterized as being distractible and having short attention spans (Bos & Vaughn, 1994). These students spend less time engaged in on-task behavior and more time in off-task behavior. They are often inattentive, uninvolved, and impulsive. In addition, students with learning and behavior problems often waste time, accomplish little, and require increased instructional attention and effort from teachers and supervisors (Berger, 1995). As a result of these behaviors, school work is incomplete, students do not make hoped-for gains, and teachers are frustrated.

One solution to this dilemma is to teach these students to monitor behavior and academic or work performance through the use of cognitive behavior modification (CBM). CBM encompasses a number of approaches,

including observational learning, self-instruction, and self-monitoring, that emphasize the influence of internal cognitions on self-control (Cipani, 1991). The premise of CBM, then, is twofold. Students must become aware of how they feel, think, and behave, and how their behavior affects personal performance as well as interactions with others (Versi, 1995). Unlike behavior modification techniques that are instructor or supervisor driven, CBM teaches the student to continuously evaluate progress toward predetermined goals or standards. Thus, students are empowered to regulate their own actions and recognize success (Fraser, Belzner, & Conte, 1992). In addition, when CBM is implemented successfully, students can generalize it to multiple environments. As a result, this intervention "should go beyond symptom management by providing a basis for continued growth and rehabilitation" (Barabasz & Barabasz, 1996, p. 13).

This article briefly describes observational learning, self-instruction, and self-monitoring, and offers specific guidelines for implementing self-instruction and self-monitoring training in the classroom.

OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING

According to Cipani (1991), observational learning is a cognitive approach that results in students acquiring information about how to behave in particular environments by observing how others perform. Observational learning is the primary theory binding several approaches and incorporates three components: (a) modeling,

(b) mediation, and (c) anticipation. Through modeling, students attend to the behavior exhibited by others and begin to approximate their actions. Modeling opportunities occur vicariously and as a result of planned activities like role playing. Mediation influences behavior in that after students focus on a particular stimuli (e.g., the student who raises his or her hand to ask a question during individual seatwork), they assess how they would respond under similar circumstances. Finally, anticipation of a reinforcer (e.g., attention from the teacher) contributes to whether or not the behavior will be demonstrated.

SELF-INSTRUCTION

Procedure Description

Self-instruction involves the use of self-statements to assist in regulating behaviors that often interfere with effective learning and performance (Cipani, 1991; Kamann & Wong, 1993). It is particularly effective in helping students to recall the steps necessary to solve a particular academic or social problem (e.g., two-digit multiplication, responding to bullying). Initially, students are taught to verbalize aloud to themselves, to a peer or adult, or to a tape recorder. Over the course of training, however, the statements become more covert. Solution procedures typically include statements of (a) the problem, (b) possible solutions, (c) solution evaluation, and (d) self-reinforcement (Fraser et al., 1992).

Implementation Guidelines

Prior to self-instruction training, the teacher first targets an academic or social problem. The problem should be observable and easily recognized by the student for whom the procedure is intended. Next, the teacher must prepare materials, which might include the academic task the student is to complete while using the intervention or cue cards that prompt the self-instruction steps (Berger, 1995; Kamann & Wong, 1993). An example of the self-instruction steps is provided in Figure 1. In addition, the instructor must consider reinforcers, including social, activity, and edible/tangible. Finally, the teacher meets with the student about the difficulty and the strategy and obtains a commitment to learn and use the procedure.

Berger (1995) described a six-step model for teaching self-instruction:

1. The student observes the teacher as he or she models performing a task while thinking out loud. As the teacher works, he or she (a) describes the problem, (b) asks questions, (c) decides on a plan, (d) follows through on the plan, and (e) self-reinforces.

WHAT am I going to do?

1. **W**hat is the problem I'm having?
I need to think about the situation.
2. **H**ow can I handle the problem? I
need to pick the best plan.
3. **A**ct. I need to follow through with
my plan.
4. **T**reat myself to a pat on the back.
I solved the problem!

Figure 1. Cue cards taped to the desk or the front of the text can be used to prompt self-instruction steps. Students can also carry cue cards in their notebooks or wallets. (This figure may be photocopied for noncommercial use only. Copyright © 1997 by PRO-ED, Inc.)

2. As the teacher again models the self-instruction procedures, the student listens and completes the same task the teacher is performing.
3. The student does the work while overtly talking him- or herself through the task.
4. The teacher models the same task while self-instructing in a quiet voice.
5. The teacher completes the same task silently. The student observes body language and facial expressions as the teacher uses inner speech to do the work.
6. Finally, the student guides him- or herself through the activity using inner speech.

One modification to this particular intervention is a story-based procedure. Aydin and Yerin (1994), for example, used a story-based CBM procedure to reduce test anxiety. The story was written in first person and chronicled the character's strategies for overcoming nervousness about tests. The story was introduced to students in parts and provided a catalyst for discussion.

Successful use of this strategy requires ongoing practice. Practice sessions should include verbal rehearsal of the self-instruction components as well as opportunities to use the strategy in familiar and novel situations.

5. Use brief verbal corrections to aid the student in staying focused on the target behavior during work periods when he or she is not recording his or her performance.

6. Prompt the student to reinforce him- or herself when things are going well.

CONCLUSION

Cognitive behavior modification procedures are one way that children can acquire improved self-control (Fraser et al., 1992). This procedure, however, is most appropriate for students who have the skills necessary to complete independently an activity (Quinn et al., 1994) and, in the case of self-instruction, the language ability to engage in self-dialogue (Kamann & Wong, 1993). In addition, although the CBM strategies presented here are for individualized circumstances, the procedures can be readily modified for group use (e.g., a centrally located timer that signals all students, whole-group training). As Berger commented, "Ultimately, everyone benefits as the students in the classroom learn to control their behavior. The environment becomes more peaceful and students can get on with their schoolwork" (1995, p. 20).

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