We live in pressing times, we are pushed into judgments and formulations, the need overrides discretion, and expediency supplants research. Our guesses become theories, our narrow-mindedness becomes dogma, our ignorance becomes curriculum, our complacency becomes conviction. The result: a series of "authoritative" pronouncements without benefit of practical knowledge. These pronouncements, if taken seriously, have a profound effect on the pattern of education for the severely retarded child. (D'Amelio, 1971, pp. 4-5)

Now that normalization has become a guiding concept in human service, community placement in itself is considered a vast improvement over institutionalization: less regimented, therefore more dignifying; less barren, therefore more humane. However, communitization may be destined for the pitfalls of any massive relocation pursued without careful

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(Corrections have been made on reprints.)
brought expanded instructional opportunities to people traditionally excluded from classrooms as “untrainable” and therefore “hopeless” (Barrett, 1977; Birnbrauer, 1976). And research continues to develop, analyze, and refine methods for teaching people with increasingly severe behavior deficits. The success of these methods has made it feasible to mandate public education for even the severely handicapped. Unfortunately, however, normalization ideology is being emphasized (Soefring, 1974; Wolfensberger, 1972) at the expense of training in the technology of behavior normalization. As a result, advocate-habilitators are seldom prepared to teach the behaviors that community living requires.

Most experts in behavior-normalizing technology consider normal environments inappropriate for people defined by their inability to function adequately within them. A large body of evidence supports this position. Diverse as they may appear at first glance, behavior-analytic procedures that normalize both deviant and deficient behavior share a common property — a property that distinguishes them as “special” in the habilitation of handicapped individuals. All such procedures employ successive and often extreme modifications of the instructional environment.

In the initial stages, these modifications are designed to produce instructional environments that even the most severely handicapped person can respond to and derive reinforcement from. Subsequent steps in the development of new behaviors consist of gradual revisions of the instructional environment. Each revision more closely approximates the “normal” environment, thereby requiring progression in the form, complexity, or fluency of a person’s behavior.

Initial modifications may have to depart greatly from procedures used successfully with the nonhandicapped. An example is the physical guidance or “putting through” required in early stages of movement formation. Another is the very finely tuned fading that may be necessary to produce visual discriminations that normal children learn almost instantly. Or the departure may be as simple as provision of more-frequent-than-normal praise for appropriate social, academic, or self-help behaviors. Severity of handicaps may be more functionally described by the “power” of the procedures necessary to normalize them than by conventional classification (Gold, n.d.). In this case, “power” refers not only to the extent of departure from “normal,” but also to the degree of sensitivity and skill necessary to design optimally instructional environments.

Just as normalization advocates often overlook behavior-normalizing technology, behaviorally oriented teachers often fail to incorporate more “normative” practices (Wolfensberger, 1972) into what should be a pedagogical continuum. If normalization of behavior is a long-term goal, we should make maximum use of existing guides for developing increasingly
normalizing technology. At the risk of using a controversial concept, I refer to community behavior norms — descriptions of activities and performance standards typically found in community settings.

In varying degrees, community norms are implicit in most training endeavors. However, as instructional guides, they appear to be used inconsistently. For this reason, community behavior norms bear re-examination and re-explication. If our goal is to help severely low-functioning individuals become more competent and thus more acceptable to and better “blends” with their peers (Vincent & Broome, 1977), we should examine in greater detail the characteristics of typical behavior (Bricker, Ruder, & Vincent, 1976; Haring & Gentry, 1976; Haughton, 1972). In particular, what are some of the implications of community behavior norms for (1) selection of instructional outcomes, (2) modification of instructional procedures, and (3) choice of methods for evaluating progress toward behavioral normalization?

**SELECTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES**

Instructional outcomes are the products of instruction — the skills that the learner is expected to have as a result of instruction. Ideally, they should be quantifiable performances that occur under specified conditions and that meet specified criteria.

It seems obvious that the least restricted persons are those with the greatest variety of readily available skills for dealing with community life. Yet the range of instructional outcomes selected for handicapped pupils is often unnecessarily (albeit unintentionally) restrictive. Decisions about what to teach more often than not reflect the instructor’s methodological training. They also reflect the instructor’s assumptions about the nature of retardation and his or her expectations of what retarded people can or should be able to do. In addition, educational options for low-functioning people continue to be limited by psychometric classification. This situation exists even in Massachusetts, where a 1972 act of the legislature obiterated the political phenomenon of “mental retardation” (Jordan, 1973) and substituted another one — “special needs.”

Assumptions about what is “normal” for “retarded” people still underlie selection of instructional outcomes. As a result, we see emphasis on self-help skills without any consideration of the numerical skills, sight vocabulary, handwriting, or other forms of communication that are necessary for community living. Or, worse yet, we see “eliminative” education (Goldiamond, 1975) aimed solely at removing “undesirable” behavior from people with already abnormally barren repertoires — often diverting these people of their only means of interacting with their environment.

Other nonnormative variations emphasize cosmetic behavior control — being “still, quiet, and docile” (Winett & Winkler, 1972), “on task,” “in seat,” “clean,” and so forth. Community peers who regularly present such appearances might be called well-behaved, but unless they also display the social and academic skills expected for their age levels, they, too, risk being labeled “retarded.”

Instruction limited to specialized skills has also become popular. Outcomes chosen for instruction include such sophisticated skills as telephoning, time-telling, making change, and reading price tags and restaurant menus. No doubt the “face” validity of these cosmetic instructional outcomes will improve the credibility of publicly sponsored educational programs by normalizing the “image” (Wolfensberger, 1972) of handicapped people. But ironically, instruction that impacts only a veneer of normality may set these people up for failure that would have been less likely without it. Community peers who regularly engage in these complicated activities have previously mastered a complex substructure of prerequisites and components as well as a host of related skills. A handicapped person who displays specialized competencies may provide persuasive evidence that expectations should be changed. But the same person may become trapped by deficits that accumulate from failure to display related skills normally expected by and of age peers with comparable advanced skills. (A “special needs” savant?)

Diagnostically, to the specialized skills approach is one that focuses only on elemental skills such as object sorting, identity matching, cross-modal matching, and object naming across various kinds of materials and with varied instructors, without any discernible sequential programming toward more commonly expected competencies. This task x materials orientation to curriculum content may appeal to those seeking a systematic approach to some form of generalization training with a very “basic skills” emphasis. Pursuit of these instructional objectives may yield a pool of subjects well pretrained for popular laboratory tasks and may, indeed, be a boon to the statistician. Unfortunately, such splinter skills appear to be unrelated to the cumulative skill development that underlies most normative notions of education.

Exemplify application

These approaches are examples of “retarded norms” — not “normal norms” that the rest of the world recognizes. And, inconsistent though it may seem, they may be practiced by instructors who are firmly committed to some concept of normalization. Nevertheless, they all seem to operation- alize some unrecognized assumptions. One such assumption may be that low-functioning people are so far removed from the average that attempts to progress toward more conventional educational practices will be a waste of time. Recent redefinition of the psychometric range of retardation could
learned to show you which numeral is "four," to tell you what numeral you are pointing to — whether vocally or by signing — and, perhaps, even to set clocks correctly. People who match coins to price tags would also have acquired one-to-one correspondence, rational counting, and even equivalence. People who once engaged in atavistic behaviors to avoid or escape various activities would have been taught to indicate choice by saying or signing "No" or perhaps even by displaying anger if their "No" is not honored.

Standardized, validated, hierarchically arranged curricula that aim toward the goals of community skills are defensible in theory. They are also methodologically justifiable as operational referents for determining how far and in what ways handicapped people depart from and therefore need specialized instruction in approximating community behavior standards.

**SELECTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES**

Normalization of behavior also requires progressive modification of instructional procedures commonly used in classrooms for low-functioning people. We may all agree that, for severely handicapped pupils, specialized instructional technology is necessary to teach a host of behaviors that normal preschool children already have. However, we should also be continually aware that persistence with some procedures may limit our pupils' approximations of normality. Even the best analyzed and best sequenced hierarchy of instructional objectives will fail to produce more normal behavior if the methods used to reach those objectives are not themselves successively modified toward normality.

For example, many have questioned the kinds of consequences dispensed during instruction. Community peers don't get bits of food for correct responses. They do get token rewards — but most frequently in the form of marks rather than plastic chips. And the back-up for tokens usually consists of parental, peer, or teacher praise, privileges, and access to leisure-time activities including simply resting or appearing to "do nothing." The "keep 'em busy" practice in some special classrooms precludes "doing nothing." Yet this is a highly prevalent "activity" among handicapped people. Perhaps some would learn to get marks for that purpose.

Contrived consequences are often necessary in the early stages of instruction. But they can become yet another stigma of and restriction on the handicapped student unless additional training is undertaken to build the reinforcing function of more normally available events. Such training would require the same sensitive programming as techniques used to condition the reinforcing function of other response-produced events (e.g., tokens,
teacher or peer approval) that originally failed to strengthen behavior. The more behavior that is supported by commonly available consequences, the closer the approximation to community reward systems.

Compared with the irregular scheduling of consequences in the "real" world, reinforcement of every correct response is artificial. We must constantly remind ourselves that behavior is not sustained by the schedule that works best in early acquisition (Ferster & Skinner, 1957; Lindsley, 1964); that intermittent scheduling must be intentionally programmed for all behavior that we expect to be maintained outside the prothetic environment of acquisition. To ensure that our pupils are minimally restricted, our instructional procedures should be extended to incorporate schedules increasingly like those that sustain the behavior of community peers.

Instructional formats also deserve some examination for their relative normality and their normalizing effects. Once again, the notion of least restrictive alternatives is applicable. Unfortunately, many instructional formats that proliferate under various "behavioral" guises seem to be unnecessarily inflexible.

Despite the heterogeneity that characterizes community classroom pupils, the effort to achieve homogeneously handicapped groups still enjoys undue popularity. This notion seems to have originated from concern that less capable students would develop "failure sets" from participating with more capable people. By now we should realize that a teacher can arrange contingencies to prevent that from happening. Furthermore, if a teacher uses the imitative skills that exist or are being taught, less competent pupils, instead of experiencing "failure," may acquire more normal forms of behavior through imitation of their more competent peer models (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976).

One of our residents with Down's syndrome — an astute observer of others — acquired one-to-one correspondence and rudimentary equivalence simply by repeatedly seeing his more competent peers counting their pennies to exchange for dimes. So, clearly, even unprogrammed modeling provided by heterogeneous groups can be an instructional aid that also provides a more community-like instructional environment.

Another related practice is exclusive reliance on individual tutorials, often in cubicles. Isolation may be necessary to facilitate training of various attending behaviors. However, without individual instruction in group settings and, eventually, group instruction, pupils are prevented from acquiring behaviors commonly expected of their community peers. Retarded pupils should be taught to take turns, to attend to and consecutively one another's behavior, to work independently in the presence of others, to cooperate as well as compete with one another — in short, to learn from one another. Appropriately designed contingencies make these realistic and normative goals.

How often have behavioral conditioning procedures been called dehumanizing, rigid, automatic, robot-producing, or behavior-controlling, rather than behavior-developing? How often do we hear teachers complaining about inflexible scripts that are boring to follow? How often do we see pupils who do nothing until they are told to do something? Isn't this one of the characteristics we hope to change? Surely such dependence is not characteristic of their community peers.

Exclusive use of teacher-controlled, teacher-presented trials reflects the assumption that low-functioning people will always be totally dependent on their instructors. This will surely be so if teacher presentation is coupled with rigid adherence to priming or prompting (Skinner, 1968) without provisions for shifting control of responding from teacher to instructional materials. Opportunities for self-presentation and independent skill practice with multiple-stimulus formats such as worksheets should be available to handicapped people. Procedures and formats that foster continued dependence on teachers are highly restrictive and may be only a short step above custodial care. They are also antithetical to the normalizing function of good programming.

Self-presentation, self-pacing, and fading of unnecessary prompts are basic procedures of programmed instruction. They operationalize what Skinner meant by "freeing" the student (Skinner, 1968). While primes, prompts, and other forms of teacher control may be necessary during early acquisition, continued use of "acquisition crutches" (Lindsley, 1964) prevents development of independent responding. Until we provide transition to free-response formats, we will not have offered handicapped people the full advantages of programming technology. Nor will we ever know how closely they can approximate normal behavior patterns.

In short, if we wish to produce greater flexibility in the behavior repertoires of our pupils, we must first become more flexible in our own ways of arranging their instructional environments. Again, the patterns of community peers should be our guides.

**CHOICE OF METHODS FOR EVALUATING PROGRESS**

Expanding our instructional objectives and elasticizing our instructional procedures may create more normal or even less restrictive appearances in many classrooms. Lattices of longitudinal curricula with well-developed rationales and communicable lesson plans may provide recorded
mastery but also perpetuates the expectancy of limitation that we are trying to dispel.

But suppose we require consistent 100% accuracy as a criterion in cumulative skills development, and suppose we also incorporate in our curricula the practice periods, retention checks, and reviews found in conventional school curricula. Is accurate performance sufficient to achieve the degree of behavior normalization we seek for handicapped people?

If we look more closely at the measures used in community schools, we find that accuracy is only one dimension of normally measured behavior. Percentage correct is a highly restrictive measure that yields relatively little information from a pupil. Whether it be derived from a person’s performance in one setting with one teacher and one set of cues and materials or from many variations of these environmental variables, a major dimension of behavior is disregarded if we rely solely on percentage correct. That disregarded dimension is time. How long does it take to teach Jimmy to feed himself? To brush his teeth? Once taught, how long does Jimmy take to perform these complicated behavior chains? And how consistently does he perform them? Has he really mastered these skills that normal children perform easily and rapidly every day? These questions cannot be answered from percentage of components completed accurately nor from percentage of time Jimmy engages in these activities appropriately. We are restricting Jimmy’s communication to us by limiting the measured dimensions of his behavior.

Why do we limit our own effectiveness by persisting with such fragmentary information when we invest so much energy in trying to train the handicapped?

In the community, time is one of our most precious commodities. The clock and the calendar provide a base for evaluating instructional effectiveness. If a pupil can’t keep up with the pace, remedial procedures are called for. And pupil records are cumulative through time. Progress is judged by Jimmy’s cumulative skill development during units of time called terms or semesters. In community living, time restrictions are everywhere.

And if we ask how well our most accurate pupils will be able to function in community environments, we are forced to consider such temporal measures as duration and rate of responding. Jimmy must be able to count money at supermarket-acceptable speeds. He must be able to speak, read, or sign fluently enough for comprehension. A trial-by-trial teaching format locks the child’s performance into a rate determined by the teacher. On the other hand, self-presenting lets the child’s rate emerge. Self-presenting also provides a format that facilitates fading of
unprompted accurate repetition of these skills within specified time limits. Having normalized our pupils' accuracy and permitted them opportunities to speed up their performance, as their community peers do, we now question whether, in so doing, we have normalized their fluency. Using the exact formats provided our pupils, we have some community schoolchildren and adults perform the same skills within the same short probe periods, say, 30 seconds.

For example, Figure 1 presents exploratory results from four of our state school pupils as they compare with an equal number of young nonhandicapped public school pupils and adults. Rate (frequency) ranges are based on the highest of four rates attained by each individual on successive probes.

Note that, even though the groups are very small, there is a lawful relationship among the rates of the three groups across all 16 skills. The state school pupils performed at consistently lower rates than much younger public school pupils and they, in turn, performed at consistently lower rates than the adults. Note also that, of the 16 skills probed, only five show any overlap in the range of fastest performances obtained from state school residents and those shown by younger public school pupils.

![Graph showing frequency comparisons on some components and prerequisites of elementary skills](image)

**Figure 1** Frequency comparisons on some components and prerequisites of elementary skills (Based on an unpublished pilot study conducted by Frances George and Deborah Pease)
Yet all were performing these tasks at 100% accuracy. Furthermore, the state school residents were theoretically at an advantage because they had practiced these tasks prior to the probes that yielded these data. This example shows us how incompletely we have performed our own task of normalizing our pupils' accurately performed behavior.

By adopting one additional dimension in our measurement system, we increased the opportunities for our pupils to communicate with us. Then, by comparing their performances with those of their community peers, we were made aware that both our methods and our objectives must be expanded in the direction of normality if we are to provide our pupils increasingly normalizing habilitative options. Use of a single additional parameter of "normal" performance—rate—necessitates revisions in instructional methods and in curricular formats to permit multiple opportunities for pupil response limited only by specified time intervals. With a quantitative description of the "normal range" on the subskills chosen for comparison, we now have a first approximation of the "normal" criteria that should be applied in evaluating our pupils' progress.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

"Retardation" is more than a label. It is more than a sociopolitical arena. It is a behavioral reality. Until we can fully normalize our pupils' performance, the reality of retardation will persist regardless of what labels are substituted and what geographic locations the labeled people behave in. And our effectiveness will be inversely related to the restrictions we place on their measured communication to us.

Clearly, normalizing the behavior of severely handicapped people is a very different and more complicated undertaking than simply changing their habitat. Yet it cannot be accomplished without successive environmental normalization as an integral process in behavioral habilitation. Moreover, if we adopt the common language of measured "normal" performance standards as instructional guides, we see the need for considerable methodologic development to provide the skill-supportive instructional environments that will enable our pupils to perform as normally as possible.

No matter how strong the legal and political pressures, we must evaluate our environmental changes in terms of their effects on the behavior of the people to be habilitated. Only our pupils can tell us what environments are more favorable for them. And we must give them as many options as possible for communicating with us. If we permit their measured interactions with various environments to determine the adequacy of our environmental designs, we will avoid the inconsistencies that accrue from approaches that disregard their critical evaluative feedback.

It is the thesis of this article that:

1. Communication of the severely handicapped is being undertaken without adequate evidence of its effects on the people for whom benefits are being sought;
2. Until their measured behavior supercedes our assumptions, inconsistencies between principles and application will continue to undermine our mission of enhancing their future well-being;
3. The medium of communication best suited to articulate and amplify their response to our interventions is the universal language of measurement;
4. Only by posing relevant questions of and seeking answers from the measured behavior of our clients and their community peers can we begin to reconcile their needs and our assumptions.

With measured progress toward the goal of behavioral normalization and with the measured message of normal behavior as a guide, we will be better able to determine where we have been, where we are going, and how far we have to go.

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