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Humanistic Behaviorism Applied - University 100: A College Survival Skills Course

In a previous paper (Benefield, 1978), a cognitive-social learning model of humanistic behaviorism was proposed. This model proclaimed as its goal to make the methodology of applied behavior analysis relevant to anyone who might choose to use it for purposes of skill development or personal enrichment. In short, the taking of contemporary self-management and self-actualization psychology to the lay public was suggested. University 100: College Survival Skills is an application of that model to the teaching of study skills. The primary focus of the course is the development of skills that promote surviving in college.

A brief history of the course.

During the fall semester, 1978, an ad hoc faculty committee was formed to study the campus problem described as "an unusually high incidence of students failing courses" and to propose possible solutions to this problem. Anecdotal evidence provided by students suggested that the problem was due, in part, to students having failed to develop the skills necessary to "study effectively" for their courses. The idea of developing a course to teach study skills emerged from the work of this committee.

Under the direction of the committee chairperson, the committee began an investigation of how other colleges and universities utilize coursework to teach study skills. A questionnaire was mailed to over 100 colleges that indicated via their catalog that a study skills course was available for students. A request was made for a course syllabus and textbook information in addition to the questionnaire data. Only twenty-nine institutions provided complete questionnaire, syllabi, and textbook information. Based on that data and partial data from more than 50 institutions, the following conclusions were drawn. First, most colleges offer a study skills course. Second, this course is *typically* a "credit-for-graduation " course that is administered through a counseling/tutorial/learning center on campus. Third, the topics most often noted (in catalogs and syllabi) as "course content" include: 1) time management; 2) study/reading/comprehension systems and techniques; 3) test-taking skills or test anxiety management; 4) memory or concentration skills; 5) relaxation/imagery training; 6) goal-setting/contingency management; 7) social skills; and 8) writing/note-taking skills.

In October, 1979, the committee recommended that LSU-Shreveport begin offering a one-hour "credit" course (one lecture and one lab per

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week entitled "College Survival Skills" using Pauk's (1974) *How to Study in College* as the text. Course participation was voluntary and a pass/no credit grading system was recommended.

In the fall and spring semester, 1980-1981, University 100 was taught using the Pauk text; however, beginning in the fall semester, 1981, Shapiro's (1978) *Precision Nirvana* was added as a supplemental text and the course was offered as a two-hour "credit" course (two lecture and one lab hour per week). Effective the fall semester, 1982, the above texts were replaced with Fenker's (1981) *Stop Studying Start Learning*, Benefield's (1982) *Human Consciousness and College Survival*, and Ickes' (1982) *Study Skills*. Entering freshmen whose ACT scores require them to take two or more remedial courses are also now required to take University 100. By far, the majority of students who enroll in the course are voluntary participants who describe themselves as "needing help" to survive college. Non-freshman students who enroll, typically, have made average or below average grades in previous college work and many are on scholastic probation and must maintain a 2.0 or better semester grade point average to remain in school. Through the fall semester, 1983, 770 students have participated in University 100.

Course content.

The approach used to teach study skills in this course focuses on the concept of "human consciousness" and its relevance to college survival. A bimodal perspective of human consciousness (i.e., TALKER and LISTENER; see Fenker, 1981) is presented. Techniques designed to promote an awareness of TALKER-skills and LISTENER-skills are exemplified and demonstrated during the course with specific reference to college survival.

TALKER consciousness is examined as if it were a predominantly "making sense" phenomenon that generally lends itself to a linear analysis. Habituation, automatization, categorization, and other perceptual processes are discussed and illustrated. Sequence analysis, utilizing applied behavior analysis principles, is demonstrated as one approach for gaining insight into TALKER consciousness.

LISTENER consciousness is examined as a predominantly nonlinear "just sensing" phenomenon characterized by its receptive nature. Deikman's (1966) deautomatization concept and EMG biofeedback training experiences are utilized to illustrate LISTENER awareness. Silencing the TALKER is suggested as beneficial in promoting LISTENER receptivity. The complementary union of TALKER and LISTENER is denoted as being related to the "path of heart" concept (Shapiro, 1978).

A generalizable self-management program called EAT (experimental analysis of the talker) is taught in the course. EAT is based on the principles of applied behavior analysis. The utilization of an EAT diary and the information necessary to use operational definitions, to conduct task and sequence analysis, and to establish functional relationships via single-subject experimental designs is provided. Concentration, comprehension, memory, time-management, and other TALKER skills are demonstrated using the EAT technique. LISTENER skills (such as creativity and visual thinking) are taught utilizing techniques such as deep muscle relaxation, brainstorming, and guided imagery. LISTENER skills are recommended as an important balance to the "control-oriented" TALKER skills.

An EAT technique is also employed by students for purposes of managing stress or coping with anxiety. Two TALKER components of the stress response are functionally analyzed: PERPs (physiological emergency response patterns) and SSs (self-statements). Imagery and relaxation training are used as techniques for reducing stress. Stressful situations are also examined as an opportunity for increasing LISTENER awareness.

RAT (rational analysis and thinking) is an EAT procedure designed for dealing with MUSTerbation (Ellis, 1978). RAT is a self-administered program which permits students to identify and refute irrational beliefs or MUSTS. RAT is shown to be particularly useful in differentiating irrational MUSTs and one's "path of heart."

A self-administered assertiveness training package called EASI (experimental analysis of social interactions) is also presented. EASI involves both TALKER and LISTENER components. EASI promotes discovering "what one feels" and the appropriate expression of those feelings.

Becoming and Being are suggested as important concepts in achieving self-actualization (i.e., one's path of heart). Being achieved via the TALKER-silent, deautomatized LISTENER state which promotes a non-contingent acceptance of one's self and all others, a feeling of unity with the universe, and a vision of one's path of heart. Being is characterized by a receptivity and yielding and a general acceptance of the "uncontrollability" associated with one's path. Being is emphasized as crucial in avoiding pseudo-Becoming or self-justification. Becoming results when TALKER skills (accessible to control) are employed in combination with Being. Thus, balancing Being and Becoming is suggested as necessary for achieving self-actualization.

Data analysis and conclusions.

A research project was conducted utilizing seventy-six University 100 students during the fall semester, 1980 (previously reported; see Benefield & Perry, 1981). That study was designed to test the effectiveness of EAT techniques in the acquisition of study skills—specifically, individually-stated operationally defined, concentrative behaviors. Both between groups ($n = 76$) (contingencies utilized -vs- no contingencies utilized) and single subject designs ($n = 35$) were employed for data analysis purposes. Dependent variables examined included: changes in scores on the Wrenn Study Habits Inventory; test scores, etc., in other college courses; semester grade-point averages; and weekly "concentration" data (including subjective rating scales). The following conclusions were drawn from the above data (and have generally been re-confirmed in follow-up studies conducted since):

1. Concentrative behaviors (and other operationally defined study skills) can be improved using contingency management strategies such as contingent "payoffs" for concentrative performance and task analysis of the concentrative activities.
2. Exam scores and semester grade-point averages reflect the changes shown in concentrative behaviors.
3. Students vary considerably in their benefits from University 100, in general, and EAT techniques, specifically. Seventy to 75% of the students who complete EAT projects show improved grades. Better than half of all University 100 students show improved grades.

Data collection has continued since the above report (n = 621). Four specific sources of data collection have been employed:

1. Single-subject research designs with volunteer participants who employ EAT techniques.
2. Written course evaluations including detailed student feedback on textbooks, lectures and class exercises and specific skills/techniques acquired.
3. Analysis of written narratives including an autobiographical sketch, an obituary (see Shapiro, 1978), MUSTerbation worksheets, and EAT diaries.
4. Pre/post scores on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Rotter Locus of Control scale, the Heinberg Achievability of Future Goals scale, the Crites Career Maturity Inventory, the Long-Term Personal Direction Scale (Ricks, Epley & Wessman) and others. (Data analysis in progress; see Ickes and Benefield, unpublished data.)

Two conclusions may be justified from the above data. First, EAT participants continue to show improved grades when compared to their no-EAT counterparts and when compared to their own prior performance. However, it should be noted that these students "voluntarily participated," thus suggesting that they may be more "motivated" than non-EAT participants. Second, no *one* generalizable technique is consistently correlated with immediately improved concentrative behaviors. Instead, the following picture typically emerges. A student will experiment with numerous techniques and strategies during the semester he/she enrolls in University 100. By the following semester a "personalized approach" to academic tasks has evolved. EAT participants show *continued* improvement in grades during the semester following University 100 while no-EAT students often remain at the same level of improvement that was obtained while they were enrolled in University 100.

Analysis of the data collected on all University 100 students (including those who do not attempt formal EAT projects) has produced the following two findings. First, the skills and behaviors most frequently cited by students as the most important in producing changes in academic performance are: (% students reporting this factor)

1. Stress management/Relaxation training (51%)
2. Time management (37%)
3. Rewarding "good" concentration behaviors (29%)
4. General feedback and S^D skills; i.e., concentration location, magic pencil technique, gotcha point, etc. (26%)
5. Note-taking/Text-using skills (25%)
6. Dealing with test anxiety/Test situation (21%)
7. Utilizing "pay attention" behaviors in classes (20%)
8. Comprehension/Memory techniques (18%)
9. Visual-Imagery skills (15%)
10. Assertiveness training (11%)

Second, the other factors and changes most frequently attributed to the course and suggested by the students as related to their academic success are:

1. Improved feelings/attitudes about "self" (47%)
2. Improved interpersonal communication skills (37%)
3. Changes in internal self-statements (29%)
4. Improved ability to "quiet the talker" (16%)
5. Decreased "worry" behaviors (15%)
6. Decreased acts of aggression/intense anger (10%)
7. Increased acceptance of other persons (9%)

Final comment.

Students who complete University 100 generally learn to become more successful at academic endeavors. Even greater academic success is evidenced by those students who participate in formal EAT projects. It is the belief of this author that this success is due, in part, to the development of two sets of skills: 1) TALKER skills and a generalized problem-solving strategy that promotes increased self-responsibility, and 2) LISTENER skills and a noncontingent self-acceptance that promotes commitment to one's individual path of heart.

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