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TEACHING SOCIAL/VOCATIONAL SKILLS TO RETARDED ADULTS WITH A MODIFIED TABLE GAME: AN ANALYSIS OF GENERALIZATION

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In this study, a social skills training program for institutionalized mildly or moderately retarded adults was extended to include skills relevant to vocational settings. Target behaviors involving a verbal action or reaction within six skill areas were taught using a commercially available board game, *Sorry,* and a specially designed card deck. The training program featured response specific feedback, self-monitoring, individualized reinforcers, and individualized performance criterion levels. Using a multiple baseline across two groups ($n = 3$ per group), the game contingencies increased social/vocational skills in all targeted areas. Generalization was assessed in two settings: a simulated workshop in which pre and post measures were taken and in the institutional workshop where the residents worked. The posttraining simulated workshop results revealed that the residents' newly learned skills had generalized. However, repeated generalization measures of the residents' social interactions in the institutional workshop were equivocal as were measures of their productivity.

DESCRIPTORS: Social skills, educational game, generalization, multiple baseline, vocational behavior, social validation, workshop behavior

Pessimistic reports regarding the success of mentally retarded persons in employment situations (Edgerton & Bercovici, 1976; Fulton, 1975; Stanfield, 1973) have led to attempts to identify what constitutes effective vocational training for these persons in institutional and community settings. Two primary training goals have emerged (Mithaug & Haring, 1977; Wehman, 1975). First, training should target the acquisition of some marketable skill that can be consistently performed in a specific work setting. Second, training should establish the appropriate adaptive behavior or social skills necessary for acceptance of the individual by supervisors and co-workers. The vocational habilitation literature has focused primarily on the first goal of demonstrating that mentally retarded adults can acquire specific task-related skills. The development of what Rusch and Schutz (1981) have labeled "social survival skills" has been largely ignored, despite the fact that the absence of such skills may account for many of the failures of retarded persons in competitive employment situations (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Kelly, Wildman, & Berler, 1980).

The study reported here is an extension of our previous research (Foxx, McMorrow, & Schloss, 1983) that was designed to teach general social skills (i.e., interactional skills that would be relevant in a variety of social settings) to mentally retarded adults using a board game (*Sorry,* Parker Brothers, Salem, Mass.) and 48 cards specially designed to elicit complex verbal responses. This study is similar to that conducted by Foxx et al. (1983) in that the same modified table game, game materials, rule changes, experimental design, data collection, and training procedures were used in the game setting. It differs with respect to the target behaviors selected for training and the design and analysis of the generalization tests.

Social skills research with the mentally retarded has failed to demonstrate generalization convincingly (Jackson, King, & Heller, 1981). Demonstrating generalization has been a formidable problem because it is difficult to monitor settings in which the trained skills could occur naturally. In

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an effort to overcome this problem, researchers have typically constructed analogue or simulated situations that approximate those in which the behavior might occur naturally and then systematically arranged the occurrence of setting events to prime the behavior. Yet, data from these generalization tests must be interpreted cautiously because simulations often include events that artificially prime appropriate behavior (e.g., those events that controlled appropriate responding during training), and exclude other natural stimulus events that control the performance of inappropriate behavior. Furthermore, simulation or analogue data may not correspond to other measures of social behavior (cf. Matson, Esveldt-Dawson, & Kazdin, 1983).

We attempted to address these issues by conducting an in-depth analysis of generalization. This was accomplished in two ways. First, a simulation was conducted prior to and following training. Second, unobtrusive measures of the residents' social interaction behaviors and productivity in the institution's workshop were taken throughout the study.

METHOD

Residents

The institution's workshop supervisors and the staff of a coeducational ward for high-functioning mentally retarded adults with behavior problems were asked to refer residents for social/vocational skills training. Nine of the unit's residents were independently identified by both the workshop and ward staff as being deficient in social skills. Six residents were chosen for training on the basis of having the lowest preassessment simulation scores (described later) and being available to participate in the program. None had participated in the earlier study.

Individual preassessment scores were used to match residents into two groups. Group One consisted of three males whose mean age was 24; Group Two consisted of one male and two females whose mean age was 34. The overall age range was 19 to 41. The institutional records indicated that the residents were diagnosed as either mildly or moderately retarded, although all appeared to function at a higher level than their IQ scores would suggest. For example, although the respective mean IQs were 60.7 for Group One and 44.0 for Group Two, all residents could speak in complete sentences and had independent self-help skills.

Experimental Design

A multiple-baseline design across groups was used to evaluate the effects of training in the game setting. Data were collected in two additional settings to assess generalization.

Settings

All games were played in a large room located in the basement of an institutional building. The room was equipped with a one-way vision glass so that videotaping could be conducted from an adjacent room.

Two other settings were used to assess generalization. Pre- and postsimulations were conducted in a separate basement area. This simulated workshop included a work area (containing tables, various assembly tasks, and other props such as janitorial supplies and boxes) and a break area (containing a table and chairs, sofa, coffee pot, and a coke machine). Social behaviors were also recorded at the institution's prevocational workshop (the residents' normal work setting) during their regular work shift. The workshop contained several work tables, a variety of assembly tasks, a workbench, and janitorial supplies. The residents were among 8–17 individuals who attended the workshop each morning. During this work shift, residents switched jobs after completing a task so that they were exposed to a variety of tasks each day. The task on which they were observed was performed at a table at one end of the workshop. The task was created for this study to ensure that all residents had equal exposure to it. The workshop supervisor scheduled the task into the work routine.

Data Collection

Target behaviors: The game. Foxx et al. (1983) identified six social skill component areas: compliments, social interaction, politeness, criticism, so-

cial confrontation, and questions/answers. A review of the vocational literature, consultations with workshop personnel, and videotapes made of the residents in the workshop during the 2 weeks prior to training revealed that these areas were quite applicable to the types of interactions that occur in work settings. Eight game cards that depicted workplace interactions or contained referrents to vocational behavior were developed for each of the six component skills. Each component was further differentiated into four "actor" and "reactor" situational competencies. Actor situations required that a player initiate some interaction. For example, one of the criticism situations was "You are working on a sorting task with another worker. He is not doing his job right. What should you do?" Reactor situations required players to respond to an interaction initiated by someone else. For example, another criticism situation was "You are working on an assembly task and your supervisor says, 'You're not doing that right.' What should you do?" The 48-card deck was prearranged so that each player would be required to respond once to each card after four games (i.e., 12 exposures per game per player).

Correct responses for each component area were determined by using criteria that had been developed earlier as a scoring guide (see Foxx et al., 1983). In addition, 10 mental health personnel who either worked in or were familiar with vocational settings were asked to respond in writing to each situation. Their responses were used to validate the criteria further and to develop the correct responses used by the facilitator during the game. (A copy of the 48 social situations and sample correct responses can be obtained from R. M. Foxx.)

Probe data were also gathered on the number of words players used to form each response. These measures were taken from verbatim transcripts of two randomly selected games from each condition. Responses from the simulations were also analyzed. All words were counted; contractions were counted as a single word. Number of words per response was considered to be a corollary measure, because it reflected the complexity of the players' responding, but was not targeted in the training.

Nontarget behaviors: The workshop. Three hundred feet of videotape (approximately 20 min of recording) were recorded as each group of three players worked on a structured task. The tapes were later evaluated by examining each 20-ft section of tape and scoring the appropriateness of the interactions that occurred. For example, at the 80 ft mark, the first verbal action by a player that was not a continuation of a statement from the previous section was scored as being either appropriate or inappropriate. Following this player's verbal action, the verbal reaction by another player was scored on the same basis. The appropriateness of the verbalization was determined by fitting it into one of the six social skill component areas (e.g., questions/answers, confrontation) and using the scoring criteria for that area. For example, one player might say "It sure is a nice day," and two players could respond "It sure is." In this case, the opening statement would be scored as appropriate within the social interaction component area. Both reactor responses would also be scored as appropriate within that component area. Only interactions between players were scored. Additional scoring rules included: (a) scoring all reactions, e.g., scoring two players individually when both responded to another player's verbal action; (b) scoring a failure to respond as inappropriate behavior, e.g., when a player failed to respond to a question directed to him or her; and (c) no scoring if no verbalizations took place during the 20-ft tape section. Appropriate interactions were calculated as a percentage of the total number of interactions that were scored.

Each group's productivity was also assessed to determine the relation between it and appropriate interactions. Productivity was determined by counting the number of pieces completed on a three-part task. The task consisted of the following steps: one resident selected three papers of the same dimensions from a box containing two sizes of paper and placed them in front of a second resident who stapled the papers and handed them to a third resident who folded the papers, inserted them in an envelope, and placed the completed piece in a box. When one of the group did not attend the

workshop, productivity was determined by counting the number of pieces completed by the remaining two group members.

Procedures

Each game was played by three residents and the facilitator. The facilitator (Mark Mennemeier) was a male undergraduate in psychology who had no previous interactive history with the players or experience in training social skills. His undergraduate training was not behaviorally based.

Baseline. During baseline, players could move their game pieces on their turn regardless of whether or not their responses were correct. They received no feedback although the facilitator always gave (modeled) a correct response on his turn.

Social/vocational skills game. During training, movement of the playing pieces was contingent on responding correctly. The facilitator provided specific positive and negative feedback. Players self-monitored their performance during the game and graphed it afterwards. Individualized performance criteria were established based on each player's mean baseline performance. The criteria began at 30% above the baseline mean, increased to 60%, and finally to 90% correct. Following each game, players received a preselected reward whenever their criterion was met.

Supervisor. After the facilitator conducted 12 training games, the players' workshop supervisor served as the trainer for a four-game training series. The facilitator was not present during this training. The supervisor condition was added to: (a) assess whether players' performance levels would be maintained and (b) enhance generalization of the players' appropriate social/interactional behaviors to the workshop.

Generalization. Two primary tests of generalization were conducted. The first involved workshop simulations that were intended to replicate commonly occurring social situations of a vocational workshop. The simulations were conducted 1 week before the baseline and 1 week after the supervisor condition ended. The initial simulation served as a pretest and as the basis for group assignment. It was later compared with the post-training simulation as a test for generalization. Thirty of the 48 game situations were arranged in a logical sequence as they might occur in a workshop and scripted into the simulations. (A copy of the simulation script can be obtained from R. M. Foxx.) The sequence and method of presentation of the situations were different than during the training. The simulations were acted out by three employee confederates who had no association with the training program. Two acted as workshop clients and one as the workshop supervisor. The confederate clients' scripts included both appropriate and inappropriate social/vocational behavior. The residents were tested individually and received no feedback during the simulations.

A second test of generalization involved daily monitoring of the players' social interactional behavior and productivity at the institution's workshop. Each group of three players was videotaped while working on the structured task. To ensure that players adapted to the presence of the recorder, camera operator, and task, tape recordings were made each workday for 2 weeks prior to the start of baseline. Before each session, residents were instructed on their part of the task and told that they could talk all they wanted, but that the camera operator would rather they talked about work. They were then instructed to begin working and the videotaping began. No feedback was given regarding the purpose of the recording, the nature of the players' interactions, or their productivity. In fact, the camera operator avoided interactions with the residents. The task assignments were rotated so that each resident received equal exposure to all three task parts. Furthermore, the players' seating arrangement was varied and the number of times their supervisor interacted with them was controlled. Finally, the supervisor remained naive regarding the targeted skills until he became the game trainer.

Recording and reliability. Each response to a game card was scored correct/incorrect (cf. McFall, 1982) by the facilitator and a trained observer. The observer was located in the videotaping room. When the supervisor conducted training, the facilitator and trained observer sat apart in the video-

taping room and scored responses. Reliability was calculated by dividing agreements by agreements plus disagreements, times 100. In addition, four mental health professionals who were unaware of the design and intent of the study were given verbatim transcripts of the games to score players' responses from two randomly selected games from each condition (a total of six games per group).

During the baseline, training, and supervisor training games, the mean interobserver reliability between the facilitator and observer for Group One was 93.2% (range, 77.8% to 100%) and 90.8% for Group Two (range, 75.0% to 100%). Comparisons between the observer and each of the four independent raters across six randomly selected games yielded mean reliability scores of 81.5%, 83.3%, 86.1%, and 84.3% for Group One, and 83.7%, 77.8%, 82.9%, and 83.8% for Group Two. Although these scores were lower than those obtained between the facilitator and observer, it should be noted that the mental health professionals were provided no criteria by which to determine the appropriateness of the responses. To validate the scoring criteria further, the facilitator's responses (which were partially developed from the scoring criteria) were also blindly scored, i.e., mixed with residents' responses, by the four professionals. They scored only 16 of 576 facilitator responses as inappropriate or a 97.2% level of agreement.

Reliability in the pre- and postsimulations was determined by comparing the ratings of the trained observer and a separately trained rater, both of whom read verbatim transcripts of the tests. Mean interrater agreement on the pretest simulation was 87.7% across the six residents (range, 80.0% to 96.7%) and 97.2% (range, 93.3% to 100%) on the posttest simulation. Reliability on the number of words players used to form each response during the games and simulations was determined by having two persons independently score verbatim transcripts. There was 100% agreement in every instance.

Workshop interactions were scored independently from the videotapes by the camera operator and one of two trained observers. Reliability scores for each group were obtained from two randomly selected sessions from each condition. Reliability was determined by dividing the number of agreements in each interactional category by the total number of scored interactions, times 100. The mean reliability across sessions was 91.3% for Group One (range, 86.4% to 96.5%) and 96.7% for Group Two (range, 90.3% to 100%).

Reliability on the number of pieces completed per session was determined by having the pieces independently counted by two persons. These counts were made at least twice per condition and yielded 100% agreement in each comparison.

RESULTS

Training. Figure 1 shows that Group One responded correctly to an average of 43.0% of the game situations during baseline and 76.8% during training. Group Two averaged 38.8% correct during baseline and 71.7% during training. At the end of the 12 training games both groups were responding near 90% correct.

Because each player received a predetermined sequence of 12 different situations per game, four games were required before a player had been exposed to all four card sequences. Therefore, the first four training games represent each player's first exposure to a particular card sequence under training conditions. An analysis of the individual data revealed that players improved from baseline on 21 of 24 of their first training exposures to each particular card sequence and that their performance generally continued to improve as they were reexposed to the various sequences. The smallest individual gain between baseline and training was 28.6% (43.7% correct in baseline versus 72.3% in training).

Table 1 shows that gains were achieved in all six component areas. In general, these gains accelerated throughout training. Interestingly, the least amount of improvement occurred in the compliments component.

The game cards posed situations that were equally distributed across skill areas and whether an "action" or "reaction" was required within those areas. Both groups improved in both categories

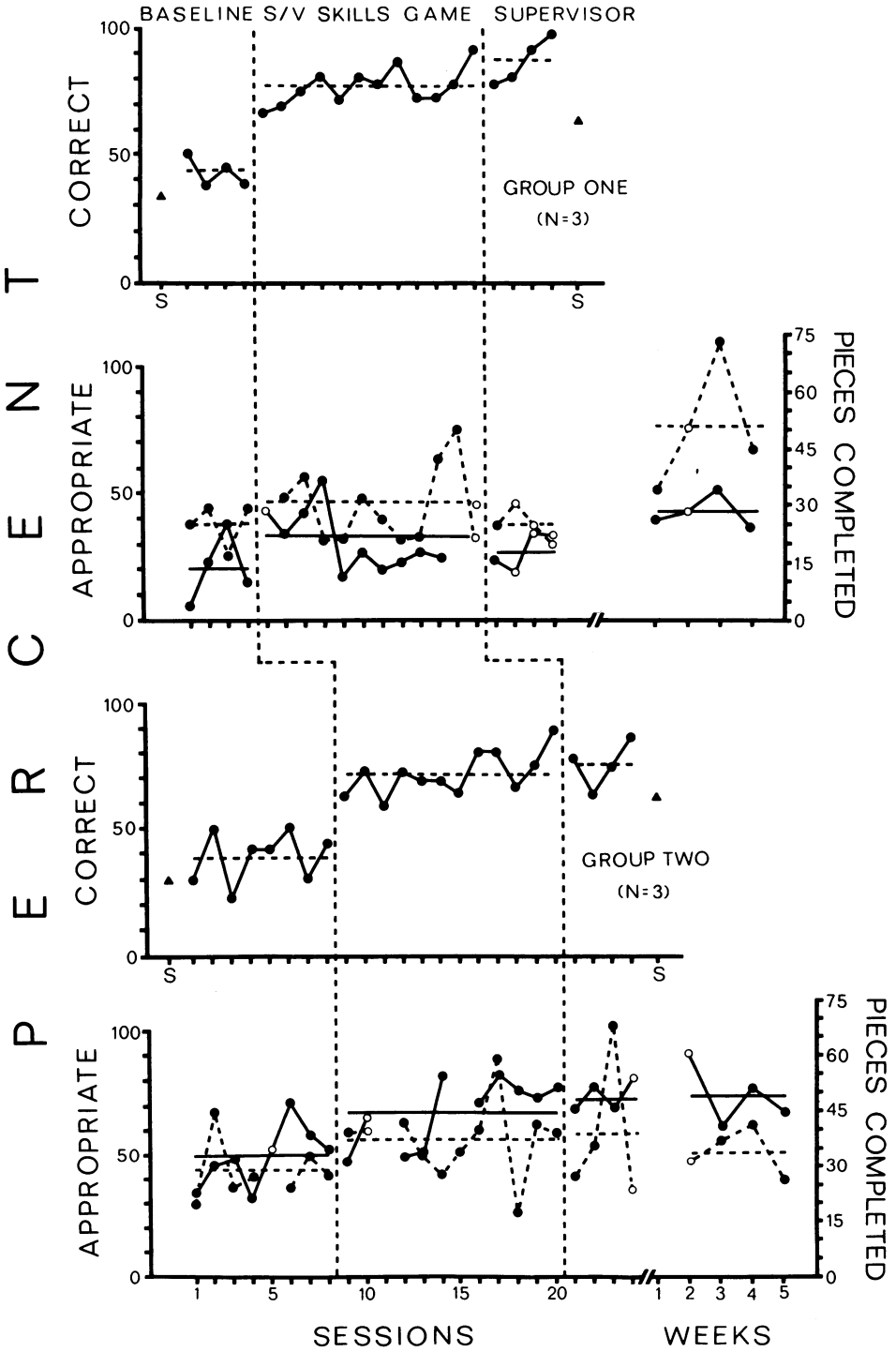

Figure 1. First and third panels—Training & Simulations: Mean percent correct responses during baseline, social/vocational skills game, and simulations. Triangles indicate performance in the pre- and postsimulations. Second and fourth panels—Workshop: Mean percent appropriate interaction data points are connected by solid lines and means for each condition are represented by solid horizontal lines. Mean number of pieces completed data points are connected by broken lines and means for each condition are represented by horizontal broken lines. Open data points indicate that one of the workers did not participate in the workshop session.

Table 1
Percentage of Component Skills Correct

Exposure	Compliments	Social interaction	Politeness	Criticism	Social confrontation	Questions/answers
			Group One ($n = 3$)			
Baseline	54	54	42	12	33	62
Training:						
Series 1	61	75	75	58	75	87
Series 2	62	92	75	58	87	100
Series 3	50	87	92	67	79	96
Supervisor	58	96	100	75	92	100
			Group Two ($n = 3$)			
Baseline:						
Series 1	37	54	54	21	21	29
Series 2	46	58	58	17	25	46
Training:						
Series 1	63	79	75	38	71	75
Series 2	54	88	71	42	83	88
Series 3	54	83	83	58	92	96
Supervisor	58	83	92	58	75	88

and they tended to score slightly higher in actor situations.

Supervisor. Following the facilitator-conducted training (12 games), the workshop supervisor served as the facilitator for an additional four-game series. Figure 1 shows that the residents not only used their newly learned skills in the presence of their supervisor, but continued to improve: Group One averaged 86.8% correct and Group Two 75.6% correct.

Generalization. Figure 1 shows that Group One averaged 33.4% correct in the preassessment simulation and 63.2% on the postassessment, whereas Group Two averaged 30.5% and 62.2% correct, respectively. Individual gains from pretest to posttest ranged from 13.3% to 52.9% in Group One and from 21.7% to 40.0% in Group Two.

The players' workshop behavior provided a systematic assessment of generalization because social interactional behaviors and productivity were measured daily throughout the program. Figures 1 and 2 show that there was considerable variability in the group (Figure 1) and individual (Figure 2) point-by-point measures. Accordingly, the group and individual averages should be viewed very cautiously. Group One's appropriate verbal interactions averaged 20.9% of the total interactions that occurred during baseline and 33.0% when training was instituted in the game setting; Group Two averaged 50.4% and 67.5%, respectively (see Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows that although all residents' mean appropriate interactions increased from baseline to training, there was considerable variability within and between residents, and two residents (R1 and R3, Group One) showed a downward trend. Group productivity was also variable. Figure 1 shows that Group One's production averaged 25.2 pieces during baseline and 31.2 pieces during their participation in the initial 12-game training program, and that Group Two's production averaged 29.1 and 37.5 pieces, respectively.

Figure 1 shows that Group One's mean appropriate interactions during the supervisor training condition was below their mean during the facilitator training condition, as was their productivity. Group Two continued to increase very slightly on both measures. Figure 2 reveals that the appropriate interactions of all Group One residents decreased during the supervisor training condition, whereas those of Group Two showed little change from the previous condition.

Number of words per response. Group One used a mean of 4.3 words per response in the two baseline games that were sampled; Group Two's mean was 4.8 words. In the initial 12-game training sequence Group One's mean increased to 7.8 words per response, and Group Two's increased to 5.3 words per response. There was a further increase in the supervisor condition to 8.6 and 6.2 words per response for Groups One and Two, respectively. Group One used a mean of 2.5 words per response in the preassessment simulation and 4.1 words in the postassessment simulation and Group Two used 2.7 and 4.7 words per response, respectively.

Follow-up. After all training was completed, recording in the workshop was conducted once per week for one month. Again, there was considerable variability in the group and individual point-by-point measures. Figure 1 shows that Group One's

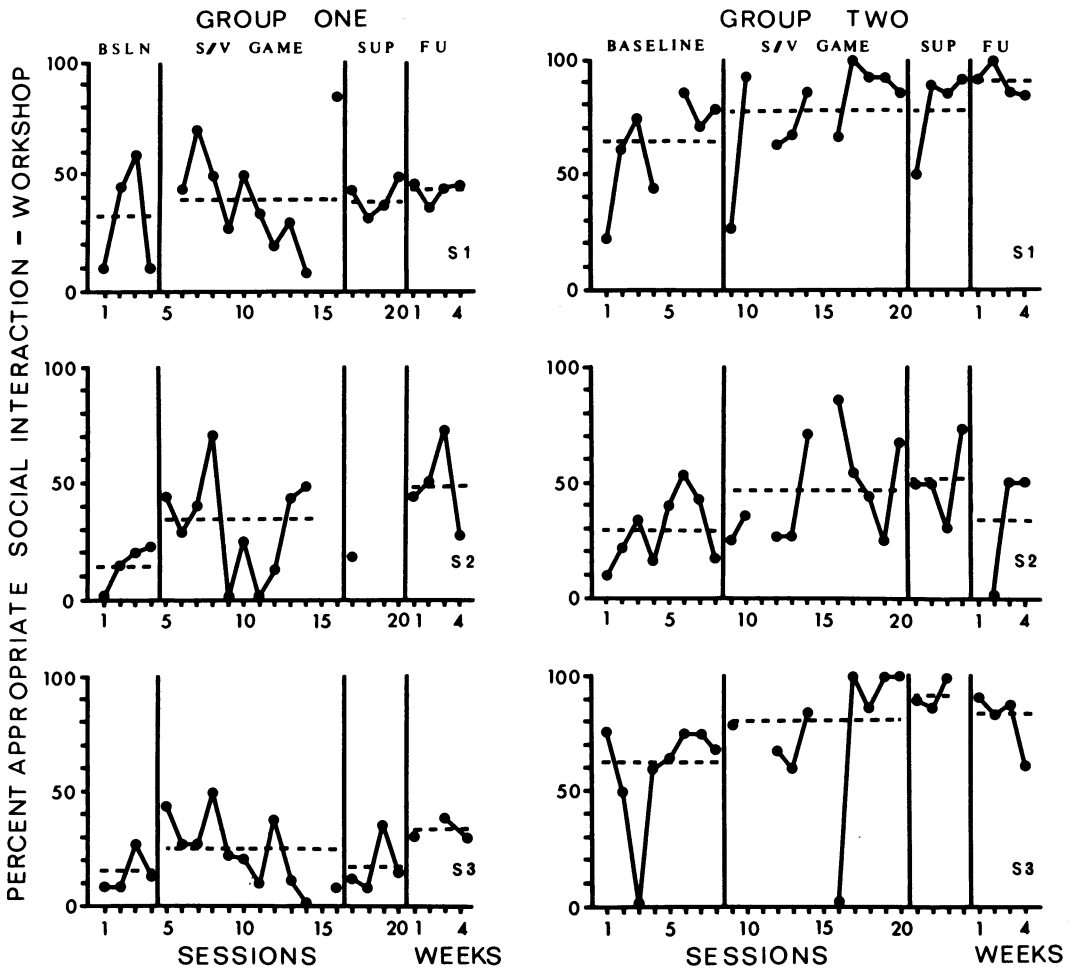

Figure 2. Percentage of appropriate interactions in the workshop generalization setting for each resident across conditions. Mean for each condition is represented by a horizontal broken line.

performance was higher than during any other condition. Group Two's average appropriate interactions showed virtually no change from the supervisor training condition and the production dropped. Figure 2 shows that four of the six residents' appropriate interactions were highest during follow-up, although their responding remained quite variable.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that the players' appropriate social responses to vocationally relevant situations increased during training that was conducted first by an undergraduate facilitator and later by their workshop supervisor. The players' gains occurred over a wide range of skill areas and in situations that required either an action or reaction. A nontargeted behavior, number of words per response, also increased during training and in a nontrained setting (i.e., the simulation), suggesting an increase in the complexity of the residents' responses.

Although these findings were encouraging, our primary interest was to determine the extent to which the trained skills generalized across settings. Accordingly, the residents were evaluated individ-

ually in the simulated workshop and as a group in their work setting. The results from the simulations are clear: all residents improved from pretest to posttest—the smallest gain, 13.3% and the largest, 52.9%. These results further demonstrated that the program can be used to train appropriate interactional behaviors that generalize to an analogue setting (cf. Foxx et al., 1983). This appears to be important because the simulations approximated the residents' work environment by including confederates who were not associated with the training.

The results from the generalization assessment in the institutional workshop were equivocal, in several respects. First, there was a great deal of within- and between-resident variability in appropriate responding during the baseline. In addition, some of the residents' appropriate social interactions were increasing. Second, there was no consistent or immediate improvement in appropriate responding after training had commenced because responding remained highly variable. Third, some residents showed a downward trend during the initial 12-game phase. All these factors indicated that the effects of the training program did not generalize. Although some improvement in appropriate social responding seemed evident during the follow-up, there was no experimental demonstration that this effect was functionally related to the residents' participation in the training program.

Although the workshop results were disappointing, they may provide some useful information regarding the nature of group social behavior that should be considered in subsequent social skills training research. The individual data support the hypothesis that the social behavior of individuals was highly dependent on the behavior of the other group members. This seems especially evident for Group One because an inspection of the training data in Figure 2 for Residents 1 and 3 shows a decreasing pattern of appropriate interactions for both until the last session. Further support for the interdependence of this group's social behavior is provided by the verbatim workshop transcripts that revealed that all three Group One members were making fun of each other in an escalating fashion, although they later became more socially appropriate in their interactions. This may also explain, in part, the lack of generalization in the workshop. Conducting the workshop generalization assessment in the institutional workshop provided stimulus events that previously controlled the performance of inappropriate social behavior, e.g., peers and other setting variables. Residents with a long history of inappropriate interactions probably can not be expected to begin interacting appropriately when they are placed together in a group assessment. It is more likely that appropriate interactions develop gradually because each member's social interactions, whether positive or negative, are determined by the behavior of the other members.

These points may help explain the difficulty in demonstrating generalization of social skills in natural environments (cf. Berler, Gross, & Drabman, 1982), but not in simulations or role played analogues. Consider that a major difference between our natural environment assessment and simulation was that residents were assessed collectively in the former and individually in the latter. Although we attempted to make the simulation as natural as possible, we may have left out a crucial factor—the presence of peers. Including peers may make it more difficult to design simulations and demonstrate generalization effects, but their inclusion should increase the predictive validity of the analogue data. In addition, researchers may need to consider conducting long-term generalization assessments in natural environments. Creativity will be needed to demonstrate that such gradual generalization effects, if obtained, are functionally related to the training program. On the other hand, this difficulty might be overcome by intensifying the training efforts, programming directly in the target environment or both (Koegel & Rincover, 1977).

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