

A VICARIOUS PSYCHODRAMATIC TECHNIQUE FOR MODIFYING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

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Recently the author introduced the technique of "Behavioristic Reviewing", an approach for dealing with aggressive behavior in children (1972). The approach combined the technique of behavioristic psychodrama in which the teacher involved a child in play acting a prescribed behavior which is considered inappropriate and the technique of self-monitoring behavior which emphasizes self control by having the child set up conditions in his environment to bring about specific behaviors in himself.

The technique of "Behavioristic Reviewing" is a very effective one, especially when dealing with aggressive, anti-social behavior. However, the technique could possibly cause a more serious problem to develop, especially if the youngster manifesting such symptoms does so because of a deep rooted neurotic personality disorder.

In lieu of the above, the author devised a vicarious psychodramatic approach which could be used to modify different behaviors and at the same time not be as threatening to a particular youngster or teacher.

The vicarious psychodramatic technique in no way singles out a particular youngster in the class, even though the teacher may emphasize a behavior that one or several students are manifesting and that she feels should be modified or changed.

METHOD

To illustrate the above technique, one approach is described. Let us say that Mrs. Smith, a third grade teacher, wishes to modify the aggressive behavior of a boy in her class whose name is Jim. Mrs. Smith makes up a story about a boy named George who is quite aggressive and who constantly picks on members of his class. The teacher elaborates on such behavior being manifested in various settings, as on the playground, in the cafeteria, in the gym, on line, pushing and shoving in the hallway, etc.

The teacher then has several children in the class (excluding Jim-George) act out the story in front of the classroom. The next step is for the teacher to encourage the class to analyze the aggressive behavior and the reasons as to why a child would manifest such behavior. When the discussion lags the teacher selects other students to dramatize in front of the class positive alterna-

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tives which the aggressive child could use to attain better acceptance by his peers. Among these, Jim-George might well be engaged. The class members then discuss the entire story and perhaps even write short themes about aggressive behavior.

The teacher can apply such a vicarious psychodramatic technique to other behaviors, such as stealing, tattling, clowning, withdrawn behavior, dependent behavior, etc.

The above approach can be implemented by the classroom teacher with little guidance from the school psychologist.

This overall approach is not threatening to either the child or the classroom teacher, and similar to behavioristic reviewing, this approach seems quite effective when utilized in the presence of the peer group.

Because of the shortage of professionally trained psychologists, counselors and school social workers, the classroom teacher is called upon more and more to manage and remediate behavior problems within the classroom situation. The vicarious psychodramatic technique is an example of another approach the teacher can include in her armamentarium in coping with behavioral problem children.

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