

The Analysis and Training of Rationales for Child Care Workers

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Research has suggested that the use of reasons by parents and child care workers plays an important role in educating and otherwise influencing children and adolescents. However, there has been no systematic effort to train parents or child care workers to use reasoning in their interactions with their children and adolescents. The present research evaluated the effectiveness of a set of procedures in training prospective child care personnel to deliver rationales, a type of reason. The training procedures consisted of a self-instructional package, a workshop lecture, and an individual practice (to criterion) and feedback component. These procedures were administered to three groups of trainees preparing to operate group home treatment programs for delinquent adolescents. Their performances across pre- and posttest simulations of youth problem behavior situations were recorded and analyzed following a multiple-baseline design. The findings suggested that the training was effective in increasing the trainees' level of rationale-delivery during test situations. Validity ratings obtained on a sample of pre- and posttraining tapes by a group of court-adjudicated girls from a community-based, group-home program indicated that interactions containing rationales were more highly rated along treatment-relevant dimensions.

Reprints of this article and copies of any of the materials used in this study may be obtained by writing to Patrizia D. Braukmann at the Achievement Place Research Project, 111 Hawthorth Hall, University of Kansas 666045.

There is a need for better methods of disseminating to parents and child care workers those parenting practices that research has indicated are effective with and preferred by children and adolescents (Fawcett, Seekins, & C. Braukmann, 1981; Kazdin, 1979). Some research would suggest that effective dissemination of parenting practices might be best accomplished through direct, explicit training of parents and child care workers using such training procedures as modeling and individual practice with feedback on performance (Ejberg & Matarazzo, 1980). This direct training approach has been used in training parents to undertake or assist in the remediation of many child problems (Graziano, 1977) and in training child care workers to engage in effective and preferred treatment interactions (Dancer, C. Braukmann, Schumaker, Kirigin, Willner, & Wolf, 1978; Willner, C. Braukmann, Kirigin, Fixsen, Phillips, & Wolf, 1977).

One seemingly critical practice in working with children and adolescents that has been relatively neglected is the direct training of parents and child care workers is the use of reasons. Reasons are explanations to a child or adolescent concerning why he or she should behave in prescribed ways and/or why the adult is teaching, restricting, punishing, or otherwise acting in ways that affect the behavior of the child or adolescent. Reasoning has received insufficient attention in the child behavior influence literature (O'Leary & O'Leary, 1976) despite the fact that it has been associated with a number of desirable outcomes. For example, it has been found that parental disciplinary approaches that include reasoning are associated with (1) positive moral attitudes in children (Aronfreed, 1961; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967), (2) resistance to temptations to deviate in adolescents (LaVoie, 1974), and (3) nonaggressive, conforming behavior among adolescents (Bandura & Walters, 1959). Moreover, it has been suggested that older adolescents in particular favor parents who provide them with reasons when making requests, stating rules, monitoring, restraining, or otherwise affecting their behavior (Elder, 1963; Lesser & Kendel, 1969; Pikas, 1961).

A number of studies also implicate reasoning as an important tool for youth care workers. Although these studies did not have reasoning as their primary focus, they treated tangentially a subclass of reasons that were called rationales. Rationales were defined as statements pointing out the specific, naturally occurring benefits and costs that might accrue to a youth and/or to others because of specific behaviors on the part of the youth. In a series of related studies, rationales were found to be: (1) one of the staff interaction behaviors most preferred by court-adjudicated youths in group-

home settings (Willner et al., 1977); (2) highly rated by experienced child care workers as valuable in teaching new skills to adolescents and in providing effective treatment (Dancer et al., 1978); and (3) one of the components of a composite measure of teaching-parent behavior which composite measure was found to be significantly related over group home programs to youth self-reported delinquency—a negative relationship—and to youth self-reported satisfaction—a positive relationship (Bedington, C. Braukmann, Kirigin, & Wolf, Note 1). The composite measure in the Bedington et al. study was labeled "social teaching," and was constructed by combining direct-observational measures of teaching-parents' use of rationales, praise, behaviorally-specific descriptions, behavior rehearsals, and token-economy consequences. The more that a set of teaching-parents used social teaching in their group-home program, the less was the self-reported delinquency (and the greater was the self-reported satisfaction) of the youths in that group home.

It seemed on the basis of the above studies that the use of reasons might play an important role in the exercise of effective, youth-preferred group care. The aim of this research was to develop and evaluate a set of training materials that would be effective in the direct training of prospective child care staff in the use of rationales.

Method

Subjects and Setting. Seven married child care couples, called teaching-parents, participated in the study. They had been hired by boards of directors in various Kansas communities to implement Teaching-Family style group-home programs (Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1974) for court-adjudicated youths within those communities. The training and research activities reported herein took place on the University of Kansas campus.

Experimental Design. A variation of the multiple-baseline design across subjects (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968) was used to evaluate the effects of the training procedures on the occurrence of rationale statements during simulations of typical group-home problem situations. The subjects were divided into three experimental groups that differed from each other in terms of the number of pre-training measurement sessions in which each group participated. Group 1 participated in one pretraining session, Group 2 in two sessions, and Group 3 in three sessions. Each session in-

cluded five simulations of problem situations. Group 1 was composed of seven trainees, Group 2 of three trainees and Group 3 of four trainees.

Response Definition and Reliability. A summary of the detailed operational definition of a "rational" employed in the study is as follows:

A rationale is an explanatory statement either emitted or prompted by the teaching-parent that describes natural and explicit consequences (positive or negative) that may result from a youth's behavior. A rationale aims at teaching the youth why he or she should either stop engaging in a problem behavior or learn to engage in an appropriate alternative behavior.

In the complete definition used by the observers, each of the above statements was further explained and illustrated with examples. Examples of statements which did not fulfill any or some of the above points, and which did not qualify as rationales, were also included in order to teach the observers to discriminate among the varying types of reason-like statements teaching-parents could emit. Thus, a statement such as "being disrespectful to the principal may cause you additional suspensions" was considered to be a rationale, while "students should be polite to the principal" was not, since it did not teach a youth the possible outcomes of his/her behavior. Also excluded from the rationale category were: 1) statements that specified consequences that were under the control of the teaching-parent, e.g., "If you do your homework, I will give you credit toward earning snacks"; 2) statements that did not give specific consequences, e.g., "If you do that again, you are likely to get into trouble"; or 3) statements that provided consequences that were not directly for the youth, e.g., "If you fight at school, you may hurt the home's reputation." An observer listened to a tape of each simulation by each trainee and scored it according to whether it contained a rationale. A second independent observer served as a reliability checker for a randomly selected sample of 20% of the tapes in each condition. Included in the total sample of reliability tapes was at least one randomly selected situation for each trainee.

Observation Sessions. Pretraining observation sessions took place before the introduction of the rationale training procedures. Posttraining sessions occurred both on the day of training and three days later. Each session was comprised of five, four-minute individual interactions between a trainee and an experimenter. Ses-

sions were audio-recorded. Trainees were not aware of which interactional component was being assessed and they were asked not to discuss the sessions with the other trainees. At the beginning of each session the experimenters read the following instructions:

You will be asked to participate in five typical group-home situations involving interactions between a teaching-parent and a youth. You should assume the role of the teaching-parent. The role of the youth will be played by me (the experimenter). In each situation you will be presented with a card that provides some background information. Deal with each situation as best you see fit.

You will have as much as four minutes to deal with each situation. If the interaction requires less time, simply signal when you are through.

Trainees then received a card that described the problem situation to which they were asked to respond. The problems presented during pretraining included (a) a youth's arguing each time the teaching-parent gave instructions, (b) a youth's failure to undertake responsibilities assigned in the group home, (c) a youth's suspension from school for responding inappropriately to the principal, (d) a youth's fighting with a classmate, and (e) a youth's tendency to react angrily when the teaching-parent provided feedback about the quality of performance in the group home. The pretest problem situations were formulated after consulting both with several trained and certified teaching-parents and with several court-adjudicated adolescents in group homes. The adolescents and teaching-parents considered the situations to be actual problems which occurred at least occasionally. They also furnished examples of useful rationales that they had delivered or (in the case of the adolescents) heard in regard to those problems. Thus all situations seemed to be examples of socially relevant problems similar to ones to which trainees might be called upon to respond in their future work.

Each of the five testing situations was identified with a number from one to five. The order in which the situation cards were presented was randomly varied across subjects and within conditions. During each testing situation, five experimenters were randomly paired with trainees, such that each experimenter worked with one trainee at a time. The experimenters were taught to play the role of the youth following a standardized format. This involved avoiding eye contact with the trainees, making excuses for their problem behavior, and being noncompliant when the teaching-parent suggested a solution to the problem for the first time. The experimenters were instructed to comply with the teaching-parent when the same, or a different solution was brought up a

second time. Although the consistency of the above experimenter behaviors was not formally assessed, the cassette-recordings of the interactions suggest at least a great deal of uniformity in their verbal behavior or as youths.

Training of Rationales. The training of the use of rationales involved the reading of a self-instructional manual on rationales (P. Braukmann, Kirigin Ramp, C. Braukmann, Wolf, & Blase, 1979), participation in a half-hour lecture/discussion session, and participation in a one-hour behavior rehearsal session.

The Self-instructional Manual. The manual focused on the importance of using rationales during teaching, counseling, and other daily interactions with children in group homes. It included the definition of a rationale, samples of rationales to be used in various problem situations, and opportunities to practice rationale-giving during problem situations by completing a series of written exercises. The answers to the exercises were included at the end of the manual to provide trainees with immediate feedback. Trainees received the manual the day prior to the lecture on rationales.

The Lecture/discussion Session. The lecture was delivered by the first author following a prespecified standard format. Issues discussed after the lecture included: the importance of rationales to the treatment program, examples of rationales, occasions for the use of rationales, their use with other treatment components, etc. Throughout the session, trainees also discussed relevant personal experiences and asked questions of the trainer. Questions directed to the trainer which related to the definition of a rationale were answered by reiterating points made during the standardized lecture, or stated in the self-instructional manual. Toward the end of this period, trainees were asked to read out loud their answers to the written exercises in the manual. The trainer delivered positive and corrective feedback on their answers. The style of this feedback had been previously specified along with the lecture format.

The Behavior Rehearsal Session. Following the lecture, each trainee couple practiced the use of rationales with a trainer. In these rehearsal groups, each individual was asked to provide the trainer (who played the role of the adolescent in a group home), with a rationale for specific problem behaviors identified in the practice situations. To minimize the possibility of trainer-specific training effects, the same trainers were not assigned during the experimental conditions. Examples of the eight interactions practiced during the

behavior rehearsal session included: dealing with a youth's poor classroom report; counseling a youth who resisted arrest when stopped by a policeman; and teaching a youth to bring up complaints in an appropriate, nonemotional manner. Care was taken to insure that the problem situations used during this session were different from the testing situations. In order to help the trainees reach a level of quality in rationale statements, trainers provided positive and corrective feedback after each practice simulation. The practice and feedback process continued until all trainees were able to provide rationales to criterion. (That is, until they could satisfactorily deliver a rationale for two consecutive situations.) This usually took 15 to 30 minutes.

Validation Measures. Rating measures were obtained to determine whether a group of consumers (i.e., girls residing in a community-based group-home) would perceive a difference between interactions in which trainees delivered a rationale and those in which they did not. Five court-adjudicated girls (aged 12-16) from a group-home program were asked to listen to twenty randomly selected pretraining and posttraining tapes of interactions between a trainee and an experimenter playing the role of a youth. The girls were instructed to imagine they were the youth in the situation and were asked to rate, on a five-point scale, each interaction along three treatment-related dimensions. Those dimensions were: (1) "How well you like the way this teaching-parent dealt with you in this situation"; (2) "After this talk with the teaching-parent rate how likely you would be to stop engaging in that behavior in the future"; and (3) "How well this teaching-parent explained why you should not engage in that behavior problem again, or why you should have behaved in a different way." At the end of the rating sessions, the youths were asked to rate (on a five-point scale) the importance of explanations by teaching-parents when they are attempting to teach a new skill or deal with youth problems.

Results

Reliability. Reliability measures were obtained on the primary observers' scoring from audio-tapes of the trainees' behavior of rationale-giving. Three types of reliability calculations—point-by-point, occurrence, and nonoccurrence—were computed for 20% of the taped situations. Point-by-point reliability was determined by computing the total number of agreements, divided by the sum of the number of agreements and disagreements, multiplied by 100.

Occurrence reliability was determined by dividing the number of agreements of occurrence by the sum of agreements of occurrence and disagreement of occurrence, multiplied by 100. Nonoccurrence reliability was determined by dividing the number of agreements of not occurrence by the sum of agreements of nonoccurrence and disagreements of nonoccurrence, multiplied by 100. Point-by-point reliability was 93%. Occurrence reliability was 90%. Nonoccurrence reliability was 90%.

Rationale Delivery. Figure 1 shows the percent of simulations of problem situations containing rationales before and after training for individuals in each of the three groups. Each data point represents the average performance of group members on sequential exposure to the test simulations. For instance, in interaction 3 of Group 1 only one trainee out of seven delivered a rationale, thus resulting in a level of 14% of interactions containing a rationale for that exposure. The sequence of the five simulation topics within each measurement session was randomly determined for each subject. Thus, for one trainee, the first interaction exposure may have represented test situation number four, while for another trainee it may have represented situation two, and so on.

The mean level of interactions containing a rationale during the pretest conditions was 14% for Group 1, 3% for Group 2, and 18% for Group 3. The percent of interactions containing a rationale increased appreciably during the posttraining simulations resulting in a mean level of 78% for Group 1, 77% for Group 2, and 75% for Group 3. Figure 2 illustrates the level of change in delivering rationales from pre- to postconditions for each trainee. The open bars represent each individual's average level of performance across baseline interactions. The closed bars represent the average performance during the posttraining interactions. As the figure shows, each trainee increased the use of rationales following training. Changes in the level of rationales delivered ranged from a pre-post difference of 20% for trainee 4 to 100% in trainees 7 and 10. Figure 3 shows the average level of performance in delivering rationales per problem situation. The open bars represent the mean average performance of all trainees during baseline conditions, while the closed bars represent the mean average performance of trainees during posttraining conditions. The data suggest that the test problem situations were comparable with respect to likelihood of eliciting a rationale from the trainees.

The Validity Questionnaire. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the outcome of the questionnaire administered to the five girls from a

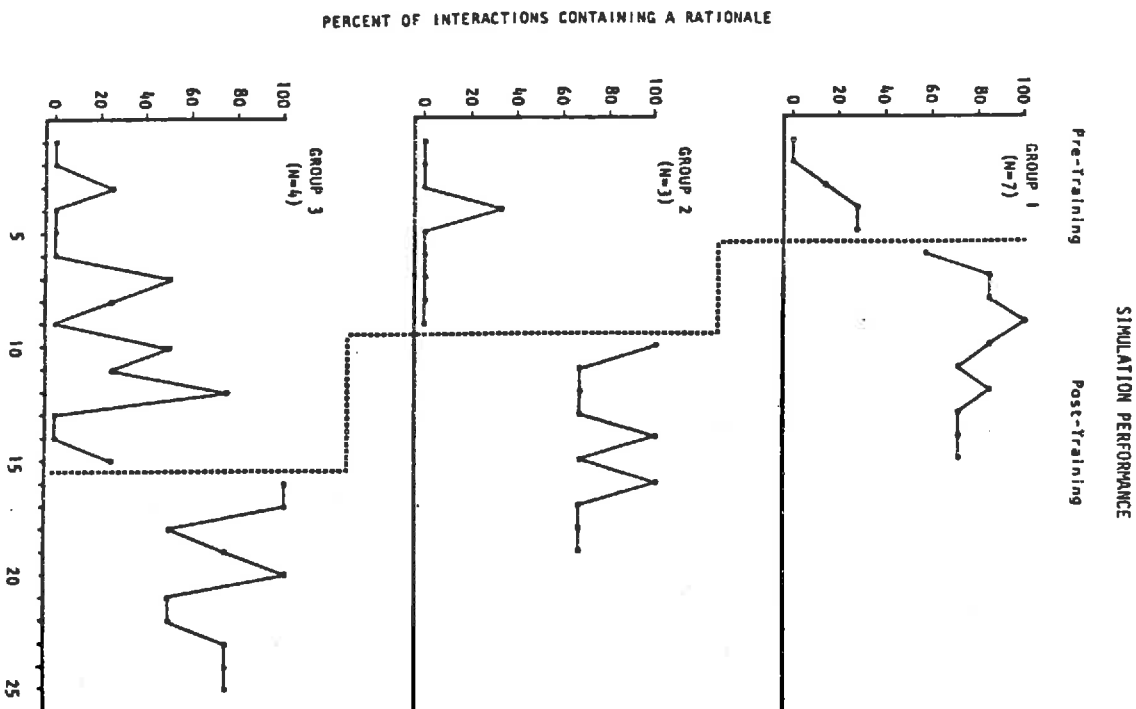


FIGURE 1
The percent of simulated problem interactions containing a rationale during the pretest and posttest conditions for Groups 1, 2, and 3.

EFFECT OF TRAINING ON INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

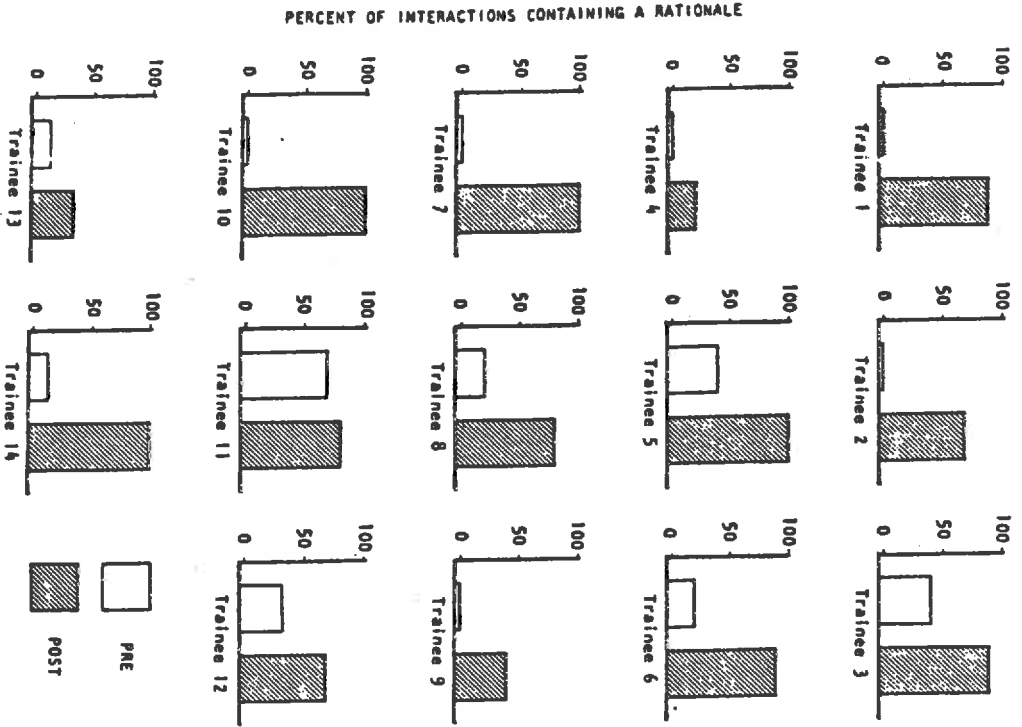


FIGURE 2

The mean number of rationales delivered by each trainee during the simulated problem situations before and after training.

EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON EACH PROBLEM SITUATION (N=14)

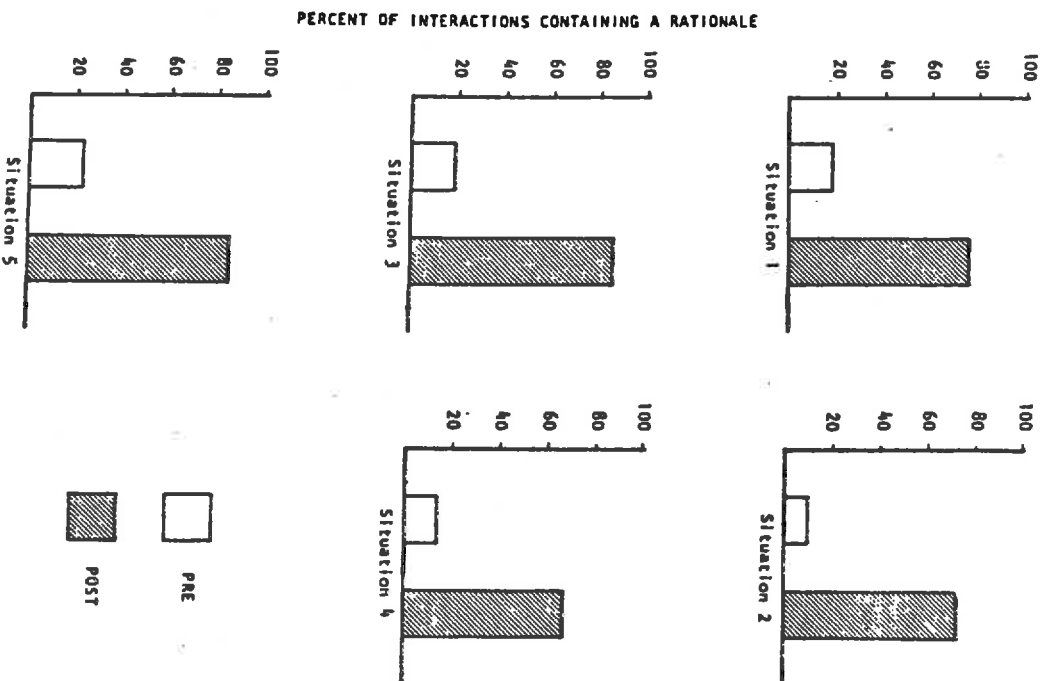


FIGURE 3

The mean number of rationales delivered by all trainees for each simulated problem situation before and after training.

AVERAGE VALIDITY RATINGS BY YOUTHS: GROUP DATA (N=5)

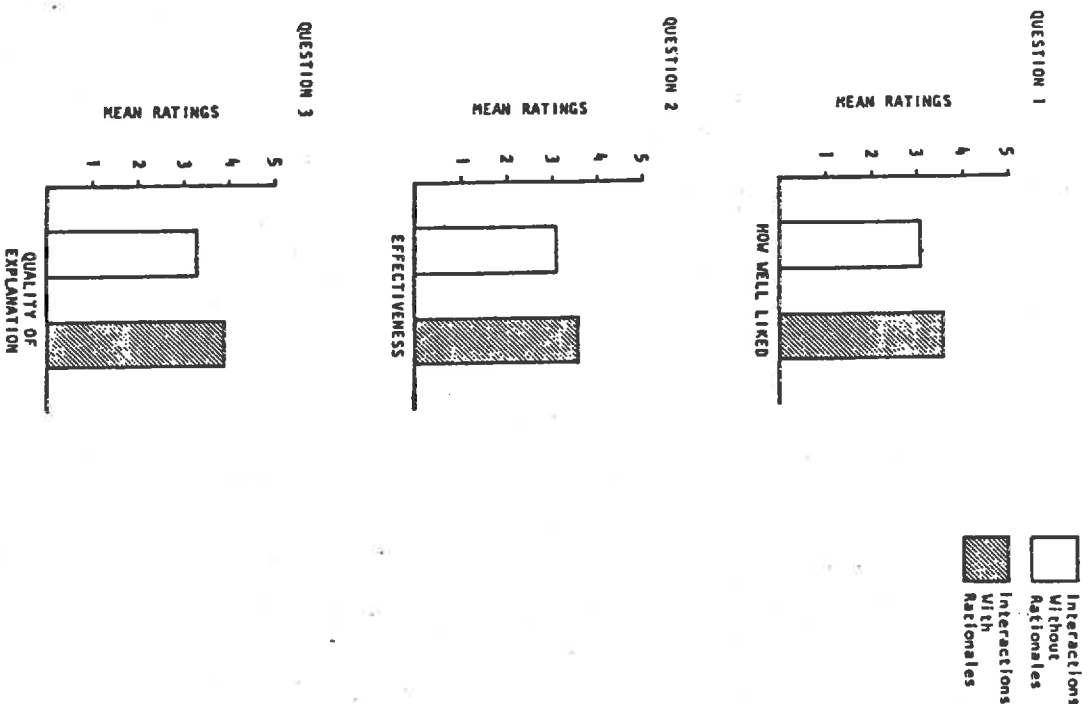


FIGURE 4

The mean rating scores given by the five youths on each of the three validity questionnaire items for taped interactions containing rationales and for those not containing rationales.

AVERAGE VALIDITY RATINGS BY YOUTHS: INDIVIDUAL DATA

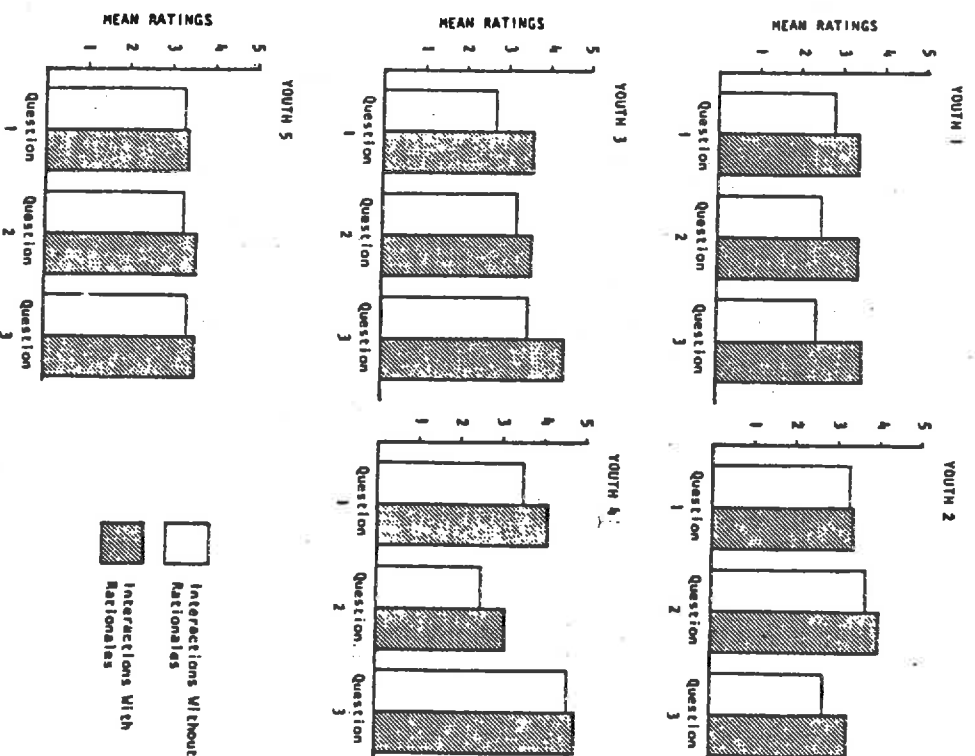


FIGURE 5

The mean rating score given by each youth on each of three validity questionnaire items for taped interactions containing rationales and for those not containing rationales.

group home. As it can be seen in Figure 4, the interactions which contained ratios were rated, on the average, one half scale-point higher across each of the three questions. Figure 5 shows each girl's average ratings for the interactions containing rationales and those containing no rationales. Scores obtained for the interactions with rationales were uniformly higher, with differences in scores ranging from .1 for Question 1 by Youth 2 to 1.1 for Question 3 by Youth 1. These average differences in scores were statistically significant for each of the three questions (Mann-Whitney U-test). The rating differences were significant at the .05 level for the first two questions (how well the youth liked the teaching-parent's handling of the situation, and how likely the youth would be to avoid that behavior in the future) and at the .01 level for the third question (how well the teaching-parent explained why the problem behavior should be stopped or why the youth should engage in an alternative behavior instead). In addition, on the final question concerning the importance of explanations by teaching-parents when teaching new skills or dealing with youth-related problems, the girls provided a mean rating of 4.8 (where 5.0 corresponded to "I think it is extremely important" and 4.0 corresponded to "I think it is very important").

Discussion

The training procedures employed in this research produced substantial changes in the level of rationale statements emitted by prospective child care workers. After training, more of the trainees' interactions dealing with group-home problems contained a relevant rationale. The importance of using rationales was validated by a small group of girls from a group-home program. These court-adjudicated girls were asked to rate taped interactions, some of which contained rationale statements. Overall the outcomes of these consumer ratings suggested that the girls discriminated between interactions varying in the quality of the explanations provided by the teaching-parent. The ratings also suggested that the girls preferred teaching-parents who delivered rationales, and were more likely to accept advice derived from teaching interactions which contained rationales.

Although the differences in average youth validation ratings between interactions with and without rationales were consistent across all girls and all rating questions, these differences were not large. One possible explanation for these small, yet significant rating differences is that the quality of the rationales was variable and the specific rationales used would not always have been appropriate

ate for the youth doing the rating. To be the most valuable, a rationale should specify consequences that are important to the particular youth involved and should be perceived by the youth as having some probability of actually occurring (important here is the credibility already established by the rationale-giver). A second possible explanation for the small rating differences can be found in results obtained by Willner and his colleagues (1977). That is, when interacting with teaching-parents, adolescents are likely to respond to several qualities of teaching-parents which they "like" (e.g., the delivery of explanations, statements of concern, positive feedback), and which they "dislike" (e.g., negative instructional behavior, lack of "understanding"). It is possible that in rating the taped interactions in the present study the girls may have responded to several important "liked" and "disliked" behaviors exhibited by the trainees in addition to the presence or absence of an adequate explanation. For example, at the end of the rating session, during a discussion of one of the taped interactions, a girl said that she liked the way the teaching-parent explained why one should not get into fights at school, but that she had marked him lower on the scale because his tone of voice sounded "too strict." An important area for future research would be to determine whether substantial increases in consumer ratings in the area of rationales may only be achieved after training individuals in a number of good parenting behaviors, in addition to the use of reasons. Examples of desirable child care behaviors are provided extensively in the literature (e.g., Baumrind, 1968; Becker, 1964; Pikas, 1961; Willner et al., 1977; Bedlington et al., Note 1).

It seems to us that rationales are only likely to be effective in conjunction with other desirable child care behaviors. We are therefore not suggesting that workers rely exclusively on rationales. Telling a youth why to do better is no substitute for telling a youth how to do better. However, there would seem to be great value in telling the why along with the how. Under the right conditions, providing reasons can demonstrate the fairness of a worker's action; make clear the worker's concern for the youth; motivate a youth to work towards consequences he or she might otherwise not have anticipated; and perhaps help the youth internalize controls on his or her behavior (Rice, 1978, pp. 525-526). Furthermore, giving reasons—because it is a behavior that appears to be valued (preferred) by youths—could make more palatable to youths efforts by workers, to teach them how to do better.

It is important to note the limitations of youth preference assessments in the selection of youth care worker techniques. Preference per se is not a sufficient criterion for the selection of a

technique. The technique also must help to bring about a beneficial, treatment-relevant effect more often than not. Youths undoubtedly would prefer many worker behaviors that at best would not be therapeutic. However, as suggested above, youth preference for a technique can enhance its effectiveness. Youths are more likely to respond positively to preferred than nonpreferred techniques and less likely to avoid such techniques or the person using them. Furthermore, effectiveness being equal, youth preferred techniques are more desirable on humanitarian grounds.

While data suggest a consumer preference for the inclusion of reason-giving as a treatment technique (Willner et al., 1977) and provide anecdotal support for their effectiveness (Dancer et al., 1978), specific illustrations of the independent effects of rationales on the behavior of problem youths are presently not available. Nevertheless, there is some correlational evidence (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Bedlington et al., Note 1) linking the use of reasoning by parents and child care staff to a reduced likelihood of delinquent behavior. More definitive statements concerning the impact of rationales in child care in general and in the treatment of delinquent children in particular will require future experimental investigation. Additional research also will be required concerning the generalization of trainee's use of rationale-giving from training settings to care settings.

The skills involved in rational parenting and youth care are complex. It would seem that to be most effective, reasoning: 1) should be individually suited to the child or adolescent and to each unique situation; 2) should be used by a parent (or child care worker) who has a teaching approach and who is consistent, fair, often right about the likely consequences of behavior, and encouraging of the adolescent's involvement in making decisions that affect the adolescent; and 3) should occur in the context of a mutually-rewarding relationship between the parent (or child care worker) and the child or adolescent (C. Braukmann, Kirigin, & Wolf, 1980). Under such conditions, reasoning would seem to have potential for helping teach children and adolescents to accept responsibility for their own actions, for helping them to understand the impact of their behavior, and for increasing their capacity for responsible, autonomous decision-making. The present study has provided preliminary research in this area by demonstrating that one type of youth preferred reasoning behavior can be defined, measured, and taught to prospective child care workers.

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