



Teachers' Corner

Using Reinforcement Hierarchies to Reduce Prompt-Dependency

E. Amanda Boutot
Texas State University

Not long ago I was teaching receptive body parts to two-year-old “Jamie,” who has autism. One day when I directed her to “touch your nose,” she held her right arm aloft, as if waiting for me to do the action for her. In fact, that is exactly what she wanted! Though I thought I’d faded the physical prompt fast enough, she had become prompt dependent. Often necessary when working with students with developmental disabilities, the goal of prompting is to aid the child in learning a new skill. If not faded quickly enough, however, prompt-dependency can occur, as it did with Jamie. Common forms of prompt fading include “most-to-least” prompting, “least-to-most” prompting, and use of time delay (Migliorini, Kirby, & Peterson, 2006; Scheuermann & Webber, 2002). Prompt-fading techniques alone, however, may not prevent prompt dependency. For this reason, after a child has begun to acquire a skill I often employ a Reinforcement Hierarchy in combination with prompt-fading procedures to prevent prompt dependency.



Using a Reinforcement Hierarchy involves systematically increasing the “level” of the reinforcer contingent on the child’s progression to more independent performance of a skill. Jamie’s most preferred reinforcement was a red block; this was identified as one of her Level 1 reinforcers. Level 1 reinforcers are the items that the child prefers most often and to most others. Level 2 reinforcers are those items or activities that usually are motivating for the child (e.g., usually he will work for them) but that are inconsistent in their effectiveness. A third level may be added if there are things that the child likes if given for “free,” but for which s/he will not work. To increase independence in the receptive body parts task, I withheld the block until Jamie

performed the skill without the use of physical prompts. Jamie quickly ascertained that to earn her favorite object, she had to work harder; i.e., touch her nose herself. Prompt-dependency was no longer an issue for her. The number of levels depends on the child and his/her likes. Two levels at minimum are necessary.

Steps to Creating a Reinforcement Hierarchy

1. Identify what the child likes and is willing to work for, i.e., reinforcers
2. Prioritize according to effectiveness
3. Create a list of reinforcers according to level; I recommend placing tangible items in bins according to level

(continued on p. 8)

Inside this issue . . .

President’s Message	2
Call for Papers, 11th International DDD Conference	3
CEC Boston: Be There!	4
2008 DDD Meetings and Social Events at CEC Boston	4
<i>Research-Based Practices in Developmental Disabilities—Second Edition</i>	5
Students’ Corner	5
News from the Diversity Committee	6
Attention Students and Practitioners!	6
Membership and Unit Development Committee News	7
Executive Director’s Corner	7

Call for Papers
11th International DDD
Conference
Oct. 8–10, 2008
San Diego, CA
(see page 3)

President's Message

Polly Parrish

I recently attended a meeting for teachers, administrators, and teacher educators. At one of our meals, several teacher educators began to lament how current teacher candidates lacked a genuine passion for teaching. As the only classroom teacher at the table, I listened to the conversation with great interest.

I have thought of that conversation often since returning home. It has generated many questions in my mind, two of which are: What is the passion for teaching, and just how does one develop it?

I have the passion for teaching; of that I am certain. But how would I describe it to teacher candidates so they could identify it in themselves? I am not sure I could. Is it different for each teacher? Maybe. For me, it is a drive, a yearning that does not diminish regardless how difficult the day or tedious the paper work. It is a constant inner need and desire to improve my skills, my approach, and my delivery to better meet the needs of the students I teach. It is a thirst to continually learn and be a student myself.

What ignited the spark, the passion for teaching within me? I reflected on my own days as a teacher candidate. Important as the theories, the laws, and the processes were, all have changed several times since I began teaching 15 years ago. However, one professor resurfaced in my mind as being instrumental in igniting that spark within me. She was a professor I sometimes found opinionated and rigid when vocalizing her beliefs. I now see she was not only a teacher; she was an impassioned advocate for students with disabilities and their families, and accepted nothing less than high expectations for both.

She began teaching prior to PL 94-142, when the belief and practice were that students with disabilities could not benefit from education. She fought for educational rights for students with disabilities. She not only taught during the inception of

special education, she also taught in an inner city school in the south where minority students were also denied educational rights. Often she related current issues to her beginning days, which at the time I thought was like comparing apples to oranges. I now understand that although the issues were different, the passion behind the issues was not. She encouraged her students to attend CEC's conferences and assisted us in raising the money so we could. In fact, she dragged several of us to our first DDD business meeting, explaining the importance of hearing varied opinions within the field. Dominant in my memory of those days was her genuine passion, void of condescension or patronization, her spirit of advocacy, and her determination. All were unmistakably evident.

We did not always agree on issues pertaining to students with disabilities. I still fondly remember many heated debates. Looking back, I see the wisdom of what she was doing. I believe many of those discussions were contrived to challenge me to develop a strong thirst for the answers, a desire for justice, and a hunger for knowledge. She demonstrated and modeled that only through vocalizing my questions and opinions would I seek to dig deeper for answers and solutions. The object of her lessons ignited the spark, the passion for teaching in me.

What is the passion for teaching? I do believe it is different for each teacher. For me the spark was ignited by a professor who was not only a teacher but was also an advocate, a seeker of knowledge, and a challenger. I previously thought teachers had a more challenging job than teacher educators. I shamefully admit I smugly clung to this belief. I no longer believe this. It must be more demanding to be a teacher educator and have the difficult and crucial job of challenging future teachers and igniting the passion for teaching within them.



Amanda Boutot, Treasurer, and Linda Laz, Far West Member, at the DDD Midyear Board meeting.



DDD Board at work



Call for Papers

The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Developmental Disabilities (CEC-DDD)

is hosting its 11th International Conference on
Cognitive Disabilities/Mental Retardation, Autism, &
Other Developmental Disabilities:

October 8 - 10, 2008
Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina
San Diego, California



The 11th International Conference is practitioner-focused; CEC-DDD welcomes the submission of innovative, evidenced-based proposals within the following strands:

- ◆ Assistive Technology
- ◆ Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ◆ Moderate to Severe/Profound Cognitive Disabilities
- ◆ Multiple Disabilities
- ◆ Transition
- ◆ Mild Mental Retardation
- ◆ Paraprofessionals

Proposals should include the following information:

- ◆ Presenter name(s), affiliation, contact information (including e-mail)
- ◆ Session title, abstract (50 word maximum), and summary (300 word maximum), including information as to how the proposal addresses diversity
- ◆ Session format - poster session, lecture or panel presentation

Proposals may be submitted electronically to Cindy Perras,
Conference Co-ordinator at cindy.perras@cogeco.ca
Deadline: April 15, 2008

CEC Boston: Be There!

The Conference Will Be Engaging and Informative for DDD Members

Dave Smith
Conference Chair

After a record-breaking number of session proposals were submitted to DDD, almost 70 of these proposals were selected by DDD reviewers for the Boston CEC conference. The DDD program will consist of a very good blend of poster sessions, presentations, and demonstrations focused on autism, intellectual disabilities, and other developmental disabilities. DDD members can expect to have an exciting range of choices: from interesting and recent research findings to new evidence-based strategies for practitioners including language development strategies, augmented communication, enhancing social skills, and the use of new instructional technologies. The DDD Showcase Ses-

sion is titled "Addressing Critical Issues for Teachers of Students with Developmental Disabilities." Critical issues that have been identified by teachers in the fields of autism and developmental disabilities will be discussed. These will include addressing grade level content standards, assisting with student self-determination, and using classroom assessment data to plan and deliver instruction. The panel will be moderated by Robert Stodden and will include David Mank, Polly Parrish, Darlene Perner, and Michael Wehmeyer. Don't miss it! See you in Boston



2008 DDD Meetings and Social Events

See You in Boston!

Division on Developmental Disabilities (DDD)

All meetings will take place in the DDD Presidential Suite, except for the General Business Meeting.

- Executive Committee Meeting
Tuesday, April 1, 7:00–9:30 pm
- Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, April 2, 8:30 am–5:00 pm
- Divisions' Diversity Chairs Shared Agenda Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 7:30–8:30 am
- Critical Issues Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 8:30–9:30 am
- Subdivisions Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 12:00–1:00 pm
- Awards Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 1:00–1:30 pm
- Past Presidents' Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 1:30–2:30 pm

- Professional Development and Professional Standards
Thursday, April 3, 2:30–3:30 pm
- General Business Meeting
Thursday, April 3, 5:00–7:00 pm
Location to be announced
- President's Reception
Thursday, April 3, 7:30–10:00 pm
- Diversity Meeting
Friday, April 4, 8:00–9:00 am
- Membership Meeting
Friday, April 4, 9:00–10:00 am
- Conference Meeting
Friday, April 4, 10:00–11:30 am
- Publications Meeting
Friday, April 4, 11:30 am–12:30 pm
- Communications Meeting
Friday, April 4, 12:30–1:30 pm
- Board of Directors Meeting
Saturday, April 5, 8:30–10:00 am



*DDD Committee meeting
at the DDD midyear Board
meeting*

Visit the official Web site of the Division
on Developmental Disabilities at
<http://www.dddcec.org/>

Research-Based Practices in Developmental Disabilities— Second Edition



When CEC's Division on Developmental Disabilities published its landmark first edition of *Best and Promising Practices in Developmental Disabilities* in 1998, it quickly became a staple in the libraries of professionals working in the fields of cognitive disabilities/mental retardation, autism spectrum disorders, and associated developmental disabilities. Covering existing best practices in such arenas as assessment, curriculum development, and instructional strategies, that work quickly established itself as the premier publication of its kind.

Now this landmark publication is available in a greatly expanded second edition. Featuring contributions from some of the most notable names in developmental disabilities, the new *Research-Based Practices in Developmental Disabilities—Second Edition* provides current professional thought on such fundamental issues as the meaning of developmental disabilities, learning characteristics, assessment and instructional planning, and inclusive programs.

When CEC's Division on Developmental Disabilities published its landmark first edition of *Best and Promising Practices in Developmental Disabilities* in 1998, it quickly became a staple in the libraries of professionals working in the fields of cognitive disabilities/mental retardation, autism spectrum disorders, and associated developmental disabilities. Covering existing best practices in such arenas as assessment, curriculum development, and instructional strategies, that work quickly established itself as the premier publication of its kind.

Present-day practitioners providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities are now required to implement best practices that are supported by research. This work answers the need of these practitioners for accessible and immediately practical information that reflects best practices as based in research.

The book is also designed to meet the needs of university personnel in special education teacher preparation programs. Each of the 29 chapters includes:

- Summary of chapter contents
- Learning outcomes
- Glossary of professional terminology
- Specific CEC Standards addressed in that chapter
- Web site resources

An accompanying Instructor's Manual offers for each chapter a variety of useful supplements, including:

- Outline
- Extension activities
- Exam questions and answers

Students' Corner

Angi Stone-MacDonald,
Student Governor, Indiana University



It's Almost CEC Conference Time!

As you dive into your spring semester, don't forget that the CEC conference is just around the corner. CEC is in Boston this year from April 2–5, 2008. Boston is beautiful in the spring, and it is a great opportunity to learn new teaching techniques and about the latest research. Plus, you can meet lots of people who share your interest and love of children and their many unique qualities.

At CEC, there will be several special events for students, members, and those interested in becoming members of DDD. Some of these events include:

- Student Orientation: Wednesday, 3:30–4:30 pm
- Addressing Critical Issues for Teachers of Students with Developmental Disabilities and Autism: Thursday, 9:45–10:45 am
- Student Forum: Thursday, 1–4 pm

- DDD Reception: Thursday Evening
- Student Scholarship Fundraiser: Thursday 8–11:30 pm

There are also preconference workshops on April 2 where you have the opportunity to learn about a specific topic in a half- or full- day session. Be sure to check out the CEC Web site (<http://www.cec.sped.org/>) for all the details. Remember, there are registration discounts for students and for student groups of five or more, so get together with your friends to register for less.

Finally, I want to remind you about the DDD conference coming up in October 2008. While that seems like a long time from now, going to San Diego would be great as winter approaches. In this edition of the *DDD Express*, you will find information about the conference, and I encourage students to submit paper or poster proposals about the wonderful work you are doing.

Conferences are a great way to learn new things and meet great people. I always look forward to conferences to see old friends and reinvigorate my semester with new ideas and the excitement of people talking about their work.

**Watch for the CEC and DDD Student/Professional
Transition Initiative Coming this Spring!**

News from the Diversity Committee

Rosa Lockwood,
Diversity Committee Chairperson



Current Shared Agenda Initiative Activities

Participating divisions are returning commitment forms signed by their presidents and diversity chairs. Division presidents were asked to facilitate discussions with their boards and return written responses to the following items:

1. The relevance of the Shared Agenda initiative to our division, the membership and CEC is/are ...
2. Our division's vision for cross-division collaboration is ...

The returned data will be analyzed and compiled by DDD's Diversity Co-chair, Dr. Charles Dukes. The results will become the basis for an article that will be submitted in draft form, at Boston, for cross-division participants to review. The final article will be provided for participating divisions to disseminate to their membership. There will be a Shared Agenda meeting scheduled in Boston (Friday, 7:30–8:30 a.m.). For more information, contact Rosa (rosa.lockwood@earthlink.net).

Attention Students and Practitioners! DDD Awards

CEC-DDD encourages students and practitioners to consider submitting proposals for the 2009 CEC Convention in Seattle. Session presentations by students and practitioners have been well attended at past conventions, and attendees have appreciated hearing about innovative practices from peers.

Student and practitioner presentation proposals that are relative to the field of mental retardation and developmental disabilities and accepted for the 2008 and 2009 CEC Annual Conventions in Boston and Seattle, respectively, will be reviewed by the DDD Conference Program Chair and then submitted (with the permission of the author[s]) to the DDD Awards Committee for consideration of two distinct DDD Awards: the Herbert J. Prehm Student Presentation Award and the Practitioner Presentation Award. Up to three presentation

proposals from each category (i.e., Student Presentations and Practitioner Presentations) will be reviewed by the DDD Awards Committee. The Committee may then select one presentation proposal from each category for these awards. A DDD Award Certificate, along with a \$400 monetary award, will be given to the recipients of each category at the DDD General Business Meeting during the CEC Convention. We hope you will start thinking now about writing a presentation proposal related to the field of mental retardation and developmental disabilities for the 2009 CEC Convention in Seattle.

For more information about these two awards and other DDD awards, please contact **Toni Merfeld** (toni@metrowestkids.net). See you in Boston!

Start Thinking about Writing a Proposal for CEC 2009 (Seattle)

Although we have not yet all gathered for the 2008 Annual Convention and Expo of the Council for Exceptional Children in Boston, it is not too early to begin thinking about writing a proposal for DDD to present at the **2009 CEC Convention in Seattle!** Mark your calendars, as the Convention will be **April 1–4**. While CEC has not yet officially sent out the call for pro-

posals or the due date, we are asking DDD members to think about innovative and creative proposals related to students with developmental disabilities, including cognitive disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. Continue to check the **CEC Web site** for information.

Search the Entire Archives of Education and Training in Mental Retardation/
Developmental Disabilities at
<http://www.dddcec.org/search.htm>

Membership and Unit Development Committee News



Debora Wichmanowski,
Co-Chairperson

Hurray, our division is on the rise once again! We are once again showing a growth in membership to where we now have more members than we did at this time last year. I believe that this shift is a good omen for the year 2008. Our goal is to increase our membership again this coming year and to assist divisions in ways to increase their membership. We would also like to promote DDD in states where there is currently no subdivision.

One area of membership where growth has been so successful is in student membership. We thank you, student members, for your support. You are our future!

Your input is critical to our success. Sharing your knowledge, expertise, and recommendations for building membership will greatly enhance our efforts in increasing membership numbers. As you go about your daily work, we hope you realize how powerful all of us can be together in our efforts. Also, please take the time to contact us and let us know how we can help you and your colleagues. Let us know your suggestions, your ideas, and your thoughts on how we are doing. You will help us make a difference. We look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me (dwichman@pasco.k12.fl.us) or Kara Hume (kahume@indiana.edu) to get the ball rolling.

We wish everyone a very prosperous and healthy year!

Executive Director's Corner



Tom E. C. Smith,
Executive Director

DDD seems to have turned the corner relative to subdivisions. During the past several months, numerous DDD subdivisions have either been established or reactivated. Hopefully, this is a sign that states where DDD subdivisions have been active in the past are gearing up for more active status, and states where there have been no subdivisions are organizing around the DDD division. There

are several reasons why DDD has begun to re-emerge as a leading division in CEC. These include: (1) the growing interest in Autism Spectrum Disorders and the division's leadership in this area, (2) the DDD biennial conferences that have showcased advocates and self-advocates, and (3) the growing realization in the field that organizations can once again have a major impact on the quality of services for individuals with disabilities.

If you are in a state that does not have an active DDD subdivision, please contact me. DDD can assist you in many ways to get your subdivision up and running. Please contact me (tecsmith@uark.edu) or any of the division officers for assistance.

Editor's Note . . .

Darlene Perner

On behalf of DDD, I would like to thank **Amanda Boutot** for another valuable contribution to our *Teachers' Corner*. Amanda always offers practical strategies for teaching students with ASD. Also I would like to thank one of our DDD members, **Kristine Derer**, for responding to a recent article in the *DDD Express* and expressing her reflections on changing terminology. See the next issue of *DDD Express* for her article. Look also for changes to our Web site (<http://www.dddcec.org>)!



If you have any questions, please contact me by e-mail (dperner@bloomu.edu) or postal mail at: Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Department of Exceptionality Programs, 400 E. 2nd St., Bloomsburg, PA 17815. (Please notify CEC if you have a change of address.)

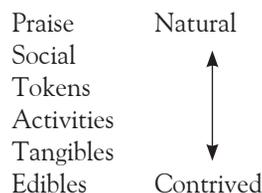
("Teachers' Corner" continued from p. 1)

Using a Reinforcement Hierarchy to Reduce Prompt-Dependency

1. Use Level 1 reinforcers for independently performed skills (e.g., those that require less prompting)
2. Use Level 2 or 3 skills when the skill requires more prompts

The type of reinforcer used will depend on the child and should be based on a reinforcement assessment (see Scheuermann & Webber, 2002, for example). Level 1 reinforcers may be more natural for some children, while others may need more contrived reinforcers. Using more contrived reinforcers, though effective in promoting independent success, is not "natural"; in real life, no one hands you a red block when you successfully identify your nose. Therefore, teachers are urged to fade reinforcement from contrived to natural soon after the student has gained independence or near independence on a target skill. A good technique is to pair the natural reinforcer with the contrived until the natural reinforcement increases its effectiveness. For example, to increase the effectiveness of praise for Jamie, we paired praise with the red block over several therapy sessions. Over time, she began to work for praise as a higher level reinforcer, and we could fade away the block. One must be careful, however, not to fade reinforcement too quickly and frustrate the child but also not to wait too long and have the child expect the Level 1 reinforcer every time.

Types of Reinforcement



In summary, the use of prompts to teach new skills is known to be effective for students with developmental disabilities (Migliorini, et. al., 2006), however, prompt dependency is a concern that must be addressed (Tincani, 2006). When teachers combine prompt-fading procedures with appropriate use of a reinforcement hierarchy (e.g., ensure that the most motivating reinforcers are reserved for the most independently performed skills and fade to more natural reinforcement in a timely fashion), student success is achieved.

References

- Migliorini, J., Kirby, T. J., & Peterson, S. M. (2006). Using prompts to help your child learn. In E. A. Boutot & M. Tincani (Eds.), *Autism spectrum disorders handouts: What parents need to know*. Austin: PRO-ED.
- Scheuermann, B., & Webber, J. (2002). *Autism: Teaching does make a difference*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth
- Tincani, M. (2006): Using natural consequences to teach your child. In E. A. Boutot & M. Tincani (Eds.), *Autism spectrum disorders handouts: What parents need to know*. Austin: PRO-ED.

JOIN A DDD Committee!

The following is a list of the **DDD Committees and Chairpersons for 2007–2008**. Contact any Committee Chairperson directly to obtain information and/or to **JOIN A COMMITTEE!**

Awards	Toni Merfeld	fullertjm@qwest.net
Communications	Darlene Perner	dperner@bloomu.edu
Conference	Dave Smith	jdsmi24@uncg.edu
Co-coordinators	Cindy Perras	cindy.perras@cogeco.ca
Critical Issues	Bob Stodden	stodden@hawaii.edu
	Nikki Murdick	murdictn@slu.edu
Diversity	Rosa Lockwood	rosa.lockwood@ode.state.oh.us
	Charles Dukes	cdukes@fau.edu
Finance	Amanda Boutot	aboutot@mac.com
Legislative (CAN)	Bob Stodden	stodden@hawaii.edu
Membership/Unit Dev.	Debbie Wichmanowski	dwichman@pasco.k12.fl.us
	Kara Hume	kahume@indiana.edu
Nominations	Phil Parette	hppet@ilstu.edu
Professional Dev./Standards	Scott Sparks	sparks@oak.cats.ohiou.edu
Publications	Jack Hourcade	jhourca@boisestate.edu