

# Research Developments



A Publication of The May Center for Applied Research

Issue 1, July 2002

## From the Editors...

Innovative healthcare-related organizations have long recognized that conducting important research and applying the findings of that research improves practices, creates better standards of care, informs the professional community, and stimulates new thinking. With these goals in mind, The May Center for Applied Research was created in 1997 to direct, supervise, and coordinate research activity at The May Institute.

The May Center for Applied Research supports ongoing training in a variety of research-related areas in addition to continuing education opportunities. Professionals provide clinical support, case consultation, and peer review, and have a major role in disseminating research findings through publications and presentations at conferences.

We are pleased to introduce *Research Developments*, a newsletter that will keep you informed about The May Institute's latest research initiatives, publications, and conference presentations. Each issue will have a featured report describing a completed research project, published article, or "work in progress," as well as personal profiles and accomplishments of institute professionals. A "Briefly Considered" column will highlight diverse points of interest. We invite you to share your thoughts, comments, and feedback with us.

## Innovative Peer Training Improves Task Completion

A project conducted at The May Center for Adult Services in Mashpee, Mass., evaluated an innovative approach to teach a 17-year-old young man with mental retardation how to complete daily living and self-care tasks more proficiently. The training method involved peer instruction, in this case provided by a 25-year-old man who also has mental retardation. The trainee received prompts and support from his peer while he was

working on four domestic tasks at his residential group home. The peer teaching increased independent task completion beyond instruction provided by staff.

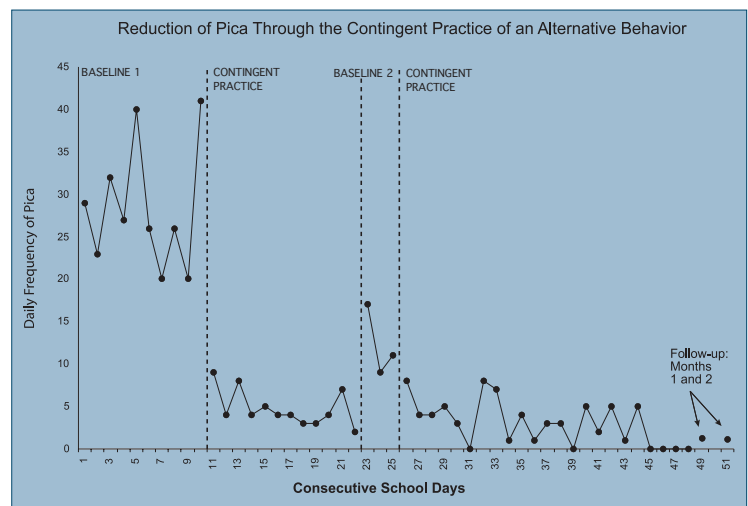
The publication citation is: Hibbert, D., Kostinas, G., & Luiselli, J.K. (2002). Improving Skills Performance of an adult with mental retardation through peer-mediated instructional support. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 14, 119-127.

## Intervention Helps Eliminate Pica Behavior

*"Research suggests that pica may occur in as many as 25-33 percent of young children. It may be even more prevalent in children with developmental disabilities."*

Pica is a behavior disorder characterized by the ingestion of inedible objects. It is a serious health risk to children and notoriously difficult to treat. Teachers at The May Center for Early Childhood Education in Arlington, Mass., developed and implemented a successful intervention with Robbie, a 5-year-old boy with autism and a history of pica behavior.

Their study included an initial phase (baseline) during which they interrupted Robbie every time he placed an object in his mouth. This is a typical response to such behavior but is rarely successful in difficult cases. Teachers subsequently implemented an intervention termed "contingent practice." Each time Robbie displayed pica, a teacher interrupted the behavior as before, but then prompted him to throw the object away



*continued on reverse*

## Recent Publications of The May Institute

- Harchik, A., Anderson, M., Thomson, R., Forde, K., Feinberg, L., Rivest, S., & Luiselli, J. K. (2001). Brief report: Evaluation of a participatory competency-based model of staff training in a community habilitative setting. *Behavioral Interventions*, 16, 1-16.
- Luiselli, J. K., Benner, S., Stoddard, T., Weiss, R., & Lisowski, K. (2001). Evaluating the efficacy of partial hospitalization services for adults with mental retardation and psychiatric disorders: A pilot study using the Aberrant Behavior Checklist (ABC). *Mental Health Aspects of Developmental Disabilities*, 4, 61-67.
- Luiselli, J. K., Campbell, S., Cannon, B., DiPietro, E., Ellis, J. T., Taras, M., & Lifter, K. (2001). Assessment instruments used in the education and treatment of persons with autism: Brief report of a survey of national service centers. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 22, 389-398.
- Luiselli, J. K., Putnam, R. F., & Handler, M. W. (2001). Improving discipline practices in public schools: Description of a whole-school and district-wide model of behavior analysis consultation. *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 2, 18-27.
- Putnam, R. F., Luiselli, J. K., Sennett, K., & Malonson, J. (2002). Cost-efficacy analysis of out-of-district special education placements: An evaluative measure of behavior support intervention in public schools. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 15, 17-24.
- Reedy, P., Luiselli, J. K., & Thibadeau, S. (2001). Brief report: Improving staff performance in a residential child-care setting using computer-assisted feedback. *Child and Family Behavior Therapy*, 23, 43-51.

### *Pica Intervention... continued from front*

("Robbie, that's trash. Where does it belong?"). This intervention was repeated ten times following each pica incident.

As seen in the graph on front page, "contingent practice" was effective in reducing, and essentially eliminating, pica in this case. The evaluation conducted by the teachers was strengthened by briefly withdrawing intervention for three days (baseline 2) and then introducing it once again with positive outcome. Follow-up showed near-zero occurrences of pica at month one and two.

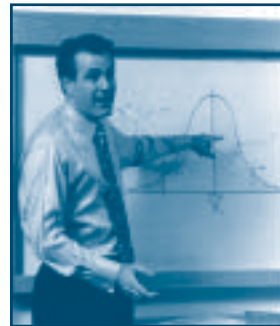
This project is an example of systematic intervention to eliminate a health-threatening behavior and will be submitted for publication. Classroom implementation was supervised by Senior



*Dr. Joseph Ricciardi and May Center senior teacher Shannon Terrill discuss a young student's progress.*

Teacher **Shannon Terrill** in consultation with Clinical Director **Joseph Ricciardi, Psy.D.** The May Center in Arlington is directed by **Tania Treml, M.Ed.**

## Briefly Considered



- ◆ Graduate students enrolled in The May Institute Predoctoral Clinical Psychology Internship Program must complete a research project as a training requirement. Former intern Hani Murad recently published his project in a psychology journal: Murad, H., & Luiselli, J.K. (2002). "Evaluation of a cognitive-behavioral treatment protocol for panic disorder." *Clinical Case Studies*, 1, 122-132.

◆ Presenters at the May 2002 Annual Conference of the Association for Behavior Analysis in Toronto, Canada, included: Erin Dunn, Ph.D., Alan Harchik, Ph.D., BCBA, Marcie Handler, Ph.D., James Luiselli, Ed.D., ABPP, BCBA, Robert Putnam, Ph.D., and Gary Pace, Ph.D. Topics included research in the education and treatment of persons with autism, improving discipline in schools, and cost analysis of special education placements.

## THE MAY INSTITUTE

*The May Institute is a private, nonprofit organization committed to providing the highest standard of behavioral healthcare, education, and rehabilitation services. Named among the nation's "Schools of Excellence" by the U.S. Department of Education and featured in the book "In Search of America's Best Nonprofits," (Jossey-Bass, 1997), The May Institute operates 170 programs nationwide, serving more than 18,000 individuals and families each year. An active center of research and training, we maintain affiliations with more than 40 universities, hospitals, and agencies worldwide, and has a Professional Advisory Board comprised of leading authorities in the field..*

### EDITORIAL STAFF

James K. Luiselli, Ed.D., ABPP, BCBA • Joseph N. Ricciardi, Psy.D.  
Pamela M. Bush, VP of Communications • Patricia S. Ladew, Editor • Juanita Class, Designer