

Research Developments



A Publication of The May Center for Applied Research

Issue 2, Fall 2002

Positive Behavior Support Leads to Successful Long-Term Outcome

Many adults who have mental retardation and psychiatric disorders display serious challenging behaviors. As a result, they may be subjected to invasive treatment in one or more secure settings. A recent publication from the May Center for Adult Services in Revere, Mass., describes intervention with a 27-year-old woman who demonstrated serious aggression and self-injury. She had been hospitalized repeatedly, given numerous medications, and placed in mechanical restraints for as long as six hours a day. When she was admitted to the May Center, restraint was eliminated and she participated in a comprehensive support plan that featured positive reinforcement, life style changes, environmental modifications, and antecedent control procedures. Her challenging behaviors were virtually eliminated several months following intervention and this outcome was maintained over a seven-year period. The publication citation is: Luiselli, J. K., Sperry, J. M., & Connolly, N. M. (2002). Elimination of mechanical restraint, community-based behavior support, and seven-year maintenance evaluation in the treatment of a woman with mental retardation and multiple psychiatric disorders. *Mental Health Aspects of Developmental Disabilities*, 5, 69-77.

Reducing Physical Restraint of Students with Acquired Brain Injuries

Many children and adolescents who have acquired brain injury (ABI) exhibit extremely challenging behaviors such as aggression, self-injury, and property destruction. These behaviors can be dangerous, health threatening, and an impediment to education. Sometimes, physical intervention in the form of therapeutic restraint is required to maintain personal safety and eliminate risk.



Erin Dunn, Ph.D., and Gary Pace, Ph.D., review research data from The May Center for Education and Neurorehabilitation.

At the May Center for Education and Neurorehabilitation in Brockton, Mass., several research projects have focused on *antecedent assessment* to better understand situations that may result in the necessity of restraining a student. As part of one research project, direct care staff were trained to document events and interactions that occurred before restraint was implemented. It was determined that certain instructional activities, such as making a transition or having a request denied, were antecedent conditions that preceded restraint use. Using this information, May staff members worked to change these conditions to reduce the likelihood that restraint would be required. For example, altering the manner in which transitions were announced and implemented was effective in reducing and eliminating physical intervention.

This type of "contextual analysis" is rare in the ABI literature and should provide a new perspective in understanding the "causes" of challenging behaviors and how to treat them successfully. The research is directed by Gary M. Pace, Ph.D., Erin K. Dunn, Ph.D., and James K. Luiselli, Ed.D. The initial report of findings will be published later this year in the journal, *Brain Injury*.

This type of "contextual analysis" is rare in the ABI literature and should provide a new perspective in understanding the "causes" of challenging behaviors and how to treat them successfully. The research is directed by Gary M. Pace, Ph.D., Erin K. Dunn, Ph.D., and James K. Luiselli, Ed.D. The initial report of findings will be published later this year in the journal, *Brain Injury*.

Collaborative Research Focuses on Readiness Skills

The May Center for Early Childhood Education in Arlington, Mass., has initiated a collaborative research project with PRAXIS, Inc., a group devoted to improving instructional technology with children who have developmental disabilities. Located

in Cambridge, Mass., PRAXIS has designed computer-based teaching programs that foster early learning readiness skills such as matching pictures. These skills, in turn, lead to the acquisition of reading and communication abilities. The

continued on reverse

Recent Publications of the May Institute

- Jefferson, G.L., & Putnam, R.F. (2002). Understanding transition services: A parent's guide to legal standards and effective practices. *Exceptional Parent Magazine*, 32, 70-77.
- Luiselli, J.K. (2002). Avoidance learning. In M. Hersen and W. Sledge (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy* (pp. 145-148). New York: Academic Press.
- Luiselli, J.K. (2002). Commentary on "urine alarms and prompts for fostering daytime urinary continence in a student with multiple disabilities," by Lancioni, Van Bergen, and Furniss. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 94, 1301-1302.
- Luiselli, J.K., & Murbach, L. (2002). Providing instruction from novel staff as an antecedent intervention for child tantrum behavior in a public school classroom. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 25, 356-365.
- Rey, Jannette & Putnam, R.F. (2002). Effective social skills programming. *Exceptional Parent Magazine*, 32, 32-36.

Collaborative Research... continued from front

research is implemented at the May Center under the supervision of PRAXIS field supervisors and center teachers. The research findings will be incorporated into the participating students' educational programs and represents a meaningful demonstration of "research to practice" philosophy. For more information please contact Joseph N. Ricciardi, Psy.D., Clinical Director at The May Center for Early Childhood Education.



Alyssa Porter, Research Assistant for Praxis, Inc., conducts a research session with a student at the May Center for Early Childhood Education in Arlington, Mass.

Briefly Considered

- ◆ James K. Luiselli, Ed.D., Vice President of Applied Research and Peer Review, presented a workshop on "Writing for Publication: A Primer for Clinicians and Practitioners" at the annual conference of the Berkshire Association for Behavior Analysis and Therapy (BABAT), held October 17-18, 2002 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. He discussed ways to improve writing for publication and communication of research findings.
- ◆ Research regarding families of children with developmental disabilities, a collaborative project of the May Center for Early Childhood Education, Arlington, Mass., the May Center for Education and Vocational Training, Braintree, Mass, and the May Center for Child Development, Chatham, Mass., was recently published. The publication citation is: Ellis, J. T., Luiselli, J. K., Amirault, D., Byrne, S., O'Malley-Cannon, B., Taras, M., Wolongevicz, J., & Sisson, R. W. (2002). Families of children with developmental disabilities: Assessment and comparison of self-reported needs in relation to situational variables. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 14, 191-202.

THE MAY INSTITUTE

The May Institute is a private, nonprofit organization committed to providing the highest standard of behavioral healthcare, education, and rehabilitation services. 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