

The Department of Psychology Presents:

Promoting Positive Verbal Climates in Urban Schools

Brown Bag Lunch

with Dr. Nancy Neef

Dec. 18, 2015

at 1 p.m.

1728 Wood Hall

I will introduce examples of our developing efforts to promote more positive climates in urban schools through shaping of verbal behavior. In one study, a multiple baseline design across participants examined the effects of shaping of general education teachers' verbal behavior about their interactions with students, and the collateral effects on their interactions. We differentially reinforced teachers' responses to experimenter questions that favored teachers' behavior-specific praise and found that specific praise increased while reprimands decreased as teachers interacted with their students. Shaping verbal behavior therefore appears to be a viable option for adding desired behaviors to teachers' repertoires. Specifically, our findings suggest that an effective strategy may be to arrange contingencies for teachers' verbal behavior about how they interact with their students rather than for the interactions themselves. In another study, a multiple baseline across kindergarten students showed that training and token reinforcement for "tootling" increased the children's reporting of positive behaviors of their peers. However, there were no collateral effects on the children's positive interactions with one another, which remained low. These examples provide directions and needs for future research related to verbal shaping in applied settings.