

## Child Psychology

GOAL: Consolidate and apply the concepts in research methodology.

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### Group Discussion: A School Debate

The faculty and the principal at Dulles Middle School have been having a heated debate over how to increase school attendance and reduce tardiness. The faculty and administrators have a wide range of ideas about why children are coming late and missing school, and these differences in interpretation are making it difficult to settle on a plan for taking action.

Many of the teachers had attended a workshop on Behavior Modification over the summer. They suggested that the children should be rewarded for coming to school and arriving on time. They suggest that children should be given tokens when they arrive on time that can be spent at the school cafeteria; and that each grading period those children who have an improved attendance record should receive a coupon for free movie rentals.

Some teachers are concerned that too much emphasis on rewards undercuts a child's natural, internal competence motivation. They believe that coming to school should be its own reward. Children should not be "lured" to school with incentives of food and movies. They should come because teachers care about the children and make it interesting and exciting to learn. As a result, children will form a stronger identification with their teachers and will internalize their values for learning. The teachers want to create an environment where children experience satisfaction in working hard to achieve new levels of skill and pride in their mastery of challenging tasks.

Other teachers argue that children are highly influenced by the behavior of the peers. They emphasize the importance of observational learning where children see the positive consequences for valued behavior and the negative consequences for non-valued behavior. They suggest showing approval and recognition for students who have perfect or near perfect attendance records, and creating a "wall of shame" for students who come late and miss school often.

The principal, Dr. Sherry Sloan, is being pressured by the state Board of Education to improve attendance rates. According to state data, high attendance and low tardiness are highly correlated with student achievement. She has learned that the school will lose funding if attendance rates do not improve in the coming months. Perhaps because of this external pressure, Dr. Sloan is more aware of the family, school, and community influences of her students' attendance patterns. She recommends increasing parents' responsibility for their children's attendance patterns. She recommends increasing parents' responsibility for their children's attendance. She proposes establishing a truancy board to review attendance patterns and calling parents before this board if their children have more than two absences or four tardies in a grading period.

1. What theories seem to be reflected in the views of the teachers and principals? Consider the different theories about how to improve school attendance and reduce tardiness. How might the nature of the school environment influence which theory is a better fit for the situation? Can the same behavior, such as high absenteeism, have different causes in different environments?

2. Based on your theory, how might you conduct a study on improving absenteeism?

Answer the questions pertaining to the following hypothetical study.

Two-year-old children were randomly assigned to two conditions: free play without adult assistance (Group 1) and free play with adult assistance (Group 2). All of the children and their parents were invited to a standard playroom and were allowed to play freely with the same set of 20 toys for 30 minutes. During the first 10 minutes, children in both groups played alone with the provided toys without any parental assistance. During the next 10 minutes, children in Group 1 continued to play with the toys alone, with their parents sitting nearby watching quietly without providing any assistance; parents of the children in Group 2 were instructed to play with their children using the provided toys. During the last 10 minutes, children in Group 1 continued to play with the toys alone and the parents of the children in Group 2 were instructed to withdraw from playing and sit nearby watching quietly without participation in their children's play. All of the activities during the 30-minute session were videotaped via a hidden camera. In analysis, symbolic play activities were compared between the two groups of children.

- 1) This study used an experimental method or a correlational method?
- 2) Identify the independent and dependent variables in the study.
- 3) What variable(s) was (were) put under control? Why?
- 4) If the researchers followed these children one year later, what developmental design would that be? (cross-sectional, longitudinal)?
- 5) If the researchers recruited a new group of 2-year-olds and collected data using the same procedure. Then they compared this new group with the two-year-olds in their previous study. What developmental design was that?
- 6) Why did the researchers divide the 30-minute session into three phases: 10 minutes - children playing alone; 10 minutes - parental assistance vs. no assistance; 10 minutes - children playing alone again? In other words, what are the purposes of the three phases?