

Stokes T F & Baer D M. An implicit technology of generalization.

J. Appl. Behav. Anal. 10:349-67, 1977.

[Univ. Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and Univ. Kansas, Lawrence, KS]

An effective therapeutic behavior change often must occur over time, persons, and settings, and the effects of the change sometimes should spread to related behaviors. This generalization of behavior change does not always occur automatically, and frequently needs to be actively programmed as part of a treatment intervention. The research literature relating to the technology of generalization promotion was reviewed. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI[®]) indicates that this paper has been cited in over 165 publications since 1977.]

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"In 1971, I was a junior psychology major at the University of Western Australia in Perth. One day I was at the library coffee shop with a friend, Milton McGhee, who was a graduate student in social work. We talked about some of his practicum experiences with juvenile delinquents, noting the fact that initial behavior changes could be accomplished readily, for the most part, within the controlled confines of a secure institution. Unfortunately, however, these newly learned skills often were not used after release to a competing environment containing multiple reinforcers for deviant as well as nondeviant life-styles. We sat there, in our temporary escape from the books upstairs, pondering the need for development of additional treatment procedures to accomplish this needed generalization of behavior change.

"Around this same time, I was in the throes of deciding upon the topic for a

senior honors thesis. I had heard that a distinguished American psychologist, Donald Baer, would soon be at the university on sabbatical. I therefore took the bold step of writing to recruit his assistance as the supervisor of the project. With little regard to the extant literature, I proposed 'examining something dealing with generalization.' My prudent solicitations were handsomely rewarded. In July of 1971, I received a letter from Baer. He suggested we get to work shortly after his arrival in Perth, 'assuming minimal culture shock.' Baer's letter ended in his usual charming style by noting, 'The problem you cite is an excellent one, and could prove reinforcing to us both. Let's hope so.' So began our positive and productive collaboration, beginning with my senior honors thesis.¹

"Following the completion of my bachelor's degree, I ventured to Kansas to attend graduate school and study further with Baer. We continued collaborative research on issues in the development of a technology of generalization. In addition, we commenced a systematic review of the research and treatment literature in that area. An initial draft was produced within a year, followed by two years of discussion, review, and refinement of our ideas. Finally, we succumbed to the pressure of academic life and publication priorities and submitted the paper before someone else responded to the current concerns about generalization by producing a similar analysis and discussion.

"I believe that the paper is widely cited because it discusses one of the major issues in behavior analysis and modification. As the treatment intervention techniques have become more sophisticated and effective with a diversity of behavior problems, so the need to establish and document generalized behavior changes has become much greater. The paper makes a number of suggestions for the clinician to incorporate into interventions. It also critiques a number of promising areas in the technology of generalization promotion and provides a general categorization of techniques designed to assess or program generalization. It was our hope that the field would regard the discussion as a useful organization and conceptualization of generalization and its programming."

1. Stokes T F, Baer D M & Jackson R L. Programming the generalization of a greeting response in four retarded children. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* 7:599-610, 1974.