Increasing Compliance Using Operant Motivation & Direct Skills Instruction

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Abstract

A 4-year-old boy in a midwestern preschool classroom was referred by his classroom teacher for noncompliant behaviors, particularly refusing to transition from free play to large group activity. A functional behavior assessment was conducted and resulted in indirect methods of data collection yielding one potential function and direct observation resulting in another. Following a baseline assessment of behavior, hypotheses were tested sequentially and treatment effectiveness was analyzed.

Introduction

- Academic engaged time is an important construct, and his highly related to academic achievement (for an overview see Gettiger & Miller, 2014).
- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is a well-researched and empirically supported method that helps a practitioner match an appropriate intervention strategy to the function (reason) for a child’s inappropriate behavior (Steege & Watson, 2014).
- FBA includes a thorough review of the child’s academic records, interviews with teachers, direct observation, and experimental analysis when appropriate (Steege & Watson, 2014).
- When a treatment package is matched to a correctly identified function, intervention effectiveness is highly effective (Steege & Watson, 2014).
- Guided compliance training through reinforcement of appropriate behavior has been shown to be effective in increasing compliant behavior (Wilder & Atwell, 2006).
- Compliance training at the preschool level is vital, as noncompliance is predictive of future behavior difficulties and a lack of prosocial skills. Effective instruction, positive praise, and reinforcement have been shown to be effective in increasing compliant behavior (Johnson-Gros & Shriver, 2006).

Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1: Based on anecdotal ABC recording and teacher reports, the hypothesized function of Jack’s behavior is attention. If attention is withheld from Jack when he engages in inappropriate behavior, and attention is given for desirable behavior, Jack’s noncompliant behavior will decrease.
- Hypothesis 2: Based on results from the FAIR-T and MAS, the function of Jack’s behavior is escape. If Jack is properly motivated and reinforced for compliant behavior, his inappropriate behavior will decrease.

Method

Participants

- Jack was a 4-year-old boy enrolled in a midwestern preschool classroom. At the time he was receiving special education services for Speech Language Pathology for articulation difficulties. He was referred for intervention services by his teacher for noncompliant behavior.

Setting & Materials

- All interventions occurred in Jack’s general education classroom during center time and during the transition from center to circle time. He had access to several toys within the classroom.
- Several reinforcers were available, including stickers, hand stamps, and highly preferred toys.

Dependent Variables

- Total time spent engaged in noncompliant and disruptive behavior (i.e. running around the classroom during large group instruction).
- Total number of behavioral incidences per day.

Experimental Design

- Following baseline data collection, intervention data was collected throughout the semester.

Procedure:

- To test hypothesis 1: Jack’s classroom teacher was instructed to ignore his inappropriate behavior when it occurred, while praising and reinforcing his appropriate behavior.
- To test hypothesis 2: Jack was told he could play, but after play time was over it was time to read a story. A sand-timer was used as a visual cue to remind Jack how long he could play.
- Following Free play, Jack was instructed to clean up his play area and walk to the area of the classroom dedicated to large-group instruction. He was given verbal praise and stickers for complying. When he attempted escape behavior, he was redirected and praised for agreeing to cooperate.
- When Jack’s affinity for stickers wore off, he was allowed to sit at story time with a preferred toy in order to motivate him to engage in his academic work.
- After Jack met his goal, he was given a social story to help maintain appropriate behavior.

Results (cont’d)

- Hypothesis 1 was not supported, as behavior did not significantly decrease from baseline when inappropriate behavior was ignored.
- Hypothesis 2 was supported. Compliance training through direct instruction and motivation/reinforcement was effective in reducing both the time spent engaged in problem behavior and number of behavioral occurrences per day.
- While not directly assessed, Jack’s teacher reported a drastic improvement in his social skills following the intervention.

Discussion

- This case study provides support for the FBA procedure and demonstrates both the ineffectiveness of a treatment plan when a false positive behavioral function is found, and the effectiveness of a treatment package matched to the appropriate behavioral function.
- This intervention also improved Jack’s social interaction with his peers. Prior to intervention he displayed very little social interaction, but post-intervention he demonstrated excellent prosocial skills, according to his classroom teacher. Further research is needed to identify if this is due to the compliance training or other environmental factors (such as maturity).

References


