

Evaluation of the Impact of Functional Communication Training on Behaviors of Concern for Students at a Non-Maintained Special School

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Abstract : Introduction: Functional Communication Training (FCT) is an approach which aims to reduce behaviours of concern by teaching more effective ways to communicate. It requires identification of the function of the behaviour of concern, through gathering information from key stakeholders and completing observations of the individual's behaviour including antecedents to, and consequences of the behaviour. Appropriate communicative alternatives are then identified and taught to the individual using systematic instruction techniques. Behaviours of concern demonstrated by individuals with autism spectrum conditions (ASC) frequently have a communication function. When contributing to positive behavior support plans, speech and language therapists and other professionals working with individuals with ASC need to identify alternative communicative behaviours which are equally reinforcing as the existing behaviours of concern. Successful implementation of FCT is dependent on an effective 'response match'. The new way of communicating must be equally as effective as the behaviour previously used and require the same amount or less effort from the individual. It must also be understood by the communication partners the individual encounters and be appropriate to their communicative contexts. Method: Four case studies within a non-maintained special school environment were described and analysed. A response match framework was used to identify the effectiveness of functional communication training delivered by the student's speech and language therapist, teacher and learning support assistants. The success of systematic instruction techniques used to develop new communicative behaviours was evaluated using the CODES framework. Findings: Functional communication training can be used as part of a positive behaviour support approach for students within this setting. All case studies reviewed demonstrated 'response success', in that the desired response was gained from the new communicative behaviour. Barriers to the successful embedding of new communicative behaviours were encountered. In some instances, the new communicative behaviour could not be consistently understood across all communication partners which reduced 'response recognisability'. There was also evidence of increased physical or cognitive difficulty in employing the new communicative behaviour which reduced the 'response effectivity'. Successful use of 'thinning schedules of reinforcement', taught students to tolerate a delay to reinforcement once the new communication behaviour was learned.

Keywords : augmentative and alternative communication, autism spectrum conditions, behaviours of concern, functional communication training

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