

Building independence for pupils to successfully access a college provision

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Executive summary

Over the past year, a group of Sixth Form pupils have been learning the skills required to build their independence in order to attend a mainstream college. This case study will look at the impact on pupil's independence and the skills required for them to successfully access a mainstream college provision. The importance of breaking these skills down into small steps and generalisation to different environments will be discussed for independence to be successfully maintained across environments.

Introduction

A group of 8 Sixth Form pupils, ranging from year 12 to year 14, have been attending the college provision over the past year. These pupils have been assessed against BeyondAutism's Independence Framework Assessment to be at a level where they have limited barriers to learning, can work alongside others and are currently working on skills to build upon their group participation and further increase their independence.

All pupils in Sixth Form are preparing for adulthood, building their independence, functional self-help skills, communication and developing their hobbies and interests. In this case study we will look at some of the key skills being developed at college to increase pupil's independence, the ways of effectively teaching these skills and what the next steps are in order to prepare them for life beyond a school/college setting.

Method

In order to start building learner's independence, baseline assessments were completed to establish which key skills these students had already mastered or achieved. From this point, Individual Educational Plans

were created targeting key skills that students needed to learn and to fill the gaps in their skill set for them to work towards independence.

One key target area for our pupils in Sixth form was their travel to college. All pupils use public buses to get to college. The key skills therefore needed to travel independently include: identifying the correct bus to get on and stopping this bus, use of an Oyster Card, selecting an appropriate seat/ place to stand on the bus, appropriate behaviour when riding the bus and getting off the bus at the correct stop. These skills were systematically taught to each of our pupils ensuring that they have mastered each skill. It is also important that pupils can adjust their behaviours when unpredictable events occur, for example the bus terminates early, stranger awareness or being able to make a phone call to ask for help if they are lost. Using behaviour chains, teaching and fading procedures and identifying reinforcers that can be available to the students in their natural environment, we can start to teach these skills and achieve mastery.

Other key skills pupils have worked on to increase their independence to access college is through use of the college canteen. Pupils have had the opportunity to purchase food from the buffet available working on key skills such as waiting in line, selecting their food and appropriate portion sizes, paying for items and finding an appropriate seat in the canteen. Most of our pupils have been able to generalise these skills into the local community around college, going to local cafes or restaurants to order their lunches. It is important that skills taught to pupils in one setting are generalised to different settings so they can learn to be independent outside of their immediate teaching environment (Baer, 1999). Without generalisation, skills taught at school wouldn't be beneficial to our learners in preparing them for adulthood beyond school.

Results

This is an ongoing review of evidence as the skills required for pupils to become as independent as possible are being continuously worked on during their time in education. Pupil B, see Figure 1 for skills tracker, has mastered skills required to enter the correct bus correctly. It is important to note that these skills have been taught alongside a 1:1 support staff member.

Once independence is achieved with the staff member being present the next step will be to fade this staff member so the pupil can become independent with their travel to college. From the skills tracker it is evident that a number of skills are still required to achieve mastery. These skills have been worked on since June 2019, highlighting the amount of time and intensive

teaching required for this pupil to master these independence skills. This pupil easily generalised the skill of getting on bus 44 to getting on bus 270. However, other pupils have had to be taught these skills on each bus they use.

Using the canteen independently involves many steps to mastery, see Figure 3, involving creating a behavioural chain which breaks down the task into small steps. Each pupil attending college will work on each step. Each student has learnt these skills at different rates, with one student mastering over 80% of the steps while another mastering 40%. These skills will continue to be worked on, generalising to other restaurants and cafes to ensure independence is also achieved in these settings.

References

Baer, D. M. (1999). How to plan for generalization. 2nd edition. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Alberto, A.A., & Troutman, A.C. (2003). Applied behaviour analysis for teachers. 6th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill-Prentice Hall.

Discussion

In conclusion, we have learnt that in order to be truly independent and to build on skills required to attend a college environment tasks and activities for learners with autism need to be broken down into small achievable steps. For individuals with autism, 'tasks with many steps or components may be divided into phases for teaching purposes' (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). In this way, key skills that students have needed to increase their independence at college have been broken down to allow them to master each skill. Whilst this way of teaching may be time consuming, it has highlighted that students are able to master each step of tasks and generalise these to other settings so independence can be achieved for these tasks.

Skills Tracking Sheet		
Acquisition:	3	Mastery criteria 80% independent
Skill area:	Using the public bus	
Target Skill	Date Introduced/Known	Date Mastered
Recognise bus 44	01/06/2019	01/01/2020
Recognise bus 270	01/06/2019	01/01/2020
Stops correct bus	01/01/2020	01/03/2020
Find and use oyster card	01/06/2020	01/07/2020
oyster card in pocket to keep	01/06/2020	
Selects appropriate seat	01/06/2020	01/07/2020
Pushes stop button at correct stop	01/06/2019	
Gets off bus at correct stop	01/06/2019	

Figure 1: Skills Tracker showing the skills required to independently ride the public bus. Those highlighted yellow have been mastered by the pupil. Those without a mastered date are still being worked on.

Stimulus response data sheet

Learner: _____ Skill: buying food from the college canteen

Instructions: create a stimulus response chain with the SD and consequence listed for each response. Record the prompt level for each response (total task), or current target step (backward chain or forward chain)

21	Response						
1	Find wallet or purse	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
2	Take wallet or purse and stand up	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
3	Walk to canteen	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
4	Join the line	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
5	Wait your turn	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
6	Choose what you would like to buy. Tell the person near the hot food what hot food you would like	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
7	Collect the plate from the person	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND
8	Hold onto the plate and stay in line	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP	FP
		PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
		IND	IND	IND	IND	IND	IND

Figure 1: Stimulus response chain demonstrating the number of steps required to master to achieve independence to buy food from the canteen.