

Behaviour change

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ABSTRACT: This case study will focus on the pupil journey in the school setting. The research will describe how implementing new communication methods have increased functional communication and decreased the frequency and duration of socially inappropriate responses. Implementing new communication methods, routine-based activities and a choice of activities helped the student to self-regulate and engage in different school-based activities for an extended period of time.

The case will analyse the pupil's program implemented in school and the evidence of progress of the duration of the behaviour data.

This case study focuses on an 8-year-old pupil in Key Stage 2, and his journey in a new school in September 2021.

Since the pupil started, they have enjoyed the school setting, exploring and showing interests in different activities such as books, music, soft play and sensory toys. They also tolerated groups and peer play for a short period of time, and they developed a positive relationship with their tutors and seemed to be comfortable around other pupils.

Their behavioural barriers were related to transitions to new places, sitting down and participating in a new activity. Also, loud noises and tolerating small group instructions for a longer period of time could be a setting event for behaviour that challenges and task avoidance responses. Originally his requesting repertoire was limited, and the preferred activity sometimes did not serve as a reinforcement.

The study will show how the pupil made progress and how his tolerance and behaviours that challenge were decreased by implementing a routine-based timetable (now and next board), a choice board to tolerate the ending of a preferred activity and their vocal communication was combined with a communication board. The use of a visual (timetable and communication), helped the student to increase his communication repertoire.

Literature Review

Bosh and Fuqua's research was helpful in understanding the concept of behaviour and behaviour cusps. A cusp is 'a behaviour change that has consequences for the organism beyond the change itself' (Baer, 1997). The authors propose a criterion to identify important behaviour changes: access to new reinforcers and

environments, social validity, generativeness, and competition with inappropriate responses. The access to new reinforcers can lead the pupil to have access also to new environments, in this case the student had access to a new tool such as a choice board to have access to their preferred activities. With the implementation of the now and next board the student had access to new environments and new contingencies. These contingencies may shape behaviour such as social play, tolerating waiting for an item and not having access to an activity. Generativeness is very important when it comes to generalising a particular skill or response to different situations and environments. The development of the student's communication repertoire ensures that the pupil could always communicate his needs and make choices during his day.

'Does the behaviour have social validity in that the response meets the demands of the social community of which the learner is a member?' (Wolf, 1978). With the new targets and new tools added to the pupil program, they will be able to respond to the community and the school setting without engaging in behaviours that challenge – meeting the dimension suggested by Wolf (1978).

Method

The pupil's programme focuses on the implementation of different methods of communication in order to tolerate when activities are not available, interruption from preferred activities, transitions and how the tutors implement new communication methods. When the student started in September, they found their transition into a new school environment challenging e.g., sitting down for an activity for a long period, such as morning registration. This resulted in aggression and task avoidance behaviour (e.g., asking constantly for the toilet when the toilet was not needed). Other antecedents observed initially when the pupil engaged in behaviours that challenged included denied access to a preferred item/told no, transitions or interruption and waiting for a preferred item/activity. The goal of the student's programme was to reduce the socially inappropriate responses. These included crying and whining, grabbing, shouting, bolting, task avoidance, jumping on seat, biting his own fingers, hitting elbows on table, head banging, head butting others, kicking others, scratching self and others. One of the first method implemented, as recommended by the Occupational Therapists, was to meet his sensory needs and run a sensory diet every 30 minutes doing an alerting activity (jumping on trampoline, therapy ball bouncing) and one calming activity (sand play, bubble pop toy). Therefore, to make the pupil participate actively and in a calmer state for registration a small period in the soft playroom was added to his daily routine as soon as they arrived in school in the morning.

Another method implemented was the use of a timer when the student was watching videos on the computer (preferred item). The pupil would be upset if they could not communicate the video they wanted and when transition from this activity they would engage in behaviour that challenges. Their tutor, as advised by the Speech and Language Therapist, made him a communication board with the video they liked, and they introduced a timer to make them understand that their time on the computer was limited. As the behaviour that challenged decreased in frequency and intensity, the timer was replaced with the sentence "computer is finished" and demonstrated with the visual timetable (now and next board) that showed them which activity was coming next.

Having a predictable routine has supported the pupil to engage in other activities for extended periods of time in particular independent play and peer play.

Results

The evidence collected since the pupil started his journey in Park House School shown a decrease of the behaviours that challenged. Regarding their first behaviour, the frequency and cumulative duration of the pupil's behaviour was collected using a sequence analysis (Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence) from September to October. A total frequency of 20 episodes occurred lasting a total duration of 116 minutes and 55 seconds. This indicated that the pupil had an average of 1 episode per day for an average duration of 9 minutes. The data collected shown that the student engaged in behaviours that challenged when a Demand was placed on him (1), Told no/Denied access (16), Interrupt/transition (1), Wait (2). Consequently, these behaviours had been targeted for reduction: crying, whining, grabbing, shouting, bolting, task avoidance, jumping on seat, biting own fingers, hitting elbows on waist, head banging, head butting others, kicking others, scratching self and scratching others.

To reduce these, behaviours skills teaching was implemented into the student programme. Vocal manding was implemented to develop the vocal skills of the student to request for items, teaching the pupil how to occupy their time, tolerance for the word 'no' and presenting an alternative. Social praise was used when the pupil walked appropriately next to his tutor with his hand down.

The programmes changes implemented with the Speech Therapist concerned communication tools such as a now/next board to help them transition during the day and a choice board to be able to choose an activity and built his own timetable during the day.

The Autumn 2021 ABC graph showed that at the beginning of the school year (27/09) challenging behaviours occurred often with its peak in October when the average duration was 12 minutes every day. From November the duration of the challenging behaviour was reduced. The data showed that the week starting from the 8th the pupil had an average of 10 minutes. The week of the 15th the average duration was 5.4 minutes, and the week of the 22nd it was 1.8 minute. The Spring 2021 graph showed that in January the average duration of the BTCs was 12 minutes per day (based on three weeks), in February the average duration was 9 minutes per day (based on three weeks).

The data showed that the pupil behaviour decreased in Autumn 2021 but started to increase again after the second half term, with a reduction of 3 minutes per day.

Discussion and conclusion

The data have showed that the progress of the learner is still ongoing. The implementation of new communication methods such as a choice board, now/next board, communication board have helped the pupil to understand their daily timetable, to choose among many activities and to tolerate the denied access to specific activities and items. These methods are still the main part of the learner programme as they will keep working with their tutors on the daily basis. The outcomes will be to reduce drastically the duration of behaviour that challenges and to help the student to self-regulate and deal with challenging situations throughout their journey in school and outside in the community.

References

Bosh. S., Fuqua. R.W. (2001). Behavioural cusps: A model for selecting target behaviours, *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis*, 2001,34,123–125.