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Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) for students with disabilities, making it essential for teachers to identify, select, and use EBPs in their classrooms. Many EBPs for autistic learners have a foundation in applied behavior analysis (ABA; see Steinbrenner et al., 2020). Unfortunately, some interventions based on ABA can feel out of place in the school environment, and teachers might find it difficult to determine how they fit within their current classroom routines. This presents a challenge for teachers and school administrators in identifying practices that strike a balance between research support and feasibility in classrooms.

One potential solution is to look toward naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions (NDBIs). NDBIs are based on the principles of developmental science and ABA and utilize natural learning opportunities and contingencies to promote student learning (Schreibman et al., 2015). Furthermore, NDBIs are recognized as an EBP (Steinbrenner et al., 2020). One example of an NDBI is Pivotal Response Training (PRT; Koegel & Koegel, 2006). PRT has been used predominantly by clinicians and parents in home and research settings to improve learners' motivation and use of pivotal skills (i.e., skills that improve performance across multiple areas). For example, teaching play skills may also have a positive impact on a child's communication functioning.

Some teachers report using PRT in their classrooms (Stahmer et al., 2005). However, they also report several barriers to its full adoption, including implementation in group instructional arrangements, training its use to paraprofessionals with limited ABA knowledge, and using it to target existing goals on students' individualized education programs (IEPs; Stahmer et al., 2012). Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching (CPRT) was developed in response to these reported barriers (Suhrheinrich et al., 2013). The developers considered teacher feedback and findings from confirmatory studies of whether challenging components of PRT could be removed or adapted during classroom implementation (e.g., Reed et al., 2013; Rieth et al., 2014). In two recent investigations, researchers found teachers could be trained to implement CPRT procedures with high levels of fidelity (Suhrheinrich et al., 2020) and that CPRT produced greater gains on students' focal IEP goals when compared to students not receiving CPRT (Stahmer et al., 2022).

In general, CPRT involves arranging motivating learning opportunities for students and ensuring educational team members respond to students in ways that promote successful, ongoing use of new skills. CPRT consists of 12 components that preserve the original PRT features and its foundation in ABA but are adapted to use language consistent with that of typical school programming. When implementing CPRT in the classroom, teachers should consider the components described in ***Table 1***.

One of the greatest strengths of CPRT is that it can be used to facilitate student motivation. Teachers find that using preferred materials, incorporating choices, and including easier tasks increase their students' engagement in classroom activities. Let's take a look at how these strategies may work to enhance student

Table 1 **Components of classroom pivotal response teaching**

Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching component	*Description*
Gain student attention	Ensure the student is paying attention before delivering an instruction.
Use clear and developmentally appropriate cues	Be clear as to what behavior is expected of the student and use words that align with the student's developmental level.
Varied cues	Provide instructions in different ways (e.g., touch the, point to, go find).
Intersperse easy tasks	Alternate between easy and difficult tasks to facilitate motivation.
Use preferred materials	Embed materials that the student likes into the learning activities.
Varied materials	Use varied materials to promote generalization across different materials.
Choices	Offer choices between and within activities.
Respond to student interests	Acknowledge when student interests change.
Contingent responses	Use carefully planned responses to each type of student response (e.g., correct, incorrect, prompted, approximation).
Direct rewards	Rewards should be related to the activity or the behavior
Reward attempts	Shape student behavior by rewarding when student attempts get closer to the goal.
Provide opportunities for turn taking	Facilitate interactions between students in the group and/or take teacher turns.

motivation in two different classroom lessons.

Application Example 1

Activity: Counting to 10 with one-to-one correspondence
Materials: A box of character figurines, a box of animal figurines, a 10-frame drawn on poster board, number flashcards.

The teacher first shows the figurines to the students (student attention) and explains to her students they that will be counting figurines (clear instruction). She begins the lesson by placing the number cards face down. She asks the students to choose a card (choice), which will indicate the number of figurines they will need to count. She then selects a student and asks them to choose whether to count character or animal figurines (preferred materials; choice). As the student counts, she asks them to place the objects into the boxes of the 10-frame (easy and hard tasks). When the student finishes counting their figurines, the teacher provides positive feedback (reward attempts, contingent responses) and indicates it's time for another student to take a turn (turn taking). She continues until all students have had a turn drawing a card and placing figurines. After all students have had sufficient practice with counting, she offers time to play with the figurines of their choice for a specific time period (direct, contingent responses).

Application Example 2

Activity: Handwriting
Materials: Superhero writing templates, markers, crayons, colored pencils, letter rubber stamps

A group of students are working on correct formation of letters and spacing between letters. The teacher uses students' favorite superheroes to create writing templates (preferred materials) where students must write about their hero (e.g., name, superpower). He begins the lesson by explaining behavioral and academic expectations (clear instruction) and then asks students to choose their superhero template (choice). He provides prompts and feedback to support students in negotiating for their favorite superhero's template (turn taking). He then gives students a choice of tools with which to write (choice). When students finish completing their writing, he provides them access to rubber stamps and markers to use in decorating their work (direct, contingent reward).

Conclusion

The development of CPRT is a powerful example of how behavior analytic principles can be used to support educational programming in typical school settings. Although CPRT is a relatively new intervention framework, its components likely are applicable to students with a range of support needs across different school settings. Finally,

its practical and feasible procedures can be implemented by a range of educational team members to offer a coordinated approach to student support.

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