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SPEAKERS

Veronica

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Hi, and welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Dr. Christine Reeve, and I'm your host.

For those of you who don't know me, I have a PhD in Clinical Psychology in addition to be a board certified behavior analyst. And my focus has always been on taking research and making it accessible and usable in real life environments. But even more relevant to this week's episode, and the series that were starting my research focus was always working on challenging behaviors and communication to replace challenging behaviors. So we'll talk a little bit about that research as well as some of the background research in today's episode.

You are listening to Episode 206. And in this episode, I'm going to be talking about how we make teaching replacement behaviors work in a real life classroom setting. And I'm going to use replacement behaviors for escape related behavior as my example, because I think it's one of the ones that people really struggle with the most. And I'll talk more about what that struggle looks like and why it happens as well.

I'll be focusing on the next few episodes on specific replacement behaviors, and how we troubleshoot and figure out what to do with them. I have a free webinar on how we can set up the classroom to prevent challenging behaviors. And I'll share that link. And I've got links for some other resources as

we go through this episode as well.

So if you're looking for what to do with that student who is struggling with any work or social situation or any other situation in the classroom that they're avoiding, then this episode is for you. So let's get started.

Now, what I am focusing on in the next few episodes is essentially called functional communication training. If you're a diehard behavior analyst, we sometimes call it Differential Reinforcement of other behavior. But it's a specific form of DRM. In that we are reinforcing a communication strategy that specifically replaces the function of the behavior.

And it's a really important thing. And if you've not done or heard anything about functional communication training, you can go to Episode 123, at autismclassroomresources.com/episode123, for an introduction on what it is. But I think it's important to recognize that it's not as simple as just using your words, or telling a student to use their words, it's that's not enough. And those are the steps that I'm going to talk about today.

The idea behind FCT is that we're teaching functional and adaptive skills. And it's reducing challenging behaviors in a way that can prevent that behavior from getting worse before it gets better as it does with some behavior management strategies. And because of that, it fits well into a classroom situation. We are essentially doing what we call a behavior analysis, teaching collateral responding, an increase of positive reinforcers from caregivers outside the FCT paradigm. It's also one of the advantages of FCT. So there's a lot of reasons why we use it.

The research shows that teaching augmentative communication can generally result in positive behavior change that was in Durand 1993, Walker and Snell 2013, Walker et al 2018. Walker et al actually looked at FCT across a wide variety of individuals with disabilities. And that's important because a lot of our research really comes from the developmental disability literature. But they found that the effectiveness across varying support needs and different intervention conditions showed that it was still an effective strategy. So it is really an evidence based strategy. And it is something that we can fit into the classroom. And that's what I'm going to focus on in the next few episodes.

So our first question is, when do we use functional communication training? And it's important to recognize and I'll talk a little bit more about this in a little bit. But it's important to recognize that we are not using the term replacement behavior to mean what I want the student to do. We are focusing on teaching a skill that serves the same function as the behavior and that means that our first step is always to do a functional behavior assessment.

Now that might be a formal assessment, where we specifically do a lot of data collection and have somebody come in and look at them and, and write up hypotheses. It may also be that you have a

somebody come in and look at them and, and write up hypotheses. It may also be that you have a student in your classroom that you feel you really know what the function is. And because this is a strategy that is non punitive, it's increasing skills, it is something we could use even before an FBA is completed. So it's something that if you pretty sure you know what functional behavior is, we can try to teach some replacement behaviors as a way to see if we're right. If it doesn't work, maybe our assessment was incorrect.

So the assessment doesn't have to be a long paperwork drawn out kind of thing. But it is really important that we're making our decisions based on the functional assessment and what we have determined the function of the behavior to be, because the replacement behavior is going to have to serve that same function. So using my example of an escape related behavior, it's important to know that I'm not just going to if he's getting up and running around the room as a way to escape from a situation, then the replacement behavior is not simply sitting in his seat. That's an incompatible behavior, but it doesn't actually replace the behavior, in this sense.

A replacement behavior would be something else that gets him out of work. And that leads us to why sometimes escape related behavior can be really difficult to wrap your head around.

Now, if you want more information on how to start a functional assessment, go to Episode 8, where I talk about the functions of the behavior. And there are a number of episodes after that one that will take you kind of through the process of a general FBA. And so as we go through the next few episodes, it's going to be important that you have a good understanding about what the functions of behaviors are. Episode 8 can help with that.

It's important that we choose the primary function, sometimes our students have more than one function of their behavior. So we're going to pick one that we're going to work on, and really focus in on. For escape related behavior. What this means is that we're going to teach the student a way to escape from that situation, that work demand that direction, whatever it is that our functional behavior assessment shows us they're trying to escape from. And that makes a really good point of the importance of really understanding what they're trying to escape from. Just a one word function is not helpful.

So I've got some episodes that I'll link in the show notes about how we write hypothesis statements that lead us to what these replacement behaviors should be. But if I have an escape related behavior, I need to teach them how to get away from that thing, or that person or that situation in a more appropriate way. Typically, that involves asking to do so.

Now I know that that seems really counterintuitive, to a classroom that's designed to teach students. We don't generally teach them to ask not to do something. But there are some really good reasons why we need to teach this skill. I realized it's a paradox with our high levels of our high standards, and the need to really focus on IEP goals and the curriculum and work on curriculum mastery to get students to grade level and things like that. And I think we're getting a lot of feedback about that

from all the people around the classroom. But it's really, really important that in order to be able to access the curriculum later, that we actually know a way to let somebody know that I need a safety valve, essentially.

So I realized that when I tell teachers that you should let a student choose not to complete something, that this seems very counterintuitive to your job. And I get it, I promise, but I'm going to ask you to do it anyway. Because if you do it right, you can go from getting out of work with that communication phrase, to getting back to work fairly quickly, as opposed to just continuing to fight it and fight it and fight it.

So, you know, first, there's some very good reasons why we want to do this. First, how much work are you really getting done for a student who's engaging in challenging behavior through the whole work time? Or how much socialization are you really able to teach if you are battling or dealing with challenging behavior during that whole activity?

So whatever time the challenging behaviors taking place, are you really accomplishing your goal In that sense, and are you really making the most use of your instructional time.

Second, in the long run, you can get more work done, when the behaviors have decreased, because you've taught the student to do something, before taking a break. I'm not going to stop it, he asked for a break, and he never has to do it, we're going to talk about how we build in actually doing the work.

Third, it's a lifelong skill. And it's a self regulation skill that you're teaching. So you're improving the quality of life for your student, and you're teaching them a skill that they can walk out of your classroom and to use in a wide variety of settings, to avoid someone else having to figure out how to address this behavior in the future.

So it's a lot easier to tell somebody, he needs a break every once awhile, but he'll tell you when he needs it, then to say no, you got to toe the line, or he's really going to, you're going to have to keep giving him work and make him do it. Because when we kind of hold them to that toe, the line kind of behavior management approach, and think that we can just extinguish the escape related behavior, one of the things that we run into is that the student may learn to do it with you, but not other people in your classroom, or certainly not other people outside the classroom.

Now, with all of that said, given that, especially with escape related behaviors, when we're teaching a kid to ask for a break, one of the things that we're struggling with is people understanding that one of the things I highly recommend is that we write goals for it in the IEP.

There are a number of reasons for that is. One is it's a really important skill. Two is the behavior is probably a really significant piece of his learning profile. And it's something that we need to really address and replacement behaviors can do that. And the third is that it helps everybody, administrators, families, other staff members, and you in your own internal dialogue, to understand that you are taking this time to teach a skill. And that skill is on their IEP. So this is not, quote unquote, wasted time. This is really, really important.

So let's talk a little bit about you have to know the function of the behavior. I talked about that. We have very early research from 1985 from Carr and Durand that shows, if we teach a communication strategy that doesn't serve the same function as the behavior, then it's not effective. So that is a really important component. But from that information, we need to choose what our replacement skill is going to be.

In the case of FCT, I'm going to talk about communication forms. And this is probably one of the biggest decisions in using functional communication training. Now Horner and Day in 1991, found that response efficiency is really the key to choosing your replacement behavior. And what response efficiency means is that the communication and response that you're teaching is getting reinforcement quicker, easier with less effort, and more consistently. And they found that when you taught a skill that had high levels of all or some of those, versus a skill that was low on those, you got a much better response with the ones that were highly efficient.

And this is actually what my master's thesis was on. The idea that the faster a student can get to reinforcement, the easier it is for them to display that skill, and the more consistently that it gets that outcome leads to high efficiency which leads to better and faster mastery of the skill.

A meta analysis by Walker and Snell and Walker et al in 2018, found that AAC as a part of this, it doesn't always have to be augmentative communication, but I often will start with something that a student can touch or hand me or physically do something so that I can prompt them. If a student is verbal, they will quickly switch to that because verbal is much more efficient than having to find a picture to give to somebody. But the ease and availability were really important components. And that means that the most efficient kind of strategy is going to win out.

So some guidelines for choosing that are choosing something that the student can already do. So choosing if he's using an augmentative communication device of his own, it might be his if he's not then it might be just exchanging a picture like the picture exchange communication system that I talked about, I think in Episode 197.

You also want to if it's not in his current repertoire, choose something he can acquire quickly. Tiger et al in 2008 did a review of the literature that was something that came out. Fisher & Bouxsein, in 2011 also found that using something that was simple to use, really made this a more effective process.

My dissertation but also my master's thesis actually looked at the interpretability of the skill that you're teaching when we taught a sign that other that some people knew and some people that didn't, because many of our students do what we call idiosyncratic signs, where the signs don't even look like ASL. And most of our participants, most people don't necessarily know ASL. That when they used ASL, they were more likely to have problems when somebody didn't know that sign than when they did.

Not surprising, there was a delay when they couldn't figure out what they wanted. So you want something that's going to get reinforced reliably, and you want it to be easily interpretable to other people, so that they can use it with multiple people and expand their generalization.

You also want to choose something that doesn't have a negative learning history. And I'll talk about that in next week's episode when I talk about a break. And I'll give you an example of a student that had experienced asking for a break meaning timeout. And that did not work. And that meant that that wasn't a great strategy for us to use. We had to look for some other kinds of communication. So I will talk in my next episode, I'm going to talk more about what a break looks like and how we need to put it together. Because it's a little bit more complex than just oh, okay, we're on a break, because that'll work for some students, but not others.

But it's important to remember that an escape related behavior is something that results from the student often being removed from that situation or leaving a specific situation. Doesn't have to be work related. It can be social, it could be environmental, it could be anything. But your break needs to take all of that in mind. So again, when we do our FBA, we want to have as much information about that as possible. And I will talk about that next week.

So once we have an idea about what our communication strategy is going to be. Whether it's handing you a card that says I need a break, whether it's hitting a button that says I need a break, or let me out of here, or I don't want to, or no thank you, as I had one student who used to use. Whether it is something that is verbal, and they're able to regularly echo and imitate you so you could use that.

Whatever that strategy is, it's not enough just to have the communication strategy, we have to actually teach it.

Now, we could teach it in a way that just kind of blends into the environment. The problem is that if we're really having significant challenging behavior related to escaping from a situation, chances are good that that natural situation doesn't always lend itself to really being able to remove the student.

You know, let's picture a cafeteria that a student engages in challenging behavior to be removed from the cafeteria, when maybe there's no one there to remove him or go stay with him if he leaves. So that may not be a good time to teach that skill, and we may be undermining ourselves.

So one of the things that I suggest to teachers to do is to do what we sometimes call strength training. That idea that I have to get my reps in just like with strength training in a workout, it's not enough to just, you know, make my bed and push my vacuum, I need more intensive instruction. And for students who have really challenging behavior, they need more intensive instruction. So we need to actually set up our strength training times.

We actually have some research that found that if we contrived situations, I sat down next to the student, and I said, Okay, it's time to do this, and immediately prompted him to ask for a break. And then I removed the work, and we took a break. And then we came back. And we did it again. And again, that would be contrived. That gives you more frequent opportunities to practice the skill, which leads to quicker acquisition. It gives you denser reinforcement over time. And that means that again, you're getting faster acquisition.

You will need to fade that and really build it into the naturalistic environment. We're not ignoring the rest of the class. But we really want to think about that. It does mean that they don't have we're not going through extinction of we can't do that right now, which will happen in the naturalistic environment. So we will still need to do some teaching there.

But the naturalistic environment where we just wait for a situation that we know he doesn't like and use that as our teaching opportunity, we get less frequent opportunities. They get more times where maybe escaping isn't an option, or someone doesn't know that that's the plan that could lead to more behavior because the reinforcements just been dropped. But the naturalistic environment like in motion instruction leads to better generalization to other places. So there are some pros and cons. But for most of our students that are really struggling with this, I would start with, with a contrived setup situation where you control more of the variables and then move out to more naturalistic instruction.

And what that means is that I typically set up a teaching situation of one to one work in the case of of escape related behavior, maybe it's work, maybe it's, I go one to one to the setting, he doesn't like to be in a one to one in a social situation, it depends on what your situation is. And I want to make sure that it's something that I have the ability for him to be able to access the break.

So I need to be able to have whatever I need for the break to take place. It doesn't have to be a calm down corner, it doesn't have to be separate areas of the room, it can literally be, here's a book, I had a parent who said, You do know that when he asked for a book, that basically means leave me alone, he puts the book up in front of his face, and you don't bother him anymore. Like you're absolutely right, that's his break. So that's an important component, don't think it has to be some big thing.

So choose a task in which you typically see these behaviors, set up that task, and create opportunities where you're going to be able to remind him to ask then we might use a social story.

And I've got some social stories I'll share with you at the end of the episode, where we actually tell a student how to do this, because for some of our students, if we give them that information, they can act on it. And we don't need as much of a step by step process. But for many of our students, they need the actual experience of having this work.

During this initial teaching, remember that what you're teaching is the communication response of asking for the break. It is not the work, quote, unquote, that you are trying to do. So it is not the math worksheet or the social interaction, it is the task of asking to be removed from a situation.

I will generally begin with a brief explanation now we're going to do some work. Remember, if you don't, don't want to work, you can tell me I need a break by hitting the switch or giving me a picture or a model. And if they're verbal, I'm going to set that situation up. And I'm going to wait and see if they initiate it.

But before I get to the point where challenging behavior starts, when I'm presenting the Math Worksheet, for example, I'm going to if I need to prompt them to make that request. It's not a very naturalistic protocol, but it helps them make the connection between communication and the outcome. And then they get reinforced immediately by having the work taken away, whatever your break is going to look like, which again, we'll talk about next week.

And then decide if the behavior continues to happen what are we going to do? And I have an episode I'll put in the show notes on responding to challenging behavior. But it might be that there's a short delay, and then we're going to prompt a replacement behavior again. It might be I'm going to continue to present the work demands or the task demands, and then re present. And I might reinforce the challenging behavior with a shorter period of the reinforcer and then reinforce the communication response with a higher value. So maybe he gets out of work for 30 seconds, versus getting out of work for 30 seconds plus getting high preferred activity. So I'm going to really boost up my reinforcement of the use of communication response and downplay my reinforcement for the challenging behavior.

And this is an important strategy to use. Because if we're going to rely on extinction, where we're engaged, we're letting the behavior just play out, many times it's going to escalate. And if it escalates to the point where we have to intervene, then we're going to escalate its severity by having to reinforce or attend to it, or remove them for that situation.

So if we can make a difference in how well the reinforcer get something more get something faster, easier, and better than the negative behavior or the challenging behavior, then that makes it more likely that they're going to use the communication form. And that's actually study by Davis et al in 2012, where they found that that strategy, it was challenging behavior was met with 30 seconds of

escape. And when they asked for a break, they got a higher value reinforcer, 30 seconds of escape, plus a high preferred activity. And they found that was effective for three out of four participants. So like with everything, not everything works for everyone. So try what you're doing on your students.

And then after that, after they've had the break, then we go back to work. And we do it again. And we do it again. You know, if they're reluctant to return to work, present the demands and immediately remind them that they can ask for a break. And so you're going to do that kind of rinse and repeat until they begin to get it.

Now obviously, you might work in a five minute session, or even a three minute session for some of our kids because it may be too much for them. Or maybe you don't have a lot of time to work with them in this situation. So you're going to do those little bursts as a way to really get this skill going. And then we're going to start moving it to reinforcement in a more natural level. Because when I asked to get out of things I don't give out of everything. And I'm guessing you don't either.

So we might, we're going to delay the reinforcer. So, okay, we're going to do one more problem. And then you can have your break. That's also called the chain schedule where we're embedding our demands, we might be using multiple schedules where maybe there's a cue that says this a break isn't available, now you can have a break, and then I take the visual off, when it breaks not available.

Maybe I get to the point where I start limiting the opportunities to gain reinforcement. So I get a set number of breaks cards. Now I'll talk in a future episode, I forget which one, about the ethical issues of removing the communication system. That I would not do. But I think we, you know, the, we have less research on limiting the opportunities. But for some of our students, that can work as a way. Many of your students will make this connection once they understand how it works. And they may not need us to do all this feigning. They may just go straight from Oh, I got it, and asking for a break, and then going, Oh, okay, I can wait. And you can just slowly increase how much work you're giving them.

And it's important when we're doing that you don't require them to make another request while they're doing it. So once they asked, they get it. If I said, Okay, we're gonna do one more problem, and then you get a break, he doesn't have to ask for a break, I don't push it. I don't push it go, Oh, he did it. So I'm gonna give him a second one. Now, I say, Oh, you did your one, now you get your break. I'm gonna hold up my end of the bargain. And I gotta be reliable, especially at this stage of the game. So be careful with that, because it's easy, easy to do.

And then, over time, we're going to gradually increase that waiting time. And then we're going to start moving into other settings, working with other trainers. And hopefully, the skills that we've taught are going to generalize because they're understandable to people, they make sense, and we've gotten them to a point where maybe it's not, you know, we're not taking a five minute break, we're taking a one minute break or a 30 seconds break.

And I've done this very effectively with individuals who were not verbal, who were using augmentative communication, who had intellectual disability, all different types of students, where we were able to go from taking a break for most of the day for really severe behaviors, to taking a break four to five minute sessions back. And that was it. And we did that in about three or four months. So it's important to recognize that this does not have to be a forever kind of task.

So those are my very long episode on ideas for teaching replacement behaviors for escape behavior. If you are looking for more information on functional communication training, we have a whole workshop on it, and a whole course on behavioral support and FBAs in the Special Educator Academy, so you can come check that out in the free trial at specialeducatoracademy.com.

If you are looking for tools to help you implement FCT and specifically for teaching and break, check out my calm down tools for self regulation in my store. It's got social stories, it's got visuals to help teaching requesting break, and it also has a protocol that breaks the skill down into steps that you can use. And you can get that at autismclassroomresources.com/calm-down.

And you can grab behavior data sheets for monitoring your students progress at autismclassroomresources.com/behavior-data-sheets, behavior data sheets with hyphens between the words.

Finally, if you want to get started with preventing challenging behavior, check out our free webinar at autismclassroomresources.com/behavior-webinar. And I really hope that you are enjoying and will enjoy the behavior series on the podcast.

Don't forget to hop over to Apple podcasts and leave a rating and review. That really helps other people to find me and for hopefully me to get some strategies out to people who are really struggling in the classroom. And I'd also really love to hear from you. Talk to you soon.

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