UC Davis
UC Davis Previously Published Works

Title

Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7st1m399

Journal

Teaching Exceptional Children, 54(5)

ISSN

0040-0599

Authors

Chan, Janice
Suhrheinrich, Jessica
Rieth, Sarah
et al.

Publication Date

2022-05-01

DOI

10.1177/00400599221095301

Peer reviewed

Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching

Janice Chan[1,2], Jessica Suhrheinrich[1,2], Sarah Rieth[2,3], Aubyn C. Stahmer[4]

[1]*Department of Special Education, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA*
[2]*Child and Adolescent Services Research Center, San Diego, CA, USA*
[3]*Department of Child and Family Development, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA*
[4]*Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of California, Davis, Davis, CA, USA*

Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching

IDEA 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 (NDBI). NDBI 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). Further, NDBI are recognized as an evidence-based practice (Steinbrenner et al., 2020). One example of 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 have reported 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 plans (Stahmer et al., 2012). Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching was developed in response to these reported barriers (CPRT; 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., Rieth et al., 2014). In two recent investigations, researchers found that 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., under review).

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 which 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 following components described in Table 1.

Table 1

Components of Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching

CPRT Component	Description
Gain student attention	Ensure the student is paying attention before delivering an instruction.
Use clear and developmentally	Be clear as to what behavior is expected of the student, and

Chan, J., Suhrheinrich, J., Rieth, S., & Stahmer, A. C. (2022). Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children.* https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599221095301

appropriate cues	use words 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.

One of the greatest strengths of CPRT, is that is 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 motivation in two different classroom lessons.

Application Example 1:

Activity: Counting to 10 with one-to-one correspondence

Chan, J., Suhrheinrich, J., Rieth, S., & Stahmer, A. C. (2022). Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children.* https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599221095301

Materials: A box of character figurines, a box of animal figurines, a ten-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 ten-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, offer 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 supporting 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 support educational programming in typical school settings. Though 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.

Chan, J., Suhrheinrich, J., Rieth, S., & Stahmer, A. C. (2022). Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children.* https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599221095301

References

Koegel, R. L., & Koegel, L. K. (2006). *Pivotal response treatments for autism: Communication, social, & academic development*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.

Reed, S., Stahmer, A.C., Suhrheinrich, J., & Schreibman, L. (2013). Stimulus overselectivity in typical development: Implications for teaching children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 43(6),* 1249-1257. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1658-x

Rieth, S.R., Schreibman, L., Stahmer, A.C., Suhrheinrich, J., Kennedy, J., & Ross, B. (2014). Identifying critical elements of treatment: Examining the use of turn taking in autism intervention. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 29(3),* 168-179. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357613513792

Schreibman, L., Dawson, G., Stahmer, A.C., Landa, R., McGee, G., Kasari, C., Ingersoll, B., Kaiser, A., Rogers, S.J., Bruinsma, Y., McNeriney, E., Wetherby, A., Hallaway, A.

Chan, J., Suhrheinrich, J., Rieth, S., & Stahmer, A. C. (2022). Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children.* https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599221095301

(2015). Naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions: Empirically validated treatments for autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 45(8),* 2411-2428. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2407-8

Stahmer, A. C., Collings, N. M., & Palinkas, L. A. (2005). Early intervention practices for children with autism: Descriptions from community providers. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 20*(2), 66-79. https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576050200020301

Stahmer, A. C., Suhrheinrich, J., Reed, S., & Schreibman, L. (2012). What works for you? Using teacher feedback to inform adaptations of an evidence-based practice for classroom use. *Autism Research and Treatment, 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/709861*

Steinbrenner, J. R., Hume, K., Odom, S. L., Morin, K. L., Nowell, S. W., Tomaszewski, B., ... & Savage, M. N. (2020). Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism. *FPG Child Development Institute*.

Suhrheinrich, J., Stahmer, A. C., Reed, S., & Schreibman, L., Reisinger, E. & Mandell, D. (2013). Implementation challenges in translating pivotal response training into community settings. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 43*(12), 2970-2976. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-013-1826-7

Suhrheinrich, J., Rieth, S. R., Dickson, K. S., Roesch, S., & Stahmer, A. C. (2020). Classroom pivotal response teaching: Teacher training outcomes of a community efficacy trial. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *43(3),* 215-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406419850876