ABSTRACT

Two young boys diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) displayed excessively slow responding when engaging in task demands and conversations with both adults and peers.

Results of a single-function functional analysis indicated that slow responding to intraverbal (conversational questions) occurred in response to being presented with questions relating to non-preferred items or activities (e.g., academic tasks). Subsequently, a function-based intervention was introduced to increase fluent responding.

Results indicated that contingent escape was not effective in decreasing response latencies for one participant and the addition of a positive reinforcement contingency did not result in significant increases in fluent responding.

These findings highlight the importance of developing effective interventions that can improve the social interactions and educational gains of children with ASD. Some limitations of these findings, as well as areas for future study, are briefly discussed.

METHOD

Participants, Setting, Response Definition and Data Collection

Two children with ASD participated in this study. Evan and Isaac demonstrated extremely long latencies to respond to intraverbal questions. Therapists conducted all sessions in a small therapy room of a private facility that provided behavior analytic services. Sessions were 5 minutes in duration. Therapists conducted 3-5 sessions, 1-2 days per week. The session room was typically equipped with a few small tables, chairs, some toys, and often another therapist and student.

Fluent responding was defined as beginning to emit a vocal response within 3 seconds of the ID (i.e., question being asked).

Functional Analysis

Results of a single-function analysis indicated that both participants demonstrated low rates of fluent responding when presented with non-preferred intraverbal questions compared with preferred questions. These questions were identified through a high probability assessment prior to conducting the functional analysis.

Experimental Design and Procedures

In the baseline conditions, participants were asked a variety of non-preferred intraverbal questions following approximately 3 alternative tasks (e.g., tacting, echoics, etc.). In the intraverbal escape phase, therapists provided escape from the intraverbal task by returning to alternative tasks if the participant responded within 3 seconds. The participant was given 3 opportunities to respond to the question prior to the next trial being presented. Escape from the intraverbal task could be accessed at any point during the 3 attempts. Next an escape phase was introduced whereby the participants could access 30 seconds of escape from all tasks following a fluent response to a non-preferred intraverbal question. This was again available at any point during the 3 attempts. In the first attempt phase, participants were able to escape all demands for 30 seconds only if they responded fluently on the first presentation of a non-preferred intraverbal task. For Evan, an escape plus positive reinforcement phase was introduced. A multiple stimulus without replacement (MSWR) preference assessment was conducted prior to each session. Evan was provided with 30 seconds of escape plus access to his preferred item following fluent responses to non-preferred intraverbal questions.

RESULTS

The overall results, to date, across participants are mixed. Figure 3 shows the percentage of questions that Isaac responded to fluently across the various phases. As a whole, results across the phases show that escape from tasks alone is not sufficient to increase fluent responding, and the addition of a reinforcer did not result in a significant increase in fluency. Figure 4 depicts the percentage of questions that Isaac responded to fluently across phases. Results demonstrate that escape from tasks demands did result in increased fluent responding and Isaac met criterion to increase the number of consecutive fluent responses required prior to accessing escape.

REFERENCES


