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EMPIRICAL REPORT

Correspondence Training Using Special Interests to Increase Compliance During Transitions: An Emerging Technology

Robert W. Huffman[1] · **Diane M. Sainato**[1] · **Emily S. L. Curiel**[1]

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During a typical school day, most pre-school and elementary students engage in multiple transitions between activities (Sterling-Turner and Jordan 2007). As students may spend an average of 25 % of their day engaged in transition, their ability to quickly move between activities is considered an important behavior for school success (Sainato et al. 1987; Schmit et al. 2000). Often, classroom transition times are unstructured, with ambiguous behavioral expectations, and may be particularly difficult for students with special needs. Such transitions may decrease opportunities for meaningful engagement and elicit or set the occasion for challenging behaviors to occur (Dettmer et al. 2000; Sainato 1990; Sterling-Turner and Jordan 2007).

The importance of implementing effective strategies for transition times on a class-wide level has been noted in the literature (Sainato 1990; Witt et al. 1999; Henley 2006). These strategies include minimizing wait time, teaching class-wide transition rules, and providing warnings prior to transitions (Sterling-Turner and Jordan 2007). When class-wide procedures fail to increase the independent performance of students with developmental disabilities, concurrent individualized behavioral interventions may be necessary to support the student. Empirically validated interventions include those incorporating high-probability requests (Ardoin et al. 1999), visual activity schedules (Cihak 2011; Hume et al. 2014), and video modeling (Cihak et al. 2009). Additional strategies implemented for individual children include those focusing on antecedent prompt procedures and peer mediation (Sainato et al. 1987), differential reinforcement of other behavior and extinction (Wilder et al. 2006), and the use of a multi-component "Power Card" (Angell et al. 2011). While these interventions show promising results for increasing compliance and on-task behavior during transitions, additional research is needed to generate strategies to increase self-management skills of students with special needs, thereby facilitating independent performance during daily transitions.

Correspondence Training

Correspondence training is one strategy used in applied research to increase self-management skills in young children. Risley and Hart's (1968) seminal study used correspondence training to establish a generalized correspondence between children's vocal and non-vocal behavior. Three other correspondence procedures have been developed and categorized as "say-do," "do-say," and "say-do-report." The say-do procedure consists of asking children to verbalize plans to perform a behavior (the "say" component) and providing reinforcement if they engaged in the target behavior as verbalized (the "do" component) (Bevill-Davis et al. 2004). The do-say procedure consists of providing the child an opportunity to perform the desired behavior and then providing reinforcement for accurate reporting of that performance. The say-do-report procedure consists of asking children to verbalize plans to perform a behavior, providing an opportunity to perform the behavior and then providing reinforcement for correspondence between vocal and non-vocal behavior. This correspondence training

✉ Diane M. Sainato
sainato.1@osu.edu

[1] Department of Educational Studies, College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, A354 PAES Building, 305 West 17th Ave., Columbus, OH 43210-1224, USA

procedure (say-do-report) has demonstrated the highest level of empirical support (Bevill-Davis et al. 2004).

Since the Risley and Hart's (1968) study, several researchers have tested the impact of correspondence training on the use of play materials (Baer et al. 1985; De Freitas Ribeiro 1989), on-task behavior (Bevill et al. 2001; Morrison et al. 2002; Machalicek et al. 2009), social behaviors (Odom and Watts 1991; Osnes et al. 1986; Rogers-Warren and Baer 1976), compliance (Ruiz-Olivarez et al. 2010; Weninger and Baer 1990), self-care skills (Stokes et al. 2004), and verbally mediated responses (Lima and Rodrigues 2010). Although previous research findings for correspondence training validate this intervention for increasing desired behaviors, research is still limited on using correspondence training to facilitate independent performance during classroom transitions.

Special Interests

Over the past two decades, researchers designed interventions incorporating special interests to increase social skills (Baker et al. 1998; Koegel et al. 2012) and cooperative play (Baker 2000) for individuals on the autism spectrum. Recently, The Power Card strategy (Gagnon 2001), an intervention that provides visual and written cues to match a desired behavior to that of the individual's special interest, has been used to increase compliance (Angell et al. 2011; Campbell and Tincani 2011) and social skills (Keeling et al. 2003; Spencer et al. 2008). Although the Power Card strategy and the use of special interests have been documented over the past 20 years, research is needed on the generality of this intervention across various disabilities and pre-school age children.

Bambara and Knoster (1998) suggest that the most effective interventions in the field of applied behavior analysis consist of treatment packages rather than the use of single-component interventions. Given this rationale, a multi-component treatment package consisting of correspondence training (say-do-report), and task analytic picture cues of a special interest character, was designed to measure the effectiveness of increasing compliance and during daily pre-school transitions. To date, the use of embedded special interests with *correspondence training* and *task analytic picture cues* has not been explored in applied research. We developed this treatment package to increase the participant's overall compliance and on-task behavior during transitions.

Method

Participant and Setting

This study was conducted in an inclusive half-day pre-school classroom that was in session 4 days a week (Monday–Thursday). Five children with developmental delays and five of their peers comprised the classroom group. The participant in this study was a 6-year-old boy named Matt who was diagnosed with Down syndrome. Matt was verbal, speaking in two- to three-word sentences consisting of mostly functional communication (i.e., requesting and greetings). Matt was selected for this study due to a history of exhibiting challenging behaviors (i.e., non-compliance) toward teachers during daily transitions in the classroom. Response topographies of his noncompliance consisted of refusing to move toward the designated activity, yelling "no," and throwing materials. A review of Matt's Individual Education Program reported the outcome of a functional assessment conducted by the school psychologist 2 months prior to the start of the study. The components of the functional behavior assessment were as follows: (a) parent and teacher interviews, (b) scatterplots, and (c) A-B-C observations. The functional assessment suggested that his challenging behaviors during transitions were maintained by positive reinforcement in the form of teacher attention.

Prior to the experimental conditions, the experimenter administered The Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development II (Brigance and Glascoe 2010) to determine Matt's age-equivalent scores in the developmental domains relevant to this study. The results of the assessment were as follows: cognition, 32 months; expressive language, 29 months; receptive language, 36 months; and social-emotional skills, 30 months.

This study was conducted during three daily classroom transitions, in which Matt exhibited high rates of non-compliance. These were the cleanup time after free play, hand washing before snack, and the transition from group instruction to table work.

Materials

Matt's educational records stated that picture cues and activity schedules had been used but were not effective for increasing compliance and on-task behavior during transitions. Therefore, the experimenter interviewed the classroom teachers and Matt's parents to identify a high-interest character or person to be incorporated into the task analytic picture cues. They noted that Matt was often observed imitating the actions of a monthly classroom visitor, "Rockin' Ronnie." Rockin' Ronnie was a character created by the lead teacher, who dressed as a "rock star" to sing children's favorite songs and conduct circle time instruction. The experimenter, who was also the lead teacher, often incorporated music during circle time with his guitar but appeared as Rockin' Ronnie once a month to create a novel environment for circle time.

Each of the three experimental settings (transition activities) for this study was divided into a four-step task analysis.

Next, three 51×76-cm poster boards (one per setting) were created, each depicting picture cues of Rockin' Ronnie modeling the desired behaviors corresponding to the steps of the task analysis. Furthermore, the fourth step of each transition activity included an imitative behavior of Rockin' Ronnie, consisting of Matt raising both hands in the air and saying "rock and roll" to signal the completion of the transition activity. This was a behavior Matt often imitated throughout the school day and was incorporated into the final step of the task analysis to increase the reinforcing value of the activity (Baker 2000). The four-step task analytic picture cues of Rockin' Ronnie were attached to the left side of the board from top to bottom in chronological order of the task analysis. Next to each picture cue were two columns, labeled "yes" and "no," each with "happy" and "sad" faces of Rockin' Ronnie. Matt was not able to read, so the addition of happy and sad faces was used to support his understanding of each column. Additionally, two 2.5×2.5-cm pictures of guitars were laminated and placed under each picture cue. The first guitar served as a visual symbol for Matt's forecast to engage in the transition activity, and the second guitar served as a visual symbol for the experimenter's observation of Matt's behavior. These symbols were added to serve as visual referents so Matt could see whether or not his responses corresponded with the experimenter's observations (Sainato 1990).

In addition to the poster boards, a Rockin' Ronnie treasure box was created to use as reinforcement during the intervention sessions. This was a 22×16-cm wooden box that included a picture of Rockin' Ronnie on the front. The treasure box included highly preferred items determined by the classroom teachers to be effective reinforcers.

Dependent Variables and Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to increase Matt's compliance during daily transitions. The three dependent variables were on-task behavior, compliance, and the number of correct occurrences of correspondence (say-do-report). *On-task behavior* was defined as any purposeful manipulation of classroom materials while replicating the steps of the transition activity. *Compliance* was defined as initiating the transition activity within 6-s independent of experimenter prompts. *Correspondence* was defined as verbally forecasting with the experimenter to complete the transition steps and accurately reporting back after the transition activity. Three data collection procedures were used to measure the participant and experimenter's behaviors throughout the study. These data collection procedures were as follows: (1) 10-s whole interval recording, (2) latency, and (3) event recording. Each experimental session was recorded using a Flip Video Camera©. The participant's on-task behavior was measured by using a 10-s whole interval recording procedure. Percentage of intervals for on-task behavior was calculated by the following formula: total number of on-task intervals divided by the total number of intervals multiplied by 100. Compliance was examined using latency recording (via a stop watch) that consisted of measuring the total duration of elapsed time (seconds) between the experimenter's request to initiate the transition activity and the participant's response to begin the given transition. Therefore, once the participant initiated the transition, whole interval recording was then used to measure the participant's on-task behavior for the duration of the transition activity and any refusal behaviors were coded as off-task for the given 10-s interval. Correspondence was measured using event recording to examine the number of independent correspondences during each treatment session. In addition, event recording was used to collect data on experimenter prompts and behaviors that were outlined in the procedural integrity checklist for the corresponding experimental condition.

Research Design

A multiple baseline design across settings (transitions) was used to investigate the effectiveness of the correspondence training intervention package on compliance and on-task behavior during daily transitions. The three experimental conditions of this study consisted of baseline, correspondence training package, and maintenance probes.

Experimental Conditions

Baseline The general class-wide procedures employed during transitions in Matt's classroom were also used during the baseline conditions. This set of procedures consisted of (a) notifying students' about the transition 2 min prior to the transition, (b) group directive (i.e., "it is cleanup time") to the class to engage in the transition activity, and (c) the delivery of one least to most prompt (verbal-gestural-physical) per minute if Matt did not initiate the transition activity after 15-s from the initial group directive. The exception to this prompting protocol consisted of additional prompts (verbal-gestural-physical) if Matt exhibited aggressive behaviors (hitting, kicking, or throwing items) at any time during the given transition.

Correspondence Training Package Prior to each transition, Matt was asked to meet with the experimenter and was shown the poster board depicting the task analytic picture cues of Rockin' Ronnie modeling the behaviors of the transition activity (see Fig. 1.) Next, the experimenter verbally reviewed every step of the transition and asked Matt if he was going to do each step of the transition activity. The participant's verbalizations during forecasting and reporting were modified to yes or no responses due to his expressive language delays.

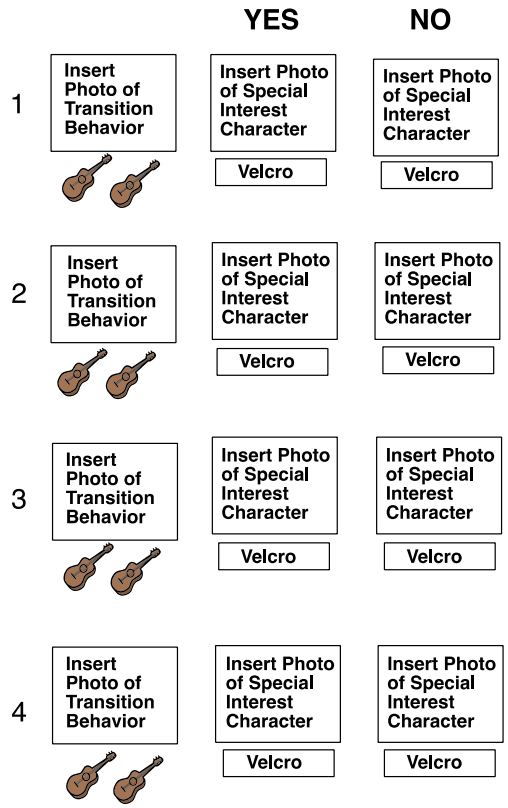

Fig. 1 Correspondence training board

For example, the experimenter said, "Matt, it is your Rockin' Ronnie cleanup board. Rockin' Ronnie always cleans up, so now you tell Rockin' Ronnie you will do it, too. Matt are you going to pick up the blocks like Rockin' Ronnie?" If Matt said yes, he put the guitar icon on the yes column. After Matt forecasted that he would do all four steps of the transition, the experimenter told Matt, "Okay, now go clean up like you said you would do!" If Matt did not comply or initiate the task within 15-s, the experimenter pointed to the poster board depicting the picture cues and reminded him of the four steps of transition activity. Additional general prompts (i.e., "Matt, clean up like Rockin' Ronnie") were delivered (1 per 60-s) if Matt was observed to be off-task for six consecutive 10-s intervals. This prompting protocol remained constant through all experimental conditions to rule out prompting as the cause for increased compliance and on-task behavior. After the transition, Matt met with the experimenter who asked (in turn) if Matt had engaged in each of the four steps of the transition. The experimenter started every reporting session by saying, "Okay Matt, it is time to tell Rockin' Ronnie if you cleaned up." If Matt said yes when asked if he did the given step of the transition activity, and his actions matched his original forecast, the experimenter put his guitar in the yes column. Social attention in the form of praise was provided to reinforce Matt's verbal/non-verbal behavior correspondence (i.e., "Matt, you said you were going to pick up the blocks, and you really did it!"). If Matt completed three out of the four steps of the transition, he was given access to one item from his Rockin' Ronnie treasure box. This same procedure was followed for the subsequent transition settings.

Maintenance Probes These conditions were identical to baseline, with this one altered instruction, "Matt, you have been doing a great job with cleaning up, so go clean up now!" Maintenance probes were replicated twice during the cleanup setting but were only examined once in the other two settings due to time constraints with the end of the school year.

Interobserver Agreement and Procedural Integrity

We assessed interobserver agreement (IOA) by having a second observer independently record data for 50 % of baseline sessions, 25–30 % of intervention sessions, and 50 % of maintenance and follow-up sessions. Prior to collecting IOA data, the first author trained the second observer by operationally defining the response measurements of the dependent variables, providing instruction on how to use the data collection procedures, and then conducting data collection training sessions. The second observer was one of the classroom teachers and also an undergraduate student in special education. During each IOA training session, the second observer viewed the videotapes of sessions that consisted of Matt engaging in the same transitions that were used in each experimental condition. The criterion for starting the collection of interobserver agreement data was the second observer being able to accurately define the response measurements of the dependent variables and three consecutive training sessions with 98 % or higher IOA data between the first author and second observer. IOA for percentage of intervals of on-task behavior was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and then multiplying by 100 to get a percentage (Cooper et al. 2007). Agreements were defined as both observers recording the occurrence or non-occurrence of on-task behavior per 10-s interval. The mean and range of interobserver agreement for percentage of intervals on-task during baseline were 98.5 % (91–100 %), intervention 95.3 % (90–100 %), and maintenance 98.6 % (95–100 %), and follow-up sessions were 100 %. IOA for latency recording was calculated by dividing the shorter latency time by the longer latency time and then multiplying by 100 (Cooper et al. 2007). Mean interobserver agreement for latency during baseline were 100 % and intervention 99.5 % (98–100 %), while maintenance and follow-up sessions were 100 %. In addition, IOA was calculated on the correspondence between the participant's forecasting to engage in the specific transition activities and his actual performance during those activities. Agreements were defined as both

observers recording the correspondence between occurrence and non-occurrence of the participant forecasting to engage or not engage in the transition activity and his behaviors during the transition activities. IOA was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and then multiplying by 100. Mean interobserver agreement for the say-do-report correspondence was 100 % across sessions.

To assess procedural integrity, a checklist (available from the authors) was completed following each session outlining the procedures of each experimental condition. During baseline conditions, the procedural integrity checklist included four components identifying the experimenter's behaviors. These included whether or not the following occurred: (a) an individualized prompt was delivered 2 min prior to transitions, (b) a group directive was delivered to the class to engage in transition activities, (c) the participant received an additional prompt within 15 s of the group directive, and (d) the delivery of one verbal prompt per 60-s interval if the child was observed to be continuously off-task. Procedural integrity was calculated by dividing the number of checks for each component of the checklist by the total number of checks and then multiplying by 100 (Campbell and Tincani 2011). Procedural integrity was 100 % during all baseline conditions. IOA was taken on 30 % of sessions and was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and then multiplying by 100. An agreement was defined as both experimenter and second observer recording the occurrence or non-occurrence of the experimenter's behaviors during each component of the procedural checklist. IOA during all baseline conditions was 100 %.

As in the baseline condition, a checklist was completed following each intervention session. This checklist included 14 components outlining the experimenter's behaviors during each of the three steps of the correspondence training package (say-do-report). The mean and range for procedural integrity and IOA data were as follows: (a) cleanup 97 % (93–100 %), (b) hand washing 98.2 % (95.5–100 %), and (c) table time 100 %. IOA during all intervention conditions was 100 %.

Social Validity

The classroom teacher and paraprofessional completed a survey adapted from the *Treatment Acceptability Rating Form-Revised* (Reimers and Wacker 1988) to evaluate their acceptance and understanding of the intervention as well as if they would use the intervention in the future. The survey consisted of eight questions presented on a seven-point Likert-type scale and is available from the authors.

Results

Baseline Figure 2 depicts Matt's percentage of intervals of on-task behavior during each experimental condition. The mean and range for percentage of intervals on-task were as follows: (a) cleanup 14 % (0–45 %), (b) hand washing 0.7 % (0–6 %), and (c) table time 7.9 % (0–72 %). Figure 3 depicts Matt's latency response time to initiate the transitions when instructed by the experimenter. The mean and range of Matt's latency response time were as follows: (a) cleanup 145 s (40–180), (b) hand washing 180 s during every baseline session, and (c) table time 139 s (5–180).

Correspondence Training Package The use of a correspondence training package increased Matt's compliance in initiating each transition and in his overall on-task behavior during the transitions. Figure 2 depicts Matt's percentage of intervals of on-task behavior throughout all three settings during intervention. The mean and range for percentage of intervals on-task were as follows: (a) cleanup 88.7 % (5–100 %), (b) hand washing 87.6 % (67–100 %), and (c) table time 100 %. Figure 3 illustrates

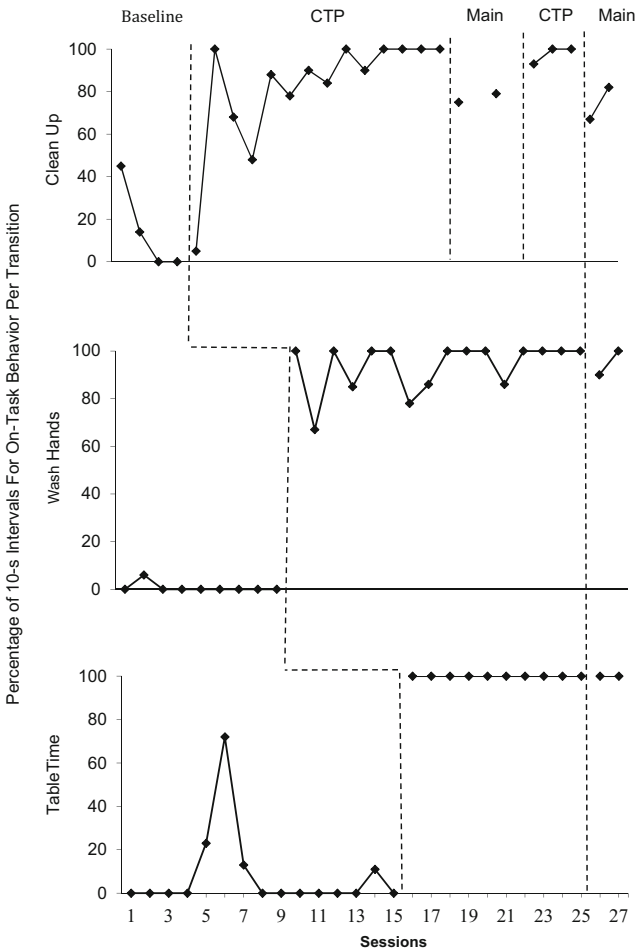

Fig. 2 Matt's on-task behavior for each setting

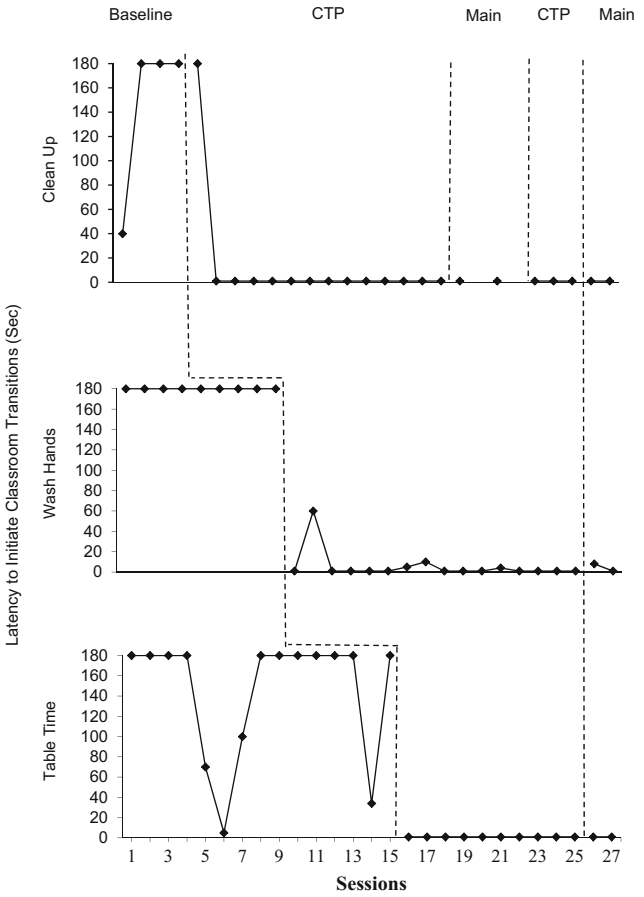

Fig. 3 Matt's latency data to initiate classroom transitions

Matt's latency time in initiating each transition once instructed by the experimenter. The mean and range across all three transitions during intervention were as follows: (a) cleanup 9 s (1–180), (b) hand washing 6 s (1–60), and (c) table time 1 s (automatic compliance) for every session during intervention.

Maintenance The mean and range of percentage of intervals for on-task behavior during maintenance probes for all three transitions were as follows: (a) cleanup 77.7 % (67–82 %), (b) hand washing 95 % (90–100 %), and (c) table time 100 %. The mean and range of Matt's latency time for all three transitions were as follows: (a) cleanup=1 s for both sessions, (b) hand washing=4.5 s (1–8), and (c) table time=1 s for both sessions.

Matching with Experimenter: Say-Do-Report Correspondence

The third dependent variable measured in this study was the correspondence between Matt's antecedent verbalizations to complete all four steps of the given transition activity and his actual behavior during the transition activity with an accurate report back to the experimenter. Correspondence data were only collected during intervention sessions. The mean and range of say-do-report correspondence during cleanup were 97 % (0–100 %), hand washing 93 % (75–100 %), and table time 100 %.

Experimenter Prompts

The mean and range of experimenter prompts during baseline were as follows: (a) cleanup 4.5 (3–8), (b) hand washing 4.4 (3–8), and (c) table time 3.8 (2–8). Throughout the baseline condition, Matt exhibited a high frequency of challenging behavior that required the experimenters to deliver more than one prompt per minute The mean and range of experimenter prompts during Correspondence Training Package (CTP) were as follows: (a) cleanup 1.4 (0–5), (b) hand washing 1.7 (0–2), and (c) table time 0.1 (0–1). During maintenance, the mean and range of experimenter prompts were (a) cleanup=1.5 (1–2), (b) hand washing=0 prompts, and (c) table time=0 prompts.

Social Validity

The mean and range of the teacher and paraprofessional's responses were 6.8 (6–7) and 6.6 (6–7), respectively, indicating their acceptance of the intervention and the possibility of using these procedures in the future. The classroom teacher also commented on the survey that Matt's parents were satisfied with the intervention and were interested in using this intervention at home.

Discussion

This study examined the effects of a correspondence training package for increasing compliance and on-task behavior during transitions in a pre-school classroom. The use of a correspondence training intervention incorporating special interests increased Matt's compliance with teacher requests to initiate and complete daily classroom transition activities. Matt's classroom teachers noted that the intervention was effective and easy to implement in the classroom.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research findings demonstrating an increase in desired behaviors using a correspondence training package. Three studies, Morrison et al. (2002), Bevill et al. (2001), and Machalicek et al. (2009), each combined correspondence training with activity schedules and/or visual cues to increase engagement with either classroom materials or playground equipment. Our study differed in that the visual cues employed were photographs of a high-interest character modeling the desired behaviors of the targeted activities. First, a high-interest character was identified and incorporated into the

intervention. Second, each transition activity was broken down into a task analysis demonstrated by picture cues of the high-interest character. Another modification to the use of visual cues was related to the sequence of the task analysis. One of Matt's perseverative behaviors (i.e., imitating Rockin' Ronnie) was included as the final step for each of the three task analyses used during the intervention to establish additional reinforcement in the behavior chain (Baker 2000). Matt's teachers reported that they attempted correspondence training and visual cues for several occasions throughout the school year with minimal results. Therefore, the outcomes from this study suggest that the incorporation of special interests into correspondence training and/or task analytic visual cues may be an effective modification to these interventions for individuals who engage in a high frequency of preservative behaviors related to a special interest character.

Implications for Classroom Practice

This study yields several implications for practice. The materials used in this intervention were inexpensive, and the posters with task analytic picture cues were created in a minimal amount of time. Although the high-interest character in this study was fictional, a teacher could conduct a preference assessment to confirm the child's high-interest character and then incorporate those pictures into a task analytic picture sequence depicting the desired behaviors during classroom transitions. Additionally, the say-do-report correspondence training sequence is a procedure that can be conducted in a short amount of time, thereby alleviating the problem of implementing an intervention that disrupts the flow of the classroom. The following notes guidelines for implementing this intervention:

1. Identify the student's perseverative character of interest and gather images of that character to use for the correspondence training board.
2. Develop a task analysis of the targeted transition setting and take photographs or make visuals that depict each step of the task analysis.
3. Identify the visual icon the participant and teacher will use to represent the match between the participant's say-do-reporting on the correspondence training board (see "Materials" section).
4. Find a quiet and convenient space to take the participant to implement the intervention prior to and after the transition (forecasting and reporting).
5. During implementation of the intervention, ensure the participant understands he/she is forecasting and reporting his/her behaviors to the perseverative character.
6. Provide reinforcement and specific praise (i.e., "you told Rockin Ronnie you were going to pick up the toys and you really did it") for engaging in the forecasted behaviors of the transition.

Future Research and Limitations

The results from the functional behavior assessment suggested that Matt's non-compliance was maintained by positive reinforcement in the form of attention. During correspondence training, the antecedent (forecasting) and consequence events (reporting) were paired with experimenter attention. Therefore, the say-do-report sequence may have capitalized on the reinforcing function of attention, given that Matt received presession and consequent access to teacher attention, thereby possibly establishing a confound variable to the data (O'Reilly et al. 2007). However, future investigations should examine the effects of using correspondence training to treat challenging behavior maintained by attention. Currently, educational research for incorporating special interests into non-preferred activities is currently limited to students on the autism spectrum. The participant in our study was a pre-school child with Down syndrome. Future research on the effects of incorporating special interests to increase desired behaviors pertaining to students with Down syndrome and multiple disabilities may support the generality of this intervention across populations of students with special needs.

This study also employed a multi-component intervention package; therefore, it is uncertain which component or arrangement of strategies facilitated an increase with compliance and on-task behavior. A component analysis consists of systematically examining the individual components of an intervention package by analyzing their effects on modifying behavior (Deitz 1982; Stokes et al. 2004). A component analysis may be conducted to confirm if correspondence training, task analytic picture cues of a high-interest character, positive reinforcement, or the combination contributed to the profound increase in compliance and on-task behavior during daily classroom transitions. Further, a comprehensive analogue functional behavior analysis was not administered in this study. Matt's non-compliance may have been multiply maintained by escape/attention. The addition of special interests may have "enriched" the classroom transitions contributing to additional treatment factors to the results of this intervention. A further limitation to the study with regards to experimental control occurred when CTP was introduced during cleanup. At this point, latency to compliance decreased during sessions 5, 6, and 7 during the table time transition. However, Matt's latency to compliance baseline data stabilized for the subsequent baseline sessions. Although additional research is needed to support the validity of this correspondence training package, our results illustrate an emerging technology for increasing compliance and on-task behavior during classroom transitions.

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