Proposal for Determining How to Gain/Maintain Authority with an Engaging

Syllabus for Students Age 5 to 10 (on the Autistic Spectrum)

for

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Abstract

The COVID pandemic has seen many classrooms moving from in-person to online sessions. Online the dynamic of the "classroom" is very different and it can prove to be difficult to teach kids through this media. The purpose of this study is to create a guide for teachers, specifically Behavioural Interventionists, struggling to maintain or gain authority and therefore the attention of the kid(s) being taught. A short literature review was conducted to further understand the importance and types of authority that can play a role in the classroom. Three interviews were conducted, through the phone or via an emailed document, with two Behavioural Interventionists and one Behavioural Consultant. These interviews established guiding points each Behavioural Interventionists should take when teaching their lessons. In general, the length of a lesson should be increased over time to help adjust the child to learning for the two hours. At first, easy questions should be asked to establish a rapport with the child and ease any tensions of adjustment between the child and teacher. Lessons, especially for young children should be built into a narrative to increase interest in the subject material. Many choices should be afforded to the child throughout the lesson, with rewards as well as with lesson type, as the illusion of choice will increase the likelihood of participation. Ensure that "no, means no" to maintain the idea that the words of the teacher are final and inflexible. Finally, when needed parents should assist the Behavioural Interventionist by either providing rewards at the end of lessons or sitting with the child to establish the importance of listening and participation.

Introduction

Since the middle of March 2020, Covid-19 has had enormous impacts on education. Schools across British Columbia, and the rest of the world, have had to shut down due to their potential to be huge transmission sites for the virus. Education is a vital aspect of our society and essential for future generations' success and survival, and so there have been huge efforts to continue education in whatever way is possible. For most teachers, this means moving to an online platform.

This transition can be a big struggle for educators, not only adjusting to a new platform but finding a way to capture the attention of children in an enriching and engaging way online. For Behavioral Interventionists, those teaching children on the autistic spectrum, the changeover can be even harder. Screens have proved to be a very difficult platform for the delivery of education to children, who face what can be hours of online learning, sitting in the same place, with all the distractions of the internet right at their fingertips. Authority, because of this, is essential for a teacher to run lessons smoothly. In many cases, it is the key to keeping the children abiding by their instructions.

Teachers lacking authority in the online platform can waste hours trying to gain the attention of students. This means that the children are not getting the instructional time required and accumulating knowledge that they may need to continue their education. The implication is that time, energy, and money are being wasted due to the difficulties of online education, and there is an enormous need to find more efficient and effective ways to assist teachers during this pandemic. This problem has become especially

prominent for Behavioral Interventionists and has led to many team meetings trying to address various difficult situations.

One of the proposed solutions is to make a guide for teachers, specifically Behavioral Interventionists, to gain authority in an online platform while complying with program requirements. Most students in a traditional classroom setting learn to respect the teacher because the teacher is (most often) the only adult in the classroom and who also tends to have the ability to reprimand any behavior that disrupts the teaching environment. Online, however, reprimanding is far less effective online, especially with young children, and therefore there needs to be new ways to make this authoritative connection with the students. With the creation of a guide to gain authority for Behavioral Interventionists online, there should be not only a quicker transition to the online platform but a savings of time, energy, and money. This guide will be created with input from a group of Behavioral Interventionists sharing their experience with teaching online and describing techniques that proved to be more effective than others for addressing their students. This guide will be presented to the supervisors of an organization of Behavioral Interventionists and, if approved, would be published on a group forum.

Authority Types and Importance

For many years the topic of classroom authority has been a subject of interest. With classroom settings switching to a more digital platform and classroom dynamics changing due to changing time and laws the idea of a teachers authority is

ever-changing. Judith L. Pace and associates in the journal article "Classroom authority: theory, research, and practice" state that authority made in the classroom setting is essential for kids to do well in school as well as remain engaged with course content, especially for kids in kindergarten through grade 16 (Pace, XI). Authority has been defined in a multitude of ways but the essential idea is that it holds a certain "coercive power" (Pace, 2). The teacher has at their disposal four types of authority which are often used in tandem. The first of which is "traditional authority" which allows for a teacher to gain control based on the longstanding tradition that teachers hold positions of power and control over their students (Pace, 3). Second, "charismatic authority" relies on the teacher's ability to inspire their students with their personal qualities (Pace, 3). Third is "legal-rational authority" which allows the teacher to gain control through the rights of a teacher such as control of grades or detention (Pace, 3). Finally, "professional authority" comes from the teacher's breadth of knowledge about the subject which they teach. Once teachers can employ one, or more types of authority in their classroom, they are more easily able to educate their students. Each of these types of authority can be easily implemented online, except for the possible hindering of the "charismatic authority" that can be harder to convey due to the limitations of a computer screen.

Program Background

Behavioral Interventionists use a specific teaching method when working with kids on the Autistic Spectrum to ensure the best behavioral results. Children on the

Autistic spectrum often display deficiencies when engaging in social situations and therefore may need additional instruction to assist with their education. During lessons, students and teachers engage in content that the child may be struggling with such as pronouns, pronunciation, requests, and motor skills, depending on their age. A key aspect of this method of teaching is that no negatives are used. When the child gets the wrong answer instead of meeting them with a negative statement, "no" or "that is wrong," instead the teacher is to repeat the statement and say the correct answer as to avoid any negative association. Correct answers are immediately met with positive reinforcement with a verbal statement, "yes, good job," and intermittently spaced treats, a video, or a game. Each question answered is entered into a data sheet shared between the Behavioural Interventionist teaching, to show progress statistically. To ensure the data is valid, each Behavioural Interventionist must ask the question in a specific manner and obtain the child's attention before. To ask these questions productively and correctly, the authority must be gained and maintained throughout the two-hour sessions. Therefore, it is with this in mind that interviews and research into authority during lessons were carried out.

Methods

To collect data, interviews were conducted with each of the teachers in a Behavioural Interventionist division that were available as well as an interview with a Behavioural Consultant. The interviews were either conducted over the phone or emailed as a document. The goal of these interviews was to identify common struggles the teachers

have experienced, stemming from issues of establishing authority, as well as

techniques they have found effective within each of their lessons. Besides, the

information collected by the teachers' antidotes from lessons will be incorporated into

the guide. Advice from the training PowerPoint will also be incorporated into the guide to

ensure that program guidelines are met and reinforced.

Data Section

Details of Behavioural Interventionists/Consultants Interviews. The sample

consisted of two Behavioural Interventionists and one Behavioural Consultant who all

work with the same child. The phone interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes and

surveys were returned within two business days. All those interviewed had completed

the mandatory training session for work as Behavioural Interventionists before

beginning their lessons with the child. Of those interviewed, two work four hours with the

same child per week, split into two sessions. The consultant touches base with the

families and the Behavioral Interventionists every one and a half weeks.

Data Limitations. Due to the small sample size, large conclusions from this inquiry

should not be made. While these interviews and guide contain general advice to gain

and maintain authority during these lessons all Behavioural Interventionists were

working with a specific client and cannot be applied to all situations and children.

Therefore, this guide will only be added to the shared documents between Behavioural

Interventionists and it is up to the discretion of the Behavioural Consultants as to whether it would be beneficial to other divisions of Behavioural Interventionists.

Time Spent Gaining/Maintaining Attention. Based on answers from the interviews, the amount of time spent trying to keep the student engaged in the course work online depended greatly on the age and whether they were high or low functioning (Ando & Chen). Generally, approximately half of the whole of the lesson was used trying to engage the child in the course content using various methods (Ando & Chen). For new Behavioural Interventionists, it is a particular struggle to maintain engagement, and therefore it is suggested to implement more frequent breaks between questioning (Ando). These breaks should be filled with fun activities for the child whether that be a video containing the child's favorite media content or an online game (Ando). The last hours tend to be the most difficult in terms of maintaining attention and therefore more frequent and longer reinforcements should be used (Chen).

Time Spent on Rewards. Rewards are mini-breaks that are implemented into every session. These breaks are used to help reinforce good behavior and engage the child in content that is known to be preferred. The amount of time spent on rewards again depends on the child's ability and the length of the lesson. As the session goes on, more rewards must be used and must have a higher level of appeal for the children (Ando). A new Behavioural Interventionist should reinforce every three to four questions

whereas a more experienced Behavioural Interventionist can implement rewards every

10 to 15 minutes (Ando & Chen).

Techniques used to express authority to maintain attention. The biggest way to

express one's authority is to use reinforcements to reward only good work (Ando, Chen

Trieu). Rewards should not be given if the child is not compliant as it would allow them

to have control of the session (Ando). If the child realizes that bad behavior gets them

rewards faster it creates even less productive lessons with the Behavioural

Interventionist holding no authority (Chen & Trieu). The Behavioural Interventionist must

ensure that "no means no" or they will lose any power in the situation (Ando). If a child

is particularly distracted with a toy the Behavioural Interventionist can allow the child to

play with the toy for a limited time (Chen). This shows that the teacher has allowed them

to play with the toy as a sort of reward but they are required to come back when the

timer is up. The child is most times more willing to come back after they have had time

to play with their distractions as well. As a new Behavioural Interventionist, parents can

assist by giving the child a treat after every lesson, thereby pairing the Interventionist

with the desired item (Ando & Trieu). If the child is working for a reward, the progress

should be shown visually in some way, such as holding up fingers, to maintain authority

while capturing their attention with more constant stimuli (Chen). The type of authority

described in the above examples is "legal-rational authority" as the teacher holds the

power of giving them rewards (Pace, 3). If the child is particularly young (2-4 yrs old) the

main job of the Behavioural Interventionist is to act as more of a friend to play with while

the child answers a couple of questions. In this case, the authority would not be applicable, but instead, the personality of the teacher would establish their "charismatic authority" with the child (Ando &Pace, 3).

Techniques to keep course content engaging. To keep course content engaging it is important to be constantly introducing more programs, to avoid repetition (Ando). Lessons should incorporate some of the child's interests, such as their favorite animals or cartoons (Ando & Trieu). If the child gets bored with questions, the lessons should be woven into reading stories or the videos that they are watching (Ando & Chen). Questions can be asked by stuffed animals or puppets if the Behavioural Interventionist has them at their disposal as they draw more interest in the lesson (Chen). Each question should be met with something the child enjoys. Give the child a choice of the possible rewards that they can have or the lesson type that they may want to do next (Ando & Chen). This will keep the child engaged. Since they are choosing what they would like to do next, this gives them the impression of agency during the lesson (Ando).

Transitioning to teaching online in terms of authority. Most of the Behavioural Interventionists interviewed had the experience of teaching in-person lessons before transitioning to the online platform (Ando & Chen). The in-person sessions allowed them to establish a power dynamic that shifted over well to the online forum (Ando & Chen). For a new Behavioral Interventionist trying to establish a role of authority online, it is

important to spend the first couple of lessons just playing games with the child (Ando).

These lessons should last no longer than 30 minutes and once rapport is established,

course content can slowly be introduced (Ando). If the short sessions appear to be

going well and the child remains engaged, lessons should be increased by 30 minutes

until lessons are 2 hours long (Ando). This slow progression should help the child adjust

to the long periods spent with the Behavioural Interventionist (Ando). For all Behavioural

Interventionists, it is recommended when moving lessons online to keep rewards

frequent and targeted to the child's interests to get them used to sessions on screen.

Questions asked should also be easy for the child to answer to avoid associating

lessons on the computer being hard and unenjoyable (Chen & Trieu).

Recommendations for new Behavioural Interventionists struggling with control.

New Behavioral Interventionists should learn to balance being "fun and strict at the

same time" to show the student that lessons will be fun when instructions are followed

(Chen). When the child follows instructions or gets questions right Behavioural

Interventionists should follow with verbal praise so the child learns that they are a nice

voice and will praise them for good behavior (Chen). Ensure that as the lessons go on

the child has some sort of affinity for the Behavioural interventionist because children

will not listen to people they don't like (Ando). Always start with easy questions that the

child will be able to answer so they will not be embarrassed and they will be

immediately met with praise which should help create a bond between the child and the

Behavioural Interventionist (Ando & Trieu). Any Behavioural Interventionist struggling to

maintain attention online should revert to games, books, and videos until the child seems to be calm and attentive (Trieu). Trying to gain control with a child who is not ready and willing to participate can take away any authority that the teacher may have because the child learns that they don't have to listen (Ando & Trieu). With the unique situation of online lessons, the Behavioural Interventionist's only power is that of online fun; and once that is lost, authority is very hard to gain and maintain. To avoid this ensure that videos and games are targeted for the child and that their attention and engagement are there before any questions are asked (Ando & Chen).

Techniques for gaining authority online. When asking questions, it is important to incorporate questions from the lesson into conversations as opposed to asking them point-blank (Ando, Chen & Trieu). For each of the programs, Tact, Mand, and Motor can be turned into games that will interest children (especially the young children being taught) (Chen). Since the course content is just being turned into a game, it is still within program recommendations. Ensure that if the specific lesson is very long to switch between each of the tasks, to not be asking the same sort of questions for too long (Ando). This will help keep the program fresh and interesting instead of monotonous.

Conclusion

Summary and Interpretation of Findings. Children have been moving in high numbers to online classes for all age ranges. New teachers can find it difficult to gain authority online and some may have difficulty maintaining it. For Behavioural

Interventionists new and old, it can be a challenge to engage students and have control of a lesson through a screen. This has been expressed in the in-person and online interviews through the experiences of Behavioral Interventionists and consultants over the years and with this specific client. Keeping course content fresh and targeted to the child is the best way to keep their attention on the screen. Frequent rewards and reinforcements are necessary to add an enjoyable aspect to the lesson and to ensure it remains that way, especially for young children. New Behavioural Interventionists should play with the child for the first few 30-minute lessons to establish a rapport. Sessions should increase by 30-minute increments as the child and Interventionist get acquainted until they are two hours in length. When the Behavioural Interventionist is asking questions and running course content it is important that the child is attentive and instructions are followed before any praise or reward is given. While the role of the Behavioural Interventionist is to assist with the child's growth in any aspect that they need, this task proves impossible if there is no bond, friendly or authoritative, between the pair.

Recommendations.

Guide for Behavioural Interventionist Teaching Online

1. Ensuring during lessons that *"no means no"*

2. When instructions are followed good things come. (ie rewards, reinforcements)

3. Towards the end of the lesson, more *powerful reinforcements* should be given to keep the lesson going as the child's attention wanes. (ie. videos of their favorite cartoon)

4. Weaving lessons into conversations, stories, and videos can make course content infinitely more engaging and therefore make the child more willing to participate.

5. Positively framing questions and allowing the child to have some choice with the course content allows for the child to feel some level of control.

    a. If the child feels as if they have chosen to participate in an activity they are more likely to follow through to the completion of the activity.

6. Reverting to playing games when control is lost will help maintain the idea that lessons are fun.

7. Ask the parents for help in the form of giving their child rewards at the end of lessons or helping them sit down and listen during the session

8. Ask different kinds of questions (different lessons) instead of repeating the same type of questions for too long.

    a. Switch the lessons up to keep the content new and fresh.

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