Welcome to the May edition. In this edition, I’ve reviewed the research around supporting people with Dementia. In addition I explored playing I-spy as an NET activity, the career of Dr. Jillian Wilson, PsyD BCBA-D and what “promised reinforcer” means. Also, check out the study tips, events and product suggestions. Have a great month. Stay Safe!

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BEHAVIOURAL APPROACHES TO DEMENTIA

Dementia is a diagnosis given for a group of symptoms associated with neurological deterioration, which impact memory, language, social behaviours, and daily activities. Dementia is typically associated with aging and there are a variety of types of Dementia, including Alzheimer’s, Vascular Dementia and Early onset Alzheimer’s. Alzheimer’s Research UK (ARUK) report on their page that 52% of people know someone with dementia. The prevalence is relatively high with 850,000 people are estimated to have dementia in the UK, and 1 in 3 people born this year will develop a form of dementia in the lifetime (ARUK). There is currently no cure for Dementia, although there are a variety of medications that can be prescribed to support people with managing their symptoms.

Dementia often leads to a loss of skills. Teaching and shaping up skills requires reinforcers that are socially valid and powerful for the learner. Ortega et al (2012) successfully conducted a preference assessment with fourteen adults with dementia and then a reinforcer assessment with four of these adults. These procedures are common practise within intervention development for people with developmental disabilities and is empirically supported. They found that the preference assessment was successful at identifying effective reinforcers. They also reported that the participants mostly chose leisure items over edibles, and these results differ from adults with intellectual disabilities. Dementia can impact taste sense which may explain why edibles are chosen less often.

Researchers have also investigated the best way to present demands to adults with dementia. Dementia can impact a person’s ability to discriminate verbal instructions, so simple and clear instructions can assist with understanding. However, this can evoke challenging behaviours, as the person finds it rude or patronising. Williams et al (2020) investigated successful ways to present demands to one resident, who often responded with verbal refusal or aggression when given instructions. Instructions would often be delivered to this resident when staff were supporting other residents, so her co-operation was crucial. They investigated presenting demands as statements, questions (“would you like to....?”), or as requests for assistance i.e., “should we do it this way or this way?”. They found that issuing instructions as statements (e.g., “please move”) evoked the highest rate of ‘rude behaviours’ and lowest rates of compliance. They reported that presenting demands as questions was most successful with this person. They stated “for adults with long learning histories of social interactions with other adults, careful consideration as to the nature of social interactions and demands is needed”.

As Dementia impacts memory and language skills, people with dementia can still produce language, although...
If you are preparing to become a supervisor or consultant you will be required to conduct assessments as part of your new role. To learn more about this, you can do the online course provided by the Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP). This will help you develop a good understanding of this assessment and how to develop interventions and learning programmes.

**PRODUCTS**

You can access the first chapter of the Happiness Trap by Russ Harris, for free. This is a great book if you are struggling with stress or difficult thoughts during this difficult time. There are also free resources available to compliment the book.

**EVENTS**

Due to COVID-19 many people are recommended to stay at home and isolate. I have put together a list of some fantastic online resources, webinars and podcasts, which you can check by clicking this link.

Association of Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) will be hosting a conference in Dublin, Ireland in September 2021. To learn more, visit the event page.

**STUDY TIPS**

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the deficits impacts their ability to stay on topic in conversations, and also their speech increases in ambiguity, for example “I took that thing over there”.

Oleson et al (2014) investigated teaching requests to two residents through mand training. They conducted a preference and reinforcement assessment, and the begun mand training, by contriving motivation and prompting a request. Despite no physical limitations, there is often noted a decrease in engagement in leisure activities, which may be due to limitations in making requests. Increasing requesting for activities could lead to more engagement. The researchers had success with one participant, although its important to note they introduced an element of Contingency –specifying stimulus (CSC) for this participant. CSC involves stated the contingency prior to the activity, for example “if you want me to talk to you then all you need to do is ask”.

The research into Dementia and gerontology with Behavioural approaches is limited. There are many parallels between the needs and social problems of this population and the population of people with development disabilities, where there a wealth of research. Behavioural approaches can help support this population, giving consideration to functionality of speech, increasing the efficacy of reinforcers for communication or teaching of daily skills and reducing challenging behaviours. Being mindful of the person’s learning history, which would be extensive, can impact the efficacy of a procedure.

Despite this, there is little research transferring and investigating the successful interventions for this population. The aforementioned research shows there is some promise of the use of preference assessments, functional communication training (FCT) and managing challenging behaviours. These are all procedures that are common practise in research and applied settings with people with developmental disabilities. In 2011, Trahan stated that in the five years previous (2006-2011), “JABA [Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis] has published more than 300 empirical articles with only five articles specifically addressing aging issues.


Next month we’re looking at Mands for removal, so be sure to subscribe so you receive the next exciting edition.

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