Self-management of instruction cues for occupation: review of studies with people with severe and profound developmental disabilities

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Abstract

Helping people with severe and profound developmental disabilities acquire and maintain constructive occupation is an objective of great practical importance. During the last 15–20 years, studies directed at this goal have largely relied on five strategies of self-management of instruction cues. Those strategies consist of the use of (1) picture cues presented on sets of cards, (2) picture cues stored in computer-aided systems, (3) object cues attached to cards, (4) verbal cues stored in audio recording devices, and (5) self-verbalizations. This paper reviews the aforementioned strategies and discusses their overall effectiveness and their suitability (practicality). The paper also points out some relevant issues for future research. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Developing strategies to help people with developmental disabilities acquire and maintain constructive occupation with minimal staff supervision has been an objective of great interest for many years (Ackerman & Shapiro, 1984; Anderson, Sherman, Sheldon, & McAdam, 1997; Connis, 1979; Lancioni & Oliva,

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1988; Simmons & Flexer, 1992; Wacker & Berg, 1983, 1984). Constructive occupation is considered to be important for promoting a number of valuable outcomes including: an increase in adaptive responding and physical exercise, a reduction in deviant behaviors, an improvement in general appearance and social status, and a successful preparation toward forms of domestic and community-related jobs (Beyer, Kilsby, & Willson, 1995; Brown & Chamove, 1993; Conley, Rusch, McCaughrin, & Tines, 1989; Duker et al., 1989; Huang & Cuvo, 1997; Lancioni & O'Reilly, 1998; Martin, Burger, Elias-Burger, & Mithaug, 1988; Morgan, Ames, Loosli, Feng, & Taylor, 1995; Rapley & Beyer, 1996).

During the last 15–20 years, the literature on establishing constructive occupation in people with developmental disabilities has largely relied on five strategies of self-management of instruction cues. Those strategies consist of the use of (1) picture cues presented on sets of cards, (2) picture cues stored in computer-aided systems, (3) object cues attached to sets of cards, (4) verbal cues stored in audio recording devices, and (5) self-verbalizations (Berg & Wacker, 1989; Ferretti, Cavalier, Murphy, & Murphy, 1993; Harchik, Sherman, & Sheldon, 1992; Hughes & Agran, 1993; Johnson & Miltenberger, 1996; Lancioni, Van den Hof, Boelens, Rocha, & Seedhouse, 1998; Martin et al., 1988; Steed & Lutzker, 1999; Wacker, Berg, Berrie, & Swatta, 1985).

This paper is an attempt to review the application of the aforementioned strategies for people with severe and profound developmental disabilities. The reason for targeting these people is that they are known to have very serious difficulties achieving independent (or partially independent) occupation and apparently need, more than other individuals, the support of special strategies to approach such an objective (Engelman, Altus, & Mathews, 1999; Harchik et al., 1992; Lancioni et al., 1998; Montgomery et al., 1996; Nailos, Whitman, & Maxwell, 1994; Pettipher & Mansell, 1993; Spence & Whitman, 1990). The first aim of the paper is to provide the reader with a general picture of the studies conducted with the various strategies. A second aim is to discuss (a) the effectiveness of the strategies for training, maintenance and generalization purposes, (b) the suitability (practicality) of the strategies, and (c) the possibility/desirability of withdrawing these strategies after the establishment of constructive occupation. Finally, the paper also points out some relevant issues for future research (e.g., adjusting the strategies as the persons' engagement skills improve and assessing the persons' and staff's attitudes toward the strategies).

The studies included in the review were identified through a computerized search of PSYCLIT, ERIC, and MEDLINE EXPRESS databases for journal articles from 1983 to 1999. A hand search was also conducted. Only studies that used the aforementioned strategies for establishing/supporting specific multistep tasks or the performance of activity schedules (i.e., sequences of familiar activities and simple tasks) were included in the paper. For example, studies that employed self-verbalizations to solve problem situations interfering with task performance were not included (e.g., Agran, Salzberg, & Stowitschek, 1987; Hughes, 1992; Hughes, Hugo, & Blatt, 1996; Hughes & Rusch, 1989). In Table 1 we provide lists of studies reviewed which were divided according to the