

A Practitioner's Guide to Teach for Generalization in ABA Treatment for Autism and other Disabilities using The R.E.A.L. Model

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Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is very complex and the wide range of skill deficits and barriers for each child affects individuals differently. ABA gives practitioners the conceptual framework necessary to critically analyze contextual variables that lead to behavior change - or not - through causal or functional analysis, reliability, and validity. Thus, systematic programming in *how* to teach for generalization deserves the same attention and specificity that curriculum development has received for treating ASD.

Many individuals with ASD have difficulties generalizing from a structured learning environment to the "real world" independent of their functioning level. This is likely attributable to the degree they are affected by the disorder and their individual learning styles which, in turn, affects their rate of acquisition, maintenance and generalization of new concepts, skills and repertoires taught. To simply rely on structured skills teaching puts practitioners in a "train and hope" situation when addressing generalization.

The issue is not a lack of resources about what is necessary to bring about generalized behavior change. But, rather, there is a gap between a conceptual understanding and what is necessary to teach for generalization where practitioners can be systematic and effective. Thus, the need to *rethink generalization* when planning and programming for generality.

Program Description

Children learn at different rates and generalize skills successfully in one situation and not in others. However, children with ASD have exponentially many more barriers interfering with generalization of learned skills in common repertoires such as communication and language, academics, play or social situations. This is well documented in the applied behavior analysis literature.

ABA treatment effectiveness lies in the theoretical understanding and application of the scientific behavior analysis principles. Starting with the behavioral assessment, the Real Matrices (Terzich, 1996, 2020) are developed and used to help organize and identify natural existing antecedents and consequences across daily life routines. This allows for a more accurate analysis of generalization barriers before treatment. The structure of each generalization level provides for observable and measurable accountability as to how a concept, verbal operant, skill, or repertoire is acquired based on the environmental conditions present. Each level provides the practitioner with a behavior analytic structure by which treatment is evaluated and targets selected to teach for the generalized behavior change expected.

References:

Terzich-Garland, B. J. (2020). *The R.E.A.L. Model, Rethinking Generalization*. New York, NY: Different Roads to Learning.

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Abstract

This poster shows how practitioners can plan and effectively train for generalized behavior change in the applied setting utilizing *The R.E.A.L. Model, Rethinking Generalization: Recreating Environments to Accelerate Learning* (Terzich-Garland, 2020). The R.E.A.L. Model teaches for generalization using a unique 5 level process, which systematically changes environmental antecedents and consequences in order to effectively increase skill acquisition and generalization. R.E.A.L. begins the behavioral process to teach for generalization during stimulus discrimination training of concepts and the teaching of skill acquisition taught in a highly structured environment. The process continues when systematically introducing stimuli and contingencies within the natural environment. Special emphasis in bridging concepts and skills in order to teach complex repertoires follows, as well as, establishing multiple-control, and generalized social behavior to the verbal community. Data indicate skill acquisition across all ABA program areas. The R.E.A.L. Model systematically trains for generalization so practitioners can increase skill acquisition and accelerate learning across all applied settings.

R.E.A.L. Model Levels of Generalization

Level 1: The R.E.A.L. Model begins in level 1 focusing on the behavioral process to teach for generalization during stimulus discrimination training of concepts and the teaching of skill acquisition taught in a highly structured environment.

Level 2: In level 2, the process continues with systematically introducing stimuli and contingencies within a structured teaching setting focusing on stimulus generalization in the teaching of concept formation.

Level 3: At level 3, behavioral persistence and retention becomes the focus when training for generalization across settings and time as stimuli and conditions from the natural environment are introduced from a structured to a semi-structured teaching setting.

Level 4: As concepts, skills, and language are acquired at mastery, targets are moved to level 4 where special emphasis is on bridging concepts and skills and bringing behaviors under multiple control with daily routines. The focus is on teaching for generalization of complex repertoires the child will use in the natural environment in the shaping of behavioral cusps.

Level 5: Finally, Level 5 focuses on the teaching of social repertoires generalizing to the verbal community. Emphasis of teaching is on social competence and flexibility while training the needed social skills in play and communication when the child interacts with peers, family and the community.

The R.E.A.L. Model does the work for the practitioner by providing a systematic framework to teach for generalization so practitioners are more successful with increasing the child's skill acquisition across all applied settings. Generalization is planned for across the levels rather than one level at a time, but training for generalization at each level will vary depending on individual needs. When training for generalization occurs, the practitioner systematically changes environmental antecedents and consequences across each level in order to increase skill acquisition and accelerate learning. This behavioral process to teach for generalization works within any existing ABA program.

Results

Data indicate skill acquisition across all ABA program areas when the R.E.A.L. Model is implemented. The child's generalization ability increases from structured treatment to natural environments representative of child's daily life with family and the community. Family's report getting their child back and having a meaningful relationship with them for the first time.

Discussion

Providing ABA Treatment and promoting generalization is well-known among practitioners. ABA is not a commodity, but a scientific evidenced-based discipline informed by the principles of behavior analysis and generalization is paramount in the success of treatment effectiveness and social validity. It is one thing to know about generalization and effectively teach for generalized behavior for each person receiving ABA treatment

The R.E.A.L. Model is a comprehensive behavior analytic guide for planning and programming across five unique levels of generalization within intensive behavioral treatment. It was specifically designed to critically analyze the generality of behaviors from the same behavior analysis perspective used to address any operant behavior.

Deficits are grouped by concept discrimination, skills for self-care and play and verbal operants that allow the child to functionally communicate and develop language skills. But what makes the R.E.A.L. Model effective is that teaching for generalization starts from the beginning of the child's ABA program and is systematically progressed to the end of treatment. Involving the parents in the process is emphasized and key to successfully teach the needed generalization skills in the child's daily life with family, peers and in the community. Essential is the focus on concept formation and bridging concepts and skills in the shaping of behavioral cusps where the outcome of the generalized behavior change exposes the child to new experiences, environments, responses, and has generative qualities.

