Functional Communication Training in the Natural Environment: A Pilot Investigation with a Young Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract (p. 615).

1. Purpose: To evaluate the effectiveness of FCT implemented in a natural setting.
   - This study investigates the success of applying FCT in real-world environments.

2. Participants: One young child diagnosed with ASD.
   - The study focused on a single participant for detailed observation.

3. Setting: Natural environments like home and school.
   - The intervention was implemented where the child interacts daily.

4. Results: Significant reduction in challenging behavior and increased functional communication.
   - The findings highlight the potential benefits of FCT in everyday contexts.

Introduction -What is Functional Communication Training (FCT)? (p. 616).

Behavioral intervention strategy.

FCT is designed to address challenging behaviors effectively.

Replaces challenging behavior with appropriate communication.

The goal is to substitute problematic behaviors with functional alternatives.

Rooted in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

It is a core component of evidence-based ABA interventions.

Importance of the Natural Environment (p. 629).

Why Natural Settings Matter	**Generalization of skills.**	**Skills learned in natural environments are more likely to generalize.**
	Greater ecological validity.	**Real-world settings improve the relevance and applicability of interventions.**
	Opportunities for naturally occurring reinforcers.	**Reinforcers in natural settings enhance the sustainability of behavior changes.**

Participant Details – (p. 615).

Age: 4 years.

- The participant was a preschool-aged child, allowing for early intervention.

Diagnosis: Autism Spectrum Disorder.

- The child exhibited symptoms characteristic of ASD.

Communication Profile: Limited verbal skills.

- The participant's limited verbal ability necessitated a communication-based intervention.

Methodology

Study Design (pp. 618-622):

Baseline phase: Observing challenging behaviors.

- Initial observations established the frequency and types of challenging behaviors.

Intervention phase: Implementing FCT.

- The intervention was introduced systematically after the baseline.

Data collection in home and school settings.

- Observations occurred in settings familiar to the participant.

Intervention Procedure - How FCT Was Implemented?

Identify the function of challenging behavior (e.g., attention, escape).

- Functional assessment pinpointed the motivations behind the behaviors.

Teach a functional communication response (FCR).

- The child was taught specific communication strategies to replace the behavior.

Reinforce the FCR immediately.

- Immediate reinforcement ensured the new communication behavior was strengthened.

Data Collection Methods

Frequency of challenging behaviors.	• **Behaviors were recorded to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.**
Frequency of functional communication responses.	• **Increased FCRs indicated the success of the training.**
Observations across settings.	• **Multiple settings ensured the intervention's generalization and reliability.**

Results: Reduction in Challenging Behavior (p. 626).

Behavioral Outcomes:

Significant decrease in tantrums.

- The frequency of tantrum behaviors reduced markedly.

Reduced aggression and non-compliance.

- Problematic behaviors such as aggression and non-compliance showed notable improvements.

Results: Increase in Functional Communication (p. 628).

Communication Outcomes:

- Increased use of communication boards.
  - The participant began to rely on communication boards as an alternative.
- Increased verbal requests.
  - Verbal communication improved, with more frequent and context-appropriate requests.

Discussion (p. 629).

Key Findings:

FCT is effective in natural environments.

Importance of individualized interventions.

The intervention proved successful in everyday settings.

Tailoring interventions to the participant's needs is critical for success.

Limitations (p. 630).

Study Constraints:

- Single-subject design.
  - The findings may not generalize to all children with ASD.
- Short duration.
  - The study's time frame limited the scope of observed changes.
- Limited generalizability.
  - Further research with larger samples is necessary to validate findings.

Implications for Practice (p. 629).

Application in ABA:

Use FCT to address challenging behaviors.

- Practitioners should consider FCT as a primary intervention for behavior management.

Train caregivers to implement FCT in natural settings.

- Caregiver involvement ensures consistency and effectiveness.

Future Directions (p. 630).

Next Steps in Research:

Larger sample sizes.

- Expanding research to include more participants enhances reliability.

Longer follow-up periods.

- Extended observations will help understand the long-term effects.

Application across diverse populations.

- Testing FCT in varied cultural and demographic contexts ensures broader applicability.

Conclusion

Study Takeaways:

FCT is an effective strategy.	**Natural settings enhance skill generalization.**	**Encourages independence and communication.**
The intervention shows promise in addressing communication challenges.	**Skills learned in these environments have lasting impacts.**	**FCT fosters autonomy and social interaction.**

Reference

•Mancil, G. R., Conroy, M. A., Nakao, T., & Alter, P. J. (2006). Functional communication training in the natural environment: A pilot investigation with a young child with autism spectrum disorder. *Education & Treatment of Children, 29*(4), 615-633. https://library.capella.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/functional-communication-training-natural/docview/202674980/se