

Module: Discrete Trial Training (DTT)

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

Rachel

Step 1. Deciding What to Teach with Discrete Trial Training

Rachel is a seven year old girl with autism in an inclusive setting. She speaks in short intelligible sentences and has mild intellectual impairments. When the IEP team gathered to discuss Rachel's progress at the end of the year, they highlighted the need for continued progress in the goal of identifying and labeling shapes. Rachel's teacher, Ms. S, says that Rachel is not able to identify and produce the labels independently.

The IEP team discusses the possible use of behavioral interventions, such as discrete trial training, to support Rachel's progress in producing labels for shapes. The team decides to utilize discrete trial training to teach Rachel to name shapes. Parent and family members are consulted to ensure that they support this goal for Rachel. Parents and family members agree to promote this skill in the home setting. The team writes the following goal: When completing an activity involving shapes (e.g., puzzles, drawing, matching), Rachel will spontaneously identify (e.g., point, show, hold up) and label at least 5 different shapes (square, rectangle, circle, triangle, diamond, star, oval etc...) at first opportunity in the school and home setting across three consecutive days.

Step 2. Breaking the Skill Down into Teachable Steps

Rachel's IEP team conducts a task analysis on the steps required for Rachel to label shapes. The team decides to utilize various child-preferred activities and materials incorporating shapes to reinforce Rachel's use of labels. They identify the following steps:

1. Identify and label 1-2 shapes with verbal reminder (e.g., "That's a square" "Show me the circle").
2. Identify and label 1-2 shapes in response to open ended question (e.g., "What shape is that?" "What do you have?")
3. Spontaneously identify and label 1-2 shapes + verbal reminder or open ended question for 2-3 or more new shapes
4. Spontaneously identify and label 5 or more shapes.

Step 3. Setting-up the Data Collection System

The team chooses a data collection system to chart Rachel's progress on the above steps for identifying and labeling shapes. The data sheet is prepared for daily collection

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and lists the time of day and each shape listed above with a spot to note each attempt to label.

Step 4. Designating Location

Ms. S decides that the best location to work with Rachel to improve her shape identification and labeling skills is in the classroom during small work group. Although there will be activities taking place in other parts of the room, Ms. S wants Rachel to start using the skill in the classroom environment. Rachel's parents also practice shape identification and labeling at home and coordinate with Ms. S to ensure that similar teaching procedures and reinforcement strategies are used to promote skill acquisition.

Step 5. Gathering Materials

Ms. S makes copies of the data collection sheet. The team has previously identified that puzzles are highly rewarding activities for Rachel. In addition, Rachel enjoys drawing and other art activities, and the team decides that shapes can be easily embedded into these other child-preferred activities.

Step 6. Delivering the Trials (Discrimination Training in this example)

While the rest of the class is working in small groups with the para-professional, Ms. S works with Rachel one on one. She decides to start by collecting baseline data on Rachel's current skill level. She asks Rachel to identify and provide labels for a variety of shapes. Ms. S notes that Rachel is able to spontaneously identify and provide labels for the shapes 25% of the time. Ms. S explains to Rachel that they will be working to help Rachel say the names of different shapes. She tells Rachel that for every correct response, she will receive another item or material related to the activity (e.g., another puzzle piece, cut out a circle, draw a triangle etc...).

Ms. S begins conducting the discrete trial training sessions by showing Rachel the puzzle. Ms. S knows that Rachel is able to complete the puzzle independently by placing the squares and circles in the correct spots. Together Ms. S and Rachel remove the puzzle pieces from the board and place them on the table. Ms. S puts the board on her lap under the table and prompts Rachel to select a puzzle piece. She then asks, "Is that a circle or square?" If Rachel successfully labels the shape Ms. S gives her positive verbal reinforcement ("Good job!") and gives her the shape to insert into the puzzle. If Rachel does not label the shape, Ms. S provides further prompting to Rachel by saying, "What shape is that?" Ms. S notes the outcome for each trial on her data collection sheet. After several weeks, Ms. S looks at the data she has collected and sees that Rachel is able to identify and provide labels for 2 different shapes (circles and squares) at first opportunity in response to being asked open-ended questions (e.g.,

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“Which shape do you have?”). Ms. S decides to check for generalization of the skill by having the Rachel’s family note Rachel’s ability to label shapes at home. She provides materials to Rachel’s parents to work with her on identifying and labeling various shapes. Using a similar discrete trial technique, Rachel’s parents prompt Rachel to identify and label shape magnets which she then places on the fridge as the reinforcer. As a result, Rachel’s parents also report mastery of this teaching step at home. Ms. S. begins teaching the next step in the task analysis (i.e., see skill #3 above) and incorporates 2-3 new shapes using a verbal reminder or open ended question to elicit a response from Rachel. Once Rachel acquires this skill (as determined by the criterion listed in the objective), Ms. S will introduce the final teaching step in the task analysis and coordinate with Rachel’s parents to ensure skill acquisition at home.

Step 7. Review and Modify

Rachel’s progress in identifying and labeling shapes is monitored for several additional weeks. Rachel’s educational team meets to discuss if the discrete trial training was a successful strategy for teaching Rachel to label shapes. The team decides that it was an appropriate strategy and they discuss extending the discrete trials to include labeling colors and sizes inside similar child-preferred activities, such as having Rachel select which color marker to use or size to make when drawing shapes or whether to paste the large, red diamond or small, red diamond onto the construction paper.