

- I am the master of my emotions...

Issues relating to teaching the language of emotions to children with autism

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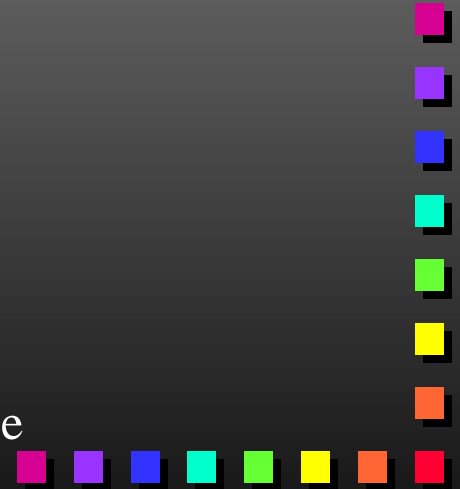
Pyramid Educational Consultants, Inc.

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Applied Behavior Analysis:

Evidence-based Solutions for Helping People



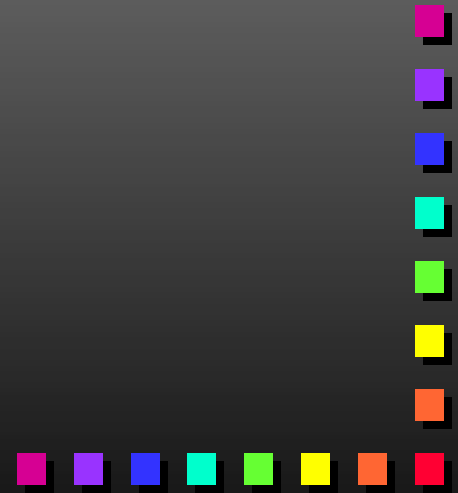
What's the problem?

- People with autism often have difficulty:
 - Expressing their emotions
 - Expressing their feelings
 - Describing what they are thinking
 - Using the subtle language of emotion
 - Responding to the subtle language of emotion



How do we learn to talk about feelings and emotions?

- Simple and direct
 - My knee hurts
- More complex
 - I'm happy; I like this!
- More complex and subtle
 - I love you for who you are
- **ALL ARE PRIVATE EVENTS**



Knowing versus Doing...

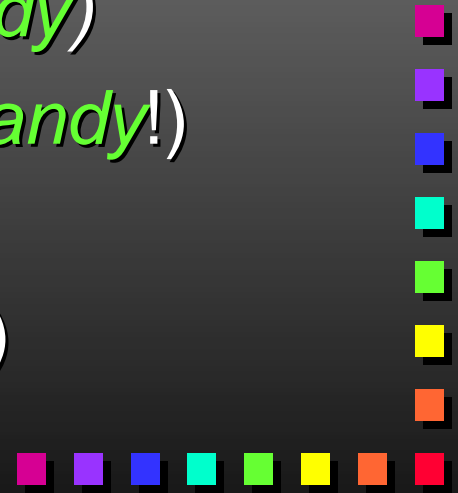
- Everyone *knows*

how long 5 seconds is, right?



Skinner's influence

- 1957 publication of Verbal Behavior
- Defined types of what is said by function NOT form
 - Mand (I want *candy*)
 - Tact (I see *candy*; I see *red candy*)
 - Intraverbal (Name a sweet? *Candy!*)
 - Echoic (Say candy. *Candy*)
 - Autoclitic (I *really* want candy)



Is *Modality* the Key?

- “In defining **verbal behavior** as behavior reinforced through the mediation of other persons, we do not, and cannot, specify any one form, mode, or medium. Any movement capable of affecting another organism may be verbal.” (p. 14)



Skinner's comments on Private Events

- How to generate *verbal behavior* to private stimuli:
 - 1. “A common *public accompaniment...*”
(p. 131)
E.g., He falls → He bleeds
 - 2. “...use some *collateral response...*
[including]...facial expressions...” (p. 131-2)
E.g., He falls → He winces or cries



Skinner's comments on acquisition

Or: How do we acquire *tacts* to private events?

“...he acquires verbal responses echoically from the teacher (p. 131).”

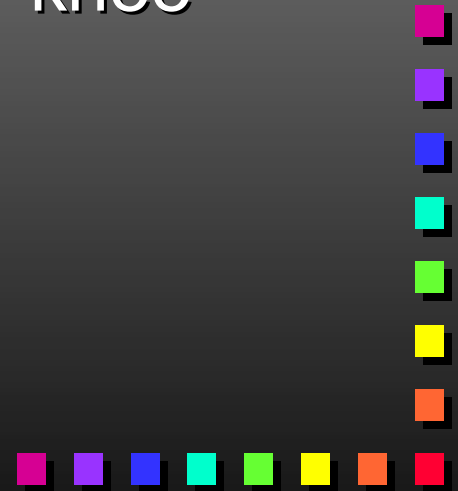
Direct: Dad says, “Your leg hurts!” “Does your leg hurt?”

Indirect: Mom says, “His leg must hurt!” “Hey, Mikey likes it- he really likes it!”



Example: My leg hurts...

- We see child fall and...
- We see
 - 1- He fell and he's bleeding
 - 2- He's crying
- We comment: "Oh, poor baby- your knee hurts!"
- We ask: "How do you feel?"
- He says, "My knee hurts!"
 - Later generalizations...



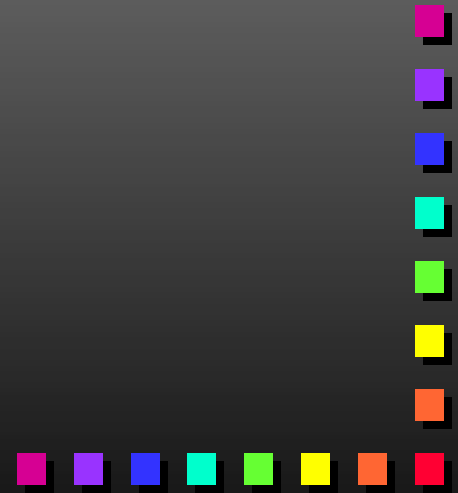
Example: I like this!

- We watch a child eating an ice cream cone...
- We see
 - She eats it very fast and sloppily
 - She smiles and giggles while eating
- We comment: “Wow! You must like that a lot!”
- We ask: “How do you feel?”
- She says, “I like this a lot!”
 - Later generalizations...



What may be different with children with autism?

- We see them fall and bleed...
- We see them eat quickly and sloppily...
- We may *not* see the facial displays (the collateral behaviors)
- So what do we often fail to do?
 - *Comment on their feelings!*



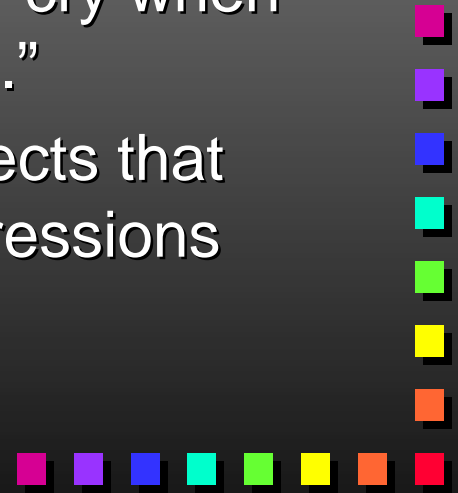
Personal observations:

- We learn to name things out there before we name things within (e.g., “This is a chair” before “My knee hurts”)
 - (We tact external stimuli before we learn to tact events within our skin)
- *If we don't label the emotion first, they can't learn to name it later*



Lovaas' position: Emotional Development Problem

- "...children were taught to hug...but many times the embraces seemed more like the children were merely going through the motions without 'real feelings.' We referred to these hugs as operant hugs."
- "At the same time, it became apparent that it was impossible to teach the children to laugh or cry when it was appropriate to express such feelings."
- "Their genuine appearance most likely reflects that these emotions are inborn or reflexive expressions common to all human beings."



Emotional Development Lessons

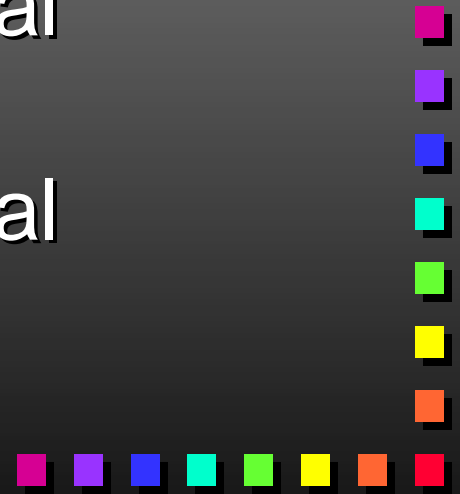
- 1. “One of the first steps in shaping emotional behaviors is teaching the student to recognize and identify expressions. **We start by teaching the student to identify outside or external expressions of emotions.**”
- 2. “We then teach the student how such external expressions correspond to internal states or feelings.”
- 3. “Finally, we teach the student to identify the causes of various feelings”



Initial Lesson Sequence a la Lovaas

(and many others since)

- Receptive identification of emotional expressions in 2-D format
- Receptive identification of emotional expressions in vivo
- Expressive labeling of emotional expressions in 2-D format
- Expressive labeling of emotional expressions in vivo



Higher level lessons

- Teaching underlying feelings of emotional expressions (*What is he doing? Smiling. How is he feeling? Happy.*)
- The causes of feelings (*What is he feeling? Sad. Why? Hitting.*)
- Teaching the student to label his/her own feelings (*How do you feel? Angry. Why are you angry?...*)



Lessons to teach “mind-reading”

- 1. Recognition of facial expressions from photographs (**‘Point to *happy*’**)
- 2. Recognizing emotion from schematic drawings (**‘Point to *happy face*’**)
- Identifying ‘situation-based’ emotions (Show picture of situation with blank face, ask **‘How will he feel?’**...show face/give two choices)



Hanen Centre approach

- *“The best time to identify emotions with a Cue Card is when your child is experiencing them.”*
- Jake loves candy. When mom gives one, she says, “Jake likes candy. Jake’s happy” and prompts Jake to touch happy-face card and repeats, ‘happy.’
...One day, mom gives candy and waits...Jake makes mom touch Cue Card and says, ‘Jake’s happy’

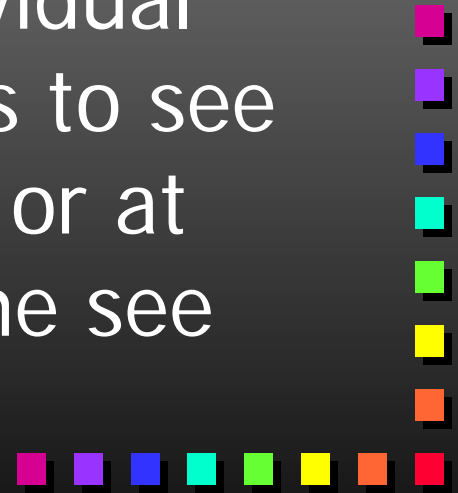


- So why is this so hard with children with autism?



What Skinner says about: Social Reinforcement and Self-Awareness

"As we have noted, it is *social reinforcement* (emphasis added) which leads the individual to know himself. It is only through the gradual growth of a verbal community that the individual becomes 'conscious.' He comes to see himself only as others see him, or at least only as others insist that he see himself (p.140)."



Defining the Autoclitic

- 1. "The term "autoclitic" is intended to suggest behavior which is based upon or depends upon other verbal behavior (p.315)."
- 2. "An autoclitic affects the listener by indicating either a property of the speaker's behavior or the circumstances responsible for that property (p. 329)."



Non-Vocal Autoclitics

1. "The autoclitic function can be carried by an arch look or a tone of voice (p. 318)."
2. "It [punctuation] corresponds, in part, to temporal and intonational patterns in vocal behavior, which must also be regarded as autoclitic (p. 355)."

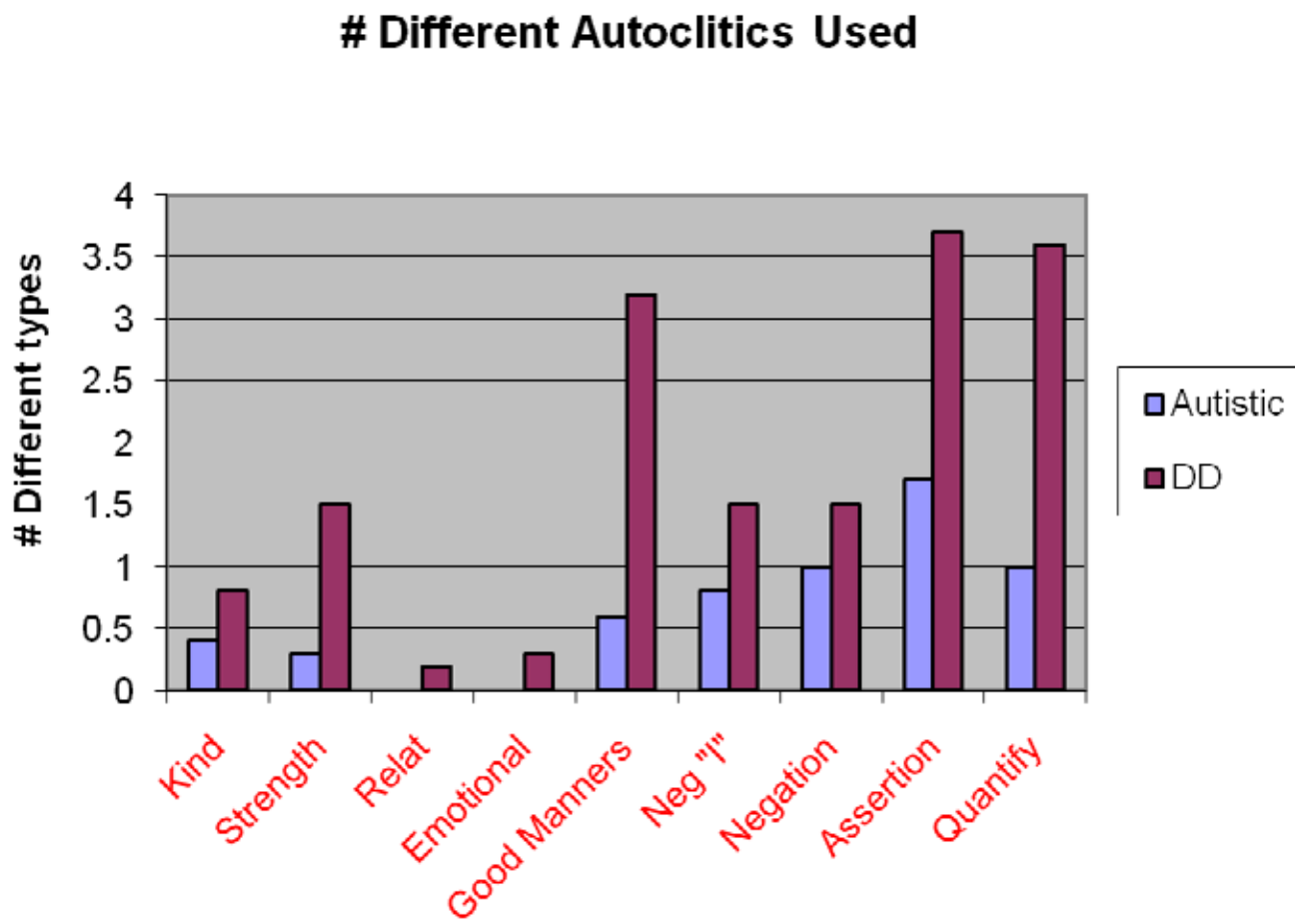


What Skinner says about: Social Reinforcement and Autoclitics

- "... the contingencies which generate a response to one's own verbal responses are *unlikely* in the absence of *social reinforcement*. It is because our behavior is important to *others* that it eventually becomes important to us...(*emphasis added*) (p. 314) ."



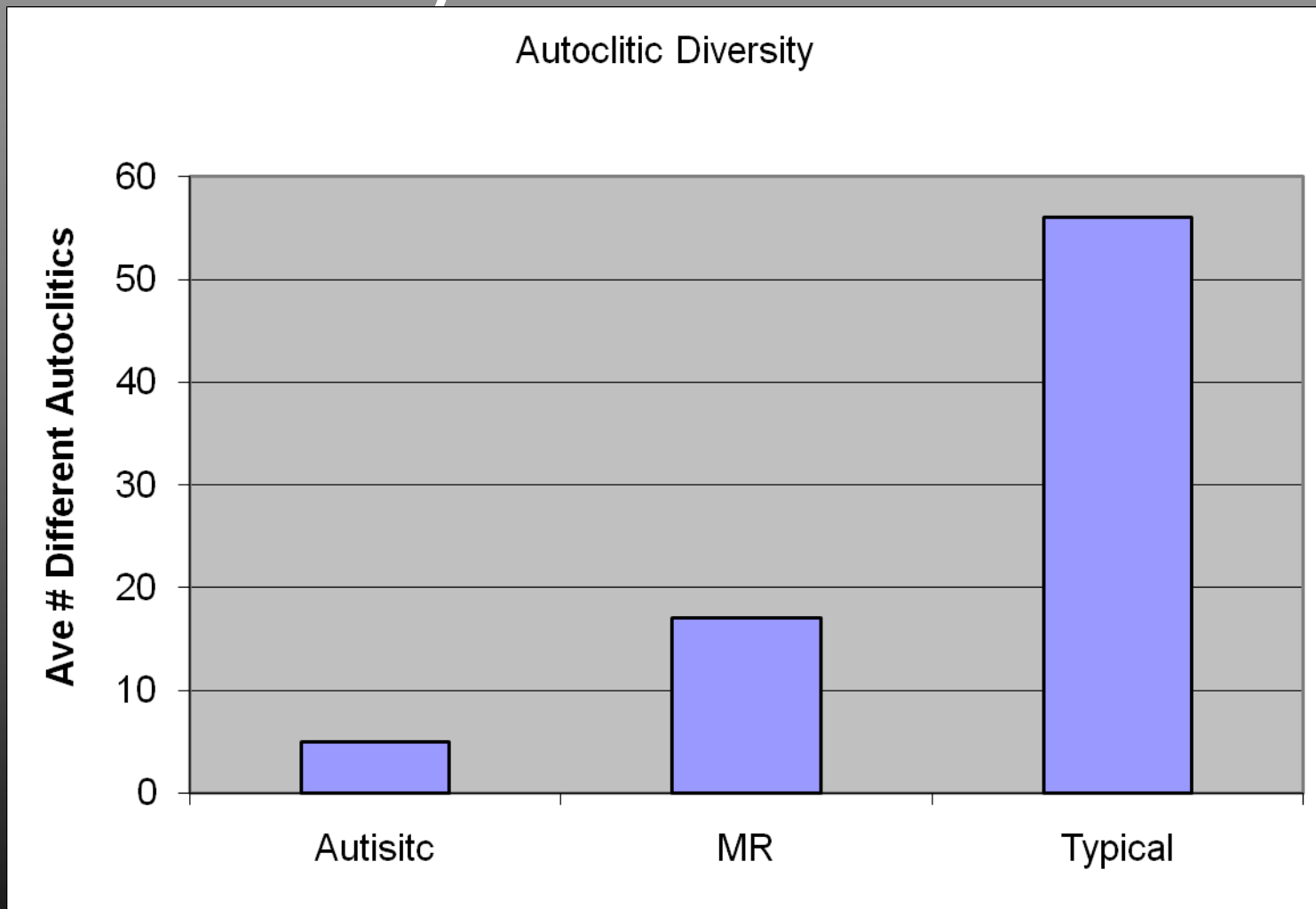
Children with autism vs. DD and the # of different autoclitics used



Negation
and
Assertion
account for
70% of all.
For typical
children,
these
categories
account for
only 31%.

(From Frost & Bondy, 1992 ABA presentation)

Diversity of autoclitics used



(From Frost & Bondy, 1992 ABA presentation)

Can we take advantage of natural contingencies?

Can we create feelings?

What are our ethical obligations to the students?



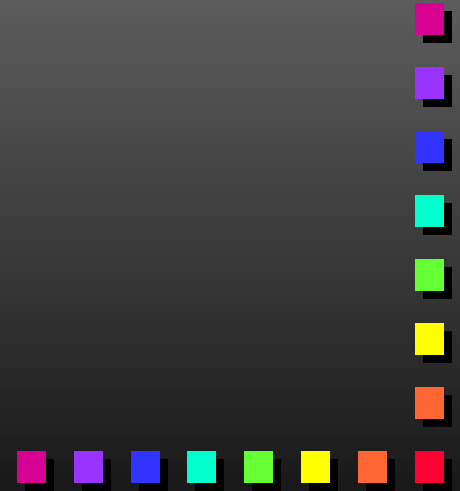
Capture versus create

- Capture means take advantage of what life presents-
 - Don't just fix- comment and prompt
- Create opportunities
 - What makes your child happy? Sad? Angry? Anxious? Scared?
 - Model what he/she feels- not what you feel!



How do we teach any skill?

- We need examples and contrast
 - Hot vs. cold, big vs. little, red vs. blue
 - Happy vs. ?
 - Angry vs. ?
 - Anxious vs. ?
 - Proud vs. ?



How Do We Teach Autocritics?

How do we really teach 'really?'

