Watch Your Language! Does Jargon Matter?

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INTRODUCTION

When engaging with teachers in the development of individual behavioral interventions through school based consultation, it is important for consultants to understand what elements influence teachers’ acceptability of behavioral interventions. Of particular interest to consultants should be the type of language used when describing behavioral interventions to teachers. Specifically, should consultants be using jargon or non-jargon language when describing behavioral interventions to teachers during consultation? Research that examines these factors is conflicting and outdated (Hyatt et al., 1991; Hyatt & Tingstrom’s, 1993; Kazdin & Cole, 1981; Knotek, 2003; Witt, Moe, et al., 1984; Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1979; Woolfolk et al., 1977).

METHOD

• 101 K-6 public school elementary teachers participated.
• Participants were given a description of a student displaying a problematic behavior in the classroom setting.
• Participants were asked to read one of two positive behavioral interventions to address the problematic behavior.
• Some participants were presented with a positive behavior intervention described in non-jargon terms while others were provided a description in jargon terms.
• Participants were asked to rate the acceptability and usage of the intervention read on the Usage Rating Profile-Intervention (URP-IR) (Briesch et al., 2013).
• In addition, teachers completed brief demographic questions such as age, grade taught, highest degree held, number of years teaching, etc.
• Complete participation in the study lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

The following jargon and corresponding non-jargon terms/phrases are samples taken from the scenarios used for this research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jargon Term</th>
<th>Non-Jargon Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement of Incompatible Behavior (DRI)</td>
<td>Operantly Condition Reinforcing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Cooperate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rewarding</td>
<td>Fostering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Jargon Term</td>
<td>Jargon Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Jargon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habit</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant difference between the type of language used (jargon versus non-jargon) and total acceptability and usage ratings on the URP-IR, F(1,99) =.65, p = .423. In addition, for the acceptability and usage ratings on the URP-IR, the variances were equal for the positive behavioral intervention described in jargon and non-jargon language, F(1, 99) = .123, p = .727.

When a two-way ANOVA was completed, results indicated that there was not a significant main effect for the scenario. The jargon (M = 136.12) scenario was not rated significantly higher than non-jargon (M = 136.79) scenario, F(1, 95) = 5.60, p = .456. Furthermore, there was no main effect for type of classroom taught. Specialized (M = 138.00) classroom teachers did not provide a significantly higher rating than general education (M = 136.32) or special education (M = 135.00) teachers, F(2, 95) = .256, p = .775. Lastly, there was no significant scenario by class interaction, F(2, 95) = .445, p = .642.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research assist in clarifying previous conflicting findings in this area (Hyatt et al., 1991; Hyatt & Tingstrom’s, 1993; Kazdin & Cole, 1981; Knotek, 2003; Witt, Moe, et al., 1984; Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1979; Woolfolk et al., 1977). This research can assist in forming the basis for a theory related to language preference (jargon versus non-jargon) and the type of classroom taught (e.g., gym, art, music, etc.). The findings of the present study also have practical implications for school psychology and applied behavior analysis graduate training programs. Courses that contain content related to behavioral consultation or applied behavior analysis can present these results as a foundation for relationship/rapport building with consultees, particularly teachers.

CONCLUSION

• Type of language used (jargon versus non-jargon) did not affect total acceptability and usage ratings on the URP-IR.
• Type of classroom taught (e.g., general education, special education, specialized) did not affect preference on the URP-IR for jargon versus non-jargon terminology when describing a positive behavioral intervention.
• Therefore, in relation to acceptability of intervention, there may be no reason for consultants to use jargon terminology when describing behavioral interventions.
• More research is needed on the effect of jargon on other areas of behavioral consultation such as relationship building, fidelity of implementation, or willingness to collaborate.

REFERENCES


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