

Action Research – Communication (Complex Communicators)

Focus

Communication (Complex Communicators)

Strategic Aims

Students who have complex communication needs will wave in response to being greeted

Annual Aim

Students will wave hello in response to being greeted. Baseline data collected, progress recorded and analysed. Future direction outlined.

Reported to the Board of Trustees.

Targets

100% improvement across Term 3 for all 18 participants.

Context

The ability to greet people is an important social skill for an individual to acquire. Greetings are one of the most used forms of communication in day-to-day life. Greetings are a way of communicating with both familiar people as well as meeting new people and beginning to form relationships with others. This opens up being able to learn more about a person. Building relationships is a valuable skill for children to acquire and is something that should continue to be done across their lifespan as they move through different stages of life and interact in a variety of contexts¹. Individuals who are on the autism spectrum are known to have difficulty with social skills including greeting others and therefore it is a valuable skill to target for these individuals², as well as other individuals who may have difficulty with social skills as well.

At Ruru Specialist School, greetings are always a big part of everybody's day. However, the ways in which a greeting is responded to, varies greatly especially for our population of students who present as complex communicators. A lot of our verbal students are able to respond to a greeting by saying "hello" or waving, whilst complex communicators respond to a greeting by vocalising, using body language, giving eye contact, or do not respond at all. For this reason, action research has been undertaken to determine if complex communicators can be supported to respond to a greeting by waving. Waving is a universal greeting understood by everyone and it does not require a communication device or verbal speech therefore making it a suitable option for a lot of individuals in a range of contexts unless they have physical limitations.

Gathering of Information/Action

¹ Hood, S. A., Luczynski, K. C., & Mitteer, D. R. (2017). Toward meaningful outcomes in teaching conversation and greeting skills with individuals with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 50*(3), 459-486

² Bondy, A., & Weiss, M. J. (Eds.). (2013). Teaching social skills to people with autism: Best practices in individualizing interventions. Woodbine House.

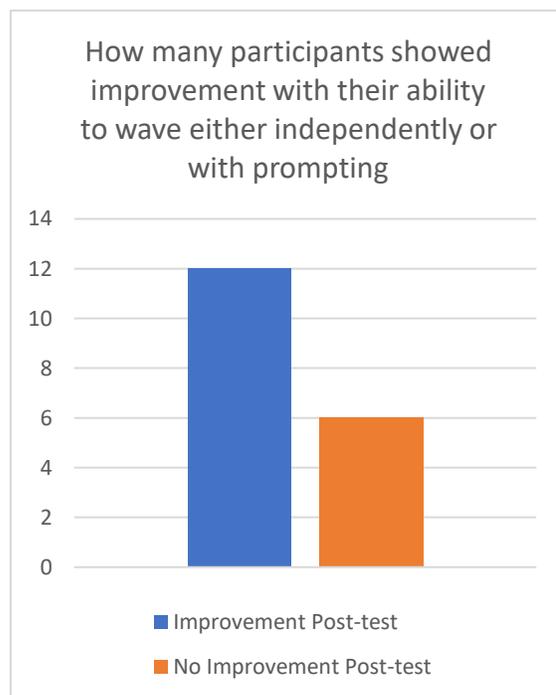
At the beginning of Term 3 (July 2022) the Speech-Language Therapist gathered data on 18 students who present as complex communicators, on how they responded to a greeting. These students were in Te Matatini Tahī, Te Matatini Rua, Donovan and Salford satellite classes. Assessment occurred by scribe waving and verbally greeting each student and seeing how they responded. A few levels of prompting were trialled if students did not independently respond to the greeting/wave. Students were then reassessed at the end of Term 3 in September and the results were compared to their initial responses.

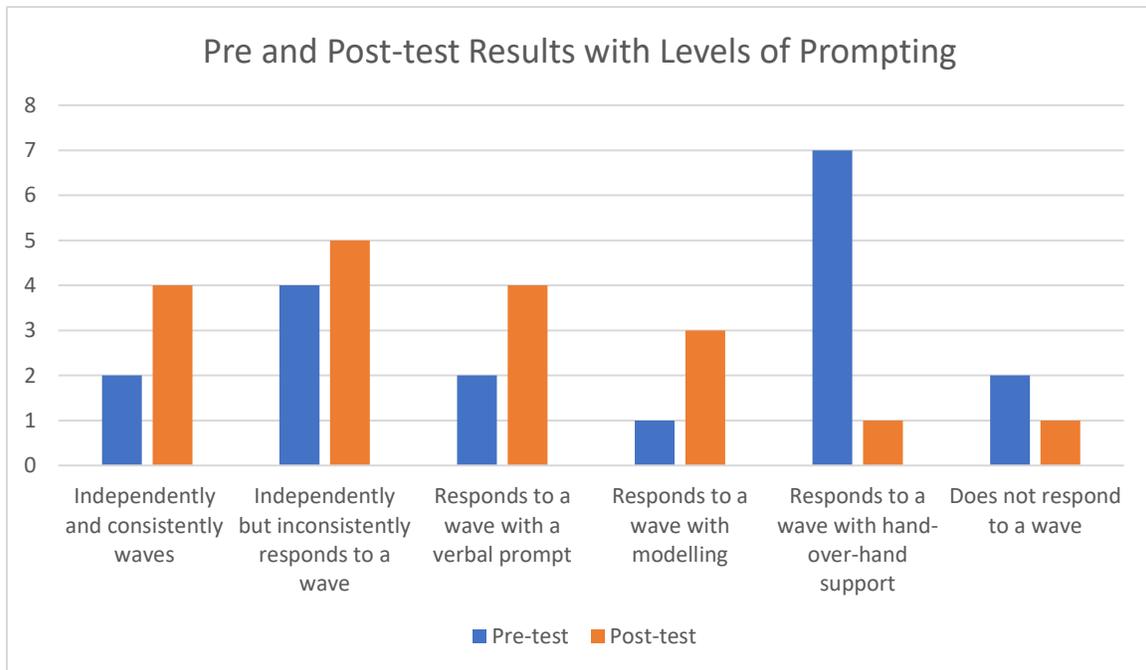
A staff training session was provided by the SLT and suggestions were given to each class as to when and how to support students to respond to a greeting. Each class was provided with a personalised social story which included a song and a prompting hierarchy was given to classroom staff so they could see how to prompt each child. Staff were encouraged to practice waving at specific times of the day e.g. during newsboard as well as other appropriate times e.g. morning greetings, when entering a class etc. Teachers were also encouraged to set IEP's for the students of waving where appropriate. The SLTs also included greetings into sessions either by greeting each child individually and applying the prompting hierarchy with the support of classroom staff as well as reading the social story provided to each class. SLTs also made an effort to greet and wave to students when entering the classroom or other learning areas e.g. pool, playground. Ongoing support and follow up was completed across the term as needed and teachers continuously gave verbal feedback to SLTs re progress.

Outcome

Pre-test results indicated that only 11% (2/18) of target students had an independent and consistent wave in response to a greeting whilst 22% (4/18) had an independent wave in response to a greeting however this was inconsistent. Post-test results showed improvement across the group of 18 students with 66% (12/18) of target students showing improvement (either moving towards independent waving or requiring reduced levels of prompting). 22% (4/18) of the students who did not improve were already independent with waving either consistently or inconsistently. The remaining 11% (2/18) of participants who did not show improvement required hand over hand support and did not respond to a greeting by waving.

There were six levels on the waving hierarchy used to gather pre and post test data. There were 2 students who could independently and consistently respond to a greeting by waving pre-test and 4 post-test. Whilst 4 students could independently but inconsistently respond to a greeting by waving pre-test, this increased to 5 post-test. There were 2 students who responded to a greeting by waving with a verbal prompt pre-test and 4 post-test. 1 student responded to a greeting by waving with modelling pre-test, this increased to 3 post-test. There was a significant decrease in the number of students requiring hand over hand support with there being 7 pre-test and only 1 post-test. 2 students did not respond by waving pre-test and this was reduced to 1 post-test.





In addition to changes being observed with waving in response to a greeting, other changes were observed in response or relation to greetings across the group of students. 61% of target students showed improvements with either verbal greetings or using greetings on their device both as a response to a greeting from someone else as well as initiating a greeting. Some students were also observed to spontaneously recite/look at the social story provided to the class as well as sing the “this is the way we wave hello” song.

Reflection/Reason for Variance

The findings of this inquiry indicate a successful outcome for the 18 participants. 77% of the target students were able to show some improvement with their ability to respond to a greeting by waving or were already waving independently at baseline. This indicates the strategies of implementing a social story with a song, embedding practice into class routines and Speech Therapy sessions, and modelling by classroom staff and peers were successful to support the improvement of students with the target of waving.

There were 4 students who did not achieve the aim and were not already independently and consistently waving. These students remained at the same level of prompting in pre and post tests. Upon reflection two of these students have significantly decreased joint attention in social interactions. It is anticipated that with further support these students will begin to improve their greeting skills and whilst one of these students did not begin to wave without hand over hand support there was an increase of exploring greeting buttons on her talker throughout the day. Two students remained inconsistent but independent with their waving in response to a greeting – it is likely they require continued prompting and a longer period of time to achieve this goal.

It was pleasing to observe a lot of changes to other forms of greetings throughout this time period. This is not a surprising find and is likely a reflection of teachers and other staff members being

knowledgeable and accepting of all forms of communication as well as modelling this for the students e.g. greetings on AAC devices.

Evaluation/Next Steps

- All staff will continue to be encouraged to greet students and prompt responses from students as well as model appropriate responses to greetings especially waving
- Teachers will be encouraged to keep using the social story provided and consult with SLTs if they have any queries around teaching students greetings/how to respond to greetings
- Future Speech-language therapy sessions will work on students developing a wave in response to a greeting and aim to reduce the levels of prompting taken at the end of this inquiry
- Students who can respond to a greeting by waving will begin to work on other modalities of greeting others if they have not already achieved this e.g. verbally, using AAC devices
- Parents will be asked about how their child greets others in out of school contexts during IEP/ICP meetings
- Additional IEP/ICP goals relating to greeting and specifically waving will be set and resources provided to teaching staff and whanau as required

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Speech Language Therapist

2022 Analysis of Variance Summary

Focus: Communication (Complex Communicators)			
Strategic Aim: Students who have complex communication needs will wave in response to being greeted			
Annual Aim: Students will wave hello in response to being greeted. Annual baseline data collected, subsequent progress recorded and analysed. Future direction set. Reported to the Board of Trustees.			
Baseline Data: Only 11% (2/18) of target students had an independent wave in response to a greeting whilst 22% (4/18) had an independent wave in response to a greeting however this was inconsistent.			
Target: 100% improvement across Term 3 for all participants.			
Actions (what did we do?)	Outcomes (what happened?)	Reasons for the variance (why did it happen?)	Evaluation/Next Steps