

Early Intervention Research in the Time of Covid: Possibilities Through Telehealth

Claire Shingleton-Smith, Maurice Feldman, Alicia Azzano, Julie Koudys, Paige O'Neill, Amanpreet Randhawa
Department of Applied Disability Studies, Brock University, ON, Canada

Introduction

- Parents of infants at-risk for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be able to identify warning signs as early as 9 months of age (Feldman et al., 2012).
- ABA-based early interventions may help reduce severity of symptoms pre-diagnosis (Azzano et al., 2020a, b).
- Previous studies focusing on parent-mediated interventions did not have an emphasis on generalization (Azzano et al., 2020a, b).

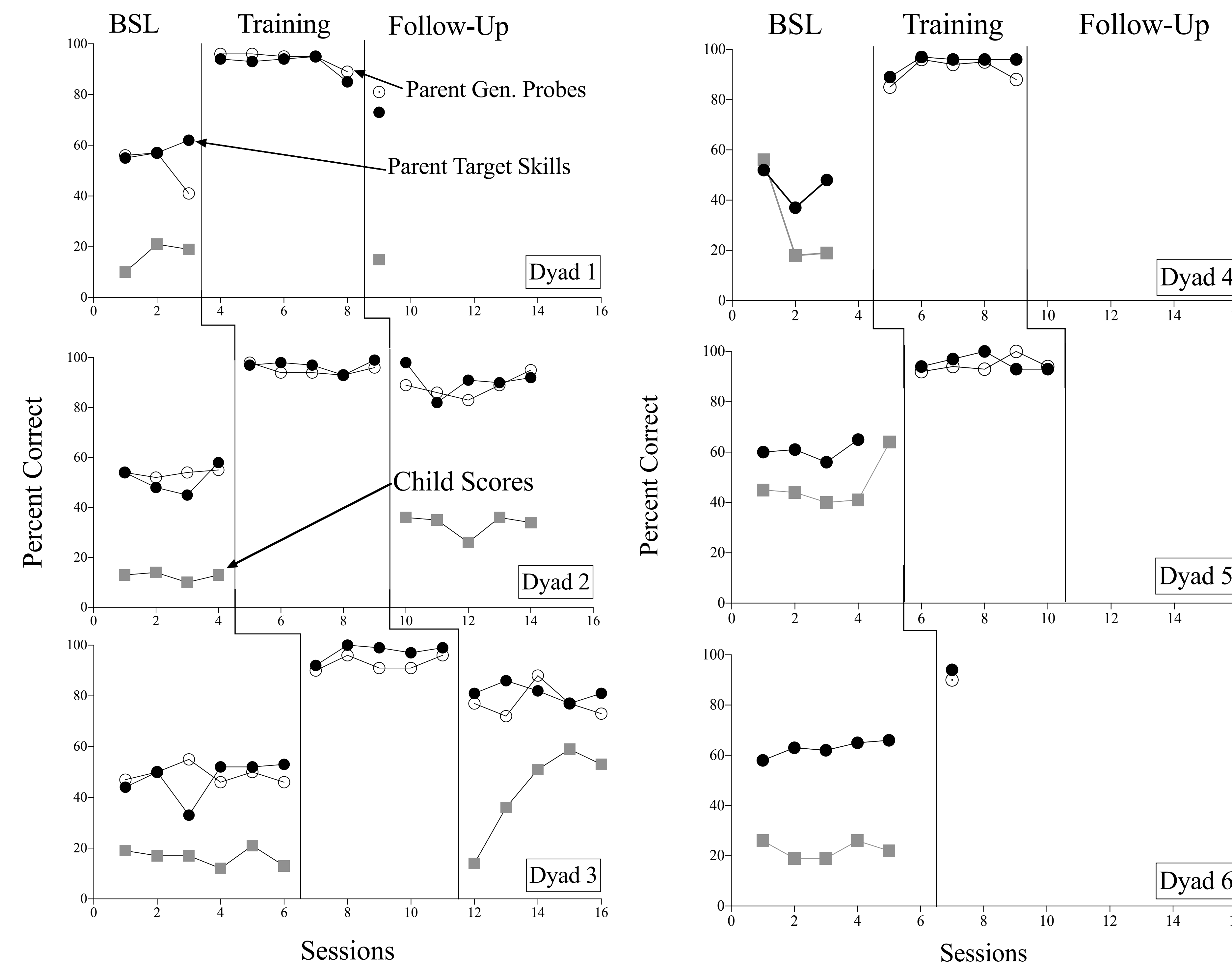
Purpose

To examine the effects of general case training (GCT) on the acquisition and generalization of teaching strategies for parents with young children at-risk for autism spectrum disorder via telehealth.

Methods

- Six parent-child dyads (child age: 10–36 mos.) participated in two concurrent multiple baselines across participants.
- Parents completed the Parent Observation of Early Markers Scale (POEMS; Feldman et al., 2012) monthly. Child target exemplars were selected from elevated POEMS items.
- Parents trained using behavioural skills training (BST) and GCT (Seiverling et al., 2010; Ward-Horner & Sturmey, 2008) via telehealth over 5 sessions.
- BST involves providing written instructions, behavioural models, practice and feedback to learn new skills.
- GCT involves the inclusion of multiple training exemplars that are taught across a broad range of discriminative stimuli and responses to simulate the entire instructional universe.
- Parents were trained to teach their child 9 target exemplars across 3 broad skill categories: imitation; receptive language; expressive language.
- Parent teaching accuracy was assessed using the Parent Teaching Skills Checklist.
- Additional untrained exemplars were tested in baseline and probed during intervention to assess generalization.

Results



Consumer Satisfaction

- 80% of families who completed training reported they were **extremely satisfied** with the training program, 20% reported they were **somewhat satisfied**
- 100% of families who completed training reported they were **highly likely** to recommend the training program to other families
- 60% of families who completed training reported they learned **a great deal** from the training program, 40% reported they learned **a moderate amount** from the training program

IOA Parent data: M = 88% (range: 66–100) across 41% of sessions
Child data: M = 84% (range: 75–100) across 25% of sessions

Conclusions

- Parent teaching accuracy increased in both trained and untrained exemplars from baseline to training.
- GCT combined with BST may be an effective approach to parent training for pre-diagnostic young infants with developmental warning signs.
- Using GCT may enhance generalization of parent teaching skills and allow for less subsequent training.
- Training parents via telehealth is a cost-effective, efficient, and socially valid way to implement interventions for families without direct access to services.
- More data collection is needed to determine children's long-term developmental gains and parent skill maintenance from this approach.

Future Directions

Data collection for the second set of three parent-child dyads is continuing to be collected.
Future researchers should consider implementing an in-home teaching model and a randomized control trial.

Acknowledgments

Council for Research in Social Sciences • Special COVID-19 Related Dean's Discretionary Fund

Contact: cs18sk@brocku.ca

