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The Role of Functional Behaviour Assessment in Early Childhood Education:
Supporting Teachers to Manage Challenging Behaviours in the Classroom

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Abstract

This research looks to explore the use of functional behaviour assessment (FBA) within early childhood education (ECE) settings, as employed by teaching staff themselves. Although the use of FBA is widely researched, there is minimal research to date on its effectiveness within the ECE sector and within Aotearoa specifically. Debates in current research argue whether or not teachers are equipped and skilled enough to effectively carry out an FBA. This research study therefore investigated its applicability within Aotearoa's ECE field, as conducted by ECE teachers themselves, after completing an FBA professional learning programme. Specifically, this thesis explores how five ECE teachers reported that they implemented FBA within the classroom, how their understanding of challenging behaviours and how to manage them, may have changed after learning about and employing an FBA; and the benefits and challenges they believe there are, around FBA and its use within an ECE classroom environment. Through the use of a qualitative thematic analysis, findings conclude that FBA can be effectively and accurately implemented within ECE classrooms by teachers themselves, after completing an FBA professional learning programme. ECE teachers reported that they now think functionally about behaviours while considering the role and influences of antecedents and consequences. Furthermore, it was found that the advantages of using FBA within ECE include working in a team of teachers, the ability to intervene at an early age, and the perceived alignment with Aotearoa's ECE curriculum document, Te Whāriki. Challenges identified in this study of using FBA within ECE include, understanding the differentiation between age appropriate behaviours and problematic behaviours, no full teaching teams attending the workshop, and that there was still a need for additional external support.

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