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What is Verbal Behaviour (VB)? *By Dr Vince Carbone*

In the past most ABA programs implemented for children with autism were based on the work published by Ivar Lovaas in the 1980's.

However, during those years Jack Michael PhD, Mark Sundberg PhD and James Partington PhD among others in the field, focused on researching BF Skinner's Analysis of Verbal Behaviour and its effectiveness of teaching language skills.

This research has improved ABA programs by emphasizing the important elements in language acquisition previously ignored by traditional Lovaas-based programs. That is, capturing a child's motivation to develop a connection between the value of a word and the word itself. The Verbal Behaviour approach focuses on teaching specific components of expressive language first. Lovaas based approaches use ABA to teach language skills based on the premise that receptive language should be developed prior to expressive language.

Another difference lies within the emphasis of "function" (Verbal behaviour) of language instead of "form" (Lovaas-based) – e.g., in a VB program, a child is first taught to ask for a "sweet" any way they can (vocally, sign language etc..) only when they actually want a "sweet". They capture that desire for a sweet and turn it into the lesson that the word (or sign) for a sweet will get you what you want... A sweet!

In a Lovaas-based program, the child may be taught to say the "sweet" while other words are repeatedly taught but not necessarily when the child wants a sweet at that moment.