

January 2015

Issue 34

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ABC analysis (Antecedent - Behavior - Consequence)

In our last newsletter we discussed the importance of identifying *antecedents* and how to use this knowledge to prevent problem behavior. This article will provide a brief overview of how to analyze and intervene with a student in regards to their behavior and the *consequences* which follow. While we may do our best to use our knowledge of antecedents to prevent a problem behavior from occurring, we often still have difficulty decreasing the behavior. To make an effective plan, antecedent interventions should be paired with consequence interventions. Analyzing the consequence is crucial to a successful plan since we cannot and **should** not attempt to prevent every occurrence of a problem behavior if we are working toward the long term integration and success of our students. For example, if all we do is prevent Liam from hitting his peer by keeping him far away from the peer or by blocking him from striking, we are simply manipulating the environment in the school context to temporarily stop the behavior. Liam may still possess the *need* to hit his peer in order to elicit an emotional reaction. This is where consequences play a huge part in any intervention. This *need* that Liam has refers to *the function* of his behavior, or in other words, the reason that Liam is hitting his peer.

Consequences refer to any change in the environment that occurs after a particular behavior. For example, a consequence of Liam hitting a peer could include the teacher telling him to stop, other peers looking at him, the peer who is getting hit screaming etc. Consequences essentially represent any effect the behavior has on the environment around it. We can think of consequences also as a *pay-off*. Any behavior we engage in typically has a payoff. For example, we go to work and get a paycheck or we put a sweat-shirt on to make us feel warmer. Moreover, the consequence of a behavior determines whether the behavior will increase or decrease in the future. The same process applies to our students with autism. To return to our example of Liam, we want to analyze our ABC data to find a pattern of consequences that occur following his hitting behavior. If our data shows that the most common consequence in the pattern after the hitting is the screaming reaction from the peer, we would hypothesize that the function of the behavior is the attention Liam gets after he hits.

To take a step back, we can reduce all behavior into about four basic functions (i.e., consequences): Attention (positive or negative), tangible (item or activity), escape/avoidance, and sensory (feels good). When we are looking at a problem behavior, we want to try to determine which of these functions is involved. Keep in mind that there could often be more than one function implicated in a particular behavior. Once we collect enough data and can hypothesize about the function(s) of the behavior in question, we can proceed to developing an intervention plan. In most cases we should look at trying to teach the student a *replacement behavior*. This refers to a behavior that attempts to serve the same function as the problem behavior, but is more socially appropriate and functional. So if Liam's behavior of hitting his peer serves the function of gaining attention, we should work on finding alternative and more appropriate ways for Liam to gain this attention. We would want to try to get as much detail as possible, such as what is it that Liam likes best about the peer's reaction? Is it the sound the peer makes, the facial expression, both together, or something else? Once we can narrow the specific consequences down even further, we can look at finding other ways that the student can get access to the same type of consequence through a different, more functional and appropriate behavior. For example, if it appears that Liam likes the facial expressions the peer makes when he hits him, we can teach Liam to request that the peer makes the facial expressions with whatever level of communication is appropriate for him (use a question, one word, picture exchange, tap on the shoulder, etc.). Sometimes, it takes trial and error to figure out the alternative behavior that will work and the consequence that will effectively replace the behavior, but you will see clearly if it works when the student's problem behavior starts to decrease and the alternative behavior begins to increase. Some important ideas to keep in mind when selecting potential replacement behavior is that it be as easy as possible for the student to engage in, the natural reward for the behavior occurs immediately, and it is easy to generalize across different people and settings. Be sure to also see the *Teacher's Tip* section in our newsletter for important strategies on how to respond to problem behaviors when they do occur.

For further and more in depth reading on this evidence based strategy, please see the following resources:

- <http://www.behaviorbabe.com/>
<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageId=449>

Teacher Tip:

As with our feature article, our teacher tip will discuss what to do when a problem behavior actually occurs? Even if we are working with a good plan to prevent the behavior (antecedent strategies) and replace the behavior with something more appropriate (consequent strategies), the behavior will undoubtedly still occur with some frequency. The following tips will help guide you when the problem behavior of a student occurs:

Avoid reinforcing it!: As consistently as possible, if we know the function (i.e., payoff) of the behavior, try not to provide that payoff any longer. For example, if we know Tyler is running out of class to avoid difficult tasks, we should try to stop him from running out. It may sound challenging, but the goal is to make it easier and more likely that the student will engage in an alternative behavior instead of running out of class. If we make it a *pain* for him to run out, but easier and faster for him to raise his hand and ask for help, he is more likely to acquire this skill. There will most likely be an *extinction burst* when we stop reinforcing behaviors that have been reinforced in the past, meaning that the student's behaviors may become more intense and frequent or he may try new behaviors to gain access to the reinforcement he was accustomed to receiving. It is best to stay consistent and determined to stop reinforcing the behavior, as the student will soon learn that this behavior no longer works to get him what he wants.

Minimize attention: Although the main initial function of a behavior may not necessarily be attention, it is often a useful habit to avoid providing attention to the problem behavior as much as possible. Oftentimes, a behavior may start out with having an avoidance function but may turn into a more attention-based function when the student learns how much of a disturbance and what kind of emotional reactions he/she can elicit. As a general rule, it helps to focus more of our attention on the behaviors we do want rather than ones we do not want, as this keeps us thinking in a proactive manner and getting into less of a *damage control* mode.

Occupational Therapy Corner:

Students with ASD frequently present sensory processing and/or modulation difficulties which interfere with their ability to make sense of the world around them, use their bodies efficiently to play, and perform age appropriate activities, as well as maintain functional attention, alertness, and an arousal level necessary for productive interactions and learning. These challenges can potentially be the basis for disruptive behaviors and can take two main forms. On the one hand, the behaviors can be the direct consequence of sensory-based sensitivities. For example, a student may startle and lash out in response to unpredictable touch or in contrast may escape/avoid tasks such as finger painting, pasting or other activities involving unpleasant tactile input. On the other hand, the behavior can be the direct consequence of a sensory need. For example, a student may constantly move on his seat to support postural alignment and functional alertness. With respect to the latter, the occupational therapist will refer to the behavior as a sensory-seeking behavior.

Therefore, when attempting to determine the function of a behavior, the observer should consider each sensory system and question if the trigger of the behavior could be sensory input. This means paying attention to the level of noise, quantity of sound, visual, touch and movement-proprioceptive stimuli in the environment, as well as that naturally involved in the task itself. Repeated observation of a behavior in its context, in conjunction with a good understanding of sensory dysfunction and the student's particular sensory profile, is essential for the occupational therapist to confirm that the function of the behavior is sensory-based. In that respect, it is important to note that sensory-seeking behaviors can also have other causes aside from being the direct result of a primary sensory dysfunction per se. For example, the behaviors themselves can act as an anxiety outlet used to calm oneself.

Once sensory has been identified as being the function of the behavior, we can intervene by altering the student's environment appropriately, and/or provide more functional sensory-based activities to answer the student's sensory needs. As we know, many students with ASD seek frequent movement input in an attempt to facilitate the processing and modulation of all the incoming sensory information from the environment. The occupational therapist will often recommend embedding sensory-based activities/strategies and natural movement breaks into the student's schedule in order to provide much needed sensory input periodically throughout the day. Here are a few safe movement/proprioceptive activities (providing alerting and organizing input) that could be used for this purpose: floor time play; being door monitor at recess; pushing heavy furniture (large garbage/recycling bin on wheels, cart of books); carrying heavy objects (library basket, milk cart, putting chairs on desk, organizing mats in gym); standing up from the seat and stretching; repetitive squatting to pick up objects from the floor; distributing papers/supplies to peers or picking up materials in a bin; and bringing a note/absentee card to the office. Overall, when trying these strategies, keep in mind that the functions of a behavior may be multiple and require a combination of strategies to be addressed successfully.



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Our team is composed of professionals with a variety of specializations. Designated as a Centre of Excellence within the province, our mandate is to assist LBPSB schools in the implementation of best practices for the inclusion of students with ASD and to serve as a resource to the other English school boards in Quebec. Our team provides assistance to students and families and works to support educational personnel in augmenting their capacity to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom. We do this through direct intervention, coaching, consulting, professional development, and the sharing of materials.

We're on the web! <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca>

AUTISM: CLASSROOM SUCCESS WITH ABA*

By using applied behavior analysis (ABA), teachers can make positive and meaningful changes in the lives of their students, including teaching new skills and reducing interfering behavior. Extensive evidence demonstrates that ABA significantly improves outcomes, particularly for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This guide is designed as a quick-reference tool for teachers and paraprofessionals using ABA in their inclusive and special education classrooms. It is also a useful resource for teachers and parents as they consult with board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs). Written by experienced special education teachers who are also BCBAs, this guide reviews the key features of ABA and offers examples of how to apply it in classroom settings.

What is ABA?

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is the process of systematically using principles of learning theory to develop interventions for improving socially significant functions, such as connecting with others, reading, solving math problems, sitting still in class, and many other important skills for succeeding in school. ABA is a data-driven approach that involves closely observing target behaviors in their context, assessing the effects of the antecedents and consequences of those behaviors, and manipulating the antecedents and consequences to produce a meaningful change. At the core of ABA is the A-B-C chain:

- Antecedent (A)—What happens before the behavior occurs.
- Behavior (B)—An observable, measurable action.
- Consequence (C)—What happens after the behavior occurs.

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Michael has cookies.	Michael asks for one.	Michael gets one.
Michael has cookies.	Michael asks for one.	He looks angry and sad.
Michael has cookies.	Michael asks for one.	His mother takes the cookies.

ABA is used to:

- Teach new skills.
- Maintain and generalize productive or appropriate behaviors.
- Decrease or extinguish interfering (e.g., off-task, disruptive, inappropriate) behaviors.

The Seven Dimensions of ABA

Baron, Reich, and Fraenkel (1988) identify the following fundamental characteristics of ABA: (The terms "interventions" and "teaching procedures" are used interchangeably).

- **Applied**—Interventions focus on meaningful, socially important behaviors.
- **Behavioral**—Behaviors are defined in observable and measurable terms consistently.
- **Analytic**—Data are gathered to establish whether the cause of the change in behavior.
- **Technological**—Teaching procedures are written in enough detail to be implemented consistently.
- **Conceptually Systematic**—Interventions are based on learning principles, not tricks.
- **Effective**—Interventions produce significant changes.
- **Generalizable**—Behavioral changes are maintained over time and in environments.

What are Behaviors?

Behaviors are observable, measurable actions. They may be either:

- **Productive skills** (such as making requests, greeting others, reading, writing) that we want to teach or increase. OR
- **Interfering activities** (such as screaming, hitting, running away) that we want to decrease.

To use ABA, behaviors must be:

- **Clearly defined** using descriptive words so they can be measured reliably consistently over time and by different observers; AND
- **Examined in context** to determine whether the goal is to increase and strengthen them, replace them, or decrease them. For example, the context determines whether we set a goal to decrease running (around the hallway) OR increase running (during lap on the playground).

*Applied Behavior Analysis

Read all about it!

Autism: Classroom Success with Applied Behavior Analysis

By: Wendy Ashcroft and Angela M. Dellosa

Autism: Classroom Success with Applied Behavior Analysis is a brief laminated guide that was written by two special education teachers who are also Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA's). It provides information on the application of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) principles in the classroom. It offers an overview of several key principles of ABA such as reinforcement, prompting, modeling, shaping, etc. It provides useful strategies to reduce maladaptive behaviors, and reviews important methods that will help to understand behavior functions and monitor progress, such as data collection. Additionally, this guide can be a helpful resource for parents of students with Autism who are receiving ABA services.

http://www.parentbooks.ca/ASD_Classroom_ABA_for_Educators.html

Try This!

To minimize avoidance/escape type behaviors from students who find writing and reading tasks challenging, try using graphic organizers and other tools to help them organize their thoughts and define the who, what, when, where and why or other details of the assignment.

It is also helpful to increase predictability during difficult tasks so that students are aware of specific expectations and understand how much they are required to produce for a writing assignment.

For students who avoid reading and writing tasks due to their challenges in understanding the perspectives of the characters or in predicting what the characters might be planning to do or what might happen next in a story, it is helpful to model *social thinking* strategies and encourage making smart guesses based on how the characters were described and what they said or did in the story. We can then begin to ask the students questions about what led them to a particular assumption and help them problem solve any misinterpretations.

For more information about building social thinking and reading comprehension see; Jensen A. Med, BCBA, (2011), *I get it! Building Social thinking and Reading Comprehension Through Book Chats*, San Jose, California: Social Thinking Publishing.

Coming soon:

Gold Learning Centre CURRENT TRENDS IN ASD CONFERENCE 2015

MARCH 31, APRIL 1&2, 2015

UQAM, Centre Pierre-Péladeau, Salle Pierre-Mercure
300 boul. de Maisonneuve Est, Montréal, QC H2X 3X6

Tuesday, March 31, 2015

9:00 am **Jed Baker** Social Skills Training

1:00 pm **Jed Baker** No More Victims - Protecting those with ASD from Cyber-Bullying, Internet Predators and Scams

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

9:00 am **Brenda Smith Myles** The Hidden Curriculum

1:00 pm **Isabelle Hénault** Sexual Education for Adolescents with an ASD (*presentation in French*)

Thursday, April 2, 2015

9:00 am **Catherine Faherty** Self-Knowledge and Self-Advocacy in School-Aged Children with ASD

1:00 pm **Peter Vermeulen** Autism as Context Blindness

10% off 3-day registration for groups of 10 or more -- call 514 345 8330 ext. 319

<http://www.goldlearningcentre.com/Current-Trends-in-ASD-Conference-2015-e226/>