

Using Teacher-Training Programs to Bring Applied Behavior Analysis “Under the Dome”

Claire St. Peter Pipkin, Ph.D., BCBA-D (West Virginia University)

In the course of normal conversation, I periodically am asked “what do you do?” I rarely respond with “I’m a behavior analyst.” This is perhaps an unusual omission, because I *am* a behavior analyst. I teach behavior-analytic coursework at a university well-known for its behavior analysis program. My research deals with applications of behavior analysis to school contexts, translations of basic behavioral principles to application, and the effects of reinforcement schedules and reinforcement history. My clinical work focuses on changing the behavior of young or disabled children so that they can fulfill their potential. In my spare time, I use behavior-analytic procedures to teach my horses ground manners and skills under saddle. Even my husband sometimes jests that I must be putting him on some kind of behavior-management plan. In sum, I am probably more of a behavior analyst than I am any of the descriptors that I typically use about my job.

So, why not just answer “I’m a behavior analyst”? Mostly, because I like having conversations with people, and I’ve found that claiming to be a behavior analyst typically results in a change in conversation topic. The new topic often consists of a corny joke (“So, are you analyzing my behavior right now?”), an awkward comment (“So, ummm, the Steelers are looking good, huh?”), or an awkward conversation about autism (“My cousin has autism...”).

If behavior analysis has the potential to have substantial impact on many areas of human life, and I think that it does, why is it so difficult for even hard-core behavior analysts like myself to claim our science in casual conversation?

Among the reasons, applied behavior analysis (ABA) has become a buzz phrase associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)—and nothing else. In many ways, being so strongly associated with ASDs a great thing. Applied behavior analysts continue to work toward bringing ABA treatments to the attention of relevant stakeholders, including parents, teachers, legislators, and insurance companies. It is through these efforts that children with autism will have the best chance of being exposed to effective, empirically based intervention. It is also through these efforts that some laypeople now know the term “applied behavior analysis.”

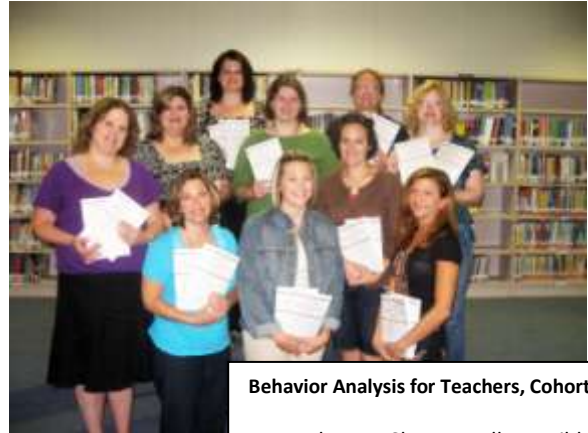
Although the work in autism is exceptionally important, ABA will never become the positive force in society that Skinner envisioned if we limit ourselves to one area of exceptionality. To have a larger-scale impact, applied behavior analysts need to start working “under the dome” (Friman, 2006)—that is, on problems that have mainstream relevance and would directly affect a larger percentage of the population. One way to move under the dome is to collaborate with medical practitioners, such as pediatricians (Friman, 2010).

Another area in which increased collaboration may be useful is in education. Efforts to expand the influence of ABA in education are certainly nothing new; both Skinner and Keller wrote extensively about education in the 1960’s, Bijou noted that ABA had much to offer educational practices in 1970. More recently, the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) movement gained national

support, including legislation requiring that schools consider positive behavior supports for any child whose behavior interferes with his learning or the learning of others (in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA). Despite these inroads, few teachers know that ABA techniques can help them improve their classroom management and their students' academic achievement.

To have a bigger impact on educational practices, we must change what we are doing as consultants. First, we need to start working on changing forms of behavior that have been previously dismissed because they were not "severe." In education, this includes minor disruptive behavior, messy desks, incomplete assignments, unsigned planners, noisy talking in the hallways. It also means that we need to actively pursue the dissemination of our technologies that address curriculum design and student academic growth. Second, we need to actively demonstrate that we are effective with populations other than autism. For example, when we act as consultants for schools, we may need to seek referrals from regular educators and special educators who work with higher-incidence populations, like learning disabilities.

When we are successful with these typically developing students, we must ensure that administration and those responsible for future referrals are aware of the changes in student behavior, which in turn helps to encourage more "under-the-dome" referrals.



Behavior Analysis for Teachers, Cohort 1

LR: Back Row: Sharon Holbert, Libby Davis. Middle: Chrystal Evans, Regina Chisler, Sacha Pence, Jennie Cox, Rhonda Haney. Bottom: Caron Vilasuso, Keegan Costello, Kara Samaj

Although a consultant model serves many behavior analysts well, it may limit the impact that we can have in a system at large. Fantuzzo and Atkins (1992) argued that behavior analysts would have a much greater impact on education if they were viewed by the consumers as "insiders" in the educational system. Unfortunately, attaining "insider" status is difficult to achieve because it is often impossible for behavior analysts (or any consultant) to spend enough time in the school culture to gain real acceptance. To address this issue, Fantuzzo and Atkins suggest that behavior analysts take the time to attend cultural events at the school, like PTA meetings and school fairs. In addition, they recommended cultivation of natural resources within school systems, such as peer tutoring and parental involvement. A similar recommendation comes from the PBS movement, in which consultants initially train individuals, who then serve as the program facilitator within their schools (for more information, visit www.pbis.org). Providing training to individuals who are already part of the school culture could dramatically improve the extent to which teachers "buy in" to behavior-analytic procedures. However, a potential limitation of this method is that behavior-analytic trainings for school personnel are typically brief, and substantial drift from the core behavior-analytic values often occurs over time.

Another way to cultivate natural resources is to provide in-depth training in behavior analysis to teachers or administrators. Behavior-analytic teacher-training programs are not new, Bijou discussed features of effective teacher training programs in 1970, and several programs are still ongoing today. For example, Dorothea Lerman at the University of Houston Clear Lake conducts an intensive one-week teacher training program during the summer. During this program, teachers receive instruction on how to conduct common behavior analytic procedures, such as descriptive observations and preference assessments. According to Dorothea's website (<http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/Lerman/Research.htm>), "approximately 80 certified special education teachers in Louisiana and Texas have participated in this intensive teacher preparation program during the past six summers. The model, which combines didactic and performance-based instruction, has been shown to be highly successful for training educators to instruct students effectively in both structured and unstructured situations."

The need for additional teacher-training programs is substantial. In my first years serving as a consultant for local school districts, I continued to hear teachers complain that their training programs had not adequately prepared them for the challenges that they faced in the classroom. When we consulted with teachers, they often asked why they hadn't learned some of these strategies before. Our local school district, Monongalia County Schools, was interested in providing teachers with additional training, and they agreed to financially support a program that would provide such training. Because of this, West Virginia University's Behavior Analysis for Teachers program was created.

Programs like ours provide extensive training in behavior analysis, resulting in teachers who are sophisticated behavior analysts trained in the basic science as well as practice. The core of the program consists of five graduate-level courses and a year-long classroom-based practicum. Completing these requirements results in teachers being eligible to sit for the Behavior Analysis Certification Board examination. Although our numbers are much smaller than those of other programs— we have trained 7 teachers per year on average— the impact that these teachers can have, and have had, on the district is substantial.

Our program is currently in its second year. During that time, we have demonstrated that teachers not only achieve measureable growth in the skills that we directly teach, but there are also a host of indirect effects. First, the skills that our teachers acquire result in substantial change in the behavior of their students during the course of the teachers' everyday instruction (Pence & St. Peter Pipkin, 2010). Second, trained teachers are able to teach their peers how to implement common ABA procedures. We have demonstrated that this kind of pyramidal training works well with acquisition of skills related to preference assessments (Pence, St. Peter



Behavior Analysis for Teachers, Cohort 2

LR: Front row: Carlene Rhodes, Ann Lawson, Cindy Bucy. Back: Theresa Miller, Regina Wagoner

Pipkin, & Tetreault, in preparation) and functional analyses (Pence & St. Peter Pipkin, in preparation). Third, the teachers begin to identify needs in the school district, and create both individual and large-scale trainings to address those needs. This has occurred at least twice in the past six months. In one case, a teacher identified that other educators were having difficulty using data to make decisions, so she designed a task-analysis on graphing and provided a training to approximately 40 other educators on how to use Excel to make decisions about student progress. In a second instance, a teacher realized that she could maximize instructional time if her paraprofessionals ran discrete-trial procedures with the students. She was able to train several paraprofessionals to fluently conduct discrete-trial sessions within a single in-service session, and these skills not only generalized to the classroom, but maintained during three-month follow-up observations (Costello, Giles, & St. Peter Pipkin, 2010).

The local effects that the teachers had at their schools have begun to spread to the district. Some of our teachers have written letters to their administrators lauding the training they have received, thanking the district for making the training possible, and requesting more (*examples follow article*). District-level administrators recognized the skills of the teachers, and have begun to dispatch the trained teachers to other schools to serve as consultants. This allows the teachers to have a broader effect than they otherwise would. Although these teachers work in a consultant role, teachers may view other teachers more favorably than they would “outside” consultants. Because of the success that trained teachers have both within their home schools and as consultants, the local district has begun to propose that certification as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst be required for certain positions (e.g., teachers in alternative education settings).

Applied behavior analysis has the potential to make wide-reaching, socially significant changes in behavior. Teacher-training programs are just one way that applied behavior analysts can increase our visibility and thereby increase our overall impact on society. I hope that the example of our program provides readers with a starting point in thinking about what they can do to increase the mainstream relevance of our science and practice. (***Letters follow References.***)



Regina Chisler



Rhonda Haney with a client



LR: Kara Samaj, Caron Vilasuso

References

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- Pence, S., St. Peter Pipkin, C., & Tetreault, A. S. (*in preparation*). Using pyramidal training to improve teacher implementation of preference assessments.

Letters following:

[Regina Chisler](#)
[Keegan Costello](#)
[Jennie Cox](#)
[Elizabeth Bell Davis](#)
[Chrystal G. Evans](#)
[Rhonda Haney](#)
[Sharon Holbert](#)
[Kara A. Samaj](#)
[Caron Vilasuso](#)

July 21, 2010

Dear Administration and Board Members,

First and foremost, thank you kindly for providing the opportunity to encounter the single greatest year of education I have received thus far. Every class in this program is applicable to teaching students, creating plans for behavior change, and supporting other teachers and service staff through passing along these Applied Behavioral Principles. After exposure to these principles, my teaching will never be the same.

During the last year, our cohort has read, compared, and synthesized many research articles in reliable journals. In my work with secondary students in the autism program at Morgantown High School, I have used many of these articles, and hands-on training in discrete-trial teaching methods. This method has the ability to generate data-driven proof that academic progress is being made, and is generalizing. This is just one among many ABA methods that is applicable to my daily teaching.

I personally am thrilled with the idea that Monongalia County Schools will have sixteen behavior analysts working in partnerships with other teachers to make our students more successful. To expand on this number of BCBA in the district, it would be beneficial if we adopt behavior analytic principles county-wide.

In addition to BCBA's passing these principles to other teachers, it is important to educate the service staff. These staff members are critical partners in the learning community. Finding the time to pass these teaching methods on to our support staff is difficult.

Dr. Pipkin shared the following website: www.endicott.edu/gps/behavioranalyst. After reviewing this site, it seems that support staff could use this computer based learning as staff development hours. This training provides our staff with knowledge to better support for our students. These are the paraprofessionals/mentors that support our students in co-teach settings, and other classroom environments. If they are following the same principles, data collection methods, and treatment implementation, the student will have more exposure to consistency and in-turn success.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity. My life is forever changed.

Sincerely,
Regina Chisler

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Sarokoff, R. A., & Sturmey, P., (2004). The effects of behavioral skills training on staff implementation of discrete-trial teaching. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 37, 535-538.

July 21, 2010

Dear School Board,

As a first year teacher, I was intimidated by the severe problem behavior and astounding skill deficits of my students. The challenges posed by their lack of age appropriate skills felt overwhelming. The Behavior Analysis for Teachers program has provided me with the skills necessary to manage my classroom more effectively. I am now able to conduct functional analyses to create function based behavior intervention plans, develop skill acquisition programs to increase progress toward IEP goals, and maximize instructional opportunities for all students by working together with other teachers and paraprofessionals. Ultimately, the knowledge I have acquired during this training will be measured by the success of my students.

I can only compare our journey through training to what it must feel like to learn a whole new language. However, this new vocabulary served as a sturdy foundation for the practicum experience. During this time, I had the opportunity to conduct a functional analysis as one part of the functional behavior assessment (FBA) process. Through the systematic manipulation of consequences for specific behaviors, I was able to determine the function of students' behaviors. This process was critical in developing a function based behavior intervention plan. Developing an effective behavior plan for one student enabled me to conduct engaging whole-group activities in the classroom, in turn, maximizing instructional time for all students. The FBA process, dreaded by many special educators, has become so much more valuable to me.

Data propelled the first behavior intervention plan, and data continued to be a driving force behind every decision made in my classroom this year. I found data most useful when determining the level of prompting necessary for my students to complete academic tasks without error. I learned to outline detailed prompt levels, as well as criterion to progress from one level to the next. The errorless teaching of Discrete Trial Instruction (DTI) has been instrumental in the skill development of my students. Following a more structured prompt fading technique made my students' progress more consistent. The reason I became a teacher was to play an active role in childrens' learning. Never have I witnessed more evident skill acquisition than when implementing DTI programs with my students. Previously, I found it challenging to provide effective, empirically based instruction to my students, especially those with more severe disabilities. Behavior analytic approaches to skill acquisition apply to the general education environment as well. The training process has taught me to target foundation skill deficits for teaching, which will allow students to be more independent among their typical peers.

During the final stretch of the training program, I had the opportunity to work with students outside my classroom. During this time, I used my experience to develop new behavior intervention plans and programs for skills acquisition. When evaluating the overall effectiveness of a staff training program, one critical element is the ability of the trainee to exhibit trained skills in novel environments (Jahr, 1998). I am confident in my ability to use this new skill set; even in a new setting, with new clients, targeting new behaviors.

The benefits of the Behavior Analysis for Teachers program will extend far beyond the students in any one classroom. Together, this team of teachers has formed a supportive bond. During our weekly clinical meetings we offer suggestions and welcome the input of others. So, in the end, the success of this program cannot only be measured by the progress of *my* students, but by the collective progress of all of our students. This training has given us the tools to change behavior, as well as use data to clearly demonstrate such changes.

Sincerely,
Keegan Costello

Jahr, E. (1998). Current issues in staff training. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 19*, 73-87.

July 21, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Over the past two years, I have had the opportunity of a lifetime. I have been part of a group of teachers, sponsored by the Monongalia County Board of Education, to complete coursework in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) through West Virginia University. I have worked endless hours on reading research articles, conducting Functional-Analysis sessions, creating Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), and interpreting and analyzing graphs, among many other things. This coursework, the supervised hours, and the practicum required have proven to be invaluable in my classroom. Not only have my students benefited from my new-found knowledge, but my coworkers have learned along the way as well.

As a Special Educator, I am always looking for programs that can give my students the extra boost they need to meet the rigorous grade level expectations of their age appropriate peers. I have learned that ABA is not only about "behavior" but it can be used to help students progress academically as well. Skill acquisition is a major component of ABA and is supported through years of empirical data. One type of training that supports skill acquisition is called discrete-trial teaching (Dib & Sturmey, 2007). The drill and practice of this errorless procedure enables students to master skills with more efficiency. This method also results in decreases in students' disruptive or maladaptive behavior (Dib & Sturmey).

Learning about different training programs, like discrete-trial teaching, has given me the confidence that I need to be an "expert" on behavior in my school. As a teacher of students with behavior disorders (BD), I now feel more equipped to develop appropriate BIP's to support student success while providing teachers with the research and data to back up my decisions. I understand the importance of ensuring that students are getting the most appropriate and ethically sound treatment they deserve.

This program has provided me with the knowledge, the practice, and the tools to be a better teacher. I have learned how to use data to drive my instruction and I have discovered the importance of finding research to support the daily decisions I make. This has been a very rewarding and educational experience for me. Providing other professionals with this opportunity would only continue to empower teachers and the work they do for the students in their classrooms. If more classroom teachers were equipped with the knowledge to increase academic success in their classrooms and use research to drive their decisions, the education system would be in a much better place.

Sincerely,
Jennie Cox
Special Educator, BD
Cheat Lake Elementary School

References

Dib, N., & Sturmey, P. (2007). Reducing student stereotypy by improving teachers' implementation of discrete-trial teaching. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 40*, 339-343.

Dear Board of Education Members,

It is with much gratitude that I thank you for the support you have shown by providing our cohort the opportunity to participate and complete the Applied Behavioral Analysis program. I thank you for allowing me this opportunity. I have never been so challenged yet so inspired to learn new material. This material will benefit not only the students I teach but also allow me to support our entire staff to raise their effectiveness.

As an experienced teacher of twenty-seven years I have always been open to new ideas and have experienced many changes in educational methods. This opportunity gave me the chance to enrich and further build my expertise. I have to say I have learned more than I expected to in both supportative and usable methods for my classroom. The skills I have acquired not only help me have better classroom management but add to the teaching methods I currently use. I have perfected my use of data collection. I kept data before but not at this level. I have also acquired the skills to use research to help me find better methods to teach and plan for my special students. Many of the skills I have learned I have shared with my peers. They were excited to try them and have had a lot of success with their implementation.

As teachers we must bring our expertise to the next level so we can raise the bar for our students. We can only achieve this by further developing our skills. Educators who have the techniques that are offered in an ABA program will be of the highest quality in academic implementation. They will also have great skills in individual child and group behavior management techniques.

Research has shown that ABA applications are effective in all areas of academia. Studies on peer support (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997), natural reinforcement (Horcones, 1992), reducing disruptive behavior (White & Bailey, 1990), preference assessment use (Resetar & Noell, 2008), teacher performance feedback (DiGennaro, Martens, & Kleinmann, 2007), and Functional analysis implementations by educators (Wallace, Doney, Mintz-Resudek, & Tarbox, 2008), are only but a small sample of the research that has shown direct effects in education. My favorite is the focus on the simple use of praise as a behavioral reinforcement technique and how it can have an astounding effect on classroom management as well as raising the academic levels of the class (Tapp & Lively, 2009).

I think all teachers should have the opportunity to have training in applied behavioral analysis techniques. They may not all wish to complete the intensive training that we did or to try to become Board Certified Behavior Analysts, but I think teachers would appreciate being taught the basics of treatment methods and data collection techniques. These two areas will not only support their teaching of academics but improve classroom management. I think school systems that choose to offer training would be amazed at the changes in their programs. They would have fewer behavior problems as well as a rise in academic scores. With the test scores that most school systems are struggling to achieve, this would move our district in the right direction.

In closing I again thank the Board of Education for your support of the students in our county by allowing our cohort of teachers to achieve this level of expertise.

Sincerely and Gratefully Yours,
Elizabeth Bell Davis

Dear Board of Education,

There is so much at stake in our youth. We as educators have a responsibility to provide our youth with the most effective education possible. As a current special education teacher in the Monongalia County school district, I feel that I have been exposed to many resources and trainings. I participated in technology integration training and most recently the Applied Behavior Analysis for teachers training. Never have I felt more strongly about a potential impact than that in which could result from training teachers in Applied Behavior Analysis.

Research has suggested the use of Applied Behavior Analysis in the school systems and it has yet to be implemented as suggested. Educating professionals in small groups is only the first step. Selinske, Greer, and Lodhi (1991) found that "The 2-year experiment and follow up data showed that increases in trials taught, correct responses, and objectives achieved were a function of the implementation of the treatment package and that the effects were maintained." Implementation was done in a personalized package including instruction, behavior management, teacher assessments, and instructional trials at a school for students with disabilities. Success was found and maintained with overall objectives met following implementation. Described are outcomes that many teachers work to meet on a daily basis which can be improved with the application of behavior analysis.

Data and monitoring progress of our students has always been an important aspect, but how can we improve in this area and provide the resources for our teachers? Initial trainings would provide teachers with the tools necessary to apply Applied Behavior Analysis techniques without any additional equipment or curricula. Teachers can receive training on applying skill acquisition and positive behavior support to use these very effective strategies in their classrooms. Also, more intensive programs can be provided to allow schools to have the resources of certified behavior analysts to assist with skill acquisition, behavior management, and data collection.

Curriculum development and teaching strategies are so important in education that only in-depth research should be done to assure their effectiveness. So many strategies, techniques, and even curricula are studied and the studies are then published for review. With proper training, teachers can continue to educate themselves on the current strategies and procedures being used as well as their effects. Educators can then train colleagues on what they have learned from research evaluation and trainings. The need is expressed for "more interaction between researchers and consumers, in which practitioners have significant involvement in the various processes of research and development (Neef 1995)." Working together for the learning and success of our youth today and tomorrow is what is important, after all.

Sincerely,
Chrystal G. Evans

Neef, N.A. (1995). Research on training trainers in program implementation: An introduction and future directions. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 28*, 297-299.

Selinkse, J.E., Greer, R.D., & Lodhi, S. (1991). A functional analysis of the comprehensive application of behavior analysis to schooling. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 24*, 107-117.

To whom it my concern,

Monongalia County has provided a group of teachers the opportunity to become Board Certified Behavior Analysts. This has been a great experience because it has allowed me to gain knowledge that will directly benefit my students. I will also be in a position to share this knowledge with my peers in the hope that they will use it to increase student learning. After this experience, I believe that a class in applied behavior analysis should be part of every teachers undergraduate course work. This would better prepare them to effectively deal with the challenges every classroom teacher faces. Such as maintaining classroom control and implementing empirical based research strategies in the classroom.

Today parents, educators, and politicians are becoming increasingly concerned with the nation's educational system. Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is one tool that educators could use to "fix" many of the problems facing our educational system. Some strategies, which have proven effective, include positive behavior support (PBS), Precision Teaching, and Direct Instruction. All children can directly benefit from ABA a field that was once considered applicable to autistic and developmental delayed children only.

Heward (1995), a supporter of ABA, has 12 reasons why ABA is good for education. ABA is meaningful in that it is empirically researched based. ABA is much more effective than most methods used in the classroom today. ABA is focused on helping students to succeed by analyzing skills and/or behaviors through data collection. ABA is broadly relevant and effective for all learners across the curriculum. ABA is self-correcting in that if students are not learning, something needs to be changed so that learning does take place. ABA is accountable by applying scientific thinking to collect data and make improvements on students learning. ABA is public meaning that it is visible. ABA is doable with training by all teachers. ABA is replicable if the teacher implements the procedure correctly. ABA is empowering by giving teachers a tool that works. ABA is optimistic in that all students will learn with a "why not" attitude. ABA shows that motivation and positive reinforcement works.

ABA provides empirically based research making it a powerful tool for educators. Unfortunately, very few educators have been trained in the usage or implementation of ABA methods. Teachers have the right to be trained in the techniques of applied behavior analysis. After being trained, teachers can help their students to be more productive in skill acquisition while reducing and potentially preventing problem behavior. This will result in higher performance on standardized tests and an improved ability to creatively solve problems. This will better prepare our students to compete in the global market place.

In conclusion, I am thankful for this opportunity to become certified in applied behavior analysis, and I would hope that this program (at least part of it) is a future component in the curriculum for students preparing to become teachers. I believe the children in the school systems will be the ones who will directly benefit from usage of applied behavior analysis.

Sincerely,
Rhonda Haney

Heward, W. (2004). Reasons applied behavior analysis is good for education and why those reasons have been insufficient. W.I. Heward, T. E. Heron, N.A. Neef, S. M. Peterson, D. M. Saino, G. Y. Cartledge, R. Gardner, L.D. Peterson, S.B. Hersh, & J.C. Dardig (Eds.), *Focus on behavior analysis in education* (pp. 316-339). New York: Prentice Hall.

Dear School Board,

Training teachers in the principles of applied behavior analysis is one of the best investments a school system can make. One of the most important challenges facing U.S. society today is improving the effectiveness of public education, and for more than four decades researchers have provided powerful demonstrations of how applied behavior analysis can promote learning in the classroom (Heward et al., 2004).

With proper training, teachers can learn to use a scientific approach to education. Educating teachers on the technology of applied behavior analysis allows them to use data to make critical decisions about students' progress, behavior plans, and curriculum development. Using data as the cornerstone of decision-making takes the subjectivity and liability out of education. National policies, including No Child Left Behind, make the use of scientifically proven educational practices a necessity. Project Follow Through, a federally funded scientific experiment that compared 22 models for teaching low income children in the primary grades, should have been helpful in determining which educational practices were effective. Out of the 22 models, the 2 behaviorally based curricula were at or near the top on every achievement variable measured in the study (Heward et al., 2004).

School systems have everything to gain and nothing to lose by educating their teachers on how to be more thorough and systematic in their decisions about the effectiveness of their teaching. Applied behavior analysis offers scientific research that helps teachers develop better classroom management skills, teaching protocols, and curriculum modifications. The adoption of effective behavioral interventions and teaching strategies for young children is largely influenced by the extent to which stakeholders find the procedures appropriate and the effects important (Hanley, 2010). Staff development is often focused on giving some training on a specific protocol, intervention, or methodology. This type of training results in teachers gaining knowledge about several topics. Teachers are the most critical stakeholders in education. The degree to which they implement effective teaching practices is directly linked to student achievement. Ongoing training in the principles of applied behavior analysis and the application of current research would enable teachers to become experts in the scientific approach that our national government is demanding.

We live in a data-driven society. Consumers want data on the medication they have been prescribed, the hotel or resort they want to stay in, the used car they are interested in purchasing, or which movie they see on a Friday night. The results of these decisions result in short-term consequences. The type of education we provide for our children produces long-lasting effects on that child's future and quality of life. Don't we want that same data when it comes to our children's education?

Sincerely,
Sharon Holbert

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Heward, W. L., Heron, T.E., Neef, N. A., Peterson, S.M., Saino, D.M., Cartledge, G.Y., Gardner, R., Peterson, L.D., Hersh, S.B., & Dardig, J.C. (2004). *Focus on Behavior Analysis in Education*. New York: Prentice Hall.

7/20/10

To Whom It May Concern,

Over the past fourteen months, I have been privileged to be a participant in a cohort of educators studying Applied Behavior Analysis. One of the first important concepts I learned was that "behavior-human or otherwise-remains an extremely difficult subject matter" (B.F. Skinner, 1969). Humans are capable of acquiring an extensive repertoire of behaviors. As an educator, I observed the individual behavioral repertoires of the students in my classroom. Each repertoire was unique to the individual student and their reinforcement history. I quickly learned that applied behavior analysts develop language, social, motor, and academic skills that make contact with reinforcers and avoid punishers (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). This aligned with my goals as an educator. As a special education teacher, I wanted to provide each of my students with instruction that was designed on evidence-based practices and using the least intrusive effective methods and placement options.

Through the program I learned how to collect and graph data to drive my instruction, conduct a functional analysis of a behavior, develop function based behavior intervention plans, and design individualized curriculum plans. These skills have helped me make decisions concerning which behaviors are important to target for individual students. I have to ask myself how the behavior change will improve the person's life. For many of the students I have worked with in the past, specific behaviors have been targeted because it was more likely that the behavior would contact reinforcement. In the Sherman and Cormier study (1974), it provided evidence that changes in classroom behavior of students had consistent effects on the teacher's behavior. In the study they reported, the data seemed to indicate the need to take a broader approach to classroom behavior modification. "This approach should include all parties involved in a particular social setting and view all behavior as interactive. The present study has shown that a student can affect a teacher's behavior; other research has shown teachers can affect student behavior" (Sherman and Cormier, 1974).

For this reason, I think it is extremely important that all educators have the opportunity to take applied behavior analysis trainings focusing on data collection, antecedent strategies, and curriculum development. The more tools we have as educators, the more prepared we are to implement effective instructional strategies. The Behavior Analysis for Teachers program has developed and fine tuned our skills to create and implement individualized educational programs (IEPs) based on data. It has also shaped our behavior as teachers and how we respond to student behavior. Students have the right to effective educational plans.

Sincerely,
Kara A. Samaj

Dear Board of Education,

I would like to thank you for your ongoing support of teachers through research-based training that is invaluable in my field as a special educator. In order to acknowledge the valuable training in behavior analysis, I can describe this part of my education by telling you how I am able to utilize what I have learned from this behavior analysis for teachers (BAT) program and how I see it being used in the future.

In our diminishing economy, I see more and more students who are dealing with serious problems in their home lives. Some of these tribulations manifest in outward behavior issues at school. At the same time our nation's population of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is on the rise according to the CDC (2010). Though many of these children are in education settings with no noticeable handicap, they have social and behavioral issues that often separate them from their peers. The skills that I have acquired equip me to improve my students' learning experiences.

I view behavior analysis as a backpack of highly analytic tools to reduce specific socially undesirable behaviors through a series of interventions and reinforcement. These are specific procedures that work for each function of behavior and not a "bag of tricks." Behavior analysis is backed by thirty-five years of trials and research that works very well when compared to other popular instructional methods currently out there for students with ASD or behavioral handicaps (Baer, 2002). Our school system has already gotten a good start in behavior interventions on a large scale for RTI with school-wide positive behavior support plans and tracking systems to utilize the data collected by teachers and principals. In this way, we are fruitfully assembling the skills our children need to be successful in the classroom.

Some of the research-based methods I have learned as a behavior analyst student this year were to utilize tier II interventions. These interventions are of particular interest to me because tier I does not support a small percentage of the children school wide. Tier II interventions improve behavior by 45-75% (Fairbanks et. al 2007). These are interventions that can be easily implemented by teachers of any background with training and easily taught school wide (Anderson et al., 2010).

Additional training I now use in my job is helping to run Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA). My training in FBA's has been extensive and includes areas such as data collection and targeting behaviors. As well, this group of BAT's excels in writing FBA's that are function-based and not just jargon or speculation. To write an FBA you must really determine-- not just guess-- as to the reason (function) of a child's behavior so that time is not wasted. I have in the past had students who had behavior issues that were because they wanted to escape work. This is common. Had I not known the function of the student's disruptive behavior data collection and analysis, I may have guessed the behavior to be for attention (also common). I may have lavished praise when, in fact behaviors did get better for a short while because the student was escaping work while I was lavishing attention, and at the same time not being an effective teacher. One way we can help our county now is to help train those who have to write FBA's with some of the latest data collection methods so that their FBA is data-driven and not inferential. This way, time is not wasted and our county is writing uniformly so that it is easily interpreted by other parties.

Another area I feel confident in as a result of my training is writing a behavior intervention plan or a classroom behavior plan for a student. This is something more teachers in every type of teaching

placement find themselves doing for students. They are time consuming and there is no easy way to write them since each child's needs are different. However, I feel positive about passing down the knowledge I have in coming up with a plan that can measure the behavior improvement in a way that is useful to us as educators. Our group of BAT's may be able to train school wide groups or small groups or just help the teacher next door come up with a behavior change plan as I did this year.

Most important was our experience with our own students utilizing the strategies we have learned. Such skills as fading prompts or chaining a series of desirable behaviors for a child who needs social skills has proven invaluable in the classroom. We are giving our children the latest technology so to speak in helping them learn in an environment that keeps them active learners at their highest ability level with ABA-trained staff. I cannot say I did not come across behavior issues in my own classrooms this past year but, I can say that I was well equipped to handle any of the student issues that arose and was able to eliminate most of them by the end of the year. I now have my backpack packed for a new year at a new school in our county; thrilled to equip students in my care with the latest in behavior "technology."

Yours Sincerely,
Caron Vilasuso
Special Educator

References

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