Training Paraeducators to Use Behavior Management Strategies: Implementation and Evaluation of a Brief Targeted Intervention

Aubrey Whiting
Utah State University

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TRAINING PARAEDUCATORS TO USE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: 
THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF A BRIEF TARGETED INSERVICE

By

Aubrey Whiting

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In

Special Education

Approved:

____________________________    _____________________________
Nancy Glomb, Ph.D.      Susan Turner, Ph.D.
Major Professor     Committee Member

____________________________
Charles Salzberg, Ph.D.
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah
2014
ABSTRACT

Training Paraeducators to Use Behavior Management Strategies: The Implementation and Evaluation of a Brief Targeted Inservice

By

Aubrey Whiting, Master of Education

Utah State University, 2014

Major Professor: Nancy Glomb
Department: Special Education and Rehabilitation

Training paraprofessionals to be highly qualified providers of services to students with disabilities is a requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), although many special education paraprofessionals still lack the skills and knowledge to work with students with special education needs – particularly those who engage in disruptive behaviors. This project evaluated the use of one module of a 10-week online paraeducator inservice training (Morgan et al., 2004) that focused on behavioral interventions. Five paraprofessionals who currently work at a public school for students with significant behavior problems in a rural school district in the Western United States participated in the training. The live face-to-face training included direct instruction on the basic principles of applied behavior analysis. A single-case pretest-posttest design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the face-to-face training for all five participants immediately after the training had ended, and the extent to which participants maintained the information one month after the training session. Data collected on participants’ acquisition and maintenance of knowledge of behavior
management strategies based on the principles of applied behavior analysis indicate that the training was successful.
Introduction

Paraprofessionals, when trained properly, are a key component to educating students with disabilities (Breton, 2010). During the past twenty years, paraeducators are being used with increasing frequency to provide direct services to students with disabilities, and as a result there is a greater recognition of the need for more trained individuals (Carter et al., 2009).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) requires that paraprofessionals are highly qualifies, but lack of expertise within districts to develop or select training programs, lack of funding for training, low salaries for paraprofessionals, and the time it takes for special educators to adequately supervise and train their paraprofessionals are factors that often preclude effective and sufficient training for paraprofessionals (Morgan, Forbush, & Nelson, 2004). In addition, there are no national standards for paraeducator licensure as there are for special education teachers (CEC, 2012; Katsiyannis et al., 2000). There is no way to make sure all paraprofessionals have gone through the same training, and that all individuals are expected to know the same things. This makes it difficult to hold all individuals to the same standard. This would suggest that local districts and schools need to take responsibility for ensuring that the paraprofessionals in their buildings have the skills and knowledge to work with their specific populations. Supervision and training typically starts and ends with the classroom teacher, but it is ultimately the administrator’s responsibility to supervise paraprofessionals (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006).
Since the IDEIA requirement in 2004 that paraeducators be highly qualified, all states have standards for paraeducator knowledge and skill. In Utah, the Standards for Instructional Paraeducator (http://utahparas.org/standards4paras.pdf) emphasize instructional skills in academic areas, and specific behavior management skills are not included. And yet, a majority of paraprofessionals' time is spent dealing with behaviors or implementing behavior plans (Carter et al., 2009). Due to the fact that behavior is dealt with often and that “challenging student behaviors are a prominent factor in the development of teacher stress and burnout” (Gebbie et al., 2011) behavior training appears to be an area that should be addressed “up front” for paraprofessionals who are hired to work with students with challenging behaviors.

What to Teach

While state and national standards for paraeducators include standards such as “Implement individualized reinforcement systems and environmental modifications at levels equal to the intensity of the behavior as determined by the instructional team” and “Use strategies as determined by the instructional team in a variety of settings to assist in the development of social skills” (CEC, 2012), paraeducators rarely receive training in the basic principles of applied behavior analysis that serve as the foundation for these standards. Paraprofessionals need to understand that behavior is learned, that is shaped by the consequences of that behavior, what reinforcement and punishment really are, and that behaviors have a function (Cooper, Heron, and Heward, 2007). Given the fact that several researchers have found that the least qualified paraprofessionals were the ones in charge of educating the most challenging students (Carter et al., 2009; Breton, 2010; Giangreco & Broer, 2007), and that most paraeducators receive only information about
students’ specific behavior intervention plans and not the underlying principles guiding them, there appears to be a need to include training in the principles of applied behavior analysis for paraeducators who work with students with challenging behaviors.

**Approaches for Training Paraprofessionals**

Most of the studies on paraeducator training describe one-day, and in some cases one week at the beginning of the school year (Dowey et al. 2007; Gore & Umizawa 2011; Hall et al. 2010; Sawka et al. 2002; Tierney et al. 2007). Two of the common limitations in these studies were: 1) too much content was covered leading to overload, and 2) the lack of follow-up coaching to promote the generalization and maintenance of the skills presented during training.

Morgan, Forbush & Nelson (2004) provided a web-based training for paraprofessionals that was delivered after school during one-hour sessions for 10 weeks. While this training was effective in teaching paraeducators about basic behavior management and instructional skills, it does not address the need to quickly prepare paraprofessionals who work with students with severe behavior problems to respond to those behaviors. Another drawback to this approach is the current lack of funding for compensating paraprofessionals to work additional hours.

Gebbie et al. 2011, provided face-to-face training via broadcast technology and included online discussion formats so that teachers located at different buildings within the district could communicate with one another. As with the Morgan, Forbush, and
Nelson (2004) study, this training covered a very broad range of knowledge and skills and although online follow up support was available, on site coaching was not provided.

**Purpose Statement/Evaluation Questions**

Paraprofessionals who work with students with significant behavior problems need specific, targeted training in the basic principles of applied behavior analysis prior to entering the classroom. Furthermore, paraeducators need on-site, follow-up coaching to support the generalization and maintenance of those skills once the in-service training has ended. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the efficacy of a brief targeted inservice training for paraeducators who work with students with significant behavior problems. The inservice used two of the ten modules created by Morgan, Forbush & Nelson (2004), namely: Module #1: Overview of Special Education, and Module #4: Principles of Behavior Management. The specific evaluation questions were:

1. Will participants’ knowledge of applied behavior analysis improve after participating in the in-service training?
2. Will participants’ knowledge of applied behavior analysis maintain one month after training has ended?

**Method**

**Setting**

Training took place at Con Amore School, a school for students ages 3 to 22 with severe cognitive disabilities. It took place in the conference room where there is a big table and a projector.
Participants

Five paraeducators participated in this project. All participants began their employment at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. One participant had taken an undergraduate special education course, one is a parent of a student with an IEP and had familiarity with behavior management terminology, one has had some prior training in behavior management from a previous employer, and two had no prior knowledge or experience with behavior management strategies or terminology. All of the participants work at Con Amore School - one in the preschool, one in the K-2nd grade classroom, one in the 3rd-5th grade classroom, one in the 6th-8th grade classroom, and one in the 9th grade-age 22 classroom. Before the first inservice training day, all participants signed a consent to participate in the project (Appendix A).

Preparation of Training Materials

Because the training for this project was conducted during a live training sessions, as opposed to online as in the Morgan et.al. (2004) study, the lessons and activities from the behavior strategies module were typed into a power point presentation, and hard copies of the end-of-module test that was used as the pretest/posttest measure were also produced. The school principal reviewed the original video modules and power point and print-based materials created for this training to ensure that the content was identical.

A Thursday afternoon was identified by the administration as a good day to conduct the training, and substitutes were arranged for the paraeducator participants.

Procedures

Training Day: The training session included all of the content and activities included in the fourth module in the Morgan et.al. (2004) 10-week training. This module
provides information and activities related to the principles of applied behavior analysis. The training began with a pretest, which consisted of 20 fill in the blank questions about the principles of applied behavior analysis (Appendix B). After the pretest, I went through the power point presentation (Appendix C) including the whole-group discussion during mini assignments, video examples and discussions and progress checks. Participants gave ideas and examples, and asked questions to clarify instruction or to tie content to their working environment. The participants ended the training by completing the post-test measure (Appendix B). A district administrator attended the training session and checked each section of the lesson as a fidelity of implementation measure. The lesson was implemented with 100% fidelity.

**Maintenance Probe:** The five participants in this project were observed once a week for four weeks following the training, and coaching on behavioral strategies was available if necessary. Three of the five participants implemented the behavioral strategies necessary for the students in their classrooms with 100% fidelity, and two of the participants required coaching to implement behavioral strategies such as delivering reinforcement for appropriate behaviors and delivering consequences for inappropriate behaviors. The focus of those weekly coaching sessions in included in Appendix D. Four weeks after the second training session was conducted, I administered the post-test again to the five participants.

**Dependent Measures**

The dependent variable for this project was paraeducator knowledge of the principles of applied behavior analysis. The dependent measure was the pretest/posttest measure that was administered before and after the second training session, and one
month after the training. The pre-test/post-test consisted of twenty fill in the blank questions.

**Evaluation Design**

An AB single subject design was used to determine the extent to which the training was associated with improvements in and maintenance of participants’ knowledge of applied behavior analysis.

**Results**

The number of correct responses per item on the pre-test, post-test immediately after the training and the post-test that was administered one month after the training were graphed to allow for an item analysis. Figure 1 presents the results of that analysis. Questions 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 20 were answered incorrectly on the pretest by all participants. The post-test that was administered immediately after the second training session resulted in improvements in responses to all of the questions included in the assessment, although maintenance of the information covered in the training on applied behavior analysis was highly variable one month after the second training. Only seven of the 20 questions included in the assessment showed either the same or increased rates of correct responding on the one month follow up. It is interesting to note that participants 1 and 5 (Figure 2) were the paraeducators who received coaching during the one month follow up based on classroom observations of their implementation of the behavior plans, but the coaching did not appear to be associated with improved responding relative to two of the three paraeducators who did not receive coaching.
Discussion

Participants 2 and 4 (Figure 2) had some prior knowledge of special education procedures – more so than the other three participants, and this may have affected their performance on the pre-and post-tests. Another variable that may have differentially affected the participant’s responses was the fact that each paraeducator was assigned to a different classroom, and some classrooms have more significant behavior problems and more structured behavior plans than others. The participant who scored higher on the immediate post-test and one month follow up posttest (participant 4) had more opportunities to practice the strategies included in the training and probably scored better because there were more practice opportunities.

Additionally, participant 3 was resistant to the training throughout the project and did not like the posttests, even though she had consented to participate in all aspects of the project. She refused to complete the immediate posttest because she reported feeling overwhelmed with too much information and took it at a later time. It may be beneficial in future inservice trainings for paraeducators to offer incentives for fully participating.

Finally, conducting live role plays beyond just discussing the examples included in the videos may have helped to reinforce learning and make the training more engaging.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations discussed above, all participants showed improvements in their overall knowledge of applied behavior analysis principles, indicating the use of individual modules in the 10-week training package can be used to improve
paraeducator’s knowledge of special education practices – specifically in this case the principles of applied behavior analysis. If I were going to conduct this training in the future, I would include additional practice activities for the items that resulted in low to no maintenance after one month, include live role play activities, use real examples from the paraeducator’s classrooms to make the training more meaningful, and include incentives for participation.
References


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http://web.ebscohost.com.dist.lib.usu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c79c8d
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Appendix A:

Consent Form
Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Utah State University

TRAINING AIDES WHO WORK WITH SEVERE BEHAVIORS TO RESPOND SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Aubrey Whiting. The purpose of this research is to ensure quality training on behavior for aides teaching students with severe behaviors.

Your participation will involve taking a pre and post-test, participating in an hour long in-service on behavior, and being observed a month after to see how the knowledge learned is being utilized in the classroom.

Protection of confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained with regards to your pre-test, post-test, and evaluation. No individual names will be used in any publication that has to do with this study, only scores and numbers will be utilized.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, or if any problems arise, please contact Aubrey Whiting at (801) 473-3613.

Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant’s signature_______________________________ Date: _________________

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.
Appendix B:

Pretest Posttest Measure
Unit 4 Test

NOTE TO THE READER: Respond to each of the items below. Each test item appeared in a Lesson Progress Check.

1. Identify the antecedent, behavior, and consequence in the following examples.

Mrs. Watson told Gabrielle, a second grade student, to clean the paint from her table after an art project. Gabrielle cleaned up all of the paint. Mrs. Watson praised her after she completed the task.

   A =
   B =
   C =

The A-B-C sequence also applies to harmful or disruptive behavior. That is, harmful or disruptive behavior is surrounded by its own antecedents and consequences. For example, Alice and Melinda argue over whose turn it is to use the colored markers. Alice pushes Melinda to the floor. The teacher reprimands Alice. Identify the antecedent, behavior, and consequence in this example:

   A =
   B =
   C =

2. In the following example, identify the consequence. Is it a positive reinforcer, neutral consequence, or punisher? Explain your answer.

David was slow to dress for P. E. class. Mr. Andrews, the P.E. instructor, found that David was on time for calisthenics (the first P. E. activity) in only 3 of 10 class periods. Mr. Andrews met with David. They agreed that he could lead the class in calisthenics if he were on time for at least 8 out of 10 P. E. classes. After that, David was on time in 5 of the next 10 class periods.

   C =

Positive, neutral, or punishing consequence?

How do you know?

3. Write a definition for each behavior below.

Accepting correction from the instructor who assists on an assignment:

Accurately completing homework assignments:
4. When a behavior is to be weakened, we should specify

5. Identify an appropriate, alternative behavior to the one listed below and write a
definition for it.

Complaining to the instructor about assignments:
Alternative Behavior:
Definition:

6. Name three of the five reasons to assess behavior.

7. Describe the three ways to observe and record behavior presented in this lesson:

Frequency Counting:

Time Sampling:

Per Opportunity Recording:

8. Troy is an eleven-year-old student with behavioral problems. He is participating
in an intervention to improve his responses to the instructor’s corrections.
Using per opportunity recording, his instructor first collected baseline data for
four sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate Responses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Then, Troy and his instructor started the intervention (social skills training and a daily certificate to send home to parents for accepting correction appropriately). The intervention has been used in 6 sessions so far (Sessions 6 through 10). See graph:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Appropriate Responses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Given this information on Troy, graph the data below.

b) Is Troy’s intervention effective? How do you know?

9. Name the six components of effective praise.
10. Describe one limitation of activity reinforcers:

11. Describe one limitation of material reinforcers:

12. Describe two ways to select positive reinforcers:

13. In Lesson 3, we watched Derek, a high school aged student who was disruptive during independent seatwork. As Derek’s instructor, let’s say that you would like him to participate in an intervention to increase time spent working quietly. Derek reports that he enjoys computer games and listening to music. Describe how you would make these potential reinforcers contingent on Derek’s quiet work behavior, given the instructor’s permission. Your answers should include a description of praise and activity reinforcers that can be made contingent on Derek’s appropriate behavior, i.e., working quietly.

14. List and describe the 3 steps in preparing an intervention:

15. Describe four steps used to implement the intervention for increasing alternative communication.
16. Describe four steps used to implement the intervention for increasing alternative way to get attention.

17. Describe four steps used to implement the intervention for delivering positive consequences for the absence of disruptive behavior.

18. Describe four steps used to implement the intervention for mixing easy and hard tasks.

19. What types of behaviors should not be ignored?

20. Camillia frequently lost her temper. Her instructor counted her tantrums and found out that Camillia had averaged five tantrums per day. Camillia and her instructor met to discuss the problem. They decided that if Camillia had no tantrums for a week, she could earn the “student of the week” award. In the first week of the intervention, Camillia’s tantrums increased to 12 per week. Describe the guideline that was not followed?
Appendix C:

Power Point Presentation for Training
Lesson 1: Principles of Behavior

Principles of Behavior:

Three principles are drawn from a large body of scientific research conducted in school environments (Koocher, Haynes, & Newhard, 1978; Jensen, Illian, & Young, 1988). These principles have provided considerable guidance to the teachers and instructors.

Principle 1: Behavior occurs because of events which surround it.

- That is, behavior is influenced by events that occur before and after it. Events in the school environment may include a teacher's verbal directions, books, assignments, and so forth. They may also include behaviors of others, such as peers, instructors, parents and so forth.

- Two types of environmental events surround behaviors:
  - events that occur before behavior, which we call FOSTERING inferences;
  - events that occur after behavior, which we call CONSEQUENCES. For example, the omissions may be an assignment given by an instructor. The behavior may be completing the assignment. The consequences may be the grade received by the instructor to the student. One way to remember this relationship is "A" (antecedent) followed by "B" (behavior), followed by "C" (consequence).
  - Analyzing behaviors in relation to antecedents and consequences allows us to pinpoint behaviors and decide why they occur.

- Practice:
  - Miss. Hodges, a 5th grade teacher asked Amy to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Amy repeated the words along with her class, and Mrs. Hodges said "Thank you!"
  - A=
  - B=
  - C=
Principle 1: Behavior occurs because of events which surround it.

Example:

- Jamie, a 5-year-old kindergartner, was having difficulty adjusting to her new school environment. She screamed and threw toys on the floor for 30 minutes. Her instructor reacted by withdrawing attention (other than observing her to ensure her safety) and waiting until she calmed down so that they could interact with her.

Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

Environmental events which serve as antecedents to student behavior may include an instructor’s directions, the final bell for being in class, an announcement of an assignment, or a smile from one’s friend seated in the next row. These and other events may have little or no impact on a student’s behavior. An instructor who carefully and systematically changes antecedent events can influence student behavior in positive ways. Some authors refer to this as “environmental engineering” or “debugging” the classroom environment (Carr, Levin, McMordie, Carson, Kamp, & Smith, 1994; Mengel & Lambert, 1995).

Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

Use of some consequences will strengthen, or increase, the behaviors that they follow. This is called REINFORCEMENT. POSITIVE REINFORCERS are events that a student will work to get. In Amy’s example above, receiving a “thank you” was a positive reinforcer for reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

A second type of consequence is called PUNISHMENT. Punishment decreases, or weakens, behavior. Examples of punishers may include verbal reprimands, timeout from positive reinforcement (i.e., temporary withdrawal of positive reinforcers or attention from others, such as in Jamie’s case above), and response cost (i.e., taking away a privilege).

Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

This program will not focus on punishment for these reasons:

- Punishment is often unreliable
- Specific training is required to use punishment procedures
- Many districts and states have regulations that limit or prohibit the use of restrictive procedures. Check your district or state regulations about use of punishment procedures. The program will focus on positive reinforcement to strengthen student behaviors.

Some consequences have no effect on the behaviors they follow. These “NEUTRAL CONSEQUENCES” neither increase nor decrease the chances that a behavior will occur in the future.

Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

Practice: Identify the consequence

- Jill worked on her math assignment during independent seat work about 60% of the time. The rest of the time, she stood out the window until Mrs. Kim, her instructor, prompted her back to the assignment. Mrs. Kim told Jill that if she stayed on task at least 80% of the time and finished her assignment, she could play video games at the end of the period. Jill increased her time on task from 60% to 80%.

- Positive, neutral, or punishing consequence?
Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

- Practice:
  - Justin was frequently disruptive during the reading period in Mr. Brockle's class. In one week, Mr. Brockle counted a total of 12 disruptive comments during 2 reading periods. Mr. Brockle met with Justin and they agreed that, for each time Justin was disruptive, he would have to remain after school for 10 minutes. Using this intervention for 1 week, Mr. Brockle counted 2 disruptions in a total of 2 reading periods.

- C:
  - positive, neutral, or punishing consequence?

Principle 3: All students can learn in a positive, carefully managed environment.

All students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can learn if instructors strive to establish and improve a positive school environment. This may include setting achievable standards, creating frequent opportunities for instruction and student response, implementing the instructional process, and motivating students through positive consequences. As much as possible, instructors need to anticipate problems and prevent them before they occur. Also, they must continually strive to create a positive school climate where students remain actively engaged as participants.

Principle 3: All students can learn in a positive, carefully managed environment.

- Respect the right of the student to be treated as an individual. Each student has unique learning characteristics, experiences, and interests. The instructor must be aware of these differences and not expect all students to respond the same way. This means understanding that students learn at different rates, require instruction at different paces, and require different incentives. It also means understanding that a student may not respond the same way from one time to the next.

Principle 2: Behavior is influenced by its antecedents and consequences.

- Practice:
  - Calvin was on time to his first hour class an average of only 5 days each week. His first hour instructor, Mrs. Olson, and Calvin decided he could earn 5 minutes of free time in the gym for each day that he was on time. After 2 weeks, Calvin was on time to his first hour class an average of 3 days per week.

- C:
  - positive, neutral, or punishing consequence?
Principle 3: All students can learn in a positive, carefully managed environment.

- Respect the rights of parents and legal guardians to understand and consent to behavioral interventions, particularly the more restrictive ones. Parents/guardians should receive comprehensive information about plans for behavioral interventions. For some restrictive interventions, they should provide written informed consent. Consent requirements vary from state to state. Instruct teachers to keep parents/guardians informed of developments as behavioral interventions are implemented and changed over time.

Principle 3: All students can learn in a positive, carefully managed environment.

- Know what is required by your school, district, or state regarding behavioral interventions. Many state departments of education, schools, and districts have developed specific regulations to restrict and monitor the use of behavioral interventions. Ask your classroom teacher about regulations that may apply to you.

Reasons for Specifying Behavior

- When we want to change a behavior, we need to identify it in specific terms. There are three reasons why we specify behavior:
  1. To prevent when others are occurring. By using specific language, behaviors can become habituated or extinguished. RAAABEAD can observe and record a behavior at a specific time. In doing so, RAAABEAD can make clear expectations that may dissolve students’ expectations, such as “Raaabeads do not come in the hall” or “Raaabeads do not read during the checkout.”

Lesson 1 Progress Check

Reasons for Specifying Behavior

- 2. To set clear expectations. When we specify behavior, we communicate our expectations to students in precise, unambiguous terms. Clearly communicating expectations may help instructors avoid problems with students. For example, RAAABEADs may respond to her throwing of a pencil by saying, “Please ask for help if you have a problem with the reading assignment.” This is much clearer than saying, “Raaabeads, don’t do this!” RAAABEADs may respond more appropriately if her instructor communicates expectations clearly.

Reasons for Specifying Behavior

- 3. To assess progress and communicate with others. Using specific language allows instructors to pinpoint behavior and assess it with precision. Assessment of behavior will be described in Lesson 3. Specific language also means that instructors clearly communicate what a student is doing in a classroom and what the expectations are. Parents and other IEP team members are more likely to understand when we use specific language in describing student behaviors.
How to Specify Behavior

There are 5 steps that instructors should follow when specifying behavior:

1. Define the behavior.
2. Identify the behavior by giving it a specific name and description. Avoid ambiguous terms. Describe the actions that make up the behavior in observable terms. Avoid confusing or vague language.

3. Specify an alternative behavior to strengthen.
4. Consider other factors might be affecting the behavior.
5. Determine the behavior's history.

Practice:

- Poor: Javi is always finding excuses to miss class.
- Better: Javi learns to be on time.

- Poor: Sam will always be late for class.
- Better: Sam will learn to be on time.

- Poor: Kasia never does her homework.
- Better: Kasia will learn to do her homework.

- Poor: Steve always disrupts class.
- Better: Steve will learn to respect others.

- Poor: Lisa always misses deadlines.
- Better: Lisa will learn to be on time.
Step 2: When behavior is to be weakened, specify an appropriate, alternative behavior to strengthen.

- **ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIORS** are socially accepted behavior that accomplish the same purpose, or “function,” for a student as the harmful/disruptive behavior. Always identify an alternative behavior to be strengthened, or increased, when the concern is about a behavior that must be weakened, or decreased.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors to be weakened</th>
<th>Alternative behaviors to be strengthened</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not working on a task</td>
<td>Working on the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbally threatening a student</td>
<td>Talking appropriately about school events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screaming and yelling</td>
<td>Saying “I don’t like that because…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantrums</td>
<td>Communicating frustration by asking for a break</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is an example of a clearly defined disruptive behavior and an alternative behavior:

- Disruptive Behavior: Yelling at the teacher. A student uses a loud tone of voice (above conversational volume) directed towards the teacher after she gives him an assignment.
- Alternative Behavior: Communicating frustration in an appropriate way. The student uses a normal tone of voice to ask the teacher for help on the assignment.

Step 3: Identify the antecedents and consequences of the behavior.

- Antecedents and consequences were defined earlier. Words for antecedents that seem to “trigger” the behavior. Note whether they occur in a consistent way. These events may be the occasion for a behavior. Let’s take a closer look at information that can be obtained by examining antecedents and consequences. For example, lets meet Stephanie and Tora.

- Freema’s work is divided into three, her favorite subjects are English and Science. Group of students including Stephanie, the other students, tend to be lazier. Stephanie has a habit of staying after school to ask the teacher questions. Stephanie is usually quiet in class, but she tends to get very agitated when she doesn’t understand the material. The teacher noticed Stephanie acting out in class and decided to talk to her about it. Stephanie was quiet in class and was usually reserved, but she became very agitated when she didn’t understand the material. The teacher decided to talk to Stephanie about her behavior and asked her to come to after school to talk about it. Stephanie was a bit surprised at first, but she agreed to meet with the teacher after school. Stephanie’s behavior improved after the meeting, and she began to participate more in class.
Step 3: Identify the antecedents and consequences of the behavior

Jerome is a 15-year-old involved in an employment transition program. He and the instructor, Rashid, met twice per week. They wanted to assess and develop a functional behavior to make Jerome more functional for work and daily living. After several sessions of identifying functional skills in these sessions, Rashid noticed that Jerome was becoming increasingly unresponsive. He would refuse to participate in community reading activities, saying “leave me alone!” When Rashid asked Jerome if he wanted to discontinue the session, he would say, “No, I want to read.” Rashid noticed that Jerome read five, then received a snack. He remained unresponsive. After Rashid discussed the matter with Jerome’s mother, she identified the antecedent to the behavior. Rashid learned that Jerome was tired by mid-afternoon because he stayed up too late at night.

Step 3: Identify the antecedents and consequences of the behavior

To identify antecedents, consider whether the behavior consistently occurs:
- at certain times of day
- in certain settings
- with particular students present
- during certain academic or other activities, and
- during transitions from one activity to the next.

Identifying antecedents may provide clues for changing the environment to make the behavior less likely to occur.

Step 4: Consider other factors that may be affecting the behavior.

Here are a few of the many factors that instructors should consider:
1. Time of day: Many behaviors consistently occur at about the same time of day due to schedules, presence of certain people, eating patterns, etc.
2. Emotional or physical state: Behaviors in children who are experiencing pain (e.g., headache, toothache, stomach ache, constipation, etc.)
3. Medications: Students may take prescription medications for hyperactivity, behavior, depression, etc. It is important that specialists be aware of students’ medications and their possible side effects.

Step 4: Consider other factors that may be affecting the behavior.

- Diet: Many health experts believe that diet has a profound affect on behaviors and therefore is a prime factor to consider when attempting to change it.
- Specific People: Some behaviors are triggered by the presence of certain individuals with whom students come in contact.
- Level and type of stimulation: Many people are sensitive to noise, music, or auditory stimulation. Children may become bored and show disruptive behaviors when no one is around. Careful observation will help determine what a student may be reacting to and provide the instructor with the information necessary to “debug” the environment.

Step 4: Consider other factors that may be affecting the behavior.

- Sleep Patterns: As many of us know, sleep patterns affect our moods and behaviors such as irritability and academic performance. Many students prone to problem behaviors have inconsistent sleep patterns or short sleep periods.
- Allergies: Some professionals believe that certain behaviors might be allergic reactions or side effects of allergies (Petron, 1990). Close the habits of students and any behavioral or physical changes that follow. In addition to potential food allergies, be aware of other types of allergies as well. Many have, for example, is not only triggering, but affects one’s energy level, irritability, and irritability.

Step 4: Consider other factors that may be affecting the behavior.

- Misjudgment of a behavior by the student: Sometimes, students behave in a certain way because they misjudge the effects of their behavior on others. They may believe they are “with the crowd” but misinterpret it. For example, let’s mean Jerome.
Step 4: Consider other factors that may be affecting the behavior.

Janesen enjoyed social interaction with her peers and teachers at school. She carried on conversations, asked appropriate questions, and described her experiences to others. However, she always seemed to be right in others’ faces when she talked. It was common for Janesen to stand no more than a few inches from others. Some of her friends took offense and tried to step away from Janesen, but she would keep moving toward them. Friends would ask Janesen to “stand back” but she didn’t understand.

Step 4: Consider other factors that may be affecting the behavior.

In Janesen’s case, the instructor had to describe and remind Janesen of the “social rule” about maintaining an arm’s length distance from other people. Effective instructors identify the important social rules and review them with students on a regular basis.

Step 5: Determine the behavior’s history

Amie was friendly and polite. However, he frequently picked his nose. Naturally, everyone found his behavior disgusting. Not only was nose-picking a hygiene problem, it was a disruptive behavior and one that prevented him from making and maintaining friendships.

Effective instruction understood that some behaviors have their place. In Amie’s case, the instructor directed him to the restroom, where he could tend to nasal hygiene, then wash his hands thoroughly before returning to the classroom. Can you think of other examples?

Video

Lesson 2 Progress Check
Assessing Behavior

After we specify a behavior, we use procedures to assess it. By systematically assessing behavior, we can learn more about it and how to change it (Amsterdam, 2001). For example, we can determine how often it occurs, when it occurs, and what happens before and after it occurs (i.e., what the antecedents and consequences are). Assessment is necessary before we can start a behavioral intervention.

Why Assess Behavior?

Here are a few reasons to assess behavior:

1. Teachers can compare one student's behaviors to other students' behaviors to verify that a problem exists.
2. Teachers can determine how much of a problem the behavior is creating in the classroom (i.e., if the behavior occurs at a high frequency or for a long duration of time).
3. Teachers can determine the level of severity of the behavior before intervention begins, and during intervention, to find out whether the intervention is working. If a behavior continues or gets worse, intervention may need to be changed or made more intense.
4. Teachers can determine if other students are also engaged in similar behavior, and whether the situation is the same for several students.
5. Teachers can determine if the behavior is used to avoid receiving negative consequences, or if it is used to remove oneself from a task or task situation.
6. Teachers can meet the standards for accountability on a student's report.

Formal Assessments

FORMAL ASSESSMENTS are structured tests requiring rigorous, “standardized” examination procedures (McLaughlin & Lewis, 2001). These assessments include psychological or achievement tests that measure academic development, learning abilities, or motor or vocational skills. Formal assessments are often given by psychologists, teachers, and other trained personnel, and are used to determine diagnosis, classification, or eligibility for special education services. These types of assessment are typically not used to gather information about a student’s behavior.

Informal Assessment

We use INFORMAL ASSESSMENTS to gather specific information about a student's behavior or classroom performance (McLaughlin & Lewis, 2001). There are six types of informal assessment: behavioral assessment, note taking, classroom observation, curriculum-based assessment, test analysis, and portfolio assessment. Behavioral notes taking, and classroom observation are described below. Curriculum-based assessment, test analysis, and portfolio assessment will be described in Unit 8.

Informal Assessments

BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENTS are used to identify harmful or disruptive behaviors. Behavioral assessment allows instructors to observe and record a student’s behavior to other students’ behaviors to verify if it is a problem (Zimpo & Halloy, 2001). A trained observer may conduct behavioral assessment in a school setting under the supervision of the classroom teacher or other professional. We will describe four types of behavioral assessment: checklists, rating scales, questionnaires, and functional assessment. Specific examples of published behavior assessments will not be described here because authors use many different names for these tools, and thus it is not possible to list them all.

Behavior Checklists

BEHAVIOR CHECKLISTS are published lists of behaviors that require an observer to assess harmful actions or disruptions in classrooms or other settings. A trained observer identifies which specific behavior from the list represents problems by checking “yes” or “no.” For example:
Behavior Checklists

Behavior rating scales

Behavior Rating Scales

QUESTIONNAIRES

FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

Note taking
Note Taking

To illustrate the importance of nonjudgmental note-taking, decide which of the two statements below is objective and avoid judgment.

Example 1: Ralph went to the supermarket today to work on loading groceries and to purchase items. He performed poorly as he was constantly shuffling with customers and talking to girls at the store.

Example 2: Ralph had a conversation with customers each time he prompted him to start a program. The second statement above is objective and avoids judgment.

Classroom Observation

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION involves systematically observing a student and recording information about behavior during a specific activity. In the United States, we define CLASSROOM observation as the assessment of the level of a behavior or skill before starting an intervention. We define INTERVENTION as a systematic set of procedures to improve student behavior and skills. When we observe and record a behavior during baseline, then continue to observe and record it after starting an intervention, we find out:

- Whether a behavior is changing
- How much progress is being made, and
- How close we are to meeting our goal or objective.

Classroom Observations

Instructors often plot data on a graph to display a record of student behavior. For example, an instructor may graph how many times a student throws tantrums during the school day. Instructors can visually assess changes in students' performance over time. Locate the graph below. The vertical axis indicates the level or amount of the behavior. Then, the higher the point on the graph, the more the behavior occurred. The horizontal axis indicates the passage of time. For example, the graph shows behavior on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

Frequency Counting

FREQUENCY COUNTING refers to a tally of the number of times a specific behavior occurs. To obtain and record using frequency counting, the behavior:

- Must be specified and defined,
- Must be easily observable (e.g., the behavior must be clear and direct),
- Must have a minimum frequency (e.g., the observer must see the behavior four times or more), and
- Must occur more than one time about the same length of time. Examples of observations include:

  - Number of occurrences
  - Duration of behavior
  - Number of times a specific behavior occurs
  - Number of times a specific behavior occurs per minute
  - Number of times a specific behavior occurs per hour

Converting frequency data to rate

We can compare frequency data collected in one session to other data collected in another session only if the sessions are the same length. However, sessions may vary in length. Last week we observed that Suzanne was physically aggressive with her classmates 2 times during a 20-minute class period. On Monday, she was physically aggressive once during that same period. The frequency of physical aggression can be compared, because the period of time was the same. We can say that Suzanne was less aggressive on Tuesday.
Converting frequency data to rate

However, if daily sessions are of different length, the data cannot be directly compared. What if school was dismissed on Tuesday after 20 minutes due to a snowstorm? Can the frequencies from Monday and Tuesday still be compared? No, because the data were collected in sessions of different lengths.

When sessions are of different lengths, we convert frequency data to rate so we can compare observations of different lengths of time. Rate data are usually expressed as number of occurrences per minute or hour.

**Rate per minute** is the total frequency of behavior in a session divided by the total time.

**For example**, if Jason is disruptive 15 times in 30 minutes, the rate of his behavior is 15 divided by 30 (15/30) minutes = 0.50 disruptions per minute. If during the next period, he is disruptive 8 times in 26 minutes, the rate is 8/26 = 0.31 disruptions per minute. By converting to rates, 0.50 and 0.31 can be compared. Jason was more disruptive when his rate was 0.50 per minute than when it was 0.31 per minute. We can plot the data on the same graph.

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**Mini Assignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Length of Time</th>
<th>Data per minute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 disciplines</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 instances of aggression</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 teacher reflections</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Time Sampling**

Time sampling is a records of behavior that occurs at sample points in time. To observe and record using time sampling, the behavior:

- Must be specified and defined
- May have no discrete beginning or ending (i.e., it may not start and stop like some behaviors, but appear more continuous)
- May occur at such a high frequency that it is easier to record at a time sample than at a frequency

Common behaviors recorded in time samples:

- Working on a task
- Speaking with peers
- Engaging in conversation
- Functioning that has no clear beginning or ending

---

**Converting time sampling data to a percentage of the total observations**

Divide the total number of "*" by the total number of observations, then multiply by 100%, like this: Total "*" / Total observations x 100
**Time Sampling**

Let's say Lindsey played appropriately with other students (✓) in 6 out of 14 total observations. What is the percentage of total observations in which we observed her playing? \( \frac{6}{14} = 0.43 \times 100 = 43\% \)

**Per Opportunity**

In **PER OPPORTUNITY RECORDING**, an observer determines whether a behavior occurs when a student has the opportunity to respond. Opportunities are events such as an instructor’s question, a verbal instruction, a turn in a game, or 20 math problems. To observe and record, we must consider the following conditions:

1. The behavior must be specified and defined.
2. The situation must be the same for the student to respond.
3. When the opportunity is not the observer determines whether the student’s response was correct (✓) or incorrect (✗).

Sometimes, no response may occur at all. When this happens, record a “O”.

**PER OPPORTUNITY RECORDING**

Examples of behaviors recorded per opportunity:

- Following instructions
- Responding to the instructor’s question
- Responding to math problems
- Opening a door

The steps in per opportunity recording include the following:

1. Identify the opportunity.
2. Record a correct/incorrect response (✓ or ✗) for each response. If applicable, record “O” for no response.
3. Calculate the percentage of correct responses similar to time sampling. That is, divide total ✓/total opportunities × 100.

**Video:**

- Description or link to video content.

**Types of Positive Reinforcers**

Now that we have described ways to observe and record behaviors, it is time to consider positive reinforcing consequences (✓) for behaviors. We will describe four types of positive reinforcers: praise, activities, materials, and tokens.

**Lesson 3 Progress Check**

- Review or assessment questions related to the content covered in Lesson 3.
Praise

Praise is a naturally reinforcing consequence for most students. It is commonly used as a reinforcer in and out of the school setting. Occasionally, some students, especially those with behavior disorders, emotional disturbances, or autism, may not respond to praise. For them, praise may not be a positive reinforcer; praise may eventually become a negative reinforcer.

Components of effective praise:

Praise must be contingent, that is, it must immediately follow the occurrence of the behavior. If we delay praise, it may have no effect. NOTE: with younger students or those with severe disabilities such as severe mental retardation or autism, praise must follow the behavior within a few seconds (usually 1-5 seconds). If delayed, the instructor should describe the behavior being praised.

Components of effective praise:

Praise must be descriptive. The praise statement should describe the specific aspects of the behavior that you are trying to strengthen. NOTE: with younger students or those with severe disabilities who may not be able to comprehend verbal language, instructors must still describe behaviors in understandable ways. We may do this by imitating the behavior while praising it, using manual signs to describe and praise behavior, using communication boards or other assistive devices, etc.

Components of effective praise:

Praise must vary in content and style. Avoid repetitive and mechanical praise statements; they may not be reinforcing at all. Praise must be delivered frequently. At first, we should praise with each occurrence of a behavior. Later, as the behavior has increased, we should praise less frequently. For example, praise 2 out of 3 occurrences, then 1 out of 2 occurrences, then 1 out of 5 occurrences, and so forth. Eventually, the student's behavior will continue with only occasional praise.

Components of effective praise:

Praise must be sincere and enthusiastic. Many students with disabilities experience frequent failure. They may not recognize when they are successful. Sincere, enthusiastic praise communicates to them that they can be successful and motivates them to keep trying. Praise must fit age, culture, and gender. That is, we should tailor our praise to a student's chronological age and cultural membership. For example, many younger students respond best to public, boisterous praise, while older students or those representing other cultures may prefer private or individualized praise.

Mini-Assignment

List 10 alternative ways to say (or communicate in nonverbal ways) “good work.” Ensure that your messages are consistent with the components of effective praise.
Activities

Activity reinforcers are opportunities for students to participate in preferred events if they meet some behavioral requirement. To be effective as reinforcers, activities must be appropriate to the age, gender, culture, and personal interests of the student. Examples of activity reinforcers include free time use of a computer or CD player, time in the gym to play basketball, opportunity to be a messenger, time in the library, etc.

How to identify activity reinforcers:

- Watch to see what students do during free time.
- If possible, allow students to communicate what they like to do. Ask them, “What activity would you like to work for?”
- If possible, ask parents/guardians or others what the child likes to do.

Limitations of activity reinforcers:

- Not all activities, such as field trips, can be conducted immediately after appropriate behavior. Therefore, because they are delayed, these activities may not be contingent reinforcers. Token, discussed later, can help “bridge the gap” between a behavior and a delayed reinforcer.
- Some group activities may not be reinforcing to all students. That is, group activities may be reinforcing to some students but not others. Offer students choices between activities.
- Talk about your classroom teacher.

Materials

Materials are items delivered contingent upon the occurrence of appropriate behavior. They must be appropriate to the age, gender, culture, and personal interests of the student. Examples of materials that instructors might use as reinforcers include stickers, toys, magazines, books, cassette tapes, etc. Instructors may lend many of these materials to students for brief periods.

How to identify material reinforcers:

- Identify material reinforcers by asking students what they like.
- If possible, ask parents/guardians or other instructors what children like.
- Place several items in front of students and record which one(s) they take.

Limitations of material reinforcers:

- Some materials may not be appropriate or appropriate in certain circumstances. Talk with your classroom teacher.
- Some materials may cost too much or may be freely available. If freely available, materials cannot be used as contingent reinforcers. Instructors should restrict materials and deliver them only after the occurrence of appropriate behavior.

Tokens

Tokens represent other positive reinforcers delivered at a later point in time. They are items that students can accumulate and exchange for valued activities or materials. The tokens may be points, stickers, play money, chips, etc.
Features of a Token System:

- Tokens must be exchanged for backup reinforcers, such as activity or materials.
- Tokens will lose value when they are frequently exchanged for backup reinforcers.
- The relationship between a token value and the exchange rate must be clearly outlined. That is, a token must be worth enough, but not too much, that time, so the student will want it.
- Tokens must be distributed fairly to students based on their work performance. Instructors and students should decide how many tokens will be distributed for certain behaviors. The number of tokens that are earned and distributed should be outlined.
- Once tokens are exchanged, there should be time for negotiations concerning the token value.
- Tokens should be an independent activity, not on the number of tokens received. Describe the behaviors that earned the tokens.

Limitations of Token Systems:

- Since tokens become valuable, theft or counterfeiting may occur. Guard against it by using your initials or another method to authorize tokens.
- Backup reinforcers sometimes become boring and predictable. If students lose motivation, vary the backup reinforcers to keep interest levels high.

Mini-Assignment

- Describe potential reinforcers and how you would make them contingent on Kim's behavior (from lesson 5).
- In lesson 3, we described Kim, a student who was on-task during a low percentage of independent seat work observations. We want to increase Kim's on-task behavior.
- Kim enjoys praise, in-class, and drawing pictures. Describe potential reinforcers that you would discuss with your supervisor and how you would make them contingent on Kim's behavior during independent seat work.

Video:

Five Guidelines for Behavioral Interventions

- There are five important guidelines for applying behavioral interventions.
  1. All interventions should include positive consequences for appropriate behaviors. Always focus on applying positive consequences to alternative, appropriate behaviors when you are trying to decrease harmful or disruptive behavior.
  2. Once an intervention has been applied, all instructors who work with the student should be aware of it and should use the same intervention procedures. Communication among instructors is critical to the success of an intervention.
Five Guidelines for Behavioral Interventions

1. Students should play a part in developing interventions. By allowing students to participate in their interventions, they have ownership and responsibility. When students feel their ideas and suggestions are important, they are more likely to carry through with the conditions of the intervention. Students can become involved in developing an intervention by:
   - Selecting reinforcers
   - Setting the level of performance required to receive the reinforcer
   - Identifying other behaviors that might be strengthened, and
   - Monitoring their own behavior.

2. Students’ expectations must be achievable. If the expectations are too high, the student may become frustrated and stop trying. If the expectations are too low, the reinforcer may become trivial, and the student may lose interest in obtaining it. Carefully monitor the student’s progress at the beginning of the intervention to determine if the expectations are being met. If the expectations are too high or too low, talk to the classroom teacher about adjusting it. This is important because one critical factor is that students must experience success soon after the intervention starts.

5. All interventions must be applied to specific and well-defined behaviors. Recall from Lesson 2, that specifying and defining behaviors are important to observe and measure behavior. When behaviors are specific and well defined, we know exactly when and if to apply an intervention. We can also observe and assess behavior with greater accuracy.

Steps in Preparing for an Intervention

We will describe three steps to prepare for starting an intervention:

1. Select the most appropriate recording procedure for the identified behavior. In Lesson 3, we discussed three ways to assess and measure behavior: frequency counting, time sampling, and opportunity recording. When you start an intervention, the recordings will tell us whether the intervention is effective.

2. Observe and record the behaviors. Make sure you have established ways to observe and record behavior before starting an intervention. For more information on this, return to lesson 4.

Formal and Informal Interventions

We will describe behavioral interventions as formal or informal. FORMAL INTERVENTIONS are those that include punishment procedures. Usually, they must be written and approved according to school district and/or state regulations. After a formal intervention is developed with a student, it is presented to appropriate persons for approval. Paraeducators using formal interventions must have extensive training. These interventions will not be discussed here because they depend on each state’s or agency’s regulations and on completion of training (Morgan, local, & Smith, 1997). Consult your instructor or supervisor for more information.
Formal and Informal Interventions

Informal interventions are those that usually do not require approval based on school district or state requirements (Morgan, Wold, & Strickland, 1997). However, informal interventions must be approved by the classroom teacher. These interventions may be simple agreements between an instructor and student about changing behavior. They take the form of “If you be this way, then you get some type of reinforcer.” Paraeducators using informal interventions must have approval from the classroom teacher.

Applying Informal Interventions

Let’s examine five informal interventions that may be useful for students with whom you work:

1. Debugging the environment to promote appropriate behavior
2. Increasing alternative communication
3. Increasing alternative ways to get attention
4. Delivering positive reinforcement for the absence of disruptive behavior
5. Mixed “easy” and “hard” expectations

Intervention 1: Debugging the environment to promote appropriate behavior

Occasionally, students behave in harmful or disruptive ways because of factors in the environment. For example, busy, noisy environments may increase harmful/disruptive behaviors. Also, interacting with a distractible person, participating in activities in hot/cold settings, or learning boring tasks may increase harmful/disruptive behaviors. Effective instructors watch for these factors and “debug” environments to promote appropriate behaviors.

Example of Intervention 1: Michael was a youth with autism. His paraeducator (Shelley) was delivering instruction to Michael on how to make purchases at a supermarket. When Michael and Shelley entered the supermarket, Michael engaged in squealing, lumping, hand-biting, andmv-biting the hands up and down. Because Michael had no verbal skills and limited sign language, he could not tell Shelley why he was acting as such. Shelley observed that Michael was running to new vending machines being placed in the front of the store. When Shelley asked Michael if he was interested in having a soda, he signed “Yes, I want a drink.” Shelley de-bugged the environment by arranging for the and Michael to enter the supermarket through another entrance. Also, she set up a point system so that Michael could earn a soda after the instructional session if he did not exhibit, jump, bite his hands, or wave his arms.

Intervention 2: Increasing Alternative Communication

Many of our behaviors function to communicate information, verbal expression,onalization, and gestures/other information that we want. Communicating information is a critical skill. Unfortunately, it is a skill with which many students have little experience. When students try to communicate frustration or anger, the behavior is harmful and disruptive because it appears expressive, aggressive, or dangerous. If we concentrate on decreasing these harmful/disruptive behaviors without increasing alternative communication, we may leave students with no way to communicate. This intervention focuses on increasing positive, alternative ways to communicate (O’Sullivan & Reichle, 1993). To implement this intervention, follow these steps:

1. Meet with the student to find out what messages the student is trying to communicate. This student may be trying to say “I need a break,” “It’s too hot,” “I need a drink,” “I’m tired,” “I don’t want to,” “It’s hot,” etc.
2. With the student’s permission, agree on messages and/or other forms of communication that you will accept as a positive, alternative form of communication. Agree that, when the student uses this form of communication, you and others will accept it by either granting the request or offering an alternative.
Intervention 2: Increasing Alternative Communication

3. When the student uses this message, respond by granting the request (example: “OK, let’s work on an easier task for awhile.”) or by offering an alternative (example: “Thanks for asking nicely. Let’s work on an easier task.”).

4. If the student uses harmful/disruptive behaviors to communicate (such as a loud voice, obscenities, tantrums, etc.) try to redirect the student. That is, direct the student to return to the task until she is ready to use the agreed-upon message. Be careful not to give too much attention while the student is still behaving in a harmful or disruptive way.

Intervention 3: Increasing Alternative ways to get attention

Some students may get attention from others by behaving in disruptive ways. Intervention 3 involves decreasing these attention-seeking behaviors while increasing more appropriate ways to get attention. This involves reinforcing an appropriate behavior while ignoring the disruptive, attention-seeking behaviors. Note that ignoring disruptive behavior may initially cause it to increase. Therefore, ignoring should only be used when the behavior is not harmful. To carry out this intervention, follow these steps:

1. Meet with the student to find out why attention is needed. Does the student want to work with someone else? Does he want an opportunity to talk about something?

2. Agree on a way that the student could seek out attention that everyone will accept as an appropriate alternative (e.g., saying “Can I talk with you now?”). Agree that, when the student uses this form of attention-seeking, everyone will try to provide attention or offer an alternative.

Intervention 3: Increasing alternative ways to get attention

3. When the student uses the appropriate form of attention-seeking, provide attention or offer some alternative (e.g., “Thanks for asking nicely. I’m busy right now, but I could talk with you in five minutes.”).

4. If the student uses disruptive behavior to get attention, try to ignore it. However, if the behavior becomes dangerous or harmful, redirect the student to another task until he is ready to use the agreed-upon message. Be careful not to deliver too much attention while the student is still behaving in a disruptive way.
Intervention 3: Increasing alternative ways to get attention

Communicate intervention 3 to all instructors. Someone who does not understand the intervention may inadvertently pay attention to the behavior. This makes the behavior harder than ever to decrease.

Intervention 4: Delivering positive reinforcement for the absence of disruptive behavior

Sometimes students develop habits that are difficult to break. For example, students with autism may engage in "self-stimulatory" behaviors, such as waving their arms or rocking back and forth. These and other behaviors may be considered disruptive because they serve no useful purpose. One effective way to change these disruptive behaviors is to reward the absence of disruptive behavior. That is, provide reinforcement according to a time schedule as long as the disruptive behavior does not occur, or X minutes after the last occurrence. To carry out this intervention, follow these steps.

Intervention 4: Delivering positive reinforcement for the absence of disruptive behavior

- Meet with the student to describe the behavior you want to decrease.
- With the student's help, identify positive reinforcers that change the behavior.
- Decide how you will deliver the positive reinforcer if the disruptive behavior does not occur. This can be done:
  - Deliver the reinforcer when a specified amount of time has passed after the last disruptive behavior, such as 10 minutes after the last disruption.
  - Deliver the reinforcer according to time intervals of the behavior (e.g., every 10 minutes). If the student engages in the behavior, try to ignore it. However, if the behavior becomes frequent, redirect the student to return to the task. Be careful not to deliver too much attention when the student is still engaging in the disruptive behavior.

Example of Intervention 4: Calio had been diagnosed with autism. She sometimes rubbed the back of her head rapidly. Rubbing her head did not seem to communicate a message, nor did Calio do it for attention. However, it interrupted her activity and caught the attention of classmates, so it was considered disruptive. Her preschool teacher (Doug) noted that Calio enjoyed listening to music during free time. When Doug sat with Calio, they agreed that she could listen to her favorite music as long as she did not rub her head. If she rubbed her head, Calio agreed that she would give up five minutes of music during free time. After the first five minutes of free time, they could turn on the music. If more rubbing occurred, the music remained off for another five minutes.

Intervention 5: Mixing “easy” and “hard” tasks.

Most of our daily routines involve both easy and hard tasks, or preferred and nonpreferred activities. If we do all the easy tasks first, we lose motivation to do the hard ones. Few of us do the hard ones first and the easy ones last! Many of us naturally mix the easy and the hard ones to maintain motivation and avoid a long series of hard tasks. Instructors can help students do the same thing. To carry out this intervention, follow these steps.

Intervention 5: Mixing “easy” and “hard” tasks.

- Meet with the student to identify the easy and hard tasks (or easy and hard instructions) to follow.
- With the student's assistance, identify a positive reinforcer that changes the schedule of reinforcement, such as a high response rate after a hard task. Note: It does not have to be a specific amount of time, but it must be accompanied by reinforcement. In the event of a hard task, the student should remain with an easy task.

If the student makes progress using this intervention, change the schedule of reinforcement, that is, fewer success on the easy task or success on an easy task that decreases the schedule to a random (staircase) sequence. As with previous interventions, change to a random sequence after the first few successful steps.
Intervention 5: Mixing “easy” and “hard” tasks.

Dallas was a student with social and emotional challenges. He enjoyed drawing pictures and was considered “the second grade artist.” However, he disliked reading. He would often start a reading activity with the paraeducator (Amelia) by reading a few sentences aloud, mispronounce a few words, and then show frustration by yelling, screaming, and throwing the book. Amelia arranged for Dallas to read one sentence, then draw a picture about the sentence. After one minute of drawing, Dallas would read the next sentence, then draw another picture or add to the first one. Dallas continued to alternate drawing and reading activities. After three daily sessions, Amelia asked Dallas to read two sentences before he drew a picture. Eventually, Dallas was reading an entire story, then drawing a picture to describe it.

Lesson 5 progress check

Post Test
Appendix D:

Coaching Session Topics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent:</th>
<th>Before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior:</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence:</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONSEQUENCES:**
Positive: Behavior Increases
Punishing: Behavior Decreases
Neutral: Behavior doesn’t change

**LEAST RESTRICTIVE:**
Try least restrictive and if it is ineffective then try more restrictive.

**SPECIFYING BEHAVIORS:**
1-Pinpoint behavior
2-Have clear expectations with students
3-Assess progress and communicate with teachers and parents

**SPECIFY**: Define exactly what is going on (be specific)

**DEFINE**: What do you want the student to do instead?
Be specific: What (behavior), How much (percentage), When (what time), Where (which class period)

**OTHER FACTORS:**
T-Time of day
I-Illness
M-Medication
E-Environment (stimuli)
Assessing: reasons to assess behavior

1. Compare behavior to verify problem
2. Determine how much of a problem it is
3. Compare baseline to intervention to see if it is working
4. Determine how behavior is related to events before and after
5. Meet accountability for IEP

Frequency Counting:

1. Specified & Defined
2. Easily observable
3. Start & Stop
4. Same length of time

Time Sampling:

1. Specified & Defined
2. No beginning or end
3. High frequency

Per Opportunity:

1. Specified & Defined
2. Instructor sets the opportunity
3. Observer determines whether the response is correct or incorrect
Activity Reinforcers:

1. Ask parents what student likes to do
2. See what they do in free time

*Limitations: Activities that are too far away

Material Reinforcers:

1. Ask parents what like
2. See what student likes

*Limitations: some materials not acceptable for all classrooms

Token Reinforcers:

1. Frequently exchanged
2. Emphasis on the performance not on tokens

*Limitations: Have back-up reinforcers to keep motivation

6 Components to Effective Praise:

1. Contingent
2. Descriptive
3. Varied
4. Frequent
5. Sincere
6. Age Appropriate
Interventions:

- All interventions need to include positive consequences
- All instructors need to be aware of procedure
- Student helps with intervention
- Must be achievable
- Specific & well defined

Prepare an Intervention:

1. Select recording procedure
2. Observe & record
3. Graph

Intervention 1: Debugging

-Look @ environment & change as needed

Intervention 2: Increase Communication

1. Find out what trying to communicate
2. Agree on appropriate message
3. Respond with request if appropriately asked
4. Redirect with inappropriate request

Intervention 3: Increase Attention

1. Find out why need attention
2. Agree on appropriate response
3. Respond with request if appropriately asked
4. Ignore with inappropriately request

Intervention 4: Positive Reinforcement for Absence of Behavior

1. Describe behavior to decrease
2. Identify reinforcer
3. Decide how to deliver reinforcer
4. Ignore disruptive behavior

Intervention 5: Hard & Easy Tasks

1. Identify hard & easy tasks
2. Identify reinforcer
3. Describe how will deliver reinforcer
4. If making progress, change reinforcement schedule

4 ways for student to participate in intervention:

1. Select reinforcer
2. Set level of performance
3. Identify other areas to work on
4. Monitor own behavior
Figures
Figure 1: Number of participants who answered each question correctly on the pre-test, post-test, and one month follow up test.
Figure 2: Number of questions answered correctly per participant on the pre-test, post-test, on one month follow-up test.