Behavior plan, does it work?

Blanca M. Gonzalez
M.Ed. Educational Diagnostician Certification
University of St. Thomas
Special Education Teacher
Houston Independent School
Houston, Texas

Professor: Dr. D. Brown
University of Saint Thomas
Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for EDU 5332

November 2015

ABSTRACT

As educators, we are responsible for teaching academic skills. However, some students not only need to learn academic skills but they need of behavior support, due to problematic behaviors that are happening in the school setting. In this article, we will learn more of what are the implications, requirements and best strategies for a behavior plan. The article focuses on answering the question, does a behavior plan work?

Introduction

As Parents and educators, we would like that all children comply with the rules of the classroom and school. However, some children are not falling within the norm. These few children may need additional support and services to be successful in school. A child in a regular education classroom who is exhibiting behavior challenges may need support available in the classroom. Strategies that teachers can use are modeling, restating the rules, having a student and/or parent conference, time out, notes home, detention and sending a student to the office for a discipline referral.

When a child exhibits behavior problems, it creates friction between the child, teacher, and parents. A typical teacher wants to give the parent great news and compliments; however, often a teacher needs to report student(s) difficulties in following the rules. When a teacher is having trouble utilizing strategies to support with inappropriate behaviors, it is time to ask for assistance with the IAT (Intervention Assistance Team), which is a team who will recommend interventions strategies that can be helpful in the classroom.

Background information

   As a special education teacher with over ten years of experience working in different programs servicing exceptional students including co-teacher, inclusion, content mastery, and resource and currently as SLL teacher (Skills for Learning and Living). The student classroom ratio is 11:3 in a Title I school in Houston Texas. Student disability conditions varied as AU (Autism), ID (Intellectual Disability), OHI (Other Health Impairment), SI (Speech impairment). When working with students who have special needs, students with OHI and ID labels would exhibit more challenging behaviors. It is difficult for a special education teacher to know if the disability is the cause of the problematic behaviors. It is possible to see students around the same age, same gender and same disability condition behaving differently. It is relevant to mention that not all the children in a self-contained classroom are under medication and that all pupils are exhibiting problematic behaviors. There are a few of them who are on medication, and as a paradigm, in often, when students are on medication is when the problematic behaviors may get worse instead of getting better.

   About half of the students have good behavior. However, the other half who are in need of constant re-direction, prompting and lack of self-control and ability to follow the classroom rules. For those students, a behavior plan was completed during the ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) meeting.

"President Clinton signed the bill reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA, US Department of Education, 1997) stipulating use of the

Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA) as a mandatory practice" (Moreno, 2011)

Required forms for FBA

   Different methods and forms are available to aid educators to collect data. Methods of

Functional Assessments procedures are broadly classified into three categories: Indirect

or informant procedures, open procedures or descriptive analysis, and functional analysis

or experimental analysis (Gable, 1996; Iwata et al., 1993; Ward, 1998). Other required

forms are data collection tools such as questionnaires, functional assessment interview

and rating scales completing by parents and teachers. These forms are utilized to define

the problem behavior(s), to narrow down variables that may be affecting a problem

behavior, and last to formulate hypothesized functions of a problem behavior (Ward,

1998).

   The recommendation is that forms may be completed not only for the teacher. It is

important that another person can also make observations in a different setting and

various activities. This procedure will give an additional perspective besides the student's

teacher. This descriptive analysis method involves observing persons with problem

behavior in their usual routines (Drasgow, Yell, Bradley, & Shriner, 1999). The

Information gathered from direct observations is helpful to formulate the hypothesized

function of a problem behavior as stated by Kim & Choi (1998). The use of direct

observations requires identification of problem behaviors in observable and measurable

terms to select the conditions under the problem behaviors happened, and the selection of

assessment strategies, such as frequency, interval recording, to the recording of problem

behaviors (Ward, 1998).

One of more time consuming forms is ABC's Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence. It

is the most common and requires forms because after analyzing information, the function

of the behavior is established when comparing the existence of problem behavior during

a suitable control condition (Iwata et al., 1993). One completed all forms of direct and

indirect observations are completed, and then is time to move to define problem behavior

by analyzing data and determine the function of the behavior. Once is this process done, a

behavior plan can be created.

Participants in the BIP

When there is a need for a behavior plan, the participants in the meeting may be

varied depending on the school and parent request. These are the members needed:

parents of the child, regular education teacher, special education teacher, LPAC

(Language Proficiency Assessment Committee) representative if the student has limited

English and school administrator. In some cases, the social worker, counselors, the nurse

may be invited to the meeting. When the student is exhibiting severe behaviors, a

psychologist or a behavior interventionist may be present to help develop a functional

behavior assessment to complete further the behavior intervention plan.

Developing an effective behavior plan is the primary goal of the meeting. However,

after a few weeks implementing the behavior plan, data collection will show if the

behavior plan interventions are effective. According to Cook et al., "It is imperative that

plans and service provided for students with behavior problems improve, because failing

to do so not only has negative implications for the well-being of children and schools but

society as well (p. 204).

It is difficult for a teacher to share and implement strategies and intervention with

other teachers and school personnel who also work with the student. Having several

students with a behavior plan and having to collect data and teach is not an easy task.

However, it is our duty to understand and implement the behavior plan and keep

documentation to check further on progress and effectiveness. Schools continue to

struggle with the mandates as outlined in IDEA. Even though the research continues to

show us that FBAs and BIPs are highly effective tools, there should be more

investigation done to ensure the integrity of the process. Additional research on these

topics will help us to identify further the gap between conducting the FBA and the

implementation of the BIP. (Couvillon, 2009)

Often, the student is the most important participant when developing a behavior plan

because who else can better tell what they like, what they want and what is important to

them. According to Kerr, M. & Nelson (2010), "A critical prerequisite of successful

interventions for these students are the careful assessment of the student and the context

in which problem (as well as desired) behavior occur" (p. 4). As stated by Alter, et al.

(2008), "A final factor that impacts the comparison of results of different types of

functional assessment procedures is the issue of multiple functions. Various functions

may serve the same behavior in the same setting as a result of differing establishing

operations" (p.202). The ideal situation will be that parent, student, teacher and other

appropriate staff who have expertise in behaviors may be present during this process, to further assist, since the function of the behavior can be hard to establish.

Behavior intervention plan

A behavior intervention plan is an individualized intervention developed for students who are experiencing social and academic failure despite targeted interventions. As educators, we find ourselves with limited time to cover all appropriate content during the day. Having behavior problems in the classroom reduce the instructional time and impede student learning. However, disruptions in the routine, talking out of turn, not asking permission, off-task behavior, and non-compliance are some of the behaviors that are more frequent these days. A behavior plan will help to delimit the only two behaviors that we need to concentrate on. Kerr, M. & Nelson (2010) noted, "It is acknowledged that schools can no longer afford to ignore the behavior needs of students until they reach the point that potential threats to school safety exist" (p.5). However, we have to understand that behaviors are still occurring in our schools. It seems that behavior problems are manifesting more often these days. We hear more and more news that involves bullying, physical aggression that affect and impact our schools.

According to the EC (Exceptional Children), special programs section division at DPI under the resources link you can find behavior support, such as detail information about behavior supports and interventions. As stated in EC,"A behavioral intervention plan (BIP) is designed for a particular child to try to help that child learn to change her or his behavior. Once the function of a student's behavior is determined, the Individual Education Program (IEP) Team should develop the behavior intervention plan."

Cook et al. (2007) state that "the law requires schools to develop and implement behavior intervention plans under the following circumstances: (a) a student' behavior impedes his or her own or others ability to learn; (b) when behavioral goals on the IEP are not sufficient to address problem behavior; (c) prior or subsequent to a manifestation determination meeting (student suspended in excess of ten days); and (d) when a student is placed involuntarily into a more restrictive placement due to behavior" (p. 192).

One model of designing a behavioral intervention plan is based on the information from functional assessments is the "Competing Behavior Model" developed by O'Neil and his colleagues (O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Sprague, Storey, & Newton, 1997). The Competing Behavior Model calls for (a) developing the behavioral intervention plan based on the summary statements from the functional assessments and (b) identifying antecedent (and setting), behavior, and consequence strategies to prevent and replace problem behavior (Biniker, Kristi, 2008). Regardless of what model or form is used based on the school district what is important is that BIP describes and specify clearly target behaviors and include intervention strategies that all members understood and will be able to collect.

Data collection

We have to keep in mind that FBA and BIP should be individualized and that we only are to collect two main target behaviors. Teachers can make a change when they are involved in the process along with other staff members. Information in the FAB and BIP

should not be general and applicable to all students, it should be created only to satisfy

and fit students' needs. These days is not surprising as noted by Kerr & Nelson (2010),

"All educators must deal with students who exhibit such challenging behavior, even

though they constitute a small portion of the student population in our schools" (p.5).

Therefore, a teacher should be fully participating in creating, following and analyzing

progress that is crucial to make sure that this is not only a document but a helpful tool

that will enhance student positive change and growth. It is important that the obligation

not only fall on one person, but it should be a team participation, including student

participation when setting learning goals. Requiring students to share the responsibility

of discussing their progress with the teacher and their parents build ownership and

accountability. Having full participation of all members creates ownership and instills the

importance of setting goals and working to achieve them.

In their article, Blood & Neel (2007) stated, "The BIP may be considered to be a

compliance document rather than a source of information needed to develop effective

instruction in the classroom teachers' lack of knowledge of the plans" (p.75). It is sad to

see that when asked about the behavior intervention plans of students, none of the

teachers could identify the goals or report what was in the BIP, even though teachers

were involved in the process of creating the BIP. It is common to see that a BIP was

created prior to creating the FBA. When there is not enough training and expertise,

additional professional development with a behavior expert is vital to make sure that

when creating FBA and BIP process and documentation will be valid, accurate, and

meaningful.

Best strategies that work with students with disabilities

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) are implemented in thousands of

school throughout the United States. These interventions usually work with about eighty

percent of the school population. However, when a student is not responding to PBIS, the

next step is to use student's response to intervention (RTI), which is a process to define

when more deep levels of intervention are required, and when additional evidence-based

practices should be used to tackle student's needs. Both PBIS and RIT are on a multitier

intervention process in which progressively more intensive interventions are provided to

students who fail to succeed with less intensive interventions in place.

The Cool Card program, a self-management procedure allowing students to track

their progress, was outlined in the BSP. Examples of the Cool Card and the self-

monitoring form that Mark and Rick used to record their performance as displayed in

Figures 2 and 3, (Anderson, 2006).

Best strategies when working with challenging behaviors

- Teacher should identify the expected behaviors in the classroom and model for the
  students. The teacher can develop and use behavior contracts or token economies.

- The classroom has to be consistent with rules and routines, making sure that students
  know the daily schedule and what is expected of them to do. Students can refer to an
  individualized visual picture schedule with daily routine.

- Offer multiple opportunities to reinforce desirable behaviors with emphasis on
  safety, we can use a "hands to yourself or quiet hands" rule to respect personal space
  and prevent hurting themselves or others in any instances of physical aggression.

- Provide varied engaging activities that allow students to move during instructional time. Also, create a break, time out, calming area where they can practice coping, calming strategies.

- When a confrontation occurs, avoid the power struggle, have a conversation about what happened in as few words as possible and use a calm, not angry voice, but still go over consequences of the student's behavior. Make sure that a consequence is not given to the student unless it will happen because the student will not believe it the next time.

Conclusion

Developing FBA and BIP for students who are exhibiting challenging behaviors is a mandated process. Studies by Blood and Neel show that additional research needs to be conducted to determine why behavior plans are not being developed and implemented in the manner intended. Implementing a behavior plan is not an easy task for any teacher because it requires planning, organization and large amounts of paperwork. Another reason is that some special educators are often involved with assessment and plan development as mandated regulation rather than a process that help instructional planning and students' success.

When a BIP worked, it was because of effective interventions that were not developed in isolation but as a team effort, and it was consistently implemented to determine effectiveness. It is common to meet again for an ARD meeting, to review and change interventions and strategies that meet students' needs in the classroom and other school settings. The paperwork required in special education is not going to go away soon. Therefore, it is critical that we select the best system that we can follow and implement in our routine. We need to be effective when planning and organizing data collection.

Luckily, there are many resources available that contain detailed information about data collection. Based on our districts, we will be required to use forms that are mandated and that we cannot change. On many occasions, based on time, we will need to make quick notes to transcribe, others times, we will tally and then analyze the progress or regression of target behaviors. The appropriate forms will aid us in saving time and maximize instructional time. However, a key factor is to create a friendly and open communication among all members of the team. Having the same goal and working towards student success is key. In conclusion, the behavior plan works when it is utilized as a tool to guide and provide replacement behaviors that are appropriate for the student. It is our duty and obligation to complete and implement BIP. The BIP will work if it is based on clear expectations, is applied consistently, and is individualized to fit students' needs. Nevertheless, the key ingredient is to build trust. When we believe and trust in each other, we work together believing that we can accomplish our goal. The main objective is to provide assistance and support contributing to the best education in a safe and successful learning environment.

References

Alter, P. J., Conroy, M. A., Mancil, G. R., & Haydon, T. (2008). A comparison of

functional behavior assessment methodologies with young children: Descriptive

methods and functional analysis. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 17*(2), 200-219.

Retrieved

from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.asp

x?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ791101&site=ehost-

live; http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10864-008-9064-3

Anderson, D. H., Fisher, A., Marchant, M., Young, K. R., & Smith, J. A. (2006). The

cool card intervention: A positive support strategy for managing anger. *Beyond

Behavior, 16*(1), 3-13. Retrieved

from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.as

px?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ840240&site=ehost-

live; http://www.ccbd.net/content/cool-card-intervention-positive-support-strategy-

managing-anger

Blood, E., & Neel, R. S. (2007). From FBA to implementation: A look at what is actually

being delivered. *Education and Treatment of Children, 30*(4), 67-80. Retrieved

from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.as

px?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ778108&site=ehost-

live; http://www.educationandtreatmentofchildren.net/contents/index.html

Cook, C. R., Crews, S. D., Wright, D. B., Mayer, G. R., Gale, B., Kraemer, B., et al. (2007). Establishing and evaluating the substantive adequacy of positive behavioral support plans. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 16*(3), 191-206. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ774380&site=ehost-live; http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10864-006-9024-8

Couvillon, M. A., Bullock, L. M., & Gable, R. A. (2009). Tracking behavior assessment methodology and support strategies: A national survey of how schools utilize functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 14*(3), 215-228. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ855882&site=ehost-live; http://www.informaworld.com/openurl?genre=article&id=doi:10.1080/13632750903073459

Drasgow, E., Yell, M. L., Bradley, R., & Shriner, J. G. (1999). The IDEA amendments of 1997: A school-wide model for conducting functional behavioral assessments and developing behavior intervention plans. *Education and Treatment of Children, 22*(3), 244-66. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ597258&site=ehost-live

Gable, R. A. (1996). *A critical analysis of functional assessment: Issues for researchers and practitioners. Behavioral Disorders*, 22, 36-40

Kerr, M., & Nelson, C. (2010). *Strategies for Addressing Behavior Problems in the classroom* (Sixth edition ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Moreno, G., & Bullock, L. M. (2011). Principles of positive behaviour supports: Using the FBA as a problem-solving approach to address challenging behaviours beyond special populations. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 16*(2), 117-127. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.stthom.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ925638&site=ehost-live; http://www.informaworld.com/openurl?genre=article&id=doi:10.1080/13632752.2011.569394