Implications of Current Research on the Use of Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Support Planning in School Systems

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Abstract

Functional behavior assessment and function-based support have increasingly been used in school settings in the past decade. This increased use has come under scrutiny from some experts who have argued in the past that function-based support has not yet been proven to be effective in typical school settings with students without severe disabilities. But recent research has demonstrated its effectiveness in general education settings, and current research is providing insight into procedures that can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of functional behavior assessment and function-based support in typical school settings. In this article the authors provide six guidelines for effective functional behavior assessment and support in school settings.
Keywords: functional assessment, behavioral assessment, behavior disorders, school systems

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Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is a process for understanding an individual's problem behavior, identifying events that predict and maintain it, and using this information to design behavior support plans that minimize problem behavior and maximize functional, prosocial behavior (O'Neill et al., 1997). It is an applied process with clear roots in applied behavior analytic literature and over sixty years of empirical support (Ervin, Ehrhardt, & Poling, 2001; Skinner, 1953). FBA has been in practice by clinicians, consultants, and school personnel under the varied names of functional assessment, functional analysis, functional analysis assessment, or as a general technique used by applied behavior analysts. At the core of these different names (and variations in approaches) are the underlying assumptions that behavior is predictable, occasioned by environmental events, and serves a purpose, or function. Identifying the function or functions that maintain problem behavior provides a key to the elusive question of "why" problem behavior occurs, but also (and more importantly) provides the information needed to reduce problem behavior and teach socially acceptable, functional alternative skills that can be used to improve life outcomes.

Though its primary research base comes from studies and clinical use with individuals with severe disabilities, more recent uses of FBA have focused on a broader range of individuals with problem behavior, including individuals with mild or moderate disabilities or those at risk for such disabilities. This use has been hastened by amendments to the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997), which mandated the use of FBA in determining appropriate placements for students with significant problem behavior. Since its passage, it has been a ubiquitous part of providing behavior support, as well as due process lawsuits, in today's schools. To many educators, FBA has been misinterpreted as a way to determine if students are "in control" of their behavior or as a piece of the paperwork needed to suspend students with problem behavior. As a result, the typical school perception of FBA has become very different than its intended purposes. As we approach a decade of the inclusion of FBA into law, it seems worthwhile to examine its use and effectiveness, and reexamine the recent research literature to determine its best practice in schools.

The Use of FBA in School Settings

Now that FBA has been used in school settings on a large scale, it is possible to explore the state of practice in function-based support with a broad range of students in schools rather than the limited population of participants that typified research in previous years. In addition, with the increase in students receiving FBAs, there has been a corresponding increase in the range of people using FBA in

schools, adding school psychologists, school behavior specialists, teachers, and counselors to clinicians as personnel commonly completing FBAs.

This broadening of the population for function-based support and the resulting technology transfer has been greeted with varied responses from prominent scholars. Some have described the expansion of FBA as a logical extension of an effective practice to a population that could distinctly benefit from such practices (Crone & Horner, 2003; Lewis & Sugai, 1996; Scott, Bucalos et al., 2004). Others have described this movement as an unwarranted overgeneralization of results from individuals with severe disabilities to an unproven population (Gresham, 2003; Nelson, Roberts, Rutherford, Mathur, & Aaroe, 1999; Sasso, Conroy, Stichter, & Fox, 2001). The arguments of these latter authors can be summarized into the following main assertions: a) function-based support has not been documented as more effective for students with mild or moderate disabilities than interventions based on the topography of problem behavior, b) the field currently lacks the technology to intervene effectively with the complexity of behavior displayed by high-functioning students with problem behavior, and c) many school personnel lack the expertise to implement effective function-based support.

These authors posed valid questions that clarified the research gaps and effectively shaped the research agenda in FBA and function-based support in the last few years. As such, many of these questions have been addressed through rigorous research, by research teams from a number of universities. The resulting research highlights some of the challenges of FBA in school settings but also demonstrates clearly that FBA and function-based support in schools is possible and can lead to more effective treatment of problem behavior.

Function-based support can be more effective than non function-based support. This line of research comes directly from the criticisms that interventions derived from FBA may not be any more effective than interventions not based on these results. A host of research teams directly compared the effects of interventions derived from FBA results to interventions selected without this information in general education settings. Results in all five studies showed little to no improvement in behavior for the non-FBA interventions and powerful effects for plans designed based on FBAs (Filter & Horner, 2006; Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2005; Newcomer & Lewis, 2004; Russell & Horner, 2006, in press). These studies demonstrate the relevance and importance of FBA procedures in informing effective intervention plans.

Comprehensive function-based support can support complex behavior. Critics argue that simple contingency-based interventions (rewarding desired behavior and punishing problem behavior) are unlikely to be effective with sophisticated students who engage in complex problem behavior. In our estimation, this is absolutely true. However, the state of the technology for supporting students has moved away from simple consequence manipulation to more comprehensive plans that also include antecedent-based interventions designed to prevent problem behavior (Kern, Choutka, & Sokol, 2002), teach functional alternative skills (O'Neill et al., 1997), and promote strategies that generalize to contexts where there is no possibility of adult-delivered punishers or reinforcers (Kern & Dunlap, 1999). In addition, complex student behavior can be better analyzed if organized into logical clusters of behavior, grouped by routines and response classes (March et al., 2000). These skills have been in effective practitioners' repertoires for some time, and have been used with students with mild, moderate, or no disabilities (Ervin, DuPaul, Kern, & Friman, 1998; Lewis & Sugai, 1996; March & Horner, 2002; Sprague & Horner, 1999).

Practitioners can be trained to complete accurate FBAs. Outcomes of teaching FBA procedures to school personnel have been mixed, with some researchers reporting positive results of training on skills (Kamps, Wendland, & Culpepper, 2006; Teri Lewis-Palmer, Bounds, & Sugai, 2004) and others reporting mixed results (Scott, McIntyre, Liaupsin, Nelson, & Conroy, 2004). One plausible conclusion is that

effective training has been demonstrated in some cases and is possible, but the instructional variables that enhance or inhibit competence in behavior support have yet to be explored.

The research described above has done much to address the challenges facing FBA and function-based support in schools and experimentally document their worth with a broad range of students. However, schools remain complex settings for function-based support, and more information is needed to optimize its use for maximum effectiveness. Those earlier research studies have given birth to a new generation of current studies that provide some indication about what would be the most effective and efficient use of functional behavior assessment and support planning within the context of school systems. Hence, we provide six guidelines based on recent research that may lead to more effective use of FBA and FBS in schools.

Guidelines for Effective Functional Behavior Assessment and Support

1. Situate within a Continuum of Support

Function-based support is a resource-intensive process, and the sheer volume of students needing some level of behavior support in schools can easily overwhelm a skilled practitioner. The probability of successful support decreases substantially when multiple students in a classroom need comprehensive plans. To provide support for all students who need it, attention must be placed on providing a preventive level of behavior support to all students (Walker et al., 1996). School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS; Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005) is an emerging evidence-based approach that includes as its foundation a universal system of support for all students. Through SWPBS, school staff directly teach students expectations for behavior, acknowledge prosocial behavior, and provide further instruction and support for students who exhibit problem behavior. Recent research has shown that implementation of SWPBS is associated with significant decreases in problem behavior and increases in expected behavior, perceived school safety, and indirectly, academic achievement (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005; Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Nelson, 1996; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). Implementation has been effective in both classroom and non-classroom settings, including hallways (Kartub, Taylor-Greene, March, & Horner, 2000), playgrounds (Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 2000), and buses (Putnam, Handler, Ramirez-Platt, & Luiselli, 2003).

Providing a continuum of support through SWPBS can assist in the delivery of function-based support in three important ways. First, by providing universal support for all students, students who may be at risk for significant problem behavior may receive the support and social skills needed to function successfully in school settings. As such, SWPBS can reduce the number of students who need function-based support. Second, SWPBS provides a base level of structure and predictability to all settings in which it is implemented. The additional supervision, instruction, and reinforcement provided in these spaces can promote student success as they move among settings, especially when support plans are implemented inconsistently across settings or school personnel. Third, SWPBS provides a range of programs that provides multiple levels of support for students. If students do not respond to universal programs, a secondary intervention may be applied, such as a check-in/check-out daily report card intervention (Crone, Horner, & Hawken, 2003; March & Horner, 2002). If students do not respond to this additional level of support, then function-based support may be provided. In this way, SWPBS and function-based support are not separate entities at all—function-based support is the primary practice used to support students who need the highest level of support. This process is demonstrated by the research of Fairbanks and colleagues (in press). There is another advantage to implementing this tiered system—it may be as helpful in reverse. When students are achieving success, the support can be faded

gradually. Support can be dropped to a lower level of intensity rather than removed altogether (and possibly too quickly).

2. Consider Academic Factors

The primary goal of schooling is to promote student academic competence. Hence, a singularly powerful variable in school settings is individual academic skill level, and academic skills dramatically influence the environment for students. Students with high academic skill levels experience a context of less demanding tasks and ready access to teacher praise and adult recognition of achievement, both typically provided for correct academic responding. Students with low academic skills are exposed to more aversive tasks and have reduced access to reinforcement for correct responding. These experiences may increase the potential value of consequences for problem behavior. As seen in recent research, low academic skills early in elementary school can predict future problem behavior, even when students had no early history of problem behavior (McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, & Good, 2006), and these low skill levels can evoke problem behavior when students are presented with typical general education tasks (Hoff, Ervin, & Friman, 2005; McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Dickey, & Braun, 2006; Roberts, Marshall, Nelson, & Albers, 2001). The results from these studies and others highlight the need to assess academic skill levels in functional behavior assessment.

A promising practice is to assess specific academic skills used in completing typical tasks. A particularly valuable approach is to use curriculum-based assessment or evaluation to identify academic skill levels (Howell & Nolet, 2000; Shapiro, 2004). If low levels of academic skills are identified, practitioners can use structural analysis procedures to assess which specific tasks (or task features) act as antecedents to escape-maintained problem behavior (Roberts et al., 2001). Potential interventions include modifying tasks to decrease their aversiveness, and more importantly, providing academic instruction to improve academic skills. Such instruction could both make aversive tasks easier and improve long-range life outcomes for the individual. In fact, simply providing instruction has been shown to decrease escape-maintained behavior to a socially acceptable level (Lee, Sugai, & Horner, 1999). As such, effective academic instruction can be seen as both prevention and intervention for problem behavior.

3. Use Validated FBA Measures

Since its legal mandate, there has been a vast increase in the number of FBA measures available to practitioners. In addition, indirect FBA measures, such as interview tools and rating scales, have grown in popularity because of their short administration times in relation to direct observation or functional analysis procedures. The use of these measures have been called into question, particularly because they lack the robust research base of direct observation and functional analysis (Gresham, 2003; Nelson et al., 1999; Sasso et al., 2001). This criticism is valid and poignant, especially if use of these measures is likely to produce a false hypothesis statement. It becomes grave when considering the harmful effects produced when practitioners design interventions based on the wrong function of behavior (Filter & Horner, 2006; Ingram et al., 2005).

There are a number of articles that describe methodologies for assessing the technical adequacy of FBA measures (Cone, 1997; Floyd, Phaneuf, & Wilczynski, 2005; Shriver, Anderson, & Proctor, 2001). Essentially, the questions asked are of validity (e.g., does the measure produce accurate predictors and maintaining consequences?) and reliability (e.g., are results consistent across time, settings, and users?). Most studies evaluating indirect FBA measures have yielded results varying from moderate to poor validity and/or reliability (Barton-Arwood, Wehby, Gunter, & Lane, 2003; Floyd et al., 2005; Kwak, Ervin, Anderson, & Austin, 2004; Stage, Cheney, Walker, & LaRocque, 2002; Zarcone, Rodgers, Iwata, Rourke, & Dorsey, 1991). As such, practitioner should use indirect FBA measures with extreme caution

in absence of supporting evidence. Some indirect measures that do have some emerging evidence of validity and reliability are the *Functional Assessment Checklist—Teachers and Staff* (FACTS; March et al., 2000)[1], a school-based interview measure with moderate to strong agreement with direct observation and functional analysis and adequate reliability (McIntosh, Borgmeier et al., 2006) and the *Questions About Behavioral Function* (QABF; Matson & Vollmer, 1995), a clinical rating scale with moderate agreement with functional analysis (Paclawskyj, Matson, Rush, Smalls, & Vollmer, 2001) and adequate reliability (Paclawskyj, Matson, Rush, Smalls, & Vollmer, 2000).

Some recent research has provided preliminary support for the approach of integrating a variety of measures into FBA. Stage and colleagues (2006) used multiple methods, including interviews, rating scales, direct observations, and functional analysis to assess the convergence of these sources on the presumed antecedents and maintaining consequences of problem behavior. Though they did not always find perfect agreement, the majority of sources pointed to a hypothesis that was validated through functional analysis. This provides some indication of best practice use of indirect measures—by gathering information from various sources and with various methods, some of the inadequacies of individual measures can be mitigated. These results may provide some evidence for the approach of using a variety of indirect measures (such as interviews, rating scales, and review of office discipline referrals)to generate an initial hypothesis, and if results are inconclusive (e.g., hypotheses are inconsistent across sources, practitioners doubt the results from certain measures), they can be verified through direct observation or functional analysis procedures (Crone & Horner, 2003).

These studies have yielded directions for practitioners in the form of suggestions for appropriate use of FBA measures. First, when choosing among FBA measures, use the evidence for technical adequacy as a basis for selection and consider this information when interpreting results. Second, when identifying antecedents and maintaining consequences, assess the convergence of multiple sources (including adult and student interviews, review of office discipline referrals, and especially direct observation) and collect more information if there is not a consistent pattern. Third, consider that the measures themselves are but one factor in the equation. The skills of the assessor and the knowledge of the informant (about both the student *and* principles of behavior) probably play a greater role in accuracy of FBA results. The field is far from having any type of measure that can make up for lack of skills or unawareness of contingent events, and an adequate measure in unskilled hands is unlikely to yield beneficial information.

4. Design and Implement Plans Using a Team Approach

Though function-based behavior support plans can have a high level of complexity, the process of designing such plans can be equally complex. There are a number of variables that warrant attention to design a plan with a high probability of effectiveness, as well as a high probability of being implemented. The two variables of import are technical adequacy, the degree to which plans have the features that reduce problem behavior and increase prosocial behavior, and contextual fit, the extent to which the plan is consistent with the setting and the values, skills, and resources of implementers (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996). As a plan's ultimate effectiveness is based on both of these variables, practitioners must strive to increase both when designing plans. If practitioners do not attend to technical adequacy, the plan is less likely to produce results; if practitioners do not attend to contextual fit, the plan is less likely to be implemented at all.

Recent research has shown both the complexity of this task but also the relative simplicity of the solution. Benazzi and her colleagues (2006) explored these variables to test the role of support team composition on technical adequacy and contextual fit of behavior support plans. She assessed plans created by typical school-based behavior support teams (often consisting of an administrator, general and

special education teachers, and aides) and behavior specialists (individuals with both training and experience designing school-based function-based support). Plans were created based on hypothetical FBA information in the following three conditions: the specialist alone, the school-based team alone, and the specialist facilitating the school-based team. The plans were then rated on two key criteria—technical adequacy, rated by experts in the research community, and contextual fit, rated by the plan designers themselves. Plans developed by the specialist alone had high technical adequacy but low contextual fit. Plans developed by the school-based team alone had with low technical adequacy but high contextual fit. Plans designed with the specialist facilitating the school-based team had moderate to high technical adequacy and contextual fit. These results indicate that behavior support plans can be effective and feasible only when the team designing the plans has members with: a) knowledge about the student, b) knowledge about the context, and c) knowledge about behavioral theory. In today's schools, a team most likely to have all of this information would consist of school personnel who would be implementing the plan, including the student's primary teacher(s), led by a district-level behavior specialist, such as a trained school psychologist or behavior analyst.

Albin and colleagues (1996) identified a multi-step approach to designing plans with high technical adequacy and contextual fit. Table 1 includes a process for designing a plan that based on that approach. The key points for maximizing technical adequacy and contextual fit include the specialist or some team members generating a preliminary plan with multiple options that meet technical adequacy, the team brainstorming options, and selection of final strategies in the plan based on a discussion of technical adequacy and contextual fit. Tools for designing plans in this manner, including the competing pathways analysis form, are available online at http://www.pbis.org/tool.htm.

Table 1. **A Multi-Step Process for Designing Behavior Support Plans to Maximize Technical Adequacy and Contextual Fit (based on Albin et al. 1996)**

1. The team completes a comprehensive functional behavior assessment that identifies the problem behavior, events that reliably predict and do not predict problem behavior, and events that maintain problem behavior, as well as features of the setting that may be altered to improve behavior.
2. The team or behavior specialist uses a competing pathways analysis to create a preliminary plan ("rough draft") that includes options for preventing problem behavior, responding to problem and desired behaviors, and teaching alternative acceptable behaviors that serve the same function as problem behavior.
3. The team meets to decide upon and finalize the plan, which includes the following:
    A. Agreeing on hypothesis statement
    B. Brainstorming strategies to prevent problem behavior, respond to problem and desired behaviors, and teaching alternative acceptable behaviors that serve the same function as problem behavior (through use of the competing pathways analysis)
    C. Choosing strategies to implement based on technical adequacy and contextual fit
    D. Determining an action plan that specifies *who* will do *what*, *when* (including a plan for data collection and evaluation)
    E. Evaluating the need for a safety/crisis plan
4. The team assesses implementer skill levels and provides necessary training/support as needed.
5. The team provides implementation support or information to family members.
6. The team evaluates the fidelity of implementation and effectiveness of the plan based on data collected and makes modifications to the plan as needed.

5. Plan for High Fidelity of Implementation

Even when a plan has been designed with an emphasis on contextual fit, there is no guarantee that a behavior support plan will be implemented as intended (Elliott, Witt, Kratochwill, & Stoiber, 2002; Progar, Perrin, DiNovi, & Bruce, 2001; Telzrow & Beebe, 2002). In fact, most of the research in this area indicates that even simple plans are more likely to have inconsistent, rather than strong, fidelity of implementation (e.g., Noell et al., 2005; Wickstrom, Jones, LaFleur, & Witt, 1996). However, not all plans are doomed to failure. Two phases in support planning provide opportunities to improve fidelity. First, during the design process, steps can be taken to ensure that the plans are acceptable to implementers and stakeholders and feasible with current resources. These plan aspects may be addressed through the collaborative team design process described above. Second, during the implementation process, practitioners can choose from a number of proven techniques to improve fidelity of implementation. Below are four procedures for increasing fidelity of implementation: direct consultation, detailed implementation procedures, fidelity monitoring, and performance feedback.

Direct consultation. Direct consultation (Watson & Robinson, 1996) is a process by which consultants (e.g., the behavior specialist who facilitates plan design) provide a more hands-on approach to intervention than the typical indirect approach. Watson and Robinson describe how consultants can do more than simply suggesting strategies, such as providing specific instruction to implementers (through modeling and coaching) in how to use the strategies. This process can improve fidelity by teaching the skills needed to work with the current student and adding capacity to work with future students.

Detailed intervention procedures. One tool that is particularly helpful in supporting implementers in using the strategies outlined is providing intervention procedures (Gresham, 1989; Telzrow & Beebe, 2002). This approach involves creating descriptions of the steps taken in implementing the plans and using them as visual aids to teach implementers how to use strategies and as a resource when working with the student. These materials may take the form of step-by-step instructions, flowcharts, or scripts.

Fidelity monitoring. Assessing fidelity of implementation is as important as assessing effects on behavior. Without documentation that the plan is implemented as designed, a lack of beneficial outcomes becomes doubly problematic—it is not possible to assess if the plan designed by the team would have made a difference (Crone & Horner, 2003). Unfortunately, asking implementers if they have implemented the plan is unlikely to produce accurate results (Noell, Duhon, Gatti, & Connell, 2002; Wickstrom et al., 1996), so other methods are preferred. More accurate methods include direct observation with a fidelity checklist (Russell & Horner, 2006), assessment of permanent products (such as point sheets or timeout records), or detailed self-assessment checklists (Elliott et al., 2002).

Performance feedback. Fidelity data is most effective when it is provided to the implementers at regular intervals (Noell et al., 2002; Noell et al., 2005). In these brief meetings, the consultant provides graphed data to implementers so that fidelity can be easily evaluated. Meetings can consist of a structured process in which implementers use the data to self-assess their fidelity, and the implementer and consultant together devise an action plan to improve or maintain fidelity (Martin, 2001). These meetings can also provide a space to reassess contextual fit, evaluate student progress, and modify the plan. They can help promote fidelity in two ways: first, it provides accountability for the implementers—knowing that someone will come to talk with them can, in of itself, improve fidelity (Elliott et al., 2002; Noell et al., 2005). Second, it provides an opportunity to give corrective feedback in applying the plan correctly.

7. Build and Maintain Local Expertise

Possibly the greatest challenge in providing function-based support in schools is not the actual process of FBA, support plan design, and implementation, but having access to school personnel with the expertise needed to provide successful behavior support. Typical efforts in this area involve attempts to hire personnel with skills and experience in function-based support when positions become available. This approach is unlikely to build expertise for three reasons: a) not enough applicants have these skills, b) attrition of personnel with these skills may reduce the level of expertise over time, and c) existing personnel may not have these skills. Similarly, sending some personnel to workshops or providing a single series of intensive trainings is also unlikely to establish expertise (Scott, McIntyre et al., 2004). It may give some initial exposure to a small number of personnel, but not the experience and regular feedback needed to build behavioral expertise.

One promising solution to these problems is implementing a systems-based approach to building and cultivating local expertise in functional behavior assessment and support planning. This approach involves implementing programs to support school personnel by providing regular skills training and ongoing support in implementing function-based support in schools. The program follows a typical model of instruction, in which trainers model the process to provide initial exposure, then use guided training to provide ongoing support when personnel complete FBAs and support planning with actual students (Crone, Hawken, & Bergstrom, 2006). This scaffolded approach allows personnel to receive ongoing feedback and gain experience while providing support to students who need it. The goal of this program is to create a community of learning with the common framework, language, and tools of a behavior analytical approach to student support. School personnel can simultaneously share data, receive monitoring and feedback, and benefit from repeated examples in monthly or bi-weekly meetings. Lewis-Palmer and her colleagues (2004) provide an excellent description of a district-level system put in place to cultivate and maintain local expertise in FBA and FBS procedures. A measure to assess the implementation of individual student systems in schools is available (Lewis-Palmer, Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sampson, 2003) and is currently undergoing assessment of its technical adequacy.

One aspect of training in function-based support that is beginning to be explored is the question of who receives it. To what extent should all members of a school-based behavior support team be experts in behavior? Initial efforts focused on providing intensive training to all team members, but it may be more efficient and feasible to train district-level behavior specialists who are available to schools for facilitating assessments, plan design, and plan evaluation (Benazzi et al., 2006; Crone et al., 2006; Crone & Horner, 2003; Luiselli, Putnam, & Handler, 2001). This allows districts to vary the support delivered to individual schools depending on need and existing school-level expertise. Future research may indicate whether district-level expertise that is available to school teams is as effective as school-based expertise. However, it may be beneficial in support planning to provide a basic level of exposure to the process to all school personnel. If plan implementers (including classroom teachers, aides, and administrators) have some background knowledge, it may be easier for them to take more responsibility for assessment and intervention. In fact, teaching implementers to take an active role in the process can lead to effective support and better long-term maintenance of effects (Kamps et al., 2006; Lucyshyn et al., 2006; Luiselli, Putnam, & Sunderland, 2002).

Future Research

The research described above has moved the science of function-based support into the twenty-first century. Yet there is much that is unknown about function-based support in schools. A rigorous research agenda is needed to study the remaining gaps in knowledge, particularly about FBA measures, training, and the long-term effects of function-based support. There still exists a continued need to investigate the technical adequacy of FBA measures, especially the validity of rating scales. Some critical questions regarding training include exploring the most effective methods of teaching the FBA process and the minimum training time needed for the average practitioner to complete accurate FBAs. In regards

to long-term effects, more follow-up maintenance studies are needed like the one completed by Lucyshyn and colleagues (2006) to explore the durability of function-based support over *years* of implementation. In this area, more research is needed in looking at the function of behavior over time. For example, how stable is the function of problem behavior across multiple years? It could also be beneficial to investigate if there are trends in the reinforcing value of certain consequences (e.g., teacher vs. peer attention) as students move through grade levels. The research described above is a logical and necessary extension of the efforts in recent years.

Conclusion

When functional behavior assessment was included in special education law ten years ago, the technology was already well established for supporting individuals with severe disabilities (Carr et al., 1999). The research base for students with mild to moderate disabilities and in general education was limited, and to some extent unknown. Codifying FBA into IDEA may have been an example of policy moving ahead of the evidence base, but, in the last ten years (and evidenced by the studies cited in this paper), it appears that the evidence base has caught up with policy. Now there exists a growing literature of published studies showing the value and effectiveness of function-based support with students in general education settings. Certainly there are challenges, and the quality of FBAs completed in schools still varies widely. Though there is much to know, the past ten years have provided the field with much in terms of knowledge in the effective use of function-based support with a broader range of students. The recent reauthorization of IDEA (2004) has recodified the use of function-based support in schools, ensuring the opportunity for practitioners to put this knowledge into action in supporting students.

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Notes: [1] The *FACTS* measure is available online for free download at http://www.pbis.org/tools.htm.

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