ABA in Schools
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In 2014 the Center for Disease Control, or CDC, released information specifying that 1 in 68 children are identified as having autism spectrum disorder. With the prevalence of autism being as high as it is, a growing number of schools are developing educational programs for students with autism. Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA, is considered an evidence-based practice for individuals with autism, and may be incorporated in educational programs to varying degrees. Schools range in their use of ABA, from using behavioral systems for the entire school, to offering ABA classes that use discrete trial teaching (a teaching methodology where skills are broken down and taught in very small components). Additionally, individuals across all classroom types may have a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), which is a very specific behavioral plan tailored to the precise behavioral challenges of that student.

1. What to know before you start
    - The New York State Education Department (NYSED) requires all teachers seeking special education certification to take a 3-hour workshop on the needs of children with autism. This training covers behavior management and positive behavioral supports, as well as evidence-based instructional methods for individuals with autism.
    - Although many people equate Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT) with ABA, it is actually only one of many instructional methodologies that falls under the umbrella of ABA. A classroom may incorporate numerous facets of ABA with or without the use of DTT.
    - ABA tends to be most effective when it is consistently implemented in the school, home, and community settings.
2. Questions for the BCBA
    - Which practices under ABA are evidence-based?
        o The National Professional Developmental Center on Autism has identified 27 evidence-based practices, many of which are considered "behavior analytic". Among these are: antecedent-based interventions (ABI), Differential Reinforcement of Alternative, Incompatible, or Other Behavior (DRA, DRI, DRO), Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT), Extinction (Ext), Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), Functional Communication Training (FCT), Modeling (MD), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Pivotal Response Training (PRT), Prompting (PP), Reinforcement (R+), Response Interruption/Redirection (RIR), Social Sills Training (SST), Task Analysis (TA), Time Delay (TD), Video Modeling (VM), and Visual Support (VS) (see Books and Resources below).
    - What is PBIS? Is it the same thing as ABA?
        o PBIS stands for Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems. PBIS includes the application of principles of ABA in a 3-tiered approach to decrease challenging behavior. Tier 1 is universal, and is applied to the school or classroom at large. Tier 2 is selected, and tends to be geared toward at risk students. Tier 3 is individual, and is reserved for high risk students for whom tiers 1 and 2 have been proven ineffective.
    - If my child is not in an ABA classroom, can I ask my child's classroom staff to implement ABA in the classroom?

- o While a school district does not need to comply with requests to use specific instructional methodologies, there is no harm in communicating with your child's team regarding specific behavioral strategies have been effective with your child. This can span from the use of visual cues in the environment to specific reinforcement systems that your child has been successful in responding to. It's always best to take a collaborative approach when working with your child's educational team.
- What should I do if my child is having challenging behaviors in school?
  - o Under NYSED's program standards for behavioral interventions (Part 200.22), the Committee on Special Education (CSE) or Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) should consider what is called a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) when a student's behavior puts him/her or others at risk of harm or injury, when the student exhibits persistent behaviors that impede his or her learning or the learning of others, and/or if the committee is considering a more restrictive educational program / placement because of the behavior. It's important to note that parents are a part of the committee, and therefore are part of this decision making process. Before a BIP is developed, something called a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is conducted.
  - o An FBA is a behavioral assessment that is comprised of information from people close to the student who is engaging in challenging behavior, as well as direct observation data from a trained staff member. This may be your student's teacher, a teaching assistant or aide, the school psychologist, or a behavior specialist/consultant within the district. The direct observation data are collected on the occurrences of the challenging behavior, as well as environmental conditions that surround the occurrences (such as what precedes and follows the behavior, in which settings the behavior occurs, and what times of day during which the behavior occurs). When sufficient data are collected, the school staff analyzes the data and identifies any patterns that exist with the behavioral occurrences. This information leads the staff to generate a hypothesized function of the behavior, or a reason why the behavior is continuing. Conducting the FBA allows the educational staff to determine whether a BIP is necessary, and drives the strategies that should be included the BIP if it is necessary.
  - o If the committee decides that a BIP should be developed, it will include some necessary information to help decrease the challenging behavior. It will include a baseline of the behavior(s), proactive intervention strategies that help to prevent the occurrence of the behavior, appropriate consequences to implement when the behavior does occur, and appropriate adaptive replacement behaviors to teach as alternatives to the challenging behavior. The plan will also include a progress-monitoring schedule that specifies when the current data are compared to the baseline data in order to gauge how effective the plan is.

3. Materials you may want to have
   - Materials will vary depending on the types of behavioral supports implemented by the educational staff.
   - General classroom materials may include the following:
     - o visual cues around the classroom (for example, a written script on a door that reads, "I'm going to _____" , or on a sink that reads, "I need to wash my hands"),

- - o classroom expectations, such as keeping hands and feet to oneself, sitting quietly, and raising one's hand to speak.
    - o a classroom management system where each student has an envelope in which classroom dollars are earned
  - Individual behavioral plans may include materials such as the following items:
    - o A reinforcement chart displaying visual expectations of appropriate behavior
    - o Tokens to be applied to the chart when appropriate behavior is demonstrated
    - o A timer
    - o A data sheet and pencil
  - A program book for a student receiving DTT may include materials such as the following items:
    - o A binder with specific teaching protocols for each program
    - o A data sheet for each program
    - o A graph for each program
    - o A schedule for running the programs

4. Data collection
   - Data collection is a cornerstone of ABA, and is necessary to gauge how effective the behavioral supports are.
   - Data collection typically begins with collecting baseline measures, or a measure of the behavior of concern prior to the start of intervention. Baseline measures can be collected at the school-wide level (e.g. number of disciplinary referrals), the class-wide level (e.g. number of completed homework assignments turned in each morning), and at the individual level (e.g. number of instances calling out during a group lesson).
   - Once strategies have been identified and agreed upon, the efficacy of those strategies is measured through continued data collection. Data collected after the implementation of intervention are compared to the data from baseline in order to determine if change in the desired direction is occurring.
   - Data may be collected by numerous school professionals (for instance, the teacher, a teacher's assistance, a behavior consultant, and a school psychologist, among others).

5. What to expect
   - If you have a behavioral component in the home, expect that there may be some discrepancies between your child's performance in the two environments. Collaboration between the home team and the school team is crucial to increase consistency of expectations in both environments.
   - If a part of your child's intervention plan calls for the removal of events that perpetuate the challenging behavior, the behavior could get worse before it gets better. This initial increase in behavior should be relatively short lived.
   - Your child's educational team should collaborate with you on your child's progress, whether it be the educational progress through an ABA program, or behavioral progress through a BIP. This may come in the form of progress reports, team meetings, and/or scheduled reviews of the BIP.

6. Books and resources
   - A list of evidence-based practices for autism as identified through the NPDC: http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/evidence-based-practices
   - The Treatment of ABA under IDEA: http://www.kcslegal.com/assets/Treatment_of_ABA_under_IDEA.pdf
   - ABA in Classroom Settings: http://www.behaviorbabe.com/classroom-strategies
   - PBIS World: http://www.pbisworld.com/

- NYSED's program standards for behavioral interventions: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/lawsregs/sect20022.htm

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