Case Studies for
Positive Behavior Supports in
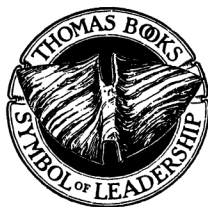# Classrooms and Schools

Keith Storey, Ph.D., BCBA-D

CASE STUDIES FOR
POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS
IN CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS

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By

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I dedicate this book to Linda Haymes who helped to revitalize my career through her knowledge, passion, work ethic, collegiality, and humor.

PREFACE

Scope

The intent of this book is to serve as a guide for teachers, teachers in training, and other service providers to engage in developing and implementing Positive Behavior Supports and to help prepare them for how they can best support and teach all students. These case studies provide a guide for analyzing real life situations and will help readers to become a better teacher and service provider. Too often the Positive Behavior Support planning process only looks at a few areas and not a comprehensive analysis of skill and support needs. This book provides the framework for analyzing these areas.

My approach is to write in a non-technical style and provide case study examples and guides for assisting readers in analyzing and understanding appropriate supports and interventions in Positive Behavior Supports. In this book, I provide a system for teachers, teachers in training, and others (school psychologists, behavior specialists, classroom assistants, etc.) to analyze Positive Behavior Supports. In the references, I have deliberately included "older" references that I see as being both important and relevant today, as well as to provide an understanding of how the field has built upon "classic research" for establishing the basis of Positive Behavior Supports,

Purpose

This book responds to a critical need for highly qualified personnel who will become exemplary professionals in Positive Behavior Supports because of their advanced knowledge, skills, and experiences in working with students with varying support needs. The exploration of Positive Behavior Supports needs to be situated within a context, which, in this book, is the use of the case studies for understanding and analysis.

An advantage of this book is that universities, school districts, and organizations preparing teachers and other professionals can easily use it in courses or trainings that address Positive Behavior Supports as the case studies comprehensively cover methodology and issues that represent best prac-

tices and evidence based methods in this area. Those who are already teachers or other support providers will find the case studies to be practical and helpful for increasing their skills in applied settings. I see three main groups who would primarily be interested in this book:

The first is teachers (or other professionals) in training (such as college teacher preparation programs). The second is teachers (or other professionals in the field) who are interested in learning more about Positive Behavior Supports or are involved in service training regarding Positive Behavior Supports. The third group is college instructors teaching courses in Positive Behavior Supports. College instructors are likely to choose the book based upon:

    a. The consistent format throughout the book.
    b. The "practicality" and "readability" of the book for students in college.
    c. The comprehensive analysis and coverage of developing Positive Behavior Supports.
    d. The direct applicability of the case studies to applied settings.
    e. The ability to use the case studies as assignments and/or exams.

Plan

There are 12 case studies in the book with four providing complete analysis and eight that provide a description of the case with the components for analysis that readers can use for their own education and that professors or other instructors can use in courses and/or trainings. What the book covers:

    1. Overview of Positive Behavior Supports
    2. Overview of the Case Studies
    3. Four Case Studies with Complete Analysis
    4. Eight Case Studies with Partial Analysis
    5. Appendix A: General References Related to Positive Behavior Supports
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    8. Appendix C: Empirical Research to Support that the Interventions Used in the Case Studies are Evidence-Based Practices

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OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS

What is Applied Behavior Analysis?

The foundation of Positive Behavior Supports is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and ABA is derived from the work of B. F. Skinner (1953, 1971). Skinner was a psychologist who advocated that the focus of interventions should be on the behavior of people rather than on internal states (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2001). Behavior may be defined as observable actions that a student does. Sitting in a seat, completing a math problem correctly, raising one's hand to answer a question, running out of the room, and cursing are all observable behaviors (verbal behaviors are classified as behaviors as well). These are all student behaviors that can be changed (for better or worse). Being motivated, trying hard, feeling sad, and having bad thoughts are not observable behaviors and thus cannot be directly changed.

John Watson is often credited as being the first behavioral psychologist and in his 1913 manifesto, he wrote that, "Psychology, as the behaviorist views it, is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior." For Positive Behavior Supports (and education as a whole), the key words are "prediction" and "control." Good teachers[1] are effective at predicting what will work in their classroom (by using Evidence Based Practices such as active responding strategies, reinforcing classroom rules, using cooperative learning strategies) and then controlling the classroom environment so that these practices occur. Sometimes teachers have concerns with the concept of control and view "control" as being a bad thing. However, not positively controlling student be-

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1. Throughout this section I use the term teacher for brevity while I mean all support providers in schools such as teachers, behavior specialists, school psychologists, inclusion specialists, classroom aides, administrators, etc.

haviors only leads to anarchy and poor student learning. In contrast, doing things such as having set routines, classroom rules, and praising students for completing assignments, the teacher is "controlling" student behavior but having a teacher controlling a classroom environment in this way is good teaching and is not deceitful or wrong. In other words, the focus is on the cause and effect relationship between the environment and the behavior of the student (Nye, 1992). This cause and effect is not a one-way process because there is the issue of counter control where the behavior of the student also influences the environment (e.g., the behavior of the teacher).

As they read this, many teachers may be thinking "I do this every day." Good teachers use these types of strategies all the time. In this text, I try to present a coherent and comprehensive systematic approach to understanding Positive Behavior Supports and how teachers can implement these strategies to arrive at the desirable results for carefully targeting the behaviors that need changing, as opposed to a "hit and miss" strategy that many teachers use.

In ABA, it is assumed that the behavior of students is lawful. This means that students do things for a reason, such as being previously reinforced for a behavior (such as turning in homework) or being punished for a behavior (such as talking out in class). In other words, students have a history of being reinforced or punished for certain behaviors, and this history influences their current behavior. For example, if a student is consistently reinforced for turning in homework (praise from teachers, positive feedback on homework, good grades, positive notes home to parents, etc.), then the student is likely to continue to turn in homework consistently. A student who does not receive this reinforcement for turning in homework is less likely to turn in homework assignments consistently.

The three basic assumptions of ABA are:

1. All behavior is learned or is a physiological response (such as sneezing due to allergies).
2. Behavior can be changed by altering antecedents and/or consequences.
3. Factors in the environment (the classroom or school, including teacher behavior) can be changed to increase and maintain specific behaviors or to decrease specific behaviors.

Behavior analysts agree that people feel and think, but they do not consider these events (feeling and thinking) as causes of behavior. For instance, a student may engage in certain "undesirable" behaviors[2] (such as talking back to the teacher or refusing to complete in-class work). To analyze these behaviors as "feelings" of the student is not helpful because it is an inference as to the causes and the teacher cannot directly change the feelings of a student.

ABA focuses on the observable behavior of people. Behavior is not considered to be an expression of inner causes like personality, cognition, and attitude. Poor performances on exams, talking out in class, or being late to class are analyzed as problems of behavior rather than examples of a student having a "poor attitude" toward school. Interventions for undesirable behaviors are directed at changing environmental events (teacher behaviors or the classroom setup) to improve behavior (e.g., to increase desirable behavior). For example, engaging in peer tutoring for exams and using a self-management strategy to eliminate talking out in class could change the student's undesirable behaviors for the better and by doing so could change the "poor attitude" of the student. But this is accomplished only by changing specific behaviors of the student (which was accomplished by changing the environment of the student through peer tutoring and teaching self-management skills).

So the focus is not only on the behaviors of students but also on understanding why students engage in certain behaviors (e.g., the function of the behavior, which can be either to get/obtain or to escape/avoid (O'Neill Albin, Storey, Horner, & Sprague, 2015).

Kazdin (2008) succinctly summarizes this issue:

> Even today, even at our most scientifically precise, we can't always or even often locate the exact source of a behavior problem. . . . We know how to change behavior for the better, regardless of its exact cause, and our best bet is to just go ahead and change it. Instead of treating the child as if there's something wrong inside her that needs to be fixed, let's treat the behavior as the something wrong, and address it directly. In practice, that means locating the problem in

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2. In this book, I use the terms "desirable" and "undesirable" in describing student behavior. A variety of terms have been used in the professional literature, such as difficult, acting out, disruptive, challenging, good/bad, appropriate/inappropriate, at-risk, target behavior, and problem behavior. Basically, these terms have been used to describe student behavior that I see as being either desirable or undesirable from the teacher's viewpoint.

the relationship between the child and the situation around him, in how he interacts with other people and things, (which might well include flaws in the therapy or how it's delivered). (p. 169)

Factors That Influence Behavior

There are two factors that influence behavior: antecedents (what occurs before a behavior) and consequences (what occurs after a behavior).

Antecedents become effective at producing desirable behavior only when they are a signal for a predictable consequence. For instance, if students know they get points for each time that they are at class on time and that points can be traded in for backup reinforcers (i.e., things or activities delivered at a later time, such as stickers, pizza party, etc.), then they may be more likely to be on time to school and to class.

Consequences affect behavior by strengthening the behavior (increasing its probability) or weakening the behavior (decreasing its probability). In the prior example, the on-time behavior was strengthened through positive reinforcement (the token economy). The behavior of being late could be weakened (decreased) through consequences with the use of punishment (a response cost system where students are fined points for being late).

How ABA Works in Classrooms and Schools

Baer, Wolf, and Risley (1968, 1987) have outlined key dimensions of ABA, and here I highlight how these fit into the application of Positive Behavior Supports.

Applied: ABA is focused on practical issues that are of importance and are socially relevant. Research in ABA occurs in "real-life" settings such as classrooms and schools rather than in laboratory settings (which is often known as the Experimental Analysis of Behavior and is focused on basic experimental and transactional research with animal or human participants).

Behavioral: As indicated earlier, ABA focuses on the observable behavior of students, and references to inner states and causes are not deemed useful in that they do not serve as causes of behavior. Skinner made the distinction between overt behavior (which is observable) and covert behavior (that which occurs "within the skin").