



Positive Behavior Supports in Classrooms and Schools

Third Edition



Effective and Practical Strategies for
Teachers and other Service Providers

Keith Storey, Ph.D., BCBA-D

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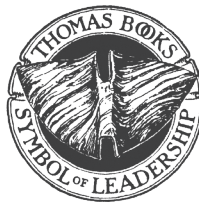
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and Other Service Providers**

By

KEITH STOREY, PH.D., BCBA-D

*Touro University
Vallejo, California*



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I dedicate this book to Dawn Pauling Inafuku who has been a trusted friend for many years and she had a major influence in my life by introducing me to the wonders of Yellowstone National Park. I have always admired her enthusiasm and zest for life. Many thanks!

PREFACE

Scope

The scope of this book is to provide an overview of positive behavior supports that is written in an informational format that teachers and other service providers can immediately put to use. I have tried to write in a non-technical style that is directed toward practitioners rather than for other academics. This book is focused upon positive behavior supports in school settings. It is generic across age levels, and it should be of interest to those working in the schools as teachers, classroom assistants, school psychologists, administrators, counselors, and other support providers. In the chapters, 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 this field of study has built upon “classic research” for establishing the basis of positive behavior supports.

Purpose

This book is intended to give teachers and other service providers the knowledge and skills for providing positive behavior supports in school settings, thereby improving the academic and social skills of their students. The rubber meets the road not only in how to teach, but also in how to implement positive behavior supports, so that effective instruction is delivered to students in classrooms and schoolwide. An advantage of this book is that it covers methodology that is seldom covered in detail in most texts addressing positive behavior supports and, thus, can easily be used in courses preparing teachers and others.

College instructors are likely to choose our book based upon:

- a. The consistent format throughout the book.
- b. The “readability” of the book for their students.
- c. The comprehensive coverage of positive behavior supports.
- d. The direct applicability to applied settings.

In addition to college instructors, I hope that others providing instruction, supervision, and training to teachers and other direct service providers will find this book useful.

Plan

In this book, each chapter follows the sequence of:

- Key Point Questions
- Window to the World Case Studies
- Best Practice Recommendations
- Discussion Questions
- School-Based Activity Suggestions
- References Cited in Chapter
- Empirical Research Supporting that the Interventions Presented in Chapter are Evidence-Based Practices (*this is not included in Chapters 1 and 2 as these chapters are not focused on interventions*)
- General References Regarding Topics in Chapter

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POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS

Key Point Questions

1. What is Applied Behavior Analysis?
2. What are Positive Behavior Supports?
3. How are Positive Behavior Supports different than other approaches?
4. Why are Positive Behavior Supports important?
5. What are barriers to the implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis and Positive Behavior Supports?
6. How do Applied Behavior Analysis and Positive Behavior Supports relate to student learning?
7. What is the three tier model of support?
8. What are evidence-based practices?

Window to the World Case Study 1

Mrs. Denecke is known at his high school as a model teacher. The students in his classes do well academically, are happy to be there, and are engaged in related activities outside of the classroom (homework and clubs). Parents are always pleased when their children are in his classes, and they often pester the principal to make sure that they have him as their teacher. University professors always try to place student teachers with Mr. Denecke. This semester he has Ms. Kueffner as a student teacher. The first week of her placement, the principal, Ms. Naylor, is in the classroom and notices a list that Ms. Kueffner is working on. She looks at the list and observes it is a list of what behaviors Mr. Denecke is engaging in that are enhancing the learning of his students. It is quite an extensive list of teacher behaviors: praising students for desirable behaviors, greeting students as they enter the classroom, going over the class rules at the start of class, having a mix of activities in the class period, not wasting a minute of instructional time, immediately correcting any

student violation of classroom rules (no matter how minor) and then quickly getting back to instruction, making sure that assignments and expectations are clear to all students, and so on. This list gives Ms. Naylor an idea, and she asks for a copy of the list.

Window to the World Case Study 2

Teaching at the same school as Mr. Denecke is Mr. Walton. He is a first-year teacher and is struggling, to say the least. Students in his class are disruptive, disrespectful to him, and not doing their work and, needless to say, not much learning is going on. Ms. Naylor has been quite concerned and is not sure whether he will make it as a teacher. Mr. Walton is wondering why he gave up a career as a legal assistant to become a teacher although teaching was what he had always wanted to do. After seeing Ms. Kueffner's list from Mr. Denecke's class, Ms. Naylor observes Mr. Walton's class and makes a list of what he is doing wrong (ignoring inappropriate student behavior, starting class late, being drawn into conversations that are off topic, getting into arguments with students about acceptable and unacceptable behavior, making consequences for students but not following through on them, etc.), as well as a list of what he is doing right (a very short list such as having good content knowledge and well-designed lesson plans). Ms. Naylor covers several class periods for Mr. Walton so that he can observe Mr. Denecke's class and make his own list of what Mr. Denecke is doing right. She and Mr. Walton then meet and go over their lists and discuss specific behaviors that Mr. Walton can engage in to change his classroom. In addition, Mr. Walton and Mr. Denecke meet several times at lunch so that they can plan changes to Mr. Walton's class and his teaching style. Within several weeks, there is a dramatic change for the better in Mr. Walton's teaching and the academic engagement of his students. Although there are still struggles, Mr. Walton continues to improve, and by the end of the school year, both Mr. Walton and Ms. Naylor are quite satisfied with his performance, and, most importantly, satisfied that his students are doing very well in learning the academic material.

Key Point Question 1. What is Applied Behavior Analysis?

The foundation of Positive Behavior Supports is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is derived from the work of B. F. Skinner (1953, 1971). Skinner was a psychologist who advocated that the focus of education should be on the behavior of students 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, and being unruly are not observable behaviors and thus cannot be directly changed.

John Watson is often credited as being the first behavioral psychologist. 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 are effective at predicting what will work in their classroom (using Evidence-Based Practices such as active responding strategies, reinforcing classroom rules, using cooperative learning strategies, etc.) and then controlling the classroom environment so that these behaviors occur. Sometimes teachers have concerns with the concept of control and view “control” as being a bad thing. However, not positively controlling student behaviors only leads to anarchy and poor student learning. For instance, by doing things such as having set routines, classroom rules, and praising students for completing assignments the teacher is “controlling” student behavior. 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 am presenting a coherent and systematic approach to understanding the purpose of Positive Behavior Supports and how teachers and other support providers 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.

Applied Behavior Analysis

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) 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” behaviors¹ (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 performance 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).

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 is described in more detail in Chapter 3).

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

1. 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.

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 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 Fits into Today's Focus in Classrooms and Schools

Baer et al. (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 Experimental Analysis of Human Behavior and is focused on basic experimental and transactional research with animal or human participants).

Behavioral: As indicated earlier in this chapter, ABA focuses on the physical/observable behavior of individuals, 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”).

Analytical: Applied behavior analysis looks for the condition or stimulus (what happens in the environment) that is responsible for the effect on the behavior (what the person does in response). In positive behavior supports, this is often analyzing the function of the behavior (why the student does