Using Electronic and Other New Ways to Help Students Improve Their Behavior

Functional Behavioral Assessment at Work

Kim A. Condon • **Tary J. Tobin**

As a special education teacher, you may be on the teacher assistance team or may be called on to consult with a student's general education teachers about behavior issues. Though your school has a schoolwide behavior support system in place, some students do not respond to the universal or specialized group interventions. These students are part of the 1%-7% of students who require specialized individual interventions (Sugai et al., 2000).

Functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavior support plans are effective with many students with behavior issues (Broussard & Northup, 1997; Dunlap, White, Vera, Wilson, & Panacek, 1996). This article presents two case study examples from our own experience (names have been changed) to demonstrate how teachers can use FBA information to design behavior support.

Class Clown Learns New Ways to Get Attention

Jason was a student in a general education second-grade classroom. The classroom teacher asked for help from the teacher assistance team (TAT) because she was having a problem with Jason. She described him as the "class clown." When she moved away from him in the classroom, he would pretend to fall out of his chair. He also wandered around the room, talking to other students during lessons and independent work time. During transitions, Jason ran and pushed to the front of the line. He was frequently teasing and wrestling with other students in line.

The teacher was at her wit's end. She felt that the school had done everything possible for Jason. He had not only participated in the whole-school assemblies where students learned about school rules but had also participated in a "friendship" group set up to teach social skills to at-risk students. Jason was still receiving office referrals and minor incident reports for physical contact and off-task behavior that was extremely disruptive to the class. The team recommended conducting an FBA.

Functional Behavioral Assessment

FBA is a process of gathering information from interviews, direct observation, and school records, whereby "setting events" (or certain distractions), antecedents, and functions of a behavior are identified.

Many resources are available that explain how to conduct FBAs for behavior support (see box, "FBA Resources").

Before writing a behavior support plan, it is helpful to summarize all the information gathered by diagramming the "competing pathways" of behavior [see *Competing Behavior Pathways* (O'Neill et al., 1997; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan, 1998)]. Using the

The educational assistant holds the remote for the Mr. Attention device.

competing behavior diagram (Figure 1) as a guide, the team can fill out an Intervention Strategy Planning Chart to use as an outline in writing the specific plan (Figure 2). The competing behavior diagram shows three ways a student could respond to a given situation: (a) with the ideal, desired way; (b) with an inappropriate or problem behavior, and (c) with an alternative behavior that, although not ideal, is a way the student can meet his or her needs in a socially acceptable way. The planning chart has four columns for listing problem-solving ideas related to each of the four parts of a behavioral sequence: (a) setting events, (b) antecedents, (c) behaviors, and (d) consequences.

Jason's FBA

Interviews revealed Jason's strengths and interests. He was most interested in hands-on types of activities, such as art and construction projects. He received reading instruction in the Title I program and was beginning to enjoy showing off his new reading skills. Jason was responsive to positive feedback and enjoyed bringing positive behavior reports to his parents.

Interviews and direct observations allowed us to develop and test the hypotheses that two of Jason's most challenging behaviors, being off task and inappropriate physical contact, were actually being encouraged, or maintained, by attention from peers and, in the form of redirections, from the teacher. We completed a Competing Behavior Pathway diagram for Jason (Figures 3 and 4, page 47).
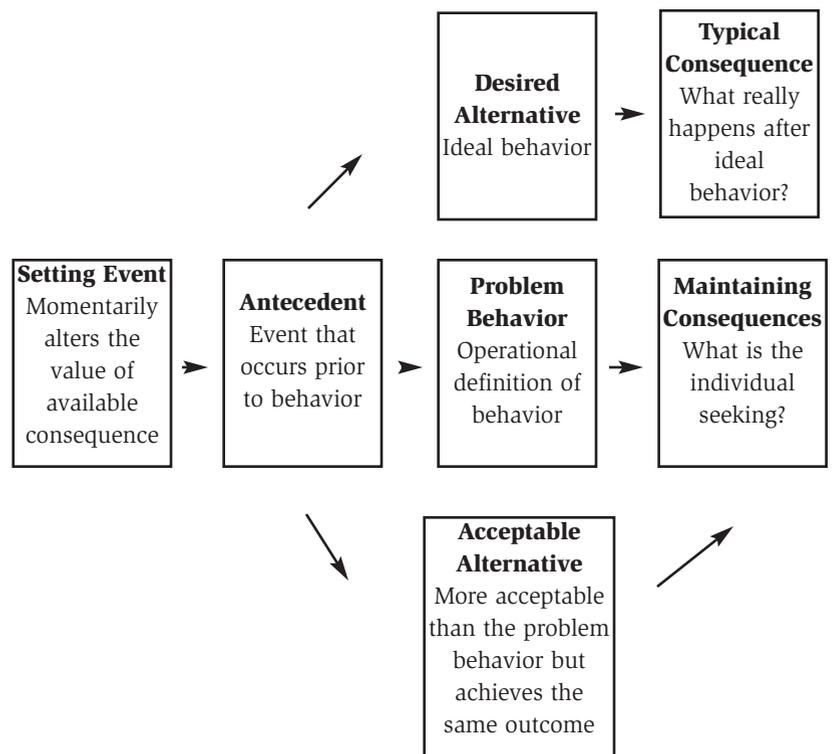
Jason's Planning Chart

We also completed Intervention Strategy Planning Charts for both behaviors—being off task and innappropriate physical contact (Figures 3 and 4). Although "setting events," or distractors, such as coming to school without breakfast or being teased in the cafeteria, are essential factors to consider in developing support for some students (Dadson & Horner, 1993), setting events were not an issue in Jason's case.

Behavior Support Plans

In developing a behavior support plan for a student, it is essential to look at the function the inappropriate behavior serves. A student's problem behavior will not be changed unless we make the problem behavior inefficient, irrelevant, and ineffective (O'Neill et al., 1997). We do this by using multicomponent interventions to

FBA Resources

In Print

O'Neill, R. E., Horner, R. H., Albin, R. W., Sprague, J. R., Storey, K., & Newton, J. S. (1997). *Functional assessment and program development for problem behavior: A practical handbook.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/ Cole.*

Sugai, G., Lewis-Palmer, T., & Hagan, S. (1998). Using functional assessments to develop behavior support plans. *Preventing School Failure, 43*(1), 6-13.

Witt, J. C., Daly, E. M., & Noell, G. (2000). *Functional assessments: A step-by-step guide to solving academic and behavior problems.* Longmont, CO: Sopris West.*

On the Web

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, at http://pbis.org

Effective Behavior Support, at http://brt.uoregon.edu/ebs/faframe.htm

Positive Behavior Support at School, at http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/ ~ ttobin

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, at http://cecp.air.org/fba/problembehavior/main.htm

Technology You Can Use

Hofmeister, A., Althouse, B., Morgan, D. P., Reavis, H. K., Likins, M., & Jensen, W. R. (1999). *Functional Assessment Intervention Program (FAIP): Software that makes conducting FBAs easier.* Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Liaupsin, C. J., Scott, T. M., & Nelson, C. M. (2000). *Functional behavioral assessment: An interactive training module: User's manual and facilitator's guide* (2nd ed.). Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Figure 1. Competing Behavior Pathway Diagram

Desired Alternative Ideal behavior

Typical Consequence What really happens after ideal behavior?

Setting Event Momentarily alters the value of available consequence

Antecedent Event that occurs prior to behavior

Problem Behavior Operational definition of behavior

Maintaining Consequences What is the individual seeking?

Acceptable Alternative More acceptable than the problem behavior but achieves the same outcome

Source: Adapted from O'Neill et al., 1997.

Figure 2. Intervention Strategy Planning Chart

Setting Events	What are ways to minimize the likelihood or neutralize the effect of the setting event?	* Remove interruptions or distractions * Provide food * Provide rest * Other
Antecedent Strategies	What are ways to change the context to make the problem behaviors unnecessary?	* Clarify rules and expected behavior for whole class * Written contract with the students * Change seating arrangements * Change schedule * Other
	What are some ways to prevent the problem behavior?	* Reminders about behavior when problem behavior is likely * Provide extra assistance * Modify assignments to match student skills * Other
Teaching Strategies	What can be done to increase expected behaviors or to teach a replacement behavior?	* Teach new behavior * Practice expected behavior in class * Self-management program * Other
Consequence Strategies	What should happen when a replacement behavior occurs?	* Whatever was the maintaining consequence for the problem behavior such as peer attention, teacher attention, break from work, etc.
	How can the maintaining consequence for the problem behavior be eliminated or reduced?	* Minimize negative attention * If safe, allow a 10-second delay before responding * Teach peers how to concentrate on their work and ignore distractions * Other
	What should happen when a desired behavior occurs?	* Reward program * Praise from teacher * Other

Source: Adapted from O'Neill et al., 1997.

Functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavior support plans are effective with many students with behavior issues.

• Create environments where the problem behavior is not necessary.
• Teach replacement behaviors that are more efficient in achieving the same function.
• Change consequences so that the problem behavior is no longer effective and the desired or alternative behaviors lead to more desirable outcomes for the student.

The student is unlikely to start using a behavior that is not tied to the consequences that he or she wants. For this reason, it is important to teach a functionally equivalent alternative behavior. To do this, couple the teaching and reinforcing of the alternative behavior with changing the consequences—to make performing the desired behavior a more appealing option. In this way, you can
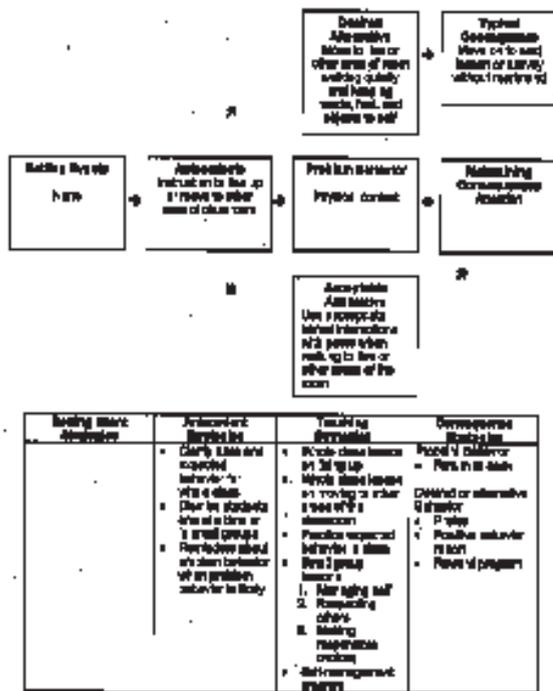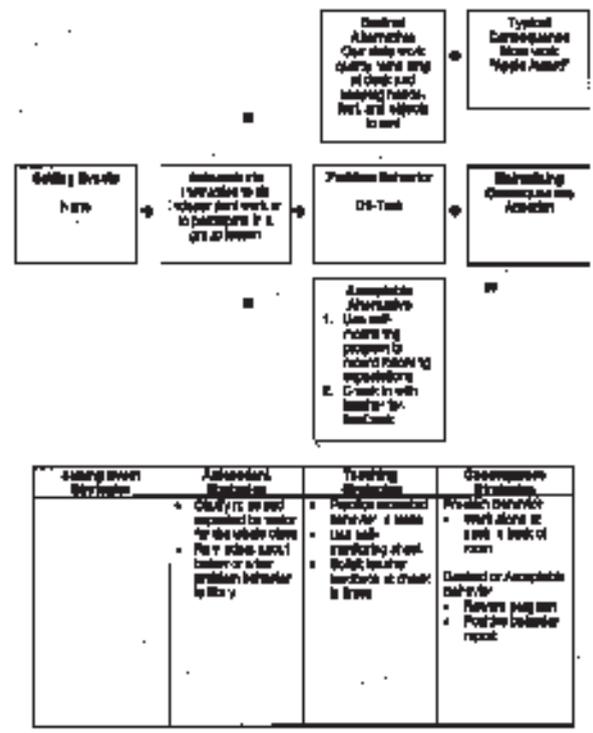
encourage students to move from exhibiting the problem behavior to the alternative behavior and, ultimately, to the desired behavior.

After using competing behavior pathways diagrams and intervention strategies charts to summarize the FBA information and to outline the components of the behavior support plan, it is time to meet with the team to write specific plans for implementation and evaluation of the behavior support plan. Everyone who has a part in the imple-

mentation of the plan, including parents, teachers, assistants, and others, should be involved in the meeting. The plan for implementation should include who, when, where, and how each component of the plan will be implemented. The plan for evaluation should specify what type of data will be collected, when, and by whom, and how the data will be used to determine the plan's effectiveness.

Jason's Behavior Support Plan

The team discussed the competing behavior pathways and outlined a plan. We wrote a detailed description and then implemented Jason's plan.

Jason had proven to be highly reactive to observation when we used it as part of the FBA process. Because of this, we decided to teach Jason to use an accurate form of data collection, daily self-monitoring sheets (Figure 5). Jason learned to monitor his own behavior; and he checked with his teacher three times during the day to see if the teacher agreed with him, which enabled him to gain attention from the teacher in an appropriate way. Jason also learned to gain peer attention appropri-

ately because one of the rewards he earned by making his goals was time to do an activity with a peer.

Graphing Jason's Behavior

We developed graphs to show the percentage of daily transitions (Figure 6) and class periods (Figure 7) with problem behaviors. Both graphs indicated that the support plan was effective in decreasing challenging behaviors.

The graphs show that a greater percentage of problem behaviors occurred before we implemented the plan than after Jason began to self-monitor. An interview with the teacher confirmed that the plan was successful.

Class Lawyer Learns to Pay Attention to His Responsibilities

Walt was the "class lawyer" because he argued with his teacher and his peers

The Essence of Behavior Support Plans

- Create environments where the problem behavior is not necessary.
- Teach replacement behaviors that are more efficient in achieving the same function.
- Change consequences so that the problem behavior is no longer effective and the desired or alternative behaviors lead to more desirable outcomes for the student.

Jason was most interested in hands-on types of activities, such as art and construction projects.

Figure 5. Jason's Self-Monitoring Sheet

Great Job 1 · Try Again 0 · Agree A 1 · Disagree D 0 · Date_____

(A self-monitoring chart with rows for Morning work, Morning work to reading, Large group reading, Recess to math, Math, Lunch to meeting time, CHECK-IN, Resting time, Resting to story, Story, Story to spelling, Spelling, CHECK-IN, Spelling to themes, Themes, Recess to PE/Music, PE/Music to classroom, CHECK-IN; with columns for behaviors and totals. Note: 5 stars = 5 minutes of choice alone or with a friend the next morning. Choices: I-Spy, Coloring sheet, Read to someone.)

about almost everything and blamed others for any problems. This kept him from attending to his tasks and responsibilities. In addition, his teacher and the school counselor believed him to be extremely hyperactive. Both had recommended that Walt's parents seek a medical evaluation for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), but the parents rejected the advice. Walt was a first grader who performed well in academics except for being below average in reading. He received Title I services for this. Walt's constant motion and arguments created daily disruptions.

Walt's FBA and Support Plan

Walt's teacher conducted an FBA, used a Competing Behavior Pathways diagram to brainstorm multiple interven-

tion strategies, and developed a support plan with three key features. First, she decided to ignore Walt's fidgeting and to avoid getting drawn into his arguments because the FBA indicated that her attention, even in the form of redirection, corrections, or reprimands, functioned to maintain and reinforce many of his disruptive behaviors.

The teacher paired ignoring inappropriate behavior with systematically increasing attention to appropriate behavior (Hall & Hall, 1998a, b). The teacher met with Walt daily to explain what kinds of behavior she expected from him. During the day, she made an effort to let Walt know that she recognized and appreciated his efforts to cooperate, even if it was just a smile or

a nod when he followed a direction without his usual arguments.

Second, following the example reported by Polaha and Allen (2000), she also used the Attention Training System (Gordon, Thomason, Cooper, & Ivers, 1991; available from Gordon Systems Inc., P.O. Box 746, DeWitt, NY 13214). This is a relatively new technology, using electronic monitors, that has been found especially helpful for students with ADHD. It is similar to many other classroom management systems (see Walker, 1995) in that the teacher closely monitors behaviors and uses visual signals to give immediate, silent feedback to students.

The teacher gave Walt a small, sturdy, battery-operated electronic device, called a "student module," that displayed digits (like a timer) when activated. He placed it on his desk. The teacher explained to Walt that this would help him by counting how many minutes he stayed on task (see box "Attention Training Tips"). It started with "1" and automatically went up every minute that Walt's behavior was appropriate. The teacher carried a kind of remote control (called a "teacher module"), which could be used from any place in the classroom to subtract a point and turn on, for a few seconds, a little red warning light when she noticed that Walt was off task.

When using this system, Walt usually stayed on task. Sometimes other students in the class wanted to use "Mr. Attention," as the device was called, and they were allowed to do so when the teacher felt it would be worthwhile.

Third, the teacher set up a system for Walt to earn special activities that would involve positive attention, such as having lunch with the teacher and

As a way to increase appropriate behavior, Walt's teacher let Walt know—by smiling or nodding—that she recognized and appreciated his efforts to cooperate.

being able to invite a peer along or earning free time for the class. The teacher used a "Point Sheet" (developed by Ann M. Warberg, 1997), similar to the self-monitoring sheet that Jason used, except that the teacher marked the sheet. It had individualized goals and "smiley," "frowney," and "straight (just OK)" faces. It was marked only once, at the end of the day, for the whole day. The form gave smiley faces 3 points; straight faces, 2 points; and frowney faces, 1 point (not zero because the student was at least at school, even if the day was not going well). The sheet was printed on an NCR form so that one copy could be kept at school and one sent home every day. Walt often earned 100% of the points possible on his "Point Sheet." His overall daily average was 86.64% of points possible during spring term.

Teacher's Views on Walt's FBA

Walt's teacher felt that the most important aspect of the FBA was when she interviewed Walt to "find ways to change school so that you like it more" (see O'Neill et al., 1997, Appendix C, for the interview). This was a positive experience for both of them and helped set the stage for the rest of the intervention.

During the interview, she asked Walt questions about activities and classes at school that he felt were times when he was most (and least) likely to have difficulty with behavior. She asked Walt to tell her what he was seeing and hearing around him at those times. Giving him

a chance to talk in this nonconfrontational way, at a time when there was nothing to argue about, helped the teacher and student begin problem-solving objectively.

According to the teacher, the most important aspect of the behavior sup-

Figure 6. Jason's Percentage of Daily Transitions with Problem Behaviors
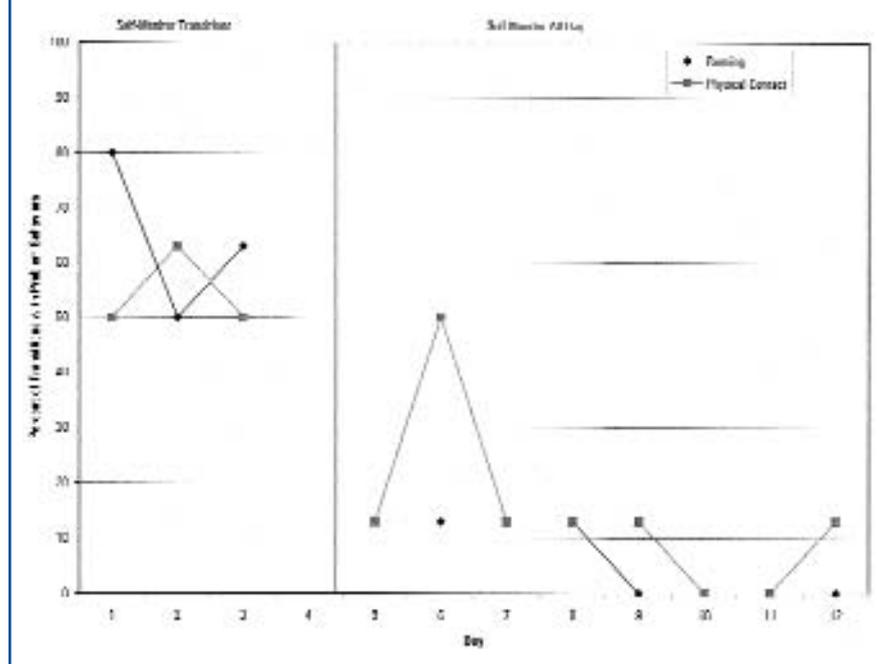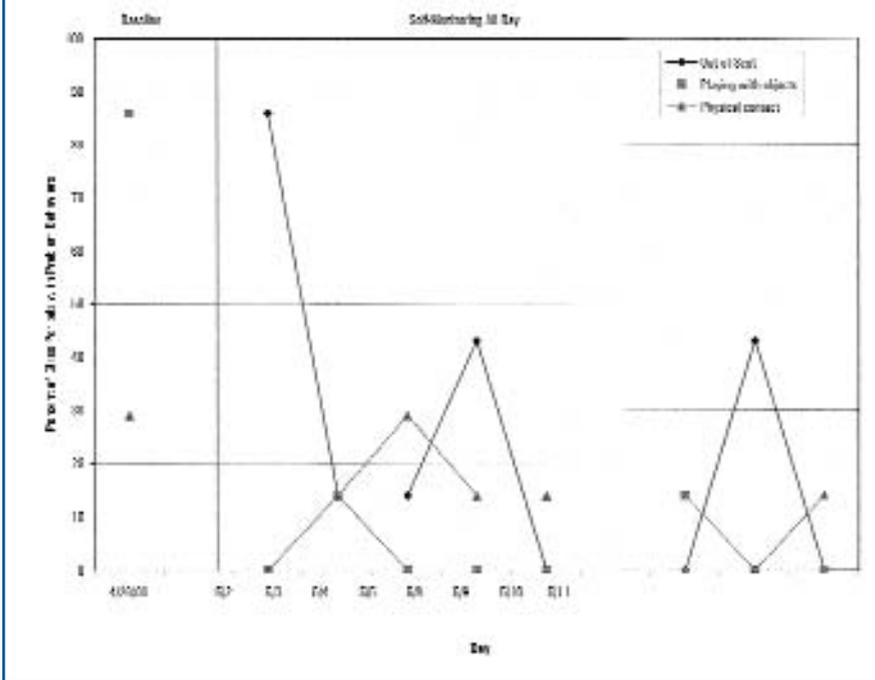
Figure 7. Jason's Percentage of Daily Class Periods with Problem Behaviors

port plan was shifting her attention away from his arguments and toward increasing recognition for times when he was cooperative.

Introducing FBA to Parents

At Walt's school, teachers introduced parents to the concept of functional behavioral assessment and related support plans, using a booklet (Tobin & von Ravensberg, 2001, available online at http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ttobin) and a brief presentation based on the booklet, as one part of a regularly scheduled parent-teacher meeting. FBA concepts were explained by using examples from situations that typically occur at home (e.g., making cookies, cleaning up), as well as an example of home and school cooperation in providing behavior support. In addition, staff members presented ideas for finding community resources when more help is needed than the school can provide.

Maintaining Improved Behavior

After students experience success and gain recognition for becoming fluent with appropriate behaviors with the help of powerful behavioral support, the next step would be to learn to maintain

the behavioral improvements with less intensive support. For example, Jason might be able to discontinue formal self-monitoring and continue to successfully manage his behavor if supported by verbal praise and recognition from the teacher for appropriate behavior.

The Attention Training System can be "faded," or used less intensively, by setting the student module, "Mr. Attention," to count a point for every 4 minutes on task instead of changing each minute. In addition, time on task could be estimated using an ordinary clock, timer, watch, or stopwatch. That is, either the teacher or the student, depending on the situation and the age of the student, could estimate the amount of time per class period or activity the student was on task by recording start and stop times, and interruptions or off-task times. This is actually a skill that is useful in many situations where one needs to report the amount of time spent working on a project. It would be especially appropriate for students to do during math class activities.

The "Point Sheet" can be faded by using it every other day instead of every day, then just twice a week or once a week. Other ways to fade Point Sheets are to reduce the number of behaviors

that are being tracked or the size of the sheet. Occasional phone calls or e-mails to parents can replace the paper report. Similarly, verbal feedback to the student can replace the ratings. Changes should be made gradually.

Teacher teams need to revise support plans from time to time and make changes on the basis of an objective record of performance. Often, support will need to be increased or varied before it can be decreased. Even when plans work out well, we suggest at least three types of changes:

- After the alternative behavior has replaced the problem behavior (student politely asks to be excused instead of throwing a tantrum), find ways to increase the ideal desired behavior (student is able to stay on task in difficult situations).
- As the student becomes more fluent with appropriate behaviors that lead to being more successful in school and to getting along better with others, gradually withdraw extraordinary supports.
- Vary the form of support as needed in different locations and at different times, even if this involves doing another FBA in cases where the functions of the behaviors seem to vary with time and location.

Final Thoughts

Special education teachers, working with parents, students, and other members of the school staff, should make data-based decisions about when to change behavior support plans. Using simple tally marks or teacher-made point sheets can help everyone get a clear picture of behavior problems—and improvements over time. Using some kind of clock or timer can help students

A student's problem behavior will not be changed unless we make the problem behavior inefficient, irrelevant, and ineffective.

keep track of their own appropriate behavior. Paying attention to actual consequences and developing positive attention situations, such as a special lunch or earning free time for the whole class, can have enormous benefits for all students.

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BooksNow

Kim A. Condon, *postgraduate student and* **Tary J. Tobin** *(CEC Chapter #1111), Research Associate, Educational and Community Supports, College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene.*

Address correspondence to Kim Condon, 2950 Mill St., Eugene, OR 97405 (e-mail: kicon@darkwing.uoregon.edu), or Tary Tobin, College of Education, 1235 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1235 (e-mail: ttobin@oregon.uoregon. edu).