

Functional behavioural assessment case study



Functional Behavioral Assessments for Sean

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Introduction

Mrs. Valdez, a second grade teacher at Hacienda Elementary School, contacted me via email requesting my services regarding one of her students. Mrs. Valdez would like me to meet with her and several administrators, including the principal of Hacienda Elementary School, to discuss the student's behavioral issues. The subject of concern is Sean, a 9 year old boy, who had been held back to repeat second grade due to his ADHD and the resulting inattentiveness and failing grades. Sean is described as a bright and lovable boy at school and at home but due to his (recently diagnosed) ADHD, he is often " inattentive" during class, jumps out of his seat and throws crumbled up school papers at peers when asked to complete a task.

His lack of concentration and the inability to finish any task at school have earned him failing grades during the prior school year and parents and teachers fear that he may be failing second grade again, if nothing is done to help him. Sean's parents are against any pharmaceutical medications to treat his ADHD and they have consulted with an herbal doctor to treat the condition. Now, Mrs. Valdez has asked me to develop a behavior intervention plan for Sean, in order for him to succeed academically and socially during the current school year.

The operational target behaviors seen in Sean are, a) inattention, in form of not paying attention to teachers' instructions and school work, b) out-of-seat

behavior, defined as any time Sean's behind was not making contact with his chair, and c) throwing items (i. e., crumbled up papers) at peers. If my interdisciplinary team and I are able to describe the specific purposes of a Functional Behavioral Assessment for Sean, to the Hacienda Elementary School administrators during the planning meeting, then we will be able to design and implement an effective treatment plan for this student based on the results of the proposed FBA.

Functional Behavioral Assessments are used to determine why an individual exhibits certain behaviors and in what way the environment influences the individual and their behaviors. In the beginning, the method of analyzing behavior was created with the autistic and severely intellectually disabled population in mind, but it can be applied to any individual with problem behaviors. According to the State Board of Education, North Carolina (2015), " The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that a Functional Behavioral Assessment be conducted if a behavior was a manifestation of the disability or, as appropriate, for other disciplinary removals" (<http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov>).

In many schools, the Individual Education Program Team (IEP team) develops an assessment plan to address problem behaviors. During IEP team meetings, target behaviors must be identified and specified. Decisions must be made about who will conduct each component of an FBA, and a timeline as to when the assessment will be completed is set. Usually, the IEP team will meet to discuss the assessment results and to design and implement behavioral interventions. Sometimes, The IEP team and members of a school administration need to bring in an independent team of experts in order to

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exhaust all possibilities of an effective FBA, especially in the case of Sean (State Board of Education, NC, 2015).

Indirect Assessments are performed when information about antecedents, consequences, and critical variables, needs to be gathered indirectly via interviews, screening forms, and rating scales. The Indirect Assessments are considered an adjunct to direct measures, as the data gathered from these measures is usually not considered quite as reliable. However, Indirect Assessments are often the first procedures performed in an FBA because the observer is able to record meaningful observations and he or she may begin the construction of hypotheses about the function of behaviors rather quickly (Steege & Watson, 2013).

The interdisciplinary team would first assess Sean by conducting five general steps of a Functional Analysis. Step one would be a Functional Assessment Interview during which the team would question at least two or three persons who know Sean very well and who have been involved in the situations in which the behaviors occurred (most likely his parents and Mrs. Valdez). The interview would focus on identifying observable behaviors displayed by our referred student. For example, when addressing Sean's "inattentive" behavior, the team should ask Mrs. Valdez, the teacher, to clearly and concisely describe the observable characteristics that constitute "inattentive" behavior. It is important to note during the interview, what function Sean's behaviors serve. For example, his out-of-seat behavior may actually serve two different functions, one to get attention from his peers by jumping out of his seat, and two to escape from or avoid academic instruction from the teacher. This type of information will be relevant for the <https://assignbuster.com/functional-behavioural-assessment-case-study/>

entire process of FBA, because, if the functions are different, the resulting interventions may be different as well (Steege & Watson, 2013).

With a typical ABC Assessment, when the interfering behaviors occur, the observer is expected to record those behaviors and the immediate antecedent and consequence variables. Observers often identify one immediate antecedent and one immediate consequence that occur during a behavioral event. For example, the ABC Interviewer could record the following in Sean's classroom: A: Antecedent: Teacher, Mrs. Valdez, requests Sean to sit down and complete his task, B: Behavior: Sean jumps up, crumbles his school paper, and throws it at a peer, C: Consequence: Mrs. Valdez verbally reprimands Sean and sends him to the principal's office. However, in this instance, a single ABC recording was not able to identify all of the relevant variables connected to this behavioral incident because, there were a number of additional incidents preceding this recording. Oftentimes, with the occurrence of a series of behavioral incidents, the observers verbally report or record only the final incident (Steege & Watson, 2013).

Thus, a Behavioral Stream Interview (BSI) could be performed in Sean's case, in which contextual variables that are associated with the interfering behaviors, can be identified. This kind of interview centers on the idea that there are many variables, including individual, antecedent, and consequence variables in Sean's environment that impact his challenging behaviors. These different variables often interact in a predictable manner and are not stagnant. Steege and Watson (2013), compare " the ongoing flow of behavior and related stimuli" to a river, " sometimes a stream that gently

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meanders through a meadow, and at other times a raging torrent rushing through mountainous canyons” (p. 106).

The BSI has the potential of identifying patterns by calculating the sequence in which the variables occur. It can be compared to a movie strip of several captured pictures in a sequence, unlike a single photograph “ of a singular antecedent-behavior-consequence interaction (A-B-C)” (Steege & Watson, 2013, p. 106).

Furthermore, data could be collected through a questionnaire such as the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991, as cited in Sattler, 2002) which measures internalizing and externalizing problems in children and adolescents. The CBCL is designed for parents of children and adolescents ages 4 to 18 years old. The rationale for conducting the interview is to observe the target behavior. The reason for utilizing the CBCL is that it includes a Teacher’s Report form (TRF, Achenbach, 1991, as cited in Sattler, 2002). According to Sattler, the TRF has satisfactory validity. Functioning Assessment Screening Tools or a Motivation Assessment Scale may additionally be used.

The Functional Behavioral Assessment Screening Form (FBASF) would be a particularly useful tool to record data about, a) interfering behaviors (i. e., target problem behaviors), b) behavioral strengths (i. e., characteristics that are functional and appropriate, adaptive behaviors, and skills), c) Reinforcers (i. e., stimuli that are preferred by the student, people, activities, and events), d) Communication skills (i. e., verbal expressions, gestures, signs, or devices). In the context of Sean’s case, his behaviors too, are not occurring

randomly, but are caused by an interaction between antecedent, individual, and consequence variables (Steege & Watson, 2013).

Direct descriptive Functional Behavioral Assessments, on the other hand, are very powerful tools in school settings. They are powerful because the procedures center on direct observations of behaviors in situations and settings in which the target behaviors occur. Systematic observations, and not just mere indirect information lead to solid hypotheses on function and triggers of behaviors (Steege & Watson).

Therefore, step two in a Functional Analysis would be a Direct Observation and collection of data by observing Sean's target behaviors directly. The team could do a Sequence Analysis by recording antecedents, behavior, and consequence (a Maladaptive Behavior Card can be used for this purpose). Furthermore, the frequency and rate of the behavior would be recorded. The frequency of occurrence per unit of time, for example, would be 30 behaviors divided by 20 min of observation = 1.5 behaviors per minute or about 3 behaviors every two minutes. Next, the duration of each behavior and the latency (which is the duration of time between a stimulus and a response) would be recorded, for example, how soon after the stimulus does Sean begin to jump up or throw paper balls at classmates (Carbone & Zecchin, 2014).

Step three deals with experimental manipulations if they are feasible based on the severity of the behaviors. This procedure enables the observer to empirically test the functions of the behavior. The situations in which the behaviors occur most frequently suggest the function of the behavior. In

order to test for the functions of the maladaptive behavior, the interdisciplinary team would have to perform an Alone Condition Test in which Sean would be alone without any stimulation and then count if any aggressive behavior occurred within a 20 minute session. Next, an Attention Condition-Test is performed to find out if the behavior is maintained by attention. This involves engaging Sean in a preferred activity and if a maladaptive behavior occurs, the team would give him 10 seconds of attention after each occurrence of the target behaviors by saying “ Sean, don’t throw anything at your classmate, you could hurt her!” The team would count the number of times the behaviors occurred and this session would last 20 minutes. Then, comes the Demand Condition - Test, which is designed to explore if a behavior is maintained by Escape or Avoidance. The interdisciplinary team will place Sean in a demanding task or situation and allow him to escape (or leave the situation) each time the target behavior occurs. The team would wait for about a minute and then direct Sean back to the demand situation or task, while keeping count of the number of times the behavior occurs. This session should also last 20 minutes (Carbone & Zecchin, 2014).

Last but not least, the Play Condition-Test will be performed, which is a control condition. In this scenario, the interdisciplinary team would place Sean in an enriched reinforcing environment, allow him to engage in preferred activities of his choosing, and count the number of times the behavior occurs. This session, again, will last 20 minutes. Step four will be a Functional Analysis Summary, to include a form/chart outlining the Functional Analysis Interviews conducted, the Direct Observation Data

collected, and the Experimental Manipulation implemented. Step five will outline a Behavior Lesson Plan and after carefully choosing of an intervention, this will be called an Intervention Lesson Plan for Sean (Carbone & Zecchin, 2014).

In the literature by Steege & Watson (2013), The Conditional Probability Record (CPR) is a form that allows the observer to simultaneously observe and record the antecedents and consequences of behavior. The advantage of doing so allows for the analysis of the likelihood (probability) of a behavior given a particular antecedent and the likelihood of a particular consequence following a behavior (p. 134).

Let's say, we take a 5-minute excerpt from a 15-minute observation period, and it shows that Sean was out of his seat during 70% of the intervals, then, of the intervals in which Sean was out of his seat, 51% of those resulted in a verbal reprimand by Mrs. Valdez and 43% resulted in her physically guiding Sean back into his seat. Therefore, Sean's out-of-seat behavior resulted in some form of attention by Mrs. Valdez in 94% of the intervals. On the other hand, when Sean was working on his assigned tasks, it resulted in no attention, verbal or physical, from Mrs. Valdez. So, only in 29% of the intervals in which Sean was working on his tasks, was Mrs. Valdez near him. Therefore, one of the hypotheses is that Sean's out-of-seat behavior is maintained by Mrs. Valdez' attention because doing so is more than three times as likely to result in some form her attention than working. During these observations, there may be some influence by Sean's peers in the form of looking at him (23% of the intervals) or cheering him on (18%), however these consequences were not as probable as Mrs. Valdez' attention.

Additionally, there also appears to be a negative reinforcement because Sean is able to escape from the assigned task by getting out of his seat. Antecedent and consequent possibilities are verified by further observation and analysis (Steege & Watson, 2013).

The interdisciplinary team could complete a Functional Behavioral Assessment Observation Form (FBAOF) for Sean. This is an assessment procedure involving direct observation and recording data of interfering behaviors and contextual variables. The FBAOF is generally used to record “behavioral episodes” or “behavioral incidents” that involve one single interfering behavior. The observer uses an FBAOF each time the interfering behavior occurs to record, 1) Date and time of day, 2) Setting events (i. e., activities, tasks, places, etc.), 3) Antecedents (i. e., events that appear to trigger the behavior), 4) Behavior (i. e., the defined interfering/target behavior), 5) Consequence (i. e., events following the interfering behavior), 6) Effect (i. e., change in rate or intensity of occurrence of the behavior), 7) Staff (i. e., person recording the data, working directly with Sean). Should the interdisciplinary team use the FBAOF, they must differentiate between an “antecedent” and a “setting event.” The antecedent is a precipitating variable (i. e., a specific event triggering a behavior), while the setting event is just the general situation that the behavior occurred in (Steege & Watson, 2013).

Last, but not least, the interdisciplinary team could utilize the Task Analysis Recording Procedure (TARP), which is an effective “procedure for teaching functional life skills and for progress monitoring” (Steege & Watson, 2013, p. 146). It is used for documenting a person’s level of performance on specific

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tasks, instructional procedures, identification of effective and ineffective instructional prompts, and to document levels of occurrence of interfering behaviors, especially in the context of instructional programs (Steege & Watson, 2013).

TARP is a useful tool for recording a decrease of interfering behaviors, while, at the same time, documenting an increase in desirable and appropriate behaviors. For example, we could use the TARP data recording in order to measure Sean's occurrences of negative behaviors within a social or classroom setting, while, at the same time, recording any desirable behavior, such as doing his assigned tasks independently. This procedure is mostly used in individuals with autism who reside in group homes but TARP could be used in Sean's case because of his ADHD diagnosis and being in a "group setting" (classroom) (Steege & Watson, 2013).

It is important for the interdisciplinary team to put emphasis on the vast selection of indirect and direct descriptive FBA procedures. In many cases, a combination of both types in an assessment process is adequate for an assessment and an understanding of behavioral functions. A comprehensive mixture of several procedures can lead to the design of effective intervention plans (Steege & Watson, 2013).

References

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