

SPED NEWS

Staff Edition



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Sevier County Schools
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The Special Education Child and Cognitive Development

by Dr. Cecil Blankenship, ETSU

Cognitive development occurs in children at different rates. Even children within the same family develop at different rates. There are many things a parent can do to help the cognitive development of his or her child.

Reading to your child is probably one of the most important things you can do to help your child's cognitive development. Try to find some time each day to read a story to your child.

Listening to your child and answering his or her questions will also help with your child's cognitive development. Try to answer his or her questions on a level which he or she can understand. It takes patience and practice to be a good listener, but it is well worth it for your child's cognitive growth.

Directors MEMO

We seem to be dealing with a great deal of inappropriate, disruptive or unacceptable behavior in the schools. As such, it is very important that we be knowledgeable of the process of developing interventions to counter the behaviors. That is at the very heart of functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans. Hopefully, the following will help clear up any misunderstanding of the purpose or process of functional behavioral assessments.

This is the process of determining the cause (or "function") of behavior before develop-

ing an intervention. The intervention must be based on the hypothesized cause (function) of behavior. Failure to base the intervention on the specific cause (function) very often results in ineffective and unnecessarily restrictive procedures. There are three ways of getting at the function (cause) of the behavior:

- (a) interviews and rating scales,
- (b) direct and systematic observation of the person's behavior, and
- (c) manipulating different environmental events to see how behavior changes.

The first two are generally referred to as functional assessments whereas the third is generally referred to as a functional analysis. Several different interviews and rating scales have been developed to try to get at the function (cause) of behavior. However, these should be used only as a starting point for systematic and direct observation of the person's behavior. Relying exclusively on interviews and rating scales should never be considered a functional assessment. Besides having poor reliability, it would never hold up in court with an expert witness. A more reliable method involves directly observing the person's behavior in his or her natural environment and analyzing the behavior's antecedents (environmental events that immediately precede the problem behavior) and consequences (environmental events that immediately follow the problem behavior).

Problem behavior typically falls into one or more of three general categories:

- (a) behavior that produces attention and other desired events (e.g., access to toys, desired activities),
- (b) behavior that allows the person to avoid or escape demands or other undesired events/activities, and
- (c) behavior that occurs because of its sensory consequences (relieves pain, feels good, etc.).

The interview, combined with direct observation of the behavior is what most people use in determining the function of the behavior. This is fine when the data collected on the antecedents and consequences is clear. Most of the time this is sufficient in determining the behavior's function(s). In some cases, however, direct observation does not give a clear picture of the behavior's functions and systematically manipulating various environmental events becomes necessary. The most common way of systematically manipulating the environment is to put the person in several different situations and carefully observe how the behavior changes.

For example, to determine the function of screaming, we could arrange for attention to be given to the child each time she screams and measure how frequently screaming occurs. We could also make demands on the child, terminating them each time she screams and measure how frequently it occurs. In addition, we could leave the child alone and measure how often screaming occurs. If screaming is more frequent when attention



Next Inservice

March 5th, TLC, 3:45-5:45

Comparing SPED and
Section 504: Legal Rights of
Disabled and
Non-Disabled Students

Memo continued

is given, we hypothesize that it occurs to get attention. If screaming is more frequent when demands are made, we can assume that screaming has served to let the person escape or avoid demands. Finally, if screaming is more frequent when left alone, we can assume that it is occurring because of its sensory consequences. This third method should be reserved only for situations in which the functions of behavior are not clear through systematic and direct observation.

An important question is "Who should be involved in the functional behavioral assessment?" The interview is important in gathering preliminary information that will guide later direct observation. As such, it is important to talk to the people who know the child the best: parents, teachers and significant others.

A functional behavioral assessment is more than a group of people sitting around a table trying to determine the cause. Although it is important to gather information from significant people in the person's life, it is not enough. Someone knowledgeable about behavior must be in the classroom directly observing and measuring the behavior. Although this takes time, it is usually time well spent because the intervention is more likely to be effective than one developed without careful consideration of the behavior's function(s).

Time is precious. Time should not be wasted on interventions (behavioral or otherwise) when there is no evidence that this particular intervention is likely to work, for this particular child, in this particular situation. If something is attempted and does not work, document your efforts and move on to something else. If you would like information or assistance, contact Jeff Moore at Parkway or one of the SDC teachers in the county. They are attempting interventions every day with a wide variety of students and behaviors.

AT Notes: Increasing Independence in the Inclusive Setting

There are features available on every computer using Microsoft Windows that make computer access easier for individuals with disabilities. These are some ideas for using Microsoft Office and Windows. Step-by-step instructions are available at www.rcs.k12.in.us/eses/closing_the_gap.htm.

Accessibility features: these features are available on every computer using Microsoft Windows. Magnifier to enlarge what is viewed including font size, titles, menus, buttons, icons, scroll bars, mouse cursors, etc. can all be adjusted for optimal viewing. High contrast options, captions with sounds/warnings, and special keyboard options are available.

Form filing: This is also available on all Windows computers and allows the user to scan in a document and mark annotations on it. It allows the user to add, highlight and underline text. There is a rubber stamp feature, which enables the user to set as a rubber stamp, frequently used items such as name, date, subject, etc. that saves a lot of keystrokes and time for a student.

Keyboard shortcuts: Shortcuts increase efficiency and decrease the need for mouse access to commonly used buttons and icons. Web sites for additional keyboard short cut informations are www.obs.org/cheatsheet/ieshortcut.htm and <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/>. Other links can be found at <http://www.microsoft.com/> and search for "accessability".

Creating forms: the Forms toolbar in Microsoft word helps the user create a form that allows a student to easily tab through the fields to complete the document. Text fields, check box fields and drop down lists are inserted. It is possible to lock or protect the form. This is a useful tool for setting up worksheets, tests, multiple choice questions, etc.

PowerPoint lessons: PowerPoint is a simple and effective means of creating computer activities. Graphics, sound, and animation can be added to make for a variety of special needs, and variety of fun activities.

Blankenship continued

Encourage your child to speak in full sentences rather than giving single word answers. Allow you child an opportunity to give extended rather than brief explanations. Above all listen to your child and let him or her know that you are truly interested in hearing what he or she has to say.

Talk to your child about things in his or her environment, especially when on a field trip outside the home. Take every opportunity in the child's world experience and make it a learning experience.

www.slc.sevier.org/

You will want to visit this website and see all that Jeff Romanczuk has been doing. It has lots of links, teacher information, parent information and FORMS. Jeff is updating the website frequently as he finds new things and as we revise or correct forms. To see what is new click on info then Summary of Site changes at the bottom. Additionally it has received awards!! The first is the Wrightslaw Top Three Education Websites Award and it is has been recognized as a Family Friendly Website.

Look for the new smaller Rights brochure. Mr. Enloe is having 10,000 printed but you can print them off your computer to use them immediately. Go to the website, click on info, then click on law. First is the big booklet that must be given out at the initial IEP meeting called Rights of Children with Disabilities and Parent Responsibilities and the new four page document called Rights of Children and Parents brochure. Change your printer settings from color to grayscale before printing to save your color ink.

IMC

Theresa McCroskey wants to remind teachers to call her if you give anyone a material or test that is checked out to you. She will check it in from you and out to the other person. This will help us find materials when they are needed. Then when you ask for something, she will be able to find it

Newsletter

Contributions for the newsletter can be submitted by email no later that the first Friday of the month to Nancy Wohl at the Trula Lawson Early Childhood Center, e-mail: nwohl@yahoo.com.