Widening the Circle

Celebrating Neurodiversity in Faith-based Schools

FOCUS STRATEGY:

Understanding the Why: Using Functional Behavior Assessments in the Classroom

Every teacher encounters students who exhibit challenging behaviors. While maintaining a positive and productive classroom environment is paramount, simply reprimanding these behaviors often yields temporary results. Faith-based school teachers, grounded in love and compassion, seek solutions that go beyond punishment. This is where Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) come in.

An FBA is a process that helps us understand the ABCs of a student's behavior: the Antecedent (what happens before the behavior), the Behavior itself, and the Consequences (what happens after the behavior). By analyzing these elements, we can identify the function the behavior serves for the student, allowing us to develop positive interventions that address the underlying cause.

The ABCs of Behavior in the Classroom

• **Antecedents**: These are the events or situations that trigger a student's behavior. Are there specific academic tasks, transitions, or social interactions that lead to disruption? For example, a student with anxiety may become disruptive during group work (antecedent).

• **Behavior:** This is the observable action that disrupts the classroom environment. It could be calling out, disengagement, or even physical aggression. Remember, the behavior itself is a form of communication – the student is trying to tell us something.

• **Consequences:** These are the results of the student's behavior. Do they gain attention from peers or avoid a difficult task? Consequences can be positive (getting their way) or negative (teacher reprimand). Unfortunately, even negative consequences can unintentionally reinforce the behavior if they provide the student with the desired outcome (e.g., attention).

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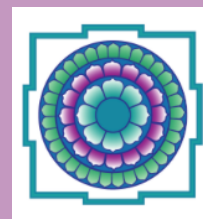
Putting the ABCs into Practice:

Teacher Tips for FBA

Here are some practical steps a school teacher can

take to utilize FBA in their classroom:

- Identify the Behavior: Be clear and objective about the specific behavior that disrupts the learning environment. Focus on observable actions rather than judgments.
- Gather Information: Don't jump to conclusions. Talk to the student, their parents, and observe their interactions with peers and teachers. Consider the student's academic history, social-emotional development, and any potential learning disabilities.
- Track the ABCs: Create a simple log to record the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences of a specific student's behavior. Over time, patterns will emerge, revealing the most likely triggers and consequences.
- Seek Collaboration: Don't be afraid to seek guidance from the school counselor, principal, or a qualified behavior specialist. These professionals can offer valuable insights and support in developing an FBA plan.
- Consider the Whole Child: Remember, challenging behaviors often stem from unmet needs. Is the student struggling with a difficult concept? Are they facing social challenges? Looking at the bigger picture allows for a more holistic approach.

Intervention Strategies Based on Function

Once you understand the function of the behavior, you can develop interventions targeted at the root cause. Here are some examples:

• **Attention-Seeking Behaviors:** Provide positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors. Use proximity control (moving closer to the student) and offer praise for on-task work.

• **Escape Behaviors:** Offer clear expectations and provide breaks throughout the lesson. Break down complex tasks into manageable steps, and allow the student to take movement breaks when needed.

• **Access to Tangibles:** Ensure the student has the materials they need to complete tasks. Implement a system for earning rewards for positive behavior.

• **Sensory Needs:** Provide fidget toys or other sensory tools to help the student focus. Offer opportunities for movement breaks or calming activities.

Remember: Developing positive classroom routines and fostering a supportive environment are key to preventing challenging behaviors. When disruptions do occur, utilize the FBA framework to understand the underlying cause. By working collaboratively with parents, school staff, and, most importantly, the student themselves, you can create a more positive and productive learning environment for all.

Additional Resources:

• The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): https://www.pbis.org/

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