Overcoming the Occupational Therapy vs. Behavior Analysis Battle: Breaking Down Barriers to Effective Collaboration

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Objectives:

- Participants will describe common sensory terminology and the comparable applied behavior analysis terminology
- Participants will be able to work with a behavior analyst and mutually develop techniques or a plan
- At the conclusion of the session, participants will see the evidence and value on collaborating with a behavior analyst

"Imagine a world where each group's experience is held in regard, offered, and shared as the need arises"

Carroll Johnson, 2001
Misconceptions

Behavior Analyst (BA)
- They do not believe behavior has a sensory component
- They use food for everything
- All they care about is data
- It is not functional (Fair-Field, 2015)
- It is not generalizable

Occupational Therapist (OT)
- They believe all behavior is sensory
- They do not teach functional skills
- The activities are not individualized
- It is not evidence-based
- OT’s and PT’s do the same thing

“Applied Behavior Analysis is the process of systematically applying interventions based upon the principles of learning theory to improve socially significant behaviors to a meaningful degree, and to demonstrate that the interventions employed are responsible for the improvement in behavior.”
Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968

Seven Dimensions of ABA
- Applied
- Behavioral
- Analytic
- Technological
- Conceptually Systematic
- Effective
- Generality
(Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968)
Reinforcement

- Consequence
- Increases or strengthens behavior
- Positive = added
- Negative = removed (escaped) or avoided

Punishment

- Consequence
- Decreases or weakens behavior
- Positive = added
- Negative = removed

Functions of Behavior

Positive Reinforcement
- Access attention
- Access tangible
- Access sensory stimulation

Negative Reinforcement
- Escape demands
- Escape aversive environmental stimuli
- Escape aversive internal sensory experience
Parallel Terminology

OT | BA

- Sensory Need
- Automatic Reinforcement

Automatic Reinforcement

- Not socially mediated
- "sensory"

Parallel Terminology

OT | BA

- Sensory Diet
- Non-contingent schedule of reinforcement
Shared Terminology

- Task Analysis
- Scaffolding
- Prompting Hierarchy
- Gross/fine motor skills
- Adaptive Behavior
- Self-help skills
- Errorless learning

Pitfalls for OT’s

- In fieldwork, OT’s are not typically exposed to behavior analysts
- More experienced OT’s may not have the training and knowledge of basic ABA
- May not feel comfortable in handling challenging behaviors (Dunleavy, 2015)
- Lack of access to continuing education for OT’s about ABA
  - Dunleavy, 2015

“Occupational therapy intervention approaches focus on establishing and/or modifying behavior rather than creating, promoting, maintaining or preventing behavior”

Case-Smith & Arbesman, 2008
Pitfalls for BA’s

- Little to no formal training in collaboration (Kelly & Tincani, 2013)
- Not all graduate ABA programs focus on education/autism
- Education process may not include:
  - IEP Process
  - Knowledge of team member expertise/roles
  - BA’s are not fully considered part of the team (Fair-Field, 2015)

What do OT’s and BA’s have in common?

- Both fields work across populations and settings.
- Both fields focus on promoting independence and life skills.
- Both fields struggle to get buy-in from the whole team so that strategies are implemented across the individual’s day.
- Both sets of professionals are passionate about what they do and the outcomes of their clients.
- Both fields have similar credentialing processes.
- There are practitioners out there for both fields that give the field a bad name.

Collaboration

- Definition
  1. to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor
  2. to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one’s country and especially an occupying force
  3. to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected (Hawrami - Webster, 2015)
Collaboration

- Case-Smith & Arbesman (2008)
  - Intensive behavior interventions used widely and have a strong base of evidence
  - OTs do not typically use intensive behavior interventions
  - Consult with BA's, make recommendations, give support

- Looks different and is conceptualized different across disciplines
- Lack of collaboration could decrease the effectiveness of the team in forming interventions with high fidelity (Kelly & Tincani, 2013)

- Kelly & Tincani (2013)
  - 302 surveys were completed
  - 56% were BCBA’s (Board Certified Behavior Analysts)
  - 22% Special education teachers
  - 19% non-board certified behavior analysts
  - 17% higher education
  - Response also from psychologists, BCaBA, general educators

“Successfully educating students with ASD requires collaboration amongst a variety of professionals and stakeholders.”

VDOE, 2010
Collaboration

- Majority of participants worked in public schools or private home
- Main diagnosis was Autism and/or ID
- Ages served were 3-21
- 45% had no professional development with collaboration in the title or course description
- 67% took no classes with the focus or collaboration included in the title
- 62% responded collaboration is part of their daily job

Collaboration

- BCBA's are more likely to accept program ideas and modifications from a BCBA.
- Least likely to adapt program ideas from: PT, OT, general education teacher, and health care provider.

Collaboration

- Barriers in collaboration include:
  - Ignorance of the basic foundations of other disciplines
  - Poor communication between the different disciplines
  - Distrust
  - Decrease confidence of other discipline
  - Narrow-minded views
  - Power discrepancies
- Orchard, Curran, & Kabene (2005)
Collaboration

- Process during team development (Orchard, Curran, Kabene, 2005)
  - Sensitization
  - Exploration
  - Implementation
  - Evaluation

“Trust evolves when there is respect for each other’s values”

Orchard, Curran, Kabene, 2005

Case Study - Demographics

- 9 year old male
- Diagnosis of Autism
- Typical language development till age 2
- Total language regression
- Attends private school 5 days a week
- Started attending private school in 2011
Case study - Intervention

- Target behavior - genital pressing
- Suspected function - automatic reinforcement
- Classroom BA developed non-contingent schedule of "bear hugs"/deep pressure every five minutes
- OT observed variation on application of intervention across instructors. Provided feedback on body positioning, level of pressure, and non-verbal cues indicating his level of comfort

Case Study - Outcomes

- Rates of behavior dropped to near zero
- Interval for non-contingent schedule increased gradually to 30 minutes
- Student began using modified sign to initiate for pressure

OT’s and BA’s need to learn about the strengths that the other has to offer and use these strengths to break down barriers.
Questions

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References


