

Handout for Worst Kept Secrets of BCBA-School Collaboration
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Stephanie M. Peterson, Ph.D., BCBA-D

Let's imagine two different teachers with whom you might collaborate as a BCBA. We will use these as a framework for some of our discussions throughout the workshop.

Sally the Special Education Teacher

Sally was just hired by Northern Prairie School District. Sally is a first-year special education teacher, who just graduated from the local university. She was in the top of her class and considered one of the best of that graduating group. Sally's university program was "eclectic" in nature (i.e., not necessarily behavior analytic). She learned a variety of teaching strategies in her training program and she learned that all of the strategies really have equal "strength." She was not really trained to examine the research literature to determine which strategy is for effective than another, but rather, she was taught to use certain "best practice" strategies, and if they don't work, try something else. She strongly believes in sensory integration therapy as an effective intervention for dealing with problem behaviors. She is very nervous (though very excited!) about her new position. She wants to prove herself to be a great special education teacher in the eyes of her principal, colleagues, and parents. She has a caseload of 12 students in her classroom, all of whom have moderate to severe cognitive impairments, and a few of whom have some fairly significant behavioral challenges. You are assigned to help with three of the children in her classroom as a BCBA. You are not employed by the district, but you are hired on a consulting contract to assist with these students. You also consult on several other students in the building/district. When Sally learned you were assigned to help her, she was pretty excited to have someone coming to help her. But she's also nervous (she hasn't told you this and you are unaware of it) that you will be in her room observing and may "judge" her. She's afraid her inexperience as a teacher will shine through and that you might not think she's a good teacher.

Gerald the General Education Teacher

Gerald has worked for Mountain Heights School District for over 20 years, all of which have been at the middle-school level. Gerald considers himself an expert with middle-school age children. Gerald's specialties are teaching math and science. He has taught both for his entire career. Recently the district adopted a new math curriculum, which Gerald really dislikes and is extremely frustrated with. He has 28 children in each of his classes, and really doesn't view it as his job to deal with students with special needs. He really doesn't have time to provide 1:1 attention to any one kid. He has struggled with classroom management, especially in the past few years. He tends to keep to himself in the teacher's lounge and believes it is best to "stay under the radar" of the school administrators. He really doesn't enjoy interacting with his colleagues very much. You've been assigned to assist him one one particularly difficult student in his class. This student has a lot of behavioral challenges, and as the behavior specialist for

the district, you are charged with helping the teachers this child interacts with set up and implement some behavior management strategies to keep the child in the school. It's your impression the school would really like to kick this kid out of school; however, the parents are very important community members, who have given veiled threats that they will file for a due process hearing if their child is removed from his neighborhood school. Gerald has expressed to you that he really doesn't have time to deal with this kid, given all the other challenges he faces in the general education classroom and the pressures for his students to perform well on the state tests. He has already told you that he's not really going to do anything special for this kid, so you might want to spend your time with the other teachers instead.

Problem #1: Behavior Analytic Language—Sally

Consider the following terms and how behavior analysts define them. Consider the following conversation a behavior analyst had with Sally, when Sally asked for help dealing with decreasing self-injury in one of her more severely disabled students.

“Okay, so I performed a functional analysis and found that Oliver's self-injury was maintained by negative reinforcement. So, we are going to teach him to mand for breaks from a difficult task. Let's set up a concurrent operant situation. We'll give him an aversive task that he wants to escape. We'll let him escape after he completes each component of a progressive ratio schedule of reinforcement. For that break, he'll get negative reinforcement as well as access to preferred toys and activities. Alternative, he can mand for a break, and we'll just give him negative reinforcement. If he engages in self-injury, we'll use extinction. Okay? Sound good? Any questions?”

Sally had no idea what to say next. She was afraid to show her ignorance by saying she had no idea what the behavior analyst was recommending. She didn't want to appear stupid. What's another way the behavior analyst could explain this intervention?

Problem #2: Motivation

Think/Pair/Share

Given what you know about each of the teachers described above, what kinds of things might be motivating them? What are some strategies that you might be able to implement to motivate each of these teachers to implement the strategies you will be recommending for the child(ren) in their classroom? Consider both antecedent and consequence manipulations.

Problem #3: Reinforcement and Punishment-Sally

Think/Pair/Share

Ben, the BCBA assigned to work with Sally the Special Education teacher, has been heading out to her classroom pretty regularly this year...a few days a week, to be clear. Although he's only been a BCBA for a few years, he is pretty confident in his skills. He had good training at his university, lots of excellent experience, and has had a lot of success with the children he has worked with. He's eager to get to work with Sally. He and Sally sit down together in mid-

September, after everyone has settled in a bit, to identify the children with whom he is going to work. Sally identifies the three children who have the most severe behavior problems, and together, they decide that Ben will complete an FBA for each of the children to help design a behavior intervention plan. Ben gets started immediately on his assessment. He conducts a very thorough assessment for each of the three children, working on them simultaneously. He meticulously reviews their records, does an FBA interview with every teacher with whom each of the children has ever had, completes ABC assessments across the school day for all three children over the course of 2 months, conducts a formal functional analysis of each problem behavior (this took another month, because their behavior was variable during the functional analysis). By Thanksgiving, there still isn't a behavior plan in place for any of the children, and Sally expresses some concern to Ben. "I've really been struggling this entire fall, and now it's Thanksgiving. I'm getting really anxious about these problem behaviors, because now the other children are starting to display some problems. Parents are telling me they are concerned that I'm not a good teacher, because I'm having so many problems with the children. When will the behavior plan be ready?" Ben replies, "You know, it's important that we conduct a thorough functional behavior assessment prior to implementing a behavior plan. If we don't, the likelihood that the plans will be successful is minimized. But I will write the plans this week and train you next week in them." The following week, Ben hands the teacher the written behavior plans and asks her when she's available for him to train her in the procedures. Sally reads over the plans and is very confused. First, she doesn't understand some of the words she is reading (for example, motivating operations, concurrent schedules of reinforcement), and second, she's worried she won't be able to implement all three of these plans simultaneously and effectively teach the rest of her students at the same time. She says, "Ben, I'm a little worried about these plans. I'm not sure this is feasible. Can we..." Ben interrupts and says, "Look, I implemented these plans last week with the children when I was working with them during my time with them. I wanted to try it out. It's totally doable. It worked great for me. I'm sure it will be fine."

1. What are some things you notice that Ben is doing that could be punishing to Sally and might be affecting their collaborative relationship?
2. What are some things that Ben could do differently to create a more positively reinforcing environment for her. (Consider some of the reinforcers you identified in the first think/pair/share, as well as any others that come to mind here. How could he turn some of those punishers around to create a more reinforcing environment?)

Problem #4: Reinforcement and Punishment-Gerald

Think/Pair/Share

Amy is the behavior specialist working with Gerald. Amy completed her assessment of the child in Gerald's classroom (though her assessment encompassed more than just the period that Gerald has the student for) and, after bringing all the teachers together as a team to discuss her assessment results and propose a possible intervention, has designed a pretty awesome token economy and check in/check out system for the student. The teachers, including Gerald, are all on board with the intervention. Amy, being sensitive to teachers' busy lives, offers to train each teacher in the system and asks when might be the best time to train them. She doesn't want to cause undue burden on them. Gerald states that the only time he really has for

training would be his prep period, which he typically uses to get some of his grading done. But he acquiesces and says he'll give it up for the training. Amy comes by to do the training and uses her best behavior analytic strategies...she has the written plan, which she reviews with him, she models the intervention for him, and then she has him practice. Gerald actually does great. She's impressed, and says, "Wow! That was really great, Gerald. You actually did that better than any of the other teachers I've been working with. I may bring some of them down to watch you and use you as a model!" (Amy has done this in the past and has found that many of the teachers she has consulted with enjoyed being viewed as the expert.) Gerald quickly says, "No, thanks. I just like to do my thing." The next week, all the teachers begin implementing the plan. Amy, feeling her job is pretty much done, goes on about her business, starting other assessments and working from her office. She monitors the data for the student using an on-line system the school has for data collection. Things are looking good on the data. The student is having far more good days. Amy goes to see the principal and lets him know the child is doing great and that she's surprised, because these middle school teachers can really be a rough bunch sometimes, especially Gerald. She proceeds to make fun of some of the things she's seen Gerald do in the past. She says, "I guess he's a better teacher than I thought he was. I honestly didn't think he cared." She follows up with, "It's amazing what can happen when teachers pair up with behavior analysts. Saving the world with behavior analysis is so cool!"

1. What are some things you notice that Amy is doing that could be punishing to Gerald and might be affecting their collaborative relationship? How about with the other teachers and principal?
2. What are some things that Amy could do differently to create a more positively reinforcing environment for Gerald and the other teachers. (Consider some of the reinforcers you identified in the first think/pair/share, as well as any others that come to mind here. How could she turn some of those punishers around to create a more reinforcing environment?)

Problem #5:

Think/Pair/Share

After a few weeks, Amy realizes the error of her ways. She was not "done." And she should have known better. Noticing the intervention doesn't seem to be working so well, she realizes she should have done more follow-up on the effectiveness of the intervention. So, she decides to pop into all the teacher's classrooms, unannounced, including Gerald's to conduct a fidelity check. She sits in the back, takes her data, and then later sends Gerald an email to let him know what she observed. She was pretty frustrated, because he really didn't follow the plan at all. She points out all of the components he missed in the intervention. She wanted to praise something he did right, but he really didn't do the intervention at all, so that was challenging. Besides, she had praised him nicely when she trained him. She says, "I'll need to come I and retrain you on the intervention. What's a good time?" Gerald writes back, "I don't need retraining, and I don't have time for it. This intervention doesn't work, and I'm not going to do it anymore." Amy replies again, "But the intervention WAS working early on. So, it does work. The problem is that you aren't running it." Gerald writes, "You aren't my supervisor, and I don't have to implement this. This is my classroom. I will do things my way." Now, Amy was getting annoyed. She says, "Look Gerald, we have to make these accommodations for the student, or

the parents will be getting a lawyer. Let's not go down that path, okay? I know this intervention works. And it's not hard to implement. I know you can do it. You were able to do it in the training we did." Amy received no reply in return, so she went to the classroom, when Gerald had his prep period. She tried to talk to him, but he just ignored her. So, Amy went to see the principal and told him Gerald was being very uncooperative. Together, they decided to hold a team meeting, inviting all of the other teachers, who were willing to run the intervention. Amy's and the principal's reasoning was that, as a group, they ought to be able to convince Gerald to "get on board." At the start of the meeting, Amy says, "Okay. Thanks for coming everyone. We're here because we need to get this intervention implemented consistently across all classrooms. Thanks, Bill and Alice for doing such a nice job implementing this intervention. I know we can get it working as well for everyone else as it has been working for you. When I'm in there with you, it just goes so smoothly. Perhaps you could explain to Gerald how you run it so he can get on the same page with the rest of us." You can imagine how the meeting went from there.

1. What are things that went right and wrong in this example, in terms of the supervision of implementation?
2. What would you have done differently as the behavior analyst in this situation?
3. How about those positive and negative reinforcers?