**Functional Behavioral Assessment in Schools**

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*Exceptionality* Vol 8(3) 1999-2000 is a special issue devoted to articles reviewing the role of functional behavioral assessment in schools. Seven articles discuss and review the role of functional behavioral assessment for use by school personnel. Functional behavioral assessment is defined, the key features and challenges for schools are discussed, and the process for moving from assessment to support plan design is outlined. Of special note: (a) one article provides a checklist that families and/or teachers could use to determine if a functional behavioral assessment has been completed, (b) one article provides a readable summary of the legal issues that link use of functional behavioral assessment and IDEA, (c) one article outlines the role of functional behavioral assessment in early intervention programs, (d) one article provides a checklist for building positive behavior support plans based on functional behavioral assessments, and (e) one article reviews current developments in the use of Information Technology to train personnel in the key skills of functional behavioral assessment and positive behavior support.

**Key Components**

Students who display problem behavior require educational programs that are effective, efficient, and relevant. Without an understanding of the factors that influence the occurrence of problem behavior, such educational programs may be difficult to develop. Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a systematic process for describing problem behavior, identifying environmental factors and setting events that predict the problem behavior, and guiding the development of effective and efficient behavior support plans. FBA is the foundation of positive behavioral support and represents a preferred practice for all students, especially students with problem behaviors.

FBA was originally developed as a methodology for designing behavioral support plans for individuals with severe developmental disabilities who also exhibited challenging behavior. However, over the last ten years, the FBA process has been applied successfully to the development of behavioral support plans for students with more typical cognitive characteristics (e.g., ADHD, emotional and behavioral disorders, at-risk). The results of an FBA give caregivers the capacity to design environments that "work" for people with behavioral challenges. Interventions based on the concept of supporting adaptive, desired, and appropriate behavior are a substantial improvement over traditional interventions, which often were unplanned and based on punishment to suppress the challenging behavior. Little attention was given to
teaching individuals more effective behaviors to communicate their needs.

Although FBA has a long history, recently many states have created laws or regulations stipulating the need for a functional behavioral assessment before permitting the development of significant behavioral interventions (e.g., Hughes Bill in California). The 1997 amendments to IDEA require that the FBA process be used to help students with disabilities in public school settings whose behaviors could lead to a change in school placement or whose challenging behavior constitutes a pattern. The regulations pertaining to placement in an alternative educational setting state as follows:

(k) Placement in Alternative Educational Setting.--

(1) Authority of school personnel.--

(A) School personnel under this section may order a change in the placement of a child with a disability--

(i) to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting, another setting, or suspension, for not more than 10 school days (to the extent such alternatives would be applied to children without disabilities); and

(ii) to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for the same amount of time that a child without a disability would be subject to discipline, but for not more than 45 days if--

(I) the child carries a weapon to school or to a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or a local educational agency; or (II) the child knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance while at school or a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local educational agency.

(B) Either before or not later than 10 days after taking a disciplinary action described in subparagraph (A)--

(i) if the local educational agency did not conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavioral intervention plan for such child before the behavior that resulted in the suspension described in subparagraph (A), the agency shall convene an IEP meeting to develop an assessment plan to address that behavior; or (ii) if the child already has a behavioral intervention plan, the IEP Team shall review the plan and modify it, as necessary, to address the behavior.

The law appears to imply the use of FBA as a reactive approach to dealing with challenging behaviors that have led to serious school problems *. However, FBA is not intended to be used solely as a reaction to
chronic and serious behaviors. FBA is most effective when used proactively, especially, when students first display challenging behaviors. All FBA processes are concerned with analyses of problem behaviors and the environmental events that predict and maintain the student's problem behavior.

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