Ethical Considerations in School Consultation:
Problems, Responsibilities, & Solutions

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Introduction

- Leah Mumford, MEd, BCBA
  - BCBA serving mostly families of school-aged children with ASD
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  - BCBA and registered clinical counsellor serving mostly families of school-aged children with ASD
- Who are you? Audience poll.

Why Ethics of School Consultation?

- Relevant to our personal practices, current events (seclusion rooms, VSB teacher dismissal), and the field.
- The complexity of the school environment can make it difficult to fulfill our ethical responsibilities.
  - How to collaborate with professionals whose values and methods differ from, may contradict, those of the consulting behavior analyst?
  - How to report intervention results and recommendations to individuals who may not understand or agree with them?

Ethical Consultation in Schools

- In other words, "What does it mean to be a good behavior analyst when consulting to schools?"
  - Our answer influences more than the immediate success of our intervention.
  - Our conduct in schools influences whether the application of behavior analysis reaches beyond peer-reviewed journals and into British Columbia's schools.

Obstacles to use of ABA in schools

- Some believe that the conventional ABA approach to school-based research discourages application of findings to the classroom.
  - Performed by outsiders
    - Classroom becomes an "applied lab"
    - Effects of natural setting minimized as much as possible
  - Short rather than long-term focus
    - Emphasis on demonstration, not integration into classroom
  - Results, not generalization or social validity, determine effectiveness.

Obstacles, cont.

- Traditional study of classroom interventions is short-term, doesn't build capacity, contributes to problem of lack of meaningful use of ABA in schools.
- To fulfill responsibility to team members *and* our client, behavior analysts must move beyond our conventional role as outside expert.
  - Affirm the teacher's role as expert in the classroom.
  - Discover helpful, respectful ways to influence teacher and paraprofessional behavior

What does it mean to be a good behavior analyst?

- The behavior analyst consulting to schools must possess expertise in communication, collaboration, and support.
  - discover ways to meaningfully change behavior of school team members,
  - rely on teachers as experts of classroom environment when developing interventions.
  - build relationships with teachers/staff,

Dilemma 1: IEP of Thrones

- Collaborating with team members of different (opposing) perspectives
- You recently started a home program building academic and social skills for a Grade 3 student with high-functioning ASD.
- In October your client hits the classroom teacher. The family asks you to attend the IEP, at which behavioral intervention to reduce aggression will be a major focus.

Collaborating with School Teams

- You have not conducted a school observation. The family informs you that the experienced classroom teacher discourages observations and prefers to "do her own thing" regarding behavior management.
- Also slated to attend the IEP is the district occupational therapist who has a plan to reduce aggression by addressing your client's unmet sensory needs.

Responsibility to Clients

- 2.0 The Behavior Analysts Responsibility to Clients
  - The behavior analyst has a responsibility to operate in the best interests of clients.
- 2.03. Behavior analysts are responsible to all parties affected by behavioral services.
- 2.04. Behavior analysts cooperate with other professionals in order to serve their clients effectively and appropriately. Behavior analysts recognize that other professions have ethical codes that may differ in their specific requirements from these guidelines.

Responsibility to Clients

- 2.10 Treatment Efficacy.
  a) The behavior analyst always has the responsibility to recommend scientifically supported most effective treatment procedures.
  b) Clients have a right to effective treatment (i.e., based on the research literature and adapted to the individual client).
  c) Behavior analysts are responsible for review and appraisal of likely effects of all alternative treatments, including those provided by other disciplines and no intervention.

Other Relevant Guidelines

- 4.0 The Behavior Analyst and The Individual Behavior Change Program
  - The behavior analyst (a) designs programs that are based on behavior analytic principles, including assessments of effects of other intervention methods, (b) involves the client or the client-surrogate in the planning of such programs.
- 7.02 Disseminating Behavior Analysis. The behavior analyst assists the profession in making behavior analysis methodology available to the general public.
- 9.01 Promotion in Society. The behavior analyst should promote the application of behavior principles in society by presenting a behavioral alternative to other procedures or methods.

Option 1: Stereotypical Approach

- Note lack of behavior change with current behavior plan.
- Note aide's lack of training and failure to establish instructional control.
- Ask for evidence on sensory integration therapy.
- Provide home program data as evidence that same tasks accomplished without aggression when token economy is used.
- Cite Hewko and Ministry of Ed policy on meaningful consultation.

Efficacy or Bust

- If successful…
- Provide in vivo training (collaboration) to EA, "train and hope" will continue with program
- Recommend effective treatment
- Review and appraise alternative treatments
- Recommend behavior analytic programs
- Exposes clinician's ethical blindspot

Ethical Blindspots

- The usual definition of treatment efficacy focuses on its benefit to the immediate client – the ability to bring about positive change.
- However, the Guidelines for Responsible Conduct emphasize the BCBA's responsibilities to *all parties* affected by behavioral services (2.03).
- Why?

How to determine what's effective?

- Looking beyond efficacy – examine whether treatment efficacy should be ultimate criterion of effectiveness
- Rather, we might consider what interventions are selected by stressed teachers, implemented correctly, and minimally intrude on classroom system.

Option 2: expert influence

- BCBA has knowledge and skills team would like to possess
- May be restricted to a specific client or type of problem (toileting)
- Closer to what staff want
  - Because they want what you, the expert, recommends

Problem with Trying to Be an Expert

- Many are published, few are chosen.
- Educators may not review evidence or seek research-based interventions because experimental environment seen as different from the "real world" of the classroom.
- Popular classroom interventions appeal to values and common sense, regardless of evidence for or against (audience observations?)

Increasing Treatment Acceptability

- Consider environmental contingencies operating on teachers and SEAs
- Changes in teacher behavior may have widespread effects on other learners in classroom
- Teachers prefer interventions that require less time and resources.
- Note for future research: conduct component analyses to determine what's essential to treatment effectiveness.
- Reinforcement fading at home prior to generalization to school

Improving on "Train and Hope"

- Consequences for teachers may increase accuracy – what type?
  - Scheduled performance feedback
  - Even better results when paired with "negative reinforcement" (escape meeting with behavior analyst!)

Changing School Staff Behavior

- Train treatment agents to a criterion rather than for a specified period of time
  - Ongoing activity
    - Therapist drift or error
  - Spot checks
  - Provide protocols and checklists
    - Examples and nonexamples

Option 3: Referent influence

- Influence based on respect and admiration
- Building trust – coffee, community events
  - Condition yourself as a reinforcer
    - Pairing yourself (and parents) with primaries.
  - Meet key individuals beforehand – quick meet and greet better than nothing
  - Opens the door to option 2
- Attempt a brief meeting/phone call with adminstrator(s) or learning support teacher before the big meeting.
- Manage client (parent) expectations prior to consultation

Building Referent Influence Without A Lot of Time

- Find a sympathetic face
- Ice-breakers
  - Holidays, children, news, sports
  - Ask questions, but remember to share something relatable.
- Compliments, compliments
  - Find elements of the classroom, school, or program to praise.
- Be flexible wherever you can – seek team input on goals, strategies, measurement, mastery

Involving Clients and Families

- Behavior analysts involve clients and families in the creation of behavior change programs.
  - Educating parents about the IEP process
    - Key terms
    - Ministry of Education and school district policies
    - Legal history
  - Helping parents plan responses to potential IEP questions and suggestions
  - Prioritizing adaptations, accommodations, modifications, and strategies
  - Supporting parents to meet with key players pre- or post- meeting for additional advocacy

Involving Clients and Families

- Similarly, clients can build relationships with teachers and administrators that further encourage trust and communication between school and home teams.
  - Letter to My Teacher
    - Strengths, preferences, needs, goals
  - Thank you notes
  - About Me scrapbook, drawing, presentation

Dilemma 2
How to report intervention results and recommendations to individuals who may not understand or agree with them?

- You have conducted an observation of a student, and see both positive examples of interventions in place that are effective as well as problem behaviors and recommendations to suggest to the parents and school team.
- And now you need to write a report. (E.g., to an invested parent, a motivated ABA Support Worker, a disinterested teacher, a supportive IST and an ambivalent principal.)

Relevant Guidelines

- 2.07 Maintaining Confidentiality.
- (a) Behavior analysts have a primary obligation and take reasonable precautions to respect the confidentiality of those with whom they work or consult, recognizing that confidentiality may be established by law, institutional rules, or professional or scientific relationships.
- (b) Clients have a right to confidentiality. Unless it is not feasible or is contraindicated, the discussion of confidentiality occurs at the outset of the relationship and thereafter as new circumstances may warrant.
- (c) In order to minimize intrusions on privacy, behavior analysts include only information germane to the
- purpose for which the communication is made in written and oral reports, consultations, and the like.
- (d) Behavior analysts discuss confidential information obtained in clinical or consulting relationships, or evaluative data concerning patients, individual or organizational clients, students, research participants, supervisees, and employees, only for appropriate scientific or professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with such matters.

Relevant Guidelines

- 2.11 Collecting and Maintaining Records. Behavior analysts appropriately document their professional and scientific work in order to facilitate provision of services later by them or by other professionals, to ensure accountability, and to meet other requirements of institutions or the law.
- 2.14 Accuracy in Reporting to Those Who Pay for Services. In their reports to those who pay for services or sources of research, project, or program funding, behavior analysts accurately state the nature of the research or service provided, the fees or charges, and where applicable, the identity of the provider, the findings, and other required descriptive data.
- 7.02 Disseminating Behavior Analysis. The behavior analyst assists the profession in making behavior analysis methodology available to the general public.

Option 1: Technological Reports

- Write a report worded similarly to Consult/ Team Meeting reports done in the ABA home program.
- Use accurate, technological language that the ABA Support Worker (who is the primary deliverer of intervention) will be able to understand and implement clearly.

Option 1

- Less response effort for analysts
  - and may be a more efficient way to communicate
- May be appropriate in some circumstances
- However, may alienate other stakeholders in the consultative relationship

Jargon

- Jargon: "Special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are difficult for others to understand"

- "Occasionally, the market enhances brand equity of integration influencing critical mass. It can be seen that a ground-breaking concern is a quick win for the potential industry. Blue-skies thinking associated with innovation is ubiquitous. Furthermore, the requirement adds value, and sufficient life-cycle refinances unbundling. Increasingly, technology strikes the market, but it will take a step change in risk management to outsource a consultancy."

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- Another sampling from jargon generators…
  - "aggregate clicks-and-mortar functionalities"
  - "empower e-business schemas"
  - "Internal Directives Technician"
  - "Forward Implementation Engineer"
  - "proper logistical apoptosis"

Option 2: Lose the jargon

- Write a report in a jargon-free manner
  - All who want to peruse may do so without hindrance
- Requires perspective-taking
  - Explain or replace words that have both a "everyday" and behavior analytic meaning
  - Rather than define, replace with commonly accepted meanings

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Option 2

- Reduce response effort
  - Consider an email rather than an attachment
- If not carefully done, can appear unprofessional and therefore, unworthy of consideration
- Wording needs to be carefully considered to stay true to the technologies of ABA as well as our Ethics.

Considerations

- How we word our recommendations can be impactful.
- E.g., Teachers rated pragmatic descriptions of interventions more acceptable than behavioral or humanistic (even when illustrating the same recommendations in each example)

Considerations

- Wolf (1978) as stated in Witt et al (1984, p. 366):
  - "If the participants don't like the treatment, then they may avoid it, or run away, or complain loudly. And thus society will be less likely to use our technology no matter how potentially effective it might be."
  - "By ignoring consumer satisfaction, we may continue to witness the relatively widespread adoption of highly publicized "pop" psychologies for which even the most rudimentary data on efficacy are lacking"

Summary

- Collaboration means more than working in the same space as another person on similar goals: it means blending our expertise along with communication skills in order to achieve meaningful and long-lasting changes.
- The onus is on us to maintain the interpersonal aspects of the collaborative relationship(s).

The grim reality

- The challenge is likely not finding an effective intervention, but rather finding one that is effective within the classroom system.
- There is little evidence-based research to guide us.
- It takes time to build a meaningful relationship with teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals.
- We need to monitor how our values affect our behavior, and be careful not to impose them on others.

Habits of highly effective consultants

- Effective US Navy Consultants:
  - Openness and responsiveness to others
  - Comfort with ambiguity and being able to make sense of it
  - Comfort with oneself in relation to others
- Organizational Development Consultants
  - Utilizing data effectively
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Establishing clear and meaningful goals together

Habits of highly effective consultants

- School Consultants
  - Knowledge of problem-solving model
  - Technical skills (intervention & evaluation)
  - Interpersonal skills

Habits of highly effective consultants

- Luiselli (2002)
  - Articulate your role clearly
  - Try to schedule regular visits
  - Recognize school staff as "local experts"
  - Write in a jargon-free manner
  - Follow through on our commitments in a timely manner
  - Know about the policy of the school district, school culture and union regulations

Determining Social Validity

- We can use the consultative relationship to create our own research projects by regularly evaluating our behavior in light of the research we do have; and our Ethical Guidelines.
- 3 suggested questions:
  - How did the consultee respond when recommendations were made?
  - Did the observation results in a clear definition of the concerns?
  - How difficult was it for the consultee to implement the intervention plan in the consultant's absence?

Recommendations

- Interpersonal skills are a valuable asset to consultation
  - Training for this not provided in most graduate ABA programs
- Participate in Pro-D opportunities to disseminate behavior analysis to the broader community
- Conduct ongoing research on your own consultative work; seek out social validity

Recommendations

- Demonstrate professional humility
- Offer to model and coach if possible
  - Telling is not teaching
- Continue ongoing Ethics professional development
- "Smile until your teeth hurt"

In Closing

- "In day-to-day practice, consultants often choose between their values and codes of professional ethics and the constraints imposed by situations…[therefore] consultants require a clear ethical framework to guide decision making and behavior." (Heron, Martz & Margolis, 1996, p. 377).

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