



Factors influencing satisfaction among teacher candidates and cooperating teachers in conducting a functional behavior assessment



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Satisfaction with FBA/BIP process warrants improvement.
- CT satisfaction was associated with degree, familiarity, and project involvement ($R^2 = 0.966$).
- Student FBA satisfaction was associated with course and child satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.952$).
- BIP satisfaction was linked to CT interest/help and FBA/placement/child ratings ($R^2 = 0.96$).

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ABSTRACT

Functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) support learners with behavior problems, but it is unclear which factors enhance FBA/BIP development. University students ($n = 81$) in a behavior course and their field-based cooperating teacher (CT; $n = 35$) responded to a survey. Only 12% of CTs were highly satisfied, and a low percentage of students were highly satisfied with FBA or BIP development (26% and 21%, respectively). Variables correlating with CT satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.966$) and student satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.952$ and 0.963 , respectively) and implications for FBA/BIP development, field placements, and university–school partnerships are discussed.

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Stakeholders across preschool–12th grade settings experience widespread concern with prolonged maladaptive student behaviors (Benedict, Horner, & Squires, 2007; Forness, Kim, & Walker, 2012; Perry, Dunne, McFadden, & Campbell, 2008) and emphasize a need for more emotional and behavioral screening and mental health supports (Bruhn, Woods-Groves, & Huddle, 2014). Prolonged problem behaviors can be externalizing (e.g., inappropriate physical or verbal responses towards others) and/or internalizing (e.g., extreme shyness, social withdrawal). Maladaptive behaviors are associated with a high rate of expulsion in early childhood settings (Ritz, Noltemeyer, Davis, & Green, 2014), increased high school dropout (De Witte & Csillag, 2014), lowered

expectations from caregivers (Belgrave & Brevard, 2015; Rutchick, Smyth, Lopoo, & Dusek, 2009), adverse social and academic outcomes (McEvoy & Welker, 2000), and negative long-term outcomes for students post high-school (Moore et al., 2015).

This issue is partly attributable to teacher perceptions and limited repertoire in brainstorming tailored ways in which to respond. Teachers may have a more negative perception of students with maladaptive behaviors (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015), which may influence expectations, daily interactions, and learning opportunities provided to these students. Aligned with Schema Theory (Markus, 1977; Renk, Roddenberry, Oliveros, & Sieger, 2007), baseline perceptions may likely inform subsequent views or actions (e.g., willingness to engage in data collection based on preconceived notions regarding the data collection process). As noted by McCormick, Ayres, and Beechey (2006), "... teachers' mental models or schemata of the education system within which they work are likely to influence their interpretations of the [proposed

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change] and its implementation” (p. 53).

In addition, a large number of students experience a predominantly negative, punitive response to behavior problems (Gershoff, Purtell, & Holas, 2015; Sturme, 2015). There is an overreliance on and/or misuse of time out, suspensions, and other rapid suppression approaches that fail to provide students with functionally equivalent replacement behaviors (Klein, 2016). Scholars caution again suspension and expulsion, which “... are predictive of reduced school connectedness, increased dropout, and entry to the juvenile justice system” (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014, p. 112). Instead, a prevention-oriented approach that *teaches* students a range of plausible, adaptive alternatives within a supportive, non-punitive climate is strongly recommended (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

1. Positive behavior intervention and support

Preschool–12th grade (p-12) settings are increasingly embracing Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), a multi-tiered framework to proactively manage behaviors and enhance social competencies for *all* students, and devise data-driven, tailored behavior plans for students needing additional supports (e.g., see <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>; <https://www.pbis.org/school>). PBIS include three tiers. Tier 1 (i.e., universal or primary intervention) stresses high quality instruction and establishing a positive, trusting rapport with students, families, and colleagues. Its focus is primarily on environmental redesign (Knoster, Anderson, Carr, Dunlap, & Horner, 2003) and promoting success for all learners by ensuring clear expectations, a class-wide reward system, as well as engaging, high-quality teaching. As a result, the majority of students will not require any additional behavior supports (George, Kincaid, & Pollard-Sage, 2009). In terms of benefiting teachers, findings from a sample of 33 elementary classrooms suggested that teachers who were more negative and used more harsh responses experienced more emotional exhaustion compared to teachers who used more positive universal support strategies (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). Although the focus of this manuscript is on university students' experience with learning to collect data and devise a behavior plan on students with prolonged behavior concerns, it is vital to emphasize that a precursor to this level of intervention is using effective universal strategies. Teachers may need more support to consistently use Tier 1, universal strategies with high fidelity (e.g., see Edwards, 2017; Farkas et al., 2012).

For those who continue to exhibit prolonged externalizing and/or internalizing behavior problems, despite Tier 1 efforts being implemented with high fidelity, a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is completed. This process involves defining concerns in objective, measurable terms and collecting data from multiple sources, including analyzing behavior antecedents and consequence, field notes, running records, weekly scatter plots, frequency and duration recordings, interviews with key players, preference assessments, and a functional assessment screening tool, etc. (e.g., <http://www.pbisworld.com/data-tracking/>). Such information helps assess baseline performance, patterns in when/where/how the behavior is displayed, and the function or purpose of the behavior (e.g., problem-solving, attention-seeking, sensory stimulation, access to tangibles, or escape/avoidance) (Wheeler & Richey, 2013). Better understanding the context in which behavior is occurring and its function (i.e., to obtain or avoid particular consequences), as part of the FBA process, then informs the development of a tailored Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Students with prolonged problem behaviors may benefit from Tier 2 individualized or small group supports in the classroom (e.g., skill-building; self-management techniques; selected or secondary

interventions) or Tier 3 supports with more intensive and comprehensive strategies consistently used across settings; targeted or tertiary intervention (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

2. Authentic application of course content

Teacher preparation programs expect teacher candidates to develop a strong foundation to understand and apply recommended practices (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hollins & Torres Guzman, 2005). To enhance retention of content, teacher candidates benefit from opportunities to engage in meaningful reflection (Pedro, 2005), and have hands-on experiences with p-12 students via field practicums (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005) and clinical placements (Ronfeldt, 2012). As noted by Jobling and Moni (2004), “... pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding about working with students with diverse learning needs [are] developed as they [undertake] real and purposeful tasks in an authentic context” (p. 5).

Teachers and other school personnel, however, often do not feel confident in the area of behavior management (Mitchell & Arnold, 2004), and in implementing components of the FBA/BIP (Killu, 2008; Neel & Blood, 2007; Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015). At the pre-service stage, studies have examined teacher candidates' confidence in applying various management strategies in classrooms (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010), fidelity in implementing behavior plans (Allen & Blackston, 2003), and varying lecture formats for teaching FBAs (Hirsch, Kennedy, Haines, Thomas, & Alves, 2015).

In addition to assessing understanding and application of content, it is also important to examine factors that may contribute to and obstacles that may impede satisfaction with any aspect of the learning process. Satisfaction, for the purpose of this study, is defined as positively meeting one's needs and/or expectations. Scholars have examined university students' satisfaction with a range of considerations, such as group projects (Gatfield, 1999), one's particular academic department (Umbach & Porter, 2002), and online learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004). There has also been interest in studying student and cooperating teachers' broad views of field experiences (e.g., Graham, 2006; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001).

At the same time, there is a dearth in understanding perceptions of and satisfaction with the process of developing FBAs/BIPs at the pre-service level. It is unclear whether and the extent to which a range of possible components (e.g., course lecture/readings, assigned placement, involvement of the placement's cooperating teacher, selected target student, experience with data collection) may influence satisfaction. This is particularly timely given the mounting importance on integrating multi-tiered models of prevention for all learners, including those with emotional and behavioral disorders (Lane et al., 2015). It is concerning that special and general educators may “lack the necessary preparation to implement a number of evidence-based classroom practices effectively” (Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, & Park, 2012, p. 499). More specifically, they found that only 14.2% of general educators and 19.3% of special educators in their sample ‘always use’ FBAs; a small percentage of general and special educators felt ‘very well prepared’ to use FBAs (11.7% and 16.3%, respectively). In another study, 86% of a small sample of behavior specialists in Australia self-reported some form of FBA training and less than half (46.5%) had experienced writing a FBA (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2010).

Given this minimal understanding and use of the FBA/BIP process, it calls into question what may be happening at the pre-service level when learning about and applying these concepts and practices in an authentic field setting. The purpose of the current analysis is to better understand satisfaction with the

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