

# Understanding Behaviour

An introduction to a.b.a.  
*applied behavioural analysis*

*developed by Jane Mackay*

Let's explore.....

- ☛ What is behaviour?
- ☛ What is behaviour analysis?
- ☛ What is a functional analysis?
- ☛ What is an ecological analysis?
- ☛ What is an antecedent?
- ☛ What is a setting event?

Continuing.....

- ☛ What is a consequence?
- ☛ What are reinforcers?
- ☛ What is punishment?
- ☛ What is extinction?

And why do I need to know about this stuff?

.....well.....

.....let's talk.....

**ABA:** Applied Behavioural Analysis

**Why do we do it?**

- ☛ To understand why people do what they do
- ☛ To notice patterns
- ☛ To find clues in challenging situations
- ☛ To develop new approaches
- ☛ To support others (and ourselves) with objectivity and clarity

**What is behaviour?????**

- ☛ Anything a person says or does
- ☛ A muscle, glandular or electrical activity
- ☛ **Dead man test** (*Ogden Lindsley, 1965*)
- ☛ "If a dead man can do it, it ain't behaviour. And if a dead man can't do it, then it is behaviour."

Another definition...

Any observable and measurable external or internal  
act of an organism

How did you like that one???????

Behaviour = Response

*Here's something potentially a tad confusing...*

Behaviour analysts often use the term “*response*” and the term “*behaviour*” interchangeably. They might also use the words “*act*”, “*action*”, “*movement*” and “*reaction*” to mean basically the same thing.

excerpt from Elementary Principles of Behaviour by Richard Malott, Maria Malott & Elizabeth Trojan, Prentice Hall, 2000.

Remember behaviour is...

Anything  
a person  
says or does

“We count because we care”

Marc Gold

Behaviour can be measured.....

We can look at different aspects:

- ☛ the **duration** (how long it lasts)
- ☛ the **intensity** (how intense it is)
- ☛ the **frequency** (how often it happens)
- ☛ the **topography** (how big or small it is) *and*
- ☛ the **context** (when does it happen)

All these dynamics give us **clues...**

OK,

then what is

**behavioural analysis?**

The study of the operation of the principles of behaviour with both human beings and other animals.

AKA (also known as)...

**DETECTIVE WORK**

How exciting!

We're exploring practical ways to be a more

**effective detective.**

## One of which is... Functional Analysis! What is functional analysis?

- ☛ The **clue** is in the name... **functional**
- ☛ An examination of the **function** of the behaviour to the person exhibiting the behaviour.
- ☛ Ask yourself... *“What is this person communicating with this behaviour”*

## Time for a story

“Nathan’s parents had a difficult time handling his tantrums at home. With help from his teachers, they asked the question, “What happens just before the behaviour occurs?” They determined that the tantrums typically occurred just before they wanted Nathan to get ready to go somewhere in a hurry. By making sure they always gave him enough time, or gave him support when time was short, the tantrums were avoided. “

from Progress without Punishment by Anne Donnellan, Gary Lavigna, Nanett Negri-Shoultz, and Lynette L.Fassbender, Teacher’s College Press, 1988.

## So what function did the tantrum play for Nathan?

Right! It communicated his challenge with making a transition too quickly!  
And clearly, too...

Ok.

I understand basically what functional analysis is.....

## What is ecological analysis?

- ☛ Once again, the **clue** is in the name.....
- ☛ Ecological analysis is about what is happening in the **ecology** or **environment** of the person to impact his or her behaviour

## Yes, it’s story time again!

George, who doesn’t use words to talk, exhibited the behaviour of rubbing his eyes a lot at his supported environment workplace and becoming agitated (picking at his head).

These behaviours only occurred in the work setting.

After ecological analysis and a study of the environment, the staff developed a hypothesis that George was struggling with headaches as a result of the fluorescent lighting in his workspace...

## The saga continues.....

Staff (working with George) had been trying to change what they perceived as the “self-abusive” behaviour..... After the analysis, they tried a different approach to the behaviour.

They gave George a ball cap to wear in the presence of the lights which shielded

him and encouraged him to put it on whenever his eyes or head were bothering him.

This is an example of an ecological or environmental analysis that resulted in an intervention that enhanced the quality of life of everyone involved.

Cool, huh?

Think of it as a puzzle...

- ☛ There are many pieces that fit together to create a whole picture.
- ☛ Sometimes we have all the pieces - other times we may be missing a few
- ☛ And remember; the puzzle is not 2 dimensional or flat - it is a **3D** puzzle... such is the nature of our humanity!

The tools we use to put together the puzzle include:

Objective analysis of what we notice  
Clear and objective documentation  
*and most importantly...*  
A desire to fully understand  
the person we are supporting with

**integrity, compassion, and heart**

So the analysis helps with understanding  
why a person does what they do  
so we can support them more effectively.

What is an antecedent?

And why should I care????

- ☛ Places, people and times that appear to directly affect the occurrence of the behaviour.
- ☛ What happened *or didn't happen* to the person or in the general environment ...  
**JUST BEFORE THE BEHAVIOUR OCCURRED**
- ☛ An antecedent is anything that happens before a behaviour..... Ante = before
- ☛ Sometimes you can see the antecedent, sometimes you can't...
- ☛ Sometimes the person can tell you about it, other times it may be very hard to

detect...

☛ it can even be a memory...

## What is a setting event?

- ☛ Temporarily distant events that may influence the likelihood that positive or problematic behaviour will occur.
- ☛ These setting events impact the Environmental Context in powerful ways and therefore can impact behaviour.
- ☛ Sometimes we know about them, sometimes we don't!

Let's try a few examples...

Think of this morning...

- ☛ Had to alter typical routine this a.m.
- ☛ Felt ill when you first woke up
- ☛ Determined that this was going to be a good hair day
- ☛ Didn't have time for breakfast
- ☛ Didn't have to rush getting ready this a.m.
- ☛ Forgot to bring something that you meant to bring

A few more...

- ☛ Found one of your favourite things in your closet to wear today
- ☛ Got a good sleep last night
- ☛ Someone yelled at you this morning
- ☛ Had a relaxed pleasant ride to the college
- ☛ Had car trouble on the way to the college
- ☛ Had some good news this morning
- ☛ Had some sad or hard news this morning

Was your behaviour changed or impacted as a result of any of these setting events?

## What is a consequence?

**A**ntecedent leads to **B**ehaviour which leads to

**C**onsequence as simple as **ABC**...

## What is a reinforcer?

A Positive reinforcer is:

- ☛ any stimulus, event or condition
- ☛ whose presentation immediately follows a response
- ☛ and increases the frequency of that response

## How about Punishment?

What's that?

A procedure in which an aversive stimulus is presented immediately following a response, resulting in a reduction in the rate of the response.

*Eg. Parking tickets make me pay more attention to the time on the meter!*

## And Extinction?

What's that?

- ☛ Basically, it's **ignoring**.
- ☛ A procedure in which the reinforcement of a previously reinforced behaviour is discontinued. In nontechnical language, extinction is often referred to as the withholding of rewards or attention or as the nonrecognition of behaviours that interfere with learning or development.

This all feels like common sense to me.

## Who put this stuff all together?

Lots of folks..... Watson, Pavlov and Skinner were considered some of the pioneers.....people were trying to understand the "science of behaviour".

*"The interest of the behaviourist in man's doings is more than the interest of the spectator - he wants to control man's reactions as physical scientists want to control and manipulate other natural phenomena."*

*excerpt from Behaviourism by John B. Watson*

I've heard of Skinner.....

## Who was he and what did he do?

- ☛ BF Skinner is often referred to as the "Father of Behaviour Modification" and Operant Conditioning
- ☛ He followed Watson (the law of effect) and Pavlov (the guy with the drooling dog) and built on the "do this and you'll get that" thinking of the early 1900's.
- ☛ He took this thinking a few steps further and explored ways to **control** the behaviour of others.

There are also some newer leaders in this work.....  
Anne Donnellan & Gary Lavigna (with Nanett Negri-Shoultz,  
and Lynette L.Fassbender) wrote a book called

## **“Progress without Punishment”**

David Hingsburger wrote a book called

## **“Behaviour Self”**

Dave invites us to consider the following points...

- ☛ All behaviour communicates and as such, behaviourists or those who wish to use behaviourism must see behaviour as a legitimate language that needs decoding.
- ☛ Anyone who attempts to program away a behaviour without understanding its meaning is unethical. We don't need to be right but we do need have tried to interpret the language.

Furthermore...

- ☛ Behaviour programming should leave the individual in more control of their lives, not just their behaviour.
- ☛ A person who uses behaviour approaches will soon see that the behaviour often communicates about an inappropriate environment or inappropriate treatment. As such, the therapist will become very quickly and often very radically, an advocate.

Excerpted from Behaviour Self, David Hingsburger,  
Diverse City Press, 1996.

Alfie Kohn wrote a book called

## **“Punished by Rewards: The trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and other Bribes”**

All very cool books...

all very different approaches...

Understanding behaviour and supporting people  
sounds like a noble goal.

Controlling people sounds less noble...

Let's chat...

☛ What do you think about behaviourism and behavioural analysis?

☛ Can you see how it could be useful in supporting individuals?

☛ Have behavioural principles ever been used or misused in your own life?

☛ What guidelines will you remember as you go forward in your career?

Read and explore and observe and question and discuss.....  
find out for yourself about  
**your personal philosophy** and approach to behavioural  
support. What resonates? What doesn't?

“The more I learn, the less I know.”

Jane Mackay 2001