

Conduct an ABC analysis

Summary

Some students may display unproductive or even challenging behaviours which affect their participation in the classroom. In many instances, students are responding to something that has happened or they are trying to get something to happen. Conducting an ABC analysis enables you to understand why and when a behaviour occurs. Analysing and understanding the environmental factors that occur before, during, and after a behaviour is exhibited can help teachers to more effectively manage the classroom and student behaviours.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 4.1 - support student participation
- 4.3 - manage challenging behaviour

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

Preparing to Teach

Why use an ABC analysis?

All behaviour is purposeful and communicates a message. In many instances, the purpose of unproductive or challenging behaviour is in response to something that has happened or an attempt to try to get something to happen.

Conducting an ABC analysis will help you to understand the purpose or function of a behaviour of concern or how the behaviour is influenced by environmental factors.

What does ABC mean

- A = Antecedent or trigger. What happens before the behaviour
- B = Behaviour. What the child does
- C = Consequence. What happens after the behaviour

How does it help?

An ABC analysis process enables you to understand why and when a behaviour occurs by collecting data on the behaviour, as well as what happens before and after it occurs.

An ABC (Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence) approach to analysis of behaviour assists you to:

- identify the specific circumstances that influence a student's behaviour

- describe the student's unproductive behaviour in detail
- understand the actions of others (unintended or intended) in response to the behaviour which may encourage the student to continue using the behaviour

Antecedents

- actions of staff and peers
- circumstances that trigger a behaviour
- events in the environment

Consequences (intended and unintended)

- any responses/actions of staff and peers that follow the behaviour

How does it work?

Data is collected on the behaviour, as well as what happens before and after it occurs.

Antecedents

- Antecedents are what come immediately before the behavioural response. Antecedents are the actions, circumstances, or events in the environment that trigger a behaviour.

Behaviour

- Establish what the behavioural response was to the antecedent. Data on the ABC of the behaviour is collected and recorded as soon as practicable after the behaviour has occurred.
- Once you have data spanning multiple occurrences, times, and settings (where possible) has been collected, it should be reviewed and any patterns noted. These patterns can be used to work out the purpose of the behaviour. The purpose of the behaviour can be to communicate or to avoid or obtain something (activity, attention, object).

Consequence

- Once the purpose of the behaviour is known, the environment can be adjusted with the aim of addressing students' needs, thereby reducing the likelihood of the behaviour and allowing for the teaching of a more productive alternative /replacement behaviour.
- NB: As you choose strategies to respond to behaviour, always refer to the student behaviour policy and guidelines within the relevant state or school system.

The collection of data

Data collection is an essential part of the analysis process. Data is collected on the identified behaviour, as well as on what happens before (antecedent or trigger) and after it occurs (consequence). When the data is analysed, a pattern may emerge, which can help to understanding what students are attempting to communicate and how relevant environmental modifications can be implemented to help meet their needs.

Collecting the data

Data on the behaviour can be collected in different ways.

- anecdotal notes
- a simple table
- a purpose built data sheet

It works better if:

- you describe the behaviour of concern in detail before data collection begins, so that all staff members are collecting data on the same behaviour
- you are able to collect data on the same behaviour at different times across indoor/outdoor activities, locations, and peer groups for an agreed period of time e.g., 2 weeks
- the ABC analysis is clearly documented in order to inform a plan

It doesn't work if:

- behaviour is automatically labelled as 'annoying' or 'bad' rather than understood to have a vital communicative function
- data collection does not sample multiple indoor/outdoor activities, locations and peer groups over time
- modifications are made that are not based on data and that don't modify the aspects of the environment which were acting as an antecedent trigger to the behaviour of concern
- too many modifications are made at once, or more modifications are made before the first ones have been determined to be effective or not.

In the classroom

Step 1: When a behavioural incident occurs

- Ensure the safety for you and your students.
- Stay calm.
- Carefully observe the behaviour, noting any As, Bs, and Cs
- Attempt to establish what the antecedent was, either through visual observation, asking the student (perhaps when in a settled state), or the students who were around at the time.

Step 2: Record information

As soon as practicable when the situation has settled, use the chosen ABC data sheet to record the As, Bs, and Cs of this incident.

When recording the information consider the following:

- **Antecedent** - what happened prior to the behaviour, who was involved, where did it occur and when
- **Behaviour** - the information should be specific, detailed and objective
- **Consequence** - what did the teacher do, what did the child do and what how did the environment respond (the paint spilled while the child was doing their art, the water from the tap splashed over their uniform)

A template is available in the resources section.

Step 3: Repeat data collection

Repeat this data collection procedure over multiple occurrences, times, and settings.

You may need to collect data from other teachers or staff, for example specialist teachers or teachers who have observed behaviours whilst on yard duty.

Step 4: Analyse your data

At the end of the observation period, analyse your data collection sheet for patterns related to:

- time of day
- activity or task
- type of behaviour (shut down, crying, upset, physical etc)
- social interaction factors (peers and/or adults)
- sensorimotor factors e.g., noise levels, lighting

Use identified patterns to work out the purpose (i.e., function) of the behaviour which may be to:

- communicate a need
- avoid something such as an activity, attention, object
- obtain something such as an activity, attention, object
- response to the environment - sensory needs

Step 5: Share and plan

Share this information with families and colleagues in preparation for a planning meeting

Materials informing this practice

Amanda N. Kelly: Functions of Behavior. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0CnHVpht0>

Anna R: The ABCs of Behavior. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxclM8klHuY>

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning [CSEFEL]. (2013). Inventory of practice for supporting social-emotional competence. <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module1/handout4.pdf>

Division for Early Childhood [DEC]. (2014). DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education 2014. <http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

Indiana Resource Center for Autism: *Observing Behavior Using A-B-C Data*. <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/observing-behavior-using-a-b-c-data.html>

Iovannone, R., Dunlap, G., Huber, H., & Kincaid, D. (2003). Effective educational practices for students with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 18(3), 150-165.