On Books

Destination Unknown: A Behavior Analysis Journey into Autism Education using Sulzer-Azaroff and Associates' *Applying Behavior Analysis across the Autism Spectrum: A Field Guide for Practitioners*

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Following a workshop I conducted a few months ago, I was asked by an eager group of services agencies and parents, “We have funding, but do you know any *good* behavior analysts who can provide these services?” It seems to me that question is asked more often these days, which is a good thing—it’s nice to be wanted.

By many measures, behavior analysis has turned the corner; the demand for behavior analysts is broad, and the resistance to our science is fading. It was not so long ago that behavior analysts struggled to be heard while squelching rumors that behaviorism’s wealth of promise had turned bearish.

Today, we find ourselves in the public eye at a greater frequency and almost always in a highly favorable spotlight (e.g., see *Department of Defense Report and Plan on Services to Military Dependent Children with Autism*, 2007). Our services are in great demand, and (would you

believe it?) we cannot produce behavior analysts quickly enough to meet the growing needs. An interesting dilemma: How do we maintain our standards for high-quality training of practitioners and resist the temptation to churn out practitioners, perhaps before they receive adequate supervision in the field? A related problem: The specifications and parameters of supervised experience have been delineated (Behavior Analysis Certification Board; BACB) to some extent, but beyond a task list, there is little to no uniformity in how to teach behavior analysis practitioners, especially those outside graduate training and internship programs.

In *Applying Behavior Analysis Across the Autism Spectrum: A Field Guide for Practitioners* (Sulzer-Azaroff & Associates, 2008; hereafter, *Field Guide*), this dilemma has been addressed head on in a systematic and effective way. This clever and important book will open doors for shaping practitioners in their natural day-to-day settings and will go far to mediate the shortage problem that we currently face. From the lively narrative story that begins each chapter (a metaphor for the behavior analysis journey), to its inconspicuous programmed teaching design, *Field Guide* carefully escorts the new field practitioner (hereafter, practitioner) into the many challenges encountered in service delivery.

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Great care has been taken to preserve the fidelity of the science, principles, and practice of behavior analysis. In addition, *Field Guide* places a strong emphasis on best practices. Topics such as informed consent, literature review, data-based treatment decisions, supervision, practicing within ones competencies, and so on, establish the ethical foundation for the beginning practitioner. And if that is not enough to entice the practitioner to embark on the journey, *Field Guide* provides nearly every form and worksheet imaginable, thereby alleviating the burden of developing comprehensive formats and allowing the practitioner to get down to the business at hand—analyzing and changing behavior.

There are numerous benefits from using *Field Guide*. Supervisors will immediately discover a cohesive and flexible program to provide guidance to practitioners across a variety of contexts. Practitioners will begin to conduct evidence-based behavior analysis treatment in a manner that defines *best practice*. Recipients of behavior analytic services will gain from behavior principles that have been applied in the most effective and conscientious way. In the long run, *Field Guide* can provide a foundation for integrating and establishing behavior analysis as the guide to effective decision-making at many levels. This, at least, was the outcome achieved at our program in which supervisors and practitioners shared in multiple successes including improved staff development techniques and competency-based training, improved academic and social skills, and more precise assessment of reinforcer preferences.

The first portion of this review provides an overview of the *Field Guide* and a selection of the topics contained in each chapter. The second portion of this review is a brief summary of the results of using *Field Guide* in a practicum seminar con-

ducted this past year at our program in Lafayette, Colorado.

Overview

The preface specifies the purpose: “to extend applied behavior analysis students’ knowledge into application using a programmed sequence of behavior analytic practice exercises students can use to teach children on the spectrum.” The authors correctly refer to the growing global need for properly trained persons who can apply behavior analysis, professionals as well as family members. Throughout the book, there is an explicit assumption that the practitioner has received instruction in the basic principles of behavior analysis and that the *Field Guide* serves to strengthen applied behavior analysis content (principles and procedures). The authors readily acknowledge that *Field Guide* will not generate fully competent practitioners in this estimated 15-week course but will provide the foundation for practicing applied behavior analysis in a competent manner.

In all respects, *Field Guide* interfaces nicely with BACB content and serves as a programmed sequence to navigate supervised field experience. *Field Guide* emphasizes the importance of establishing a verbal community of peers to share experiences and ideas, and provides useful suggestions, such as Internet group discussion and discussion topics related to assigned activities.

It should come as no surprise to readers familiar with Sulzer-Azaroff’s instructional style that *Field Guide* places an emphasis on positive reinforcement for performance and for progress. The activities are structured with behavioral objectives, accompanying forms, and estimated completion time. Activities may be repeated, with new instructions added on to build the repertoire of a practitioner who can conduct applied behavior analysis and report findings in a clear, concise manner.

Format

Field Guide is divided into 15 units, or weeks, each with specific objectives for the practitioner and supervisor. Activities are clearly written, along with time estimates for completing the activities and forms for completing each assignment. Although one could conceptualize the organization into traditional chapters, using weeks provides more structure and clearer parameters for the practitioner, and is a great tool for the supervisor to track practitioner progress through the course. *Field Guide* provides a progress chart as a visual aid for completion of the weekly assignments. Maintaining the schedule permits the practitioner to remain on the proper course and can alert the supervisor to rapid students and slower students. There are suggested points within the book for the supervisor to complete written feedback for the practitioner (see Week 8).

Weeks 1 and 2 provide an overview for the practitioner and field supervisor. Expectations are delineated clearly with suggestions for the minimum criteria for mastery of material (e.g., 90% accuracy for field assignments). In addition, videotaping sessions is strongly encouraged (five minimum) for review by the supervisor. These chapters contain various informed consent and release of information forms that can be altered with little effort to meet nearly any setting or population. *Field Guide* places an emphasis on teaching programs using an all-positive approach; that is, practitioners are encouraged not to use punitive methods to decrease unwanted behavior.¹ Rather, the acquisition of other constructive skills is recommended (e.g., academic, self-management and

self-care, social, and communicative skills).

Weeks 3 and 4 guide the practitioner through the process of gathering information about the child and the setting. Record reviews, interviews, and direct observations are discussed in the context of getting to know the student and the existing learning objectives. The practitioner is encouraged to explore several instructional objectives and begin to determine a tentative objective. At this stage, the practitioner develops narratives and extracts antecedents, responses, and consequences. As part of the shaping process, a sample narrative is provided for the practitioner to hone his or her skills at extracting the important elements: setting, reinforcers, staff interactions, resources, and the idiosyncratic culture. Like many of the forms provided in this book, the authors have embedded prompts to aid the practitioner in identifying those elements that are, or will be, pertinent to developing an effective teaching plan. Excellent supplemental mini-tutorials are provided for antecedent-behavior-consequence analyses as well as for specifying target responses.

Week 5 is devoted to two main objectives: observation and participation. The practitioner is directed to learn about the contextual matters related to the instructional setting and to participate in the learning objectives firsthand. This permits the practitioner to examine the pedagogical methods currently used and to record the first videotapes so that the practitioner and supervisor can assess teaching interactions. *Field Guide* provides a video schedule that outlines the assignments for upcoming weeks and the practitioner's responsibility for each assignment. For practitioners who are not familiar with using video recordings, *Field Guide* provides well-developed forms that contain prompts for enhancing the process of recording and reporting the video segments. The practi-

¹ For contextually inappropriate behaviors that have been identified in service plans and have been functionally assessed by a qualified behavior analyst, identified replacement behaviors could be used for a project.

tioner is instructed to begin exploring empirical articles related to the area of interest. The authors provide a list of journals, including recommendations for those that place a strong emphasis on empirical peer review related to behavior analysis applied to education in autism spectrum disorders. As the authors point out, "the vitality of the field rests on the practitioner's skills to remain abreast of new developments and well-established practices" (p. 80).

Week 6 prompts the practitioner to refine the teaching objectives and formulate the measurement design, data-collection procedure, and graphing method. The practitioner is advised that a revision in the objective might be necessary, and conveniently, a revision form is provided for any changes in the teaching objective. The practitioner is prompted to consider sensitivity in individual education plan (IEP) protocols, and the final teaching contract form requires explicit description of the teaching procedure and objectives. An excellent mini-tutorial on validity, reliability, and treatment fidelity is provided. *Field Guide* assigns a review of two more journal articles—one related to research, preferably addressing the teaching objectives, and the other related to conceptual or theoretical issues. The authors provide two different article review forms that contain prompts to help the practitioner learn to identify relevant points and information for these two different types of articles.

At this point, the practitioner prepares to collect baseline data and videotape additional sessions. Week 7 focuses on the evaluation of the measurement methodology and the completion of the first of three reliability measures. To assist the practitioner, an index of agreement form is provided to derive reliability of the recording system. The practitioner is once again prompted to review, summarize, and critique an article that emphasizes data collec-

tion and graphing conventions. *Field Guide* provides a template for sketching the results (ABAB withdrawal design or multiple baseline) and provides a self-checklist to ensure that proper graphing convention is followed. The mini-tutorial for using Excel for reversal designs is user friendly and should bring the practitioner's graphing skills up to speed. The practitioner is prompted to complete the first video recording of the proposed teaching sessions.

Week 8 is an important week that integrates the various research components—displaying baseline data, interpreting performance patterns, identifying main components of the teaching plan, and relating all of these to the teaching objectives and instructional setting. The supervisor is alerted to examine each practitioner's progress and to note which practitioner is on the proper time course and which practitioner needs additional support. By this point, the practitioner may be experiencing panic because he or she is falling behind in the assignments. The authors are sensitive to this possibility and discuss the treatment of prevailing contingencies (i.e., rate vs. quality of practitioner effort). The practitioner quickly finds solace with the prevailing wisdom: "teaching your students to do it *right* is more important than getting it done fast" (p. 143). This week also provides the practitioner with an opportunity to reflect on the original objectives and to alter them based on data gathered and new narratives, or based on the discovery that the original objectives seem to have veered off course from the IEP. The teaching plan is further refined into more explicit components and is tested to ensure fidelity. Thus, this particular chapter focuses on the details that enter into asking and refining experimental questions (Johnston & Pennypacker, 1993; Sidman, 1960).

Week 9 is an open week, inviting the practitioner to take a break, step

back and review all of the accomplishments attained thus far. This activity is not to be taken lightly. Many times I've struggled to ski down a slope that I was convinced humans were not meant to ski, but when I was halfway down, stopping to look upward at what I had accomplished made me brave (and crazy) enough to continue.

Week 10 instructs the practitioner to continue the teaching strategies, collecting data, recording videotapes of sessions, analyzing data and all teaching components, and reviewing journal articles—each of the separate skills established in previous weeks now come together into a whole cohesive repertoire.

Week 11 addresses generalization and maintenance concerns. The practitioner completes the weekly progress report using a form that prompts the relevant information from the previous weeks so that essential elements are well represented in the reports, and that these elements are strengthened in the practitioner's verbal repertoire. *Field Guide* assigns a review of a journal article that incorporates aspects of generalization and maintenance.

Activities in Weeks 12 through 14 strengthen the practitioner's competencies via the completion of weekly progress reports, each requiring a thorough examination of important elements of the instructional practices. The forms used for the weekly progress reports are generally standardized in regards to topics covered, but the prompts have slight variations, a subtle way of inviting the practitioner to examine different elements of teaching. *Field Guide* assigns the practitioner to summarize a journal article related to indirect effects of teaching procedures.

Week 13 provides the structured format for the final report, with prompts and suggestions that refer to previous field activities, completed forms, and relevant information needed to complete the report. The

astute practitioner will quickly identify the rationale and benefit of completing all previous assignments: a nearly complete, organized report that meets formatting criteria for publication.

Week 14 activities leave no doubt regarding the elements of the end product. The practitioner must complete a final version of the graphs, describe the results in approximately one paragraph (figure caption), compose an abstract, and complete the introduction. *Field Guide* provides suggestions for completing each of these, and the practitioner, by Week 15, is engaged in completing the final draft of the report.

Style

Field Guide is an effective tool for establishing a supporting and nurturing environment for new practitioners. The contents are well organized and thorough. Similar instructional guides are often comprised of measurable objectives that can come across to novice practitioners as sterile. The writing style of *Field Guide* is refreshing and at times, charming, from the opening narrative story until the last page: "And congratulations. You did it!" Success is inevitable for the practitioner who has completed all of the assignments.

Sulzer-Azaroff's writing is reminiscent of her teaching and speaking style. The style is encouraging and always positive, connoting the authors' clear understanding of, and respect for, the undertaking of the practitioner, his or her decision to practice applied behavior analysis, and the tremendous responsibility and trust to teach effectively to children with autism. And as one would expect from Sulzer-Azaroff, she maintains a watchful eye on principles of behavior analysis. The organization of *Field Guide* has obvious overtones of shaping, fading, errorless discrimination, and fluency, but they are so gracefully embedded

into a casual language that by the time the practitioner reaches his or her final destination, it is very clear that the path was the most direct route. Think Holland and Skinner's (1961) *The Analysis of Behavior* in plain, everyday language, and applied to the field.

Field Guide in Practice

In January, 2008, we used *Field Guide* in our practitioner course at our facility in Lafayette, Colorado, which serves persons with pervasive developmental disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. This course was approximately 15 weeks long and was structured directly from *Field Guide*. To supplement the book, practitioners were assigned articles and chapters that covered a variety of topics in behavior analysis, ranging from conceptual and theoretical subjects to selected articles from the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. Whenever possible, the readings corresponded to the topic covered in *Field Guide*. Practitioners were asked to complete all assignments and forms regardless of whether the forms pertained to the project. A group discussion Web page was developed for the practitioners to engage in the discussion topics suggested in *Field Guide*.

Field Guide successfully navigated our practitioners through the course. At the end of 15 weeks, practitioners were either completing their projects or were far enough along to continue conducting sessions to complete the project. As expected, practitioners were reporting that they becoming overwhelmed as they fell behind on assignments, but we echoed the authors' mantra—rate versus quality of practitioner effort—and the practitioners seemed reassured. I believe that although there are suggested time lines for completing the assignments, instructors, supervisors, and facilitators are well advised to emphasize these to the practitioner at the onset of the course. A day-timer

or similar tracking tool would be helpful and should be reviewed at each supervision meeting. Practitioners who managed and planned out their sessions fared better in completing the assignments.

Practitioner feedback on the provided forms varied. The populations served at our agency vary in diagnosis and ages, and it was not uncommon for practitioners to comment that the forms are designed to teach children rather than adults; however, *Field Guide* provides all of the forms on the accompanying CD, and this made it easy for practitioners to edit the forms to meet specific situations. In general, practitioners found the forms extremely useful, far beyond the context of the course. One practitioner enthusiastically described the forms as "sweet!"

Other practitioners had favorable comments. Three of the five practitioners had to reformulate his or her original experimental questions (e.g., simplifying broad questions into more specific questions). In this respect, *Field Guide* prompted examination of specific elements, prepared practitioners to step back and let the data guide decisions. One practitioner exclaimed, "it's amazing that [*Field Guide*] anticipated all the twists and turns of behavioral treatment."

Conclusion

There are many barriers for newcomers to behavior analysis, such as locating a cohesive and structured learning guide that captures those elements that comprise effective evidence-based treatment that is the hallmark of our science. The evolution of training materials mirrors the evolution of behavior analysis. I can recall a time when training materials were sparse and the content was limited to procedures in a "how to use" format.

Sulzer-Azaroff and Associates' *Field Guide* is a marvelous addition to the behavior analysis literature and is a must-own companion for

supervisors who seek a means to organize and orient new practitioners in navigating from scientific principles to field practice. This is particularly true for supervisors who are compelled to use a book that is aligned with the BACB guidelines. *Field Guide* graduates will use this book many times over, hopefully to supervise their own practitioners.

In many respects, *Field Guide* also serves as a perfect accompaniment to organizations that seek to bring behavioral policies and procedures into compliance with state regulatory agencies. Whereas many organizations are governed by nonrigorously defined values, *Field Guide* has effectively operationalized these terms into specific behavioral repertoires that would stand up to the most stringent state reviews.

The timing of *Field Guide* could scarcely be better. It is published at a time in which behavior analysis is being tapped by our society to meet the challenges of an explosion in autism spectrum disorders, an educa-

tional system on the brink of collapse, and a culture desperate for an effective behavioral technology to accompany technology to prevent global warming. My father used to tell me "make haste, slowly." *Field Guide* is a quality handbook that will meet the growing demand to shape a new generation of behavior analyst practitioners, with an eye to quality and best practice.

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