Six Useful Websites for Practitioners Working in Schools

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Abstract

A substantial, and seemingly increasing, number of Board Certified Behavior Analysts work in pre-K–12 schools. Many of them will be unfamiliar with the roles and activities of other school professionals, as well as with the structure, function, and mandates of schools. This article introduces 6 websites that are devoted to education. Accessing these free and user-friendly sites can provide practitioners with information and training activities that will help them function comfortably and competently in schools and benefit their clients to a greater extent. Our purpose in writing this article is to introduce and recommend these websites.

Keywords Collaboration · Education · Professional competency · Self-study

Behavior analysts have long worked in schools (e.g., Sulzer-Azaroff et al., 1988), and many currently do so. A recent survey by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) found that 12% of Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) worked in educational settings, second only to those working in autism (BACB, n.d.). School-based BCBAs can serve in a variety of roles, both as in-house staff and as outside consultants or service providers. Their work may center around behavior deceleration, skill acquisition, staff training and development, or systems analysis. As schools expand their approaches to supporting students, BCBAs may work to develop and implement multitiered systems of supports, providing targeted academic and behavioral supports for struggling students both with and without disabilities. Additionally, they may work as behavior specialists or coaches in early learning programs, as providers of staff training and development, or as coordinators for larger district, county, and state systems.

School-based BCBAs often serve on individualized education plan (IEP) teams for students with disabilities. They work to assess, develop, and support the implementation of plans and procedures to help these students acquire skills in their deficit

areas. They may also work to reduce or eliminate problem behaviors that are inhibiting educational progress. The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), the federal regulation that governs the provision of services for students with disabilities, requires that a behavior intervention plan based on a functional behavior assessment (FBA) be considered when developing the IEP of a student if the student's behavior interferes with that student's learning or with the learning of classmates. It also requires schools to have properly trained professionals available to conduct FBAs and develop appropriate intervention plans, although it does not specify who is "properly trained" to do so. Arguably, and demonstrably, BCBAs fit the bill, and this legislation opened a door and source of funding that allowed BCBAs to be hired to fulfill these and other functions in schools, either as consultants or as in-house staff.

BCBAs working in schools inevitably interact with a diverse pool of professionals who have varied educational backgrounds and approaches to treatment (McLean, 2016). Although it is challenging to do so, BCBAs must be able to work productively within a multidisciplinary team in order to meet their ethical responsibility to consult and collaborate with other professionals (BACB, 2014, Code 2.03b). Productive collaboration is also essential if BCBAs are to provide effective services for students, who have a recognized right to such treatment (Van Houten et al., 1988). One way in which BCBAs can become more effective team members is by understanding the perspectives, ideologies, and interventions of other professions (Demiri, 2017; Donaldson & Stahmer, 2014). For example, it is beneficial to delineate behavior-change interventions commonly used by other professionals, determine whether those interventions are

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empirically supported (i.e., safe and effective), and consider their compatibility with behavior-analytic principles (Brodhead, 2015; Newhouse-Oisten, Peck, Conway, & Frieder, 2017). Doing so will allow BCBAs to work with the multidisciplinary team to create and implement the best treatments possible for students.

To be effective, behavior analysts working in schools must understand how schools, and the people who work in them, function, as well as the general factors that influence these individuals. School-based BCBAs may be called upon to engage in activities that require knowledge of, for instance, curriculum scope and sequence, academic assessment, and special education law and to work jointly with professionals (e.g., speech therapists, special education teachers) who approach students' behavioral issues from perspectives unlike their own. Behavior analysts are directed to "provide services, teach, and conduct research only within the boundaries of their competence, defined as being commensurate with their education, training, and supervised experience" (BACB, 2014, Code 1.02). Our experience, as well as perusal of the BCBA course requirements and BACB Task List (BACB, 2017), suggests that very few newly minted BCBAs will be truly competent in performing at least some of the tasks required of them in school settings. For instance, in our experience, many BCBAs are unfamiliar with the special education laws that dictate how IEP teams are configured and how they make decisions. As IEP team members, BCBAs are apt to be baffled and frustrated, and unlikely to be able to use their skills and knowledge to maximally benefit students. With time, and repeated meetings, they get better.

As this example illustrates, learning need not, and should not, end when a behavior analyst receives a graduate degree, passes the BACB exam, and is certified. BCBAs who apply themselves can easily gain information that will help them function effectively in schools. They can, for example, learn the roles and functions of various school professionals, the legal mandates that frame all school activities (e.g., IDEA requirements), the terms and acronyms commonly used in education, and the high-stakes variables that influence the behavior of teachers and other staff (e.g., standards for teacher evaluation). Perhaps most importantly, they can learn about evidence-based educational practices commonly used in schools but not necessarily addressed in behavior analysis graduate programs.

To become competent and collaborative service providers, most school-based BCBAs will need to develop knowledge and skills beyond those provided by their graduate training. The BACB prompts them to do so by contacting the literature base, engaging in relevant training and supervised activities, and consulting with appropriate people (BACB, 2014, Codes 1.02b and 103). The purpose of this article is to direct BCBAs to resources that provide useful information about a wide range of topics that are important in school settings. These resources are commonly used in training special educators,

but in our experience, they are not widely used in training behavior analysts or accessed by trained BCBAs.

Empirically Supported Treatments (ESTs) in Behavior Analysis and Special Education

Both behavior analysts and special educators emphasize consistently using interventions that have the support of empirical evidence. The BACB emphasizes clients' right to effective treatments, which are defined as treatments that are literature based, scientifically supported, most effective, and individualized to the client (BACB, 2014, Code 2.09). Similarly, in education policy, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2016) requires the use of "evidence-based interventions," and IDEA (2004) emphasizes the use of "scientifically based" instructional practices. As various disciplines adopt evidence-based behavior-change strategies, there is considerable debate regarding what such practices should be called (e.g., evidenced-based practices, ESTs), how such practices should be defined, and what criteria should be used to assess them (Slocum et al., 2014; Slocum, Spence, & Detrich, 2012). Standards for classifying interventions as empirically supported are not consistent across the field of education (Cook, Cook, & Collins, 2016). However, practices designated by legitimate organizations as ESTs are consistently "supported by multiple, high-quality studies that utilize research designs from which causality can be inferred and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes" (Cook & Cook, 2011, p. 73).

Many, but not all, ESTs are commonly described in behavior-analytic terms, and it is valuable for school-based behavior-analytic practitioners to be familiar with the language, including the acronyms, that other school personnel use to describe ESTs, and to be aware of treatments that do not stem from behavior analysis. ESTs recognized in special education are summarized by the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), the IRIS Center, and the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII), among others. These sources of information, along with others relevant to school-based BCBAs, are described in the following sections. Table 1 provides the web address of each organization's website, summarizes the topics that can be accessed through each website, and lists the key resources that each website provides. All of the listed websites provide a wide variety of information; we only highlight features that are likely to be of interest to many school-based practitioners.

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC is an information database created in 1964 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (Institute of Education Sciences, [n.d.-a](#); U.S. Department of

Table 1 Websites for Practitioners Working in Schools

Resource	Website	Topic Areas	Key Resources
ERIC IRIS Center	https://eric.ed.gov https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu	Various Accommodations Assessment/progress monitoring Assistive technology Behavior and classroom management Collaboration Content instruction Differentiated instruction Disability Diversity Early intervention/early childhood Individualized education plans Juvenile corrections Learning strategies Mathematics Multitiered systems of supports/Response to Intervention/ intensive intervention Reading, literacy, and language arts Related services School improvement/leadership Transition Behavior support Literacy Math	Search engine Activities Case studies Evidence Based Practice and high-leverage practice summary tools Faculty resources Fundamental skills sheets Glossary of terms Information briefs Interviews Professional development resources Videos
National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)	https://intensiveintervention.org		Briefs Learning modules Research library Sample lessons and strategies Templates Tool charts Videos
National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT)	https://transitionta.org	Autism-specific transition services Secondary education Transition services	Annotated bibliographies Data tools Lesson plans Quick guides Tool kits Blueprints Briefs Evaluation briefs Evaluation tools Evaluation examples Presentations Publications Research publications State implementation surveys Tools Training resources
OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	https://www.pbis.org	Bully prevention District level Early childhood Equity and PBIS Exemplar from the field Frequently asked questions Family engagement Family partnership High school PBIS Juvenile justice Mental health Multitiered systems of support PBIS and the law PBIS in the classroom	

Table 1 (continued)

Resource	Website	Topic Areas	Key Resources
What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)	https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/	Restraint and seclusion School mental health SWPBIS for beginners Tier 1 supports Tier 2 supports Tier 3 supports Training Literacy Math Science Behavior Children and youth with disabilities English learners Teacher excellence Charter schools Early childhood (pre-K) Kindergarten to 12th grade Path to graduation Postsecondary	Evidence snapshots Interactive tables Intervention reports Practitioner guides Reviews of individual studies “Students Like Yours” search

Education, 2014). It allows professionals to search education literature and resources. ERIC claims to be “the world’s largest and most frequently used education digital library, composed of more than 1.3 million bibliographic records” (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.-a).

ERIC provides a research database in which behavior analysts can search for practically any topic relevant to education. It allows for access to a variety of research reports and other documents spanning topics across the field of education, and searches for publications in a large number of journals relevant to education. The broad scope of ERIC is a major strength of this resource. So, too, is its ease of use. ERIC’s platform is very similar to that of common search engines likely to be familiar to BCBAs, such as Google Scholar, and allows for several different search strategies (e.g., by topic, by topic and journal, restricted to peer-reviewed articles, by topics restricted to peer-reviewed journals with full text available on ERIC).

As an example of the potential value of ERIC, educators and other school practitioners have increased their focus on the effects “trauma” has on students, and any BCBA working in schools will encounter professionals and programs fully committed to helping students who have experienced trauma. To work effectively in such a situation, the practitioner needs to know what “trauma” as conceived by educators entails, as well as what the BCBA can contribute to its treatment. Therefore, searching ERIC using “trauma” and “applied behavior analysis” as search terms would be a reasonable strategy for any practitioner unfamiliar with the topic. Such a search conducted recently (September 11, 2019) and restricted to peer-reviewed publications yielded only two results, both old (1984 and 1990) and neither devoted to trauma as currently conceived by educators.

Clearly, turning to the behavior-analytic literature will not help a practitioner understand trauma as viewed by school colleagues, and what is needed are good summary articles. Another ERIC search, conducted on the same day, using the search terms “trauma and the schools” and restricting coverage to peer-reviewed articles with full texts available on ERIC, yielded 75 results. Some of these articles (e.g., Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, & Santos, 2016; Honsinger & Brown, 2019) provide good summaries of trauma as it relates to contemporary education and would be valuable resources for behavior-analytic practitioners. Others, however, are less useful; a problem with all large search engines is that their results require careful winnowing.

IRIS Center

The IRIS Center was created by Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College, one of the best education programs in the country (U.S. News and World Report, 2019), through

support from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). It offers an extensive database of Evidence Based Treatments that improve outcomes for learners, specifically targeting diverse populations and students with disabilities (IRIS Center, [n.d.-a](#)). Nineteen different topic areas are covered (see Table 1), with resources that include case studies, activities, information briefs, interviews and videos, Evidence-Based Practice and high-leverage practice summary tools, and fundamental skills sheets (see Table 1; IRIS Center, [n.d.-b](#)). The case studies and activities allow for the reader to read about a new skill or strategy and practice applying it through a hypothetical scenario. Information briefs provide a link to information from outside providers (e.g., "A Teachers Guide to Neuromuscular Disease" from the Muscular Dystrophy Association). Fundamental skills sheets provide a brief overview of a key skill or practice (e.g., behavior-specific praise, proximity control) and answer the questions "What is it?" and "What do we know about this skill/practice?" The sheets overview procedures, offer tips for implementation, list things to keep in mind, provide implementation examples, and list foundational resources and references. In addition to this core content, resources are provided for faculty and professional development providers, as well as a glossary of terms relevant to the various topic areas.

The IRIS Center is a good resource for BCBAs looking for more training in school practices and for quick guides that summarize topics and problems that are commonly encountered in school settings. The online modules can be used to provide training to school-based professionals (e.g., the FBA module), as well as for the BCBA's own training. The summary tools and fundamental skills sheets are valuable in providing quick information to BCBAs.

A school-based BCBA may, for example, work in a classroom that uses peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) in teaching reading, have a student on their caseload that receives services through the juvenile justice system, or work with students with hearing impairments. In these cases the BCBA could use the IRIS Center to access (a) the PALS module, which provides an interactive overview of the PALS program; (b) the "Youth With Special Needs in Justice Settings" fact sheet, which provides key information and considerations, as well as an overview of how special education law applies in these settings; and (c) the learning activity, which teaches practitioners about working with students with hearing impairments and common assistive technology they use in doing so.

National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)

The NCII provides information and tools useful in providing intensive intervention in the areas of literacy, math, and

behavior management (American Institutes of Research, [n.d.](#)). The NCII focuses on a research-based approach called data-based individualization (DBI), which makes data-based decisions through an integration of assessment data, validated interventions, and strategies for intensification of intervention and supports (American Institutes of Research, [n.d.](#)).

The NCII offers tool charts, which provide expert ratings on various assessments (screeners and progress-monitoring instruments) and interventions, which are updated annually. The NCII also provides guidance for implementing intensive interventions for teaching math and literacy and for managing undesirable behavior, as well as systems to guide data-based decision making. It provides useful online learning modules, templates, and sources of further information. Lastly, the NCII provides information targeted to specific groups of practitioners, which are categorized as state and local leaders, educators, trainers and coaches, and higher education faculty. For example, the educator page contains several online training modules, briefs, videos, tools, and sample lessons that are grouped into six different categories. If a practitioner desires additional information about any topic covered by the NCII, it can be obtained by contacting the Research Library, which allows for search by resource type, DBI process, subject, implementation guidance and considerations, student population, and audience.

The NCII provides a resource that allows BCBAs to become familiar with many nonbehavioral strategies and practices that they are likely to encounter while working in schools. Additionally, the NCII provides information and resources for school-wide behavior and academic support systems. A BCBA working in schools is likely to be part of an intervention team that works within the context of school-wide systems of support. Therefore, learning about such systems should make the BCBA a more productive team member. Lastly, the NCII allows users to search by specific descriptors (e.g., content area, student characteristics), which allows for easy access to relevant content.

BCBAs who are working in high school math classrooms might, for instance, need to know more about the Math 180 program. Using the NCII, they could access a tool chart focusing on this math program, which will give them an evaluation of its quality, results, and intensity, as well as links for further resources related to Math 180. Or, if the BCBAs mentioned previously were working at the systems level and were looking for information about how to structure data-based school intervention team meetings, the NCII provides a full page of resources that includes handouts, videos, templates, and meeting agendas.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT)

NTACT focuses on secondary education and services for secondary students with disabilities. This online resource

provides annotated bibliographies, data tools, lesson plans, quick guides, and tool kits devoted to a variety of topics (see Table 1; OSEP, Rehabilitation Services Administration, [n.d.](#)). It also gives users a database of transition-focused practices that are evidence based, as well as promising practices and unestablished practices. The tool kits are highlighted as a primary feature of the site; they consist of step-by-step guides for application and guides to further resources. Users can click on the “Top Resources” link and select a practitioner role (e.g., administrator, educator, transition specialist) to see a summary of the most beneficial resources for given professionals. Lastly, NTACT offers a specific page focusing on transition resources for students on the autism spectrum, which includes research-based frameworks, resources, and webinars.

NTACT provides information and resources in the area of transition planning. As the field of behavior analysis expands beyond early intervention, transition planning will become an increased area of focus. Additionally, BCBAs working with students with disabilities in schools will be required to abide by the laws and regulations guiding transition planning for these students. NTACT provides support for doing so. For example, a BCBA serving as a member of the IEP team will be responsible for ensuring that the IEP meets Indicator 13 requirements. A BCBA may not be familiar with Indicator 13 and what it requires. NTACT provides a checklist that provides this information.

OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

The OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is another online resource funded by OSEP and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. It supports schools, districts, and states in building effective PBIS systems, which are intended to produce beneficial social, emotional, and academic outcomes for students (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, [2019](#)). PBIS systems are common in schools and provide an overarching system of behavioral supports for students. To be effective, as well as tolerated by other personnel, BCBAs must understand and work within the PBIS framework.

Information provided by the Technical Assistance Center is arranged by the categories of school, family, community, training, research, and evaluation. The school, training, research, and evaluation categories are most relevant to BCBAs. The school and training categories contain a total of 21 links (see Table 1), with school making up 14 and training the remaining seven. Each school link contains a narrative overview of the topic, with resources provided at the bottom. Resources vary depending on the topic but include presentations, publications, and training modules. In training, each

pathway provides further links to various training resources, including training manuals, data, forms and tools, and PowerPoint presentations, among others. Research provides a reference list of scholarly studies under the categories of Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) and mental health. Evaluation contains links for evaluation briefs, evaluation tools, evaluation examples, and state implementation surveys.

The blueprints, briefs, and tools provided by the Technical Assistance Center are straightforward resources that allow BCBAs to learn about PBIS. The training videos and presentations are good educational tools, and the reference lists direct interested users to relevant published research and resources. Service delivery in schools is often dictated by PBIS systems mandated at the school, district, and state levels, and the Technical Assistance Center provides thorough information on those systems.

School-based BCBAs, for example, may be experts in the behavioral principals underlying PBIS but unfamiliar with the service delivery model used within schools. The Technical Assistance Center offers a “SWPBIS for Beginners” page that gives an overview of SWPBIS, as well as links for further study and tools, videos, presentations, publications, and training resources on the topic. Should BCBAs be required to serve on a SWPBIS team at the building or district level, which is more than plausible, the Technical Assistance Center offers a premade PowerPoint covering the topic, which would provide valuable guidance and would empower BCBAs to do their work.

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)

The WWC is an online resource that reviews existing research on various programs, products, policies, and practices in education in an effort to answer the question “What works in education?” (Institute of Education Sciences, [n.d.-b](#)). Twelve general topics are covered by the WWC (see Table 1). For each topic, a table is provided that lists relevant interventions and grade/age levels targeted by each intervention, a narrative summary, “Evidence Snapshot” and “Intervention Report” attachments, and an interactive table (including outcome domain, effectiveness rating, grades, and improvement index). The Evidence Snapshot is especially helpful. It is a user-friendly resource that provides a summary of what each intervention entails, findings regarding the effectiveness of the intervention, outcome domain ratings (i.e., evaluations of quality) and an improvement index, a summary of research settings and samples that met standards for quality, and related resources.

Another helpful feature of the WWC is the search feature “Students Like Yours.” This search filter allows a practitioner to select grade, race, ethnicity, gender, class type, school type,

urbanicity, and region/state within a topic area in order to identify interventions that may have been effective with similar students. If the practitioner chooses, the search can be further refined by specifying multiple topic areas, delivery methods, program types, and outcomes.

Further WWC resources include practice guides, which can be searched by the same 12 topic areas and provide recommendations for addressing school and classroom problems that are based on reviewed research, but do not focus on one particular intervention or practice. Examples of practice guide titles include “Improved Mathematical Problem Solving in Grades 4 Through 8” and “Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom.” The practice guides are useful for BCBAs as sources of general information about the kinds of interventions likely to be suggested by other school personnel, but the specific intervention reviews are more valuable for practitioners who need to enhance their knowledge of a specific intervention or those who are seeking specific interventions to address a particular problem. Lastly, the WWC provides reviews of and summary data from individual studies. Information provided includes study design, detailed findings, and study context. Individual studies can be searched by one of the 12 topic areas, by study design, and by WWC rating. A glossary of terms is also available, with a focus on research-related terms that may be helpful in understanding some of their reports.

The WWC provides access to an extensive research base that has been evaluated and synthesized for ease of use. This allows BCBAs to easily access information about educational interventions, including the research findings that support their use. Like other resources we reviewed, it has a search function that allows BCBAs to focus on interventions used with particular kinds of students or in classrooms with designated characteristics.

The WWC is a convenient source of information about common educational programs and interventions. If, for example, a school-based team is using a leveled literacy intervention (LLI) to provide reading support to struggling readers, BCBAs would want to be familiar with this intervention in order to support students on their caseloads and work effectively on school improvement teams. The WWC provides research reviews on LLIs, including an Evidence Snapshot and intervention report.

The WWC is also useful for helping BCBAs train other school professionals. School-based BCBAs are experts in FBA and function-based interventions and may be called upon to train other school personnel in this area. The WWC provides evidence snapshots, intervention reports, and research reviews that present FBA in a manner that targets educators, and these materials could be used to good avail by the BCBA.

Discussion

The six resources we have described provide free and fairly easy access to a great deal of information regarding the

structure, function, and cultural characteristics of pre-K–12 schools, as well as some information about higher education. There are, of course, other sources of useful information for BCBAs working in schools. For example, the Promising Practices Network (<http://www.promisingpractices.net>) provides some meaningful information, but we chose not to cover it because its funding was discontinued in June 2014, and its contents are no longer up to date. As another example, the Best Evidence Encyclopedia (<http://www.bestevidence.org>), which reviews and compares top academic programs and interventions (e.g., curriculum, intervention package programs), is a valuable resource for school-based BCBAs highly involved with academic interventions.

Regardless of the resource that a BCBA uses, reading relevant articles and working through educational exercises, such as those provided by the IRIS Center, are useful strategies for initiating changes in a practitioner’s behavior, such as the development of an appropriate vocabulary, that make working in schools easier and more productive. Contact with relevant literature and self-study are recognized ways for BCBAs to gain competence (Brodhead, Quigley, & Wilczynski, 2018), and the websites we have overviewed can be useful in this regard. Contacting them obviously does not ensure competency, but it is a step in that direction—a step that can, as our examples illustrate, be taken with relative ease and reasonable assurance of benefit. Given that access to the websites is free, that is a great return on investment.

Data availability Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no data sets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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