!OBSERVE *FAST* by **Psychsoft**

GETTING YOURSELF UP AND RUNNING WITH THE SOFTWARE

There are some preliminaries that need to be taken care of before you move to the software. Skip those areas of which you are familiar, or use them as a review.

STEP ONE

A most important component in completing a successful behavioral observation is understanding the concept of "operational definition". This term describes an observable act an individual performs, which is of interest to you , and which you have decided to set to a higher scientific standard than anecdotal recording. The description is in the form of an action verb which describes the "operations" involved in the behavior of interest. Often teachers and parents use ambiguous words to describe difficulties they are having with children, leading to a wide range if interpretations and perceptions. The goal in functional assessment or any observation is to be as precise as possible. Just what did the teacher mean when s/he stated that the student was behaving badly; or that the class is out of control. Defining problems in observable, repeatable, and measurable terms allows everyone involved in the assessment, to communicate with one another more clearly. Take a look at the following list and decide what is ambiguous and what is open to fewer misinterpretations:

To know versus to write down on paper
To understand versus to recite
To be bad versus to be out of seat
To be disrespectful versus to be non compliant
To be shy versus to avoid eye contact

Hopefully, you have identified the left-hand column as ambiguous and the right hand column as more precise and more open to observation. In summary, valid behavioral observations require that behaviors being observed are: visible (or have a visible correlate); defined by their operations; repeatable, measurable, and have clear parameters.

STEP TWO

Now we are ready to define the parameters of our observation by meeting with staff who made the referral. The purpose of these meetings is to explore with staff their perceptions of the referral problem. The result of these meetings will be agreement as to the problem or problems, and agreed operational definitions of problem behaviors.

1. The caregiver or teacher is asked to describe their perceptions of the problem in their own words. What is the "worst" problem the child is exhibiting and where

does it occur most. Problems and locations are discussed until, all difficulties have been described. The psychologist should be an active listener during this phase

2. Now we ask our interviewee what the child does that makes him difficult to teach as related to the issues discussed in number one. We help the teacher or parent identify 4 to 5 observable characteristics.

3. The next step is to rank order the behaviors by severity, and ask if this is the order of priority

4. Now have the teacher or caregiver rank order the behaviors of concern by ease of intervention, in other words which one could we successfully change with the least effort or complication.

5. Also of interest and critical for your intervention is to ask the caregiver or teacher which of the behaviors discussed would have the most positive impact on this child's chances of success; in other words, which deviant behavior if changed would have the most positive impact on the rest.

6. Focusing on the positive, using numbers one through five, see if the teacher can describe positive or pro social behaviors and other strengths the same student displays.

The result of step two is a set of behavioral descriptions and parameters of severity, as well as a description of positive behaviors. Typically the school psychologist would work with the behaviors that are most critical as described by the teacher but that are the easiest to change.

STEP THREE

Assessment of Function. In this phase caregivers are asked *why* they think the child performs or behaves in the ways described above. For example, they may have information regarding physical and/or psychological traumas the child has experienced in the past. The interviewer may use one of several published forms available to gather these data, or may use suggestions included in these materials, please check our website (www. Psycsoft.com) for links to functional analysis materials. *Hint:* start with the most immediate events and work your way back, immediate events usually have the most impact on behavior. Of course, *why* should also be directed to what the caregiver thinks the student "gains" from engaging in the unacceptable behaviors described above. Asking the caregiver to describe what happens when the student engages in these behaviors will help shed light on the how the environment may support the target behaviors.

STEP FOUR

The school psychologist reviews with the teacher or parent, their perceptions of the time or times of day and / or location the referred behaviors occur most often, occurs least often; again, the caregiver is asked the same question regarding positive behaviors.

THE RESULTS

From this interview, the Psychologist has a good idea of the caregiver's perceptions of the problem; as well as a catalog of behavioral excesses, deficiencies, and possible replacement behaviors. Furthermore, antecedents and consequences have been evaluated, which are critical to the functional assessment.

The product of this exercise is a well-defined set of behaviors both positive and negative, and the environments they are most likely to occur. These well-defined sets of behaviors will also be used to create the intervention plan, which will be generated after observations are complete and interview data incorporated into the assessment. We are now ready to begin using the !Observe software to gather assessment data.

USING THE !OBSERVE PROGAM BY PSYCHSOFT

This would be an opportune time to familiarize yourself with the !Observe program by actually reading the Manual! Even though !Observe is one of the most intuitive software programs you will ever use, this ease of use hides a powerful set of tools which can be utilized to craft you assessment. First of all the Program includes a set of pre configured templates which can be very helpful in allowing a district to develop local norms; as well as, giving the assessment specialist a standardized observational instrument of which there are very few. The strength of !Observe is its flexibility; templates are easily changed and completely new ones created in minutes. This flexibility allows for a three level observation to be established:

Level I Data Gathering and General Screening: Using the preconfigured templates or those generated by the School Psychologist, allows for a topographical view of the student's behavior. This generates the data needed to support the fact that certain behaviors are occurring at a critical rate to support a change in placement or program.
Utilizing a student comparison template, the School Psychologist could compare the referred student with a number of others in his or her classroom on a number of critical behaviors. Again these data could be used to support a change in placement.

Level II Viewing Specific Behaviors: Based on the above observations, or the product of the interview process mentioned above, the School Psychologist can eliminate the larger topographical template and narrow the observation to behaviors associated with a specific referral problem focusing on both target and replacement behaviors. Data generated will result in valuable baseline information when a management plan is created.

Level III Functional Assessment using !Observe: Once target and replacement behaviors have been decided upon, the Psychologist can use the Program to evaluate context and reinforcers. For example, if "out of seat" behavior is a target, the observer can create a template describing typical contexts in which the student is found, and which may contribute to this problem behavior. The "out of seat" template, may have contextual behaviors such

as structured class situation, unstructured class situation, teacher command, student teasing, etc. You are free to use the information gathered in the referral process and your own hypotheses during level I and II observations, to generate context. Of course, now you can use the Program to describe the relationship between referral behaviors and reinforcement, by creating a template which describes the responses given to the student under specific behavioral circumstances, for example: concrete reinforcers given, immediate reinforcement Vs delayed, who delivers the reinforcement can also be evaluated. The result of this level of observation is about as close as anyone can get to an applied behavior analysis in an applied setting. And goes beyond the requirements of Functional Assessment.

So why do it? …… **Because it is the only way to generate a useful behavioral intervention.**

Behavioral interventions require accurate baseline and consequential analyses. It is this type of assessment that gives the Psychologist the data needed to create a realistic and useful management plan. And to understand what "drives" the student