**PS385: Targeted Topics in Applied Behavior Analysis**

**Discussion Board Lecture: Unit 8 Media Lecture**

**Unit 8: Long-term Effectiveness of Behavior Change**

**Lecture:**

Welcome, students! Okay – you have conducted a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), identified the antecedents and consequences connected to the target behavior – those variables that work to trigger the behavior and to maintain it, and, you have learned how to identify the probable function of the behavior through the examination of antecedent and consequence data over time. You have learned how to design a simple-to-implement, function-based behavior intervention plan (BIP). Now what? You implement the BIP, of course. The client’s behavior is modified quickly – at least, the alternative behavior is used in the training environment – the client’s home. But, it isn’t being used at school, at the park, or when the parents take the family to the local burger restaurant. What did you forget? In Unit 8, you will discover the reasons many behavior plans fail to produce changes in untrained environments and why the changes that were targeted in the BIP fail to last over time. The rationale for, and the process of, programming for generalization and maintenance will be covered in this unit. Programming for generalization and maintenance will help to insure that changes made will be changes expressed and retained.

Unit 8 will focus instruction on three main types of generalization, i.e., response maintenance; setting/situation generalization; and response generalization. Why is programming for generalization so important? While behavior analysts spend a great deal of time implementing our behavior plans proficiently and consistently, we cannot be with our clients in all situations - or indefinitely. A priority in our work with clients is that the behaviors we work to train are maintained over time and are utilized in all appropriate situations and settings. This typically does not happen without some effort on our part!

Let’s examine response maintenance first! “Response maintenance” refers to the extent to which a client continues to perform a behavior after the intervention has been wholly or partially removed. What you have learned in your study of applied behavior analysis (ABA) is that the best way to insure a behavior’s maintenance is to insure the behavior is met with reinforcement – either each time it is expressed (continuous reinforcement) or occasionally (intermittent reinforcement). How do we manage to insure that long after we’ve left the scene, reinforcement for desired behaviors continue? The primary approach to insuring that desired behaviors are maintained is to select target behaviors that will meet naturally existing contingencies of reinforcement. For example, training a client to hold a door open for someone carrying an armful of packages will surely get the client a “Thank you so much!” Training a middle school student to study the night before a science test will earn that student a higher grade on the test and a “Well done” from parents. These naturally existing contingencies of reinforcement are the tools that will help to insure that desired behaviors are maintained.

Setting/situation generalization is the extent to which a learner expresses the desired behavior in settings or situations that are different from the instructional setting (the setting in which the behavior was trained).

The extent to which a learner exhibits untrained responses that are functionally equivalent to the trained response is “response generalization.” Functional equivalence refers to the outcome of the response. Functionally equivalent responses serve the same purpose as the trained responses.

In addition to selecting behaviors that will meet naturally existing contingencies of reinforcement, promoting generalization also requires identifying all desired behavior changes and all environments in which the learner should emit the desired behaviors after training is removed.

There are many strategies that you can use to promote generalization. Some of the less complex approaches include:

1. Teach sufficient exemplars: This strategy requires that you teach a subset of all possible stimulus and response examples and assess the learner’s performance on untrained examples.

2. Conduct generalization probes: A generalization probe is a measurement of a learner’s performance of the desired behavior in a setting or stimulus situation in which direct training did not occur.

3. Design the instruction setting to be very similar to the generalization setting. This can be accomplished by bringing into the instruction setting those features typically found in the generalization setting.

4. Teaching loosely: This strategy requires randomly varying non-critical aspects of the instructional setting within and across teaching sessions. This helps to reduce the likelihood that non-critical stimuli will acquire control over the desired behavior and makes it less likely that the learner’s performance will be thrown by the presence of a “strange” stimulus in the generalization setting.

5. Switch to intermittent schedules of reinforcement once the behavior is well established. This encourages generalized responding (and maintenance) by making it difficult for the learner to know whether his/her next response will produce reinforcement. And, as you recall, behaviors maintained through intermittent reinforcement are more resistant to extinction.

In Unit 8, you will learn the five principles of promoting generalization of behavior. These principles include:

1. Minimize the need for generalization (to the extent possible).

2. Conduct generalization probes before, during, and after instruction.

3. Involve significant others whenever possible.

4. Promote generalized behavior change with the least intrusive, least costly tactics possible.

5. Contrive intervention tactics as needed to achieve important generalized outcomes.

Programming for generalization requires a great deal of planning and effort on the part of the behavior analyst, but it is well worth the time and effort! Our goal is to teach behaviors that will increase our clients’ opportunities for reinforcement, which will also increase their quality of life.

Thank you for viewing your Unit 8 lecture!