SUSTAINING OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS: SOS
By Michael J. Boyle, Ph.D.

Over the past year, this column has been dedicated to meeting the needs of atypical learners within Catholic school settings. This article is part two of a three-part series that will focus on tools for addressing behavioral issues. The first column in NCEA Notes May 2012 issue (available at luc.edu/ccse) focused on the use of prevention as the first strategy to address the behavioral needs of students. This issue will focus on providing a framework for analyzing misbehavior in order to develop appropriate strategies. The final installment will present a process for understanding the communicative intent of misbehavior.

Intervening with challenging behaviors

This column will describe some common learning disorders that may be seen in the classroom and outlines a set of strategies designed to address these specific learning needs. Many teachers will find these approaches to be effective with a wide range of students. By using these kinds of strategies, teachers will be able to expand their repertoire of instructional approaches and stretch the continuum of students they can serve well.

Focus on students with challenging behaviors

Nothing is more trying to a classroom teacher than to work with a student with challenging behaviors. Often, behavior problems seem random or happen “out of the blue.” However, upon closer examination, behavior tends to take a predictable path. It is up to the adults to figure out the path of the student’s behavior. Once this is examined, appropriate interventions can be determined. This process also will increase the likelihood of success of the chosen strategies.

The ABC’s of misbehavior

To truly understand misbehavior, it is important to understand the ABCs—the antecedent, the behavior and the consequence. Analyzing these different aspects of behavior is part of a process called “Functional Assessment of Behavior.” This analysis will help tailor the corresponding interventions to increase potential success in addressing the student’s behavioral needs. (See Figure 1)

Often, behavior problems seem random or happen “out of the blue.” However, upon closer examination, behavior tends to take a predictable path.

The more difficult task is to identify the slow trigger. These are the events that occur before the behavioral episode but do not evoke a quick response. For example, Johnny comes to school and everything would suggest that it is a great day. However, at recess time, Johnny gets frustrated when he loses a game of tag. Now, part of the frustration can be due to losing a game. But in this case, this could also be the time that Johnny lets all of the frustration of the day come out in his behavior. In this case, the slow trigger is the slow build up of frustration that has occurred throughout the day.

Figure 1: The ABC’s of Understanding Behavior
disruptive the behavior is) can help to concretely describe the behavior and lead to developing effective interventions.

**Consequence**
In this analysis, consequence does not refer to punishment. Consequence refers to the resulting circumstances after the behavioral event. It is the consequence that usually reinforces the behavior. Behavior rarely occurs in a vacuum. There is usually something that is reinforcing the behavior, causing it to continue. It should be noted that sometimes our response to misbehavior could inadvertently be reinforcing misbehavior.

Conducting an ABC analysis (See Figure 2) can help to effectively describe the chain of events in an episode of misbehavior. For example, Susie, a second grade student, has some frustration with reading out loud in large group settings. When asked to read out loud in class, Susie starts a tantrum and disrupts the class with loud protests and crying. In response, the teacher uses a time-out process. This is not an unusual classroom response. However, in this case, the time-out procedure may actually be reinforcing the misbehavior. Susie may be experiencing frustration and embarrassment by her academic weakness. The time-out used by the teacher actually removes her from his source of embarrassment, inadvertently reinforcing the tantrum. The unintended message is “every time I feel frustrated, I can have a tantrum and then get removed from the frustrating situation.”

In order to conduct an ABC analysis effectively, the process should be written out using a chart such as the one in Figure 2. A blank chart is available for free download at www.luc.edu/ccse. Using a structured process will help account for all of the elements in an episode of misbehavior.

In analyzing the chart, several strategies can be applied. The teacher could choose to control the antecedents by using another strategy (other than reading in large groups) to practice and assess oral reading. Also, the teacher can choose to reduce academic frustration by remediating oral reading skills or matching the appropriate reading texts to the student skill level. Using this approach, the behavioral responses will be weakened, reducing the need for the time-out process.

**Next steps**
Using this process will not “cure” misbehavior. It is a tool to understand and analyze the misbehavior. This process can help increase the potential for success in dealing with misbehavior. It does take some practice! However, the process does become easier and can lead to developing successful strategies for supporting students with behavioral difficulties.

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**Figure 2: An Example of the ABC Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quick Trigger:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading in large groups</td>
<td>Tantrums and crying</td>
<td>Time-out in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slow Trigger:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Frustration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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