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BRANCHING MINDS

2025
MTSS mini SUMMIT
Behavior Deep Dive

Mini Summit Agenda

12:00 – 1:00 PM ET
Function of Behavior - It Ain't as Easy as "ABC"

1:00 – 1:15 PM ET
Break

1:15 – 2:15 PM ET
Session A: A Deep Dive Into Behavioral Screening and Tiered Support Systems
Session B: Turning Tough Moments Into Connection: De-Escalation through Conversation

2:15 – 2:30 PM ET
Lunchtime Spotlight: Canopy Case Management from Branching Minds

2:30 – 2:45 PM ET
Break

2:45 – 4 PM ET
Closing Session: Panel Discussion – Tier 3 Behavior and Wraparound Services in Practice

BRANCHING MINDS

MTSS mini SUMMIT
—— Behavior Deep Dive ——
2025

Function of
Behavior
It Ain't as Easy
as "ABC"

MTSS mini SUMMIT
Behavior Deep Dive
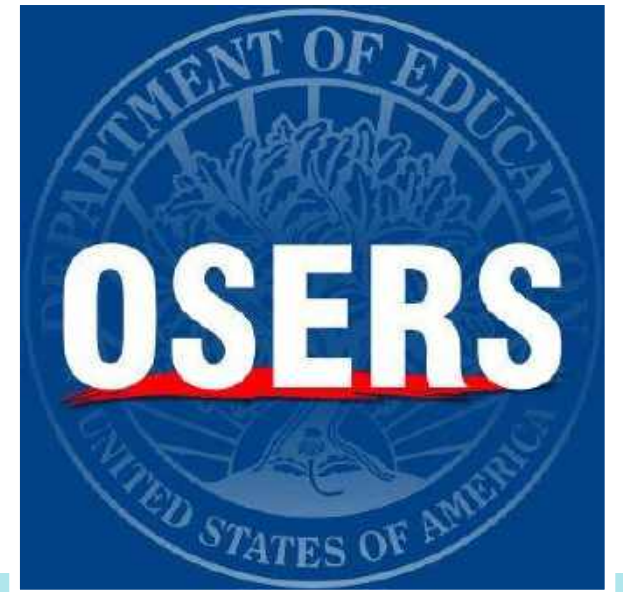
The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) has offered this definition of a functional behavioral assessment:

"Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is used to understand the function and purpose of a child's specific, interfering behavior and **factors** that contribute to the behavior's occurrence and non-occurrence for the purpose of developing effective positive behavioral interventions, supports, and other strategies to mitigate or eliminate the interfering behavior."

However, neither the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) nor the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides a legal definition of an FBA.

So into this vacuum rushed operant conditioning!

Operant conditioning: also called instrumental conditioning, is a learning process in which voluntary behaviors are modified by association with the addition (or removal) of reward or aversive stimuli. The frequency or duration of the behavior may increase through reinforcement or decrease through punishment or extinction.

B. F. Skinner

The Skinner Box

Loudspeakers

Lights

Food dispenser

Response lever

Electrified grid
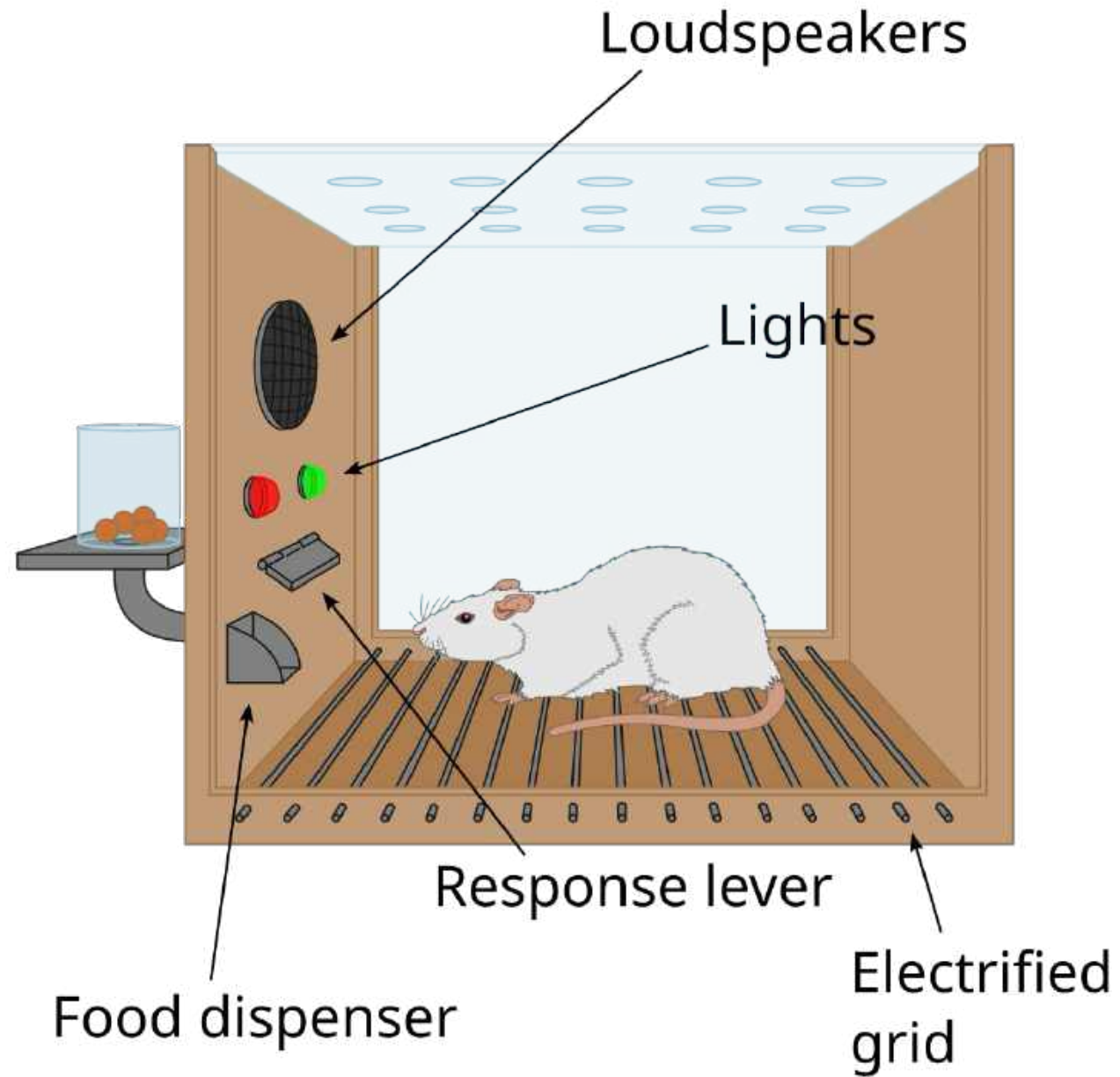
A Skinner Box with a Skinner inside (actually, it was a crib)

Debby Skinner (11 months) has lived in a soundproof, dirtproof box since birth. "We keep the temperature 78, humidity 50. She is never

Behaviorists were less concerned with what was happening inside the "black box" (i.e., the mind) and focused more on the stimulus-response relationship. They believed that all behavior could be explained through conditioned responses to environmental stimuli. The "black box" was considered a black hole of mystery, but it was accepted that its contents were not as important as the visible outcomes.
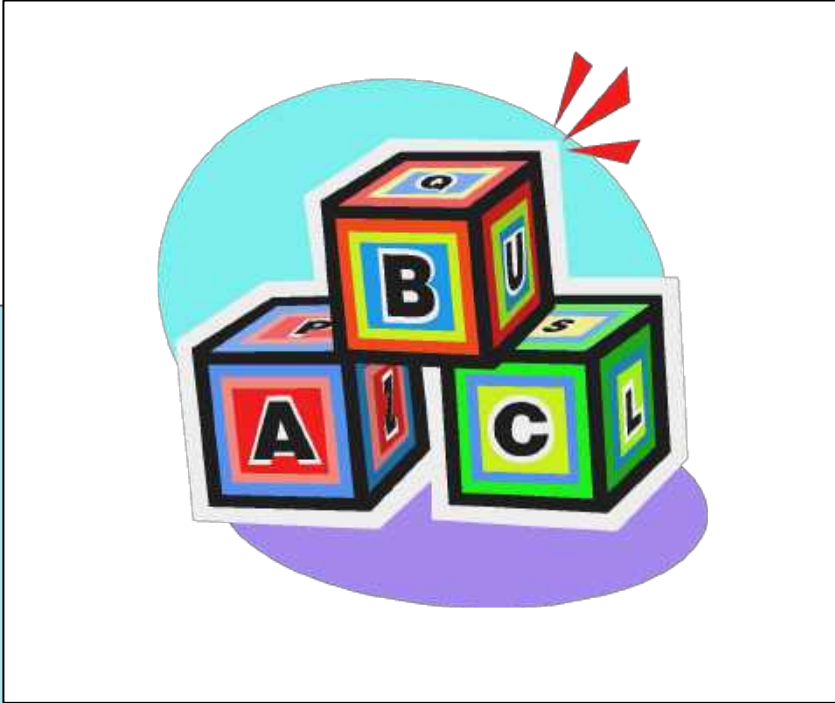
Stimulus

Response

ABCs of Behavior

Antecedent   **B**ehavior   **C**onsequence

Functional Behavior Assessment

Determine the function of the behavior

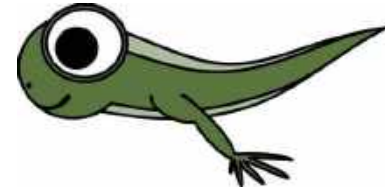| To get or obtain:	To escape or avoid:
Attention	Attention
Food	Difficult task/ activity
Toys	Undesirable activity
Hugs	Sensory Stimulation
Sensory Stimulation	Social Stimulation
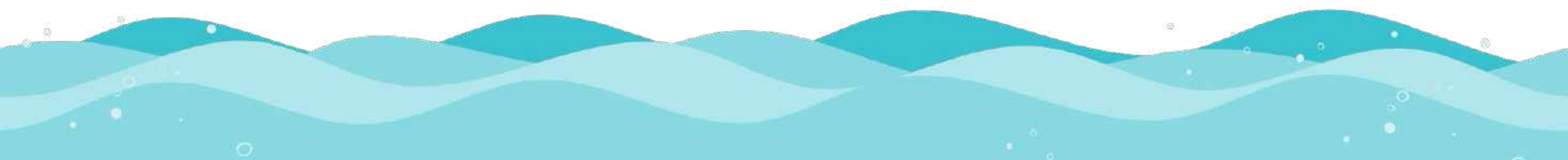
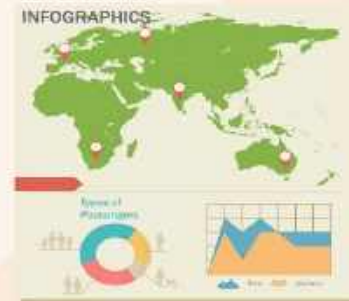# This model works well with

The operant classroom?

Operant conditioning requires two factors in order to be effective:

❯ **Deprivation:**

the reinforcer cannot be readily available on a non-contingent basis

❯ **Salience:**

the reinforcer has to be more important than anything else in the environment.
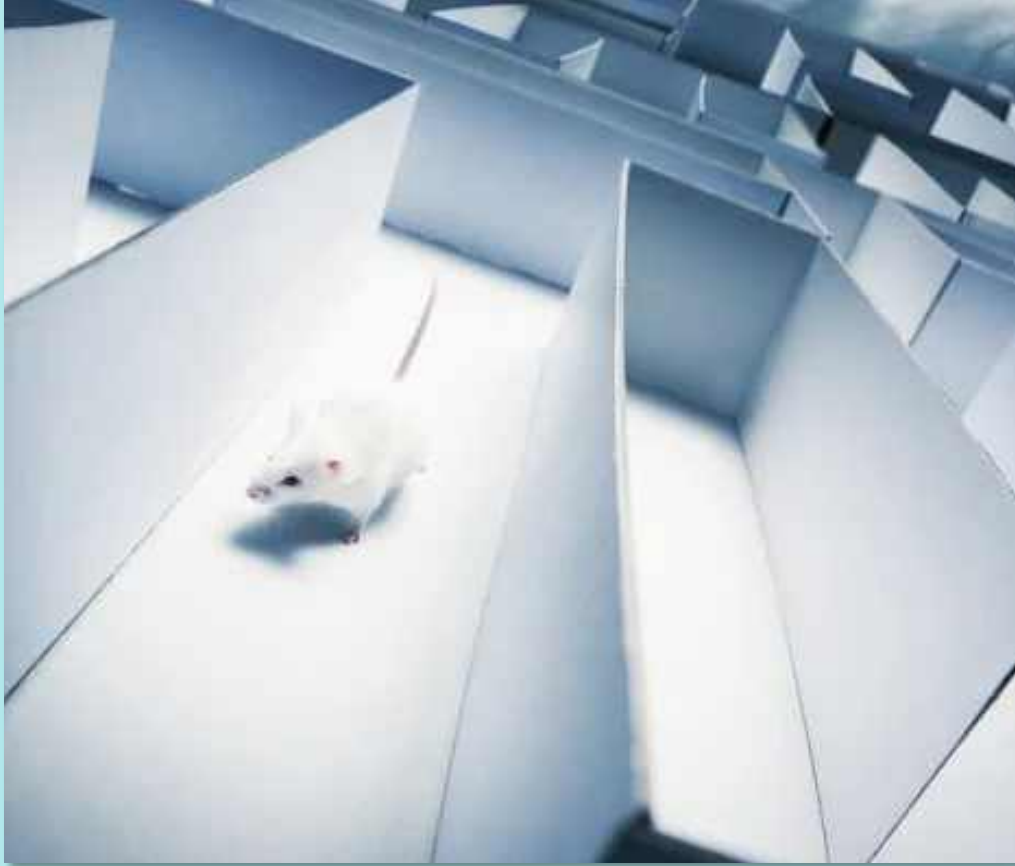
> **Without deprivation and salience ...**
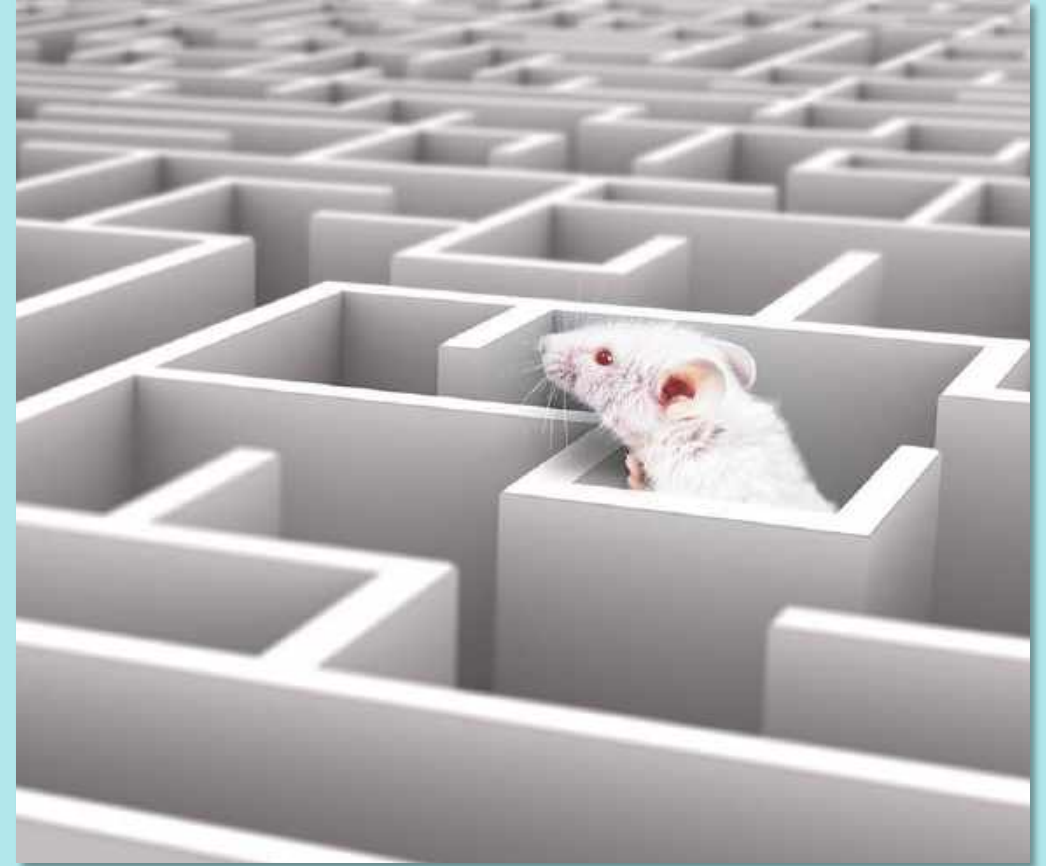
> **the subject does not perform the task.**
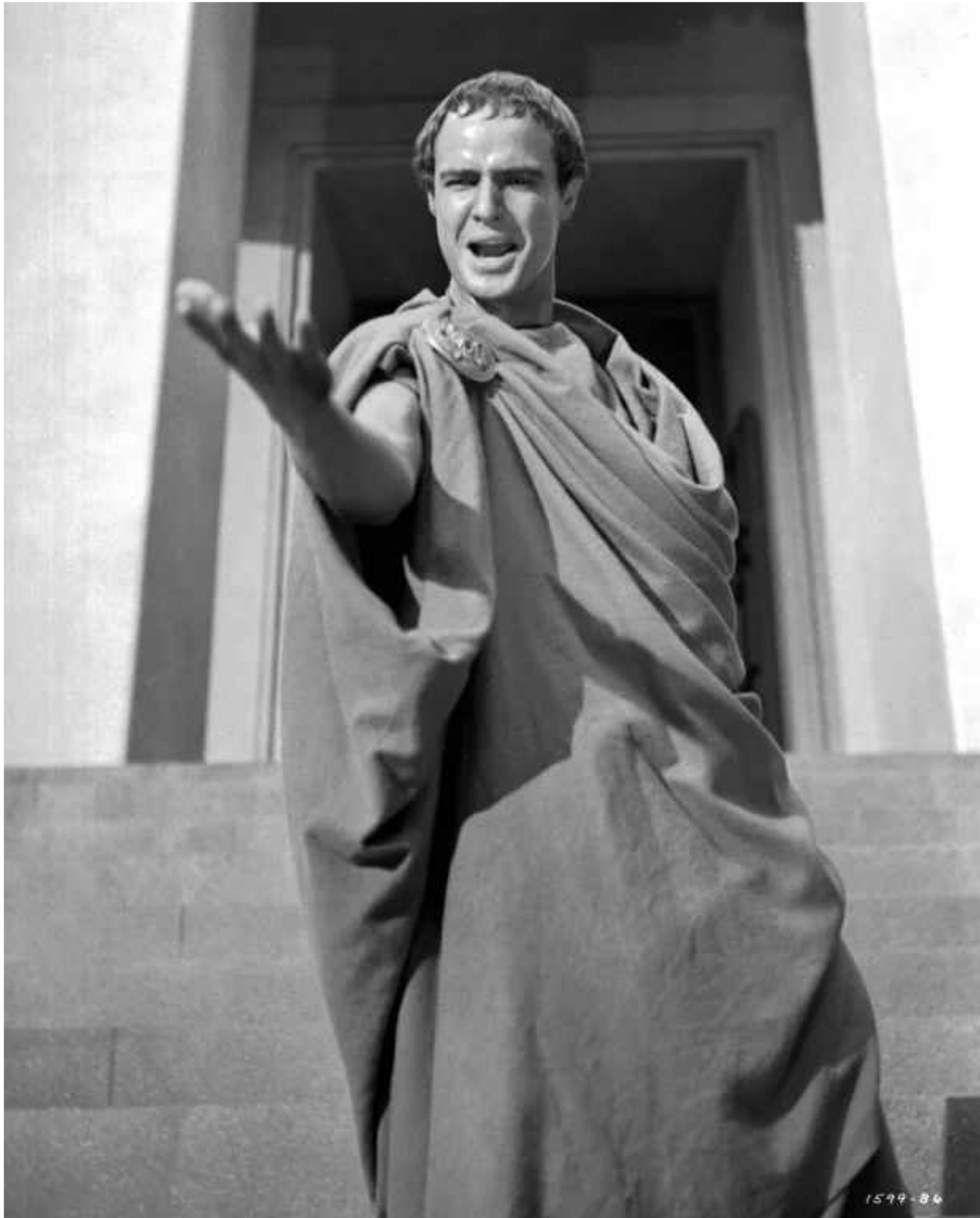
> Friends, educators, administrators,
> lend me your ears;
> I come not to bury operant conditioning,
> nor to praise it.

But I do have some information that will broaden your horizons.

Jeffrey Miller, et al. wrote that an exclusively operant perspective on humans "is inadequate to identify the full range of causes or functions of behavior, which in turn leads to the prescription of insufficient or inappropriate interventions."

> Note that he does not say that there is no place at all for operant conditioning
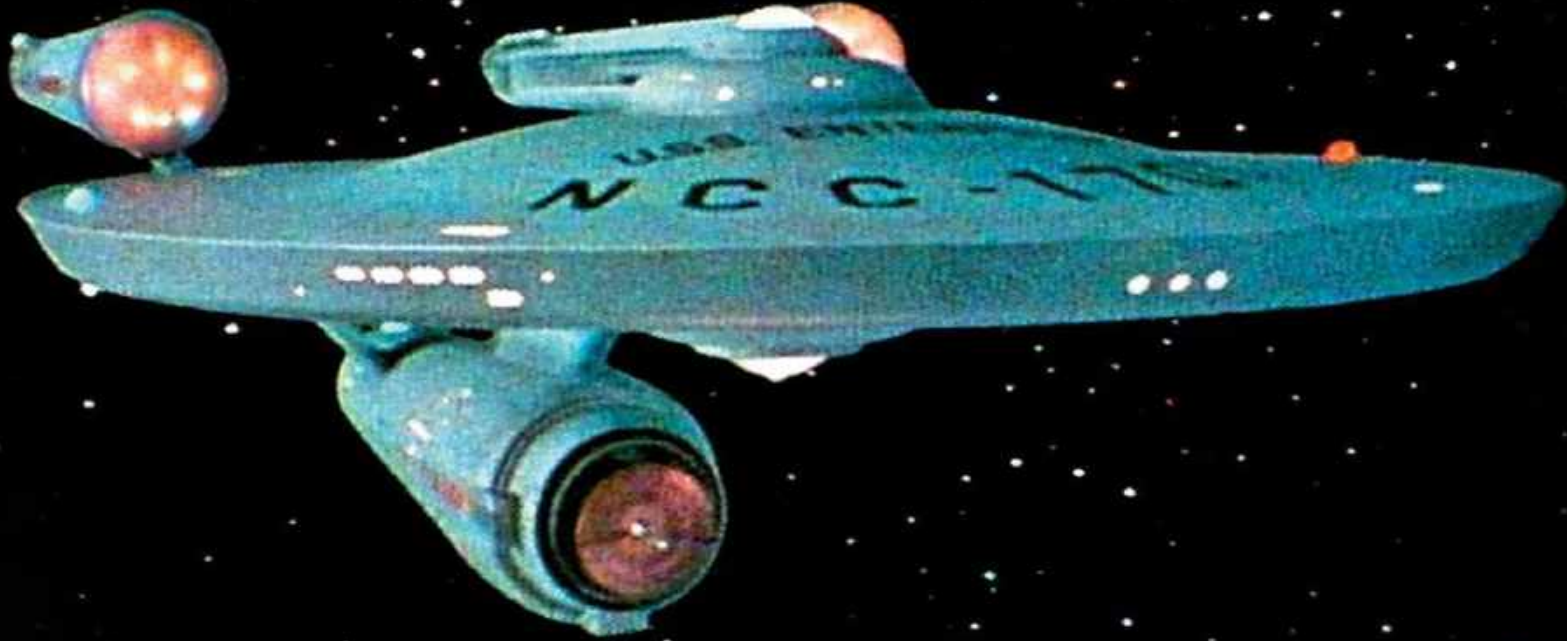
STAR TREK®

THE ORIGINAL SERIES

Even Star Trek offered critiques of operant conditioning

"Wrong thinking is punishable; right thinking will be as quickly rewarded. You will find it an effective combination."

Viktor E. Frankl

"Between stimulus and response there is space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

Viktor E. Frankl

"The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance."

Categories of Functions

- Affective regulation/emotional reactivity

- Cognitive distortion

- Reinforcement

- Modeling

- Physiological/constitutional

- Communication (of need)

- Curriculum/instruction
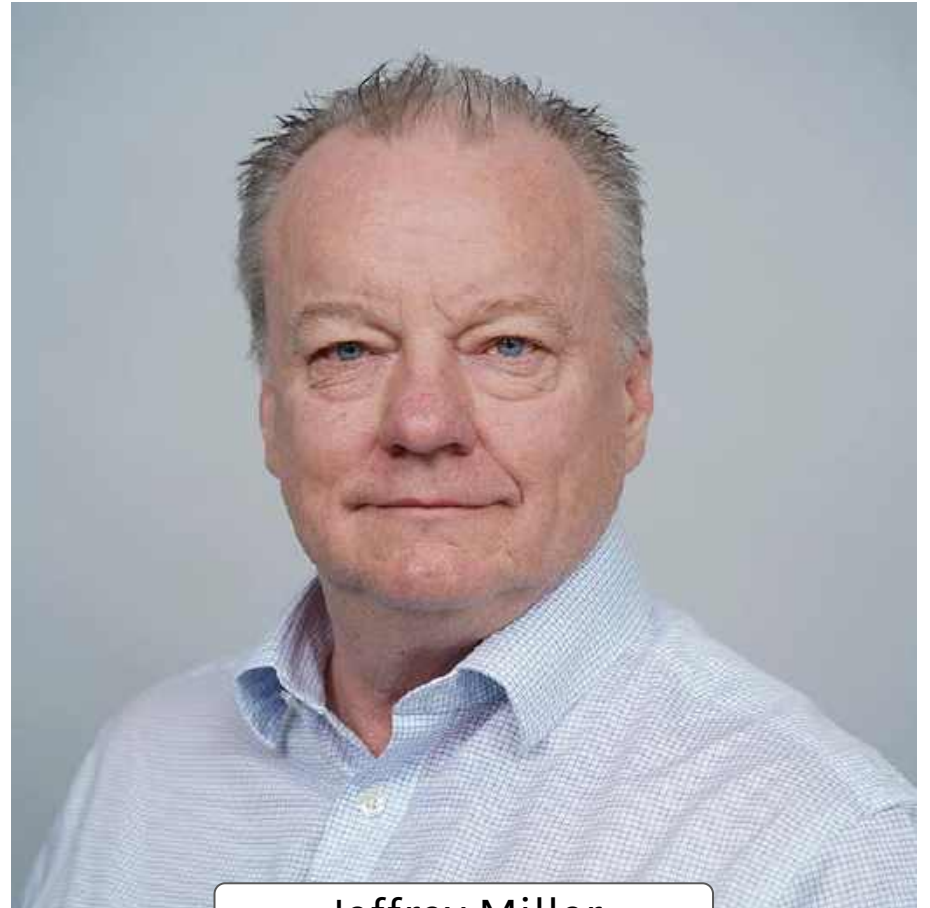
Jeffrey Miller

According to Polly Nichols:

"To understand the function of problem behaviors in students' lives, assessment of their social perspectives, beliefs, and feelings is as necessary as assessment of their immediate desires for attention, task avoidance, or escape.

[What is needed is] a **multi-dimensional perspective** that will lead to psychoeducational interventions in which students are taught to think clearly, solve problems, and self-regulate the intensity of their emotions."

Other bits of wisdom from Polly Nichols:

- Assess the student's thoughts and feelings about the antecedent event. These have been de-emphasized because they are not clearly observable, countable, or chartable.

- Interventions based entirely on behavior management and point systems can be **stultifying** and focus more on controlling than helping the student.

- Provide daily work on thinking skills and emotional self-control (e.g., emotional education curriculum).

Other bits of wisdom from Polly Nichols:

- "Observation" involves listening and asking questions as well as recording overt behavior.

- Thinking skills include:

  - Alternative thinking (coming up with more than one solution)

  - Means-end thinking (planning)

  - Consequential thinking (prediction)

  - Perspective taking (put oneself in another's shoes)

Another alternative to operant conditioning was developed by William Glasser.

- He offered "Choice Theory," which emphasized personal responsibility and the idea that all behavior is a choice.

- Choices were aimed at satisfying five "basic needs:" **survival, love and belonging, power, freedom,** and **fun.**

- He believed that behavior was not merely a reaction to external stimuli but represented a choice to fulfill basic needs. He focused on motivations behind actions rather than on the actions themselves.

Executive Functions
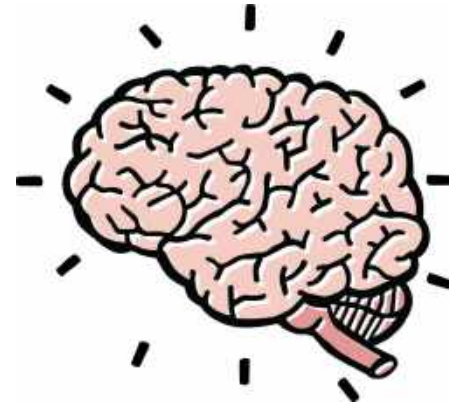
Executive Functions

Inhibition: ability to resist an impulse and to stop one's own behavior at the appropriate time.

Shifting : ability to move freely (including change focus) from one situation to another as the circumstances demand. Flexibility.

Emotional Control : ability to modulate emotional responses.

Initiation : ability to begin a task or activity.

Impulse control

working memory

processing ability

shifting tasks

task completion

emotional regulation
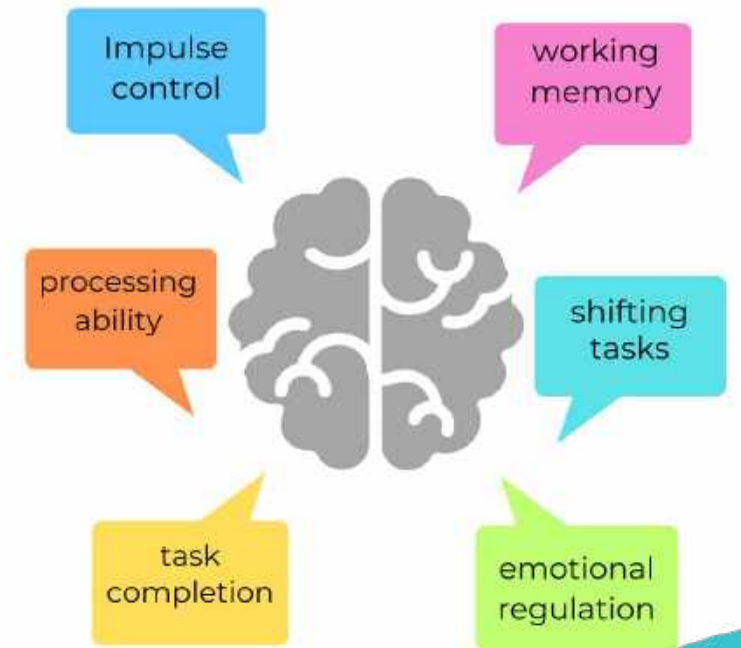
Executive Functions

Working Memory : capacity to hold information in the mind for the purpose of completing a task.

Planning/Organization : ability to manage future-oriented task demands. Self-reflection.

Organization of Materials : ability to create and maintain order in work, play, and storage of materials.

Monitoring : ability to check work and keep track of the effect one's behavior has on others.

Impulse control

working memory

processing ability

shifting tasks

task completion

emotional regulation

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Self-control: Ability to stop & think before acting.

Emotional control: Ability to manage feelings.

Time management: Ability to manage time to complete tasks.

Working memory: Ability to use memory to complete tasks.

WHAT ARE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS?

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Flexibility: Ability to modify & adapt to changing situations.

Task initiation: Ability to start & stop tasks.

Organization: Ability to develop systems to manage.

Helping a student improve executive functioning **requires skill-building,** not just operant conditioning.

Looking into the "black box" adds to the paradigm:

⭐ **Behavior HAS a function**

⭐ **Behavior AS a function**

Developing a multidimensional FBA requires a team problem-solving approach.

ABCs of Behavior

Independent work in subject that is difficult	→	Throws paper and yells	→	Sent to office (where given no attention)
Antecedent		**Behavior**		**Consequence**
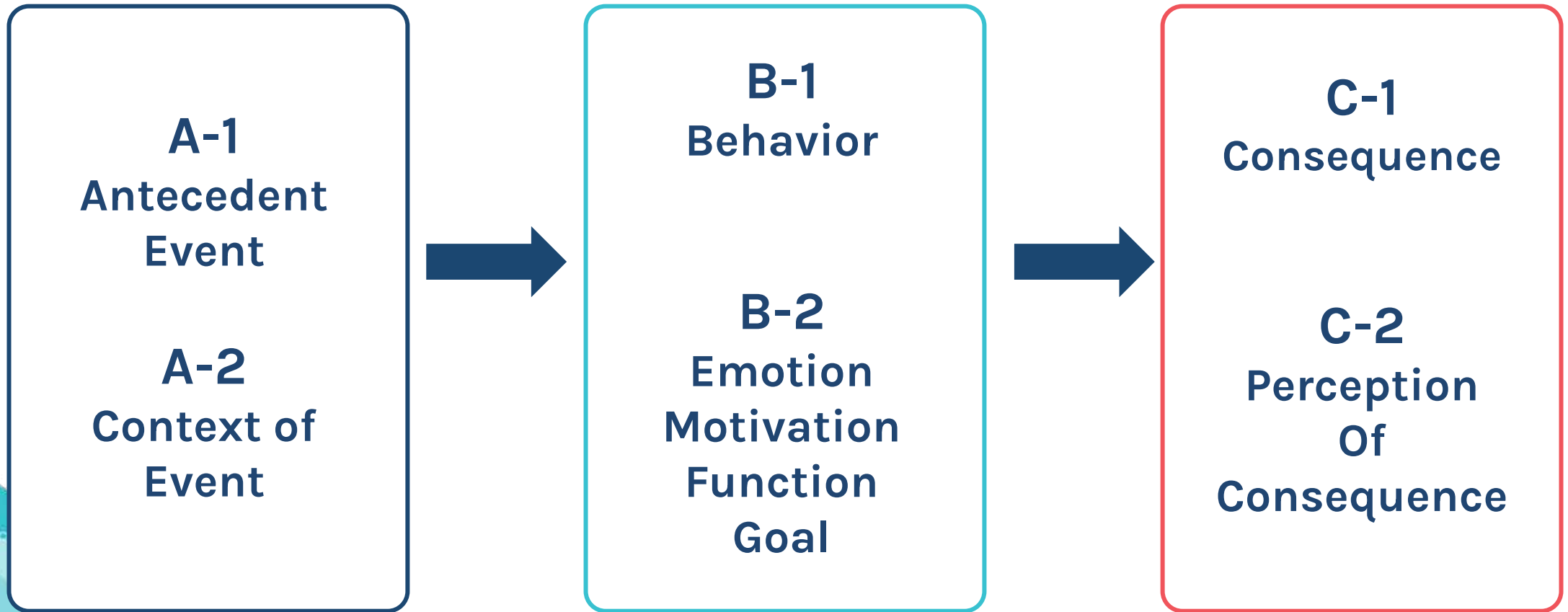
Cognitive–Affective ABCs

A-1 Event is external or internal

A-2 Context is the internal experience that filters/processes A-1

B-1 Observable behavior

B-2 Emotion/feeling, thinking, beliefs, motivation

C-1 Reinforcement or punishment

C-2 Perception of C-1

Executive functioning is involved in A, B, and C

Cognitive–Affective ABCs

A-1
Large group activity

A-2
Eddie is uncomfortable in groups

B-1
Eddie yells out and makes off-subject comments

B-2
Eddie feels embarrassed about his behavior as well as the group setting

C-1
Teacher gives mild reprimand; peers laugh

C-2
Eddie laughs with his peers in order to conceal his discomfort and distress

A sample FBA from my years at Midway ISD

MIDWAY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

13885 Woodway Drive, Woodway, Texas 76712 ▲ 254.761.5625 ▲ FAX 254.761.5778

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT (FBA)

Student's Name: Stu Dent	**Date of FBA:**

DESCRIPTION OF BEHAVIOR

Stu's classroom teacher reported that he demonstrated significantly inattentive, distractible, restless, and overactive behavior. He also engaged in intrusive behavior with his classmates. She indicated that, although he usually would complete his work if provided with one-on-one support, he was often passively noncompliant when asked to work independently. The teacher added that Stu did not engage in tantrums and that, at times, he was able to provide a correct answer to a question even if he seemed inattentive.

The instructional specialist also reported that Stu required one-on-one support in order to complete his work. She indicated that he often spent recess and other non-instructional time in her room in order to complete his assignments. She stated that he seemed to work better on the computer.

Stu acknowledged that he experienced difficulty with focused and sustained attention. He also acknowledged that his mind often wandered during class and indicated that his mind usually wandered to enjoyable activities (such as video games). He said that his mind was less likely to wander during "recess and specials," and he added that he especially liked recess because "you can do what you want."

Specific behavior problems identified by Stu's teachers:
1. Off-task behavior, including laying his head on his desk, sucking his thumb, touching others, looking around the room, and overactivity
2. Reluctance to attempt or complete written work.

Setting(s) in which behavior occurs (include precipitants, frequency, intensity, and duration if applicable):

Frequency: Off-task behavior and reluctance to do written work occur on a daily basis. These behaviors have occurred less frequently during math and during assignments involving hands-on activities (including the use of manipulatives). These behaviors have occurred significantly less frequently when he has been provided one-on-one assistance and when he has done work on the computer.

A sample FBA from my years at Midway ISD

Precipitants: (1) Introduction of a paper-and-pencil task. (2) Expectation for independent work.

Intensity: Most of Stu's behaviors are passive. His intrusive behavior (e.g., touching others) is of low intensity and does not seem to have aggressive intent.

Duration: Off-task behavior and reluctance to do written work is typically evident for the entire length of a given task.

Consequences of behavior:

Off-task behavior and reluctance to do written work typically results in increased contact with the teacher (ranging from redirection to one-on-one assistance).

Completion of assignments results in social reinforcement (e.g., praise).

Completion of assignments results in progress toward reinforcement on his behavior chart.

Failure to complete work results in loss of privileges (including recess and "specials").

Educational impact of behavior:

Off-task behavior and reluctance to do written work can affect Stu's ability to benefit from instruction and to make adequate progress in the curriculum.

Off-task behavior that involves touching others (and other intrusive behavior) can affect the learning of other students.

Stu's need for one-on-one assistance can divert the teacher from providing instruction and assistance to other students.

Problem Identification Exercise – High School

Form 1

IBIS

Problem Identification Exercise – High School

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

IBIS Staff: _____

What behaviors result in your getting into trouble at school?
Be specific; for example, being late to class, talking out in class, refusing to work in class, playing in the halls.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When, where, and how often do these behaviors occur?
Place the number of each behavior in the box(es) on the chart to indicate when, where, and how often.

When/Where How often	Before school	1st period	Hall	2nd period	Hall	3rd period	Hall	4th period	Hall	Lunch	Hall	5th period	Hall	6th period	Hall	7th period	After school
Frequently																	
Sometimes																	
Rarely																	
Never																	

What are the triggers for each behavior?
Be specific; for example, work is too difficult, peer was disrespectful, friends in class want to talk.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What thoughts and feelings are associated with each behavior?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What are the usual consequences for each behavior?
Be specific; for example, teacher warning, sent to office.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Form 2

Do you see a pattern in your behavior? _____

What are ways to change the setting (when/where)? _____

What are ways to change the triggers? _____

What are ways to change your behaviors? _____

Form 3

IBIS

Behavior Awareness and Improvement Task

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What did you do that resulted in your getting into trouble? _____

2. What did you want? (Check at least one)

☐ I wanted to be in control of the situation.
☐ I wanted to challenge the teacher's authority.
☐ I wanted to avoid doing my work.
☐ I wanted to show my independence.
☐ I wanted to be sent home.
☐ I wanted to have fun.
☐ I wanted _____

☐ I wanted status and respect.
☐ I wanted attention and approval from my peers.
☐ I wanted to hide my problems from others.
☐ I wanted to let the teacher know that I needed help.
☐ I wanted to be sent to ISS.
☐ I wanted a break.

3. Did you get what you wanted? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. What are some ways to get what you wanted that would not result in your getting into trouble? _____

5. What is your goal for improvement and how do you plan to achieve it? _____