

Highlighting ABA

THE ASSOCIATION OF BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS INTERNATIONAL HELD ITS ANNUAL AUTISM CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON, DC.

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THE CONFERENCE WAS TITLED “New Tools for Translating Science into Practice.” Presenters did just that – reviewing the research and providing attendees with a “to do list” for the implementation. This year’s conference was truly an international event which saw participants and presenters from 45 states and 16 different countries.

The conference kicked off with a poster session highlighting research from the US and around the world. A group from Western Michigan University was a visible presence throughout the conference. Under the direction of Dr. Richard Malott (aka Uncle Dickie), the BATS (Behavior Analysis Training System) students accounted for no fewer than 20 of the exhibitors in the poster session. Research ranged broadly, looking at tools related to communication and socialization such as Picture Exchange Communication systems, social stories, peer modelling and video modelling, as well as examining methodologies for the reduction of maladaptive behaviours and stereotypy.

Dr. Malott was invited by ABAI to speak on his practitioner model for undergraduate and graduate training in autism. In his entertaining and inspirational address, Dr. Malott encouraged service providers to partner with universities in order to “grow their own” clinical staff. Dr. Malott lays out his manifesto in the presentation abstract: “Our journals and books are full of evidence-based best practises, yet we are without enough practitioners to significantly impact the well-being of humanity by implementing those best practises.” Dr. Malott ended his address to a largely professional audience with a moving reminder that it was their job is to ensure that children and families have as good a life as possible and that children are not just subjects.

Dr. William Heward, Ed. D., BCBA, opened his address, “Helping School-Age Students with Autism Succeed in the Regular Classroom,” by quoting Donald Baer who said “ABA is the discipline that has most consistently considered the problem of what behaviour changes, made in what order and by what techniques, will confer the maximal benefit to the child.” Dr. Heward defined student success by stating that beyond the achievement of IEP goals, in order to be considered successful, he would expect a student to be happy, safe and engaged in program where meaningful progress could be measured. In looking to better serve those students with ASD who still struggle significantly in the regular classroom environment, a panel of 40 autism experts including researchers,

Dr. Malott encouraged service providers to partner with universities in order to “grow their own” clinical staff.

The hotel atrium in Washington, DC, kept attendees looking upwards.

Photo credit: Michelle Murdoch-Gibson



parents, teachers and clinicians, assembled to consider key questions related to these struggles and what key skills would be required by both teachers and students to achieve success in the classroom.

In achieving maximum success, Dr. Heward asserted that the following seven principles would be required of the teaching environment:

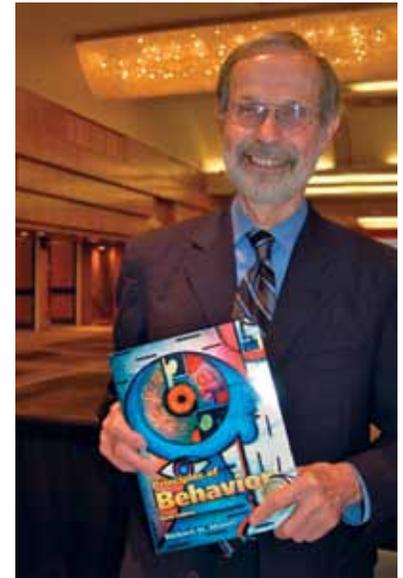
1. wise selection of behavioural change targets
2. intensive, high-fidelity implementation of research based teaching methods
3. frequent opportunities for student responses
4. plans for generalization
5. direct and frequent measurement
6. ongoing home and school collaboration, and
7. administrator support.

Just as integral, were the six behavioural target areas that the panel agreed were most important for students to acquire for classroom success, and in what order they should be prioritized. The list suggests that students should:

1. display near zero levels of problem behaviours
2. participate and learn in groups,
3. complete assigned tasks independently
4. interact with peers
5. comply with classroom rules and directions, and
6. get teacher attention and assistance appropriately.

As the weekend progressed, there were certainly many examples of those research-based teaching methods. Examples of evidence-based strategies were discussed by presenters, displayed by researchers and exhibitors and available in the conference's comprehensive book store. Of particular note was the National Autism Center's recent publication of the National Standards report and the Findings and Conclusions paper that reviews a range of applied treatments and identifies the level of scientific evidence related to each. This document is available for purchase or download at www.nationalautismcenter.org.

In addition to the informative presentations, a special agenda item delivered by the Autism Parent Professional Partnership was a poignant tribute marking the 2010 passing of Dr. Ivar Lovaas, considered to be one of the fathers of Applied Behaviour Analysis. A slide show featuring clips of Lovaas' lectures and images of him working with students and children over his long career was accompanied by a soundtrack of "Dust in the Wind," a song that Dr. Lovaas reportedly played at the end of all of his lectures to illustrate just how our lives are informed by unplanned environmental contingencies. ■



Dr. Richard Malott

AutismPro has joined with Trumpet Behavioral Health



We equip educators with the tools they need to improve the outcomes of students with autism in their classroom.

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