



...besser lernen mit ABA/VB

**Applied Behaviour Analysis: The scientific base of an increasingly popular
intervention for children with Autism**

Dr. Katerina Dounavi, BCBA-D

Clinical Director of the Melody Learning Center

Lecturer, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is the applied branch of the science that studies human behaviour (i.e., Behaviour Analysis) (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). The term “Applied” makes reference to the focus of this science on socially significant behaviours, thus behaviours that are deemed to be important for the quality of life of the person in question. There are different ways of judging if a specific behaviour is socially significant, including asking the person if they need to acquire a specific skill or reduce an inappropriate behaviour, observing successful peers’ performance on a specific domain, obtaining parents’ opinion in regards to their children, examining the social limitations that the lack of a certain skill can pose to a person, and other. Once these behaviours have been defined and assessed, specific teaching methods and strategies are put in place and the principles of learning, as discovered by the science of the Behaviour Analysis, are used in order for the person to be successful in obtaining the desired outcomes. Contrary to the common misconception that ABA is specific to Autism (Dillenburger & Keenan, 2009), ABA-based interventions have proven effective

1

Melody Learning Center e. K. * Inhaberin: Silke Johnson * Postfach 1853 * D-78158 Donaueschingen *

Eingetragen Amtsgericht Freiburg i.Br. HRA 702427 *

0049/ 1520 966 2756 * info@melodycenter.ch * www.melodycenter.ch



with a range of populations and in several settings (e.g., Athens, Vollmer, Sloman, & St Peter Pipkin, 2008; Baker, LeBlanc, & Raetz, 2008).

In relation to Autism, ABA-driven interventions are evidence-based and have proven to be the most effective in developing a wide range of skills and in reducing inappropriate behaviours (Surgeon General, 1999; American Paediatrics, 2007), thus in helping children reach their full potential. This explains their increasing popularity among families of children with Autism in the last decades and across the world.

An ABA-based intervention is designed according to each individual's needs, starts with a thorough assessment of the person's existing repertoire, and includes a continuous monitoring of progress. Its main component is motivation, therefore, a careful analysis of functional reinforcers and their effectiveness in modifying behaviour is warranted. Learning is meant to be fun for the child and skills are taught in a way that generalization and spontaneity are facilitated. Functional communication is a priority, therefore it is taught by taking into account the analysis of verbal behaviour as described by Skinner (1957) and in accordance to the most recent research outcomes (e.g., LeBlanc, Esch, Sidener, & Firth, 2006).



References

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2007). *Management of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 120, 1162-1182.
- Athens, E. S., Vollmer, T. R., Sloman, K. N., & ST Peter Pipkin, C. (2008). An analysis of vocal stereotypy and therapist fading. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 41, 291–297.
- Baker, J. C., LeBlanc, L. A., & Raetz, P. G. (2008). A behavioral conceptualization of aphasia. *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior*, 24, 147-158.
- Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2007). *Applied behavior analysis*, 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Dillenburger, K. & Keenan, M. (2009). None of the As in ABA stands for autism: Dispelling the myths. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 34, 193-195.
- LeBlanc, L. A., Esch, J., Sidener, T. M., & Firth, A. M. (2006). Behavioral language interventions for children with autism: Comparing applied verbal behavior and naturalistic teaching approaches. *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior*, 22, 49-60.
- Skinner, B.F. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. Acton, MA: Copley Publishing Group.
- Surgeon General. (1999). *Mental health: A report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Public Health Service. Retrieved on 22/05/2013 from <http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/retrieve/ResourceMetadata/NNBBJC>.