Verbal Behavior-Milestones Assessment & Placement Program

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A Behavioral Approach to Language Assessment

- Assessment is based upon B.F. Skinner’s Analysis of Verbal Behavior
- This analysis can provide us with valuable assessment and intervention strategies
- It is critical to conduct an accurate assessment of a child’s current skills and needs.
- It can be quite complicated given the variety of language problems experienced by children on the autism spectrum.

Agenda

- VB-MAPP Overview
- Milestones Assessment
  - Level 1
  - Level 2
  - Level 3
- Barriers Assessment
- Transition Assessment
- Task Analysis and Skills Tracking
- Implementing Assessment
- Analysis of Assessment
The Purpose of a Language Assessment
- Determine operant level of a child’s verbal (and related) skills
- Compare to “neuro-typical” language development data
- Identify language acquisition & learning barriers
- Identify if and where to begin intervention
- Establish Treatment Plan goals
- Design an individualized intervention program
- Determine best teaching strategies
- Monitor if the intervention is effective

Verbal Operants Assessed on the VB-MAPP
- Mand
- Tact
- Listener
- Echolalic
- Imitation
- Copying a Text
- Intraverbal
- Textual
- Transcriptive

Verbal Operants
- Skinner (1957) calls this collection of language skills “The Elementary Verbal Operants”
- The elementary verbal operants are separate repertoires and functionally independent at the time of acquisition, and each must be taught
- Speaker and listener skills are separate repertoires and each must be taught
- More complex language, such as conversations and language related to social skills, is comprised of these basic elements
Validity of our Assessments

Five components of the VB-MAPP:

- **Milestones Assessment** contains 170 verbal behavior milestones across three developmental levels (0-18 mos., 18-30 mos., 30-48 mos.), and 16 different verbal operants and related skills.

- **Barriers Assessment** examines 24 common learning and language issues faced by children with autism and language delays.

- **Transition Assessment** contains 18 measurable areas to provide a comprehensive evaluation of a student's skills and learning capabilities to identify the setting that may best support learning.

- **Task Analysis and Skills Tracking** provides a further breakdown of the 16 different skill areas in the form of a checklist for skills tracking.

- **Curriculum Placement & IEP Goals** directly linked to the assessments above and provides specific direction for each of the 170 milestones and helps design a balanced intervention program.

Development

- The VB-MAPP spans a 30-year history of research and development by Mark Sundberg.

- In 1998 together with James Partington, Dr. Sundberg created The Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS) which:
  - ‘lacked developmental appropriate scope and sequence’
  - ‘never meant to be utilized as curriculum’
  - ‘provides no guidance for what order to target objectives’
Methods of Measurement

- For educational purposes the goal is to as efficiently and effectively as possible set developmentally appropriate goals and objectives. Information on a specific student can be gathered in a variety of ways.
  - Includes:
    - Interviews with parents, teachers, or service provider
    - Observation of the student in natural setting
    - Specific assessment of the skill (especially true for Barriers portion)

Measurement Methods Used to Assess Milestones

- **Formal Testing (T):** Specifically presenting the child with a task and recording the response
- **Observation (O):** Watching for the skill to occur in environmental settings without formal presentation
- **Either Formal Testing or Observation (E):** Assessor can determine which of above to use
- **Timed Observation (TO):** Target response must occur within a fixed amount of time

Milestones Assessment

- The Milestones Assessment is:
  - Developmentally appropriate in scope and sequence
  - Criterion referenced assessment
  - Broken into 3 developmental levels
    - Level 1: 0-18 months
    - Level 2: 18-30 months
    - Level 3: 30-48 months
  - The scores for each skill are balanced across each level
  - There are 5 items and 5 possible points for each skill area
Milestones Level 1
0-18 months

- The task for the person performing the assessment is to identify a baseline for each skill.
- If a test item is clearly a part of the child's skillset, score that as a 1 and move on.
- If the child is reaching a level of acquisition, but may not completely demonstrate a skill, more direct testing is warranted.

Level 1 Skill Areas

- Mand
- Tact
- Listener
- Visual Perceptual Match-to-Sample
- Play
- Social
- Imitation
- Echoic
- Vocal
Milestones Level 2
18–30 months

- Instructions for scoring begin on page 47 of the Guide book
- In Level 2 new skill sets are represented
- These areas were not present in Level 1 because most typically developing 18 month children have yet to acquire them
- It is hoped by presenting these in Level 2 it will be clearer what to focus on for a child scoring in each of the levels

Level 2 Skill Areas

- All skill areas from Level 1 except Vocal with the addition of:
  1. Listener Responding by Feature, Function & Class (LRFFC)
  2. Intraverbal (IV)
  3. Classroom Skills
  4. Group Skills
  5. Linguistic Structure
Milestones Level 3
30-48 months

- As in Level 2, in Level 3 there are new skill sets represented.
- These academic skills should be avoided as part of the curriculum with language delays that fall primarily in Level 1 or 2.

Level 3 Skill Areas

- All skill areas from Level 2 except Imitation & Echoics, with the addition of:
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Math
Barriers Assessment

- Tool designed to identify and score 24 different learning and language acquisition barriers.
- Once a specific barrier has been identified, a more detailed descriptive and/or functional analysis of that problem is required.
- There are many ways that a verbal repertoire or related skill can become defective.
- Individualized analysis are necessary to determine the nature of the problem, and what intervention program might be appropriate.

- Common Learning and Language Acquisition Barriers:
  - Instructional control (Escape/avoidance)
  - Behavior problems
  - Defective mand, tact, intraverbal, motor imitation, listener discrimination
  - Defective echoic
  - Prompt Dependent
  - Scrolling Responses
  - Weak or atypical motivation
Where did these Barriers Originate?

- Their Environment.
- i.e., If a child cannot effectively mand:
  - Other behavior will begin to serve as the mand function
  - Extinction sets in and reinforcers narrow
  - The child starts to need adults less and less to get needs met!
- Dr. Sundberg argues that we helped create 23 out of 24 Barriers!

Transition Assessment

- Can provide a measurable way for a child's IEP team to make decisions and set priorities in order to meet the child's educational needs
- Comprised of several summary measures from other parts of the VB-MAPP, as well as a variety of other skills that can affect transition including:
  - Overall score on Milestones
  - Overall score on Barriers
  - Negative behaviors
  - Classroom routines and group skills
  - Social skills
  - Academic independence
  - Generalization
  - Variation of reinforcers
  - Rate of skill acquisition
  - Retention
  - Natural environment learning
  - Transfer skills
  - Adaptability to change
  - Spontaneity
  - Independent play
  - General self-help
  - Toileting skills
  - Eating skills
Task Analysis & Skills Tracking

- Provides a further breakdown of skills and serves as a more complete and ongoing learning and language skills curriculum guide.
- There are approximately 900 skills presented covering the 16 areas of the VB-MAPP.
- Once the Milestones have been assessed and the general skill level has been established, the task analysis can provide further information about a particular child.
- The skills identified on the task analysis contain a wide range of supporting components of the target area.
- These skills may not be significant enough to identify as Milestones or IEP goals, but each of them play an important role in moving a child’s repertoire closer to that of a typically developing child.
Before You Begin

- USE YOUR GUIDEBOOK!
- Turn to page 19 of the Guidebook, review table 2-1 to see tips for the tester
- Make sure you have material to test each skill (should be gathered in the VB-MAPP tubs in the office)
- ALWAY have a copy of the Guidebook with you during assessment
- DO NOT assume that if they can demonstrate half of the skill, that would give them a score of 1, that you can give them a ½ point

Interpreting VB-MAPP Results

- Step 1
  - Identify general level of the child
    - Level 1, 2, or 3
  - Each level is designed to correspond with an approximate linguistic and developmental age
    - Certain skills, targets, & teaching styles may be more effective
Interpreting VB-MAPP Results

Step 2
- Look at the scores in each skill area and their relation to the student’s performance in other areas.
- Are there strengths in one area that could benefit the student?
- Weaknesses that need to be addressed?
  - I.e., if a student has a strong receptive repertoire but weak echoic, you may want to look at PECS.

Scores Within Level 1
- Focus should be on establishing:
  - Mands
  - Echoics
  - Motor Imitation
  - Listener Discriminations
  - Tacts
  - Visual Perceptual & Matching Skills
Level 1 Learners

- Play and social skills should be a major part of intervention
- Teaching style may be more “intensive”
  - Higher number of trials
  - Carefully arranged contingencies
    - Prompting
    - Prompt Fading
    - Shaping
    - Transfer of Stimulus Control
    - Use of Motivation
    - Differential Reinforcement

Sample IEP Goals-Level 1 Learner

Johnny will______ with 90% accuracy across 3 consecutive days.

- Emit 10 different mands with/without desired item present
- Spontaneously emit (without prompt, “what do you want”) average of 50 or more mands per day
- Tact 50 items
- Tact 10 actions
- ID 50 items in messy array of at least 8
- Perform 20 specific actions on command
- Match 100 non-identical objects or pictures in array of 10
- Imitate 25 two-component actions
- Echo 50 V.C. combinations of 2 syllables or more or full words
- Mand to peers 5 times per day

**See page 150 of VB-MAPP Guide**
Scores Within Level 2

- Still an early learner, but is beginning to show solid learning and language skills.
- Focus should be on systematically expanding existing skills in a variety of ways.

Level 2 Learners

General target areas forming core of intervention should be:

- Expand the scope and size of mand, tact, and listener repertoires (teach more nouns, verbs, adjectives)
- Develop two- and three-step motor imitation and instruction following
- Beginning LRFFC
- Beginning intra-verbal skills
- Develop social and verbal interactions with peers
- Develop group and classroom skills
- Learning in less restrictive settings
Sample IEP Goals-Level 2

Learner

Johnny will _____ with 90% accuracy across 3 consecutive days.

- Mand for 50 different missing items with only verbal prompt ("what do you need")
- Spontaneously mand for other people to perform 10 specific actions in natural environment (game, play)
- Tact and ID 250 items
- Tact and ID 25 actions
- ID 10 different colors or shapes in array of 5
- Match 200 non-identical objects or pictures in array of 10, containing 3 similar items
- Select correct item from messy array of 10 given 200 different fill-ins or WH questions for FFC
- Answer 200 fill-in and WH questions involving noun and verb (intraverbal)
- Respond to mands from peers 10 times per day

Scores Within Level 3

- A student who is reaching the milestones in Level 3 is demonstrating a solid foundation of skills that will allow for more advanced language, social, and academic instruction.
- Level 3 begins at the developmental equivalent of 30 months of age when children have acquired TONS of language.
- Hundreds of mands, tacts and listener responses.
- Easily learning new words on a daily basis.
- Mands are spontaneous, frequent, and controlled by the child’s personal motivators especially those that relate to verbal information (asking questions).
Level 3 Learners

General target areas forming core of intervention should be:

- Expand the content of what the child talks about by teaching new mands, tacts, and LI responses
- Expand sentence size by teaching child to modify basic nouns and verbs with adjectives, prepositions, pronouns, adverbs...
- Develop more complex mands such as mands for information & involving parts of speech
- Teach intraverbal behavior (how to talk about things not present)
- Learn to use verbal skills in socially appropriate ways
- Develop social and verbal interactions with peers
- Increase frequency & complexity of peer social interaction
- Movement to less restrictive educational setting

Sample IEP Goals-Level 3 Learner

Johnny will _____ with 90% accuracy across 3 consecutive days.

- Spontaneously mand for information at least 90 times a day with at least 4 different question words (what, where, who, which, when, can, do...)
- Tact specific aspects of at least 25 different items when given at least 4 randomly rotating verbal questions
- Complete or continue 25 patterns or sequences with at least 3 parts
- Select correct items from messy array of 10 for 100 different WH questions for FFC of at least 100 different items
- Answer 2 questions about a story after being read a short passage from a book for 50 different passages
- Answer 2 questions about a story after being read a short passage from a book for 50 different passages
- Take turns and share reinforcers with a peer an average of 10 times a day
- Spontaneously engage in at least 4 verbal exchanges with a peer an average of 10 times a day
- Sit in a 20 min group session involving 5 children without disruptive behavior and answer 10 intraverbal questions

Questions & Comments