



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Examining the Causes of Disruptive Behaviors

Sarup Mathur, Ph.D. • May 2009

Topic: Reducing Behavior Problems

Practice: Describe Behavior

### Highlights

- Sarup Mathur, Professor at Arizona State University, explains why it is important to collect data on problem behaviors in and out of the classroom
- Dr. Mathur shows that collecting and analyzing behavioral data can give teachers insight into why a student is acting out.
- Understanding the reasons and motivations behind problem behaviors allows teachers and other staff to design interventions that get at the root of the behavior and are much more effective than interventions unsupported by data.

### About the Interviewee

Sarup R. Mathur is Clinical Professor in Special Education in College of Teacher Education and Leadership at Arizona State University.\* She has extensive experience in teaching, researching, and programming for students who demonstrate significant behavioral challenges. She is an expert in the practice of applied behavior analysis (ABA), functional behavioral assessments, and

behavioral intervention plans. Her experience combines clinical and technical expertise for developing effective programs for service delivery for students with special needs. Since completing her PhD, Dr. Mathur has joined the faculty at ASU and taught behavior analytic courses; supervised master's theses and doctoral dissertations that employed ABA interventions and methodology; and published numerous handbooks, book chapters, and experimental articles in peer reviewed journals that incorporated behavioral analytic procedures. She has served on several technical/advisory committees for the Arizona State Department of Education and is a member of the Professional Development of Leadership Academy for the State of Arizona. At the national level, she served as the secretary and president of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders and the president of Teacher Educators for Children with Behavioral Disorders. These leadership roles, scholarly activities, and multi-agency collaborations have provided her opportunities for working with diverse groups of professionals.

\* At the time of the interview, Dr. Mather was Clinical Professor in the division of Curriculum and Instruction at Arizona State University.

## Full Transcript

My name is Sarup Mathur. I am from Arizona State University, and I am a Clinical Professor in the division of Curriculum and Instruction.

In any problem behavior that we witness in our classrooms, there is a likelihood that the student actually engages in those disruptive behaviors because they might be trying to avoid a negative experience, or maybe something is very difficult for them to do, or they would like to gain some attention from their peers, or they are seeking teacher attention for their behavior. So, there is a lot more to that behavior in terms of understanding. Instead of focusing only on the form of behavior, which is just paying attention to the disruptive aspect of that behavior, it becomes really important for teachers to understand the meaning of that behavior, the motive of that behavior, the purpose of that behavior.

It's important that we look at the antecedents and setting events of the behavior. What actually precedes the behavior? Were the instructions from the teacher—were they clear? Were they concise? Was there any confusion in those instructions? So, those kind of behaviors are offering some kind of explanation to the behavior that actually occurs. And then the contingencies that follow the behavior, the consequences that the teacher applies, some reinforcing situations that may arise following that behavior. So it becomes really important to pay attention to the antecedents, the behavior, and the consequences of that behavior. Which of these behaviors are more concerning than others? In what context do these behaviors occur? At what time of the day do I see this particular behavior? So, when they have this information, which is more comprehensive than just the information on disruptive behavior, they have a better chance of developing an intervention that might work for this particular child.

When looking at behavioral data, teachers can pay attention to a variety of components of behavior. They

can look at different types of behavior. They can look at whether we are concerned about the behavior of shyness or withdrawal, or are we looking at aggressive behaviors. So, that way they can decide on the type of behavior and then also look at the intensity of behavior, duration of behavior, the contextual factors that are surrounding that behavior, how many times that behavior actually occurs. Was it more prevalent last week? Was Suzy engaged in fighting episodes last week more than this week? They can make certain kinds of comparisons with that data. They can also look at behaviors that are related to the playground. Is the child actually playing with different peers, or do we find more engagement in parallel play? Is the child alone and playing by himself? So, those kind of attributes of various behaviors can help teachers make decisions about various categories of behavior.

While ascertaining progress of student, it is important to look at how the student shows some on-task behaviors because not all these students who engage in disruptive behaviors are engaging in off-task behaviors all the time. It is important that teachers engage in data-based decision-making, and for that they need some support from their schools and districts. And the states need to provide some capacity-building efforts at their end to have them fully trained in the data collection procedures. Once they get used to making decisions based upon data, they would find that the interventions resulting from that process are much more desirable and acceptable and effective in dealing with problem behaviors.