

## Applied Behavior Analysis and Speech-Language Pathology

5-3-24

### Panelists:

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### Transcript

#### Welcome

Mareile Koenig: So, welcome everyone to this podcast about applied behavior, analysis and its application by speech, language pathologists. My name is Mareile Koenig. I am a soon-to-be-retired professor and clinical supervisor at West Chester University. I am joined by 4 colleagues who are also SLPs and behavior analysts. I'm going to begin by asking each of them to introduce themselves to you.

#### Introductions

Nikia?

Nikia Dower: My name is Nikia Dower. I'm a speech pathologist and Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. I am the owner of Dower and Associates, a private practice in Virginia that provides speech and language services for children and adolescents. I am also the current President of the Speech Pathology-Applied Behavior Analysis (SPABA) Special Interest Group within the Association of Applied Behavior Analysis International (AABI).

Heather?

Heather Forbes: Hello! My name is Heather Forbes. I'm also a speech language pathologist and a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. I am also an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. I also had previous experience before that as a consultant with patents, autism initiative. And that's where I provided ABA-based communication programming and services as a consultant for students with autism in public schools.

Joanne?

Joanne Gerenser: Hi, everybody! My name is Joanne Gerenser. I'm currently the Executive Director of the Eden 2 programs. We are a multi service organization, serving children as young as 3 all the way through adulthood. When I began there in 1982, I started as a

speech language pathologist. Given that it was an ABA program. I quickly became a behavior analyst in my practice. I never actually sat for the BCBA exam, so I'm not a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, but I've been practicing behavior analysis for over 40 years. I'm also a founder and board member of the Council of Autism Service Providers (CASP).

Tammy?

Tamara Kasper: I'm Tammy Casper, and I'm another duly certified SLP and BCBA. They call us unicorns, and I kind of like that. I'm Director and owner of Kasper Enterprises, and a consultant to the Clinical Center of Excellence for a company called Carabel Autism Health. And I worked for about 12 years as a SLP before I became a behavior analyst, and during that time I got to work in a variety of different settings, including a residential school, a birth to 3 pediatric clinic and an elementary school. I was a university instructor, and then, when I learned about ABA, I became a consultant under Vince Carbon, who is an expert in the area of verbal behavior. Through my connection with him I was able to travel, worldwide to disseminate applied verbal behavior, a specialized set of teaching procedures based on ABA. And the other part of that mission was to promote collaboration between SLPs and BCBAs. And that's what I also did at my clinic that I had for 15 years, where we took clients who are emergent communicators, kids who are struggling to learn how to speak. Our focus was to use ABA-based procedures to target speech and language.

Mareile Koenig: Wonderful. Thank you everyone!

### **Purpose of the Podcast**

Mareile Koenig: So, as you can see, there's a wide range of expertise around this table. We're all SLPs who value the science of ABA but apply it in different settings. Through our experiences in the larger context of service delivery, we've become aware of considerable misinformation about ABA, often communicated by individuals without a background in the field. So, our goal for producing this podcast is to provide some clarity. We're going to do that by

- (1) defining ABA and describing its application in different contexts
- (2) sharing with you how ABA has enhanced our SLP skill set
- (3) describing ABA certification
- (4) describing SPABA, the special interest group for SLPs in the world of ABA.

We believe that a better understanding of ABA will support interdisciplinary collaborative practice between SLPs and ABA professionals, and maybe that some of you will be inspired to pursue certification in ABA yourselves. So, let's begin

### **What is ABA?**

Mareile Koenig: Heather, tell us about ABA.

Heather Forbes: Sure. Well, first of all, that's a loaded question! It's a big question: what is ABA? But I also think it's a very important question. First of all, I don't know if we've talked about this, but ABA stands for Applied Behavior Analysis. I like to describe it as the science of teaching and learning. The science is based on principles that describe how individuals learn, and then it involves applying those principles to teach skills that improve quality of life. So that's what the applied means in applied behavior analysis. We apply behavioral learning principles to improve quality of life.

Now, for the most part, those learning principles exist in what we call the operant framework called ABC, where A stands for antecedent. And that's what happens immediately before a behavior occurs. B stands for behavior, which is anything someone does. And then C stands for consequence. So that's anything that happens immediately after a behavior occurs. The basic gist is that learning occurs based on what happens before and after a behavior. We can consider those A's as events that trigger the behavior to occur. So, for example, we might see a doorknob and we may want to go outside to our car. Those antecedents, seeing the doorknob and wanting to go outside to the car, may trigger the behavior of turning the doorknob. And then we experience consequences, or the C's. Those consequences tell the behavior whether or not it should happen again. So, if the door opens and we get outside to our car, then that consequence improved our life. It was successful, and so we're likely to turn the doorknob again the next time we want to get to our car. That consequence just happens to be called reinforcement. On the other hand, if we turn the doorknob and we run into a brick wall? Then that consequence impeded our life. We're probably not going to turn that doorknob again the next time we want to get to the car. And so that is, like I said, the basic gist of the that operant framework: Learning occurs based on what happens before and after a behavior.

Now, the operant framework is easy to understand, I think, when we think about simple behaviors like turning a doorknob. But in behavior analysis or ABA, we can analyze even complicated skills based on that framework. We just have more complicated antecedents, more complicated behaviors, and more complicated consequences. So, for example, there are a lot of antecedents that might trigger you to say the phrase "chicken Parmesan", right? One of those antecedents might be that you are hungry. Right? You might want to eat something. You might be seated in an Italian restaurant. You might have to read "chicken parmesan" on the menu. There may be a server in front of you, asking, "May I help you?", or "What would you like to order?" So again, a lot of complex antecedents going on there? Lots of things must be in place for the phrase to be successful. But those things can still be considered antecedents within that operant framework. Okay, so that is the basic gist of what ABA is. It is, as I said, the science of teaching and learning.

But I also think it's important to discuss what ABA is, not, especially because of what you brought up, Mareile, about misinformation related to ABA. So, ABA is not a specific treatment. Okay? It's not any specific treatment. And it's especially not a specific autism treatment. Again, it's a science. Those principles that inform a variety of programs and interventions. In other words, a person doesn't get ABA in the same way that a person doesn't get cardiology, right? Cardiology is that broad science that informs a variety of treatments. In that sense, ABA is a broad science that informs a variety of behavioral

programs and interventions. In fact, it's been applied in a bunch of areas to improve performance and quality of life. Autism is definitely one of those areas, I think, where most people are familiar with the application of ABA. But ABA is also used to design general education programs, health and fitness programs, environment and sustainability programs, substance abuse programs, mental health programs. And, what's most relevant to our audience is that ABA has been used to design speech and language programs.

The field of SLP actually has a long history of being intertwined with applied behavior analysis. SLPs might be familiar with some terms that we use in applied behavior analysis, such as “prompting.” That's a strategy that stems from the science of ABA. And then any SLP who sets up communication temptations is using an ABA-based procedure. This involves setting up the environment in ways to motivate individuals to communicate. For example, we may position toys in sight but out of a child's reach so that a child can see them and want to request them. This is a way of manipulating antecedents in ways that are consistent with ABA program design. So, SLPs might also be familiar with or hear about verbal behavior programming, which Tammy mentioned earlier. Verbal behavior is a broad behavioral method for analyzing and addressing communication skills. You might also hear about manualized ABA-based communication intervention programs, such as pivotal response treatment, picture exchange communication system (PECS), and incidental teaching. And I'm not sure you have heard of the Lidcombe program, but that is a behavioral program for stuttering. So again, the field of SLP has a long history of being intertwined with ABA.

Mareile Koenig: Thank you, Heather!

### How Panelists found ABA and applied it to their practice

Mareile Koenig: Now, I'd like to ask each of you, how did you get involved with ABA? And how has it enhanced your skill set in SLP service delivery?

Joanne?

Joanne Gerenser: Well, I went to the Ohio State University to get my masters in speech and hearing, and while I was there, I was working in a place called the Nisonger Center. The purpose of the Nisonger center was to create speech language pathologists, psychologists, special Ed teachers, all of whom learned to collaborate with each other. But, more importantly, we were being trained to work in the field of developmental disabilities. And my graduate advisor at the time said, if you're going to work in the field of developmental disabilities, you need to know a lot more than just language. And so, I took a lot of independent studies, and I took a lot of other courses, and some of the courses he had me take were in applied behavior analysis. So, I had my own rat, and I trained him. And I took a course on behavior management for kids with profound challenging behaviors, and I didn't find it in any way incompatible with my work as a speech language pathologist. Even then, I found that it was really supplemental.

And when I graduated, I really wanted to work with kids with autism. That was my thing. So, I moved to New York City, and I looked for jobs. This was 1982 when autism was diagnosed in one in 2,500 kids. So just to put that into perspective. It's one in 43 or something to that effect today. But there weren't many autism programs. And I found a job at this place called the Eden 2 School for Autistic Children. I took the job, even though it was the lowest paying of all that was offered, because my caseload would only be about 12 kids, and they were using this method called applied behavior analysis. At the time, ABA wasn't a very popular methodology. And so we went about our business, did our things.

But I quickly learned how incredibly effective it allowed me to be in changing behavior. I was able to help kids who were nonverbal to develop speech. Because I had taken the course work at Ohio State, I understood the principles of shaping and the schedules of reinforcement. And all these things that, I think, were incredibly effective in my work. You know, for those of you who are going to go on and work with autistic people. I'll let you know right now that very few won't challenge you in terms setting up your intervention sessions to get things done. The principles of behavior analysis allow me to go into a session, arrange the contingencies and arrange the environment in such a way that I didn't have the kind of behavior problems that others had with the same children. I understood how to arrange the environment to reduce their need to engage in problem behavior. And so, to me, that's one of the most important things that ABA has done for me. It has allowed me to be effective with the population I work with.

I was a speech pathologist for a long time, and then I eventually moved into Director of School Services. And because I moved out of direct service delivery, I wanted to stay in the in the world of speech and language. So, I went back, and I earned my Ph.D. at the City University of New York. And while I was there, I studied language acquisition from a very traditional linguistic and psycholinguistic perspective. And it's interesting, because, you know, Skinner has written 2 famous books. One is called Verbal Behavior, and the other is about learning theory. I can hold the 2 separate. I don't necessarily look at language in the same way that a behavior analyst might, but in no way does that create a conflict for me. Because some kids with autism don't acquire language spontaneously, and Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior has always provided me with a framework when I know I'm going to have to teach language.

But what's also been kind of fun is taking all this content from the field of speech-language pathology and applying it in a behavioral way. Mareile and I have done a lot of presentations together on ABA-SLP collaboration. and I always talk about the fact that, for me, behavior analysis has become the train that allows me to get from point A to Point B with my learners. But speech-language pathology and the concepts I've learned within the field provides the content of what goes on that train. So, that's my perspective on ABA.

Mareile Koenig: That's a nice analogy! Thank you, Joanne. So, I guess I'm next here. In full disclosure, I will say that I am the oldest person on this panel, and so I will begin by telling you that I received my master's degree in the Dark Ages, at a time when speech, language pathology programs were focusing on syntax, semantics, and articulation. I had only one course in language disorders in my master's program, and it primarily addressed problems with articulation and syntax. In my first job after graduation. I served as an SLP in a school

for children with multiple disabilities. Most of these children were nonverbal, and somewhere on the autism spectrum. My articulation and syntax tools did not apply. But I did take some courses in behavior modification during my master's degree program, and, Joanne, yes, I had a pigeon also. His name was Walter, but I digress... At the school, I found that, by applying what I had learned in behavior modification - which is what ABA was called then - I found that systematic reinforcement helped me to build a positive rapport with the children that I served, and that they would interact with me during our sessions. I didn't try to teach syntax or articulation, but I supported their nonverbal interactions.

Eventually I returned to the university for a Ph. D. with a focus on pre-linguistic communication development, and by the time I graduated I had learned all about floor time, circles of communication, following a child's lead, setting up activity routines, using communicative temptations, and verbalizing a child's intentions. These are the strategies that I then used when I served as a consultant to families of children with autism in Pennsylvania. One of my families had a 3-year-old nonverbal son, with many challenging behaviors. I worked with him for 2 months, using the child-oriented strategies that I just described, and I saw very few changes in his skill set. This family later hired a behavioral consultant from California to organize a 40-hour-a-week home program, and I participated as a therapist in that program. During our very first team meeting, the behavioral consultant showed us how to use behavioral strategies, to develop instructional control and how to create a therapy session that utilized a blend of structured and child led procedures. On that day and from that point on, the child made amazing progress. I'm sure it's partly because he participated in therapy for 40 hours a week, but also because he had learned to collaborate as an interactive partner and not just as the leader of child led activities. This inspired me to expand my education by learning about ABA and earning certification in behavior analysis. The skills that I learned not only applied to pre-linguistic communication, but to the instructional design for targeting skills across all components of speech and language. And equally importantly, the conceptual framework of applied behavior analysis helped me to analyze how to use the elements of learning theory to enhance instruction. As a professor at West Chester University, I've tried to integrate information about ABA within my courses on early intervention and language disorders, which are mostly based on a more traditional linguistic framework. And it's been challenging to do this, especially in the past few years, because of the misinformation about ABA that is projected by some members of the neurodiversity community. But we're working to find a common ground. So that's a good

Mareile Koenig: ok, Heather. Tell us how you learned about ABA and integrating ABA into your work as an SLP.

Heather Forbes: Sure. Now, you know, Mareile, you might be the elder of the group, but I graduated in December 2005, with my masters in SLP, and I also did not get a lot of information about ABA in my graduate program. After graduating, I worked for a few years in school-based programs. And then, around 2,009. I began working in preschool programs for students with autism at the Chester County intermediate unit, right here in Chester

County. Previously, I had served elementary school students with speech and language problems, but I had never really worked with students who were nonverbal. So, I walked into that preschool classroom, all excited to support younger populations. I had always wanted to work with younger populations. But I was faced with a population I never worked with before. Again, several of the students were nonverbal, and several engaged in some severe challenging behaviors. I really wanted to help those kids. But honestly, I was baffled about what to do. I had no idea where to start, because I wasn't prepared to work with that population. In fact, I hope it's not advertised this way anymore, but I think I was in the tail end of the generation of SLPs who were told that some children just plateaued and weren't going to learn anything new after a while. I don't know if any of my colleagues here were told this in their experiences. I hope I was in the tail end of that generation that was told that. And man, that was just so depressing to me to be told that that some students just weren't going to learn anymore.

Now, I was very fortunate for starting at the CCIU because one of the classrooms I worked in got state consultation in ABA from the PATTAN autism initiative, and I eventually worked for them because I was so appreciative of their impact on me. I have to say, I was very fortunate to get such thorough and accurate training in ABA through PATTAN.

Mareile Koenig: Heather, can you tell us what PaTTAN stands for?

Heather Forbes: Sure. PaTTAN stands for the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network. It is a state-funded organization. They have a variety of initiatives. I haven't looked recently. I now live in West Virginia, but I believe there is also an SLP initiative. They have a variety of initiatives. But the Autism Initiative was the specific PATTAN initiative that actually consulted in public school classrooms serving students with autism. And they brought ABA into those classrooms, which is a phenomenal thing. And having lived in a variety of states now, I realize how fortunate Pennsylvania is to have such a thing, because, as I said, they give a thorough and really accurate training in ABA for anybody who wants it, for free, in public schools.

So, you asked how ABA enhanced my skills? And I think there were a few things I learned. First, and this was one of the first things I ever said about ABA. I thought it was a very positive science, meaning there's almost always something you can do so. There's no such thing as "they're just going to plateau and can't learn." I was very attracted to that positivity. I was no longer told that there was nothing more we can do. In fact, there was always something we can do. So, it really changed my perspective in a way that jived with my passion for helping individuals on the autism spectrum, or anybody with disabilities.

Second, I learned the process of systematically teaching, and I don't think I can express that enough: Actually, having a clear rhyme and reason for why I'm doing what I'm doing. You know, something like, oh, this seemed to work before, or someone telling me to try it, or even I saw some research on this once. It's systematic teaching. I was fairly successful before I learned ABA. I had some tools in my toolbox, but not a clear system, for how to select those tools, apply those tools, and then to objectively determine whether the tools were working. So, I was more-or-less throwing procedures at the wall and seeing if they stuck with the students I worked with. And really, ABA gave me that framework to

systematically design, apply and measure the effects of my practices. I'm referring to that operant framework that I discussed earlier. This, and the data analysis methods have had a huge impact for me as a professional and just my ability to systematically teach. And then, like you, Mareile, I now incorporate the concepts and principles of ABA in most of my class work. We talk about the databased decision-making that I learned from the field of ABA. We talk about the principles of ABA and treatment practices. So, I mean, I owe my professional self, right now, to learning about applied behavior analysis, and then being able to integrate it with speech-language pathology.

Koenig, Mareile: Awesome! Thank you, Heather.  
And now, Nikia? Tell us about your background.

Nikia Dower: I graduated in 1986 with my masters in speech and language and immediately started into a private practice. We had a range of clients from learning disabilities to others that were very complex. I knew what I was doing with the learning-disabled kids and the articulation kids, but I was unsure how to manage the complex cases. At the time, it was hard to go to conferences to learn more. There was no Internet, and it was difficult to expand your scope of competence.

And then one day a private school approached me about contracting some speech and language services for them. It was a private residential school for children with autism, and I agreed to support them. Through this work, I learned that there were so many different faces of autism, I learned that there were some kids that I was able to easily work with and others that I was very challenged to work with, behaviorally and cognitively, having learning stick, if you will. The school supported Floor Time and Facilitated Communication (FC), and I just knew that FC could not be right. I wasn't really sure about DIR (Developmental Individual-differences and Relationship-based model) either. So, I was immediately trained in PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). This was the first training that had behavior analytic underpinnings. I implemented this with learners using some complex text systems. We did it to fidelity, and it worked!

And then, one day, a little girl came in with an IEP that included 5 hours of speech to be delivered by a behavioral speech- language pathologist. She was to receive 40 hours of ABA a week. So, the local school system contracted me to do that service and to get trained in behavior analysis. As I became trained and involved in the girl's program, I realized that what they're doing is working! So maybe I should dig a little bit more into this framework. So, I was sold on the teaching procedures, shaping, data collection, fast-paced instruction, and other strategies.

And then I learned about Verbal Behavior and started to chase Vince Carbon around the United States, going to all his workshops. I learned why I had sometimes been failing my students. For example, I wasn't teaching precisely. I wasn't fading prompts properly. I was fading too fast or too slow. I was teaching targets incorrectly or out of scope and sequence, and so on.

So that's how I found ABA and applied it to my practice. I started working with a lot of autistic children and became exclusively an autism SLP for many, many, years. And now I am applying behavior and analytic principles in my private practice with early learners who

have speech and language disorders. I work with very few autistic children currently. So I've served a whole range of populations using behavior analysis across the board.

Mareile Koenig: Thank you so much, Nikia.  
Tammy, tell us about your experiences...

Tamara Kasper: You know, it's great listening to everyone's stories, because they're very similar. I mean, we all share this story of having a desire to help individuals communicate, and then we witness the almost immediate effectiveness of ABA procedures. And then we know we have to be a speech pathologist and a behavior analyst within the same skin in order to provide the most effective intervention for these kids that are complex, that have complex communication needs, whether that's kids with autism or other kids that have multiple handicaps. They need both the lens of a behavior analyst and the lens of a speech language pathologist to have the most effective treatment. And it's interesting that we all kind of stumbled into a situation that highlighted that for us.

As a new graduate in SLP, I just I had new baby, and I was so excited about working at this residential school. I came in there, and the first thing they taught us was about how you manage problem behavior. This I was an excellent facility. And it was a baptism by fire in understanding the functions of problem behavior and in understanding like that, if you could figure out what function a problem behavior served - whether it was to get access to items or to get people attending to them, or to get people walking away from them - then you could teach the right communication to replace that problem behavior. And even though this seems so simple when I'm saying it now, to me at the time, this was life-changing. Like, oh, we're not just guessing, or we're just not looking at what he's doing and then doing something in response to that, we're looking at what the behavior actually means for him, and then giving a better way of expressing that. So, for most behavior analyst, this is like one of the basic things. But for me, as a new speech pathologist, I was like, oh my gosh, this is so cool how people figure this out. So amazing right? And I was amazed by that. I worked there for 3 years, and then every other job I had after that, because I had this background in dealing with kids with severe problem behavior, all the kids that had problem behavior got assigned to me. So, my caseload was comprised of kids with problem behavior and disruptive behavior. And later, when I worked in pediatrics, many of those kids were later diagnosed with autism, because autism is a disorder of communication and social interaction. And if you don't have a good way of communicating, right? problem behavior works pretty good to get things you want coming towards you and things you don't want moving away from you.

What I loved about behavior analysis, and particularly when I started learning more about the science, like Heather, I was like, Oh, my gosh! We can figure out how to fix these things by being very analytical, and by really analyzing each unique person. And that was what I think was exciting. I wasn't looking at a medical diagnosis. I was looking at a person and their unique characteristics. When I'm teaching other people, I say, "observe with wonderment. Observe without judgment, to just look at someone in fascination and see how their behavior develops and then what you can do to change that."

So, when I was working at Vertical 3 clinic, one of the kids on my caseload was one of the first kids to receive services through a Lovaas replication site, which was a giant ABA Clinic. And I was really curious about this. I went to the intro workshop. And in 3 days they thought that child more than I taught him in 3 months, and I said, I have got to learn about this. And, like Mareile, I became a therapist on that child's team, in addition to being his speech language pathologist. And through that relationship I started consulting to a Lovaas replication site and learned a lot about procedures. And then I met Vince Carbone and started studying to become a behavior analyst. And that's when I really understood 2 things that we're also life altering for me. One is that motivation doesn't dwell within an individual. Motivation is our responsibility. It's not that kids are plateauing or that they're not motivated. It's that I haven't figured out a way to contrive situations where they will be motivated, and that's on me. And it's also on me if I weaken their motivation by teaching things that are too hard or not in a systematic enough way. So those 2, just understanding those 2 made me a much better speech-language pathologist. And I'm learning more and more as I get older. And believe me. You keep learning in this field. You're going to learn every week. In fact, every day you learn something new. Kids teach you. Your colleagues teach you. Across professions, colleagues will teach you. And this will be so essential for you, continuing to learn and grow as a speech language pathologist, whether or not, you choose to become a behavior analyst as well. But that idea of like looking at each person as a unique individual, and knowing what is of social significance to them, really listening and being with them. And the understanding that communication is bi-directional, like Mareile was saying: Yes, I will follow your lead or use your lead to teach you. But also, there are times when I'm going to be the instructor and you're the child. So, you're gonna follow my instructions. I'm gonna do that in the most reinforcing and motivating way, so that you can learn as quickly as possible. But you're gonna require some of that assistance to learn. So, I think those are probably the biggest things that I've learned. And my goal, really, for the last 30 years has been to inspire engagement and speech and conversation in individuals with autism. I'm not trying to change anyone or any of their neurology. I'm only trying to set up conditions under which they'll be inspired to learn, that they'll want to learn, so that they have more options terms of what communication modality they can use; more options in terms of where they can communicate and with whom? Right? Because that's always our role as a speech language pathologist, to have support as much autonomy, right? So, you'll be able to meet your wants and needs and engage in independence and choice-making, Right? for your life.

So, I really feel like my recent work with kids who have significant, complex communication needs, where I'm really working on contriving that motivation and noticing their subtle communication attempts and shaping those and teaching other behavior analysts how to do that, and then how to layer more complex communication on top of that. This brings me so much joy, because, just like that first time when I saw that kid make that big change in 3 days. Now, when I go to a clinic, in 3 days kids are changing and people are really inspired and excited. And it's because of speech pathology and behavior analysis. I want to inspire you today to learn as much as you can about a behavior analysis and about working with other professionals so we can continue to build the 2 fields together, because together we can do so much more.

Mareile Koenig: Wow! Thank you, Tammy, for highlighting so many features of behavior analysis that can be combined with the SLP skill set to support engagement, interaction, and communication development among learners with even the most challenging profiles. And thank you to Joanne, Heather, and Nikia for your inspiring stories as well.

## Becoming Certified in Behavior Analysis

Mareile Koenig: Now, If you're a listener who is wondering what exactly it means for someone to be certified in behavior analysis, I'm about to tell you.

Certification in Behavior Analysis is awarded by the Behavior Analysis Certification Board (BACB), which is independent of university training programs and independent of the two major professional associations for Behavior analysis.

The BACB awards two certifications to individuals with university degrees. These are known as the BCBA, which stands for Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and the BCaBA, which stands for Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst. Professionals who have earned the BCBA can work independently. Those who have earned the BCaBA must work under the periodic supervision of a BCBA.

The BACB also offers a credential for individuals without a university education who want to assist in behavioral programs. This credential is known as RBT, which stands for Registered Behavioral Technician. These individuals serve as paraprofessionals in behavior analysis, and they practice under the close, ongoing supervision of a BCBA or BCaBA. Now that you understand the range of credentials, I want to tell you some more about the requirements for earning the BCBA and BCaBA.

There are four pathways to earning the BCBA. Each pathway involves three similar requirements

1. Either a master's or doctoral degree
2. a passing grade on the national certification exam
3. completion of 2000 hours of supervised fieldwork in ABA

The difference between the pathways is in how the educational content is acquired

**In Pathway 1** – the individual earns a master's degree or higher from a program that is accredited by one or both of the ABA professional associations: the APBA or by ABAI.

- o APBA = Association for Professional Behavior Analysts
- o Association for Behavior Analysis International

**In Pathway 2** – the individual earns a master's degree in a related field with degree-equivalency coursework in behavior analysis at a qualifying institution.

- o Not all universities have programs in behavior analysis. Some provide BA content under the umbrella of psychology or special education,
- o Degree equivalency is defined as 21 or more semester hours in 6 areas of BA
  - 1) BACB Ethics Code and Code-Enforcement System; Professionalism
  - 2) Philosophical Underpinnings; Concepts & principles
  - 3) Measurement, Data Display, and Interpretation; Experimental Design

- 4) Behavior Assessment
- 5) Behavior-Change Procedures; Selecting & Implementing Interventions
- 6) Personnel supervision and Management

**In Pathway 3** – the individual demonstrates relevant Faculty Teaching and Research

- o This requires an acceptable graduate degree from a qualifying institution
- o At least 3 years of full-time work as a faculty member within a 5-year period
- o Teaching responsibilities include graduate-level courses on specific topics in behavior analysis

**In pathway 4** - individual must demonstrate relevant Post-Doctoral Experience in ABA

This includes

- o Doctoral degree from a qualifying institution
- o Post-doctoral experience with 10 years of full time, cumulative practice of behavior analysis

Some BAs have a credential that is called BCBA-D. Professionals with this credential have the same responsibilities and privileges of BCBA without the D. However, the D indicates one of two additional achievements in addition to earning a BCBA:

- o Either, the person has earned a doctoral degree in BA from an ABAI-accredited program

OR

- o They have earned a doctoral degree from a non-ABAI-accredited program AND they have met one of three requirements
  - 1) Passed at least 4 graduate-level courses as part of your doctoral coursework
  - 2) Received formal mentorship from a faculty member who held the BCBA and met supervisor qualifications
  - 3) Authored two published peer-reviewed journal articles that are behavior analytic in nature

A link to this information and other details about the BCBA is available in our show notes:

<https://www.bacb.com/bcba/>

Next, I want to tell you about the requirements for earning the BCaBA credential

There are 2 pathways for eligibility. Each requires...

- Minimum of bachelor's degree
- Behavior analytic course content
- 1300 hours of Supervised fieldwork
- Passing a national BCaBA certification exam

As with the BCBA, the difference between pathways leading to the BCaBA is based on how the content knowledge is gained. There are two pathways. Pathway 1 requires a bachelor's degree or higher from an ABAI accredited program. Pathway 2 requires a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, including ~ 19 hours of behavior analytic coursework in specified content areas. This information and more is available at this URL:

<https://www.bacb.com/bcaba/>

## SPABA

Mareile Koenig: Now we're going to hear from Nikia about SPABA.

Nikia Dower: SPABA is the acronym for SPeech-pathology, Applied Behavior Analysis. This is a special interest group within the Association of Behavior Analysis International (ABAI).

SPABA was founded in 2005, by Dr. Barbara Esh, SLP, BCBA. The first annual meeting for the SIG Was in 2005. Mareile, Joanne, and Tammy were all at that very first meeting.

SPABA's mission is to mend that divide between speech pathologists and behavior analysts and to gain recognition of speech-language pathology by ABAI.

SPABA is a close-knit community of SLPs and BA professionals who can chit-chat about new findings in each field, discuss research that needs to be done, and share evidence-based teaching procedures. And we find that SPABA does this well.

SPABA's mission is also to develop and disseminate empirically sound research. We also support IPP and professional practice, particularly between the 2 domains of SLP and ABA. We strongly advocate for the application of evidence-based practice across the full range of services provided by speech pathologists and behavior analysts. We aim to narrow the research-to-practice gap through education, training, and mentorship. One of the outcomes of this last goal is the implementation of SCOPE, which stands for SPABA's Community of Practice Events. SCPPE events occurred frequently during Covid, because we were all on the computer. So, we decided to continue SCOPE beyond covid as an opportunity to learn together. SCOPE is now scheduled as an every-other-month event. Topics range from AAC, matrix training, pseudoscience, critical literature reviews, stimulus equivalents, direct instruction, or anything else that's relevant to speech-pathologists and behavior analysts. It is open to anybody, and it's free. Presenters have been generous by donating their time and expertise for SCOPE events.

We also have a significant social media presence. Please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest X, and LinkedIn. Most of our content disseminated on all media outlets. But primarily it's Instagram and Facebook. Our messages highlight ongoing research presentations and publications by dually certified SLP-BCBAs. It highlights behavior analytic research that may be of interest to SLPs and SLP research that may be of interest to behavior analysts. And it recognizes SLPs who are newly certified as BCBAs and BCaBAs.

SPABA promotes research by offering annual grants to students and practitioners to support research and dissemination projects. We strongly encourage people to apply. Applicants may be students or practitioners in SLP, ABA or special education. Preferred research content includes any study that advances the evidence base or behavior analytic conceptualizations for the treatment of speech, language, communication and feeding disorders. In other others, we seek to support research that will contribute to the science of ABA and reflect the mission of SPABA. The dissemination projects should facilitate cross discipline, dissemination of accurate information about speech, pathology and behavior analysis, so that we can continue to foster knowledge sharing and collaboration. Applicants do not need to be SPABA members.

Regarding SPABA membership: If you do not want to become a member of SPABA, you can just join our community on Facebook. There's no cost for that, and the website content is peer reviewed. If you'd like to be an official member, it's a \$20 annual membership fee for professionals, \$10 for students. Membership has grown from 23 in 2005 to 150. This year we're up to maybe 60 so far. It varies each year, but we usually have an average of about 70 official members.

I hope that answers your questions...

Mareile Koenig: Thank you Nikia for sharing information about SPABA. A link to the SPABA website are available here: <https://www.behavioralspeech.com>

By the way, I understand that there are about 525 dually-certified SLP-BCBAs and SLP-BCaBAs across 43 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico as well as 19 countries outside of the U.S. The population of Unicorns is increasing every day!

### A Resource

Mareile Koenig: Before we go, I'm going to pass the baton to Joanne for a resource about ABA for SLPs.

Joanne Gerenser: So, one thing I think we forgot to mention is that when those of us in the ABA-SLP world give presentations at conferences, the people who attend will ask, "where can I get information about ABA"? Everything is written by behavior analysts for behavior analysts.

So, Mareile and I got together with a whole bunch of really smart SLPs and behavior analysts, and edited a book called ABA for SLPs, a Guide to Interprofessional Collaboration for Autism Support Teams, and each chapter really helps describe the different components of applied behavior analysis. And the great thing is that each chapter was written by a behavior analyst and a speech language pathologist. So I think it's a really good place to go if you have questions about data, collection procedures, behaviors, management strategies, curriculum development, and so on. So I encourage you to take a look at it.

Mareile Koenig: Thank you so much, Joanne, for mentioning this book. Here is the full reference:

Gerenser, J. E., & Koenig, M. (2019). ABA for SLPs: Interprofessional collaboration for autism support teams. Brookes Publishing.

### Final Note

Before we sign off, I want to share a reflection about our content. It concerns the science of ABA in contrast to intervention procedures based on the science. Remember Heather's analogy about cardiology? She said, you can't do cardiology, because it's a huge science. But you can apply interventions based on cardiology. The same is true of ABA. You can't do

ABA, but you can do ABA-based interventions. Unfortunately, we tend to say “ABA” as an abbreviation for ABA-based interventions. So, if you heard us use that short-hand during our discussion, that is the explanation.

Next, I want to thank the members of this panel for sharing their time, knowledge, experiences, and insights about ABA in relation to SLP. I hope the listeners noticed our enthusiasm for the effectiveness of ABA-based interventions and for ABA-SLP collaboration.

Finally, to our listeners, I want to thank you for the privilege of your time. We hope this podcast has clarified some concepts about the science of ABA, the value of ABA-based interventions, and the importance of ABA-SLP collaboration.

And now, in honor of West Chester University, we wish you a Ramtastic day!  
Rams Up!