**AUDIO TRANSCRIPT**


**"Ayers All Access" Podcast**
*Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation*
*Lipscomb University College of Education*
**Episode 18 – December 5, 2022**
Title: *Ask Me Anything about Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) – Part 1*
File Length: 00:34:31


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00:00:02:28 - 00:00:32:15
Hello. Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people, current topics, practical tips, and innovative solutions— all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and all the work of the Ayers Institute, check out our website at AyersInstitute.org. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at @AyersInstitute.

00:00:33:08 - 00:01:25:00
Thanks for joining us this week for an 'Ask Me Anything' episode about Applied Behavior Analysis. We've gathered some questions from current teachers and leaders from all across the state of Tennessee about this subject, and we'll be seeking answers from two experts with years of experience in the field. They have not seen these questions in advance, so there will be some surprises. Of course, out of professional courtesy, we always give our guests the options to "pass" on any question they feel wouldn't get a sufficient answer in the Ayers All Access podcast format. If you submitted one of these questions, I hope you're listening. And for everybody else, if you find yourself with a burning question

about Applied Behavior Analysis, stay tuned to the end of this episode and we'll let you know how to send that question to us. Who knows? Your question might be featured on our next Ask Me Anything!

00:01:26:15 - 00:02:00:04
I'm Karen Marklein and I serve as an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Lipscomb University and Director of Programs here at the Ayers Institute. Today we will be talking with Annette Little and Pam Scretchen. Annette and Pam are dear friends of the Institute and we are so excited to have them today. Annette is the Director of Studies in Applied Behavior Analysis and Pam is an Instructor in the Applied Behavior Analysis Program here at Lipscomb University. Annette and Pam, thank you for agreeing to answer these questions today.

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It's my pleasure. Thank you for inviting us.

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I am thrilled to be here. Thank you.

00:02:05:04 - 00:02:31:20
All right. Okay. So today's episode, as I said, is focused on applied behavior analysis and to help set the scene. I'd like to ask you one of my questions, if that's okay. That's helpful. All right. So I would like to know in a nutshell or some people might call it an elevator pitch. Define applied behavior analysis. So what is applied behavior analysis in the context of schools and educational institutions?

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It's simply put, it is the interaction of behavior and the environment. And so it's not setting specific, but it's what we get out of our environment when we engage in behaviors in order to access things we like or avoid things we don't like. And then behavior analysis. Our job as behavior analysts is to analyze that, like, what are you getting out of your environment? What about this environment's working for you? What about this environment are you trying to avoid? And then we go in and try to improve that environment so that it then improves the lives of everybody in that environment.

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All right.

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Yes, I agree. Particularly in the school setting, we are able to go in and really work with educators and the student. And as the net said, you know, what is it that is kind of the payoff of the behavior and how can we allow the child to communicate what they want and what they need in a way that is appropriate and in a way that they can get their needs met in an appropriate way and at the same time teach the adults in the environment to respond to that appropriately as well.

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All right. So sounds like this is a very student centered approach to education. How is that student interacting with his or her environment, would you say? That's correct?

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That is absolutely.

00:04:02:00 - 00:04:14:23
Correct. All right. Well, I know this is a passion topic for both of y'all, So not this is my last personal question. Okay. So how long have you been involved in ABA and in what roles are you now currently?

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I have been a behavior analyst for a little over 18 years, and I've worked in several roles, particularly working with families in the community, going into their home settings and helping families, community, you know, work with their

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challenges in the home so that they're able to do all the things that they love as a family and be able to communicate with their child as well. I've also worked in clinical settings and throughout the school districts in Tennessee just working with different schools and consulting with teachers.

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I actually started in the field of education almost 30 years ago, and I was a special education teacher, and I kept finding myself in positions where I was in residential treatment centers. I was teaching in alternative schools, just loved the population of individuals who exhibited some interfering behaviors and eventually found my way into ABA and became certified in oh six and have been practicing in the field since then.

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And was wondering where it was when I was a teacher because it would have been so helpful for me to have had this information. So I want to share this information about ABA with as many teachers as I can, because it would have really helped me back in my earlier days.

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All right. Well, thank you for that. Such great such a breadth of experience and expertise. I'm really excited to hear what you guys have to say today. So let's just start since you were thinking, where have you been all my life? ABA? You know, so as this is a way for teachers to really access some good information as well. So let's just talk is talk in general best practices if you can. And then are those best practices specific to a developmental age or like as we separate children into elementary and secondary ages?

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Best practices for me is really, you know, tapping into

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what will make a child successful, particularly in the classroom and in the school setting. And part of that also entails, you know, the adults or the teachers taking a step back and looking at, you know, is this a won't do behavior or can't do behavior. And as educators, our job is to teach and teach a skill. It's not far-fetched to say, well, we also need to see if, you know, is this behavior deficit or interfering behavior a skill deficit? Is there a need to teach that? And many times the best practice for me is to have people step back and kind of look through a lens of how can I teach the skill or what skill does this student need right now that they're not showing that they have? And it could be anywhere from they need to learn how to recruit attention appropriately.

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It could be they need to learn how to escape or access something appropriately. So how do I teach that? That's a best practice for me.

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Absolutely. And I think best practices really need to focus on prevention. So we need to look at the environment in a way that we can predict what behaviors will occur. And if we can predict something, we can prevent something. So if we have classrooms that are set up to prevent interfering behaviors, then everyone's happy. It's a win-win for everyone. And we can do that in our field. We're really good at collecting that behavioral data, collecting environmental data and analyzing it and making those predictions and then giving supports to the adults and to the students in that environment to help prevent any of the interfering behaviors that might arise.

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Okay. All right. So we got one question about since you were talking about collecting data. We got a question from a listener. How do I need more information on how to identify student needs? So what would you say to that question?

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That's a broad question. There are so many student needs, behavioral student needs. I'm assuming.

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I would guess that that's what that's about. How do I identify behavioral needs.

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Similar to, you know, if you're looking at a data collection system? Part of what you want to distinguish is, is this a pattern that is happening? And if it is, you know, part of what we can do is, as Annette said, looking at the predictions, we call those our antecedents, our ABCs, our antecedents, the behavior and the consequence of what's happening. And look to, you know, seeing like what is happening right before that behavior, what are things going on in the environment? Was the student asked to do something? Were they

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given something or did they receive something? And then what happened directly after the behavior? Was it something that they gained access to or avoided? And maybe taking some ABC data collection about that? We also look at times of day that behaviors may be occurring and that could just simply be, you know, a data sheet that just catches time of day, a setting. What setting is the behaviors occurring or where are they not occurring? And then let's see what's successful in that environment.

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And that's kind of a data capture of looking at the needs of if we're talking about an interfering behavior that that listener is referring to.

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Yeah, I think the data will indicate what those needs are. And, and the good part of it would be how do we give that child the needs that they that they're wanting before they have to act out in order to get it? And so a lot of times we'll go in and we'll collect the ABC, as Pam was talking about what happens before the behavior, what are the triggers, essentially. And then you see the behaviors and then what does that

child get out of it or escape? And then we tell the teacher, you just need to give it to them before they act out.

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And we measure how much of it they're getting, how much, if it's attention, which is a really common one in the school setting, is that the child gets a lot of attention after an interfering behavior. And then we measure how often the child gets attention throughout the day. And then we're like, wow, Like they get 100% attention for the interfering behavior. But throughout the rest of the day, they're only getting attention about 10% of the time. Let's move.

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That.

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Right. Let's move that needle a little bit. Let's give them more attention throughout the day. And so when you build in what they want throughout the day, their needs, then that interfering behavior goes away because they don't need to act out in order to receive what they're already getting. So, you know, looking at that data to see what are those behavioral needs, and then providing that on the front end really helps.

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Everyone in that environment.

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Yeah. Okay. So I have noticed that you are intentionally saying interfering behavior. Yes. Y'all are intentionally using that word. So we have one question about the difference. How do you shift from good and bad behavior to what y'all are discussing right now? Is there really is no good or bad? There's really just interfering behavior. And so this this particular question even went on to say, for those that have grown up in environments that make judgments based on behavior, how do we break that and cause people to really look at changing their language from good and bad to more appropriate language that would be beneficial for all involved?

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That's tough because we most of us have grown up with the language, good behavior and bad behavior. But as behavior analyst, we don't believe in good behavior and bad behavior because the behavior is functional for that individual. So how can it be good or bad? It's working for that individual or they wouldn't be doing it. And so really looking at the reasons for the behavior, like separate the behavior from the child. Right. The every child is a good child. But look at that behavior and ask yourself, well, what is this behavior telling me? It's a form of communication.

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What is the favor telling me? It's telling me that this child needs something. Or as Pam was referring to earlier, this child has a deficit and is trying to avoid something that is difficult for them that they can't do. This child is telling you, I need help with this and I don't know how to ask for help. So I'm going to throw my book down and then I'm going to get sent to the principal's office. And I don't have to do that work. It's a win for me. And so really looking at what is the behavior telling me, it takes away that emotional feeling from the teacher that, oh, you're so bad.

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And it's just it moves it into this mode of communication instead. And I think that helps that helps me a lot, too. When I look at inner frame behaviors, not just in classrooms but in society in general, I look around, I'm like, Huh, That was an interesting way to act. It's an inner frame behavior. I can't really call it bad. Why? And then that's the next question that comes into my head is why did you do that? What was your purpose? What was your function? That helps me. So I don't know if that would help teachers or not, but hopefully that will help some teachers.

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Yeah.

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Yeah. Just removing the person. Oh, what were you going to add to that?

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No, I totally agree. Just being curious about it. Have a curiosity about the behavior and that takes the lot away from the good versus the bad.

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Okay, so this is back to a question that has occurred to me. So you've been saying interfering, which we might associate with the negative side of behavior. What would you call it? What would you label positive behavior or good behavior? Ones interfering.

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Socially appropriate.

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Okay. All right. So instead of good or bad, we need to say socially, socially appropriate and or, you know, interfering. Okay. All right. Thank you. Okay. So since we're talking about vocabulary, we have one just about information that focuses on ABA vocabulary. So as we are, you know, helping other people get on board with these ideas, where might you point someone or what are some really important labels that we need to keep in mind?

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So a, B, a vocabulary is really is a different language. And so we use terminology that is used in other fields, but we use it in a different way in consequences. A good example of this in in some fields and in just talking to people in general, a consequence is typically a bad thing that happens after a behavior. You're going to get a consequence for that. But in the field of ABA, consequence consequences, anything good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant that happens after a behavior that either prevents it for from happening again or keeps it going and makes that behavior increase.

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So consequences are not something that's bad. And so our vocabulary is different and we use words differently. And so what I recommend to students in the program is to start reading articles that are published out of the field of ABA. It will sound like a foreign language to you at first, but the more you expose yourself to it, the more it makes sense. I teach both foundations and advanced ABA in the program, which is the first class students take in the last class. And students really struggle in that first

class. They're like, We don't understand any of these articles and like, keep reading them, keep reading, keep reading, keep reading.

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By advanced ABA, they're like, We understand everything. This is great. And I'm like, Well, go back to foundations articles and follow those and start reading those again. So it's exposure, exposure to the language, speaking the language with the behavior. Analysts and other people who understand the language will help as well, approach it as a foreign language and learn it in that manner.

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All right.

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And I would also say, you know, particularly if you know, a behavior analyst or if you're working with one in your school, you know, don't be afraid to say, okay, in layman's terms, what do you mean by that? Like, antecedent? And I can easily say the trigger. Hmm. Like what happened right before or the consequence. Like what happened right after? Many times they may say, well, nothing happened. They didn't get a consequence. They got away with it, like there's the language piece. And then I have to pull them back and say, Did someone say something? Did someone take away something? Did they get out of something? And I can just really kind of give them kind of the application of what it looks like.

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And so, you know, that is really, you know, asking what's another way to say the behavior analytic language.

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Okay. All right. So, yeah, it sounds like you just immerse yourself in it, learn as much as you can about it, and then start looking for patterns within your own classroom. So I know we've been talking about how you work with teachers and how teachers. You mentioned teachers in schools. You may have an but a behavior analysis on staff. How do you get leaders and other, you know, admin sorts of roles on board with these practices? What would you advise teachers to do?

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I think showing success is really important. So schools have to provide the FBI's the big piece for students who are struggling, especially those students who are being served under Edina. And if they have marked on their IEP that they have an interfering behavior that's preventing them from being successful in the classroom, setting that FBA, the IEP, has to be completed. And so behavior analyst going in and creating the IP is that are super successful.

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And then administrators can see that they oftentimes need to be convinced that this is going to work. And once you show them like this child was really struggling, you guys are looking at alternative placements. You were, you know, looking at doing all these things. This VIP was put in place and now the child is remaining in the classroom all day. He's making friends. The teacher's like, Oh, I love that he came to school today. I'm so excited to see you.

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And it's genuine. And I think that's where they get that buy in from is just experiencing this success. Hmm.

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Yeah, I agree. I'm thinking of an example of a student where, you know, the only time that administrators in the office saw them was because they were sent to the office or in trouble or had to call their parent. And so when I started working with that team and developing this team approach where we needed to find other people in the building that could give this child a. Tension throughout the day prior to them acting out. And so, you know, those administrators was kind of my first target, like, okay, well, having a good day, let's go tell your principal that you're having a good day and just trying to build relationships

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with that particular student or, you know, the teacher to show kind of the positive side of what could be and what we could see more of for a student and including them. You can't help but to buy into that if you were a principal.

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And what teacher's not going to say, no thank you or what principal's going to say, No, I don't think we should do that. You know, like these real success stories, I'm sure it just has this snowball effect within a school. Y'all, this is beautiful. Because you answered a question before I even asked it. Somebody had said something about how do you get teachers to do this? It feels like we're working more because there's more paperwork or there's more things to do. But what you said, Annette, is that it really is the return on that investment. You know, you might need to invest some time.

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Would you agree with that?

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Absolutely. But I think also as behavior analysts, we need to hand over plans that are doable in a classroom setting. Oftentimes, we write plans for an individual and we forget that a teacher has, you know, 20, 25, 30 other little ones in their classroom. And so I always tell teachers, don't hesitate to tell a behavior analyst, hey, model this for me. Stand up here and teach my class while implementing this behavior plan at the same time.

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And if the behavior analyst can't do that, then maybe it's too much for that teacher. And so we have what we call social validity in our field where we take the plans and we go through them with those that have to implement the plans and we go step by step. Here's a piece of the plan. Is it feasible, do you think you can do it in this classroom setting and they say yes or no? And if there are pieces of the plan that they're like, there's absolutely no way I can implement this plan in this classroom setting, then we need to look at adjusting that piece or removing it completely.

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So plans need to be manageable. They need to be doable, and teachers don't need to hesitate to ask and go to that BCBA and say, Hey, I need a more manageable, more doable plan for this classroom. Because you're right. Like if it's super complicated, it's more paperwork, you're not going to do it. And we rather than be doing something towards this end goal rather than nothing.

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It sounds like at the heart of this, it's all about relationships. I'm building relationships with my students as the teacher, but the teacher is building that relationship with the behavior analysts to say, This is what I need as the teacher. This this is what I believe is valid for me to be able to do with students. It sounds like the relationship piece is extremely important, So that gives us a little bit towards the adults involved in Ava. And there were several interesting questions about the adults involved.

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So we at the Years Institute, we were recently with a group of teachers who introduced me to the term professional trauma. And she was saying, you know, as teachers, we all we all carry around this professional trauma as well. So when we're thinking about the adults, you know, who are involved in this, how do you how do you encourage teachers to manage their own emotions and behaviors?

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I'll take that question just because I've again seen such success when teachers and administrators take time to care for themselves and also understand what's going on within themselves when they see the interfering behaviors with the students. And we typically in our trainings will share a video by circle of security and it talks about just messages that we were brought up with concerning behavior in general, and they refer to it as our shark noise.

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What were the messages we got from our own parents in our own upbringing about what's right, what's okay, what's not, and how? Sometimes, though, that shark noise can come up in us, which then, you know, produces a lot of stress and unnecessary or sometimes inappropriate responses when we see behaviors from our students in the classroom. So the first thing that I like to do is to just put it out there and just say, what is your shark noise? Like what? What are those triggers that come up? And let's talk about those and address those.

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And then that way again, it's another way to separate yourself from all the interfering behaviors that you might see your feel like you can't handle. How much of that is yours versus what is the child. And so once you can kind of do a little bit of that work that requires, you know, some inner work self-reflection for yourself, I think that's the first part of it. And then, of course, there's the self-care buzz word. But I'd like to say doing the emotional part of that is just as important than going out in.

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Nothing's wrong with a pedicure or manicure, but that's right. But, you know, taking care of yourself in whatever way and find your people is. Well, there's been many school teams where we don't realize that we're in a stressful situation, but other people can see it on our faces. They see it in our body language, our voice, tone, interaction. And we give each other permission to tap us out, like literally tap us on the shoulder. We know what the tap is. You might not like it when you're tapped, but other people who you trust can see that you need a break and to excuse herself and just, you know, go take a minute and whether you're taking a quick walk or going and get a Coke or drink or whatever.

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Finding that tribe of people around you to be supportive is important.

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Yeah. So important. As you were talking, I was thinking, you know, we've been talking about the ABCs for students for teachers. Have those antecedents, behaviors and consequences, too, you know. So what is my trigger as a teacher and how is that behavior serving me or maybe harming me in some way? And so thank you for broadening my ideas about this. It's really important to think of all of this applies to everyone in in a school setting, classroom setting, all of those things.

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Okay. So before we end, I just want to say we had a question about how do I become an RB t or a BCBA? So tell us what an RB t is. How do I become that and tell us what a BCBA is and how to overcome that.

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So an RV T is a registered behavior technician. So it's a certification where you only have to have a high school diploma. Then you do a 40 hour training, a competency based assessment with a BCBA, which is a checklist that the BCBA has observed you completing these competencies and you're able to do these things and then a national board exam. And so once you do those things, then if you pass the exam, pass everything, you are an RB team.

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You cannot practice as an RB team in isolation. So even when you sit for that your board exam, you have to list the name of the person, the BCBA, who is going to be supervising you. And then once you have that RB tee, you can work for clinics, school systems, lots of other places. One of the benefits of being in RB T is that these companies can build insurance for your services. To become a BCBA is a little more intense. You actually have to have a master's degree. So if you don't have a master's degree, you can get a master's degree within the field of ABA.

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And then once you have that master's, which included verified courses, or you can take those as standalone courses, if you already have a master's when you finish your coursework plus 2000 hours of internship, which is really fun. But most people work full time jobs in clinics or schools within that counts as their hours. So you just have to see it as I'm going to be working full time and those are going to be my 2000 hours and then I'm going to be taking classes on top of that.

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And most programs take about two years to complete. And then, of course, it's really difficult and national board exam that you have to pass. And once you pass that, then you are a board certified behavior analyst. And in some states that's enough. In other states such as Tennessee, we have licensure. So once you're board certified, then you have to apply for licensure. And once you get that licensure, then you can start practicing as a BCBA, a behavior analyst here in Tennessee.

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All right. So let's get Lipscomb specific for a minute. So how does Lipscomb help guide that process for students?

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So Lipscomb offers a master of science in ABA, and we also have a certificate program. So the certificate program is for those that already have a master's and they don't want to add a second master's. So in the certificate program, it's four semesters. They take those verified courses. They still have 2000 hours

that they have to get in. But again, they're getting that through their jobs. The courses are offered in the evenings, so it fits within this work schedule. And we have hybrid courses so you don't have to drive all the way to campus to sit in your classes.

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And we have relatively small student to teacher ratio. Students really get to know their instructors, their professors on a personal basis. And we provide I think what Pam and I call mentoring for life because we have students that come back that graduated five, six, seven years ago, like, hey, were you consult with me? Like, I need some help, I'm starting a company or I'm doing this or I'm doing that. And of course we're always, you know, willing to help and love. To have that connection that continues past graduation.

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But the Master of Science program is a two year program, so it also has the verified courses. It has the 2000 hours of field experience that you have to get. And then we have some additional courses that are built into that master of science. One is a communication language and social skills class because, you know, behavior is a form of communication. It's actually taught by an SLP because I really want to bridge that connection between the two fields because we need to work closely together with SLPs who understand communication, understand language, and we're bringing in the behavior piece.

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So it's an SLP who teaches that course for us, and he's the only one in the program who's not abusive. All the other instructors are be CPAs, but I'm working on them, so I'm trying to get if you're out there, listen, Stephen, you're going to become a CPA. I'm going to convince you to do that. And so we also have an additional research class in the Master of Science that's not in the certificate program. And the purpose of this extra research class is to teach students how to publish. I think it's great that they take a research class.

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I think it's great that they have this research they're producing in their verified course research class, but then they present it to their classmates and they're like, Congratulations, you got an A. There you go. And I'm like, No, you need to disseminate this more widely. And so we have a class that teaches students how to disseminate their research either through publication or conference presentations, and then what is the and then we have an autism spectrum disorder class. So that's the first only three classes difference between the certificate and the master of science in that third course is autism spectrum disorder, not because that's the only population we work with.

00:31:42:07 - 00:32:16:21
It's not. We work with any living human being, but that is our biggest funding source. All 50 states now have an autism mandate. Tennessee was the last one to get the autism mandate, but we got it. So yay Tennessee in that autism mandate states that insurance companies have to provide ABA services. They have to pay for that if you have a diagnosis of autism. So that's our biggest funding source. So we want students to really understand what does this label mean? It's just a label, that's all it is. But we need students to understand what this means and how to navigate this this insurance world.

00:32:17:09 - 00:32:26:04
So that's essentially our program. Pam is amazing at running this supervision piece. I don't know if you want to talk to that piece of it.

00:32:26:14 - 00:32:48:07
No, you did well. Like, I think supervision is great. You get to apply what you learn and get feedback immediately. And so that's I think what sets us apart from other programs as well is just how closely our supervision experience is with what you learn from the classroom to what you do hands on.

00:32:48:19 - 00:33:06:08
All right. Well, thank you. And I feel like we're right back to relationships. You guys are our mentoring for life. And through that supervision, I'm seeing their relationships really emerge as well. So thank you both so much for answering these questions today. And thank you for all your work in education.

00:33:06:12 - 00:33:07:03
My pleasure.

00:33:07:13 - 00:33:08:04
Thank you.

00:33:09:07 - 00:33:31:08
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