THE ART OF CLINICAL RESEARCH

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Behavior analysts have developed a scientifically validated technology of human behavior change, with manifold applications to diverse problems of social importance. Yet, despite convincing evidence of the value of applied behavior analysis, the discipline continues to be practiced primarily by a cadre of *academic* researchers and *not* by the providers of human services themselves. Thus, the impact of this technology has been less than its potential.

This situation has arisen because of many factors, among which is the fact that although academic training may provide an adequate background in basic principles of research, most master's and doctoral programs do not attend to the special demands required of the *applied* researcher working in agency-based settings. Dennis Reid has done the field a service by providing a superlative textbook on how to set about the difficult but rewarding task of making applied research a routine and expected component of the daily activities of human services providers. This book should move the field beyond independent and circumscribed *demonstrations* of what is possible through applied behavior analysis to institutionalized *applications* of such methods to the resolution of social problems.

The approach Reid advocates is for the agency staff to conduct such research, directed by a well-trained senior-level administrator who occupies a central role within the agency hierarchy, but whose job description incorporates a major applied research role. Reid's recommendations have credibility because he occupies such a position himself, and his book is appropriately packed with examples

of research he and his colleagues have conducted and published in *JABA* and related journals.

The point of the book is how *staff* can do research, not how to *do* research. The reader is expected to have a passing familiarity with research in general and applied behavior-analytic inquiry in particular. Thus, *Developing a Research Program in Human Service Agencies* is not meant for use as a basic research text: The reader will search in vain for the usual exposition of the principles of single-subject research, methods of observing behavior, how to calculate interrater agreements, and the like. What will be found is something far more rare; specific and workable suggestions on how to institutionalize the practice of applied behavior analysis within agency contexts.

Among Reid's suggestions are many that are obvious but rarely so clearly stated, such as the following. Make it clear that the purpose of applied research is to further the *service mission* of the agency, not to make outstanding breakthroughs in one's field, build one's vitae and reputation, or to "experiment" in general. The best way to do this is to choose research topics relevant to the agency's daily routine. Do you have a client with a particularly resistant type of self-injurious behavior? If so, conduct an appropriate single-subject research investigation to provide the client with the best possible treatment. If the results are publishable, that is an added benefit but is clearly not the driving force behind the research. If staff absenteeism or turnover is a serious problem for the agency director, propose an experimental inquiry designed to reduce absences or promote job retention. Good experimental control is necessary, not to satisfy the reviewers of journal manuscripts, but to ensure that the agency's interventions and personnel policies are the best possible ones for clients and staff.

Other suggestions are to focus on singular problem areas, topics that are workable within the agen-

Review of Reid, D. H. (1987). *Developing a research program in human service agencies: A practitioner's guidebook*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas. Correspondence and requests for reprints should be addressed to Bruce A. Thyer, School of Social Work, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602.

cy's constraints and that may be addressed through research strategies that require little money, relate to service delivery, and are responsive to changing client/system dynamics. Reid explains why one should avoid experimental designs to compare the relative efficacy of one form of treatment over another and how to use modifications of conventional research designs to husband scarce resources of staff and time (e.g., probe designs).

A topic discussed at length is how to involve agency staff in applied research, from the agency administrator down to the direct care personnel. The use of modeling and shaping of research skills is presented, as is the importance of altering job descriptions to incorporate participation in applied research as an expected component of work skills. Reid also emphasizes working with direct care staff to improve their research skills in areas such as the observation of behavior and the administration of experimental treatment protocols. The creative use of local college students and temporarily assigned workers within the agency to augment research resources is described, as is the development of agency reinforcers to promote staff participation in practice research. Again, some of these latter suggestions are obvious, and some are not. Reid suggests that staff just beginning to undertake research assignments be given relatively small projects with a short-term payoff and only gradually be expected to work on long-term endeavors. He wisely recommends the appropriate but liberal use of coauthorship credits, and when warranted, even precious senior authorships should be awarded.

One of the best sections of the book is Reid's clear step-by-step description of the journal publication process. He uses *JABA* as a model to illustrate the processes of manuscript preparation and submission, peer review and commentary, revision, and resubmission. Courageously, he includes

reprinted letters from *JABA* referees critiquing a study of his that was ultimately published. Both neophyte and experienced writers will find that this section takes much of the mystery out of the publication process.

Reid speaks less fondly of undertaking large research projects supported through external funding. The disadvantages (time of preparation, low likelihood of receiving an award, being channeled into areas of inquiry that may not be relevant to agency needs, etc.) often offset the financial benefits of such grants. It is also recommended that agencies *do not* appoint a "Director of Research" to supervise applied agency-based research. Reid believes that in most cases such individuals are not seen by the direct care staff as having much administrative authority or clinical acumen. Instead he suggests that the potential applied researcher seek the above-mentioned senior level administrative role and be prepared to work twice as hard (late nights, odd hours, weekends) to perform the dual roles of agency staff member and senior researcher. This is apparently a juggling job that Reid performs well. Applied researchers in general and behavior analysts in particular will find the guidelines in this book to be exceedingly useful in taking behavior analysis out of the university and into the field.

Although the text's examples draw heavily upon Reid's own experiences in the areas of mental retardation and developmental disabilities, the lessons to be learned have obvious applications to school systems, community mental health centers, hospital settings and social welfare agencies. For my part, I plan to adopt it as a required research textbook for doctoral students.

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