Brian A. Iwata (Editor, 1984–1986)

EDITORS ARE STUDENTS OF JABA

Several experiences convinced me at an early stage in my career that *JABA*, its editorial staff, and its system of peer review serve a key educational function in our field and, furthermore, that anyone interested in conducting applied behavior analysis research should become a “student of *JABA*.”

The journal was completing its 3rd year of publication when I entered graduate school in the Fall of 1970. I knew nothing about *JABA* and little more about behavior analysis because I somehow managed to skip the course on learning during my undergraduate studies. My graduate advisor, Jon Bailey, who had just completed his PhD at Kansas and who was a new assistant professor at Florida State, made up for lost time. I was assigned to be his teaching assistant for a course in child psychology, and the readings consisted of the Bijou and Baer text on child development and, as one might guess, articles from *JABA*. My first task was to grade quizzes; later, I wrote study objectives. Both of these required careful reading of the *JABA* articles, and this was my introduction to applied behavior analysis. Research described on the pages of *JABA* was unlike any I had encountered before. The questions posed were clear and practical, the methodology was usually straightforward, and everything seemed to focus on observing and counting real behaviors (as opposed to attitudes, personality traits, or other mental processes). Quite literally, *JABA* became my “textbook,” and I spent a lot of time not only reading the journal but also asking Jon about the settings in which studies were conducted and the people who did the research.

Another early experience taught me about a different aspect of *JABA*: the personal shaping of experimenter behavior by its editors. Todd Risley, the current editor, was visiting Tallahassee while my thesis research was in progress, and he sat in on one of our informal seminars. When I described my project to him, he suggested a few possibilities for additional manipulations. None seemed nec-

essary, but Jon and I agreed that it would not hurt to follow the advice by adding on a final experimental condition. Later, while I was revising my thesis for submission to *JABA*, an issue of the journal arrived that contained an article describing an experiment very similar to mine. Only then did I realize that Todd’s suggestions allowed me to extend that work without my knowing it at the time. His subtle prompting improved my research and also moved the field a little farther along.

Near the end of my graduate studies, Stephanie Stolz, then an associate editor, asked me to provide a guest review. I previously had received valuable editorial feedback on my own manuscript, and I was eager to respond in kind. I studied the manuscript in minute detail, read several related articles, and sat for hours trying to figure out how the manuscript could be improved and the research extended. That experience taught me the educational value of the peer review process, not just for submitting authors, but for reviewers as well. Stephanie’s letter to the author and the other reviews provided numerous insights on how research activity and its translation into words could be improved. I apparently was a capable learner; my dissertation also was published in *JABA*, and I was invited by Stewart Agras to serve on the board of editors less than a year after completing my PhD.

Several years later, I still found myself in the position of studying *JABA*, but now I was looking more often at manuscripts arriving at the front end of the editorial process. Dan O’Leary appointed me as an associate editor in 1978, and Dave Barlow subsequently asked me to “stay on for a while” when he assumed the position of editor in the Fall of 1980. Thus, by the Summer of 1982, I was completing my 4th year as associate editor and looking forward to one more year of my (almost double) term. Dave called me in mid-July and asked if I would be willing to be nominated as the next *JABA* editor. I knew that the search for a

new editor was underway but had no idea that I was being considered. I fully expected one of three or four individuals more senior to be given the reins of the journal at the end of Dave's term. Still, I thought that I had a good idea of how *JABA* worked, and I accepted the nomination, which was confirmed at the APA meeting in August. My term would begin the following August (1983) and cover the journal years 1984 to 1986.

While preparing to assume the editorship, I quickly realized that the editor's role in influencing research is usually indirect. The types of manuscripts submitted are determined by editorial policy, and what is subsequently published generally reflects the initial editorial decisions of associate editors. Thus, my major responsibilities, aside from keeping the process running smoothly (which was relatively easy due to the superb system I inherited from Dave), were to determine what *JABA* would publish and who would handle manuscripts.

With the major focus of the journal continuing to be full-length research articles, I wanted to emphasize submission of two other types of manuscripts, which Todd Risley initiated during his term, but which had faded gradually during ensuing years. The first was Brief Reports. Benchmark journals in other fields (e.g., *Science*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*) routinely published very brief articles, and this seemed like a perfect outlet for replications, case studies, and the like. The *JABA* Brief Report had grown in length over the years, so that it was difficult sometimes to differentiate between a report and a full-length article (it was not unusual for some of the former to be longer than the latter). We placed stricter page limitations on reports, attempted to publish a higher ratio of reports to full-length articles by having many authors "trim down" their revisions, and prompted convention presenters to submit manuscripts. We met with some success, but the report has never achieved the status of a standard category from the standpoint of submitting authors' behavior. That is, few authors submit brief manuscripts and request review for possible publication as a report. Nancy Neef recently made some radical changes in both the format and processing of reports that

are extremely helpful for authors. I hope that her plan is successful and that we soon will see a dozen reports published in every issue of the journal.

The second category of articles that seemed relevant to but missing in *JABA* consisted of technical papers focusing on methodology and instrumentation. Given our heavy emphasis on observational procedures and creative experimental designs, and rapid developments in the area of computerized systems, it is unusual that the journal does not publish more about these topics. We attempted to stimulate interest in this area during my term, but our success was limited (i.e., I continued to see technical articles published in journals like *Behavioral Assessment*, but *JABA* saw few such manuscripts). I still believe that technical articles have a potentially important role to play in *JABA*.

My final "contribution" to policy was a minor one. Review articles sometimes were followed by either the original reviewers' comments or a substitute, which I found extremely valuable. Therefore, I began the practice of having at least one commentary (and where appropriate, a rejoinder) accompany every review or discussion article.

With respect to editorial staff, my plan was to increase opportunities for participation in the review process at all levels by limiting the terms of associate editors, adding as many new individuals to the editorial board each year as possible, and making frequent use of both guest associate editors and guest reviewers. At the time of my appointment, all of my fellow associate editors (Kelly Brownell, Ron Drabman, Bob Koegel, and Laura Schreibman) except for Steve Hayes were completing terms ranging from 3 to 6 years, and when I went searching for successors, I found out why. The pool of potential associate editors is very small for a variety of reasons; hence, editors who are fortunate enough to find an individual willing to serve are reluctant to face the task of finding a replacement. Nevertheless, I thought that regular turnover in associate editors might accomplish several things: allow more participation, expand the pool of potential editors, and encourage those asked by assuring them that their commitment would be limited to 1 to 3 years. During my 1st year as editor, Scott Geller was

added to handle manuscripts in the areas of community research and organizational behavior management, Tom Kratochwill agreed to process educational and statistical papers, and Dennis Reid inherited manuscripts on developmental disabilities. The following year, I appointed John Martin to handle clinical papers and those in the area of behavioral medicine, and Nancy Neef and Ron Van Houten to cover a variety of topics. Wayne Fuqua, who, like Nancy and Ron, had wide-ranging interests, came on board during my final year. These individuals earned my enduring respect by working tirelessly to insure that the journal's editorial standards were maintained at a high level, yet they also attempted to expand both the scope of and participation in the journal in many ways.

One special issue was published during my term as a result of serendipitous events. While at ABA one year, I attended a session on gerontology. Several presenters, including Elsie Pinkston and Laura Carstensen, emphasized the fact that greater emphasis was being placed on the aging process in our society, yet it was not reflected in the research published by behavioral journals. Several weeks later, I happened to be talking with Lou Burgio, a former postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins who subsequently accepted a position at the National Institute on Aging, about his current work. He described some interesting experiments and then added that he was unsure about where to send the manuscripts. Follow-up activity eventually produced a *JABA* special section on behavioral gerontology, which was edited by Lou and contained papers submitted by both Elsie and Laura.

Like my predecessors, I experienced a few problems and narrowly averted two near disasters, the details of which are not relevant here. On a day-to-day basis, however, the work was immensely stimulating. For me, the unique aspect of serving as associate editor and then editor of *JABA* was having the opportunity to see the shaping of research-related behavior on a large scale. Several individuals who later were to serve as associate editors or editors began submitting manuscripts, reviewing, or making editorial decisions during my term. The *JABA* peer review process improved

their skill as researchers and gave them valuable editorial experience, but only because they all were serious "students of *JABA*."

It was ironic that my immediate successor as editor would be the individual who introduced me to *JABA* initially. Jon Bailey's training at Kansas coincided with the inception of the journal. He studied under several of *JABA*'s editors and associate editors, he was one of its most frequent submitting authors, and he trained either directly or indirectly one of its editors and two associate editors. With this track record and unmatched enthusiasm for getting projects off the ground, Jon assumed the office in the Summer of 1986. He was a little late getting started due to a delay in receiving the *JABA* files (they were shipped from my office but were diverted to an unknown location at Florida State by an administrator). When everything finally arrived, he immediately began to discharge his new responsibilities, revising policy and initiating a transition in editorial staff.

As an aside, people often ask me two questions about articles on which I appeared as an author, one general and the other specific. The general question is: Who handled your manuscripts while you were editor? I faced that problem within a month after assuming office, when Mary Riordan submitted her thesis on pediatric feeding disorders. Unsure of how to proceed because *JABA* had no policy on such matters, I scanned the journal to find articles published by sitting editors. The editorial routing sheets for these manuscripts revealed no particular pattern, although current associate editors often were assigned the responsibility of manuscript handling. Concerned about possible conflict of interest, I next called several colleagues for advice and received all sorts of replies. One said something to the effect: "You make the ultimate decision on publication anyway, so why don't you handle it yourself?" I decided to have former editors handle manuscripts of the current editor and asked Dan O'Leary to coordinate the review of Mary's paper. This topic was discussed later at a meeting of the associate editors, who assured me that they would feel comfortable rejecting my papers and pointed out that I had performed the same service

on several of their manuscripts! We finally settled on a combination of current or former associate editors or editors.

The specific question pertains to a frequently cited article in which we described experimental (functional analysis) approaches to the assessment of self-injurious behavior, which was not published in *JABA*. I am often asked if the manuscript was rejected by *JABA* or, if not, why it wasn't submitted there. At the time, I was an associate editor, and the status of assessment studies was unclear. Because our manuscript contained no treatment

data whatsoever, I predicted either a prompt rejection or a requirement to add treatment results for our 9 subjects, which I was afraid would detract from the main thrust of the study. We submitted the manuscript elsewhere. In retrospect, it was an error in judgment; I should have allowed the *JABA* shaping process to run its course.

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Jon S. Bailey (Editor, 1987–1989)

LIVING AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. The worst came first.

George Ackley, my trusted editorial assistant (more on him later), and I were anxiously awaiting the truckload of material that comes with the office of editor of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. We were expecting four ancient four-drawer file cabinets containing all the reviews and editorial decisions for all the manuscripts being processed and a dozen or so boxes of office supplies, including the all-important instructions on "How to Run the Journal Office." We waited, and we paced like expectant fathers, and we waited some more, for days, long past the date the truck was to arrive from Baltimore. We were receiving new manuscripts in the mail, and authors were calling to request updates on the status of papers they had recently submitted. The trucking company insisted the load had been delivered, or was about to be delivered, any time now. We were told to "be patient, these things take time you know. We'll look into it for you." Tenure decisions were hanging

in the balance, I learned from authors so stressed out that they audibly gasped when informed about our predicament. I wasn't *really* the editor yet, and I did not have any record of their manuscript; it would be in the files, I assured them. We were waiting, and we were pacing. We were in limbo.

The tradition is that the editor-to-be visits the office of the current editor sometime in the summer before the late August transition. I had duly, and happily, visited the immaculate and efficiently organized *JABA* office at the J.F.K. Institute at Johns Hopkins where Brian Iwata had set up shop some 3 years earlier. Although I served as a member of the editorial board for several years and had completed a four-year term as an associate editor, I had never actually seen the editorial office. I entered with awe as one would a shrine, which it is in a sense; the ancient file cabinets, passed down from one editor to another, with the proper blessings and sacred instructions modified only slightly through the years.

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