In Response

Positive Behavior Support: Considerations for the Future of a Model

Kevin J. Filter

Minnesota State University, Mankato

The emergence of positive behavior support (PBS) has presented some challenges and opportunities for applied behavior analysis. In a recent review and critique of positive behavior support, Johnston, Foxx, Jacobson, Green, and Mulick (2006) acknowledge that the success of PBS in garnering support in schools, agencies that service individuals with developmental disabilities, and state and federal agencies, and suggest some behaviors to be emulated by applied behavior analysis in order to garner similar support. However, they recommend that PBS should not be embraced by behavior analysts because it poses a threat to the field and is less effective than applied behavior analysis. Before this recommendation is embraced by behavior analysts, it is important to consider the ramifications of a split between PBS and behavior analysis, particularly given that PBS has its origins in behavior analysis and is conceptualized by prominent adherents of the PBS model to be a type of or extension of applied behavior analysis (Dunlap, 2006; Horner, 2000). I propose that PBS should not be dismissed but should be viewed as an opportunity by the field of applied behavior analysis to reach its goal of large-scale adoption. A continued strong relation between PBS and behavior analysis may actually accomplish the broadest dissemination

and adoption of effective behavioral technology. It will also benefit PBS by keeping it grounded in the conceptual system that fostered its development.

PBS is clearly still in its formative stages; in fact the executive board of the Association for Positive Behavior Support currently is working to develop a comprehensive definition of PBS and to define the roles for the organization (C. Anderson, personal communication, November 2, 2006). As is true in any organization—even the Association for Behavior Analysis—different members may espouse different perspectives on issues such as the relation between PBS and other perspectives, training models, and so on. This in itself has been the source of many challenges, and perhaps misunderstandings, for those in the behavior analysis community. For example, Johnston et al. (2006) emphasize the negative views of PBS researchers toward behavior analysis. However, many leaders, trainers, and researchers in PBS have a favorable view of behavior analysis, consider themselves to be behavior analysts, and continue to publish in behavioral journals such as the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* and *The Behavior Analyst*. Thus, although this situation has been viewed pessimistically by Johnston et al., I believe that there are significant grounds for having an optimistic view about the future relation between PBS and applied behavior analysis. Because PBS is in its formative stages and is rooted in behavior analysis, the field

Address correspondence to Kevin J. Filter, Armstrong Hall 23 – Psychology Department, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota 56001 (e-mail: kevin.filter@mnsu.edu).

of behavior analysis should embrace this opportunity to be involved in its development rather than hinder it. Further, it is critical that PBS remain closely aligned with behavior analysis (and the Association for Behavior Analysis) because it is the science and technology of behavior analysis that drive PBS.

It is also important to note that an openness from the behavior analysis community to work with, not against, PBS could provide access to the educational and political communities that behavior analysis has traditionally struggled to influence. Johnston et al. (2006) correctly note that PBS has very quickly achieved large-scale adoption. This is essentially a proliferation of the behavioral technology developed by behavior analysts. By embedding behavior analysis in a service delivery model that is accessible to the larger population, PBS has maneuvered around many of the barriers to large-scale adoption that have plagued applied behavior analysts in spite of the power of their science and technology to affect human problems.

A continued strong relation between behavior analysis and PBS would also benefit PBS and the individuals who are served by those who work within the PBS model. Although there are preliminary data supporting PBS (Marquis et al., 2000), it risks losing the conceptual system that drove these early applications if its ties to behavior analysis are weakened. As Baer, Wolf, and Risley (1968) pointed out when the applied branch of behavior analysis was established, technological descriptions of procedures such as reducing the difficulty of tasks in order to improve behavior are important for replication, but conceptually grounded statements referring to “aversive establishing properties” of the task and their relation to “escape-maintained” behaviors are better because they promote the development of conceptually similar but

topographically different interventions. This insight is important today as PBS becomes a new shoot on the applied branch of behavior analysis.

To reiterate an important point, PBS is in its early developmental stages. It has attracted a diverse membership including researchers, educators, and practitioners. Members share a common goal—one shared by applied behavior analysts—to effect meaningful changes in the lives of those we serve. Due to the diversity of representation, members vary widely with regard to expertise in research methods, the conceptual basis of behavior analysis, and indeed the definition of PBS. (To some extent, this is true as well with the Association for Behavior Analysis. For example, basic versus applied researchers have different views regarding methodology [note the increasingly widespread use of statistical analyses in the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*], and practitioners often have a different sense of what behavior analysis is than do researchers.) I (and many of my colleagues who are behavior analysts and work in the framework of PBS) believe that it will be in the best interests of both PBS and applied behavior analysis if the two remain closely linked. Perhaps the best conceptualization of the relation between PBS and behavior analysis for the future was described by Wacker and Berg (2002) when they suggested that PBS is a model (but not the only model) of service delivery within the applied branch of behavior analysis. It is not, then, a new science so much as a new approach to providing behavioral interventions that is grounded in the existing science of behavior analysis. Some of the unique features of this service delivery model, as articulated by Carr et al. (2002) and Horner (2000), are (a) an emphasis on person-centered planning, (b) use of multiple interventions that target comprehensive lifestyle changes, and

(c) service to all individuals in a system across multiple levels of prevention. Although these features do little in terms of establishing a new science, they seem to have hastened the acceptance of behavior-analytic applications among a wide range of service providers, most notably at the level of whole schools (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005).

As I look to the future of PBS and its relation with behavior analysis, let me acknowledge that Johnston et al. (2006) clearly articulate the need for further discussion within the community of behavior analysts—those who are familiar with PBS and those who are not. One way to foster discussion between PBS and behavior analysis will be for scholars who work within the PBS model to present more of their research at conferences that target behavior analysts. These conference presentations offer a unique opportunity for proponents and skeptics to critically (and collegially) discuss methodology and theory. A similar benefit could be garnered by an increase in the submission of data-based PBS studies to established behavior-analytic journals such as the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. Although some PBS proponents have a significant history of such publications, new scholars in the field should adopt this practice. Finally, I suggest that organizations that promote PBS, such as the Association for Positive Behavior Support, should consider adopting policies that will increase ties between the two fields. Ultimately, I contend that any endeavors that increase or maintain the communication between

scholars and practitioners in PBS and behavior analysis will beget positive effects. It is my hope that those within PBS and those within the applied behavior-analytic community will work together to advance the science of behavior to identify and apply effective, sustainable solutions to human problems.

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