Doing It Yourself

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Applied behavior analysts must (1) be skilled in applying assessment and treatment methods and protocols, (2) be knowledgeable about the basic science upon which those methods and protocols are based, and (3) be able to read, understand, and critically evaluate new basic and applied research that is relevant to the clinical populations they treat. It is not necessary, however, that applied behavior analysts be skilled in conducting research themselves. Evidently, faculty who train these individuals must have the same skills and knowledge in order to be effective trainers. But they too need not be skilled in conducting research because this is not a part of the training they deliver. No doubt most readers will agree with items 1 through 3. The issue that Dixon et al. raise is whether faculty expertise in conducting research, as measured by their records of publication, improves these skills *in their trainees*.

Let us consider the skills one by one. It seems unlikely that trainees' assessment and treatment skills would be directly impacted by faculty research productivity, inasmuch as the two types of activity are not related. To maintain otherwise would require a roundabout argument asserting that research-active faculty are in some way better than other faculty, and therefore must provide better training in assessment and treatment methods. Dixon et al. do not make this argument, but it resonates in their article, and readers may be inclined to generate it on their own.

It also does not seem likely that trainees' knowledge of the basic science would be directly impacted by faculty research productivity. The knowledge at issue is *established* basic science, not new discoveries or refinements to knowledge that may be obtained from new research. Surely, a science teacher need not also be a researcher in order to convey the extant findings of a science effectively. Here too, it is not necessarily the case that a science teacher who is also an active researcher does a better job of conveying this information, a point that, in this domain at least, Dixon et al. concede.

This leaves the question of whether faculty research productivity improves trainees' ability to understand and critically evaluate new research. The argument here must be that research-active faculty are somehow more tuned in to the research enterprise and so are better able to instruct and guide trainees in understanding and evaluating research. But as in the other two domains, this is not necessarily the case. Consider also that there are many pedagogical methods that can be used to augment instruction in understanding and evaluating research. For example, seminars that include sessions led by trainees who present, critique, and lead discussions of research articles are likely to be beneficial in this regard. Journal clubs are another way to develop a research culture in a training program, and research savviness in trainees, goals that Dixon et al., and no doubt most other behavior analysts, find desirable. A third example is inviting active researchers to give guest lectures about their own research problems, methods, and conclusions. Because there are many pedagogical methods that can augment training in understanding and evaluating research, it is not necessary for faculty to be active researchers themselves in order to deliver excellent training in this domain.

One might nevertheless ask whether research-active faculty add value to applied training in some way. Possibly. But one could say the same about the other two skills. Faculty who

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themselves have an active practice of applied behavior analysis might be better able to train individuals in applied skills, and faculty who engage extensively, and perhaps exclusively, in science teaching, and may therefore not have expert knowledge about or experience with therapeutic applications, might be better able to convey basic science findings. These arguments are based on the principle that faculty members who themselves currently engage in the behavior they are training (applied behavior analysis, extensive interaction with science findings, or research) are more competent trainers than faculty who do not. I know of no evidence supporting this principle, and considering the large number of variables that must contribute to competent training, it seems unlikely that doing-it-yourself has a substantial positive effect of its own, if any. Note that this principle does not address whether faculty have *ever* practiced applied behavior analysis, taught basic science, or conducted research themselves. Surely many have, at the very least in their own training. And this past experience no doubt contributes to their current training competence, even if they are no longer engaged in the activity.

These considerations lead to two conclusions. The first is that excellent training in applied behavior analysis can be achieved by faculty who are not themselves active researchers. The second conclusion, which follows from the first, is that it does not make sense to evaluate applied behavior analysis (ABA) training programs, either formally or informally, on the basis of the

research productivity of their faculty. The best gauge of the quality of a program's applied training, although imperfect, is no doubt the program's BACB examination pass rate.

The information Dixon et al. provide about individual ABA training programs may nevertheless be useful to prospective students. It goes without saying that all applicants to ABA training programs will be interested in professional training and certification. But some may also be interested to varying degrees in learning about and participating in research activities, both in their training programs and perhaps also later in their professional careers. These students can use the information in Dixon et al.'s article to help select a program that best suits their needs and interests.

Author Note

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