In Response

On Critchfield's Proposal: Student Concerns and Recommendations

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The previous issue of *The Behavior Analyst* contained an article by Critchfield (2011), entitled "Interesting Times: Practice, Science, and Professional Associations in Behavior Analysis," about a rift between the field's scientists and practitioners. Critchfield observed that the science and practice of behavior analysis are subject to different contingencies of survival. He argued from history that scientists and practitioners are served best by aligning with separate professional associations to manage these contingencies. And, he concluded that behavior analysis would be served best if its scientists aligned with the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) and its practitioners with the Association of Professional Behavior Analysts (APBA).

When I, Ed Morris, read Critchfield's article, I was swayed by his observations, argument, and conclusion, and sent him this e-mail:

> I just read "Interesting Times …" and loved it twice. First, I loved the product: the argument and its conclusion. Second, I loved the process: using history to inform the argument and its conclusion. I am teaching the history of behavior analysis this semester. Assigning your paper is a perfect way to end the semester: students can see the value of doing history. Maybe I'll assign it at the beginning of the course next time. I addressed the issue of "Why history?" in the first week … but I did not have a great exemplar from behavior analysis. Now, I have one. Thanks for doing this. (Personal communication, December 3, 2011)

The week I assigned Critchfield's article, the class had a lively discussion about it. Unlike me, they were not swayed. They granted the correctness of Critchfield's observations and argument, but not his conclusion, not for behavior analysis, at least not yet. In particular, they were concerned about the effect of separating science and practice on the future of behavior analysis and on their future as behavior analysts. They also made some recommendations.

Their discussion led me to suggest that we write an "In Response" to Critchfield's article based on their concerns and recommendations. They agreed. So, they e-mailed me the points they made, and I prepared this response with them. It is organized into three parts: separate professions, separate associations, and separate conventions. None of the students' concerns is necessarily fatal to Critchfield's analysis, but they suggest that his conclusion might be qualified. Some of their concerns may appear naive, given that the students (and I) were not privy to discussions

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inside ABAI and APBA over the past several years. In this, however, we are little different from most of the journal's readers. Perhaps further analysis by members of ABAI's and APBA's governance could clarify matters.

In any event, before turning to the issues and recommendations, I offer some terminological distinctions because behavior analysis, the topic of concern, has several meanings. This can be confusing. As a field, behavior analysis includes a discipline and a practice, both of them professions, both of them called behavior analysis. As a discipline, behavior analysis includes the field's conceptual systems and sciences, the latter being its basic sciences (e.g., the experimental analysis of behavior), applied sciences (e.g., applied behavior analysis), and permutations on them (e.g., translational sciences). As a practice, behavior analysis includes applications informed by the discipline as a whole, but especially by its sciences. With these distinctions made, we turn to the separation of science and a practice in behavior analysis, that is, as separate professions.

SEPARATE PROFESSIONS

Based on the history of other fields, Critchfield argued that behavior analysis would be served best if its scientists and practitioners aligned with separate professions, science and practice, respectively. One of the fields he mentioned was psychology. This raises a variety of issues, which we organize in terms of the extent to which behavior analysis and psychology are similar and different.

Similar Fields

If behavior analysis and psychology are similar, the following issues arise. First, although psychology has evolved into separate professions for science and practice, it did not have to. Neither does behavior analysis, the differing contingencies of survival notwithstanding. Second, although psychology has survived as separate professions, it may not continue to. Behavior analysis may not survive as separate professions either. Third, although psychology has evolved and survived to the present as separate professions, it is subject to different contingencies of survival than behavior analysis. These may override those endemic to science and practice. For instance, psychology survives as a field, in part, because it faces relatively little competition. Thus, if separating its science and practice weakened it, the effects seem to have been negligible. Behavior analysis, in contrast, faces stiff competition everywhere in its science and practice. Thus, if separating its science and practice weakens it, the effects may prove momentous. At the very least, it will suffer in competition with psychology.

Different Fields

If behavior analysis and psychology are different, additional issues arise. First, although the contingencies of survival differ in science and practice, the differences may be less extreme in behavior analysis. For instance, basic research in behavior analysis elucidates principles (e.g., reinforcement) that are universal, within biological constraints, across individuals, societies, and cultures, as well as across the domains of behavior (e.g., social, emotional, cognitive). As such, the principles apply directly to practice, and practice depends directly on the principles. The contingencies of survival for its basic science and practice are thus interrelated. Separating the professions may impair the relations.

In contrast, basic research in psychology is rarely basic in the forging sense. It elucidates outcomes (e.g., behavior, reinforcers) that are historically situated within individuals, societies, and cultures. As such, they do not apply as directly to practice,

and practice depends less directly on them. The contingencies of survival for psychological science and practice are not as interrelated. Separating the professions does not greatly impair their relation.

Second, not only are the contingencies of survival in science and practice more interrelated in behavior analysis, some behavior analysts engage in both science and practice. The contingencies of survival for their applied science and practice are thus interrelated. Separating the professions may impair this relation and belie the continuum that exists between them. In contrast, few psychologists engage in both science and practice. The contingencies of survival are not as interrelated within individuals. Separating the professions does not greatly impair their relation and belies no continuum between them.

Third, not only would separating science and practice in behavior analysis impair their interrelation, it might also discourage translational research, which behavior analysis is uniquely positioned to advance, given its science–practice continuum. In psychology, separating science and practice is less likely to discourage translational research, which psychology is less suited to advance, given its science–practice dichotomy. Federal funding for translational research better aligns the contingencies of survival for scientists and practitioners in behavior analysis than in psychology.

Additional Issues

Separating science and practice in behavior analysis raises two other concerns. First, if the settings for science and practice are separated, it may hinder scientists who recruit research participants from practice settings (e.g., autism treatment centers, early childhood classrooms). They would be hindered by professional turf, the suitability of practice settings for conducting science, and the proximity of physical settings for conducting research with those participants. Without access to participants, the contingencies of survival in science (i.e., publications, presentations) might constrain applied and translational research. Second, separation invites the creation of separate science and practice graduate programs, the latter being analogous to PsyD training in clinical psychology, that is, practice without science. This likely would destroy the strength, integrity, and unity of behavior analysis, and not be in the best interests of practice.

SEPARATE ASSOCIATIONS

Separating science from practice would be accomplished institutionally by their having separate associations, which was Critchfield's main point. The concerns we raised about separating science and practice as professions also apply to separating their associations, but we do not reiterate them. We note, instead, some more practical concerns.

The mission of ABAI is "to contribute to the well-being of society by developing, enhancing, and supporting the growth and vitality of the science of behavior analysis through research, education, and practice." The mission of the Association of Professional Behavior Analysts is

> to represent the interests of professional behavior analyst practitioners who are credentialed by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, Inc. (BACB); to provide support and resources to BACB-credentialed professional behavior analysts; to work with federal, state, governmental, and third party entities to enhance recognition of BACB-credentialed professional behavior analysts; to work with federal, state, governmental, and third party entities to support the needs of BACB-credentialed professional behavior analysts; to provide education opportunities to BACB-credentialed professional behavior analysts; to provide resources to professionals in other fields and to consumers of behavior analytic services concerning the practice of applied behavior analysis; to bring professionals, consumers, and vendors together at national

and regional meetings; to support improvements in and access to services provided by BACB credentialed professional behavior analysts; to promote public understanding of the professional practice of behavior analysis.

Notwithstanding the different contingencies for science and practice, APBA's mission is arguably contained within ABAI's mission. Critchfield's point was whether one association could adequately address the needs of both science and practice. He thought not, whereas we think it should remain an aspiration, as difficult as it may be.

The reasons for the aspiration include communication across science and practice in publications (e.g., a house journal, newsletter) and governance (e.g., Executive Council representation, committee structure, task forces). The advantages of common publications include (a) maintaining a common language, suitable to each profession in the context of the other and the culture at large; (b) contacting literatures that not only span the field, but that also delve into each other's profession; (c) learning how to translate research into practice and practice into research to assist in solving each other's problems; (d) improving teaching, for instance, by providing scientists with practical examples of the principles at work and practitioners with the scientific foundations of the their applications; and (e) advancing behavior analysis as an integrated cultural practice that includes both science and practice. The advantages of common governance range from (a) sharing resources whose duplication is wasteful for both professions to (b) putting faces to the names of scientists and practitioners in a manner that engages them in reciprocal social influence to advance both science and practice in behavior analysis as a whole.

Recommendations

Should scientists and practitioners have fully separate associations, they can still advance common missions. These may be aided by (a) including representatives of each association in their governance; (b) reducing the dues for dual memberships, especially for students and junior colleagues who can least afford them and whose early patterns of membership may influence their later patterns; (c) reducing journal subscription costs for nonmembers of the other association (or members in both) for their journals; and (d) working together on common projects. The latter might include implementing a certification process similar to that of the International Society for Performance Improvement (http://www.ispi.org/content.aspx?id=1544). By using results-based certification, behavior analysis could use training and assessment techniques they have already developed (e.g., personalized systems of instruction, repeated measures of behavior, data-based decision making), thus increasing the probability that they certify only those who engage in effective practice, not just test taking or hours of supervision.

SEPARATE CONVENTIONS

The concerns we raised about separating science and practice into different professional associations also apply to annual conventions, for instance, (a) maintaining a common language; (b) contacting presentations that span the field and delve into each other's professions; (c) learning how to translate research into practice and practice into research; (d) improving teaching; (e) advancing behavior analysis as a cultural practice; (f) sharing resources whose duplication is wasteful; and (g) engaging reciprocal social influence that advances behavior analysis as a whole.

Recommendations

Should scientists and practitioners eventually hold fully separate

conventions, they can still advance common missions. These may be aided by reducing substantially the registration and workshop fees for those who attend both conventions, again especially for students and junior colleagues whose early patterns of conference attendance may influence their later patterns. Even senior colleagues, though, will be pressed to attend separate conventions without a reduction in registration.

Alternatively, the conventions could be held concurrently, successively, or jointly. They could be held concurrently in the same city at adjoining venues, as ABAI and the Association for Psychological Science once did, albeit by happenstance. This would save travel expenses. The conventions could be held successively, as ABAI does with the Society for the Quantitative Analysis of Behavior (SQAB), which meets immediately before the ABAI convention. This saves travel, lodging, and conference expenses, and integrates SQAB speakers into the ABAI convention. The APBA could share similar savings and integration by meeting immediately after the ABAI convention. Although this would make the ABAI-APBA convention more expensive for attendees and might differentially influence attendance, it would be less expensive than attending two conventions. Finally, and most advantageously, the conventions could be held jointly, further reducing the aforementioned costs and increasing integration.

CONCLUSION

My students acknowledge, of course, the difficulty of having one association address the contingencies of survival that affect both science and practice. Critchfield may well be right. Nonetheless, they urge that the benefits of maintaining one profession, one association, and one convention are worth the effort. Maintaining them is a problem in cultural engineering that behavior analysts know something about. Perhaps we need more baseline data. What data confirm or deny ABAI's success in supporting both science and practice, and why (e.g., conference attendance, participation)? Would the data be different if we had separate associations? What data confirm or deny that ABAI members are unhappy about its support for science and practice, and why? Would the data be different if we had separate associations? What experiments could ABAI undertake to improve these outcomes? ABAI's ability to address the contingencies of survival for both the science and practice of behavior analysis is a problem to be solved. The integrity of the field may be at stake, as well as it competitiveness with other fields and organizations, red in tooth and claw.

REFERENCE

Critchfield, T. S. (2011). Interesting times: Practice, science, and professional associations in behavior analysis. *The Behavior Analyst*, *34*, 297–310.