

# CONDUCTING RESEARCH AS A BEHAVIOR ANALYST PRACTITIONER

BENEFITS, STRATEGIES, AND MISSTEPS TO AVOID



Dennis H. Reid and Dorothea C. Lerman

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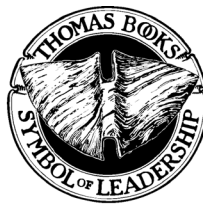
**Benefits, Strategies, and Missteps to Avoid**

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*and*

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*This book is dedicated to Brian A. Iwata, whose work, collaboration,  
and mentorship fostered the research passion and skills of students,  
practitioners, and colleagues around the world.*



## PREFACE

Conducting research as a behavior analyst practitioner has many benefits for the delivery of human services, the behavior analysis field, and practitioners themselves. Despite a frequent desire to conduct and publish research, however, most practitioners have limited if any experience in conducting and publishing research as part of their work in human service agencies. This book describes how interested practitioners can successfully engage in behavior analytic research during their ongoing work, whether functioning as a clinician, supervisor, consultant, or staff trainer.

Strategies are described in practical terms for selecting topics amenable for research in typical human service agencies, planning and implementing applied research procedures, and writing papers about research for publication and presentation purposes. The information provided is based on a collective total of over 85 years of experience conducting research as a practitioner (primarily the first author), training practitioners to conduct research (primarily the second author), and collaborating with numerous other practitioners on research endeavors (both authors). The information likewise stems from having published over 200 research articles in a wide variety of professional journals, particularly the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* and *Behavior Analysis in Practice*.

Common obstacles practitioners often face in incorporating research within their service delivery are also presented along with specific means of overcoming the obstacles. Such means include, for example, collaborative processes to ensure sufficient personnel resources to assist with research activities, promoting agency support for applied research, using existing behavior analytic skills that are relevant for conducting research, refining practitioner skills when necessary for research purposes, and selecting research methodologies that are most readily applicable within ongoing service delivery. Additionally,



attention is directed to how practitioners can comply with important ethical requirements associated with research involving agency clients and staff. An underlying intent is to help interested practitioners initiate, complete, and publish research in a manner that results in significant professional as well as personal benefits and, in turn, enhanced quality of work life.

Denny Reid  
Dorothea Lerman

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**CONDUCTING RESEARCH AS A  
BEHAVIOR ANALYST PRACTITIONER**





**Section I**  
**INTRODUCTION**



## **Chapter 1**

### **OVERVIEW OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH AS A BEHAVIOR ANALYST PRACTITIONER**

**B**ehavior analyst practitioners have been providing therapeutic services for people with disabilities and special needs for over five decades. Across that time period, the number of behavior analyst practitioners and corresponding services has increased markedly. The increase has been particularly significant during the last two decades due to widely expanded recognition of the value of behavior analytic services for children with autism. Behavior analyst practitioners now represent one of the most rapidly growing professions in the United States.

Behavior analyst practitioners currently provide a wide variety of therapeutic services, especially for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities, including autism. Therapeutic procedures carried out by behavior analyst practitioners are based on the principles and practices of applied behavior analysis (ABA). The procedures are grounded in research within ABA that developed and scientifically demonstrated their therapeutic efficacy. Correspondingly, behavior analyst practitioners typically provide services with a strong evidence base to support their therapeutic utility.

Although the most recognized role of behavior analyst practitioners pertains to providing evidence-based therapeutic procedures for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities (and training others to provide the procedures), practitioners can fulfill another important role. That role involves conducting research as part of their work within human service agencies. There can be multiple benefits of behavior analyst practitioners conducting research as part of their ongoing service provision.

Many of the benefits of behavior analyst practitioners conducting research relate to reducing the research-to-practice gap in the delivery of human services. The research-to-practice gap refers to noted differences in the recommended provision of services for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities as reflected in the professional literature versus how various services are often provided in typical human service agencies. In particular, procedures derived from research and disseminated within the literature that constitute state-of-the-art or best practices frequently are not provided in human service agencies or not provided in the intended manner. It is generally considered that if practitioners conduct research as part of their work in human service agencies, more routine service provision would include professionally recommended practices.

There are several ways that behavior analyst practitioners can help reduce the research-to-practice gap by conducting research in human service agencies. Most apparently, by conducting research themselves, practitioners will be astutely aware of the results of the research in regard to new or improved treatment procedures. Such awareness can facilitate the practitioners subsequently incorporating the procedures within their ongoing work with consumers of agency supports and services, as well as within the work of other agency staff.

Another way research conducted by behavior analyst practitioners can reduce the research-to-practice gap pertains to enhancing the applicability of research outcomes related to providing therapeutic services for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities. To illustrate, most research in this area is conducted by higher education faculty. The latter research, when successful, is published and disseminated in professional journals and related literature which practitioners can access. Practitioners can face obstacles in effectively implementing therapeutic procedures developed through such research within their human service work. The obstacles are primarily due to the *demonstration* focus of many investigations conducted by university and college faculty.

More specifically, demonstration-focused research frequently occurs in experimental laboratories or specialty clinics. The research demonstrates that a particular procedure can beneficially affect some aspect of the functioning of the research participants in those settings. However, the laboratories and clinics represent very different situations relative to the working conditions in most human service agencies that employ behavior analyst practitioners. The former settings usually

This book describes how interested practitioners can successfully engage in behavior analytic research during their ongoing work, whether functioning as a clinician, supervisor, consultant, or staff trainer. Strategies are described in practical terms for selecting topics amenable for research in typical human service agencies, planning and implementing applied research procedures, and writing papers about research for publication and presentation purposes. Common obstacles practitioners often face in incorporating research within their service delivery are also presented along with specific means of overcoming them. Such means include, for example, collaborative processes to ensure sufficient personnel resources to assist with research activities, promoting agency support for applied research, using existing behavior analytic skills that are relevant for conducting research, refining practitioner skills when necessary for research purposes, and selecting research methodologies that are most readily applicable within ongoing service delivery. Additionally, attention is directed to how practitioners can comply with important ethical requirements associated with research involving agency clients and staff. An underlying intent is to help interested practitioners initiate, complete, and publish research that results in significant professional and personal benefits and, in turn, enhanced quality of work life.

