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IN MEMORIAM

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Brian A. Iwata, PhD: A Life Well Lived

Brian and Peg Iwata in 2010.

Dr. Brian A. Iwata passed away at his home on October 7, 2023, surrounded by his family. He will be remembered as an outstanding researcher and beloved instructor and mentor. He was undisputedly one of the most influential scholars, teachers, and clinicians in behavior analysis since the inception of the field. Dr. Iwata received his PhD in clinical/school psychology from Florida State University, under the mentorship of Dr. Jon Bailey. As the story goes, he selected the school for its location in the beautiful "sunshine state." Dr. Bailey introduced him to behavior analysis and Skinner after he entered graduate school.

After graduating in 1974, Dr. Iwata accepted a faculty position at Western Michigan University (WMU). Less than 1 year later, he was invited to join the editorial board of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (*JABA*), the flagship journal in our field. He accepted a faculty position at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and the John F. Kennedy Institute (now the Kennedy Krieger Institute) in 1978. That same year, he was selected to be an Associate Editor of *JABA*. Remarkably, he became editor in chief of *JABA* just three short years later. Dr. Iwata joined the faculty at the University of Florida (UF) in 1986, where he remained a Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry until his retirement in 2022.

Dr. Iwata's work will continue to endure in large part because of the breadth of its influence. His research on the experimental analysis and treatment of behavior disorders helped to revolutionize our understanding of the learned (operant) functions of severe behavior problems, such as self-injury and aggression, profoundly influencing theory, clinical practice, and public policy (Iwata, Dorsey, et al., 1982/1994; Iwata, Pace, Dorsey, et al., 1994). Dr. Iwata and his colleagues were not the first to propose that problem behavior may be learned (cf. Carr, 1977). However, the development of a simple, effective, and eloquent methodology was necessary to clearly demonstrate that the etiology of any form of problem behavior often can be traced back to its current reinforcement contingencies. Dr. Iwata and his students conducted most of the work on refinements to the functional analysis methodology that has made it more effective in identifying function and more practical for practitioners to use (Beavers et al., 2013; Hanley et al., 2003; Iwata & Dozier, 2008). This methodology opened the door to systematic evaluations of function-based treatments (Iwata & Worsdell, 2005) and made it possible for us to have a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying common treatment procedures, such as extinction (Iwata, Pace, Cowdery, et al., 1994).

Through this research, we developed a deeper understanding of problem behavior and became highly effective in its treatment. With the establishment of a large empirical base, these methods have been widely adopted as part of routine clinical practice and have been influential in changing public policy to require functional behavioral assessment and a behavioral intervention plan when a student's educational placement is jeopardized by their challenging behavior (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997). In addition, his work on two preference assessment formats (single stimulus and multiple stimulus; DeLeon & Iwata, 1996; Pace et al., 1985), his conceptual article on negative reinforcement (Iwata, 1987), and his theoretical and empirical work on the relationship between self-restraint and self-injury (Fisher & Iwata, 1996; Pace et al., 1986; Smith et al., 1996) are noteworthy examples that have greatly influenced research and practice. Above all else, Dr. Iwata was a compassionate champion for the vulnerable populations with whom he worked (Neef et al., 1986; Van Houten et al., 1988).

Some of Dr. Iwata's other enduring contributions, however, may be less well known. The first was his thesis, which examined two token systems with students (token loss versus tokens earned; Iwata & Bailey, 1974). Toward the end of the analysis, Dr. Iwata permitted the students to choose the token system, providing an objective measure of social validity. This study was published nearly

40 years ago, paving the way for the use of such choice measures for the purpose of measuring social validity. Dr. Iwata and his students at WMU also published a series of studies on instructional strategies for teaching adaptive community skills (e.g., how to cross the street safely, use public transportation, order in a restaurant) to individuals with developmental disabilities, work that undoubtably influenced educational approaches for this population (Neef et al., 1978; Page et al., 1976; van den Pol et al., 1981). Dr. Iwata also contributed to the development of the new field of behavioral medicine in the late 1970s/early 1980s, conducting research on ways to increase senior citizens' participation in a nutritious meal program (Bunck & Iwata, 1978), to encourage people to exercise more (Wysocki et al., 1979), to treat seizure-like behavior (Iwata & Lorentzson, 1976), and to improve oral hygiene (Iwata & Becksfort, 1981). And, finally, Dr. Iwata and his colleagues at the John F. Kennedy Institute conducted some of the seminal research on the treatment of pediatric feeding problems in the early 1980s (Riordan et al., 1980, 1984), a precursor to the work of the renown Pediatric Feeding Disorders Program that has since prospered at the Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Dr. Iwata received numerous prestigious awards for his contributions to research and service, including the Gold Medal for Lifetime Achievement in the Application of Psychology from the American Psychological Association (APA). He has also received a number of "distinguished contributions" awards from state associations and numerous awards over the years from UF for professorial excellence, teaching, and research.

Dr. Iwata's most enduring contributions to the field come in the form of mentorship. Nearly 100 graduate students, interns, and fellows trained in his labs. An unprecedented five of his former students have served as *JABA* editor in chief and 14 have served as *JABA* associate editors. More than half of the applied recipients of the B. F. Skinner Foundation New Researcher Award, granted by Division 25 of the APA, have been one of Dr. Iwata's students.

When taking into consideration his approach to education and commitment to quality instruction, Dr. Iwata's influence is truly impossible to measure. He dedicated a remarkable amount of time to teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, providing detailed feedback on written work and posing challenging questions. His lessons in critical thinking and technical writing were constant and influential, and his students strive to pass his wisdom on to their own students. Even students who pursued careers in other fields, such as medicine, remark how his instruction still influences the way they think, write, and view the world. His dedication to education also extended to his mentorship of junior colleagues at UF and elsewhere who appreciated his ardent support and who remember him as a great and influential colleague. Outside the university, he conducted countless clinical workshops nationally and internationally that taught practitioners, caregivers, and teachers to better understand the function of problem behavior and effectively treat the behavior of individuals in their care. The power of producing positive behavior change is incredible and difficult to quantify, and that influence is immeasurable.

On a personal level, Brian (as he was known by his students) taught us as much about life as he did about science and behavior analysis. He taught us the importance of showing up for people at significant times in their lives, to appreciate and strive for excellence in work and life, to love different art forms, to enjoy a delicious meal with friends and family, and to see life as an adventure. He was a life-long, all-encompassing mentor, and his advice and guidance were nearly always exactly what we needed to hear even if we did not know it at the time. He believed in us when we didn't quite believe in ourselves, and he set goals for us that we never thought would be possible. He took a chance on many of us that didn't seem deserved. Above all else, Brian was a master shaper. He had the uncanny ability to see the seeds of potential in each of us that he could nurture and help bloom. Yet, he insisted that he just "steered" us "a little" when we expressed gratitude for his role in our success. "You always had it in you," he assured. His generosity toward and support for his students over nearly 50 years was tenacious and unwavering. For all these reasons, his students often consider Brian to be part of their family. He will be deeply missed, but all of his work and lessons will endure and continue to make the world a better place.

Exactly 1 week before his death, about 20 of Brian's former students had the remarkable opportunity to gather with Brian, his wife, his daughters, and his sisters to share stories and express their deep love and appreciation for his friendship and mentorship. Brian spoke individually with his students, telling each of them exactly what they needed to hear. Without a doubt, his was a life well lived.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Students and colleagues were invited to share their appreciation for and fond memories of Dr. Iwata, and those comments are available as Supporting Information. The Association for Professional Behavior Analysts distributed an earlier version of this tribute via email and social media.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.