

SPRING 2018 VOL 24 (2)

The ONTABA  
**Analyst**



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**ONTABA**  
Ontario Association For Behaviour Analysis

# From the President's Desk

**D**ear members, it looks as though 2018 will prove to be another busy year for ONTABA! The year began with the board of directors completing a full day governance training to ensure that all board members start (or continue) their terms with an understanding of their obligations and rights, as well as the processes which are in place to increase our organizational effectiveness. In January and February, the committee volunteers and board of directors developed work plans and budgets for all committees, task forces, and the overall organization for 2018. The work plans provide a way for committees to be accountable for their activities for the year while ensuring that each committee is working toward goals that are in line with our organization's strategic plan.

In addition to supporting each committee and task force to attain their goals, the board has identified other important tasks for 2018:

- Complete a staffing scan to determine the feasibility of ONTABA hiring a staff member, as well as, what type of staff member ONTABA would benefit from in the more immediate versus distant future (currently in progress).
- Develop and approve a Credit Card Policy, Privacy Policy, Social Media Policy, and Diversity Policy.
- Commence development of a comprehensive policy and procedure manual.
- Develop a basic risk management plan.
- Revise ONTABA's Mission Statement (currently in progress).
- Revise by-laws to support the implementation of the Private Act (currently in progress).

The board of directors will continue to keep the membership up to date and will seek feedback and approval as necessary. We hope that you will continue to

provide us with your support and constructive suggestions and feedback.

I encourage you to read on and find out what additional great work our committee volunteers have accomplished over the past few months. Don't forget to take a peek at the "What Would You Do?" and The Cusp columns and check out the call for papers for the latest column—The Motivator. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Cunningham  
President, ONTABA



# Announcements

The search is over...  
introducing ONTABA's President-Elect



Kendra Thomson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Disability Studies at Brock University, and a Doctoral-level Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA-D). She has volunteered on various ONTABA initiatives since 2015, was elected to the ONTABA board as a director-at-large in 2016 and has been co-chair of the Professional Regulation Committee and a member of the Accreditation Committee. Previously, Kendra served in various roles on the Manitoba Association for Behavior Analysis Board of Directors. Kendra's research interests involve investigating best practices for training others (parents, support staff, etc.) how to provide evidence-based support to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and how that impacts individuals and their families. More recently she has begun exploring

ABA for assessment and treatment of sexual offending in dual diagnosis populations and has a forthcoming book on the topic. She has taught students and conducted research across three universities in Canada, completed a post-doctoral fellowship with the CIHR chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research, has worked clinically in autism programs and sport performance enhancement, and has consulted on various government initiatives. Kendra is passionate about the field and is looking forward to being part of the continued growth of the organization in her new role as President-Elect.

## The Motivator



Call for papers  
for the Analyst's  
newest column



Welcome to our newest column showcasing original research from practitioners, college, and university students in Ontario. The goal of this column is to publish research aligned with ONTABA's Mission: To demonstrate leadership, knowledge, and innovation in education, training, and research for the ethical and effective application of behaviour analysis. We want to recognize the important work that students and practitioners do to advance the field of behaviour analysis.

We will be accepting work that is not previously published or currently under consideration for publication.

Submissions may take two formats:

**The Brief Research Article:** This submission type should contain an Introduction (with a clear statement of the research question), Methods, Results, and a Discussion/

Conclusion where the author discusses the implication for future research. Submissions should be grounded in the relevant experimental evidence in the field of Applied Behaviour Analysis and should contain figures and tables where appropriate.

**Students in the Field Report:** This submission type encourages students to write about any experience they have had in the area of behaviour analysis that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Authors should consider including the answers to the following questions to help guide them:

- What was the nature of the work you were involved in?
- What is the scientific relevance of the issue?
- How does this impact your future professional choices?
- How does this experience relate to the

advancement of knowledge and research in the broader scientific field of behaviour analysis?

For both types of articles, work written as a part of a course is acceptable for submission.

### Now onto the boring stuff:

Articles should not exceed more than 1500 words of text and three figures, excluding references. Do not include a title page, abstract, page numbers, headers or footers.

### Submission checklist for The Motivator:

- My article is fewer than 1500 words of text, excluding references.
- My article is referenced according to the 6th Edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.
- Digital object identifiers (DOIs) are included as part of my references, where appropriate.
- I have copy edited my manuscript.
- My article uses person-first language.
- I have received permission from my supervisor to submit my article to the ONTABA Analyst.
- I have included a statement that the study obtained ethics approval (or a statement that it was not required and why), including the name of the ethics committee(s) or institutional review board(s).
- I have included a statement that participants gave informed consent to participate.

Please send your submissions to [newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org). We look forward to reading your submissions!

Sincerely,

Nicole Neil, PhD, BCBA-D  
Column Editor for The Motivator

## Got something for an upcoming issue?

The ONTABA Analyst is produced quarterly. The remaining issues for 2018 will be released in the last week **July** and **October**. Interested? Send it to us! [newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org)

## Journal Club

The Professional Development Committee is pleased to announce the following journal club meetings and topics:

**May 16, 2018, 7-9pm:** Behaviour Analysis and Interdisciplinary Teams

**July 2018:** Behaviour Analysis and the Classroom (date and facilitator TBD)

**September 2018:** Interventions with Adults (date and facilitator TBD)

**October 2018:** Evaluating Research Articles—for students only (date and facilitator TBD)

ONTABA members will receive email updates with event specific information and registration details. Please note that the dates and topics are subject to change—check the ONTABA facebook page for more information.



## Suggestions or feedback?

Could we really call ourselves behaviour analysts if we didn't want feedback? [contact@ontaba.org](mailto:contact@ontaba.org) or [newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org)

Advertisement from Bond Consulting Group

## GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR AUTISM CENTRES

By Julie Bond, B.A, E.MBA



There's a government program called SR&ED, which stands for Scientific Research and Experimental Development. Chances are, you haven't heard about SR&ED. It might surprise you to find out that there is a mechanism for autistic centres to apply for funding. Then it might also surprise you to find out that this program has been around for over 30 years. If you work for or operate a for-profit autistic learning or therapeutic centre, chances are your institution is already eligible for this funding.

SR&ED is not a grant. This program is not going to pay for remodeling your office, or new equipment, or new hires, or training, or any of the activities you might naturally associate with a grant. Yes, the application results in funding, but it's still not a grant. It's better to think of an SR&ED refund as a reward for having completed work that falls under the criteria of a scientific program.

This program will reward your company for activities that lead to an advancement of knowledge in the field of cognitive studies in the area of autism. Most institutions that treat autism will qualify for this funding if they position their work with students as studies, as long as the institution or centre is incorporated. Charitable organizations, hospitals, and government agencies do not qualify for SR&ED. But incorporated professionals that work in any of these environments would qualify.

So, why have you never heard of SR&ED before? Well, probably because no one ever told you about it. The government doesn't routinely go around reminding people and corporations that they over-paid their taxes or that they are entitled to a rebate. Also, the program itself is largely misunderstood. Most accountants and financial advisors are familiar with the program, but unfortunately most of them mistakenly believe that only manufacturers or software developers can apply for SR&ED.

The truth is that this program will reward companies for work done in almost every area of engineering, science or medicine, including psychiatry and pathology. Autism is a pathological and neurological condition, so there's no doubt that work in this area will qualify.

SR&ED is not really an easy program to understand, mostly because you'll think it's a grant when it really functions as a part of your corporation's tax return. The good news is that once you take the time to understand eligibility and the approval process, you could potentially claim SR&ED for all years to come, resulting in a significant change to your business model.

Here's the beauty of this program - you can do what you love, help children and adults with autism, and receive government benefits without becoming a registered charity.

Any corporation that provides services in this medical sector should seek out an assessment to determine if your business qualifies. Your investment of picking up the phone, or sending an email, could result in significant funding. Even small claimants will typically realize a refund of \$20K-\$50K per year, however, larger refunds are very common, depending upon the size of the organization's payroll.

At Bond Consulting Group, we specialize in the SR&ED program – it's all we do, in fact. We have a deep understanding of the scientific principles relating to autism, cognitive delays, speech delays, and learning disabilities, so it's easy for us to help institutions and professionals that focus on autism.

To find out if your learning centre, or institution, or professional corporation qualifies for SR&ED, please call [416.503.4607](tel:416.503.4607) or send us an email at [info@bondconsulting.ca](mailto:info@bondconsulting.ca). You can also visit our website [www.bondconsulting.ca](http://www.bondconsulting.ca) to learn more about SR&ED.



# Committee Updates

## ASD Task Force

Our committee has met once this year and is making progress on our annual work plan goals, including:

- Monthly meetings with Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS);
- Providing input into stakeholder documents, including documents from Autism Ontario and MCYS;
- Establishing regular meetings with parent stakeholder groups in Ontario;
- Building relationships with both regional and private ABA service providers;
- Developing events related to fostering multidisciplinary collaboration between behaviour analysts and other professionals working with children and youth with ASD.

We look forward to providing additional updates throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Carobeth Zorzos  
Chair, ASD Task Force

## OSETT-CB Task Force

In the Winter 2018 issue of the ONTABA Analyst, we shared information regarding the ONTABA members on the OSETT – CB Task Force. Specifically, we shared how the project had been initiated, the overall purpose of the guidelines, and the grants that had been awarded to support successful completion of the project. At this time we would like to briefly share ongoing progress and projected completion dates. Currently, the committee has established a firm list of questions that the guidelines will address. These were developed by considering what information would be valuable to our intended audience. Our subcommittees are hard at work addressing the questions that comprise each of the three subsections of the manuscript

(introduction, assessment and treatment). At this time, a background literature review has been completed, which will be used to formulate draft responses to each question. We aim to have the initial draft completed by May 2018, with the intent to release a final version by October 2018.

Thank you for your continued support in the project, we look forward to sharing the outcomes and advocating for best practice for individuals with challenging behaviour across Ontario.

Warmest regards,

Dr. Alison Cox, Ph.D., BCBA-D  
Dr. Val Saini, Ph.D., BCBA-D  
Co-Chairs, OSETT-CB Task Force

## Jurisprudence

The Jurisprudence committee is excited to welcome Melissa Legree, M.ADS, BCBA and Pamela Shea, M.ADS, BCBA to the committee. We are certain their knowledge of Ontario ethics, jurisprudence, and history of community service, will make them valuable members of the committee. We are also excited to announce that the committee has begun working with John Wickett of Wickett Measurement Systems, to help us complete our mandated tasks.

Sincerely,

Your Jurisprudence Committee

## Professional Development

The Professional Development Committee is eager to announce our 2018 Satellite Conference partnerships with St. Lawrence College and Brock University! On April 18 and 19th

2018, St. Lawrence College Centre for Behavioural Studies hosted Peter Gerhardt and Amanda Kelly at the 9th Annual Building Behavioural Solutions Conference.

On June 12, 2018 Brock University will host Dr. Mary Weiss to present a one day workshop where she will review the Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for behaviour analysts.

Registration and event information can be found at: [https://brocku.ca/social-sciences/applied-disability-studies/wp-content/uploads/sites/146/MJWFlyer2018\\_Pd.pdf](https://brocku.ca/social-sciences/applied-disability-studies/wp-content/uploads/sites/146/MJWFlyer2018_Pd.pdf)

Other upcoming events:

**Friday June 8, 2018:** Medical Issues that Can Present as Sexual Behaviour. Presented by Sorah Stein, MA, BCBA, CSE.

**Friday October 19, 2018:** Ethics and Behaviour Assessment in Sexual Behaviours. Presented by Sorah Stein, MA, BCBA, CSE.

ONTABA members will receive emails with event registration details. Check the ONTABA facebook page for more information.

Sincerely,

Your Professional Development Committee



**By: Dr. Rosemary Condillac, C.Psych., BCBA-D**  
Associate Professor, Centre for Applied Disability Studies  
Brock University

Welcome to the “What Would You Do?” column on ethical and professional dilemmas in ABA. Please submit your questions, issues, dilemmas or tricky situations to [newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org). My responses are my own, and are not intended to represent the Behavior Analysis Certification Board (BACB), ONTABA, or any other



## Professional Practice

The Professional Practice Committee would like to invite our membership to submit professional practice questions to [professionalpractice@ontaba.org](mailto:professionalpractice@ontaba.org) and will endeavour to answer your questions or connect you to evidence-based resources. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Your Professional Practice Committee

# WHAT

## Would You Do?

### Professional and Ethical Issues

organization with whom I am affiliated. Responses should not be taken as specific legal or professional advice as it is not possible to have or provide enough information in a column of this nature.

*Karen is a BCaBA working as a job coach teaching employment skills to high school students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders under the supervision of Markus, a BCBA. In October of 2017, she became concerned about some bruises she observed on her client Jinny's arms. Jinny was elusive about the cause of the bruises. Jinny was 16 at the time, and living with her*

mom, step-father, and two step-brothers. Karen was concerned and wanted to call the Children's Aid Society (CAS), but her supervisor, Markus, reminded her that under the Child and Family Services Act, that child protection was not provided for individuals over 16 who lived in the care of their own families and only those in the care of CAS would receive child protection to age 17. Karen still felt obliged to call, and when she did she was told that they could not take her report because Jinny was over 16.

In February of 2018, Karen was doing a follow-up visit with Jinny, who is now 17. Karen noticed that Jinny had bruising on her cheek and lower arms. When Karen asked what happened, Jinny pointed to the room where her mom and step-father were sitting and would not say anything further. Karen was frustrated because she remembered that CAS was not able to provide help in October of last year, and she wanted to help Jinny.

Karen reviewed with Markus again, who reiterated that CAS would do nothing. Three days later, Karen received a call from Jinny's school letting her know that Jinny was in the care of CAS after a visit to the hospital with a broken wrist. Karen did a web search and found a pamphlet from CAS, which explained that the Child and Family Services Act had changed in January of 2018 and that 16 and 17 year olds who were in need of protection, could now be supported (CFSA, 1990, C11). Karen immediately told Markus of the change in legislation. Markus told Karen that they could be in trouble for not reporting so she probably shouldn't tell anybody. Further, he states that if she does make the report, he won't be able to trust her and will no longer supervise her.

So what are the issues in this scenario? First, Karen needs to consider the situation and consult with the

## References

Behavior Analyst Certification Board (2016). Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts. Littleton, CO: Author. [bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/161101-experience-standards-english.pdf](http://bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/161101-experience-standards-english.pdf)

The Child and Family Services Act (1990). Revised Statutes of Ontario (1990, c. 11). Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90c11>

Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts (BACB, 2016). The code states that behavior analyst must protect client rights under the law (2.05 a) and that behaviour analysts must follow the legal and ethical codes of their communities (1.04 d). Though Markus was correct in his knowledge of CAS in October of 2017, the Child and Family Services Act (1990, C11) changed in January 2018. In fact the pending change had been announced in June of 2017 and covered widely in the media.

A second concern was that Markus asked Karen to not tell anyone about their error to avoid getting into trouble. This is also a violation of the code because behaviour analysts are expected to be truthful and to encourage honesty in others (1.04 a) and not implement contingencies that would foster dishonest behaviour in others (1.04b). His advice to Karen to not report her concerns after she learned of the change in law is of grave concern as the information that Karen had from earlier that week could be important evidence in the CAS investigation of the case. Karen should contact CAS immediately, tell them what she saw and what Jinny told her. She can explain that she was mistaken in not calling sooner because of what she was told in October of 2017. Karen should not put self-protection ahead of Jinny's needs and as such should not avoid providing vital client information to protect herself and her supervisor. It would also be important for her to tell Markus that she was calling CAS and remind him of the relevant aspects of the Code. Markus clearly should not be threatening Karen for following the law. Karen should report Markus to the BACB for encouraging her to avoid her legal responsibility and for threatening to discontinue her supervision.



Have a question or a topic for

**WHAT**  
Would You Do?

Send it to us!

[newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org)



**Behavioural cusp · n. 1** | be.hav'ioʊr.al cusp | /br'heɪvjər(ə)l kʌsp/

# The Cusp

"Any behavior change that brings the organism's behavior into contact with new contingencies that have even more far-reaching consequences...a cusp is a special instance of behavior change, a change crucial to what can come next." (Rosales-Ruiz & Baer, 1997, p. 533)

## Behaviour Analysis in Ontario: The people behind the work

**Editor's note:** *After chatting with Sarah and hearing about her clinical experiences and professional achievements I was reminded of the diverse applications of behaviour analysis which is particularly appropriate given that we are officially in spring—the season of renewal and new beginnings. Admittedly, I also thought: "Hmm, what have I been doing with myself all this time?" So while I work on holding my feelings of inadequacy lightly, please enjoy this interview! Lesley*

**Dr. Sarah Dunkel-Jackson, PhD,  
BCBA-D**

Dr. Sarah Dunkel-Jackson is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst at the doctoral level and is



currently the Academic Coordinator of the Honours Bachelor of Behavioural Psychology program at Seneca College. Dr. Dunkel-Jackson conducts applied research and has presented and published several studies.

**How did you become interested in behaviour analysis?** I started out as a special education major in undergrad and after taking a few special education courses I had the opportunity to take an applied behaviour analysis (ABA) practicum working with young children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). I was placed in a special education classroom where some amazing teachers incorporated ABA strategies into their daily group lessons and practicum students conducted one-on-one discrete trial training and small group play interventions. It wasn't until after this

experience that I truly started to feel prepared to work with students with complex special needs.

After completing the practicum, I was hired to work in a few home-based ABA programs that were supervised by BCBA's and other professionals. One of my most influential employers took me to the ABAI annual convention in Chicago (yum, pizza!) and that's when I knew that this was the field for me. In my final year of undergrad I switched my major to psychology and decided to pursue graduate studies. To be honest, up until that point I didn't even really know what grad school was; I'm the first person in my family to graduate from college.

**You're originally from the States—and we're glad that you've chosen to make Ontario your home—tell us about where you came from, some highlights along the way, and what brought you to Ontario?** I grew up in Michigan and I went to Grand Valley State University (yes, near Western Michigan University). During my undergrad, I worked with a few BCBA's who were graduates of Western Michigan University so that was a nice starting point for working in the field of ABA.

During my master's degree at Southern Illinois University (SIU), my

graduate assistantship was through SIU's Project 12-Ways which is a behavioural consultation program working with families with abuse and neglect histories. Parents are supported in the environment where they are raising their families with a focus on increasing positive interactions among family members, teaching appropriate behaviour management strategies, and enhancing safety skills. We worked directly with children too, by teaching specific safety and self-protection skills. Working at Project 12-Ways was the most amazing learning experience; it taught me a lot about ABA (e.g., assessment, intervention, maintenance), working directly with families, and also about clinical management skills as I was eventually a team leader in the program.

I completed another influential practicum at the Su Casa Migrant Head Start in Southern Illinois where I used Direct Instruction to teach English as a second language to the children of migrant workers. A second practicum gave me the opportunity to work in two special education classrooms for children with developmental disabilities and adolescents with "emotional and behaviour disorders." During my master's internship and master's thesis, under the supervision of Dr.

Mark Dixon, I worked at an agency for individuals with acquired brain injury. Our research lab conducted several research studies that year and my thesis was on teaching self-control to adolescents with brain injuries. My passion for applied research definitely began here. I started my Ph.D immediately following graduation and began a graduate assistantship at the Illinois Center for Autism. This was a great experience to collaborate with many professionals, disseminate ABA, and conduct applied research to enhance the lives of children and adults diagnosed with ASD and related disorders.

Regarding the opportunity to come to Ontario, I had completed all of my coursework for my Ph.D and was working at a leading agency near Chicago as I prepared for my preliminary exams and dissertation. My supervisor, Dr. Mark Dixon, knew the late Dr. Anne Cummings—who at the time was looking to recruit behaviour analysts at Kinark Child and Family Services. My husband, Jim Jackson, and I were offered positions and we decided to move up here. Conducting applied research and collaborating with such a dedicated team to transform the School Support Program into a strong clinical program were great achievements. We've been so grateful for the opportunity to work with such incredibly talented clinicians while supporting children and their families.

In August 2017, I started a new adventure as the Academic Coordinator of Seneca College's new Honours Bachelor of Behavioural Psychology program. It was a change from my clinical role but I thought it would be a pretty cool opportunity to shape the program

and to teach the next generation of behaviour analysts.

**How is the field of behaviour analysis in Ontario different from the States?** Some of my international colleagues have shared that they have an impression that the US has better services because of legislation like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Like most places, I'd say there is still room for improvement. There are some amazing schools, programs, and agencies doing great work to disseminate our science and improve the lives of the people they serve. Yet, parents still have to advocate and agencies still have to engage in capacity building within the community. In my direct experience, and when talking with colleagues, there seems to be parts of the country that are well versed and other places in which ABA is quite new. Compared to some states, Ontario currently has a lot of public funding for individuals with ASD and right now there is an opportunity to advocate for the right evidence-based treatments—perhaps even beyond those for ASD. It is pretty special to be part of such a dedicated behavioural community that works to disseminate our science.

**To paraphrase the subtitle of one of Jon Bailey and Mary Burch's books, 'behaviour analysis is a science that can change your life'—what does this notion mean to you?** Once you learn what ABA is about, you see the world differently. You apply the principles in your own life and see your own behaviour in a different way; behaviour analysis has certainly changed my life. There's reasons for everything, the world is deterministic and lawful and I totally understand how this may be

different from a wholly developmental or constructivist perspective. The beauty and utility of a behaviour analytic view is that prior history is seen as impactful but it doesn't limit people to be stuck on that one trajectory. A person doesn't have to be a 'bad parent' or a child doesn't have to be defined by the label 'low functioning'—with the right supports people can have different lives. Labels don't have to stick.

**Are there any applications of behaviour analysis or research areas that you haven't explored yet but would like to?** I haven't done any applied research in behavioural gerontology but this area interests me quite a bit. I've learned so much from various continuing education events and reading on the topic and I'd love to explore this area more. On a personal level, my family has supported grandparents and other family members with various needs which makes this area quite relevant. As part of the Adulthood and Aging course that I teach at Seneca, I had the students read *Enjoy Old Age: A Practical Guide* by Skinner and Vaughan. As a course project, the students interviewed people over the age of 65 with questions from the book. The interviews were so fascinating and the students did such a great job that we are currently cataloguing the responses for publication and presentation.

**Tell us about any other cool projects that you have on the go right now.** One of my favourite applied research projects is on ABA in softball, a partnership with the Whitchurch-Stouffville Softball Association looking at the effect of ABA strategies on softball skills of young players and coaches. I've had

some great research assistants who have enjoyed seeing yet another application of our science.

We also received two research grants for an applied research partnership with the Geneva Centre for Autism. The research team is currently exploring functional analysis methodologies to better enhance assessment procedures and intervention outcomes for children and adults with ASD. It really is an exciting time in our field to be exploring innovative and efficacious assessment and intervention options.

I'm part of the Ontario Scientific Expert Taskforce on Challenging Behaviour (OSET-CB) outlining evidence-based assessment procedures for challenging behaviour. It has been a nice

extension of some research my colleagues Shannon Borch, Kara Kenney, and Cheryl Neely published on functional analyses in public schools.

I also do private consultation with agencies and individuals with complex needs. I recently finished consulting with Kinark Child and Family Services on the Advocacy Project, a skills-based training that teaches effective advocacy skills to parents of children with ASD. Again, another great collaborative effort with a team of talented behaviour analysts.

**If you could go back, is there anything you'd change along your education or career path?** Well it would have been nice to finish my Ph.D sooner (laughs) but between

having two babies and working full time it took me a few years to finish my dissertation after all my coursework was complete. To be honest though, I don't think I'd change much—when you've got young children, there is a limited hold on really being present with them—I didn't want to miss it. I've had so many amazing educational, clinical, and research opportunities and I'm grateful for all of them so, no, I don't think I'd do anything differently. They've shaped who I am.



## Have someone in mind for the Cusp?

Let us know, we love suggestions!  
[newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org)

# Spotlight on...



## Functional Analysis

**Note from the Newsletter Committee:** We are pleased to bring back the "Spotlight on..." column. Our goal is provide a brief overview of an important topic as explained by an expert in our field. If there is anyone you would like to hear from or if you have an idea for a topic, please contact us at [newsletter@ontaba.org](mailto:newsletter@ontaba.org).

Enjoy! *The Newsletter Committee*

Kennedy-Hopkins. Dissatisfied with decision-making models for intervention used at the time, we backed up and examined research that (often incidentally) contained a demonstration of experimental control over problem behaviour, not in terms a treatment effect, but identification of variables that contribute to maintenance. Our logic was that if one could identify a source of maintenance, one could design and organize interventions that compromise, eliminate, or compete directly with it. Our use of

**Interview with Dr. Brian Iwata**  
*Distinguished Professor in Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Florida*

**Interview by: Raluca Nuta**

**Please tell us a bit about the conception of the functional analysis (FA). Did you have any sense early on that FAs would revolutionize the field?** The impetus for our work on FA methodology involved our attempt to establish a center for problem behaviour at

the FA immediately altered the way we did business, so it did revolutionize our approach to assessment, but none of us predicted the generality of the model.

**In your experience, what have you found to be the biggest challenge in getting buy-in from clinicians to conduct experimental functional analyses? From teachers? From parents?**

The answer depends on what is meant by “buying in,” which could mean clinicians’ choice to use an FA rather than conducting an interview or taking observational (e.g., ABC) data. BACB certification does not require competency in conducting an FA. Although that is true for other skills sets, everyone has had experience observing things (taking data) and trying to change behaviour. Conducting an FA requires a more complex skills set and, not having it, clinicians may tend to rely on what they can do with little supervised experience—apply a rating scale or use an ABC log. I am not blaming clinicians because there were few programs that provided adequate FA training when most were in school. That picture is changing, so I am optimistic about the future.

If you mean “buy in” as accepting FA methodology as a useful and perhaps even necessary approach to assessment, we rarely have had any difficulties. After conducting several thousand FAs, I can count refusals on one hand. Parents and teachers are highly motivated to see reductions in severe problem behaviour and quickly understand the need to identify cause before implementing treatment (using the analogy of medical diagnosis). On the few occasions where other issues (e.g., administrative concerns about potential worsening of behaviour)

stand in the way, the following logic generally has worked: (a) Problem behaviour already is worse if not intolerable, which is why a referral is being made. (b) The problem behaviour rarely is at its worst all the time, which means that there are unknown conditions of worsening. (c) An FA identifies the conditions of worsening and simply reflects the influence of contingencies already acting in the environment. In other words, an FA does not involve exposure to conditions that are different than those experienced every day. The method of exposure is just more organized. (e) Data from a number of studies have shown that the risk posed by an FA is no greater than the risk of doing nothing; in fact, it is considerable less.

**Synthesized FAs have been gaining popularity in recent years. What is your take on them?**

The SFA (or IISCA) is not a functional analysis. In order to understand this, one must have a good understanding of what an FA is and must read the SFA studies carefully. The authors of the SFA studies have gone to great lengths, as in 6 ½ page introductions to case studies, to make the case for the procedure using extensive illogical arguments and biased summaries of published data. However, a careful examination of method yields two key features to the procedure: (a) Results of an informant interview determine the conditions of assessment (i.e., selection of antecedent and consequent events), and (b) given the multiplicity of events typically reported in an interview, these events are combined in the assessment. These two features are immediate cause for concern. First, it has been shown conclusively that verbal reports about the causes and correlates of problem behaviour are

notoriously unreliable. Given the unreliability of structured rating scales, it is unclear how interviews would yield reliable information, and this has never been demonstrated in the SFA studies. Interview data are simply accepted at face value. Second, by combining all reported antecedent and consequent events (whose reliability is unknown) one essentially confounds all of the contingencies that might maintain behaviour. Under such conditions, behaviour is almost guaranteed to occur and to occur quickly during “assessment,” although we don’t know why. If we add to that a combined intervention that addresses all of the confounded variables, behaviour will improve, and it likely would have improved in the absence of any assessment. Thus, in a nutshell, the SFA involves the use of subjective data to drive a confounded assessment, followed by a packed intervention that addresses any social function of problem behaviour. Success rate improves as a function of current knowledge that many problem behaviours have social functions (a fact established prior to assessment). But have we learned anything about causes of behaviour, how to fine tune an intervention for a special case, or how to combine or compare varied elements of intervention? For these reasons, no major centre has adopted the model. The SFA studies originate from a single lab (and graduates from that lab), and the only attempted external replication (Fisher et al., JABA 2016) was a failure.



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