

CURRENT REPERTOIRE



Scenes from Our 18th Annual Conference on Autism



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Meaningful Differences from

Distinguished Scholar Stacha C. Leslie, MEd, MSc, BCBA

Dr. Bertina Combes was the vice provost for faculty success and a special education professor at the University of North Texas from 1989 until her untimely passing in 2021. She earned her bachelor's degree from Oral Roberts University, master's degree from Southern University in Baton Rouge, and her Ph.D. in special education from the University of Texas.



Bertina Combes, PhD

Though Dr. Combes was not a behavior analyst by profession, her influence on the field is undeniable. The countless behavior analysts she mentored, along with the students, clients, and adult consumers who benefited from their dedicated service, are a testament to her enduring impact. May the following story—one of many—serve as a tribute to her remarkable legacy and express my deepest gratitude for her kindness and generosity.

A Tribute to Guiding Lights

My love for behavior analysis was shaped by the students I taught as a special education teacher. Over six years, I interacted with many impactful service providers; however, the “spark” was felt as I observed behavioral support staff teach acquisition of language and adaptive skills that drastically improved my students’ quality of life. During this time, I was obtaining my master’s degree in special education under the mentorship of Dr. Bertina Combes. Over the years, Bertina and I had several conversations about potential systems-level changes to educator training and supervision. After one memorable conversation, which consisted of us sharing our dreams and ideas to improve the special education system, Bertina said, “It’s time for you to go get your Ph.D. No more second guessing, just go.”

Admittedly, I was quite “green” to the application process. In fact, when I finally decided to apply, I was just three days away from the deadline for Spring interviews! But Dr. Combes always spoke of her superpower – her “glue”-ability to just make things come together. And so, she did - through an extreme act of kindness which included staying on

the phone with me until 11:55pm the night before the application due date to ensure my documents were up to par. It was through this act of kindness and a series of serendipitous events that I accepted an offer to join Dr. Claudia Dozier’s lab at the University of Kansas in the Fall of 2020.

Just after I accepted this offer, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed our day-to-day lives. As such, my celebrations with Dr. Combes were masked and distanced. The



Dr. Bertina Combes with Stacha Leslie

picture here depicts our last in-person meeting, just one day before I moved to Kansas to start the PhD program. During

this meeting, Bertina generously gifted copies of her empirical work and literature from special education and behavior analysis, one of which included a worn and very loved copy of “Meaningful Differences” by Dr. Betty Hart and Dr. Todd Risley.

These gifts were followed by words that have carried me through the last five years of my graduate student tenure, “Do not let the lies of imposter syndrome get you down. You are meant to be here.” You see, Bertina knew the obstacles that I would face during my graduate tenure, but she refused to let the fear of the unknown and the challenges of graduate school stop me from achieving my dreams! These wise and heartfelt words allowed me to confidently, yet humbly, walk into my purpose of serving individuals with disabilities and their relevant stakeholders; serve the field of behavior analysis at the department, university, and community level; and extend the same kindness and generosity through mentorship of other undergraduate and graduate students. These words resonate with me even now as I prepare to close out the chapter of my graduate student tenure at the end of this semester.

Dr. Combes is among the hundreds of **Guiding Lights** – faculty, professors, and researchers – that drive home the importance of making meaningful differences through meaningful mentorship. The

field of behavior analysis and special education will forever remain indebted to her and others like her for their dedication, support, and commitment to young scholars and the advancement of our field. In sharing this story, I hope to recognize the teachers, clinicians, and researchers who have come before me and made me who I am today. May I continue in Dr. Bertina Combes' legacy by walking confidently, yet humbly, in my purpose and encouraging the next generation of scholars to do the same.



With gratitude to
Stacha Leslie for
her exceptional
on-the-ground
support at KU

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At the Crossroads: What Public Education Needs from Us Now

A Commentary Janet S. Twyman, PhD, BCBA, LBA

For this newsletter I usually share tools, apps, and strategies to help support our work—things I genuinely enjoy exploring and want to share for their practical utility. But in this issue, I'm stepping away from the usual to address something foundational—the future of public education. The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of CCBS or its leadership, although I greatly appreciate the space to share my perspective.

Earlier this month, I stood before a room of educators and behavior analysts and asked two simple questions: "How many of you consider yourselves behavior analysts?... Now, how many of you also consider yourselves educators?"

I raised my hand for both. Because while behavior analysis may be my professional practice—how I analyze systems, design instruction, and affect meaningful change—being an *educator* is my identity. An educator builds up others, opens doors to knowledge and thinking, and develops ability and confidence. That is critical work—the powerful work we do every day. And right now, that work is under threat.

I asked that same group and have often asked many others:

What is the Purpose of Public Education?

We know the goals of public education in the U.S. have shifted dramatically over time.^{1,2} In the 1800s, schools were about preserving democracy. By the early 20th century, the aim had turned to workforce preparation. In the 1980s, we became obsessed with global competitiveness and test scores. In the 2000s, schools were expected to close opportunity gaps, reduce poverty, and serve as social safety nets. But what about now?

*Statistic: UNESCO has reported that if all students in low-income countries acquired basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, which is equivalent to a 12% reduction in global poverty.*³



Today, a few loud voices argue that the role of public education is to shield children from “indoctrination”—a rationale increasingly used to justify book bans, curriculum censorship, and the erasure of diverse perspectives.⁴ Rather than expand what students are exposed to, these efforts seek to narrow it.⁵ The result? Fewer voices heard. Fewer histories acknowledged. Fewer lessons to guide the future.

In the face of this I hope we ask ourselves and each other: **What do we want public education to be?** Because whatever your answer, know this: education—*especially public education*—is not merely evolving. It is being systematically dismantled.

Our Schools Are Not in a Policy Debate—They Are in a Crisis

In 2023, there were almost 75 million children and young adults aged 0 to 18 in the United States, representing about a quarter of the total population.⁶ On March 20, 2025, an executive order was issued directing the Secretary of Education to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority over education to the States and local communities.”⁷ Yet, these aren’t about returning authority, or “sending education back to the states.” States *already* make the vast majority of decisions around curriculum, staffing, and local policies.⁸ Schools already control most of their dollars. Public school funding in the United States comes mostly from local and state sources, primarily from local property taxes.⁹ Federal government funds make up only about 10% of public-school budgets¹⁰—but that 10% supports the students who need it most, our most vulnerable¹¹ and low-income students¹².

Continued

This year, 2025, marks the 60th anniversary of *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA)—signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as a promise to close opportunity gaps through federal support, including Title I that provides annual financial assistance to school districts serving students from low-income families.^{13,14} That promise is now being broken. The closure of the 19 Comprehensive Centers¹⁵ and 10 Regional Education Labs¹⁶—critical infrastructure that helped states translate research into practice—means the loss of efforts that fueled reading reforms like the “Mississippi Miracle”^{17,18} and many other evidence-based improvements. These Centers supported teacher development, literacy growth, and data-driven decision making. Their program and support are gone¹⁹, just like that.

For decades U.S. Department of Education stood as a federal guardian for equity, for children with disabilities, for civil rights in education. It bears repeating, it is now being deliberately dismantled.^{20,21,22,23}

50% of staff are gone.

Programs defunded.

Research silenced.

Data erased.

Knowledge disappearing.

Disability services left hanging

Civil rights enforcement dropped.

And the effects are not theoretical. They are having immediate, real consequences:

- **Special education and disability services** are being slashed, leaving students without supports needed for access and participation.²⁴
- **School nutrition programs** are being cut, increasing food insecurity and undermining focus and academic performance.²⁵
- **Censorship policies** restrict what teachers can teach and what students can question—suppressing essential conversations about race, gender, and identity.²⁶
- **Voucher systems** siphon public dollars to private schools that are rarely accountable or inclusive.²⁷



When we **dis-invest** in education, we don't just trim budgets—we weaken our communities, limit opportunity, and compromise not only future opportunities for learners, but also our shared future.

Why This Moment Matters to Behavior Analysts



Behavior analysis have more than 75 years of research demonstrating the effectiveness of behavior analytic strategies to promote learning.²⁸ We have helped those most vulnerable and underserved—students with disabilities, disenfranchised learners, students at risk academically or socially, and individuals for whom other systems failed.²⁹ And yet, despite our robust evidence base, we remain underutilized at the systems level.³⁰

The science is not the problem. Our gap is in application³¹, and in scale³². That's where we must also turn our focus. Because if we're serious about

Continued

improving education, we must get serious about stepping beyond the walls of our clinics and classrooms and into the broader conversations that shape policy, funding, and equity. Behavior analysis is not a niche. It is a worldview and a lens—a way to understand and change the world. It has always been essential, and in times like these, its relevance is only more urgent.

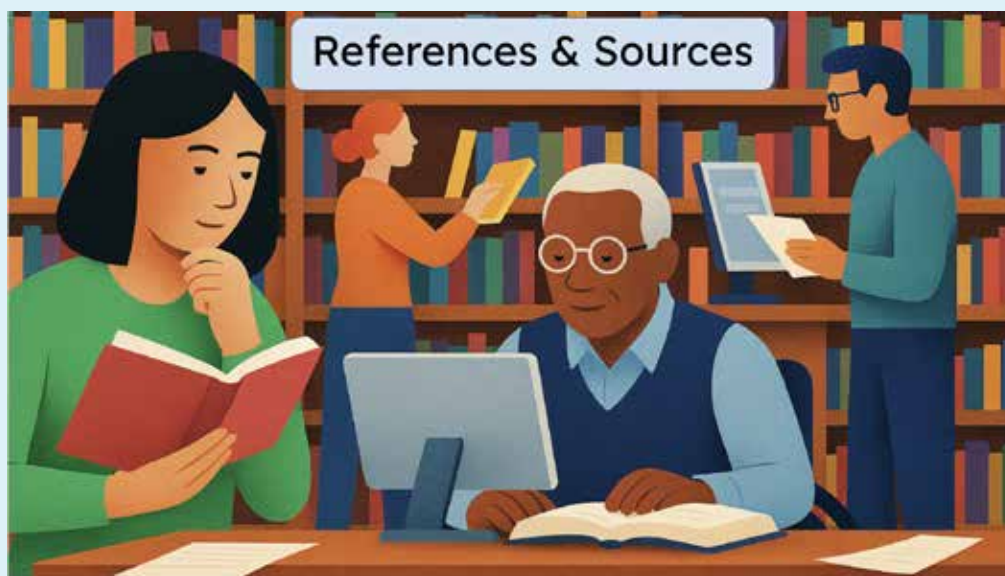
What We Can—and Must—Do

As behavior analysts and educators, we know that actions matter. Contingencies matter. Data matters. What we do, and how we do it, matters. So...

- **Learn what works.** Advocate for evidence-based instruction and practices in every educational space you enter.
- **Challenge what doesn't.** Speak up when you see ineffective teaching, censorship, inequity, or systems that harm rather than help.
- **Build bridges.** Connect science to practice. Connect teachers to tools. Connect families to services. Connect students to opportunities.
- **Engage locally.** Policy is shaped not only in Washington, but in school boards, IEP meetings, and parent-teacher conferences.
- **Think big, act bold.** Don't wait for permission to apply what we know improves learning. Do it—and help others do it, too.

And yes, our work can—and I believe, must—extend beyond data sheets and behavior plans. Attend school board meetings. Follow local and state education budgets. Ask how policy decisions affect learners with the least access. Vote in local elections where education decisions are made. These aren't political acts—they're also professional ones.

The dismantling of federal supports doesn't just weaken budgets. It weakens communities. It limits futures. And it violates the fundamental promise of public education: that every child deserves a chance to learn and thrive. As Nelson Mandela said, *"Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world."*³³ But that's not just a quote. It's a call to action—one that behavior analysts are fully equipped to answer, through science, through service, and through deliberate actions that drive meaningful behavior change.



[Footnotes \(PDF\) available on behavior.org.](#)

Tara Fahmie, PhD, Leads Department of Severe Behavior

Tara Fahmie, PhD, the new director of the University of Nebraska Medical Center Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI) Department of Severe Behavior, is ready to make a difference.

Dr. Fahmie joined MMI in 2019 as the associate director of the department, coming from California State University Northridge in Los Angeles, where she had spent nine years as a faculty member.

"It was a big career move for me, because I was coming from a heavy teaching position to a much heavier clinical position here," she said.

MMI was a perfect fit, though, because of Dr. Fahmie's deep interest in severe and challenging behaviors. And once she arrived, she found other positives – many of which played into her decision to seek the director's role when it became open in 2024.

"The biggest component is the talented team," she said. "I've never seen a group of more talented people when it comes to severe behavior all in one place. "I really enjoy working with the staff here, and I feel a high level of mutual respect for them. There are a lot of opportunities here for a leader with such a great group in place."

[Read full notice on UNMC MMI website.](#)



Congratulations, Dr. Britany Melton!

We are pleased to share that Britany Melton has successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, "The Use of Behavior skills training to Teach Compassionate Care to Registered Behavior Technicians," and officially earned the title of Doctor from Endicott College.

Dr. Melton has also been nominated to serve as an Advisor to the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies, with election scheduled to take place during our upcoming Annual Meeting of the Trustees.

Please join us in celebrating this significant achievement—**congratulations, Dr. Melton!**

We also extend our thanks to Dr. Melton for coordinating the student research poster presentations at our 2025 Autism Conference. Stay tuned for updates on poster submission opportunities for upcoming events.

Trustee Tetsuo Matsuzawa former director and professor of Kyoto University Primate Research Institute, gave a 15-minute talk at the webinar workshop for Kanzi's legacy held at Cornell University on April 19th. The title is "**Kanzi bonobo in a comparative perspective**". [View the video on YouTube.](#)

Kanzi, the bonobo, mastered language-like skills to understand spoken English and use visual symbols to communicate with humans. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh is the key researcher of the Kanzi project. Kanzi is one of the animals who has learned to communicate with humans, such as Washoe chimpanzee and Koko gorilla using Gestural sign language, and Sarah chimpanzee by David Premack using the unique plastic chips for communication.

Tetsuro Matsuzawa, Kyoto



Have news to share?

Send your milestones, moves, or shout-outs for the next issue to pavlik@behavior.org.

Aubrey Clise Daniels, Ph.D.

Thoughts from Darnell and Andy Lattal

Pioneer in Applying Behavior in the Workplace

Aubrey C. Daniels died on March 1, 2025, at age 89. While his passing was not unexpected, I was struck by how dim the morning light appeared out my window. Another giant of our field was gone. He was my colleague, a professional partner in business, and a friend. He wanted the world to see what could come from the science of behavior that he loved.

He leaves behind the values found in humor, kindness, generosity, and humility. Working with him was a never-ending delight—exploring how best to translate the basic science into consumable morsels for those far removed from behavior analysis but quick to understand both its utility and its power as a science. In particular, he is well known for introducing those outside the field to the pragmatic power of positive reinforcement (R+) in accelerating and sustaining good outcomes for individuals and their organizations. His was not a simple application of what sounds like a simple concept. As clients worked with Aubrey, they explored in detail concepts of behavior analysis, including findings from the experimental analysis of behavior. He helped his clients learn how to address complex and interconnected consequences across corporate operations and their own lives. He wanted to increase independent and skilled applications of this most optimistic science to accelerate desired performance and value-laden enrichment of the conditions that surround such accomplishments.

Affectionately known as the Father of Performance Management, Aubrey became a sought-after speaker and served on many boards, including the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies, and was an associate at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The author of six best-selling books, his works were widely recognized as international classics of business management. His textbook, *Performance Management*, is in its fifth edition and has sold more than 700,000 copies. His book, *Bringing Out the Best in People*, now in its third edition, is considered a seminal work in business literature. In 1977, he founded the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, a peer-reviewed academic journal that continues to be published and is the main source in the field today. His books have been translated into Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and French, and licensed in China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Romania, and Saudi Arabia.

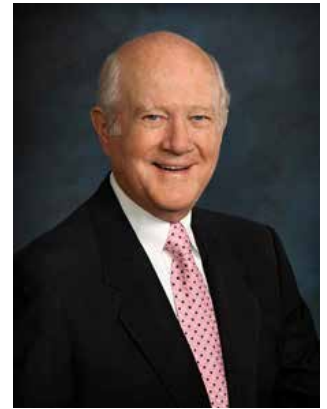
Aubrey's way of teaching the science of behavior to anyone who would listen often ended up turning them into passionate advocates of the science and its implications in application. He liked to see where behavior might go once in contact with the elements that build persistence and passion in striving to reach clearly defined and measured goals.

He was a scientist, and his lab was the workplace, developing conditions and outcomes of behavior at work that were profound. He developed simple translation tools and, in that application, created ardent advocates of the science. If we continue his honest, direct, and positive teaching methods, understanding the depth by which the power of positive reinforcement can improve how we treat one another and ourselves, that would be, as he expressed to me, a very good thing for how his contributions would be remembered-- a treasured legacy.

With Tom Freeman's permission, I am sharing a note he wrote to me on hearing of Aubrey's death. It captures so much about why this man was loved.

"We were all fortunate to have had the chance to spend even a short amount of time with this man. How much light has this one person brought to a world so often plagued by darkness? A life of such consequence, with a natural elegance yet a kind of authentic down-home sophistication that one found oneself drawn into his sphere of wisdom and easy humor without even realizing that your view of the world was being shifted towards both the truth of things and the light of service -- for what he had to say always seemed grounded in a deep commitment to benefitting the lives of others. I did not know him well, but this is the man as I saw him, and I am grateful to the universe for having allowed me to share my time on this planet with such a phenomenal human being."

If you have not read his books, take a look. His writing offers a wise, humorous, and insightful view of behavior analysis in action, and ultimately conveys to all of us our common humanity.



May 17, 1935 - March 1, 2025

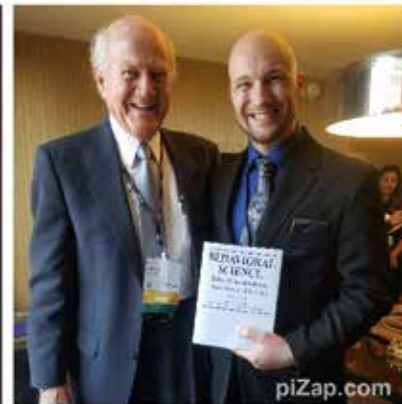
Darnell Lattal, PhD

with special thanks to members of Dr. Daniels's Family

Through the years with Dr. Aubrey Daniels



Dr. Aubrey C. Daniels addresses a group of managers from companies in the United States and Mexico, at a four-day workshop on performance management co-sponsored by the Center.



A Colleague and Friend

Aubrey Daniels was my colleague and my friend. I admired his total commitment to behavior analysis, his brilliant insights into its applications in organizations, his entrepreneurial acumen, his warmth as a human being, his wit, and, most of all, his genuineness. I did not meet Aubrey until relatively late in both our careers, but our shared interests and histories ensured a mutual and relatively quick bond. He subsequently honored me with the title of scientific consultant to the Aubrey Daniels Institute, where at its website he encouraged both my blogs on matters far and wide and the development of what was the first virtual museum of behavioral research apparatus. Hanging out at Aubrey Daniels International was a great pleasure. One never knew when Aubrey would drop by for a chat or an invitation to join him for lunch. I especially appreciated Aubrey's respect for and insights into the basic science of behavior analysis. He was an easy person to talk with. He listened to the ideas of others as well as he generated his own. We enjoyed trading stories about classic cars as much as talking about whether it really took 10,000 hours of intense practice to master a new skill or whether there was really a difference between a fixed interval 1-min schedule and a tandem fixed-time 1-min fixed-ratio 1 schedule. Much is made these days about translational research in behavior analysis. Aubrey deserves the title of "the father of translational behavior analysis." Nobody started with the basic science and whittled it down something digestible and oh so useful while never losing its essence like Aubrey. What a fine example of everything good in behavior analysis was Aubrey for all of us.

Andy Lattal, PhD

The use of electric shock delivered to the skin as a means of inducing behavior changes in humans undergoing behavioral treatments has not only a long history but also has been very much in recent behavior-analytic news. In 2021, the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) assembled a task force to consider what position the organization should take on the question of electric shock so used. After reviewing all aspects of the issue, including ABAI's scientific and humanitarian values, the task force's conclusion was as follows:

"In accordance with these values, we strongly oppose the use of contingent electric skin shock (CESS) *except in the most extraordinary of circumstances.*"

This was a conclusion with which some members of the task force and some members of the ABAI executive council did not agree. As a result, the question was put to the voting members of ABAI. The outcome was that the following was selected to be the official position of ABAI by the majority of the members who voted:

"In accordance with these values, we strongly oppose the use of contingent electric skin shock (CESS) *under any condition.*"

The present author added the italics to highlight the difference between the two statements.

Behind this controversy are historical questions about how CESS entered the behavior-analytic treatment armamentarium and the technology that led to its adoption.

In the laboratory, electric shock was used in Pavlovian conditioning in the early 20th century. Skinner (1938) used only a forceful bar slap as a punisher in the research described in *Behavior of Organisms*, but in 1941, Estes and Skinner published the first paper on what they called "conditioned anxiety," a phenomenon later described as conditioned suppression. As an animal's responding was maintained by some schedule of reinforcement, a different stimulus was introduced for a short time and followed by a brief, response-independent electric shock when that stimulus terminates. Over repeated introductions, responding during the distinct stimulus was suppressed relative to that occurring in its absence. This, of course, is *not* a punishment procedure because the shock is delivered independently of responding. Nonetheless, it was one of the earliest examples of using electric shock in behavior-analytic research. As punishment research and technology accumulated (Azrin & Holz, 1966, provided an outstanding scientific review of the topic), its translation into treatment seemed inevitable.

The interdependence of science application and technology is a frequent topic in the history of science (e.g., Lattal, 2008). Skinner's operant conditioning and the use of CESS, for example, were enabled by the technology of electricity

A Shocking History: Electric-Shock Punishment as Behavioral Treatment

Andy Lattal, PhD
West Virginia University

and electronics. Of course, it took others trained in behavior analysis to harness the technology for use in basic and applied behavior analysis.

Ivar Lovaas was among the first to use CESS as a behavior-analytically grounded treatment (e.g., Lovaas et al., 1965). Lovaas's work was controversial from its inception, and the use of CESS as treatment became even more controversial with the appearance of the self-injurious behavior inhibiting system (SIBIS). Although the latter reduced self-injury, it became a catalyst for critics of the use of CESS and, for many others, behavior-analytic treatment of any sort, whether involving reinforcement or punishment.

An early version of the SIBIS device was developed at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHUAPL) and described by Friauf (1973). The device was housed in a lightweight helmet, shown in Figure 1, worn by the person whose behavior needed to change. It could deliver an 80-millisecond electric shock automatically to electrodes, placed on the person's back, following a sudden arm movement toward the head. An accelerometer



Fig. 1 Photograph of helmet and electronic unit with integral accelerometer and electronics mounted on helmet

Figure 1. The "aversive stimulator" described by Friauf (1973).

incorporated into the device detected the movement and translated it into a shock. A later version, also developed at JHUAPL, was patented by Fischell, Newman, Riblet, and Powell, and described by Newman (1984; see also Jones, 1985). This device delivered a 100-200 millisecond shock to electrodes placed on the arm. It was Arnold L. Newman's first-listed patent ([Arnold L. Newman Inventions, Patents and Patent Applications - Justia Patents Search](#)), seemingly launching a well-regarded series of patents of more than 25 such medical devices. Linscheid (1993) noted that the funding for both systems came in part from a foundation established by the parents of a young girl who suffered from self-injurious behavior.

Linscheid et al. (1990) presented several case studies evaluating the effectiveness of a modified version of the device described by Newman (1984) in controlling self-injurious behavior, along with caveats and cautions about its use. The SIBIS device and other forms of CESS, however, continued to be debated, both inside (e.g., Iwata, 1988) and outside of behavior analysis. One result of the debate was the ABAI position statement quoted above. Another was the attempted banning by the Federal Drug Administration in 2020 of electric shock delivery as part of any behavioral treatment program. As of this writing (April, 2025), the proposed ban, having gone through both legislative and legal reviews and challenges, was expected to receive a final ruling in the autumn of 2025 (<https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2024/12/09/fda-under-pressure-to-finalize-ban-on-shock-devices-for-people-with-developmental-disabilities/31198/>).

Behavior-analytic treatments have from their inception focused on relieving human suffering. Reasonable people have disagreed as to what that focus means and how it should be achieved. Technologies acceptable to behavior analysts, caregivers, and the general public change over time as scientific and general cultural variables and values change. Well-intended technologies fade into the mists of time for good and bad reasons as others emerge. The hope of everyone is that scientifically and societally acceptable and effective behavior-analytic treatments emerge that can help those individuals afflicted by the kinds of behavior CESS was designed to ameliorate. Behavior-analytic science must seek a better understanding of how behavior is determined, wherever such a search takes it. At the same time, translating that research into procedures intended to help others requires sensitivity to cultural values of their communities so that our science can optimize its desired impact.

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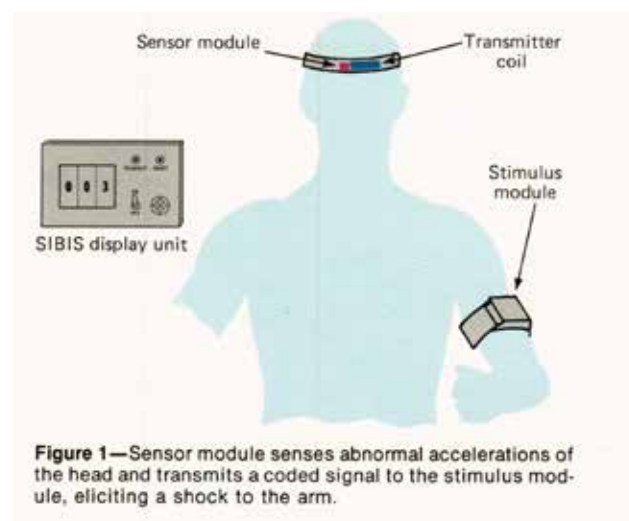


Figure 2. Diagram of the implementation of the device described by Newman (1984).

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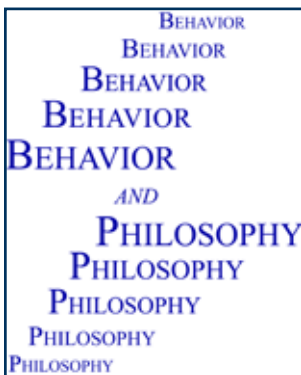
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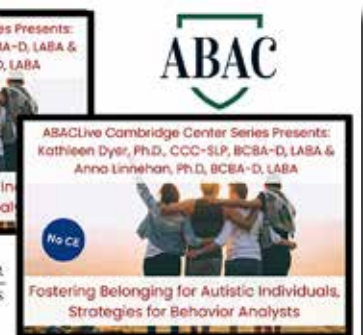
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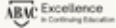
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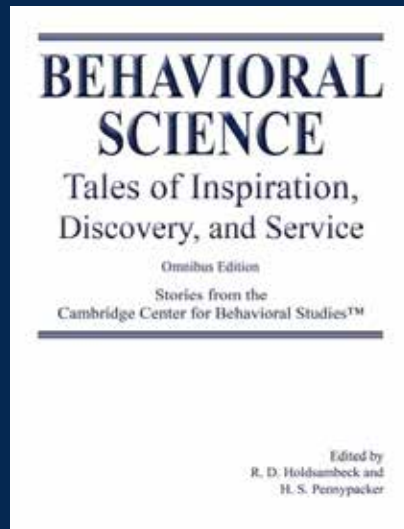
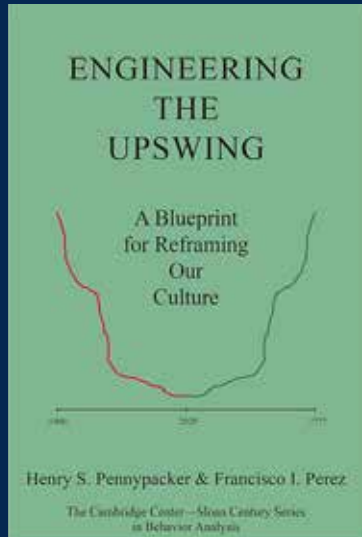
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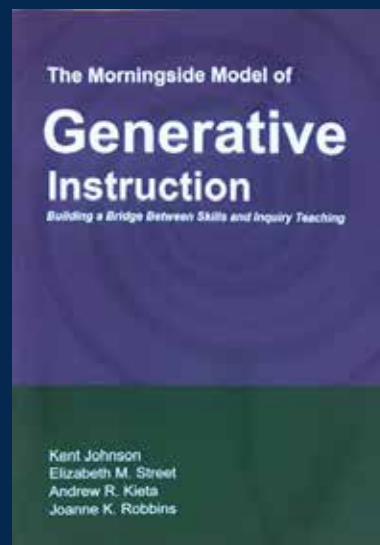
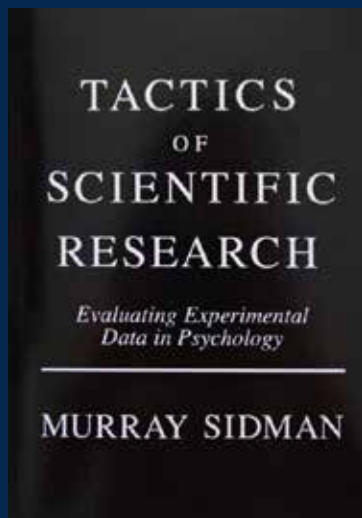
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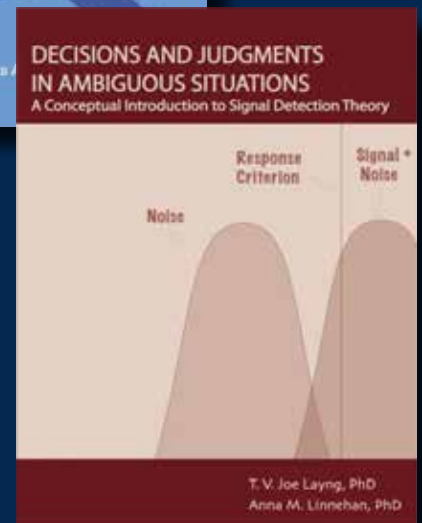
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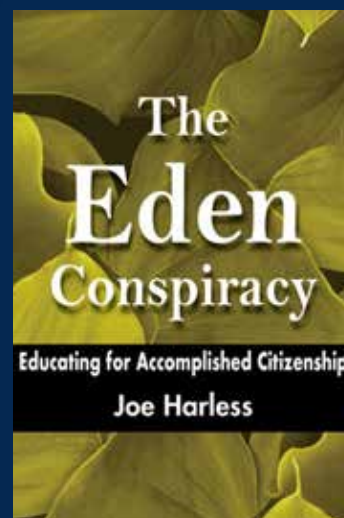
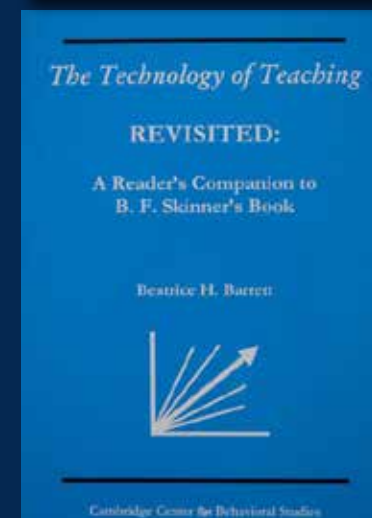
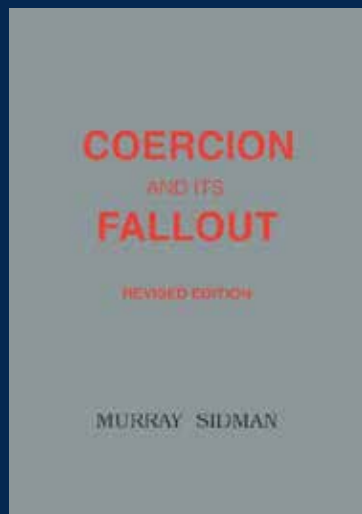
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