

**Brian Iwata, Emeritus Professor**

**Department of Psychology**

**College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**

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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 Ph.D. 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 one 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 / J. F. Kennedy 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 University of Florida 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 impact. 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 impacting theory, clinical practice, and public policy. Dr. Iwata and his colleagues were not the first to show that problem behavior may be learned. 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. This methodology opened the door to systematic evaluations of function-based treatments and made it possible for us to have a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying common treatment procedures, such as extinction. 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. In addition, his work on two preference assessment formats (single-stimulus and multiple-stimulus), his conceptual article on negative reinforcement, and his model evaluation of an alternative treatment for self-injury (sensory integration) are noteworthy examples that have greatly impacted research and practice.

However, some of Dr. Iwata's other enduring contributions may be less well known. The first was his dissertation, which examined two token systems with students (token loss versus tokens earned). 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 in 1974. In the past 15 years, we have seen an increase in 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, how to order in a restaurant) to individuals with developmental disabilities, work that undoubtedly impacted educational approaches for this population. 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, to encourage people to exercise more, and to improve oral hygiene. And, finally, Dr. Iwata and his colleagues at the J.F. Kennedy Institute conducted some of the seminal research on the treatment of pediatric feeding problems in the mid-1980s.

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 the University of Florida 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 5 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. However, Dr. Iwata taught his students as much about life as he did about science and behavior analysis. He taught his students 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. 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. He was a life-long, all-encompassing mentor, and his advice and guidance were nearly always exactly what his students needed to hear even if they did not know it at the time. He believed in his students when they didn’t quite believe in themselves, and he set goals for them that they never thought would be possible. His support for his students over nearly 50 years was tenacious and unwavering. He will be deeply missed, but all of his work and lessons will endure and continue to make the world a better place.

Exactly one 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.