

REPLIES TO ELLIS AND MAGEE, AND RUMPH ET AL.

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Ellis and Magee (2007) provide a very compelling analysis of the meta- and macrocontingencies that have developed around the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. They point out what in my article (Hursh, 2007) is described as the danger of guilt by association for behavior analysts regarding NCLB. That is, our considerable contributions to the data and rationale supporting the content of the NCLB Act can be seen as setting in motion the promulgation of rules and regulations that create the kind of maladaptive behavior described by Ellis and Magee. Our (i.e., behavior analysts') very important work to show the necessity (Hart & Risley, 1992, 1995) and possibilities (Stebbins, St. Pierre, Proper, Anderson, & Cerva, 1977) of behavior analysis, Direct Instruction, and Precision Teaching for the success of the United States' Education system in developing competent learners (Tucci, Hursh, & Laitinen, 2004) can be lost in the details and daily experience of the implementation of NCLB.

There are some hopeful developments (since their initial expression of those concerns in 2004) that in part address the concerns raised by Ellis and Magee (2007). These include the inclusion of single case research as producing rigorous scientific evidence upon which to base instructional practices (Kameenui, 2006; Whitehurst, 2005). Horner (2006) has proposed a prototype for adding single case evidence to the body of scientifically rigorous evidence as the basis for practices to be encouraged by NCLB. I also argue (2007) that we can be of assistance to educators by encouraging them to develop their own evidence base for those practices in their classrooms that produce adequate "daily" progress for their students. The Educational Testing Service is offering a frequent (weekly) assessment process that allows teachers to easily identify what to focus their instruction on during the subsequent week to achieve the rigorous content standards and objectives upon which the annual tests for adequate yearly progress (AYP) are to be based (Educational Testing Service, 2006). This promises to allow educators to be intimately involved with arranging and rearranging the parts of their instruction conditions in ways that assure student learning.

Rumph et al. (2007) have nicely drawn the connection between Skinner's (1983, 1987) analysis of the impediments to effective educational practices and the ongoing struggle between behavior analytic and other perspectives on those practices. They also have appropriately distinguished the cognitive psychology perspective from the progressive education perspective in terms of the types of challenges each presents to articulation of evidence-based practices. Further the authors acknowledge the daunting task of shifting the kinds of contingencies that must be shifted to assure the benefits of evidence-based practices are experienced and produce adequate yearly progress for all students.

Their analysis of the impact of progressive education on the instructional practices of our nation's teachers and colleges of education is a chilling reminder of the work to be done. My own contribution to this series of papers (Hursh, 2007) focuses on how we as behavior analysts can become valuable to classroom teachers as resources helping them to assure that their practices are evidence-based and that their students do all make adequate yearly progress. Their scenarios for the future of public education and colleges of education rightly highlight the very real possibilities that alternatives to both may take their place.

While behavior analysts have been involved in providing alternatives to public schools and alternative teacher training efforts (e.g., Johnson's Morningside Learning Academy), I am prompted by Rumph et al.'s analysis to offer another tactic. Let's find teachers whose students learn well year after year and study what they do. Let's not limit what "learn well" means to any particular way of learning or learning outcomes. Let's do this as scientists interested in learning about learning and as scientists open to all possibilities letting the data lead us. Let's let the data be both quantitative and qualitative data.

I offer this tactic because it sets us up to be collaborators rather than adversaries. In doing so, it allows us to help others make conspicuous what is working and not working about their instructional practices. It gives us the opportunity to offer suggestions from the position of colleague rather than imposed change agent. I recognize that we will not be asked by some to provide this assistance just because our help will be suspect. I am not worried about reaching every teacher (there are not enough of us to deliver on that possibility anyway), just those who want some help in improving what they do (and there are more who want this than we have the resources to assist).

Our focus can be on helping others to develop the evidence base for their practices and in doing so make necessary changes in those practices based on the evidence collected in their classrooms with their students. If we take this tactic seriously, we may find ourselves on occasion giving a teacher the experience needed to shift away from some ineffective practices and toward some effective ones. Those effective practices are likely to be familiar to those of us in the behavior analysis community and yet be described by the teacher in other ways. If this shift happens, do we really care what those practices are called?

The dialogue illustrated by this series of articles (Ellis & Magee, 2007; Hursh, 2007; & Rumph, Ninness, McCuller, Holland, Ward, & Wilbourn, 2007) is exactly the sort of discussion that may transform NCLB from a guilt-by-association experience to an applied behavior analysis opportunity of great magnitude. We hold the possibilities in our hands. Oddly, for many of us, the window of opportunity is only guaranteed until the elections of 2008. I assert that we must emphatically acknowledge the apolitical urgency of helping the tenets of NCLB (evidence-based practices that insure adequate yearly progress for all learners) to succeed by our assistance offered frequently and feasibly to all educators.

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