



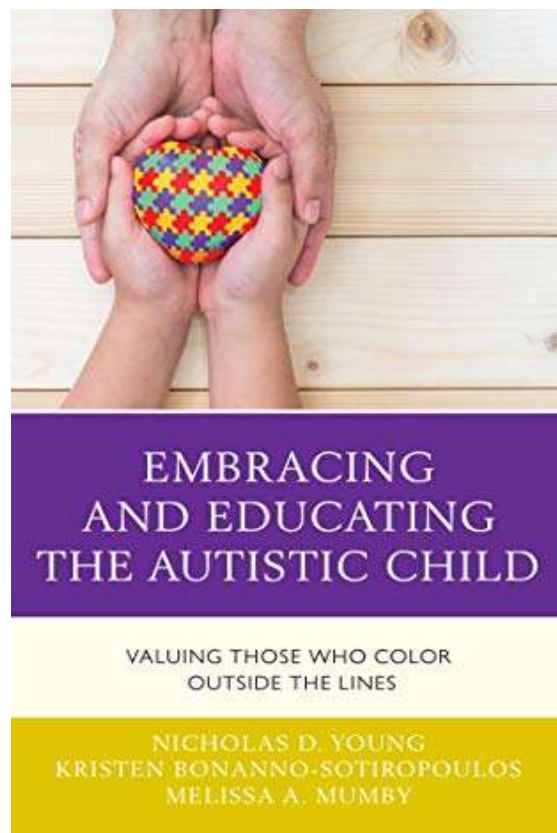
Young, N. D., Bonanno-Sotiropoulos, K., Mumby, M. A., & Robison, J. E. (2019b). *Embracing and educating the autistic child: Valuing those who color outside the lines*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

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According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in every 59 people will be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in their lifetime (CDC, 2018b). Fifteen years ago, my life was inexorably impacted when my eldest son was diagnosed with autism. Since that day, my wife and I have researched autism with the intent of preparing ourselves for whatever might come. We attended conferences and workshops, met with lawyers, joined parent support groups, watched as our family deserted us, and, on the positive side, were fortunate enough to find teachers who were deeply committed to educating our child in innovative and engaging ways. We have come to believe that the most powerful and effective support for families of students with ASD is learning to embrace the difference. This is one of many reasons why I believe *Embracing and Educating the Autistic Child: Valuing Those Who Color Outside the Lines* by Young, Bonanno-Sotiropoulos, Mumby, and Robison is an essential addition to the



library of any teacher or parent who works with or is raising a child with ASD.

In our pursuit of what was in the best interest of our son, we endeavored to navigate the complicated, frustrating, and sometimes infuriating world of special education. At the end of my son's first grade, I went on a field trip with his class only to realize that his desk was in a corner facing the wall and that he had generally been ignored all year by his teacher. After that my wife, a special education teacher herself, and I spent every free moment we had investigating research-based supports for students with ASD. When we presented these supports to the admission, review and dismissal (ARD) committee, every request was flatly denied by the principal. After appealing to the Special Education Office, we were told that virtually all of the supports we had asked for were available and could be provided to our son. This is only one example of what parents of children with ASD must face.

In *Embracing and Educating the Autistic Child*, Young and colleagues embrace autism from a holistic perspective. In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to a variety of issues that affect people with ASD, including communication and language deficits, social, sensory, and cognitive deficits, and displays of disturbing and dangerous behaviors such as head banging, hand flapping, rocking, or spinning. Unfortunately, as we learned, parents do not know that many of these deficits are age sensitive and not likely to present all at once. Often, they mature and disappear only to be replaced by a new deficit never seen before. For one year, our son would not talk. We thought we had lost him. That isn't a problem anymore. Now it's more about what he says, where, when, and how loud. This requires a shift in learning goals. Further, different environments demand different behaviors. After years of working with teachers and friends to successfully improve our son's social and communication skills, he is now in a vocational program where

socializing is discouraged while on the job. After learning to strike up conversations, he is now discouraged from doing so. Young and colleagues skillfully address so many of the changes we have witnessed and ways of working with them over the years. It would have been nice to have had this book by our bedside all along.

The book provides an overview of the history of autism, as well as information about federal and state agencies and other resources for teachers and parents. When it comes to in-classroom implementation, teachers are directed to a vast variety of exciting programs: Applied behavior analysis (ABA), play therapy, circle curriculum, hidden curriculum, and other evidence-based practices that have proven to be effective in closing the achievement gap. I was happy to see peer mediated interventions (PMI) on the list, as this is one of the easier supports to put into place and requires no additional cost for the district. This intervention involves the training of neuro-typical peers to work with classmates with autism. We found it to be one of the more effective learning tools for our son.

After watching my son's aunt ignore him one day because she didn't understand what he was talking about, not because he was inarticulate. He is quite articulate with an amazing vocabulary, but because he has the habit of starting a conversation in the middle of an idea, it can be quite disconcerting. Because she couldn't understand him, she chose to ignore him. This is not uncommon. This is one of the reasons peer mediation is a valuable tool, not just for the student with ASD but for the neuro-typical child to learn about and understand ASD. If you can't learn how to embrace the difference, there is nowhere for that child or adult with autism to go. You have to find the way in and it's not always easy. But it is also not nearly as hard as many people make it seem.

There are two detailed chapters on teaching your child or student social skills with immediately implementable strategies, such as The Superhero Social Skills Program, TeachTown, Second Step, video modeling, peer-mediated intervention, social stories, and priming. Since our son was diagnosed, there have been a number of technological advances in assistive technology. Specifically, for parents, when they receive the diagnosis of autism, this raises issues such as grief and loss knowing that their child will face challenges growing up and becoming independent. The book addresses these challenges and ways to support the whole family with strategies and resources, such as positive behavioral supports and managing the emotional impact of the diagnosis as well as finding community resource to increase positive outcomes.

Not all the deficits belong to the student with ASD. Young and colleagues emphasize the need for more teacher training and for well-written Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with clear strategies. Specifically, they outline a useful matrix for writing purposeful, attainable IEP goals that are SMART – specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic and relevant, and time-limited (Wright & Wright, 2008). They also emphasize the need for all teachers, not just special education teachers, to be able to read, understand, and implement IEPs. As a parent, I know that all teachers need substantial training to work with all students with special needs. As an educator, I know that recommendations such as school-wide training face nearly insurmountable obstacles. Proven and long accepted programs such as ABA, as detailed in chapter six, met with resistance at our son's school because of the cost of training. A seemingly simple step such as training all teachers in a school on how to read, understand, and effectively implement an IEP is time consuming and often not considered to be a campus or district priority. Even if schools and districts decide to address the training needs of all educators, manifestations of ASD are so multi-various

that training would need to be revisited regularly. Each child needs to be dealt with as a separate, continuous, individual in order for that child to be successful in and out of school.

Addressing challenges that exist in the system and ways to address positive change helps to make *Embracing and Educating the Autistic Child* a useful roadmap to understanding many important aspects of special education and autism. We have found, as parents and educators, if you don't ready yourself with knowledge and go into each ARD with a plan for your student or child, frequently essential services, supplemental supports, and new adaptive programs will go unmentioned. This book can help parents prepare themselves for what to look for and what to ask for during ARDs. Each chapter gives specific and relevant information and offers an array of useful resources, some of which I am looking into now for my son. Also, at the end of each chapter the authors included both "Final Thoughts," and "Points to Remember," which aid the reader in focusing on the depth of information surrounding the topic.

Many things have changed in the 15 years since my son's diagnosis. A number of organizations and foundations mentioned in the book that serve families and children affected by autism were not in existence back in 2004. Most of the assistive technology had yet to be developed. But what was true back then is just as true now: *Valuing those who color outside the lines* is something we all need to learn how to do, especially as more people with ASD are entering the workforce. My son included. I remember the day we heard the diagnosis of autism. One of the first things the diagnostician mentioned was that he could not color inside the lines. So what? I thought, most of the time I can't either. Is that a vital skill? Now he can color in the lines, but this skill is no longer of value.

In conclusion, I would recommend this book for all educators. But as both parent and educator, I would first and foremost recommend it for every parent with a child

who has been diagnosed with ASD. There is no way to prepare you for the tears and the fights you will face, but having this book at hand certainly might help.

About the Reviewer


Mark Pierce is a first year Ph.D. Student at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Before pursuing his Ph.D., Pierce worked in public education for 30 years as a teacher and the Program Manager of the Homeless Education Program for Dallas Independent School District for 23 years. His son is about to turn 20 and will have his first paying job this summer.



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