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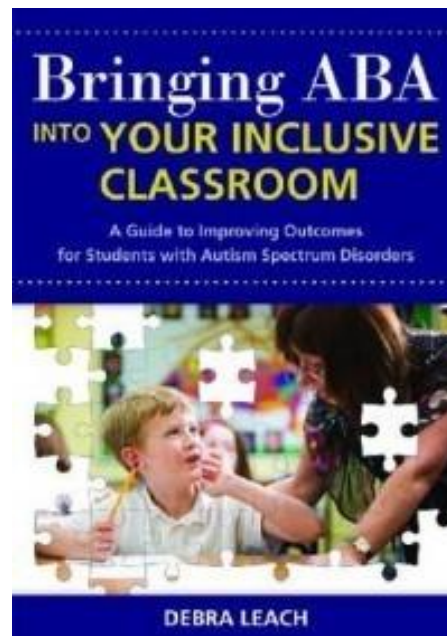


Leach, Debra. (2010) *Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom: A Guide to Improving Outcomes for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

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Upon examining the cover for *Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom: A Guide to Improving Outcomes for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* by Debra Leach, I was immediately drawn to the metaphorical significance of the missing puzzle pieces in the picture. Leach's guide is a practical and basic manual for teachers with classrooms that are inclusive of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The major contribution of this book, in my view, are the several helpful forms that make functional analysis and documentation understandable, if not more feasible considering the time constraints involved for so many



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teachers. The book is also missing several pieces, much like the picture on its cover. The current book review calls attention to some of those missing pieces, with an emphasis on strengths-based, individualized behavioral supports.

Chapter one begins with an identification of Autism, Aspergers, and PDD-NOS as “the only ASD” (p. 3). This wording is not completely accurate, nor is it supportive of the concept of a spectrum. Other DSM-IV-TR diagnoses have also been discussed as existing on the autism spectrum (e.g., Retts, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder) (Matson, Nebel-Schwalm, & Matson, 2006; Autism Society Canada, 2010; National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2011). Furthermore, a diagnosis of PDD-NOS lacks the specificity required to suggest ABA as the appropriate treatment modality, and a diagnosis of Aspergers says very little about a child’s behavior outside of the social domain.

Later in chapter one, Leach breaks out of her box to state, “When students with ASD receive the supports they need to learn how to respond to the initiations of others, initiate interactions with others, and maintain interactions with others, they may indeed prefer these interactions over being alone” (p. 4). I love the choice that this statement promotes. One of the criticisms of ABA is that its focus is to train socially appropriate behavior without regard for an individual’s sense of self. I appreciate that Leach makes several efforts in her book to use language that supports student autonomy and respects individual differences.

In general, the early chapters of *Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom* presented an inconsistent image of the functionality of repetitive behavior and language. For example, Leach did an excellent job of pointing out the functional purpose of stereotypic and repetitive language on page six, only to refer to “stereotypic and repetitive movements without a functional purpose” (p. 7) later in chapter one. The section “Increasing Active Engagement” is another example of where Leach could have been much more thorough in accounting for the underlying function of behavior. Some of the most common misuses of ABA result from inadequate recognition of the current purpose that a behavior plays for someone. Even what appear to be the most purposeless behaviors often serve a very

important purpose for children with Aspergers and high functioning autism (South, M., Ozonoff, S., and McMahon, W., 2005). For these reasons, I would be especially sensitive to the importance of stressing that every behavior has a purpose when communicating how to use ABA interventions to non-trained caregivers such as general education teachers.

I really liked the idea of including a best practices section in chapter one. The best practices section in this book was clear, thoughtful and well placed, but may fail to communicate its important messages due to the manner in which the concepts were presented. For example, while table 1.1 provides several great ideas for ways to keep students with ASD actively engaged in lessons, it lacks detail and real-life examples. As a result, suggestions such as “be much more positive than negative” (p. 11) might be considered common sense to teachers who think that they are usually very positive anyhow. Furthermore, suggestions such as “maintain a brisk pace of instruction” (p. 11) might be taken too literally and make it even more difficult for some students to follow a lesson plan that is already organized in a foreign way.

Chapter two provided a history of behaviorism. This was a nice idea, but the time would have been better spent on beefing up other areas of the book intended to provide general education teachers with practical instructions for integrating ABA into their classrooms. The concepts (e.g., applied, behavioral, analytic, conceptual, technological, effective generality) are explained clearly and concisely. As a whole, the historical applications discussed in this chapter provide definitions and a context for the terms used in later chapters.

Chapter three began with a focus on strengths in assessment that captured my interest and concurrence. Chapter three also did an excellent job of stressing the importance of baseline data and provided much better examples than chapters one and two. Functionality was eluded to, but not described in great detail. In particular, I liked the section on assessing parent and general education teacher priorities and will use the techniques suggested in my own work with children diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

My satisfaction with chapter three carried over to chapter four when Leach starts the chapter with collaborative goal setting. My inner critic returned, however, when Leach failed to include the student as part of the group responsible for collaborative goal setting. Perhaps this is assumed, but the importance of student involvement in all aspects of the plan cannot be over-stressed.

Before the tides turned completely, Leach did an effective job describing the need to state goals positively in chapter four. Although ABA is a behavioral approach, one must still insure that the environment created is conducive to the change sought. An emphasis on the negative will only serve to promote a negative self-image and it is more difficult to behave positively, if the expectation is that you will usually behave negatively. Leach is clearly aware of this dynamic.

Chapter four also provides several sample goals for students with ASD. These sample goals are helpful, but may contribute to depersonalized treatment planning so teachers should be cautioned to always stay sensitive to the heterogeneity of ASD and every student diagnosed. Overall, I liked chapters three and four much more than chapters one and two.

Chapter five started out strong with a focus on positive reinforcement that did an exceptional job of capturing the importance of rewards vs. punishment, as well as how reinforcement changes (i.e., what might be considered reinforcing one week, may not the next). Later efforts to describe ABA techniques were less thorough and did not provide as much detail related to the approach or how to implement it in a general education setting. As a result, I came away feeling like more information could have been provided on how to limit the potentially negative side effects of ABA on typically-developing peers. Furthermore, because the techniques were presented in limited detail and with few examples to support them, the complexity of working with a student with ASD is not made clear. The description of self-monitoring in particular lacked sensitivity to the difficulty of some ABA techniques for lower-functioning students on the spectrum.

Also in chapter five, though I appreciated the attention given to the use of social stories with students with ASD,

far too little guidance was provided to teachers unfamiliar with the process. For example, vital concepts such as adjusting the vocabulary, perspective, length, and content to suit the child's comprehension level, interests, and abilities were left out of the book entirely. Additionally, no mention was given to Carol Gray's recommendation that "at least 50% of all the Stories developed for any person should congratulate or applaud current skills/abilities/personality traits/ or concepts that the person does well" (The Gray Center, n.d.). I found this to be a glaring omission, as it is very easy to write a social story with good intentions, but bad outcomes, when positive expectations and the perspective of the characters are not properly taken into account.

Chapter six did a much better job than previous chapters of discussing reasonable applications for general education classrooms. The data collection tools that doubled as graphs for improved monitoring and analysis are simple, efficient, and effective for use by general education teachers. I actually came away from reading this chapter with some new ideas of my own for data collection and analysis! Overall, I found this chapter to be the best in terms of the information provided and its applicability to a general education environment.

The teaching plan formats and examples provided in chapter seven are concise and appropriate for the issues they address. The plans did not provide much guidance for how to communicate functional analysis results and all of the examples given reflected fairly benign behavioral issues. As a result, most teachers will likely come away with little to no guidance on how to work with more serious maladaptive behaviors. While I realize that at this point in our society, only higher functioning students with mild behavioral issues are streamlined into general education settings (Simpson, de Boer-Ott, Sonja, Smith-Myles, 2003), I would like to see books such as *Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom* make it possible for more students at different points along the autism spectrum to experience inclusive classroom settings in the future.

The appendix included a plethora of sample teaching plans making it one of the most significant contributions of the book. As with the examples provided throughout the

book, limited detail and a focus on relatively benign behavioral issues limited the sample plans' value. As a result, there was a cookie-cutter feel that, in the wrong hands, could promote a one-size fits all approach. It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to work with every student diagnosed with an ASD on an individualized basis. In the words of one of my mentors Dr. Gene McCabe, a child psychologist specializing in children on the autism spectrum in Rochester, NY, "if I have met one person with an autism spectrum disorder, I have met one person with an autism spectrum disorder" (personal communication, 2010).

In conclusion, although I would not say that *Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom* prepares general education teachers to write and implement ABA plans, it does promote a greater understanding of ABA and the few interventions that are reasonable and appropriate for use in an inclusive classroom. Some of the most useful elements of the book are the example forms and plans that are provided throughout. My concern is that many under-trained teachers will try to fit students to these plans rather than the other way around. More of an emphasis on person-centered approaches earlier in the book might help to limit the risk of this happening.

Little depth to the descriptions of functional analysis purpose and process was among the book's most significant limitations. Additionally, while there were a plethora of examples provided, most were anecdotal and/or of limited detail. More detailed examples and tips for problem solving more complex cases would go a long way toward making this book more valuable, as it currently lacks the depth necessary to help teachers dealing with more serious behavior problems.

Overall, I found *Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom* to be a good basic guide to ABA terminology, but weak on practical instruction. It is clear and well-written, but lacks the depth of understanding required to properly support most students on the autism spectrum who exhibit more complex behavioral needs. It may also promote an under-deserved overconfidence in the hands of some teachers who do not already have a firm grasp of basic functional analysis and behavior support theory. I would recommend it as an introductory guide for general

education teachers with the caveat that further training and supervision will be necessary.

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