**Embracing and Educating the Autistic Child: Valuing Those Who Color Outside the Lines,** by Young, N. D., Bonanno-Sotiropoulos, K., Mumby, M. A., & John Elder Robison. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, 134 pp., US$27.00, ISBN:978-1-4758-4689-8

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in every 59 people will be diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018b). Fifteen years ago, my life was inexorably impacted by ASD 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 have 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 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 any teacher or parent’s library 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 the first grade I went on a field trip with my son’s 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 have to look forward to.

In *Embracing and Educating the Autistic Child*, Young and colleagues embrace autism from a holistic perspective. In the first chapter, Understanding the Autistic Mind, we are introduced to a variety of deficits that affect people with ASD, including: communication and language deficits, social, sensory and cognitive deficits and they can display disturbing and dangerous behaviors such as head banging, hand flapping, rocking or spinning. Unfortunately, as we learned, what parents are not informed of at the same time is 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 wouldn’t talk at all. 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 is an example of shifting learning goals that need to be attended to. After years of working with teachers and friends to successfully improve our son’s social deficits and communication skills, he is now in a vocational program where socializing is discouraged while on the job. This brings into play a social/cognitive deficit that was less apparent while he was in school, different environments demand different behaviors. 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 throughout all of the changes.

The book includes an overview of the history of autism, information about federal and state agencies and other resources for teachers and parents. When it comes to in the 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 on the list as this is one of the easier supports to put into place and accrues no additional cost for the district. ﻿This intervention involves engaging neurotypical peers to be trained to work with their 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, which 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 neurotypical 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 is also a well detailed chapter on teaching your child or student social skills with immediately implementable strategies. Since our son was diagnosed there have been a number of technological advances in assistive technology. For the parents the book addresses issues such as grief, bullying, stress and just being different.

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 (IEP) with clear strategies. Specifically, they outline a useful matrix for writing a 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 barriers. 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’s priority. Even should schools and districts decide to address the training needs of all educators, manifestations of ASD are so multi-various, training would need to be revisited on a regular basis. Each child needs to be handled as a separate, continuous, individual case 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 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 a wonderful 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 aids the reader in focusing 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 discovered. 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 within the lines. So what? I thought, most of the time I can’t either. Is that a vital skill? Now he can color within the lines, but as a skill it 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.

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