THE CASE AGAINST ECLECTICISM
Queen Mary University, London
June, 2019

ECLECTICISM
Two most widely cited studies aimed at identifying Best Practice for Treatment and Education of children with ASD:
• Dawson and Osterling (1997)
• Prizant and Rubin (1999)

DAWSON & OSTERLING: TREATMENTS REVIEWED
• Douglas DDC (Rutgers)
• Health Sciences Center (Sally Rogers, U. Colo.)
• LEAP (Phil Strain)
• May Institute (Cape Cod)
• PCDI (Krantz & McClannahan)
• TEACCH (U No. Carolina)
• Walden Preschool (Emory U., Gail McGee)
• UCLA YAP (Ivar Lovaas)

CONCLUSIONS FROM BEST PRACTICE ARTICLES
• There are a wide variety of effective treatments.
• All research on autism treatments has flaws and limitations
• There is no evidence that any one approach is better than another
• There are common elements to all successful approaches
• Therefore “best practice” = Incorporate common elements of all these different treatments
COMMON ELEMENTS OF TREATMENT PROGRAMS

- Curriculum Covers Important Basic Skills
  - attending; imitation; language; toy play; social interaction
- First Establish Core Skills in Highly Structured Settings, Then Generalize to Natural Environments
- Provide Predictability and Routine
- Analytic Approach to Behavior
- Teach Classroom Survival Skills
- Family Involvement

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- Although they did not report on it, we are confident that the vast majority of staff were female in all the studies
  - Therefore best practice should include not hiring male staff???

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CURB APPEAL

- More is better: Obviously one size cannot fit all
- Blend approaches to customize mix for each student
- Capture best elements of each approach
WHAT IF THEIR CONCLUSIONS ARE FLAWED?

• Is there really “no evidence that any one approach is better than another” ???

QUALITY OF OUTCOMES

• Dawson and Osterling (1997) deemed all interventions as equally deserving of merit despite enormous discrepancy in quality of outcomes
  ➢ E.g., maintaining community placement (despite still displaying disruptive behaviors and profound skill deficits)
    Vs.
  ➢ Intellectual functioning increasing to age typical levels; performing grade level work without support in general education classes

QUALITY OF EVIDENCE

• Dawson and Osterling (1997) did not take into account quality of evidence in coming to conclusion that all interventions are equal
• Other reviews that evaluated quality of evidence have come to a different conclusion
  ➢ New York State Department of Health (1999). Clinical practice guideline

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• Dawson and Osterling (1997) and Prizant and Rubin (1999) were not empirical studies
  ➢ Did not directly compare various interventions
  ➢ No objective data to support their theory
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Then what really is “best practice”?
• If all treatments DO NOT produce the same results, then you should go with the one with the best track record
• When there is an intervention that produces superior results, the differences must be due to what is UNIQUE in the procedure, not what it shares in common with less effective procedures

EVIDENCE FOR EFFECTIVENESS OF ABA

• Birnbrauer, J.S., & Leach, D.J. (1993)
• Handleman, J.S., Harris, et al. (1991)
• Harris, S.L., & Handleman, J.S., (1994)

EVIDENCE FOR EFFECTIVENESS OF ABA

• Lovaas, O.I., Koegel, R. L., Simmons, J. Q., & Long, J. (1973)
• Lovaas, O.I. (1987)
• Reichow & Wolery, 2009
• Smith, Eikeseth, Klevstrand & Lovaas (1997).
• Weiss, M. J. (1999)

STUDIES CONDUCTED IN U.K.

• Howlin & Magiatti (2009)
• Magiati, Charman & Howlin (2007).
CASE STUDIES

- Leaf, Taubman, McEachin et. al. (2011)
- Perry, Cohen, & DeCarlo R. (1995)

WHAT IS WRONG WITH BLENDING APPROACHES?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECLECTIC</th>
<th>SPECIALIZED</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack of all trades, master of none</td>
<td>Develop focused expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudderless ship</td>
<td>Cohesiveness provides clear direction</td>
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<td>Dilution: Noneffective components can diminish impact of important elements</td>
<td>Retains only the unique and essential elements</td>
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<td>Promotes dabbling and “shopping”</td>
<td>All energy is devoted to what really makes a difference</td>
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<td>Distills Existing Approaches. (What gets lost in translation?)</td>
<td>Produces innovation</td>
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AMPLIFICATION

- Amplification: The synthesis of two (or more) elements that produces exponentially more change than the elements alone.
  - Can be true of element that by itself has no discernible impact
- Example: Teaching Receptive and Expressive Language
  - Flexible Prompt fading alone is only slightly better than scripted prompting protocols
  - Teacher discretion of item order and location is about the same as scripted.
  - But early research findings suggest that when FPF and discretion are combined there can be enormous improvement in rate of acquisition.
COLLABORATION

• Interventions that are compatible and complementary
  ➢ Skill-based O.T.
  ➢ Speech Therapy that is behaviorally based

DILUTION

• Non-evidence based Interventions that take time and energy away from what really works
  ➢ GFCF diet
  ➢ Music therapy

POLLUTION

• Non-evidence based interventions that are antithetical and potentially undermines what you are trying to accomplish
  ➢ Floortime
  ➢ Options ("Sonrise")
  ➢ Sensory Integration

How Do We Make a Choice?

• Be an Informed Consumer
• Critical Thinking
Critical Thinking

Chocolate can affect the brain by causing the release of endorphins and other opiates that can help to reduce stress and lead to feelings of euphoria.

According to the Experts:

- Dr. Eric Braverman
New York’s PATH Medical

Possible Interpretations:

1. Procedure Assisted Child in Organizing Sensory Input
2. Resolved the “Need” for Chocolate
3. Chocolate Stabilized Metabolic Deregulation
4. Child Was Distracted
5. Child Received Attention
6. Child Avoided Non-Preferred Activity
7. Served As Coping Strategy For Stress

How Do We Make a Choice?

- Be an Informed Consumer
- Critical Thinking
- Be Guided by Objective Data
- Look at Long Term Outcomes
EVALUATING OUTCOMES

- We want our children to be healthy, happy, and productive.
- What is Effective: We need to identify what works and what doesn’t work.
- What is Efficient: Time is Precious. Resources are limited.
- Our knowledge of HOW TO IMPROVE BEHAVIOR AND EFFECTIVELY TEACH NEEDED SKILLS has ONLY advanced through application of the scientific method.

EVALUATING OUTCOMES

- If we do not objectively assess outcomes we can easily be fooled.
  - If you pay $10,000 for auditory integration training you are going to see improvement in behavior.

EVALUATING OUTCOMES

- If we do not objectively assess outcomes we can easily be fooled.
  - If you pay $10,000 for auditory integration training you are going to see improvement in behavior.
  - It’s easy to be fooled into accepting false beliefs.

PRIZANT & WETHERBY 1998

Social Pragmatic Approach =

- Exploit natural opportunities to facilitate language
- Non-critical toward child’s communication efforts
- Less directive
- Adjusting language input (complexity) to fit the child
- Communication temptations; therapeutic sabotage
- Learning is Transactional and Affectively Based
PRIZANT & WETHERBY 1998

Traditional DTT =
• Rigid
• Taught in unnatural settings
• Treatment for “low functioning” children
• Narrow curriculum
• Does not promote “natural” language
• Does not promote socialization
• Reduces opportunities for generalization
• Produces rote responding

How is ABA Similar

• Respects Developmental Model
  ➢ Skills Progress Cumulatively
• Building Interpersonal Relationships
• Development of Communication
• Looks at whole person
• Aims for better quality of life

How is ABA Different?

• Intensive
  ➢ Not just 30-40 hours; It is a mindset
  ➢ Building fluency = drills
  ➢ Requires active responding
• Directive
  ➢ Willing to push hard
  ➢ Can’t wait for child to do at own pace
  ➢ Make decisions on behalf of child
• Comprehensive
  ➢ Not just verbal behavior or relationship building

How is ABA Different?

• Analytic Method
  ➢ Observable, measurable, objective
  ➢ Understanding how behavior is related to environmental events and history
  ➢ Finding relationship of antecedents and consequences to behavior
  ➢ Hypothesize, Test, Revise
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:
ABA vs. ECLECTIC

- Eikeseth, Smith, Jahr & Eldevick (2002 & 2007)
- Howard, Sparkman, Cohen, Green & Stanislaw (2005); Howard, Stanislaw, Green, Sparkman & Cohen (2014)

How Do We Make a Choice?

- Don’t Assume That Combining Approaches Will Yield Better Results Than Any One Individual Approach: More Is Not Necessarily Better
- Choose a Guiding Framework
- Maintain Cohesiveness of Approach
- Concentrate on the Interventions That Actually Make a Difference