Contingencies of Joy: Meaning, Ethics and Methods

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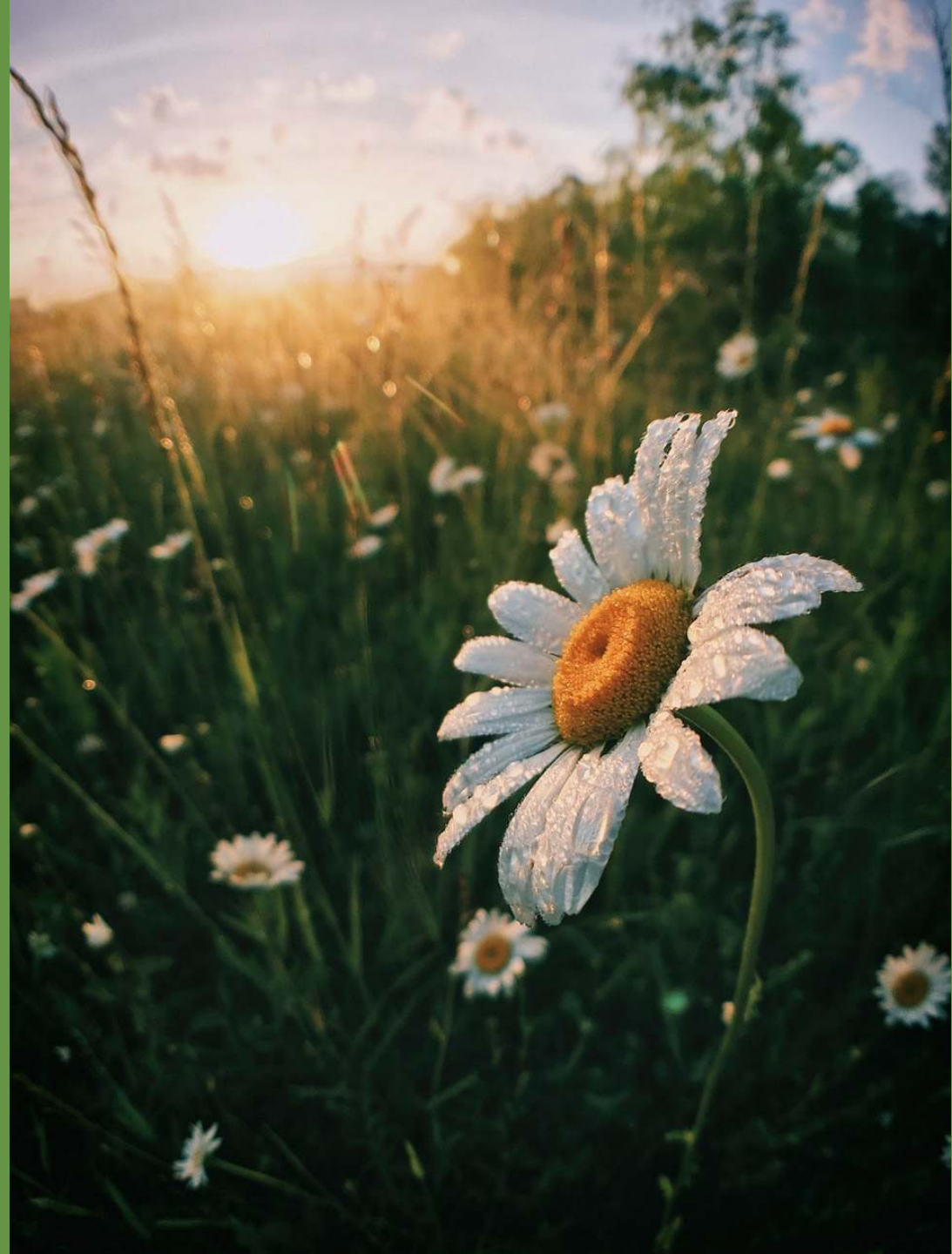
The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of practices that nurture joy in the lives of young children with autism, their families and their supporting professionals. The talk is divided into three sections. The first section explores the concept of joy and discusses the role of contingencies in understanding and changing behavior for the better. The second section focuses on the role of evidence-based practice, the need to go beyond reducing problems, and the importance of striving to preventatively and proactively foster healthy relationships at all levels. The final section provides a framework for continued progress by establishing intentional communities of practice. Communities of practice with a mission of increasing joy are likely to encourage ongoing learning, human connections and loving approaches to intervention.

This presentation is based, in part, on:
Alai & Zueg (2010), *Three Considerations,*
Alai, Toussaint & McGee (2018) *Incidental Teaching: Happy Progress*,
Miller, Re Cruz & Alai (2019) *Behavior Analysis and Cultural Responsiveness*,
Alai-Rosales, et al, (2019) *The Big Four*,
and Alai & Heinkel-Wolfe (coming in Fall 2021) *Between Now and Dreams*



Joy

photos from unsplash.com

Learning Objectives

1. To describe the conceptualizations and ethical rationales for nourishing joyful interventions
2. To identify practices that contribute to nurturing and progressive interventions.
3. To describe preventative approaches and why they are important to joy.
4. To describe a cuspal approach to nourishing joy within family relationships.
5. To describe a framework for evolving as a compassionate and skilled therapist.
6. To consider the “big questions” we can ask ourselves about interventions.

Thank you to my colleagues, especially Jesus Rosales-Ruiz, Regan Garden, Malika Pritchett, Angeliki Gena, Jessica Broome, John McEachin, Justin Leaf, Ron Leaf, Mitch Taubman, Joe Cihon, Isabel Cunningham, Amy Yauger, Claire Anderson, Sara Weinkauf, April Linden and Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe.
Of course, all of the grace and none of the blame lies therein☺

Conceptualizations

When we speak of Joy

A place of well-being, a state of happiness or felicity, a source or cause of delight (Webster's)

Joy is sacred

“When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.”
— Rumi

“Joy is the holy fire that keeps our purpose warm and our intelligence aglow.” —*Helen Keller*

Joy is intertwined with hope

“If a person is happy enough to think he has reached the happiest moment of his life, he will be hopeful enough to believe his future will be just as beautiful, more so.”
— Orhan Pamuk

Joy as an act of liberation

“When there's so much hate and so much resistance to truth and justice, joy is itself an act of resistance.”

Nicolas O'Rourke

Joy is empathic and communal

"To get the full value of joy
you must have someone
to divide it with."
— Mark Twain

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IaNR8YGdow

Emotions
guides & goals

- *Emotions are important*
- *We communicate through "expressions"*
- *Emotions flag specific contingencies*

Wolf, 1978; Ekman, 1997; Hager & Ekman, 1983 Schwartz & Goldiamond, 1975; Layng, 2006; Layng, 2009 ; Garden, Regan E. Creating a Verbal Community for Describing Emotional Responses within a Contingency Lens: The Effects of a Brief Training Workshop, thesis, December 2016; Denton, Texas. (https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc955041/: accessed October 1, 2020), University of North Texas Libraries, UNT Digital Library, https://digital.library.unt.edu

The contingency lens

- A framework for understanding dependent relations
- What happens around, before, during and after our actions
- Three term contingency provides working units to analyze and shape development
- Responsiveness to emotions can direct design of joyful contingencies

Joy Ethics

3.01 Responsibility to Clients (see 1.03, 2.01)

***Behavior analysts* act in the best interest of *clients*, taking appropriate steps to support *clients' rights*, maximize benefits, and do no harm..**

Behavior Analyst Certification Board. (2020). *Ethics code for behavior analysts*. Littleton, CO: Author.

Joy Ethics

UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding..

https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

Contingencies, Prevention & Intervention

Ala'i-Rosales. S & Zueg, N. (2010) Important Things to Consider when Starting Intervention for a Child Newly Diagnosed with Autism. *Behavior Analysis in Practice, 3, 54-55*

In the beginning

- Do you understand the enormity of the undertaking?
- Do you have the skills? Do you have a place to get help?
- Do you know how to determine if progress is made?
- How will you know if the progress is meaningful?
- How will you promote contingencies that support happiness, joy, skills, satisfaction?

How do we expand the joyful possibilities? Increase well-being and *expansive* progress?

Joyful intervention design

Moving away from difficulty & towards joy

Focus of prevention and intervention

Prevent

Over 60 years of research on "problem behavior"

Functional Analysis methodologies provide successful analysis and treatment

Lovaas, Freitag, Gold & Kassorla, 1965; Carr, 1977; Iwata, et al 1982; Iwata et al, 1994; Hanley et al, 2003; Beavers et al, 2013; Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) Standard Functional Analysis (SBA)

~~Problem behaviors~~,
Problem contingencies

Lovaas, Freitag, Gold & Kassorla, 1965; Carr, 1977; Iwata, et al 1982; Iwata et al, 1994; Hanley et al, 2003; Beavers et al, 2013; Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) Standard Functional Analysis (SBA)

1. Difficulty accessing events and activities

2. Difficulty accessing attention

3. Lack of non-harmful reinforcing events, activities, people, attention

4. Difficulty adapting or escaping aversive situations

The Big Four: Moving beyond relief & towards joy

Ala'i-Rosales, et al (2018)
The Big Four: Functional Assessment Research Informs Preventative Behavior Analysis.
Behavior Analysis in Practice

1. Communicating

*Safely, effectively, enthusiastically, respectfully sharing wants, needs, likes, dislikes and interests

2. Connecting

*Safely, effectively, happily and pleasantly initiating and gaining attention, engagement and affection

3. Engaging

* Willingly and absorbingly engaging in diverse activities alone and with others

4. Adapting

* Safely, effectively, diplomatically, confidently and courageously entering difficult situations that will increase well-being over the time

Contingencies of Joy

Ala'i-Rosales, et al (2018)
The Big Four: Functional Assessment Research Informs Preventative Behavior Analysis. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*

It should be noted that there are emotions included in the descriptions, which was an intentional attempt to tact particular contingencies. We chose to qualify the way that we stated each of the Big Four to encourage action beyond satisfying functional equivalents of potentially problematic behaviors. This is an initial effort (a) to support the goals of stakeholders (families generally want children who are happy, joyful, pleasant, respectful, and diplomatic); (b) to stress that the responses learned must be effective, as a response without a corresponding consequence is unlikely to maintain; and (c) to use words (e.g., emotion labels) that tact contingencies beyond alleviation/toleration of discomfort, receipt of desired items, or avoidance of causing trouble. For example, when we speak of *joyful*, it probably describes something beyond satisfaction with receiving attention. We hope that it means that the interaction has acquired reinforcing value for all parties. Similarly, *respectfully* might indicate some perspective-taking ability in terms of what the communicative attempt means to the other person. As part of our proposal, we attempt to expand the goal descriptions in ways that are more likely to, over time, enrich the life of the child and the family. This was one of the closing

Contingencies of Joy

Ala'i-Rosales, et al (2018)
The Big Four: Functional Assessment Research Informs Preventative Behavior Analysis. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*

- *A place of well-being, a state of happiness or felicity, a source or cause of delight (Webster's)*
- Emotion flags for non-coercive and approach and assent based contingencies
- Safely, effectively, enthusiastically, respectfully, happily, pleasantly, willingly, absorbingly, diplomatically, confidently and courageously …

When we teach three things can happen

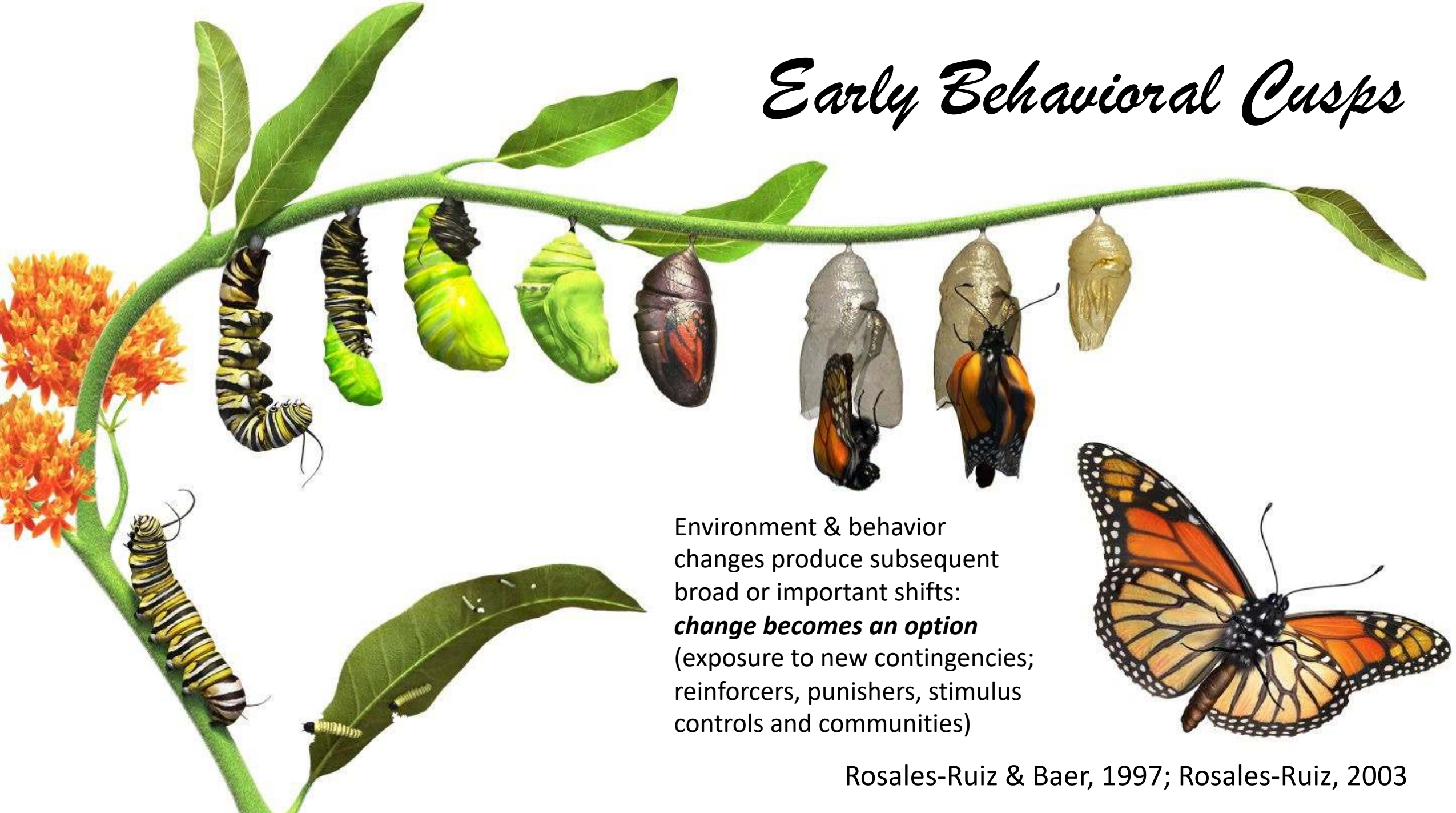
Produce behavior maintained within the intervention contingencies

Produce behavior that is established, maintained and refined by desired communities of reinforcement outside of intervention

Produce behavior that changes in the intervention, in the desired communities AND makes available new shaping contingencies and opportunities

Rosales-Ruiz, 2016

Early Behavioral Cusps



Environment & behavior changes produce subsequent broad or important shifts: ***change becomes an option*** (exposure to new contingencies; reinforcers, punishers, stimulus controls and communities)

Rosales-Ruiz & Baer, 1997; Rosales-Ruiz, 2003

Intervene and Teach Early

e.g., Bibby, Eikeseth, Martin, Mudford, & Reeves, 200; Biglan, 2015; Broomee, 2007; Eikeseth, Smith, Jahr, & Eldevik, 2002; Fenske, Zalenski, Krantz & McClannahan, 1985; Green, Gardner, & Reid, 1997; Greer, 1994; Guastaferro & Lutzker, 2018; Hart & Risley, 1995; Howard, et al,2014; 2019; Koegel, Bimbela & Schreibman, 1996; Leaf, Taubman, McEachin, Leaf, & Tsuji, 2011; *Lovaas, 1987*; *Lovaas, Koegel, Simmons, Long, 1973*; Matson & Smith, 2008; McEachin, Smith, & Lovaas,1993; Sallows, & Graupner, 2005; Sidman, 1989; Smith, Groen, & Wynn, 2000; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Wolf, Risley, & Mees, 1964

- Early environments matter
- Trajectories can change

- Coercion and its fallout
- Happiness and its build up

- Measures direct our attention
- Families and cuspal influence

The power of families

A Cuspal Program Example: Sunny Starts

Ala'i-Rosales. S., Cermak, S. & Guðmundsdóttir, K. (2013) *Sunny Starts: DANCE Instruction for Parents and Toddlers with ASD*. In Weiss, M.J. & Bondy, A. (Eds.) Teaching Social Skills to People with Autism. Woodbine House, Bethesda, MD

Guðmundsdóttir¨, K., Alai-Rosales, S., & Sigurðardóttir, Z. (2018) Extending caregiver training via telecommunication for rural children with autism. Rural Special Education Quarterly.

Joyful Families

Dancing together

Listening and speaking

Enticing and prolonging

Sharing one another's enjoyment

Engaging for the sake of each other, the emotions, the mutual reinforcement

Hart & Risley 1995

To watch us dance is to
hear our hearts speak.
~Hopi Proverb
A metaphor

An acronym

D Decide
A Arrange
N Now!
C Contemplate
E Enjoy

Dancing

The Science of Responsiveness & The Science of Neglect

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/about/what-we-do/

Schertz, et al (2020)

Dunst & Kassow, (2008)

Trivette (2003)

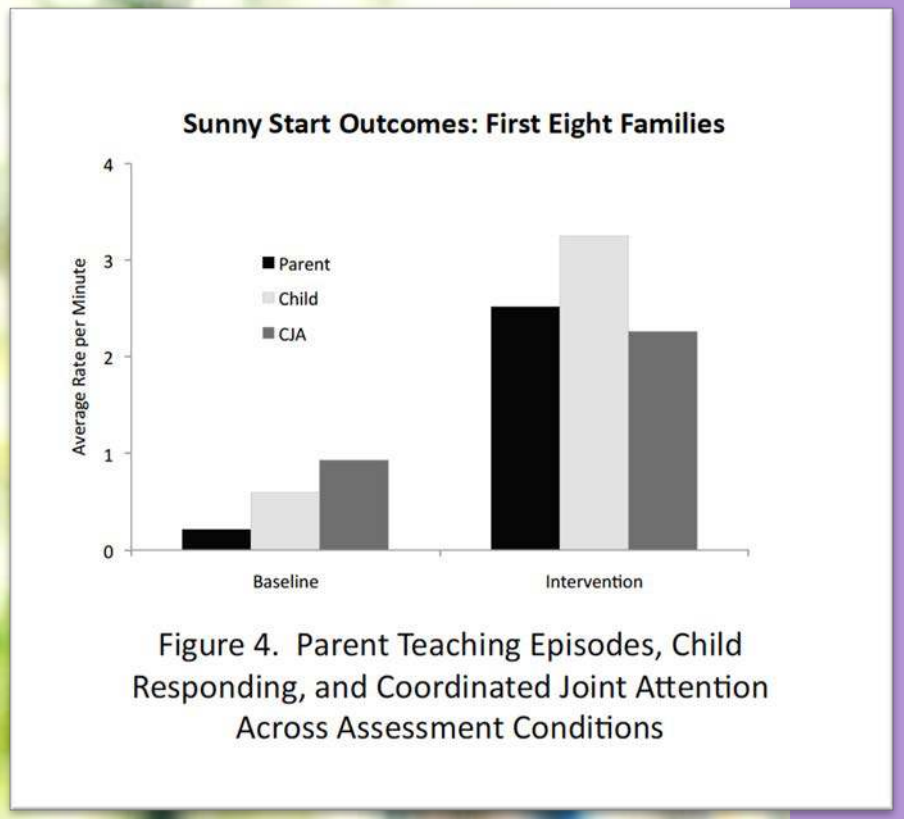


Figure 4. Parent Teaching Episodes, Child Responding, and Coordinated Joint Attention Across Assessment Conditions

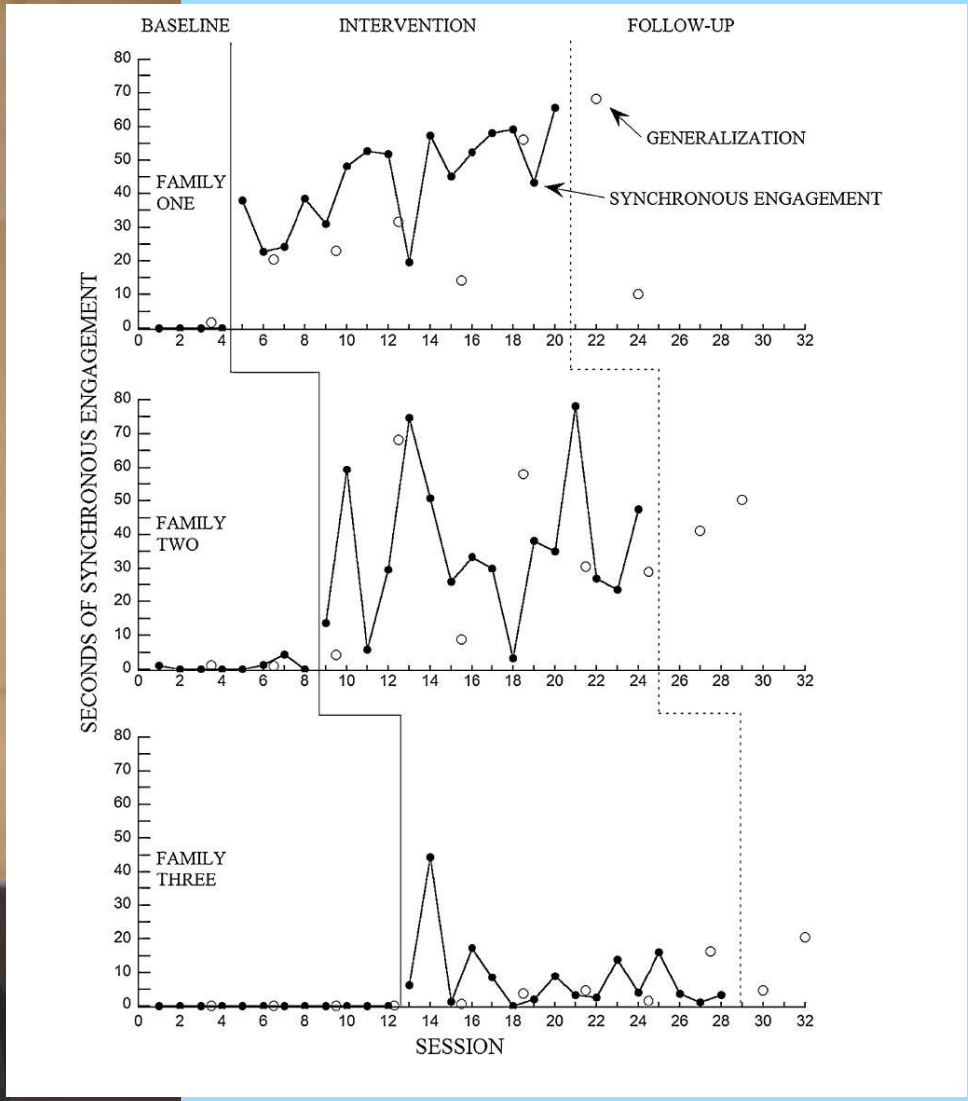
Sunny Starts: DANCE Instruction for Parents and Toddlers with ASD. Ala'i-Rosales. S., Cermak, S. & Guðmundsdóttir, K. (2013) In Weiss, M.J. & Bondy, A. (Eds.) Teaching Social Skills to People with Autism. Woodbine House, Bethesda, MD

"Toward a systematic method of evaluating favorable conditions in a parent training program: the pursuit of happiness."
Broome, J., Ala'i-Rosales, S., Rosales-Ruiz, J., Besner, A., Laino, K., Suchomel, N., Geving, M. & Newcomer, A. Symposium presentation. Association for Behavior Analysis Annual Convention. San Diego, CA **2007.**

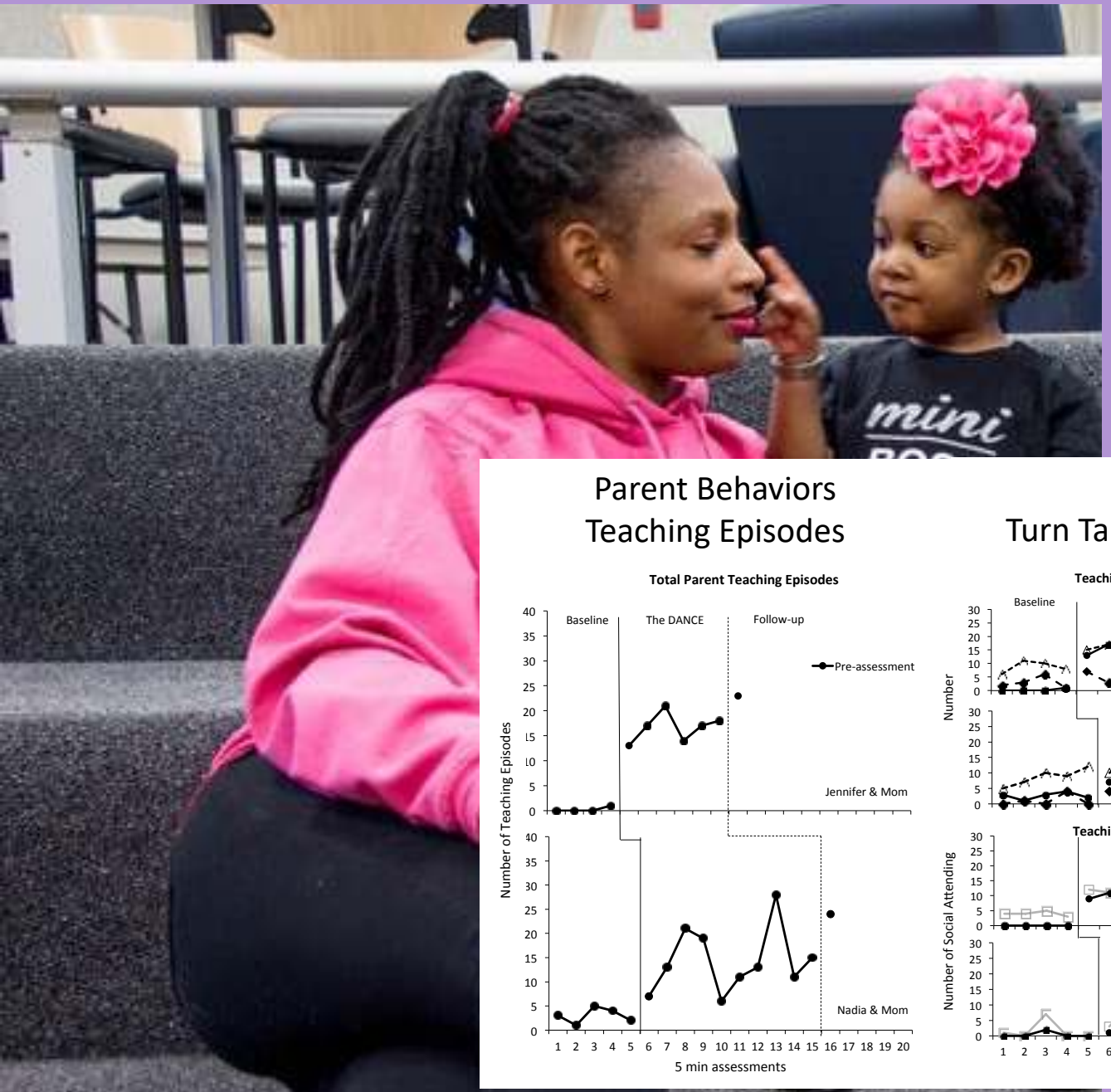
Sunny Starts
Coach Requirements & Models

- Master autism interventions skills (responsive, holistic and momentary shaping across domains)
- Master toddler play skill repertoire (responsive, fun, interactive, creative)
- Advanced coaching skills (responsive narrating, instructing, modeling, feedback, collaborative)
- Organization and technical skills (poly/monochronic, time, data, schedules, materials)

- **Friendly parent interactions skills (responsive, hopeful, attentive, kind and JOYFUL)**
- **Excellent communication skills (honest, clear, accurate, responsive, tender)**

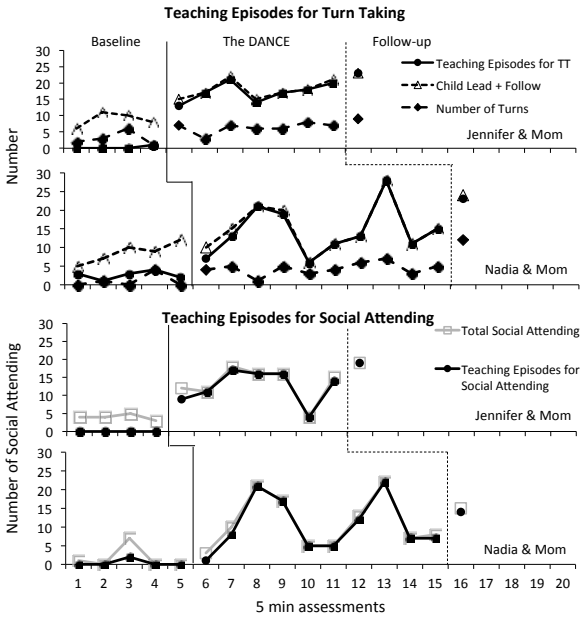


Vernon, T. W., Koegel, R. L., Dauterman, H., & Stolen, K. (2012). An early social engagement intervention for young children with autism and their parents. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *42*(12), 2702–2717. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1535-7

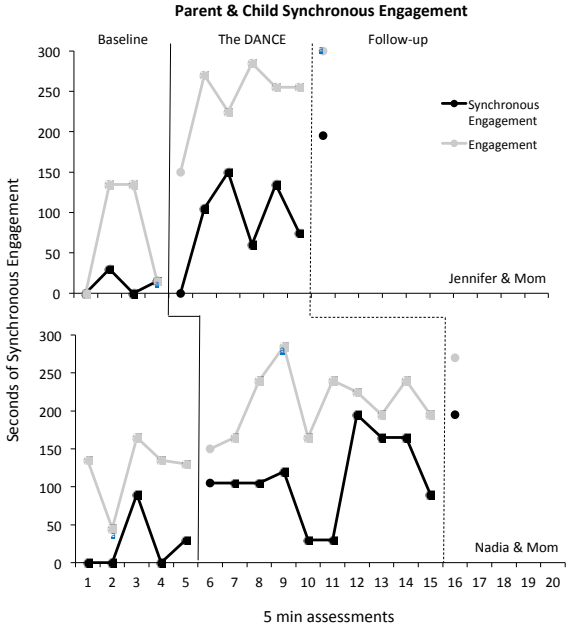


Parent Behaviors
Teaching Episodes

Child Behaviors
Turn Taking & Social Attending



The Joyful Relationship
Synchronous Engagement



Lemlin, Cunningham, O'Gorman, Alai & Rosales-Ruiz (in preparation)

123 go!

Joyful families, children & therapists

"Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness."

— Abdul-Baha

Dr. Angeliki Gena
www.researchgate.net/profile/Angeliki-Gena

Joy in the time of COVID-19

Disruptions & Revelations

- Previous practices

  Constrained, unavailable, ineffective, coercive, sad

- Wrongs and suffering exposed

  Racism, under resourced, inequitable, diminished

A portal

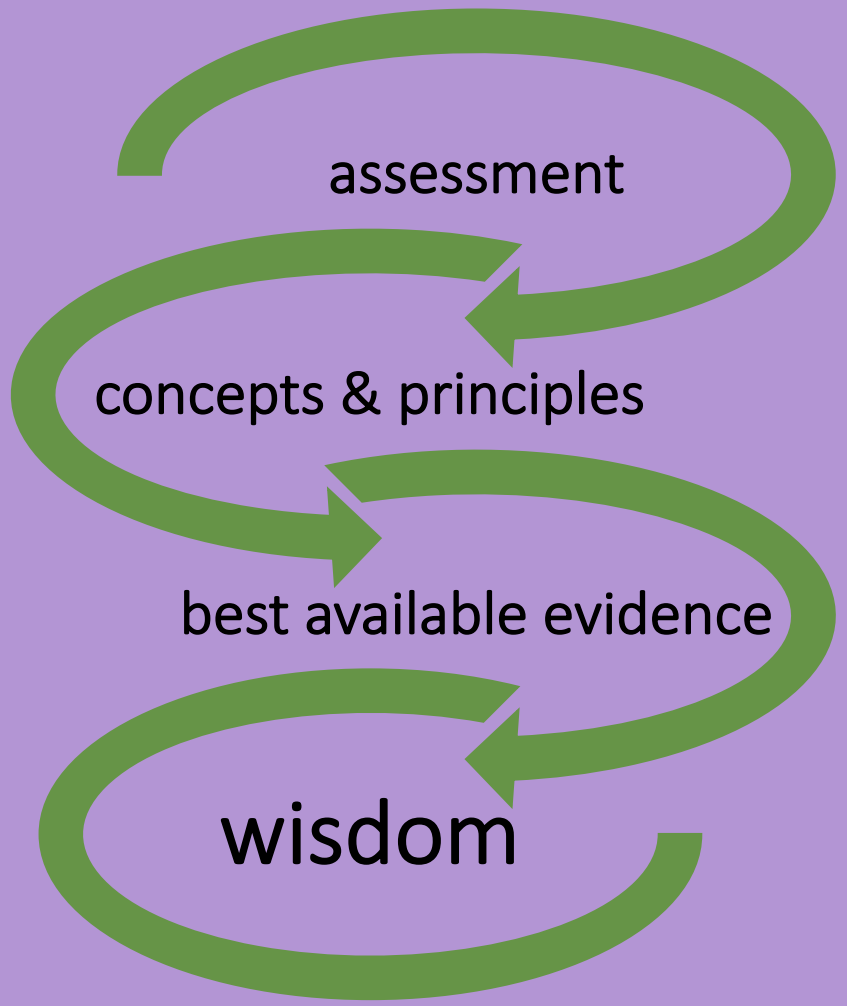
- Navigational
- Value based
- Joyfinders

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. ***Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."*** Arundhati Roy

The Great Joyfinders

learning
connecting
& loving

Learning



Evidence-based Practice

Sackett, D. L., Rosenberg, W. M., Gray, J. A., Haynes, R. B., & Richardson, W. S. (1996). ; Slocum, T. A., Detrich, R., Wilczynski, S. M., Spencer, T. D., Lewis, T., & Wolfe, K. (2014). ; Sellers, T., Alai-Rosales, S. & McDonald, R. (2016)

Levels of Clinical Wisdom

Novice

- Limited discretionary judgment
- Still learning basics, very rule governed and binary
- Needs supervision
- Does not know what they don't know

Apprentice

- ***Limited situational discriminations***
- All tasks treated equally
- Have the basics, need supervision and advanced training

Journeyer

- ***Intentional planning related to specified goals and actions***
- Learning to manage multiple and seemingly conflicting events
- Need ongoing mentoring and a strong community of practice

Master

- ***Goal oriented, uses fundamental rules and principles***
- Holistic planning, able to prioritize and adapt
- Need skilled community of practice and trusted colleagues

Grand master

- Strong vision, mission and direct actions
- Nurturing and responsive to individual and systems
- Sharp analytical skills in face of new problems & contexts
- Fluent and agile use of fundamental methods, rules and principles
- Need trusted colleagues and counsel
- Knows what they don't know

adapted from Dreyfus & Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (1980) and LeBlanc, Sellers & Alai (2020)

Wise Vison

- 4 Big Minimum
- Cuspal conditions
  - New and increased choices
  - Increased agency
  - Reinforcers expand and shared
- Enhance quality of life, as expressed by child, family and community

Pritchett, M., Alai, S., Re Cruz, A.& Cihon, T. (online 2020) Social Justice is the Spirit and Aim of an Applied Science of Human Behavior: An Examination and Reflection on the Variables Related to Moving from Colonial to Participatory Research. *Behavior Analysis in Practice.*

Wise Nurturing

Websters: Nurture

1 : *to help to grow, develop, or succeed*

2 : *to take care of*

3 : *to hold in your mind for a long time*

Wise Responsiveness to Happy Progress

Alai-Rosales, S, Toussaint, KA, McGee, G (2017) Incidental Teaching: Happy Progress.
Autism Child Psychopathology Series, Justin B. Leaf (Ed): **Handbook of Social Skills and Autism Spectrum Disorders.**

Wise Analysis

- Multi-dimensional
- Grounded in effect and meaning
- Principle driven
- Evolutionary

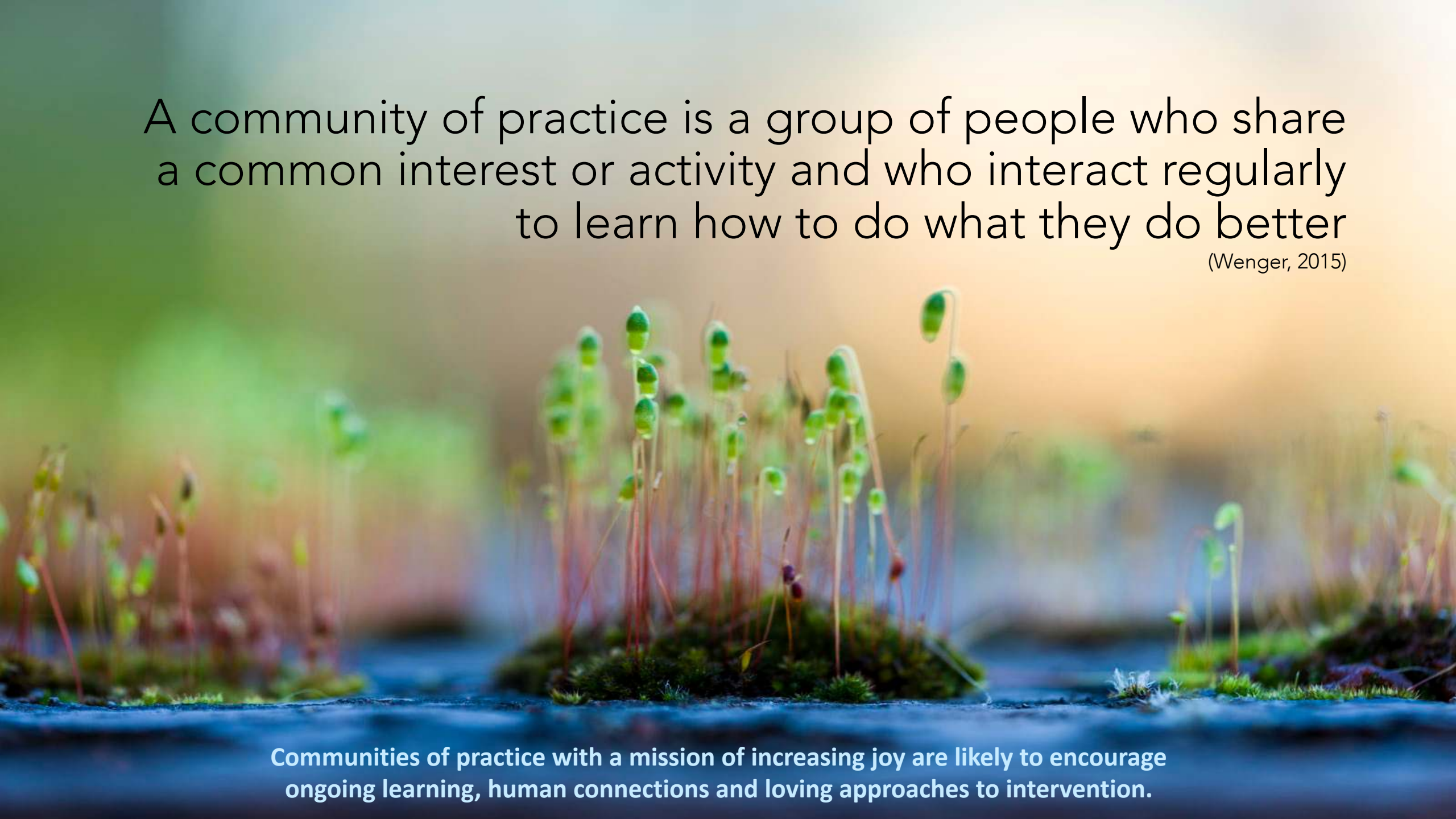
Leaf JB, Leaf R, McEachin J, Taubman M, Ala'i-Rosales S, Ross RK, Smith T, Weiss MJ. Applied Behavior Analysis is a Science and, Therefore, Progressive. J Autism Dev Disord. 2016 Feb;46(2):720-31. doi: 10.1007/s10803-015-2591-6. PMID: 26373767.

Wise Counsel

- Models
- Supervisors
- Mentors
- Colleagues & Counselors

… a community

Connecting



A community of practice is a group of people who share a common interest or activity and who interact regularly to learn how to do what they do better

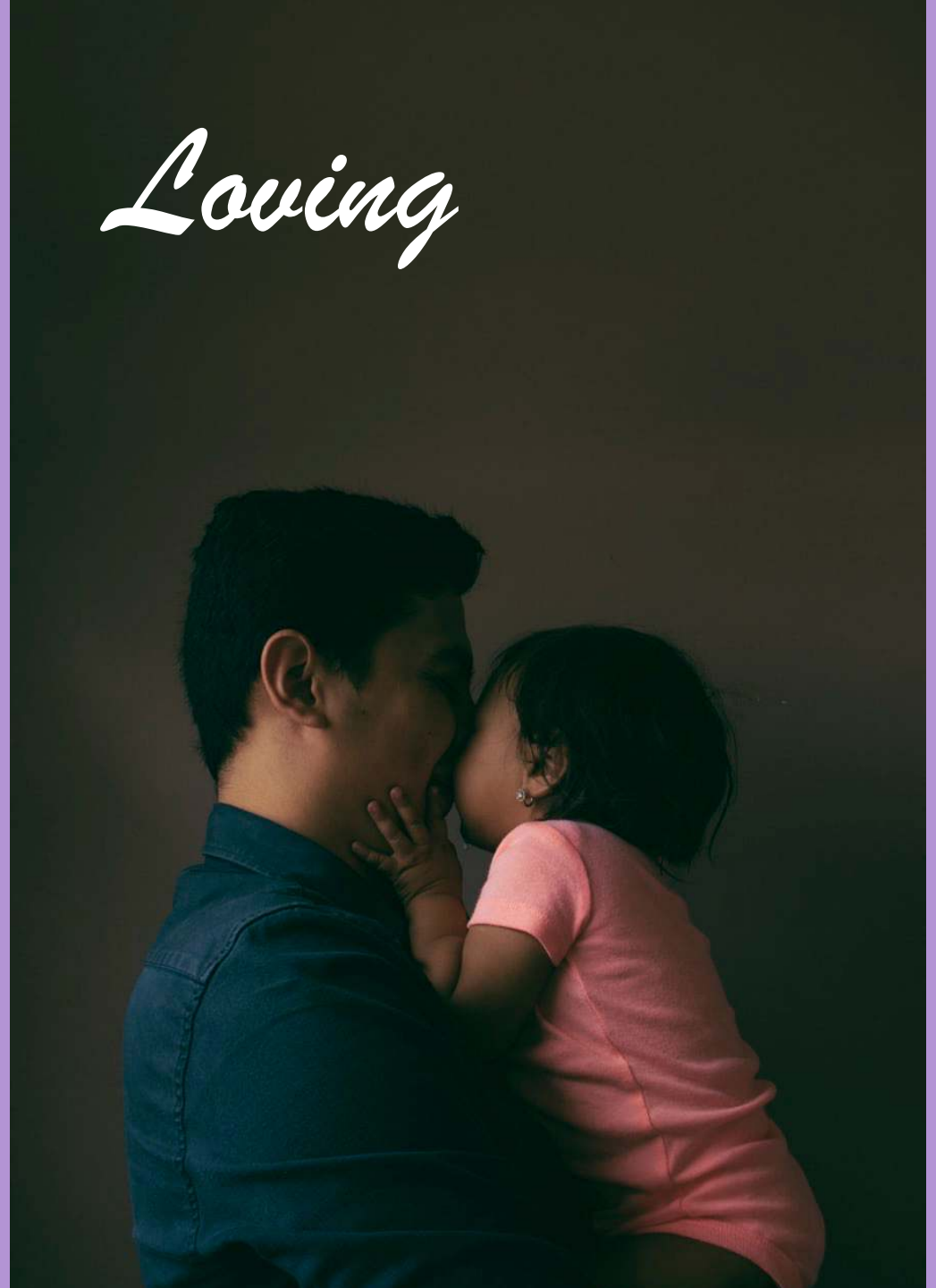
(Wenger, 2015)

Communities of practice with a mission of increasing joy are likely to encourage ongoing learning, human connections and loving approaches to intervention.

Communities of Practice Devoted to Joy

- Compassion, empathy & love
- EBP with a big emphasis on WISDOM
- Ongoing practice and learning
- Responsiveness & humility

Loving



Human relationships come with responsibility

- Accepting responsibility for an intervention is accepting responsibility for a child's future.

- Every child is precious and has a right to live a safe life filled with opportunities, learning, care, and affection.

Ala'i-Rosales. S & Zueg, N. (2010) **Important things to consider when starting intervention for a child newly diagnosed with autism**. *Behavior Analysis in Practice, 3,* 54-55

The Heart of Applied Behavior Analysis

Addressing goals that are important to people, to the world, is not unscientific, but rather, scientifically difficult (Wolf, 1978)

Being “applied” means ongoing receptivity to considering social importance and meaning from multiple and diverse vantage points (Pritchett, et al, 2020)

Meaningful Conversations

Improving Family-provider Relationships through Cultural Training and Open-ended Client Interviews Thompson, Megan (2012)

Conceptualizing Culture

Cultural groups

- Can be other identified and/or self identified
- Can be classified in many ways
- Not fixed

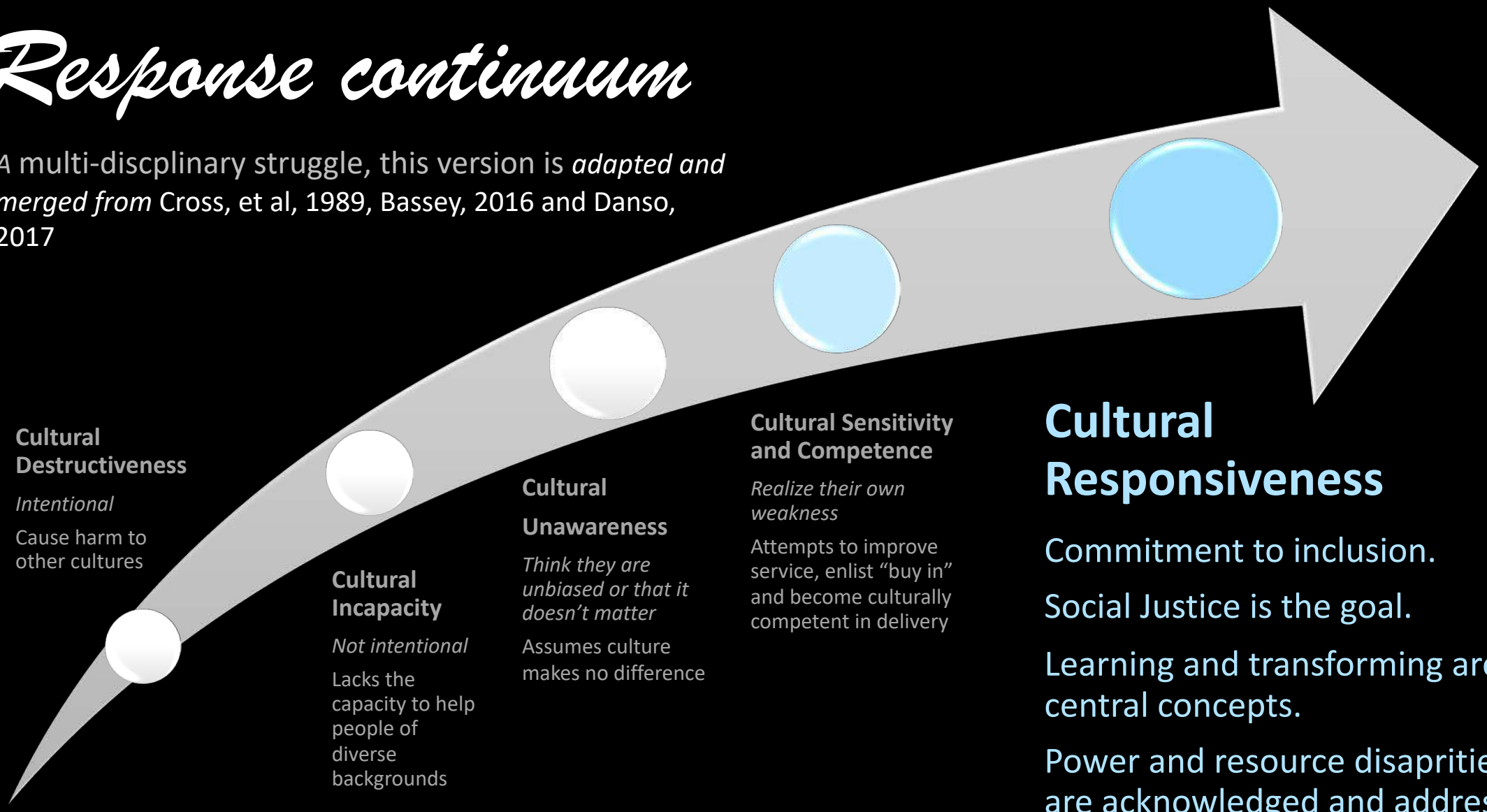
Members of cultural groups

- Engage in behavior that reflects shared learning histories
- Engage in behavior that differentiates groups across conditions
- Often have different stated values or priorities

Adapted from Sugai, O´Keeffe & Fallon, (2012). A contextual consideration of culture and schoolwide positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavioral Interventions*

Response continuum

A multi-discplinary struggle, this version is *adapted and merged from* Cross, et al, 1989, Bassey, 2016 and Danso, 2017



Swaying
suggests both the problem,
the instability,
of these intercultural
relationships,
and its
provisional solution,
flexibility.

Lynch & Hanson (2009)

Reflecting on an interconnected world

Pritchett, M., Alai, S., Re Cruz, A.& Cihon, T. (online 2020) Social Justice is the Spirit and Aim of an Applied Science of Human Behavior: An Examination and Reflection on the Variables Related to Moving from Colonial to Participatory Research. *Behavior Analysis in Practice.*

Harmonizing Many Valued Outcomes

Each of these ways of living and being involves shared learning histories and contingencies; particular types of reinforcer controls, stimulus controls, responses, and setting variables.

Adapted from Developing Cross-Cultural Competence by Lynch & Hanson (2011)

Contexts, extensions, relations of family and kinship networks

Contextual responses to harmony, conflict and power

Inclusion Everyone!

Roles and respect with regard to age, traditions, technology

Roles and respect with regard to funds of knowledge

Practices related to hierarchies, rights and responsibilities

Respect I am a ghost...

Degrees, contexts, participants and values related to dependence

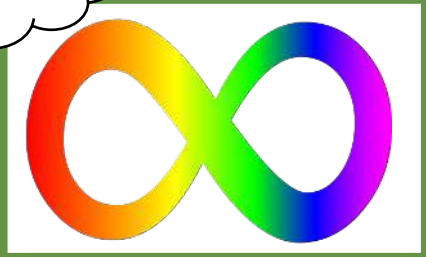
Protective and preventative actions in relation to society

Contextual and social responses to time

Stories...Safe from disease!

Concepts and meaning given to ownership and the collective

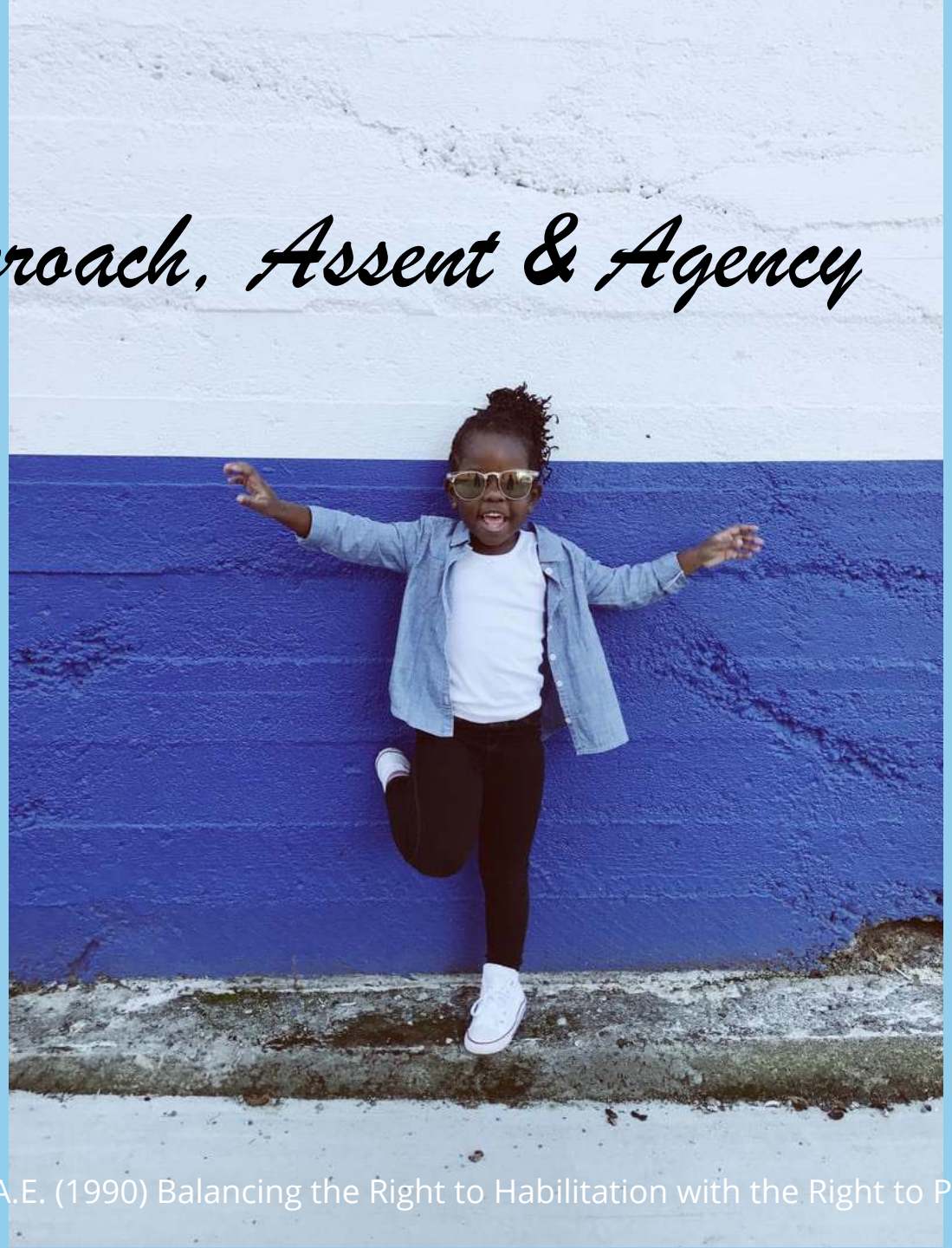
Communication contexts, cues and meaning



Autism Rights Movement

Quality of life as defined by individual and greater acceptance of range of ways of being!

Amplifying Voices: Approach, Assent & Agency



Bannerman, D.J., Sheldon, J.B., Sherman, J.A. and Harchik, A.E. (1990) Balancing the Right to Habilitation with the Right to Personal Liberties

Deep Aesthetics

Avoid facades;

they lead to mistrust and signal hypocrisy and coercive, aversive and ugly contingencies

Strive for deep beauty;

it leads to growth and signals healthy, truthful and transparent, learning, connecting, loving and joyful contingencies

Joy is a directional guide to
inclusive well-being

Keep asking the big questions

As you progress

- Are you honoring the child's life with skills and wisdom?
- How does the child feel? The family? How do you feel?
- Are groups from within and without participating in the selection, assessment, effort and evaluation?
- What are your plans moving forward?
- *Is life better because you have been there?*

Discussion