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## BOOK REVIEW: *NURTURING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: BUILDING ON THE LEGACY OF T. BERRY BRAZELTON*

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When this book arrived for review, I initially thought it was directed toward the medical profession and childcare. The authors—all highly influential innovators in their fields—represent nursing, psychiatry, psychotherapy, pediatrics, child services, psychobiology, preventative medicine, etc., and they are from such highly acclaimed entities as Harvard Medical School, University of Washington, Tufts University, George Washington University, Linköping University of Sweden, Brown University Alpert Medical School, Children’s Hospital Boston, etc. Upon reading the book, however, I realized that educators, researchers, doctors, parents, social workers, and people from a multitude of other disciplines could also benefit from reading *Nurturing Children and Families: Building on the Legacy of T. Berry Brazelton*.

Born in Waco, Texas, in 1918, Brazelton had an amazing gift of astute observation and making connections. In 1950, he started a private pediatrics practice in Massachusetts where he became interested in the development and behavior of infants. In 1996, he founded the Brazelton Touchpoints Center, which has contributed to a paradigm shift in how we see and work with children and families. His modeling and endorsement of the power of respect of children, parents, and people in general has been central to his work and life, and he continues to add to his long and highly respected legacy of research, practice, and policy relating to how we can best understand and address the needs of newborns and young children, as well as the needs of their families and the environments in which they exist.

*Nurturing Children and Families* is a tribute to Brazelton’s influence. It represents over half a century of work across disciplines, using the writing and teaching of this great man, and it presents key research and findings that reflect, tie to, or build upon his work. There is an expansive description of recent advances that reflect how widespread Brazelton’s influence has been, how powerful his “anticipatory guidance” or sharing of the developmental future of a child can be, and the wisdom of “bench to bedside to practice” science.

The book has three parts: *A Scientific Revolution in Behavioral and Developmental Research; From Theory to Practice: Innovations in Clinical Intervention; and Translational Science: Implications for Professional Development, Systems of Care, and Policy*. There are 31 chapters, from which I will highlight selected chapters that I think would have special appeal for educators and parents reading this review, recognizing that the information in all of the chapters is eye-opening and informative.

Barry M. Lester, in Chapter 1, *Transforming the Research Landscape*, points out that “Brazelton showed us that the ability to interpret experience is present at birth” (p. 4) and that use of the Brazelton scale has “forever changed the way we see, think about, and understand babies” (p. 4). Among the valuable content, one finds detailed and fascinating information about fetal development, the resilience of babies and their individual differences, and the critical reciprocal interaction between mother and baby.

In Chapter 2, *Aligning Systems of Care with the Relational Imperative of Development: Building Community through Collaborative Consultation*, Joshua D. Sparrow addresses how biological systems have come to inform social systems. Brazelton’s Touchpoints describe how, in development, there exist periods of disorganization, followed by reorganization, resulting in new capacities and skills. The term collaborative consultation is used to describe the



relationship of two or more parties, e.g. professionals, families, or community entities, who, without hierarchy, share a common mission and respect as they interact and learn from each other. Sparrow says these relationships have the potential to help all involved grow in understanding and practice concerning development and interactions. What a wonderful concept! The synergy and energy that come from these collaborations hold great potential benefit for parents, caretakers, and support systems, including educators.

Amy L. Salisbury, in Chapter 3, *Advances in Understanding Fetal and Newborn Behavior*, points out the capabilities of infants at birth: awareness, responsiveness, and social competence. Brazelton devised ways to help parents learn about their babies and interact with them. He helped take away the limiting view of infants as being solely reflexive, replacing it with an understanding of how, from birth, the newborn is an interactive being who can both initiate and respond to people and their environment. He posed the thought that, "if the infant truly possesses the ability to interact socially and react selectively to various stimuli from the moment of birth, it is a logical extension that these capacities exist prior to the event of birth." Now, though we might suspect this, to read it in print, I must admit, created in me a moment of mental pause. The research studies presented in this chapter are fascinating. The child-mother relationship is such an amazing dynamic.

J. Kevin Nugent, in Chapter 4, *The Development of the NBAS: A Turning Point in Understanding the Newborn*, discusses how the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale helped to change the old view of the infant as a blank slate (at birth) to a clearer understanding of just how capable the newborn is in many ways.

In Chapter 5, *Keys to Developing Early Parent-Child Relationships*, Kathryn E. Barnard provides the reader with interesting information about the infant and its sleep patterns, as well as behaviors and recommendations for caregiving. An explanation of habituation and learning what not to attend to, known as negative learning, helps the reader understand how constant noise in the environment can actually negatively influence the learning of speech sounds.

Tiffany Field, in Chapter 6, *Prenatal Depression Effects on Neurobehavioral Dysregulation*, explains how the Brazelton Neonatal Behavior Assessment Scale helped to identify infants born at risk. The information on maternal depression is so interesting, particularly the description of how it influences both the mother and neonate. The author addresses stress and cortisol levels, which, I learned, are a predictor for prematurity and low birth weight. The information about high-anxiety mothers and the behaviors of their newborns was very eye-opening, as well. There is a relationship between high-anger mothers and the disorganization of newborn sleep patterns. The author of the chapter also addresses the power of stress reduction therapy, e.g. massage.

Ed Tronick, in Chapter 8, *Infants and Mothers: Self- and Mutual Regulation and Meaning Making*, points out that Brazelton and others recognized that infants seek to communicate with their behavior, but the behavior dissipates when a connection or meaning is not made. Infants can, though in a limited fashion, self-organize, e.g. crying and moving and body temperature. The author includes stories about child rearing in other countries for contrast and comparison. Throughout the chapter, the reader is enticed to think about how the newborn makes meaning.

Mikael Heimann, in Chapter 9, *Patterns of Instability and Change: Observations on Regression periods in Typically Developing Infants*, proposes that early development is more discontinuous than what had been generally believed, with eight periods in the first year. The parent-child relationship is challenged with the regression, and the flux can create a faux impression that the infant is not as competent as he is. Substantiating studies from other countries, such as Spain, Great Britain, and Sweden add to the attraction of this chapter.

Chapter 11, *An Ethical Framework for Educating Children with Special Needs and All Children*, contributed by Stanley I. Greenspan, was an especially intriguing chapter for me as an educator. Along with high-stakes testing comes a microview of academics; that is, we tend to focus first on academic progress with, often times, a too limited understanding. Greenspan says, "academics build on a series of stages of emotional and social learning" (p. 121). Brazelton has been a true champion for an ethical approach to education for all children, including those with special needs. The chapter was amazing to read as it tracked, in stages, how social and emotional development

and academic preparedness are interwoven at very early ages. The early pattern recognitions, enforced by emotion-bound interactions pave the way for the academic world of learning. Helping parents recognize the importance of how learning takes place and how parents can read the signals of their young children, with their individual differences, and interact with them is both interesting and valuable, for, as Greenspan says, "Intelligence, ordinarily thought to begin with symbol formation, starts developing earlier" (p. 126). He suggests a bioethical approach to education where children are allowed to learn at their own pace and potential, avoiding a deficit grouping.

Robert A. LeVine, in Chapter 12, Protective Environments in Africa and Elsewhere, recalls Brazelton's work in the late 1960s, when he studied African mothers. LeVine was collaborator on the project. The chapter requires that we think more globally, outside of our modern-day, urban thinking, and reflect on how the children of these mothers were cared for without the technology and support we consider so essential. It was of interest to learn how the communities responded to and dealt with disabilities. In these less modern communities, women were usually valued by their ability to have children, their fertility. Initially this afforded the tribe or community more workers to sustain the lifestyle; but, as times changed, the views on childbearing and rearing were slow to change. Women without children and women in polygamous relationships, where there was jealousy among wives, were sometimes victims of witch-killings. The practice seems hard to understand because there is a cultural divide with western thinking.

In Chapter 20, Infant Mental Health, Charles H. Zeanah and Paula Doyle Zeanah discuss how the baby and its capacities are far more complex than had been thought, and that the effects of early adverse experiences on development can be more intricate than previously understood. These authors describe early experiences of young children in Romanian orphanages as compared to those who are placed in foster care with foster care faring better. Infant mental health connects to resiliency and recovery. In Brazelton fashion, the best approach is a strengths perspective that builds upon the positive rather than encouraging deficit thinking. It is overwhelmingly obvious to the reader that infant competence varies with the caregiver relationship. The studies presented in this chapter entice the reader to ask questions and make connections. For example, a study of mothers who had children with autistic spectrum disorder determined insightfulness in relation to the children's security of attachment. It was found that "80% of the mothers who were insightful and resolved had children who were securely attached, whereas only 27% of mothers who were unresolved, un insightful, or both, had children who were securely attached" (p. 236). To me, these are staggering statistics that confirm the importance of the mother's insightfulness. As teachers, I believe there is a huge "ah-ha" moment here, as correlation to education seems evident. Indeed, the authors say, "Early childhood interventionists and early childhood educators transact daily with young children and their families, and the skills they build in young children may have lasting effects on children's mental health" (p. 237). The call to treat the "whole" child is validated.

Alicia F. Lieberman and William W. Harris, in Chapter 21, Ghosts and Angels in the Nursery: Conflict and Hope in Raising Babies, remind us that "illness is often sociological as much as biological" (p. 242.) and call for a connection between infant mental health and developmental pediatrics. They discuss Brazelton's observations of Mayan childrearing practices, his observations of a baby's individuality, and the reciprocity of parent-infant interactions. Of particular interest to me was Selma Fraiberg's research on unresolved childhood conflicts or "ghosts in the nursery" and how these can interfere in the parent-child relationship. The chapter also houses information that was new to me, as I know little about the field of traumatic stress or the effects of violence or poverty. There are several points that stand out in this chapter. One such was the reporting of findings by Scheringa and Zeanah "that young children showed more symptoms of PTSD (Post traumatic Stress Disorder) when they witnessed their mothers being abused than when the children were abuse victims" (p. 246). This caught my attention as an educator. The child and mother experience trauma when they are aware of the trauma the other is experiencing.

Daniel Pedersen and Jack P. Shonkoff, in Chapter 29, Translating the Science of Early Childhood Development into Policy and Practice, suggest that it is time for a paradigm shift focusing on vulnerable children, prenatally and onward. There is need to explore the neurosciences and child development research, and economic analysis. The authors suggest a new framework, grounded in the following core concepts, to guide early childhood policy and practice: *A sturdy brain foundation is essential; Interactions matter in brain development; Skill begets skill. Cognitive, emotional, and social capacities are a package deal; Toxic stress damages developing brains; Pay now or pay more later; and We know how to improve outcomes but we must do better.* The authors go on to discuss Educare as a model of good practice.



They challenge us to build on the influence of Brazelton's study of development and parent-child interactions and to seek programs and interventions that can produce positive impacts:

This framework has Brazelton's fingerprints all over it. The ultimate challenge now facing the field is clear. It's time to create a new era in early childhood policy that is inspired by science, built on best practices and committed to a culture of innovative thinking and continuous improvement. It's time to build on the foundation that Brazelton has played such an important role in shaping and to move to the next level to increase the return on our collective investments through greater and sustainable differences in the lives of vulnerable, young children and their parents. (p. 340)

My concluding thoughts about this book are that Brazelton's genius has infiltrated so many areas influencing parenting, child rearing, neuroscience, etc. The authors of these chapters have honored Brazelton and shown how they and their research have benefitted from his life's work.

We should acknowledge that it is what happens to the individual and unique child and his interactions with the environment and others that shape the person he is to become. So, when we are reviewing the woes of academics or our problems with test scores or school dropouts, we need to think back to the foundation of childhood and the bioecology of children and to intervene to help children and their families much earlier—helping the pregnant mother, involving the father, educating caretakers and teachers about child development. In these days of budget cutbacks and teacher layoffs, we are revisiting teacher preparation and highlighting such subject areas as science and math. We need to remember that, as reflected in *Nurturing Children and Families*, at the base of academic success is emotional and social success from a very early period. I urge our lawmakers and decision makers to offer more training on fostering child development, not less.

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