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Book Review

Labas, Linda, Kendrick, Martie, Bilodeau, Colette, Son, Kathy & Gooldrup, Theresa. (1999). ***Building a foundation for cooperative behavior. Orono, Maine: Center for Community Inclusion, Maine's UAP, University of Maine, pp. iv & 113.***

Just as a pebble dropped into a pond disturbs the water's serenity with the concentric rings of waves, a young child who presents "challenging behaviors" can disrupt an entire classroom. The authors of this spiral bound book present explanations and strategies to address the creation of environments which build community; the development of respectful, responsive relationships; ways to foster friendship and teach children skills for conflict resolution and problem solving. The book's format of essential information followed by specific strategies is user-friendly and effective as a teaching tool. This is a book I would recommend be made available to every preschool teacher.

The book is comprised of four chapters: the basic human need of belonging and how it affects children's growth and development; friendship; building peaceful classrooms; and positive supports to address challenging behaviors. Each chapter builds on the one before it, offering educational theory and references to early brain research to support the proposed strategies for teacher training and classroom activities.

"Behavior is a child's way of communicating unmet need. Learning how to translate the hidden messages of behavior will help the educator respond effectively to the individual needs of children with challenging behavior. (Pitonyak, 1996)" With this statement as it's basic premise, this book offers a plan for building classrooms guided by respect for the individuality of each and every student, regardless of their levels of ability, communication and social skills. All classrooms are now facing the challenge of including children who have a wide variety of disabling conditions along with the full spectrum of behaviors exhibited by typical children. This book explores the range of possible causes for disruptive behavior, offers concrete suggestions for building friendships among diverse students, outlines the qualities that comprise a "peaceful classroom," and proposes the use of "a positive supports approach (which) focuses on the message each child is communicating through his or her behavior and seeks to address the need implied herein. When the need is addressed and the message (behavior) heard, it is likely the behavior will naturally diminish."

Teachers will find the classroom activities well-described, filled with resources and bibliography for "story time" and universally adaptable for any classroom. School directors will appreciate the staff training activities as well as the assessment tools contained in the book. Valuing the family's contribution is exemplified by references to the "team of concerned educators and parents (who) gather, discuss and reflect on the information each brings to the table."

The authors compiled this information from a four part series of seminars led by Bruce Mallory, Norman Kunc, Mara Sapon-Shevin and Diane Levin. Their distillation of the seminars and preparation of this material is concise and well organized.

While not directly addressing issues of spirituality, throughout the book there is an emphasis on respecting the "values and beliefs" of each child's family and replacing violent models of behavior with models of tolerance and respect for differences. The unique gifts of every child are presented in the most positive light, and references to disabling conditions celebrate the individuality of each and every child. Sunday school teachers would find this book tremendously helpful; the classroom activities can be interwoven into religious schools' curriculum.

While there are many resources for teachers to assist them in successful, beneficial inclusion of children who have special needs, this book offers an articulate, manageable approach that can be

used in a wide variety of settings. As the parent of a son who has autism and a daughter who has physical anomalies, I would have appreciated this information twenty years ago. As the director of an agency which oversees inclusion programs in seven preschools, I will recommend this book to each school's director.