

Chapter 66

Applied Behavior Analysis and Autism: A Latin American Case

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ABSTRACT

Alcanzando Peru is a not for profit organization that provides educational services based on the principles of applied behavior analysis to children in the Autism Spectrum, their families, and professionals interested in the field around the Spanish speaking world. This chapter is meant to share the data from their services over the last 7 years. It will discuss the ethical and cultural considerations that should be in place when providing early intervention behavioral services to these populations in various Spanish-speaking countries.

INTRODUCTION

Alcanzando Peru is a not for profit organization based in Lima, Peru, created in February 2008 with the purpose of providing services to children within the Autism Spectrum, their families, and professionals involved in the field. Their Early Intervention Center in Lima, provides screenings, evaluations, center-based as well as home-based educational services based on the principles of applied behavior analysis to children within the Autism Spectrum around the Spanish speaking world. Additionally, the center's staff provides workshops for parents and professional in various Autism related topics.

This chapter will outline their history over the last 7 years. It will additionally discuss the ethical and cultural considerations that should be in place when providing early intervention behavioral services to children with autism in the various Spanish speaking countries around the world.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is classically defined as a severely incapacitating lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. It is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain. Autism interferes with the normal development of the brain in the areas of reasoning, social interaction and communication skills. Children and adults with Autism

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typically have deficiencies in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions and leisure or play activities. It is hard for them to communicate with others and relate to the outside world. They may exhibit repeated body movements (such as rocking and hand flapping). Autism is a spectrum disorder that affects each individual differently and at varying levels (Volkmar & McPartland, 2014).

It is important to note that today 1 in 68 children are diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2014). Autism prevalence ranks as the third most common developmental disability; more common than Down syndrome. Globally, the disorders within Autism Spectrum are the fastest growing developmental disability, with a growth rate of 17-20% per annum. It is noteworthy that more children are diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum than with cancer, diabetes and pediatric AIDS (CDC, 2014).

BACKGROUND

Alcanzando was founded as an organization initially in Lima, Peru, in February of 2008, through the vision of Dr. Mapy Chavez Askins. At the time, treatment options in Peru and the rest of South America were very limited and behavioral intervention was not widely accepted. To help address the overwhelming demand, the organization wanted to work together to support families who needed evaluations, direct early intervention services for their children with Autism, and a source for training of parents and professionals. Alcanzando envisioned an initial focus on awareness of the need for intensive early intervention, as well as a development of a clinical site that would provide direct services to children between the ages of 12 months and 7 years old.

Initially, Alcanzando operated in donated office space in Miraflores, Lima, Peru. The first services provided were free consultation services to families whose children had either been identified as being within the Autism Spectrum or who believed their children presented signs of being within the Autism Spectrum. These services were funded under a Wagner College Grant, Fox Fellows - Autism in Peru: Helping Children Reach Their Potential.

With the help of this educational grant through Mr. Fox and Wagner College, the Fox Fellows Grant, Autism in Peru: Helping Children Reach Their Potential, allowed Dr. Mapy Chavez Askins and two Wagner College Graduate students to spend three weeks in Lima, Peru working with children with Autism, their families and teachers.

Between May 2008 and June 2008, this team of three spent three weeks conducting initial screenings with a total of 25 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years old. Collaborating with Dr. Mapy Chavez Askins, the students were able to gain hands-on experience with the evaluations and individualized instruction of children in the Autism Spectrum.

Prior to traveling from New York, USA to Lima, Peru to provide these services, Dr. Chavez Askins met with the two Wagner Graduate Students and discussed the following topics:

1. How was autism viewed differently in Peru when compared to the United States.
2. What services were available to the families in Peru (detection as well as intervention).
3. How cultural differences could influence how the family viewed a diagnosis of autism.
4. How cultural differences could influence how professionals viewed a diagnosis of autism.
5. How cultural difference could change expectations and intervention approaches.

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