

Rebecca Dogen, Ph.D., BCBA-D

Hong Kong

Interview by Jeremy H. Greenberg, Ph.D., BCBA-D



Dr Rebecca K. Dogen grew up as an expatriate in Hong Kong and Singapore. She received her formal education and training in the United States and relocated back to Asia following graduate school.

Dr Dogen has a Ph.D. in Behavioral Psychology/Behavior Analysis and is a certified practitioner who conducts behavioral assessments and is qualified to design and supervise behavior analytic interventions. She is focused on providing clinical services to children and adolescents as well as their families. She stresses the importance of collaborating with a multidisciplinary team including doctors, specialists, teachers, caregivers, and extended family members.

Dr Dogen provides services that utilize evidence-based behavioral and cognitive-behavioral treatments for a wide variety of developmental and behavioral problems encountered by children and youth.

When did you first become interested in B. F. Skinner's work?

My Masters degree was in clinical psychology. While I was working toward my degree I was exposed to a lot of different psychological theories. Within each of those there were multiple models, intervention strategies, and psychoanalytic approaches which I found fascinating but very broad and overwhelming. I felt like someone had given me all the pieces to one of those thousand piece puzzles, but I didn't know where they fitted. I didn't know what strategies or what interventions would work best with which cases. So then at the very end of my masters I took my first intro to Applied Behavior Analysis course. That was my first introduction to B. F. Skinner. Once I understood his concepts about behaviorism, I loved the simplicity and clarity that came with it and the fact that it didn't just work with a particular behavior or individual but across all my cases.

What's your favorite B. F. Skinner book?

My favorite and the book that I enjoyed reading the most is *Walden II*. It was a fun read. When I had started it I had only really been exposed to a limited population consisting primarily of younger children on the autism spectrum. So when I read this book it was almost overwhelming to think that a community could be created in the future that was based entirely on the application of behavioral principles. This notion was very exciting for me. I thought about the potential it had with the future populations I wanted to serve and help. I don't think that we're going to have a *Walden II* anytime soon but I do feel that we should be modeling this idea in a range of settings such as universities, clinics, and centers.

What attracted you to the field of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)?

I was attracted to ABA because I could actually see behavior change. The knowledge that I helped create that change played a significant role in staying in the field. This was very powerful and highly motivating for me to see it in a step-by-step fashion. ABA is also highly appealing to me because I can teach it to parents during my sessions. For instance, I have parents join me for most cases. Primarily because I don't want them to see me as some type of wizard, as if I was behind the curtain doing some extraordinary magical things with their kids. I want them to see what I do and that is simply just science. I think when they see me applying the skills in practice, they leave empowered to go

home and work with their children. In return, that makes my job easier and it makes the gains more meaningful.

What are your current areas of interests in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis?

My current area of interest is on the cultural competence of the practice of behavior analysis. I want to know how to improve it, and how to make better tools to help promote it. There is a trend toward increasing adoption of behavior analysis internationally. I know that when I've worked with diverse populations in Los Angeles, the Native American community, both local and expatriate families throughout Asia, the importance of culturally sensitivity is invaluable. For instance, for some of the non-American families I really have to decrease the frequency and intensity of praise. For other families, I spend more time talking about punishment and explaining the negative consequences associated with it. I've even recently had a Western European family request additional time to discuss the importance of their child's diet. The child had a limited yet still a number of foods that he liked. I did not consider this a primary issue however, eating was such an important part of their culture that the family considered it an area to address. The family and I avoided conflict because I was open to that idea, understood it, and had taken the time to learn more about their culture. I think that behavior analysts really need to focus on cultural competence to maintain balance between what our families need and value while adhering to the ethical standards of the behavior analytic community.

What do you view as the present hurdles to widespread adoption of Applied Behavior Analysis in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong has experienced tremendous growth recently. We now have 36 Board Certified Behavior Analysts and multiple service providers, which is fantastic. The hurdles that exist for widespread adoption are no different across the globe. It is just that we are at different stages compared other places like the US or UK. I remember when I was getting my masters and I was working in California. I think we were the only state at the time that provided government-funded services. Right now, 10 years later, I feel that again we're all at different stages of aware-

ness and acceptance of ABA. Hong Kong's just a little further behind some countries but it's far more advanced than others. I think that the hurdles come down to a couple different levels one of which is public policy. We need our government to acknowledge and provide funding for evidence-based treatments, such as ABA services.

Second, the community's perception of ABA needs to be accurate which is accomplished through education, awareness, and exposure. I have found in many other countries where I have worked, the perception is that ABA is synonymous with Discrete Trial Training (DTT) or punishment. Getting the community to understand ABA and how it has been effective across a wide range of adults and children is of the utmost importance.

At the organizational level we need for Hong Kong to increase its volume of schools that provide learning support teams. We also need to provide more services for children with disabilities. The local education systems require training to administration and teachers. The community could benefit from more awareness of autism and ABA. The doctors who see the children and their families would also benefit from further exposure to ABA and how it can help their patients. Last, at the interpersonal and individual levels, for our relationships with other professionals we need more collaboration rather than parallel partnerships. We need to continue to adjust our behavior speak before we will be fully acceptance into the community of professionals in mental health or behavioral health. We need to take a step back, be humble, and listen to other professionals' explanations that might be the same, just with different terminology while the goal is the same. We need to apply our skills in all aspects of our lives, not just with our individual patients. ●