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Book Reviews: Breast Intentions & Teach don't tell

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AIMS Journal, 2016, Vol 28 No 1

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Breast Intentions by Allison Dixley



Pinter & Martin Ltd.
ISBN-13: 978-1780662152
RRP £11.99

Reviewed by

Debs Neiger

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As someone who has followed Allison Dixley aka The Alpha Parent (interesting choice of name in the first place) sporadically online, I was very interested and apprehensive at the same time about what her book would have to offer. Well, the book did not disappoint, and I was most definitely right to feel apprehensive. Visually, this book appeals to me, though (and I am getting personal here, as Allison does throughout the book) I was not keen on the pink shiny blouse Allison is wearing in the inside cover photo. Thematically, I found the book extremely appealing and intriguing, having witnessed woman to woman sabotage with regards to mothering on more occasions than I'm able to count. I started to read this book as soon as I got my hands on it, expecting to read it voraciously and quickly, either nodding along in agreement or getting quite shouty over my cup of Roibos tea. Not so. Instead I found myself fighting through the chapters and feeling cross and frustrated about the subject matter and the fact that I had

promised to review it.

It is fairly heavy going (though that might be due to English not being my first language) and reads more like a thesis on the psychological factors contributing to breastfeeding cessation rather than a book potentially geared towards mothers with an interest in breastfeeding. I'm actually not sure WHO exactly the book is geared towards. Mothers? Breastfeeders? Psychologists? I'm assuming NOT formula feeders. Or indeed 'failed' breastfeeders. Dixley's premise is that all mothers know they should breastfeed and the overwhelming majority of women can do so physically. Therefore mother's who decide not to or 'fail' at breastfeeding, do so due to making (mostly silly) excuses and really ought to have tried harder. Yes. It is apparently that simple. Women who succeed with breastfeeding are 'black swans', 'diamonds in the rough' and the 'positive deviants of this world'. This premise is then supported from various angles with psychological theory, and the book ends on an over 50-pages-strong reference list.

Now, the ironic thing is that I somewhat agree with many of her points. In her opinion, maternal personality traits have a great predictive value over breastfeeding success for example and the psychological constructs are very interesting to get your teeth into. However, her choice of language and way she gets her opinions and facts across is often offensive and feels deliberately controversial for the sake of it. Not only to the 'failed breastfeeders' she so disapprovingly talks about but also others who are able to see that life is not black and white and that kindness and support go a long way when it comes to human interaction. Phrases and statements such as 'Hypoplasia sounds like the noise a baby makes when it farts in the bath', 'This triggers major butt hurt...' and '...milk deficient sob stories...' amongst other gems feel out of place in a book that seems almost academic.

It is not all bad however. Oddly, in her concluding chapter, Dixley alludes to all the positive things that can happen with regards to breastfeeding if we nurture women's body confidence and that she would like solidarity and success to reign, despite not showing either solidarity OR nurturing capability in the first part of the book. Another pertinent point that comes across in the conclusion is the importance of honesty with regards to decision making as well as owning one's decisions. The epilogue of the book is a manual on how to own your breastfeeding journey which many prospective mothers may find helpful. I personally appreciated Dixley's advice of 'Unfuck your habitat' aka 'Finding your tribe' which is more than helpful in many facets of parenting and indeed life.

So, in conclusion, an interesting book, in more ways than one. If you are a kind person and suffer from blood pressure issues you may want to proceed with caution. Same if you have painful baggage from your own breastfeeding journey. You may just about cope if you are a 'positive deviant of this world' though.

Teach don't tell by Aine Alam

Panoma Press Ltd 2015
ISBN 978 1909623897
RRP £12.99

Reviewed by
Vicki Williams

Find this book on Amazon



This is an excellent and accessible short book exploring teaching strategies for training midwives both in the UK NHS education model and traditional birth attendants in developing nations. Every educator, mentor, trainer of birth attendants, companions and support staff should read this book!

Teach Don't Tell is not a recipe book, nor a step-by-step 'how to' guide, it is an exploration of philosophies, ideas and strategies for facilitating learning in the classroom and arguably more importantly, in practice. This book shows the reader how enable others to learn in a way that encourages them to fully utilise their knowledge and skills. It is a strategy that has the power to revolutionise not only training, but care itself, through modelling effective support.

What you will find between these covers is an insight into a model of teaching that skills and empowers in a way few other education books do. The author, Ã?ine Alam, draws on her many years of midwifery experience and her research into work-based learning to encourage the trainer to be 'with student', modelling the 'with woman' approach from the very core.

This book does rely on the reader having a basic depth and breadth of both the skills required and knowledge of how people learn, but the approach taken to presenting her ideas is quirky, fresh and gets results. She explains concepts such as the 'novice to expert continuum' in a way that is supportive and empowering at every level of competence. That is refreshing on its own!

I particulrlarly liked the chapter on education theory, where Alam encourages the reader to imagine sitting down to dinner with some of the greatest philosophers and education theorists in history and listening to their discussion. For me the result of that exercise was profound, and rather than tell you

what I got out of it, I would encourage anyone who is interested in learning, at any level, to read the book and try it forthemselves.

There are some areas of repetition, but, having read the book a couple of times, I am inclined to suspect that is a deliberate effort to encourage internalisation of those concepts, as the book is clear that modelling, practise and repetition are key to effective learning.

Other chapters I found most fascinating were the chapter on the concept of understanding, exploring and evaluating how rituals feed the difference between information and knowledge, and how rituals and jargon encourage 'gatekeeping' and the chapter on 'making the invisible visible' â€“ talking your thinking in order to pass on the whole skill rather than simply teaching the process.

This book is a great start towards breaking down the barriers to knowledge, the tendency towards 'gatekeeping' that has been a part of our medical hierarchy for so long, and for me this is the best bit of the whole book. It really looks at where the knowledge needs to be, that is with the women and those caring for them, and works on ways of putting it firmly into their caring hands.