
Preface

This book is intended to serve two purposes. First, it is designed to provide a comprehensive text that can be used for coursework in the area of autism. Although the roles of communication, play, and social interaction in understanding and managing the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are emphasized, the text should have broad appeal to interdisciplinary professionals who are preparing students to work with individuals with ASD and their families. My hope, then, is that not only faculty in speech–language pathology, but also those in psychology, education, early childhood education, special education, social work, pediatrics, occupational therapy, physical therapy, nursing, and audiology, among others, will find this to be a useful resource. Second, the book is designed to serve as a practical resource for working professionals across a range of disciplines as well as families who are affected by ASD.

The reader will see that each chapter is designed in a similar way. The chapters begin with several key questions that should guide the readers' thinking. Those questions are revisited at the end of the chapter. Recognizing the value of key resources for supporting children with ASD and their families, each chapter includes a list of resources related to its particular content area. These lists are intended to expand the student's, practitioner's, and family member's repertoire of practical sources of support. All the chapters also include a number of practice opportunities for the reader and learner to apply the information presented, three to four suggested readings with a brief description of each, a list of resources for more information, and a glossary of key terms.

The specific content of the book was also strategically designed. The book is divided into two major sections: assessment and intervention. The discussion of assessment begins with diagnosis in Chapter 1, where issues of early identification, differential diagnosis, and neurobiological findings are considered. In Chapter 2, the role of families in the assessment and intervention of their children with ASD is emphasized. In Chapter 3, a field-tested interdisciplinary model for assessment and intervention planning is described to facilitate learning and practice. The World Health Organization framework guides the approach to assessment through the next four chapters. This framework was selected because it incorporates elements of both the traditional deficits perspective and the strengths perspective and considers factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to the individual. The most recent version of the framework, the *International Classification of Functioning*,

Disability and Health (ICF), describes dimensions of disability (impairment, activity, and participation) that are affected by contextual factors such as societal attitudes, cultural norms, education, and lifestyle (World Health Organization, 2001). Each of these dimensions is considered as the reader learns about creating assessment profiles for children with ASD across communication, play, social, and sensory areas in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Evidence-based practice guides the intervention chapters. My goal was to present models of intervention and specific strategies that have a solid theoretical foundation, have application to children with ASD across a range of ages and ability levels, and have some evidence of positive effects for children with ASD. As will be noted, the range of evidence for the particular interventions discussed is significant. In Chapter 8, I have included some guidelines for considering the evidence and evaluating how practitioners might select interventions for individual children with ASD. The intervention chapters on communication, play, and social–emotional development, Chapters 9, 10, and 11, provide a comprehensive description of each intervention model or strategy, the intervention goals that might be considered, the perceived value for children with ASD, and the reported efficacy.

Chapter 12, “Health Care Considerations for Children with ASD,” has been added because health care is a frequently ignored or poorly understood area of function for this population. I hope that students and practitioners reading this book will recognize how the health of the child with ASD affects that child’s ability to communicate, play, and interact socially. The last chapter offers a discussion of inclusive practices for children with ASD. It assumes the competence of children with ASD and their families, recognizes the skill of general educators as teachers, and incorporates what we know from the literature that can support learning success.

Although I have individually discussed assessment and intervention issues affecting communication, play, and social–emotional development, I recognize the interrelationships among these areas of behavior. It will also become clear that as performance is evaluated in one area, valuable information related to other areas can be obtained. Similarly, many of the intervention strategies described to support one area may be useful in supporting performance in other areas. I chose to separate these dimensions of learning and behavior so that each could be carefully examined, but I expect that the reader will make clear connections and identify the interrelationships. Also, I chose not to include a chapter on interventions related to sensory motor development since my goal is that the practitioner will recognize that communication, play, and social–emotional development have clear sensory connections and that any intervention should consider the implications of sensory motor aspects of functioning. Further, a specific chapter to address problem behaviors was not included, as I am assuming that many problem behaviors are often attempts to communicate. With a solid understanding of ways to assess and support communication, which is addressed in this text, practitioners will have several strategies they can use to support positive behaviors in children with ASD. Several excellent resources are already avail-

able to expand one's knowledge and understanding of challenging behaviors and ways to manage these behaviors.

My hope is that by reading this book, the reader will be challenged to think in different ways. My primary goal is to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills students and practitioners need to make a difference in the lives of children with ASD and their families. I also see this text as a potential resource for families seeking to understand the core deficit areas for their children with ASD and what can be done to address these deficit areas.

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder, in that it affects all aspects of day-to-day functioning—ability to communicate, to play in meaningful ways, to interact with others, and to manage the activities of daily living. Over the last several years, our understanding of this disorder has evolved to recognize the variability in severity of symptoms and the likelihood that there is a neurobiological and genetic basis to the disorder. Although autism can be a devastating disorder for children and their families, current research indicates that with early detection and intervention, progress can be made. As you prepare to read this text, it is important that you understand the nuances of early and differential diagnosis, the need to assess the core areas of deficit, and the value of evidence-based intervention practices.

Reference

World Health Organization. (2001). *International classification of functioning, disability and health*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

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