



A publication of the DIVISION ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, a unit of the Council for Exceptional Children

Focusing on individuals with cognitive disabilities/mental retardation, autism, and related disabilities

Teachers' Corner

Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Rapidly Changing Field for Practitioners

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Low Incidence*



(Summarized from a presentation given in the DDD Showcase Session *Research-Based and Emerging Best Practices in DD/Autism: Where Are We Going?* at the 2006 CEC

Annual Convention and Expo in Salt Lake City)

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD), a neurologically based exceptionality, is the fastest growing disability in the United States with a current prevalence of every 1 in 166 individuals being diagnosed with (a) autism, (b) Asperger syndrome (AS), (c) Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), (d) Rett syndrome, and (e) Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (Heller syndrome). According to the 20th Annual Report to the Congress (2006), a 700% increase in autism has been reported over the last 10 years. Despite the almost epidemic evidence of ASD in recent years, the field is in dire need of teachers who are well-prepared and equipped with evidence-based intervention, as well as more fine-tuned diagnostic instruments.

Characteristics. Despite the dramatic increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with this exceptionality, we know little about the characteristics of these individuals. Children and youth with autism, AS, and PDD-NOS are most often diagnosed using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—4th Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV, TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) criteria, which specifies deficits in (a) social interactions; (b) communication; and (c) restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped behavior patterns. However, many have questioned whether this document provides the most salient information regarding characteristics, especially for those who have an ASD and average to above-average intelligence

quotients. For example, sensory issues are not listed as a criterion for diagnosis, yet almost all individuals with ASD have marked sensory issues (Dunn, Myles, & Orr, 2003; Myles et al., 2004). Similarly, adaptive behavior challenges are not included as a determinant of AS even though deficits in this area are evident (Myles et al., in press; Walker et al., 2004). In addition, controversy exists as to how to differentiate between high-function autism and AS, or if such a distinction can be quantified (Ozonoff, Dawson, & McPartland, 2002). Thus, further research is needed to ensure that clear diagnostic criteria are established for this complex set of exceptionalities that fall under the ASD rubric.

Evidence-Based Practices. Another issue of utmost importance is the use of evidence-based practices to ensure that students with ASD receive the support and specific interventions they need to meet their potential. While a significant body of research exists on interventions for students with classical autism (National Research Council [NRC], 2001), to date there is no ideal curriculum for children with ASD. Despite the acknowledgment among researchers that a diversity of approaches is necessary for students with ASD due to their complex needs, practitioners and parents are often guided to a particular methodology comprised of literature that is often misinterpreted and overgeneralized. Compounding this issue is the association of terms, such as cure and recovery, with particular methodologies. In addition, almost no research exists on interventions for students with AS. In fact, fewer than 20 published articles have involved instructional strategies for individuals considered to be at the higher end of the spectrum and many of these utilized single subjects and, therefore, do not warrant generalization.

(continued on p. 4)

Inside this issue . . .	
President's Message	2
Announcements	2
Conference Highlights	3
DDD Schedule for CEC Convention	3
Students' Corner	4

President's Message

Phil Parette

New Year's greetings to each of you! I hope that your holiday season was a joyous occasion, providing time for much needed individual renewal after a productive and busy year. Hopefully, this time also afforded each of us an opportunity for reflection on both our accomplishments in 2006 and the challenges that lie ahead in 2007. For those of you who were able to participate in the 10th International Conference on Cognitive Disabilities/Mental Retardation, Autism, and Other Developmental Disabilities in Kona, Hawaii, I know that you found it to be an excellent professional development opportunity. Not only were our two evidence-based practice pre-conference workshops (one focusing on assistive technology and the other on autism spectrum disorders) well-attended, but a range of excellent presentations were attended by participants during the regular conference.

Highlights of this event can be found on our Web site (<http://www.dddcec.org>) and will be presented in the next issue of *DDD Express*. Our deepest appreciation is extended to all who helped to make this event a success, particularly our Conference Chair Cindy Perras and all the board members who gave of their time to assist with planning and execution of the event.

As we consider the challenges of the new year, we hope that all DDD members will become more cognizant of his or her role for increasing our membership in the Division. Each month the DDD Board receives reports from CEC headquarters noting membership declines, and, for all of us who give of our time in service to the organization, these trends have become alarming. The continuing specter of decreasing membership continues to threaten our vitality as a professional organization.

Thus, there are several things that we would ask you to consider doing as your part in maintaining the viability of DDD. First, ask your colleagues to join. Many education professionals are unaware of the many benefits of belonging to DDD. Our membership dues are quite low given that all members receive two journals that are published in a timely manner. We have special publications that are provided at no cost to all members periodically, position papers that are posted online, and

a high-quality newsletter, *DDD Express*, distributed quarterly with *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*. We have biennial meetings that bring together well-recognized researchers, practitioners in the field, and family members and their children with disabilities. And we are completing production of an outstanding textbook, *Research-Based Practices in Developmental Disabilities* (2nd ed.), that will be released by PRO-ED. So tell people about these benefits and do your part to help grow our membership!



Second, get involved in the work of the Division. There are numerous committees on which members can participate. These committees work throughout the year on targeted issues and come together at CEC for more formal discussions and decision-making. Let a board member know about your interest in serving on a committee. Visit the DDD Web site (<http://www.dddcec.org/committees.htm>) to get information about our operating committees and contacts. There are also opportunities to run for a DDD office each year. Additionally, there are opportunities afforded to all education professionals, family members, and persons with developmental disabilities to share insights and evidence-based practices with others by submitting manuscripts for publication consideration in our journals, and/or proposals for presentations at CEC and our biennial meetings. President Elect Polly Parrish, who is also the program chair for this year's CEC Annual Convention and Expo to be held in Louisville, has advised us that we have an outstanding slate of presentations scheduled for the DDD strand.

On behalf of the DDD Board I again commend each of you for your ongoing contributions to the field through your respective work in higher education, the public schools, private centers, not-for-profits, and other venues of endeavor. DDD is here to serve you—our members—and we encourage you to help us keep this Division strong through your support and participation.

Have a great spring, and we look forward to seeing you in Louisville!

CEC BOSTON, 2008 HEADS UP ON PROPOSALS

It is not too early to be thinking about proposals for the CEC convention in Boston. The convention will be April 2–5, 2008. DDD encourages all members to consider submitting presentation proposals for the Boston convention. CEC has not yet set the exact deadline for submitting proposals but it will be in early May. Give thought now to what you can add to the DDD program in Boston.

International Conference in Lima, Peru

DISES is sponsoring an international conference in Lima, Peru in collaboration with Centro Ann Sullivan del Peru (CASP) July 8–12, 2007, with the theme “Making the Impossible Possible: A Better Life for Persons with Different Abilities and Their Families.” Full information, including cultural tours available, is on the DISES Web site:

<http://www-home.carlow.edu/~sorourke/ISEF/information.htm>

DDD at CEC

DDD Sessions

During CEC's 2007 Annual Convention and Expo (April 18–21), the Division on Developmental Disabilities (DDD) will offer an exciting strand of sessions for conference attendees interested in the areas of mental retardation/cognitive disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and related developmental disabilities. DDD's strand will address the latest research, model programs and best practices in areas of inclusion, self-determination, assistive technology, curricula instruction, standards based practices, transition, family support and advocacy, early intervention, positive behavior supports, and high stakes assessments.

DDD Showcase Session

The DDD board also encourages all CEC conference attendees to come and participate in DDD's Showcase Session, "An Emergent Literacy Intervention for Students with Autism and/or Significant Cognitive Disabilities," to be held on Thursday, April 19 – 9:45–11:45 am. This featured session will include an explanation and video demonstration of the RAISE Project, an Emergent Literacy Project at the University of North Carolina, national site of a 5-year federal grant to develop, implement, and evaluate scientifically-based reading interventions for students with autism and/or significant cognitive disabilities. The DDD Showcase panel members are: Susan Gibbs, Assistant Clinical Professor; Diane Browder, Snyder Distinguished Professor; and Ginevra Courtade, Research Associate, Project RAISE, at UNC Charlotte; and Angel Lee, Program Coordinator at LifeSpan Services, Charlotte, NC.

Schedule of DDD Meetings for the CEC 2007 Annual Convention and Expo Louisville, KY

All meetings will take place in DDD President's Suite, Galt House, East Tower, unless otherwise noted

Division on Developmental Disabilities (DDD)

Executive Committee Meeting
Tuesday, April 17, 7:00–8:30 p.m.

Board of Directors

Wednesday, April 18, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
Divisions' Diversity Chairs Shared Agenda Meeting
Chair: Rosa Lockwood
rosa.lockwood@earthlink.net
Thursday, April 19, 7:30–8:30 a.m.

Critical Issues and Legislative Committee

Co-Chairs: Robert Stodden, Nikki Murdick
stodden@cds.hawaii.edu; murdickn@slu.edu
Thursday, April 19, 8:30–9:30 a.m.

Showcase Session

"An Emergent Literacy Intervention for Students with Autism and/or Significant Cognitive Disabilities"
Thursday, April 19, 9:45–11:45 a.m.
Room: TBA

Subdivision Meeting

Executive Director: Tom Smith
tecsmith@uark.edu
Thursday, April 19, Noon–1:00 p.m.

Awards Committee

Chair: Cindy Perras
cindy.perras@cogeco.ca
Thursday, April 19, 1:00–1:30 p.m.

Past Presidents Meeting

Dagny Fidler
dagny.fidler@dmeps.k12.ia.us
Thursday, April 19, 1:30–2:30 p.m.

Professional Development and Standards

Chair: Scott Sparks
sparks@ohio.edu
Thursday, April 19, 2:30–3:30 p.m.

DDD General Business Meeting

Thursday, April 19, 5:00–7:00 p.m.
Room: TBA

President's Reception

Thursday, April 19, 7:30–10:00 p.m.

Diversity Committee

Chair: Rosa Lockwood
rosa.lockwood@earthlink.net
Friday, April 20, 8:00–9:00 a.m.

Membership Committee

Co-Chairs: Jim Forristal, Ken Gerlach
jimfortpa@aol.com; kgerlach@plu.edu
Friday, April 20, 9:00–10:00 a.m.

Conference Committee

Chair: Polly Parrish
pparrish15@aol.com
Friday, April 20, 10:00–11:30 a.m.

Publications Committee

Chair: Jack Hourcade
jhourca@boisestate.edu
Friday, April 20, 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Communications Committee

Chair: Darlene Perner
dperner@bloomu.edu
Friday, April 20, 12:30–1:30 p.m.

Board of Directors' Meeting

Saturday, April 21, 8:30–noon

Students' Corner

Kara Hume

I hope the new year and the new semester are off to a great start! In April, when you may start to feel overwhelmed with upcoming finals, end-of-the-year IEP meetings, or increasing demands, I would encourage you to take several days off and head to Louisville for some rejuvenation! The Annual Convention and Expo has many sessions and activities designed to meet the needs of students in the special education field, as well as for those interested in working specifically with students with developmental disabilities. As you plan how to spend your time in Louisville, keep these sessions designed for pre-service teachers in mind:

- **Wednesday, April 18:** Pre-conference workshop—*Survival Skills for Beginning Special Education Teachers*
- **Wednesday, April 18:** Student Orientation, **3:30–4:30 p.m.**, (introduces you to the conference and highlights additional sessions you may want to attend)
- **Thursday, April 19:** Student Forum, **1:00–4:00 p.m.**, (addresses job searching and interviewing, introduces you to the CEC divisions and professionals in the field, connects students)
- **Thursday, April 19–Saturday, April 21:** A variety of sessions related to *Strategies for Entry to the Special Education Career*, including "What do you know now? Teacher Insights" on **April**

20th, 9:45 a.m., and "Success from day one: Strategies for first year special educators" on **April 21st, 2:30 p.m.**

Pre-service and in-service professionals interested in working with students with developmental disabilities may want to put the following sessions on their calendars as well:

- **Wednesday, April 18:** Pre-conference workshop—*Autism Spectrum Disorders: Making Your Student's Daily Program Meaningful*
- **Thursday, April 19:** DDD Showcase Session, **9:45–11:45 a.m.**, (related to literacy issues for students with autism and cognitive disabilities)
- **Thursday, April 19–Saturday, April 21:** A variety of sessions related to "developmental disabilities", including sessions related to assessment, curriculum alignment, behavior strategies, and content instruction
- **Thursday, April 19–Saturday, April 21:** A variety of sessions related to "autism spectrum disorders", including sessions related to inclusion, college preparation, communication training, and social interventions

Further information about session locations and times can be found on the CEC Web site (<http://www.cec.sped.org>) and in the conference program. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions (kahume@indiana.edu).

("Teachers' Corner" continued from p. 1)

Personnel Preparation Programs. Despite the large number of students identified with ASD, few personnel preparation programs exist to train educational professionals. According to the NRC (2001), "Finding certified teachers in special education has always been an uphill struggle . . . [and] that shortage is even more serious in the growing field of autism spectrum disorders (p. 184). The NRC further adds, "Of concern is not only the preparation of special education teachers . . . , but also that of school psychologists, speech pathologists, behavior analysts, occupational and physical therapists, and other professionals who fill important roles in the treatment programs of children with autism spectrum disorders" (pp. 185–186). Hence, multidisciplinary teacher-training programs are needed to prepare educational professionals in ASD.

Summary. Autism spectrum disorders are a multifaceted set of disabilities and the issues surrounding them are just as multifaceted and complex. An infrastructure must be established nationally to ensure that the needs of students with ASD are met. Such an infrastructure should include (a) an empirically derived understanding of the characteristics of autism, AS, and related disabilities; (b) development and use of evidence-based strategies for this diverse population; and (c) personnel preparation programs that support the use of evidence-based practices and evaluate implementation of these strategies. It is only through these critical aspects that individuals with ASD can attain the quality of life to which they are entitled.

References

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