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Bibliotherapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Making Inclusion Work

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BIBLIOTHERAPY AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Abstract

As the incidence of autism spectrum disorder increases and as the emphasis on inclusion for students with autism continues in schools, it is critical that professionals, parents, and community members work to provide consistent evidence-based practices across settings. Based upon research conducted through the National Professional Development Center on Autism (2009), there are twenty-four evidence-based practices for students with autism. One important practice for inclusive classrooms is that of Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII). With the goal to increase quality interaction between individuals with and without disabilities, an initial step of PMII is to familiarize neurotypical peers with age-appropriate information regarding specific disabilities. Bibliotherapy using children's books featuring children with disabilities has been shown to be an effective way to sensitively relay important information. Specific to autism spectrum disorder, there are many children's books featuring children with autism that can be used as an integral part of PMII and that will maximize the inclusive experience for all.

Bibliotherapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Making Inclusion Work

In May of 2013, the clinical definition of autism was changed per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Rather than being one of five Pervasive Developmental Disorders as was outlined in the DSM-4, the current view is that autism is a spectrum of disorders ranging from mild to severe and characterized by varying levels of need. While the previous definition included three main characteristics required for a diagnosis (communication difficulties, social impairment, and restricted/repetitive behaviors), the revised definition combines communication and social deficits, and adds the second area of restricted/repetitive behaviors as a requirement for diagnosis. There are sub-factors that further delineate these areas, with a primary goal of the revision being a more clear description of the characteristics of an individual described as having autism and the level of support needed.

Clarity of understanding is critical for parents, teachers, therapists, and community members who work with individuals with autism in a variety of capacities. Furthermore, as the incidence of autism is now 1/88 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013), it is imperative that parents and professionals have a full understanding of services, interventions, and other strategies evidenced as being effective. In school, where children with autism spend a large part of their days and where there is a multitude of relationships and dynamic daily interactions, having everyone on board to assist and provide structure for these students can significantly increase their experiences of success.

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Social Interaction

According to Baron-Cohen (1989), most children with autism have difficulties in the area of Theory of Mind (ToM). Difficulties employing Theory of Mind mean that the individual is challenged to understand that others have independent minds and perspectives different from his/her own. “Social impairment and difficulty with social reciprocity – or understanding the back-and-forth nature of social interactions – is perhaps the single most defining feature of autism” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, cited in Nietzel, Boyd, & Odom, 2008, p. 6). A manifestation of this is that students with autism may have difficulties initiating interactions and/or engaging in interactions. As taking turns and sharing class time allotted to student responses can be a struggle, students with autism may be misunderstood by peers, which in turn can decrease social interactions. Inappropriate behaviors (e.g., tantrums) or stereotypic behaviors (e.g., hand flapping) may be a response to not understanding social cues and may further isolate the child with autism.

Another area of challenge for some is in executive functioning, the “ability to go beyond whatever may be happening in the immediate environment and focus on planning, organizing, deciding what to pay attention to, choosing among alternative responses, and managing time” (Smith, 2014, p. 14). Although not specific to those with autism, and manifested differently in different individuals with autism, some characteristics of those with autism can be explained by problems in this area (Rajendran, G., & Mitchell, P., 2007). Impacting typical classroom expectations, the individual with may have difficulties deciphering steps involved in completing a task and/or resist change in routine. He/she may need adults or peers around him/her to provide prompts and cues as a way to help with task completion or transitions.

Finally, those with autism may experience difficulties in the area of central coherence, according to Frith in 1989 (cited in Happé, 1997); this means that they may attend to details of things (e.g., stories, tasks, social cues), but struggle to understand the main idea. In the area of reading, they may have difficulty with interpretive comprehension, whereas the ability to remember facts may be superb. "The gist of a story is easily recalled, while the actual surface form is quickly lost, and is effortful to retain" (Happé, 1997, Central Coherence Theory section, para. 1). As simple language tends to lessen the confusion regarding a multitude of facts that these individuals may be processing, adults or peers in the environment can provide communications that are short and to the point as a way to help those on the autism spectrum.

Evidence-based Practice in the Inclusive Classroom

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 mandates the "least restrictive environment" for students with disabilities; that is, students with disabilities should be educated with students without disabilities whenever possible. However, it is important to assess the degree to which students with disabilities will benefit from full or partial inclusion, and to make appropriate placement decisions based on individual cognitive, language, and behavioral factors. According to Smith (2012, p. 26), "the two best predictors of successful inclusion are overall level of functioning and severity of challenging behavior." With appropriate adaptations and modifications of curricula and instruction keeping in mind students' range of challenges and strengths, students on the spectrum can be academically successful. Given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways, they can learn in a manner that both interests and motivates them. Additionally, there are social benefits for some children in an inclusive classroom. As students with disabilities have the opportunity to interact with age-appropriate

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peers, friendships develop. Moreover, students without disabilities may provide models of positive behavior for students with disabilities. Reciprocally, neurotypical peers may grow in their empathy and understanding of those with differences. To accomplish these academic and social/behavioral goals, it is critical that teachers and other professionals within the inclusive school environment use evidence-based practices.

In 2008, the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, a multi-institutional organization, published results of a review of studies on instructional practices with individuals with autism from the years 1997-2007. The report identified twenty-four evidence-based practices, many of which are based on principles of behaviorism (<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/briefs>). Included in the list are Reinforcement, Extinction, Pivotal Response Treatment, Discrete Trial Training, and Task Analysis, among others. One practice specific to an inclusive community is Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII). PMII is designed to “increase the social engagement with peers for children and youth with ASD” (Nietzel, Boyd, & Odom, 2008, p. 6). Although direct adult-initiated instruction is crucial to students learning new skills, peer intervention can serve to help those on the spectrum generalize their new learning to other situations (Smith, 2012). Given appropriate instruction, peers can serve in a variety of capacities as initiators of social interactions, tutors, buddies, or communication partners. A first step in instituting PMII is to carefully select peers who have good social skills and positive social interactions with individuals with autism. Second, it is important to help peers to appreciate differences and to understand autism at a level appropriate to their age/grade level (Nietzel, Boyd, & Odom, 2008). A rationale for this is that as children recognize the characteristics of autism and develop empathy, they will be in a better position to

support those on the spectrum. The discussion “will vary in content based upon the ages of the peers. For instance, in preschool the discussion will be very concrete and will focus on observable behaviors (e.g., ‘Taylor needs help learning how to play with other kids, so we are going to teach him how.’). For school-age children, more detail about the specific characteristics of children with ASD can be given; however, the discussion should continue to focus on providing examples and observable behaviors” (Nietzel, Boyd, & Odom, 2008, p. 9). By directly teaching peers about autism and ways to interact with those with autism, interactions and generalizations are purposefully encouraged.

Using Children’s Literature in the Inclusive Classroom to Promote Understanding

One way to introduce the idea of differences in an inclusive classroom is through the use of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy refers to the practice of using books to address certain issues in sensitive ways. Kate-Lynn Dirks addressed the range of topics addressed in children’s literature in her 2010 article, “Bibliotherapy for the Inclusive Elementary Classroom;” these topics include divorce, death, homelessness, gay/lesbian relationships, and disability-related issues, among others. The benefits of using well-chosen children’s literature in the inclusive classroom are vast. In her article, “Children’s Literature Promotes Understanding,” Melissa Thibault discussed the value of bibliotherapy in the inclusive classroom and contended that “books can heal. Books can promote understanding, provide context, and facilitate conversation.” Turner and Traxler (2000, p. 10) noted: “Experiences with literature provide opportunities for children to view the world from various perspectives and to grow and develop in many ways.”

When instituting Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention, the use of literature specific to the topic of disabilities would be an effective way to promote awareness and understanding. There are many children's books that feature children with a wide variety of disabilities. The theme of many of the books is that the child with disabilities does have challenges, but that the individual also has many gifts. The books encourage empathy and understanding, while also telling an enjoyable and interesting tale. Iaquina & Hipsky (2006, p. 211) offered the insight that the use of children's literature focusing on disability-related issues facilitates the idea that there are "multiple solutions to problems." According to Turner and Traxler (2000, p. 10), "An understanding of challenges faced by those with disabilities can be ascertained through interesting and creative use of this type of literature in the classroom."

Regarding the topic of autism, there is a plethora of recently published quality children's literature. While some books present the idea of embracing and celebrating general differences, others present more specific traits of those on the spectrum; communication, social, and behavioral differences are explored. Most books tell a story from the point of view of a sibling or a friend. The following is an annotated bibliography of children's books featuring children on the autism spectrum. As some children with autism have difficulties processing sensory information, one book focuses on an individual with sensory processing disorder. Examples of classroom response activities are included.

Bishop, B. (2002). *My friend with autism*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons, Inc.

The boy who has autism in this book is good at many things. He is smart, can play well, has good hearing, and good eyesight. As told by his friend, the boy also has things that are difficult for him because he has autism. Talking, understanding others' feelings, sharing, and

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change are hard, among other things. The story highlights ways to help a friend with autism-- for example, reminding him that recess will be in a few minutes. Most importantly, the book emphasizes how the boy with autism loves to have friends. There is a "Notes for Adults" section in the back of the book with additional information on characteristics of those on the autism spectrum.

*What are some things that you are good at? What are some things that you find difficult? Make a list of 5 things in each category.

*Think of some ways that you could help the boy in the classroom. Draw a picture of yourself helping the boy in some way.

*Sometimes children like the boy with autism in this book, use APPs on an IPAD to help them. Design an APP that could help the boy with reading, writing, or math. Write a description of what your APP could look like.

Edwards, B., & Armitage, D. (1999). *My Brother Sammy*. Brookfield, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press.

Told from his brother's perspective, this is the story of Sammy, a boy with autism. The boy is sometimes sad, sometimes embarrassed, sometimes lonely regarding the way that Sammy does not interact or play with him. Their mom says that Sammy is "special," but the boy says, "I do not want a special brother!" It's only when Sammy points to him and calls him a "special brother," that the boy starts to enjoy doing the things that Sammy likes to do.

*What are some things that you like to do with your brother and/or sister? Draw a picture of you and him/her playing a favorite game.

*Make a Venn diagram of what you like to do, what a sibling likes to do, and what you have in common.

*Write an acrostic poem using the word SPECIAL. Use one descriptive word for a special person for each letter of the word.

*Close your eyes and picture sunshine shimmering on the leaves of trees. What are some words to describe what you "see."

Ellis, M. (2005). *Keisha's Doors*. Austin, TX: Speech Kids Texas Press Incorporated.

This is a story of Keisha, as told by her big sister, Monica. Keisha used to talk and play with Monica, but eventually stopped talking. Now she doesn't know how to play with toys, doesn't seem to listen, and likes to rock back and forth. Eventually, the girls' parents are told that Keisha has autism. The therapist gives the family ideas to "open Keisha's doors;" as the family

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interacts using these techniques, Keisha begins to welcome them in. The book is written in both English and Spanish.

*Keisha's therapist talks about "face-to-face" and "hands-to-face" interaction. Can you think of other things that might help Keisha to communicate.

*"Opening doors" is a phrase that is symbolic in this book; it means that Keisha's family finds ways to connect with Keisha. Can you think of other phrases that are symbolic of certain meanings? What are they?

*Draw a picture of a door. Inside the door, write words to represent ways that Keisha might be helped through "open door ideas."

*The story is written in both English and Spanish. Do you know Spanish or words from any other languages? Share a few words with a friend.

Ellis, M. (2005). *Tacos anyone?* Austin, TX: Speech Kids Texas Press Incorporated.

Written by Marvie Ellis in both English and Spanish, this book is the second in a series of books about children with autism. Told by Thomas about his younger brother Michael who has autism, he notes the ways the therapist helps Michael. For example, she teaches him sign language and has him do oral exercises. Following the therapist's lead, Michael starts to play more with Thomas. Michael really likes being a part of a "taco" (putting himself inside of many pillows), and he and Michael enjoy playing this game together. This is an entertaining story of two siblings who enjoy each other's company.

*Write an acrostic poem using "BROTHER" or "SISTER" and for each letter, write one thing that you and your sibling like to do together.

*Being inside of the "taco" helps Michael to feel better sometimes. What are some things that help you to feel better when you get upset?

*Michael does not like getting paint on his hands. Is there anything that you do not like? How could you help Michael with an activity like painting if he was in this classroom?

*The story is written in both English and Spanish. Do you know Spanish or words from any other languages? Share a few words with a friend.

Ely, L., and Dunbar, P. (2004). *Looking after Louis*. Morton Grove, Ill: Albert Whitman & Company.

A story that depicts the advantages of including children with autism in the general education classroom, this story is of two boys: Louis who has autism and Sam, who does not. Told through the eyes of another classmate, the beginning of the story highlights Louis's

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echolalic language and other behaviors typical of those with autism. With the encouragement of peers, especially Sam, Louis begins to find friendship and enjoy social interactions. All the children begin to appreciate each other's strengths.

*How can you help to include a new student in your classroom? Make a list of ways to do this.

*Louis draws a picture of Sam and him playing soccer. Draw a picture of yourself playing your favorite game with a special friend.

*The girl in this story says, "We're allowed to break rules for special people." Can you think of a reason it would be okay to break rules?

*What do you think it meant when it said in the book that the sun shone through the classroom window? What was this a symbol for?

Frender, S., & Schiffmiller, R. (2007). *Brotherly feelings*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The story is told from the perspective of an eight-year-old boy who has a brother (age 13) with Asperger's syndrome. It explores the emotions of a sibling to a child with autism, taking the reader through a range from "embarrassed" to "protective" and identifying common occurrences that make the boy feel that way. The book is a good selection to help a sibling of a child on the spectrum to realize that his/her feelings are normal.

*Do you know of anyone who has a brother or sister with Asperger's syndrome? Autism? If so, ask that person if he or she has specific feelings to share.

*Pick out two adjectives that are used in this book to describe feelings. Write a paragraph for each about what occurrences make you feel this way.

*For each word you chose, draw a picture that symbolizes your feelings (similar to what is in the book).

*It is important to let our feelings out in some way. Some ways are more appropriate than others. Choose two feelings and write or draw about a way to appropriately let these feelings out.

Gartenberg, Z. (1998). *Mori's Story: A book about a boy with autism*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

Telling the story of the many challenges a child with autism faces, this is a true story of Mori. His behavioral struggles are so severe that Mori's family seeks the help of other families to help them take care of Mori. Told by his brother, the joys and challenges faced by Mori and the other families are made more interesting through the addition of photographs of all.

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*Bring a photo of your family from home. Tell the class about it.

*Using the class photos, compile a scrapbook entitled "Our Families."

Hoopman, K. (2013). *Inside Asperger's looking out*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Using images of animals to tell the story, the author of this book highlights things that are difficult for children with Asperger's syndrome. For example, the "scratching of pencil on paper" or the "buzz of a light" can bother them significantly. While telling an enjoyable and informational story, the author celebrates the unique personhood of those with Asperger's syndrome.

*Choose your favorite animal from this book. Draw a picture of one thing you learned about Asperger's syndrome using this animal.

*Think about the "Social Rules" that are shown on page 25. With a partner, make a list of 5 social rules for the classroom.

*As it says at the beginning of the book, sometimes people with Asperger's syndrome react differently to what is seen or heard. Discuss what you heard about this. Then, talk with a partner about any similar extreme like or dislike that you have.

Larson, E.M. (2008). *The Chameleon Kid*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Using cartoon-like characters, this story brings to light the many feelings experienced by individuals with autism that often result in a meltdown. Encouraged to be a "chameleon kid" in response to an approaching meltdown, the book gives suggestions for approaches and techniques to help with feelings of frustration. For example, the child is encouraged to "take a hike" and not "have a cow." In addition to providing strategies, the book explains the meanings of many idioms.

*A chameleon is an animal that changes colors to match the environment. Why do you think the author is encouraging a child with autism to act like a chameleon?

*Do research on the internet about chameleons. Write 6 sentences telling facts about chameleons.

*In the book, "Meltdown" is depicted as a monster-like character. What are some other things you might show as a monster? Think about a pleasant character you could use to display pleasant things. Draw a picture of this character.

*Do you have any other suggestions for others to help them control their meltdowns?

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Lears, L. (1998). *Ian's walk - A story about autism*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman.

Ian is described by his older sister Julie as someone whose "brain doesn't work like other people's." He sees, hears, smells, feels, and tastes things differently. Ian goes for a walk to the park with his two sisters and disappears as they're waiting for pizza. When Julie thinks the way Ian does, she finds him lying under a huge bell ringing the gong. They are so relieved to find Ian that they walk home his way -- lining up stones at the pond, smelling the bricks of the post office, and watching the fan at the diner. Julie thinks she sees Ian smile when they finally get home.

*Ian watches the ceiling fan in the diner, smells the bricks of the post office wall, feels the stones on the ground press against his cheek as he lies on the ground, and chooses to eat dry cereal rather than fast food. Try some of the things that Ian finds interesting.

*If you could do something special with your brother, sister, or friend, what would it be? Make a card inviting him or her to do that activity.

Luchsinger, D.F. (2007). *Playing by the rules: A story about autism*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Jody and her brother, Josh, who has autism, receive a visit from their Great Aunt Tilda. As Aunt Tilda tries to interact with the children, she does not understand Josh's special "rules;" for example, Josh only likes animal games, and gets upset when his plastic animal toys are not in order. Jody helps Aunt Tilda learn the rules and interpret Josh's communication attempts through Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). It is a special day, and in the end, Jody and Josh have fun with Aunt Tilda.

*Do you have a special aunt or uncle you like to play with? What do you like to do with him/her when he/she visits?

*Certain things make Josh upset, for example, when his toys are rearranged. What types of things make you upset. Draw a picture of yourself in this situation and what you can do to feel better in that situation.

*Josh uses the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), which are pictures that people with autism can use to communicate their wants and needs. Draw 4 pictures that might help Josh communicate his needs in this classroom.

Morre-Mallinos, J. (2008). *My Brother is Autistic*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's.

The story is about a boy whose brother Billy has autism. When Billy embarrasses him in the lunchroom by his behaviors (e.g., lining up cookies, becoming upset), Billy runs away from him. His teacher helps the rest of the students to understand autism by showing pictures of

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individuals who have special talents and who also have autism. The boy comes to appreciate Billy not only for who he is, but for who he might become. The story is particularly good for siblings of children with autism.

*Draw a picture of yourself doing something that you are really good at. Share your picture with a friend.

*If Billy was a student in your school/class, how could you help him? How does an understanding of autism help you to help him?

*Have you ever been embarrassed by a brother or sister's behavior? Share your experience. What might have helped you in that situation?

*Pretend you are the boy and write a letter to Billy expressing your feelings. What could you say to Billy to make him feel better? to apologize for leaving him?

Peralta, S. (2002). *All about my brother*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Publishing Company.

Written from the perspective of Sarah, the sister of Evan who has autism, the book is a heartwarming story of her observations of her brother. The story is told through text and through Sarah's drawings. Sarah tells of how her brother likes to play with sticks, jump on the bed, and imitate clapping. She also tells of the words that the therapist uses to describe these behaviors (e.g., "motor imitation"). A beautiful relationship is described as Sarah says that she is Evan's best teacher. This story would be helpful for siblings of children on the autism spectrum.

*Sarah tells a story with her drawings. Draw a series of at least 5 drawings telling a story about your family, a sibling, or a friend.

*Sarah includes her email address at the back of the book. Write a pretend email to Sarah, asking her something you would like to know about her experiences with Evan.

*Make a Venn diagram of things that Evan likes to do and that you like to do. What things do you and Evan have in common?

*Sarah says that Evan cannot talk. What do you think Evan would say to Sarah if he could? Write at least four sentences describing what you think he would say.

Rosner, D.M. (2007). *The China doll*. Sun River, Montana: Jigsaw Press.

Comparing children with autism to a china doll, this story makes the point that although appearing different and fragile, the doll really has much to offer. For example, the doll has sparkling eyes that shine with real diamonds. As Emily, the girl in the story, plays with this doll,

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she heeds her mother's advice when she says, "Just because he's different, that doesn't mean you can't enjoy him."

*Do you have a toy that you didn't particularly like at first, but that you grew to love? Tell a friend about it.

*Make a chart with two columns. On one side, list things that Emily did not like about the doll. On the other side, list things that she did like.

*In this story, the doll is a symbol of a friend who might be a little different. Can you think of a symbol for something that you could write a story about? Try to write a story!

Schnurr, R.G., (1999). *Asperger's huh? A child's perspective*. Ontario, Canada: Anisor Publishing.

The boy in this story tells his story of his life with Asperger's, from being diagnosed as a younger child to his experiences in school. He tells how some things are just hard for him and how those around him emphasize the acronym FAAT: F stands for "flexibility," A stands for "Adaptable," A stands for "Appropriate," and T stands for "Trust Someone." Spoken from the perspective of a child with Asperger's, this story makes the reader realize the challenges and joys of children who have this disorder.

*The boy in this story has an acronym (FAAT) that stands for all of the things he has to remember. Can you make an acronym that might stand for all the things you have to do in a day

The boy likes weather. Do you have an interest that you like talking about? Draw a picture of yourself doing something that you like to do.

*According to the storyteller, sometimes "big things turn into little things" for children with Asperger's. Has this ever happened to you? How did you feel?

Shally, C., and Harrington, D. (2007). *Since we're friends: An autism awareness book*. Hong Kong: Awaken Specialty Press.

This is a delightful story of two boys, one with autism and one without. Matt, who has autism, has trouble following directions, worries a lot, and gets upset if someone takes his favorite swing. He is interested in animals and loves to talk about them. The boy without autism goes out of his way to include Matt in many activities, especially when left out by others. The book presents the many contributions to friendship that a child with autism can make.

*What games do you and your friends like to play? Draw a picture of this.

*Write a plan to do one nice thing for others each day of next week.

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*Write directions for making a sandwich that Matt could follow.

*Make a list of nice things you could do for someone on the playground.

*Matt is very interested in animals. Draw a picture of your hobby or special interest.

Shapiro, O. (2009). *Autism and me: Sibling Stories*. Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman and Company.

The author of this book has interviewed many children with autism and tells their stories. They tell of their everyday life, their challenges, and the many rewards that come from having and loving a sibling with autism. This book would be helpful in encouraging children in similar situations to share their feelings and stories.

*The author uses real photographs to accompany each story in this book. Bring in a photograph of you and a sibling and write a story about the picture.

*Make a class photograph book using all the pictures from the above activity.

*Many of the children in this book help their siblings in various ways. What are some ways that you can help a sibling when he/she is experiencing difficulty?

Thompson, M. (1996). *Andy and his yellow frisbee*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Andy is a young boy with autism who spends his recess time spinning a yellow frisbee. Sarah, a new girl at school, is curious about why Andy spins the frisbee and gently approaches him. Rosie, Andy's sister, protectively looks on and worries about how Andy will react. He doesn't respond negatively, and Rosie is hopeful about his next encounter with Sarah. Sarah and Rosie become friends in the end.

*With a peer, discuss the importance of acceptance and understanding. How did Sarah show Andy acceptance of his behavior?

*Write a dialogue that you might have with someone about a favorite toy. What would you say or ask your friend about his/her toy?

Veenendall, J. (2009). *Why does Izzy cover her ears? Dealing with sensory overload*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Izzy is a first grade girl with a sensory processing disorder. She tells of the challenges she faces in her classroom with loud noises, bright lights, and people bumping into her. Her teacher and occupational therapist help her by modifying the environment and giving her strategies to cope. Sometimes Izzy goes to the "motor room" where she can swing, crash, and

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jump. When she is at home, Izzy also knows how to "cool off." Told in kid-friendly language, Izzy's story will help children understand the difficulties faced by children with sensory processing disorder.

*Izzy is bothered by loud noises, bright lights, and bumps. What are some things that you could do to help Izzy if she was in our classroom?

*Try wearing a headset. Does the headset block the sounds around you?

*Try turning on the TV loud, having everyone in the classroom talk at once, and flashing the classroom lights. This is what Izzy faces. How do you feel? Write a paragraph describing your feelings.

Watson, E. (1996). *Talking to angels*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace and Company.

Christina has autism. As told by her sister, she notes how Christina likes to do what she does, say what she says, and sometimes can be heard softly "talking to angels." Christina and her sister are best friends. Simple, colorful illustrations highlight the simplicity and goodness of the girls' relationship.

*Do you have a sibling or best friend that you like to do things with? Draw a picture of yourself and your sibling/friend.

*What do you think Christina says when she "talks to angels?" Write a paragraph about what you think she might be saying.

*This book tells a little about children who have autism. Knowing these things, what are some ways that you could help a child with autism?

Wilson, L.F., (2012). *A-U-T-I-S-T-I-C How silly is that!* Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Told by a boy with autism, he makes the point that autism is just one aspect of his life. Using words like "brown-hair-tistic" and "south-paw-tistic," he describes his many characteristics in an entertaining way. Most importantly, he focuses on the idea that he doesn't need any labels at all- he is just a "brilliant person with autism."

*Make a list of all of your characteristics. Draw yourself, showing two or three of these.

*Make a collage of images that represent your characteristics.

*Make an identity quilt to show your character traits.

*Think about labels that are used to describe people. What is good about labels? What is bad?

Wine, A. (2005). *What it is to be me!* Fairdale Publishing.

In simple words, Danny tells what it is like to have Asperger's syndrome. He describes that some things are easy for him and others are difficult. In the end, he says, "I am proud to be an Asperger kid. It is what makes me. . .ME!"

*Even though Danny finds some things difficult, he is proud of who he is. What are some things that you find difficult?

*Write a paragraph entitled, "I am proud to be me." Tell a friend about your paragraph.

*Make a collage of pictures of all the things you are proud of yourself for. For example, what are you good at? Share your collage with the class.

*Make an identity quilt to show your character traits.

Conclusion

Using children's literature featuring children with disabilities in the inclusive classroom can be an effective way to bring age-appropriate information to children, while telling enjoyable stories. Specific to autism spectrum disorder, there are many books that sensitively present the challenges and gifts of those with this disability. Using response activities including teacher-guided conversation can be the key to setting the foundation for Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention. An evidence-based practice as identified by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder, Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention affords students with and without disabilities the opportunity to increase interactions, social engagement, and meaningful communication. As the inclusive classroom is the optimal setting for many children with autism, investment by peers as well as teachers, parents, and other professionals, can create successful experiences for all.

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