

Book Review

Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2006)

By: Clarissa Wills

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For readers who are interested in strategies and suggestions for activities to support the development of young children with autism, the book entitled **Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder** edited by **Clarissa Wills (2006)** is recommended. The readers can understand from their first glance at the book what they are going to learn for helping children with autism reach their potential since the theme is clearly presented through its title.

The purpose of this book is for educators to better understand children with autism, and to provide appropriate teaching strategies contributing to the development and learning of young children with autism spectrum disorders. The author offers suggestions on the creation of preschool environment, stimulating children with autism to communicate, learn life skills, and build social skills. This book explores appropriate instructional strategies in effective preschool classrooms to promote learning skills and learning achievement of children with autism together with problems relevant to those strategies. Most of the strategies presented are beneficial to children with autism spectrum disorder in educational classrooms.

The book consists of ten chapters and also a helpful glossary and index. The layout of the book is clear, making it easy to find the general idea of each chapter. Each chapter is presented through well-planned topics where practical teaching strategies are elaborated. This book could be divided into five parts. The first part consists of two chapters giving the readers an introduction to children with autism.

Chapter 1: Putting All the Pieces Together: Understanding This Puzzle Called Autism and **Chapter 2: From Hand Flapping to Obsession With Routines: The Way Children With Autism Related to Their World.** These two chapters give sufficient background information about areas of children with autism, such as the history of autism, the different types of autism as well as how autism is diagnosed, the symptoms of autism, treatments for autism, problem behavior of children with autism, and services available for children. Information provided in this part is necessary for teachers to integrate into teaching techniques to help autistic children live up to their potential.

In the teaching and learning part, **Chapter Three - Planning for Success: Setting Up a Proactive Preschool Environment** helps teachers learn more about strategies and activities that can be used to set up a proactive preschool environment and **Chapter Four - Learning Life Skills** discusses life skills learning of children with autism leading them to be more independent with greater self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, information for teachers to help children adjust to preschool is also explained. Many examples are given to guide further ideas for teaching life skills, such as teaching to help recognize common things and access community resources. The book also provides a list of points to remember when teaching a new skill.

The third part consists of two chapters giving details about teaching communication for children with autism. **Communication Part: Chapter Five - Misbehavior or Missed Communication: Managing**

the Behaviors of Children with Autism, and Chapter Six - Signs, Symbols, and Language: Helping a Child Communicate.

These two chapters contain kinds of communication behaviors of children and give some examples of how teachers can manage challenging behaviors including sign language, picture exchange system (PECS), and electronic communication. As this part suggests, children with autism improve their communications in different ways. It is, therefore important that educators find ways to support communication systems of autistic children and explore valuable tools to help children learn to communicate.

The fourth part includes two chapters which recommends the way to provide information the children social skills. **Social Play Part: Chapter Seven – Inside Their Own Worlds: Encouraging Children With Autism to Play, and Chapter Eight – Building Social Skills: Getting Along With Others.** These two chapters reveal the world of autistic children when they play and what teachers can do to encourage them to play. The chapters focus on the social skills of autistic children and types of their social impairment. The idea from these two chapter is that children with autism have difficulty in understanding social relationships involving in successful playing with others. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers have to help children learn to play with each other and to develop social skills. Social stories is recommended as a way to provide concrete information to help improve students' social skills and appropriate behaviors.

In the skills part, **Chapter Nine – Lights! Camera! Action! Sensory Integration and Autism** explains six senses of children with autism such as vision (sight), sound, smell, touch (tactile), taste, and movement. Strategies to help children with sensory integration disorder and dysfunction are advised for learning about sensory integration educators to adjust environments appropriately to children's learning levels while **Chapter Ten – We're All in This Together: Teaming Up with Families** suggests the cooperation between teachers and parents when working with autistic children. Apart for teachers'

role, parents are major supporters in the development of children with autism. Parents can help identify a child's learning patterns, current cognitive skills, and the behavioral techniques that will foster interaction with other children.

In conclusion, this book is an incredible overview of keys to success in teaching children with autism. It is highly recommended for readers who desire to gain better understanding on appropriate education teaching strategies in preschool classrooms. The author tells us what children with autism need to learn because of their unique learning needs and different developmental abilities. The author also made very solid integration of the fundamental issues, knowledge from the perform findings and their empirical experiences which gradually lead to presentations of relevant approaches, techniques, and methodologies of instructional practice of how to accomplish the effectiveness of development in children with autism, which contribute to the learners' opportunities to learn and succeed. Furthermore, the author presents a variety of ways of learning instruction resulting in the tendency of conducting class activities in the form of group work and independent seat work rather than the whole class organization. However, to achieve the level of comprehensibility of this book, readers need to have a great deal of background knowledge and understanding of the visual images the teaching performs. More importantly, the book is easy to read, wide-ranging, and well-illustrated. It is written in a style that is easy to follow. The cover is a paperback with an attractive colorful picture of a child's artwork, and the title theme is clearly presented. The book's main weakness is that there is no specific research mentioned to support evidences of those teaching strategies of children with autism.

Finally, it should be noted that this book is absolutely essential for anyone planning to educate a child with autism. The book serves as a valuable resource of knowledge with implications that can be drawn for further applications and developments for the benefit of Thai children with autism both in the area of special educational practice and research.