Socio-Political and Educational Perspectives of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A Case for Inclusive Classroom Strategies which Build Social Support?

Jamie Gledhill[1] & Janet L. Currie[2]

Abstract

While the signs of this disorder can vary person to person, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) usually experience challenges with their behavior, social interactions, speech and nonverbal communication. This article critiques the use of social support and other educational strategies for optimizing educational environments for students with ASD. Socio-political and legal perspectives are discussed, as well as the importance of garnering peer acceptance and understanding in the school setting.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, Social Support, Inclusion, Disability, Teaching Strategies

1. Introduction

This paper reviews the existing research literature related to the societal, political and professional perspectives of ASD, the legislative requirements of including individuals with disabilities and the nature of this condition. It particularly focuses on the issue of social support as a strategy for building optimal educational environments for students with ASD, in the Australian context.

1.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopment condition which alters the way in which an individual can imagine, relate and interact with people and their environment (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2019). It is estimated that one in every seventy people in Australia is diagnosed with ASD and the prevalence is increasing (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2019). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, the number of Australians diagnosed with ASD was estimated as 64,400 people in 2009. These numbers accelerated in 2015 to 164,000 people (ABS, 2016). Therefore, due to the increase in prevalence, the number of students with ASD being enrolled in mainstream primary schools has also increased. This has led to a demand for educators to be trained to support these students, not only academically but also socially (Dybvik, 2004). This is particularly important as many students with this condition demonstrate significant levels of anxiety and stress in the classroom. Much of which is caused by exclusion in social contexts and bullying (Cappadocia, Weiss, & Pepler, 2011).

1.2 Theoretical and Epistemological Perspectives of ASD

There are two main theoretical and epistemological perspectives towards ASD. This section provides a description of each perspective, its value and limitations.

The neurobiological perspective of ASD is the most dominant perspective as it is required in order for society to accept that an individual possesses this condition. This perspective defines ASD as a polygenetic developmental neurobiological disorder which causes abnormalities in social interaction, emotional expression and recognition, and communication (Noterdaeme & Hutzelmeyer-Nickels, 2010). The diagnosis of ASD is primarily given by psychiatrists, psychologists and neuroscientist. These practitioners follow the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) which outlines thediagnostic criteria used to determine different types of mental and behavioral disorders displayed in individuals (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

[1] Warragamba Public School, Fourth Street, Warragamba NSW 2752 Australia
[2] School of International Studies& Education University of Technology Sydney, 15 Broadway Ultimo NSW 2007 Australia
E: Janet.Currie@uts.edu.au

A limitation of such a perspective is that it defines the condition as a deficit, suggesting that there is something wrong with the individual and categorizes them as different and abnormal. Alternatively, the neurobiological perspective gives health care professionals a basis to diagnose individuals with ASD. This means that students are able to receive funding, resources and assistance to foster their educational journey (O'Dell et al., 2016).

Sociocultural perspectives focus on ASD as an identity that is materially and discursively produced within specific socio-cultural context (O'Dell et al., 2016). Nadesan (2005) suggests that "socially constructed standards of normalcy embedded in cultural values and practices not only shape our interpretations of autism but also contribute to the production and transformation of people labelled with the disorder" (Nadesan, 2005, p. 166).

A limitation of this perspective is that it is not recognized by Australian primary schools as a valid method of medical diagnosis and therefore schools are unable to gain access to funding to support a student with ASD in this way. Alternatively, this perspective acknowledges the individual as a human being and highlights the gifts, strengths and intricacies of this condition.

2. Social Support – Improving Interactions and Wellbeing of Individuals

Social support and positive social interactions foster individuals' sense of self, emotional wellbeing and mental health (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000). Social interactions allow individuals to express their emotions, concerns and opinions. Such interactions result in lower occurrences of stress, depression, anxiety and may also affect one's endocrine-immune system. Therefore, when individuals struggle to make social connections, they are susceptible to low levels of self-esteem, feelings of exclusion and anxiety (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000).

Social acceptance and social interactions are vital for the physical and mental wellbeing of primary aged students. This time in a student's life is critical to their social world as they are developing their abilities to self-evaluate and build self- confidence. Additionally, healthy and positive social interactions allow students to build their emotional understanding and sensitivity, such knowledge empowers individuals to connect with others, build relationships and deal with stressors (Duchesne & McMaugh, 2016; Hartup & Stevens, 1999). A study conducted by Levitt and Franco investigated the influence of family support and positive social interactions had on a child's self-esteem. This study involved interviews that were undertaken with one hundred and eighty-five grade five students. The results of this study found that the social interactions that students had with both their parents and peers had a significant influence on the self-esteem of the participants regardless of their ethnic background. Specifically, this study found that these interactions influenced emotional security, interaction skills, conflict resolution skills and quality friendships (Franco & Levitt, 1998).

However, students with special needs who are socially rejected by their typically developing peers have issues with anxiety, often develop low self-esteem, and tend to dislike or avoid school, resulting in poor academic performance. Such social isolation often cumulates and affects the way individuals can function socially at maturity (Court & Givon, 2003). Specifically, a study conducted by Symes and Humphrey found that students with autism who struggle with social interactions care more likely for experience rejection and display signs of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Symes & Humphrey, 2010).

3. Related Legal Frameworks – The Australian example

In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) was passed in the Australian Parliament. This act aims to eliminate discrimination against people on the grounds of disability in a range of areas, including education. Additionally, this act aims to ensure people with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community; and to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that people with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community. In relation to education, the DDA (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) outlines that:

It is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person's disability:
(a) by refusing or failing to accept the person's application for admission as a student; or
(b) in the terms or conditions on which it is prepared to admit the person as a student.
It is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a student on the ground of the student's disability:
(a) by denying the student access, or limiting the student's access, to any benefit provided by the educational authority; or
(b) by expelling the student; or
(c) by subjecting the student to any other detriment.

It is unlawful for an education provider to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person's disability:
(a) by developing curricula or training courses having a content that will either exclude the person from participation, or subject the person to any other detriment; or
(b) by accrediting curricula or training courses having such a content (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992).

The National *Disability Standards for Education* came into effect on the 18th of August 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). These standards aim to ensure that all students with a disability can participate and have access to education on the same basis as other students. This access includes admission or enrolment, participation in courses or programs and use of facilities and services. In relation to an educator's role in implementing social support, these standards require educators to make reasonable adjustments and do their best to eliminate discrimination by implementing strategies to prevent harassment and victimization of people with disability. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005).

Furthermore, the Legislative Council of NSW outlines in its policy of inclusion that NSW schools are to embrace human diversity by valuing and supporting the full participation of all students as equal members of the educational community. Furthermore, this policy outlines that all students with disabilities and special needs should not only be able to enrol in mainstream schools but teaching strategies and educational settings should be designed to include all students in an equitable manner (NSW Government, 2017). This perspective of inclusive practice was also advocated in a recent submission published by the NSW government in which they stated that they are driven by an increasing focus on the rights of students with disability and their inclusion in education provisions and opportunities available to all students (NSW Government, 2017).

4. Socio-Political Perspectives of ASD

The concept of inclusive education may be viewed through a range of socio-political perspectives. The Australian government highlights that every Australian student is entitled to an appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). This policy proposes that students are to be provided with an inclusive education that is appropriate to their unique needs and allows them to spend as much time as possible with peers that do not receive special education (Morin, 2014). The literature suggests that there are many social benefits of inclusion for both the individual and their peers. Students learn social behaviors from their peers and an understanding of difference is developed amongst peers (Boutot & Bryant, 2005; Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2008).

Students with ASD can be effectively educated within inclusive classrooms (Drukpa, 2015). However, in order for inclusive practices to be successful teachers must be trained and have adequate resources (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, & Waldron, 2006). Furthermore, Individualized accommodations and adaptions must be made to effectively cater to the needs of each individual student (Drukpa, 2015). Sansosti and Sansoti (2012) raise the notion that inclusion is not always the right choice for all students with ASD. They stress that decisions for placement must be made based on the characteristics of the pupil and the resources available. They also highlight that when inclusion is forced, the needs of the student are not met and therefore the student is disadvantaged as they are not provided with equitable opportunities to learn and develop (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). This argument that inclusion is not always an appropriate choice is further supported by Akgul (2012), who suggests that the integration of some students may hinder the learning opportunities of peers when it is not effectively implemented.

5. Teachers' Perspectives

With the rates of ASD being diagnosed in Australia increasing by forty percent in the last four years, there is a strong need within the professional community to understand ASD and the vast complexities that are presented by the many dimensions of this condition (Burns, Leblanc, & Richardson, 2009). There is currently a lack of understanding towards ASD due to low levels of training, understanding and awareness. Therefore, many educators don't feel comfortable with their own abilities to facilitate inclusive learning environments(Rodriquez, Saldana, & Moreno, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995). Specifically, while teachers in mainstream schools report that they agree with the principles of social support and inclusive education, many suggest that they do not have the necessary training and support to provide adequately for the growing number of students with ASD (Robertson, Chamberlain, & Kasari, 2003; Soto-Chodiman, Pooley, Cohen, & Taylor, 2012; Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, & Waldron, 2006).

A study by Barned, Knapp, & Neutharth-Pritchett (2011) used semi-structured interviews to investigate the knowledge and attitudes of early childhood preservice teachers regarding the inclusion of children with ASD. Interviewees demonstrated a range of knowledge and experience surrounding individuals with ASD. There were also conflicting attitudes towards the inclusion of students with ASD in mainstream classrooms and opinions about whether early childhood teachers in general, and themselves in particular, should be expected to teach students with ASD. All participants agreed that successful inclusion offers benefits for both students with ASD and their peers, but they tended to define successful inclusion primarily on the basis of a lack of behavior problems or disruptions rather than on the social experiences or actual content area learning of the student with ASD.

6. Support Strategies Designed for Students with ASD

Barnard, Prior, & Potter (2000) indicate that pupils with ASD are much more likely to be excluded from school than pupils with other or no special educational needs. Specifically, students with ASD often experience difficulties with communication and interaction. Consequently, this impedes their ability to engage with peers and form relationships and therefore increases their vulnerability and chances of being bullied frequently and chronically over long periods of time. Those students who experience high levels of victimization are around eleven times more likely to have reduced self-confidence and internalized mental health issues such as anxiety, over sensitivity, hyperactivity and self-injurious and stereotypic behaviors (Cappadocia, Weiss, & Pepler, 2011).

Therefore, it is imperative that educators are aware of the three main strategies that can be used to assist the social interactions of students with ASD:
   i.   Teaching Approaches
   ii.   Peer Understanding and Acceptance
   iii.   School Integration and Education.

6.1 Teaching Approaches

It is a common misconception that students with ASD struggle only due to perceptual barriers. However, recent studies have suggested that many students struggle due to the obstacles they face surrounding verbal comprehension, expression and lack of ability to predict and or make sense of the environment around them (Minshew, Meyer, & Dunn, 2003). Consequently, visual schedules and resources are being implemented by educators to improve environmental predictability and decrease apprehension about events that are not easily conceptualized verbally by students with ASD (Welton, Vakil, & Carasea, 2004).

Furthermore, many students with autism struggle to communicate as they have little or no functioning speech (National Research Council, 2001). Consequently, many individuals resort behaviors such as eye gazing, pointing and facial expressions to communicate their needs to others. To assist individuals with ASD to learn communicative skills, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) approaches are suggested (Bondy & Frost, 2002). ACC devises provide written words, pictures, photos and symbols to communicate thoughts and ideas in visual presentations that are predictable and static (Mineo, Peischl, & Pennington, 2008). A study conducted by Xin and Leonard illustrated that through the use of an application on i-pads, Sonoflex, each of the students was able to improve their ability to initiating requests, respond to questions and make social comments in both class and recess settings (Xin & Leonard, 2014).

Garrot, Sermier, Dessemontet and Moser Opitz (2017) conducted a study to investigate how social participation can be fostered in mainstream classrooms. Specifically, they investigated which interventions are effective in mainstream preschool and primary classrooms, with a focus on teaching interaction strategies, group activities and training of paraprofessionals. Their study focused on teachers' implementations of integration strategies during episodes of free time or classroom activities such as; suggesting games, sharing or exchanging objects, initiating conversations, making complements or commenting on an ongoing game. Almost all the responses studied showed positive intervention effects on the frequency, duration and or quality of social interactions among students. This study also looked at the implementation of group activities in an academiccontext with students' peers, support groups such as "the circle of friends" and interest clubs. These activities all had a positive impact on the social interactions and social acceptance of students with ASD (Garrote, Semier, Dessemontent, & Moser Optiz, 2017). Similarly, Allen and Schwartz (2001) suggest that direct instruction should be provided in natural contexts that arise throughout the day. Such natural contexts foster positive social interactions as the students feel comfortable in familiar and predictable environments and routines.

Ecological interventions may also enhance students' social interactions and development. Such interventions involve supporting the students by making changes to the school environment (McConnell, 2002). Some evidence suggests that when the sensory stimulation of a classroom is reduced students with ASD engage in higher rates of social participation and interaction (Harrison & Barabasz, 1991). Moreover, when classroom activities are highly structured and explicit students also illustrate higher rates of independent social interactions (DeKlyen & Odom, 1989). Moreover, by developing a familiar, welcoming and calm classroom environment student's anxiety levels may be reduced as they become comfortable and develop a sense of belonging. Such environments allow students to become more relaxed and open to social engagements (McConnell,2002). This idea is also supported by Henry and Myles (2007) who suggest that environmental modifications provide students with ASD the structure, visual supports, and predictability they need to learn new skills and develop positive relationships with others.

It is also suggested that providing routines and structure plays a vital role in promoting a calm learning environment. McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, and Florence (2004) suggest that routines and procedures can improve students' abilities to complete tasks, interact and behave appropriately. Specifically, they suggest that such routines provide clarity and consistency, which allow the students to feel comfortable and know what is expected of them. Moreover, students with ASD often become overwhelmed with change and new environments. Therefore, by providing consistent and predictable learning environments students with ASD are able to develop a sense of stability within the classroom and are therefore more open to learning and social opportunities (Cappadocia, Weiss, & Pepler, 2011).

6.2 Peer Understanding and Acceptance

It is also important to consider the acceptance and understanding of peers when looking at the social implications of ASD. Due to the behavioral influences of this condition, some students feel uncomfortable or threatened by the behaviors that students with ASD exhibit. Additionally, students don't always understand the social implications of the condition and are confused by students' tendencies to withdraw and isolate themselves (Soto-Chodiman et al., 2012). These misunderstandings and misconceptions of ASD are believed to influence the notion that students with ASD are also reported to have higher levels of bullying as well as lower levels of peer social support especially from classmates and friends (Symes & Humphrey, 2010). This concept is supported by Humphrey (2008), who suggests much of the bullying that occurs is caused by ignorance. Specifically, children see other students not only behaving differently but also being treated differently by staff but they don't have any explanation for these actions.

However, studies surrounding peer mentoring and other modes of social support have shown positive signs that there are actions that can be implemented to minimize this exclusion and isolation (Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2008). Research has shown that through peer-mediated naturalistic strategies, it is possible for students with ASD to learn social behaviors. A study by Harper, Symon and Frea (2008) showed through peer mediation, two participants with ASD adopted the social strategies modelled by their peers. These students began to independently ask to play, organize games and engage in social interactions on the playground (Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2008). McConnell (2002) also suggests that peer-mediated strategies are generally just as effective as child-specific interventions (Odom & Strain, 1986). McConnell's(2002) study found that peer-mediated interventions may help students to improve their verbal interactions and pick up on social cues. This, in turn, allows students to increase their social interactions.

Additionally, through implementing educational programs and raising awareness about this condition social interactions of students with ASD can be fostered. Specifically, as students gain insight as to why their peers act the way they do, they gain empathy and understanding for their peers. Nevill and White (2011) found that as students gain knowledge of ASD, their social interactions with and understanding of students with ASD also increased. Eldar, Talmor and Wolf-Zukerman (2010) also suggested that increasing peer awareness not onlyhelps the development of the child with ASD but it also helps the peers as they gain empathy and compassion by being exposed to children with a diversity of temperaments. Such social understanding may be developed through integration, active discussions along with active modelling of inclusive attitudes and actions by teachers (Cummings Pepler, Mishna, & Craig, 2006).

6.3 School Integration and Education

Creating a positive ethos is a cornerstone of effective inclusion for pupils with autism. Maintaining a consistent positive focus through all aspects of work within the school is central to this and helps to challenge stereotypes and raise expectations (Humphrey, 2008).

As suggested by Humphrey (2008), the attitudes, support and ethos of the school community play an important role in establishing an environment of social support for not only the students but also the teachers and the parents. Moreover, Humphrey and Symes (2011) suggest that when there is awareness and support provided by not only the school and the students but also the parents of peers an environment of inclusion and acceptance is developed. Such inclusive attitudes provide students with ASD with an accepting environment in which they are able to interact with others and feel comfortable and safe (Humphrey, 2008).

Improving training significantly improves teachers understanding and comfort when teaching in inclusive classrooms. When teachers have a greater understanding of a condition and strategies to assist students with a condition, they feel more comfortable facilitating an inclusive classroom (Akgul, 2012; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Syriopoulou-Delli, Cassimos, Tripsianis, & Polychronopoulou, 2012). A study conducted with university students who were enrolled in an education bachelor's degree. This study provided each of the participants with two hundred minutes of instructional training with ASD consults. Each of the participants showed an increased understanding of the condition, how to support students with ASD and a slight increase in their confidence when teaching students with ASD. This study also showed that when teachers lacked the necessary training, they were more stressed as they didn't have the knowledge of how to teach these students. Furthermore, stress of any kind within teaching has not only a negative impact on the educator but also the learning process and the attainment of identified learning goals (Burns, Leblanc, & Richardson 2009, p. 168). Therefore, through the implementation ofconsistent professional development, educators are able to develop their confidence and the strategies they know to assist the interactions of students with ASD. This is beneficial for the social interactions of the students as they are provided with more informed support strategies (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013).

Including individuals with ASD involves collaboration between everyone that is involved with the education of the student. This includes the principal, special education teachers, classroom teachers, family, specialist and any other party who is involved in the educational success of the individual with the condition. Such collaboration between parties provides consistency and stability across all environments from school to home. Such consistency assists the students in maintaining and developing skills that are acquired within the school environment (Irvine & Lynch, 2009). This notion is supported by a student conducted by Blair, Lee, Cho, and Dunlap (2011) in which three young children with ASD were provided with individualized behavior support that was implemented consistently by family members and educators. Specifically, the data collated found that all three of the children improved on their targeted behaviors both at home and in the school setting (Blair, Lee, Cho, & Dunlap, 2011).

7. Conclusion

The current research related to ASD illustrates a positive case for teachers to include more inclusive strategies which increase social support in order to enhance the learning environment and increase educational outcomes for this group of students. However, despite the growing amount of research that has been conducted into recommended ways for addressing ASD, there has been a lack of insight included in the wider literature into the individual perspectives of teachers to these approaches. Ironically, it is likely due to their very busy roles, that access to this data is problematic. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to explore teacher perspectives, experiences and how to overcome any perceived barriers regarding 'best practice' approaches for use of social support and optimization of the educational environment. Future studies must gain evidence towards building a positive framework for effective teaching practices and support for students with ASD.

References

Akgul, E. M. (2012). Are we ready for an inclusive classroom? School Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions of Autism. Energy education science and technology part B-Social and *Educational Studies, 4*(4), 1925-1934.

Allen, E., & Schwartz, I. (2001). *The Exceptional Child: Inclusion in Early Childhood Education.* Albany, NY: Delmar.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2016). *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, Australia 2015*. Canberra: ABS.

Autism Spectrum Australia (2019). *Aspect Schools*. Retrieved June 10, 2019, from
https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/school/aspect-schools

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: a review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17*(2), 129-147.

Barnard, J., Prior, A., & Potter, D. (2000). *Autism and Inclusion: Is It Working?* London: National Autistic Society.

Barned, N., Knapp, N., & Neutharth-Pritchett, S. (2011). Knowledge and Attitudes of Childhood Pre-service Teachers and the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 32*(4), 169-203.

Bender, W., Vail, C., & Scott, K. (1995). Teachers' Attitudes Toward Increased Mainstreaming: Implementing Effective Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 28*(2), 87-94.

Blair, K. S. C., Lee, I. S., Cho, S. J., & Dunlap, G. (2011). Positive behavior support through family–school collaboration for young children with autism. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 31*(1), 22-36.

Bondy, A., & Frost, L. (2002). *A picture's worth: PECS and other visual communication strategies in autism. Topics in autism.* Bethesda, MD.: Woodbine House.

Boutot, E. A., & Bryant, D. P. (2005). Social integration of students with autism in inclusive settings. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40*(1), 14-23.

Brownell, M.T., Adams, A., Sindelar, P., & Waldron, N. (2006). Learning from collaboration: The role of teacher qualities. *Exceptional Children, 72*(2), 169-185.

Burns, K.A., Leblanc, L., & Richardson, W. (2009). Autism spectrum disorder and the inclusive classroom: Effective training to enhance knowledge of ASD and evidence-based practices. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 32*(2), 166-179.

Cappadocia, M.C., Weiss, J.A., & Pepler, D. (2011). Bullying Experiences Among Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 42*(2), 266-277.

Cohen, S., Underwood, L. G., & Gottlieb, B. H. (2000). *Social support measurement and intervention.* New York: Oxford.

Commonwealth of Australia. (1992). *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) s.22 (Austlii.).*Canberra: Commonwealth Government.

Commonwealth of Australia. (2005).*Disability Standards for Education.* Retrieved from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/disability_standards_for_education_2005_plus_guida nce_notes.pdf.

Court, D., & Givon, S. (2003). Group intervention: Improving social skills of adolescents with learning disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 36*(2), 50-55.

Cummings, J. G., Pepler, P., Mishna, F., & Craig, W. (2006). Bullying and victimization among students with exceptionalities. *Exceptionality Education, 16,* 193-222.

DeKlyen, M., & Odom, S. L. (1989). Activity structure and social interactions with peers in developmentally integrated play groups. *Journal of Early Intervention, 13*, 342–352. Drukpa, D. (2015). A Critical Perspective on Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a Mainstream Classroom: Lessons for Bhutan. *RABSEL, the Centre for Educational and Research Journal, 16*(1), 73-90.

Duchesne, S., & McMaugh, A. (2016). *Educational Psychology* (5th ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Cengage Learning Australia.

Dybvik, A. C. (2004). Autism and the Inclusion Mandate. *Education Next, 4,* 42-49.

Eldar, E., Talmor, R., & Wolf-Zukerman, T. (2010). Successes and difficulties in the individual inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the eyes of their coordinators. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(1), 97-114.

Franco, N., & Levitt, M. J. (1998). The social ecology of middle childhood: Family support, friendship quality, and self-esteem. *Family Relations, 47*(4), 315-321.

Garrote, A., Semier Dessemontent, R., & Moser Optiz, E. (2017). Facilitating the social participation of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools: A review of school-based interventions. *Educational Research Review, 20*, 12-23.

Harper, C. B., Symon, J. B., & Frea, W. D. (2008). Recess is time-in: Using peers to improve social skills of children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 38(*5), 815-826.

Harrison, J. R., & Barabasz, A. F. (1991). Effects of restricted environmental stimulation therapy on the behavior of children with autism. *Child Study Journal, 21*, 153-166.

Hartup, W.W., & Stevens, N. (1999). Friendships and adaptation across the life span. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 8,* 76-79.

Henry, S., & Myles, B. S. (2007). *The comprehensive autism planning system (CAPS) for individuals with Asperger's syndrome, autism, and related disabilities: Integrating best practices throughout the student's day.* Shawnee Mission, KS.: Autism Asperger.

Humphrey, N. (2008). Including Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in Mainstream Schools. *Support for Learning 23*(1), 41–47.

Humphrey, N., & Symes, W. (2010). Responses to bullying and use of social support among pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) in mainstream schools: A qualitative study. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 10*(2), 82-90.

Irvine, A.N., Lynch, S.L. (2009). Inclusive education and best practice for children with autism spectrum disorder: an integrated approach. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(8), 845-859.

Leatherman, J. M. (2007). "I Just See All Children as Children": Teachers' Perceptions About Inclusion. *The Qualitative Report, 12*(4), 594-611.

McConnell, S.R. (2002). Interventions to Facilitate Social Interaction for Young Children with Autism: Review of Available Research and Recommendations for Educational Intervention and Future Research. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders,32,* 202-232.

McGillicuddy, S., & O'Donnell, G. M. (2014). Teaching students with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 18*(4), 323-344.

McIntosh, K., Herman, K., Sanford, A., McGraw, K., & Florence, K. (2004). Transitions: Techniques for promoting success between lessons. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 37*(1), 32-38.

Mineo, B. A., Peischl, D., & Pennington, C. (2008). Moving targets: The effect of animation on identification of action word representations. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 24,* 162–173.

Minshew, N., Meyer, J., & Dunn, M. (2003). Autism spectrum disorders. In S. Segalowitz &I. Rapin (Eds.), *Child Neuropsychology Part II* (pp. 863-896). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Morin, A. (2014).*Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): What You Need to Know.* Retrieved from https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/special-education-basics/least-restrictive-environment-lre-what-you-need-to-know

Nadesan, M. H. (2005). *Constructing Autism: Unravelling the 'truth' and understanding the social.* London: Routledge.

National Research Council. (2001). Educating children with autism. In C. Lord, C., &J. P. McGee(Eds.), *Division of Behavioral and Social for Children with Autism.* (pp. 235-302). Washington DC: National Academy Press.

Nevill, R. E., & White, S. W. (2011). College students' openness toward autism spectrum disorders: Improving peer acceptance. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 41*(12), 1619-162.

Noterdaeme, M., & Hutzelmeyer-Nickels, A. (2010). Early Symptoms and Recognition of Pervasive Developmental Disorders in Germany. *Autism, 14,* 575–588.

NSW Government. (2017). *Inquiry into Students with a Disability or Special Needs in New South Wales schools - Submission 135.* Sydney: NSW Government.

O'Dell, L., Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, H., Ortega, F., Brownlow, C., & Orsini, M. (2016). Critical autism studies: exploring epistemic dialogues and intersections, challenging dominant understandings of autism. *Disability & Society, 31*(2), 166-179.

Odom, S. L., & Strain, P. S. (1986). A comparison of peer-initiation and teacher-antecedent interventions for promoting reciprocal social interaction of autistic preschoolers. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 19,* 59–71.

Pancsofar, N., &Petroff, J. G. (2013). Professional development experiences in co-teaching: Associations with teacher confidence, interests, and attitudes. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 36,* 83-96.

Robertson, K., Chamberlain, B., & Kasari, C. (2003). General education teachers'relationships with included students with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 33*(2), 123-130.

Rodriguez, I., Saldana, D., & Moreno, J. (2011). Support, Inclusion, and Special Education Teachers' Attitudes toward the Education of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Autism Research and Treatment, 1,* 1-8.

Sansosti, J. M., & Sansosti, F. J. (2012). Inclusion for students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders: Definitions and decision making. *Psychology in the Schools, 49*(10), 917-931.

Soto-Chodiman, R., Pooley, J., Cohen, L., & Taylor, M. (2012). Students with ASD in Mainstream Primary Education Settings: Teachers' Experiences in Western Australian Classrooms. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 36*(2), 97-111.

Symes, W., & Humphrey, N. (2010). Peer-group indicators of social inclusion among pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in mainstream secondary schools: A comparative study. *School Psychology International, 31*(5), 478-494.

Syriopoulou-Delli, C. K., Cassimos, D. C., Tripsianis, G. I., & Polychronopoulou, S. A. (2012). Teachers' perceptions regarding the management of children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 42*(5), 755-768.

Welton, E., Vakil, S., & Carasea, C. (2004). Strategies for increasing positive social interactions in children with autism: A case study. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 37*(1), 40-46.

Xin, J., & Leonard, D. (2014). Using iPads to Teach Communication Skills of Students with Autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 45*(12), 4154-4164.