AUTISM NEWS

of Orange County & the Rest of the World

June 2004 *Volume 1, Issue 2*

Cover illustration by Gilles Tréhin

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COVER FEATURE

Faculté des Scarmattons – Reality or Fiction?

Scarmattons University. (March 1999)

The Scarmattons Faculty is located in the 15th district, it's one of Urville's most modern Universities. It is close to the skyscrapers of the Futurville 2000. The campus is the work of architect Gilbert Oisellon (1861/1933). On this drawing we distinguish in the skyline the B.F.U. Tower, which is the work of architect Gabriel Nadernes (1863/1930). Joining the Eiffel Tower for the title of the world's highest tower until 1930.

This tower, like the campus, was built for the 1923 Universal Exhibition which had for theme *"Democracy, is it a reality or a fiction?"* It received 34,000,000 visitors.

In the foreground, we have the Cours des Calicots. It was built in 1866 by the architect Joseph Idrain (1840/1908).

We are grateful for the opportunity to share one of the fantastic drawings of Gilles Tréhin with our readers. Please read more about Gilles in his article on page 16.

Mission Statement

Autism News Orange County *& the Rest of the World* is a collaborative publication for parents and professionals dedicated to sharing research-based strategies, innovative educational approaches, best practices and experiences in the area of autism.

Submission Policy

The Autism News of Orange County *RW* is available free of charge to parents and professionals of children with autism. The opinions expressed in the newsletter do not necessarily represent the official view of the agencies involved.

Contributions from teachers, therapists, researchers and relatives/children of/with autism are welcome. The editors select articles and make necessary changes.

Please submit articles in Microsoft Word using font size 11, double-spaced, and no more than four pages in length. Longer articles should have pre-approval from the editor. Photos are encouraged and when submitted with articles the permission to include is assumed.

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Please visit our website:
www.autismnewsoc.org

Editorial

By Vera Bernard-Opitz, Ph.D.

The first issue of the Autism News of Orange County *and the Rest of the World* (ANOC) was received with overwhelming enthusiasm from parents and professionals in Orange County and the Rest of the World. We are very grateful for this warm welcome of the ANOC and will try our best to live up to the expectations created. Two-thousand copies of our first newsletter have been circulated to parents, schools, medical and rehabilitation centers, private practitioners, libraries and research institutions in Orange County, the US, Australia, Europe and Asia.

Along with our newsletter we have developed a website, which makes the information available to an even bigger group of readers. This website gives valuable links to the involved agencies and shares articles from the ANOC precursor, the Autism News of Singapore. Archived summaries by parents, public talks and reports of applied research can be found. We hope this will make the newsletter available to those we have not yet reached. Please share our website www.autismnewsoc.org with friends and colleagues!

The present issue highlights the spectrum of approaches in assessing, training, mainstreaming and living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

- **Dorothea Lerman** (Louisiana State University) presents a useful behavioral method to assess pre-academic and receptive language skills. Her innovative procedure allows for the separate assessment of skill deficits and non-compliance.
- **Mark Durand's** talk (University of South Florida) was summarized in our News section. He shared his exciting findings, that parental optimism can override the potentially negative influence of the child's behavior problems.
- **Diane Twachtman-Cullen** (ADDCON Center, CT) stresses the importance of interactive, emotional experiences in language learning for children with ASD, an aspect that may sometimes be forgotten in language intervention programs.

We welcome Diane Twachtman-Cullen as a new member on our Advisory Board!

- **Michelle Garcia Winner** (Center for Social Thinking, San Jose) gives an interesting case story that demonstrates the strategies of teaching social thinking building blocks to children with ASD.
- **David Monkarsh** (Private practice, Orange, CA) outlines the problems of children with ASD and summaries specific strategies that educational environments must develop to match these needs.
- **People with ASD such as Jennifer McIlwee Myers, Gilles Tréhin and a parent of a child with autism** offer a view of autism relevant for families as well as involved professionals: How do sensory problems affect behavior? How is the world for an autistic savant? And how can careful planning make a positive impact on family time?

We thank our contributors for sharing their perspectives and hope that you all enjoy and benefit from the following articles, highlights and announcements.

Vera Bernard-Opitz, Ph.D.
Clin. Psych. Editor

A Rapid Assessment of Skills in Young Children with Autism

By Dorothea Lerman

Abstract

In this study, we evaluated a new approach for conducting skills assessments. The effectiveness of two assessment "packages" — one containing several motivational procedures and one containing several potentially effective prompts — was evaluated across two to three skills for each child. Results suggested that the assessment was useful for selecting specific educational goals for individual children, as well as for matching skills with appropriate instructional strategies.

Background and Rationale

Research conducted over the past 40 years has shown that educational interventions based on the principles of applied behavior analysis are highly effective for teaching skills to children with autism. For example, instructional prompts (e.g., modeling the correct response; exaggerating certain features of the task), reinforcement of correct responses, task interspersal procedures (i.e., alternating unknown tasks with known tasks), and opportunities to choose reinforcers or tasks have been shown to enhance learning and compliance (Koegel, Koegel, & McNerney, 2001; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 2001).

An important first step when developing educational programs is to assess the child's current skills in the targeted curriculum areas. Standardized skill assessments typically do not generate information that is precise enough to identify specific behaviors to teach (Romanczyk, Lockshin, & Matey, 2001) or to determine the most effective instructional strategies for individual children. Thus, many authors recommend that parents and teachers conduct informal assessments by directly evaluating the child's performance on tasks drawn from a pre-established curriculum. However, few specific guidelines have been delineated for conducting skills assessments or interpreting the results.

A child may fail to respond or may respond incorrectly to a task instruction because the child

cannot perform the skill independently (e.g., requires instructional prompts), because the child is not sufficiently motivated to perform the skill (e.g., requires potent reinforcers for compliance), or both. When the skill is assumed to be part of the child's repertoire, the failure to follow task instructions is typically termed "noncompliance." However, skill deficits and noncompliance often are difficult to distinguish during an initial skills assessment.

The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate an improved assessment method. We reasoned that appropriate targets for skill acquisition programs might be more readily identified by comparing the effectiveness of motivational procedures versus instructional prompts for improving performance on specific tasks. Results also would assist parents and teachers in selecting the most effective interventions for individual skills. To ensure rapid outcomes, several potentially effective prompts (task alteration, modeling) were combined into one assessment condition and several potentially effective motivational strategies (reinforcement, choice, and task interspersal) were combined into a second assessment condition.

Who Participated?

We evaluated the viability of this approach with six children, ages 4 to 6 years, who were diagnosed with autism. The children were enrolled in the Autism Summer Treatment and Research Program (ASTAR) at The Louisiana State University.

What Did We Assess?

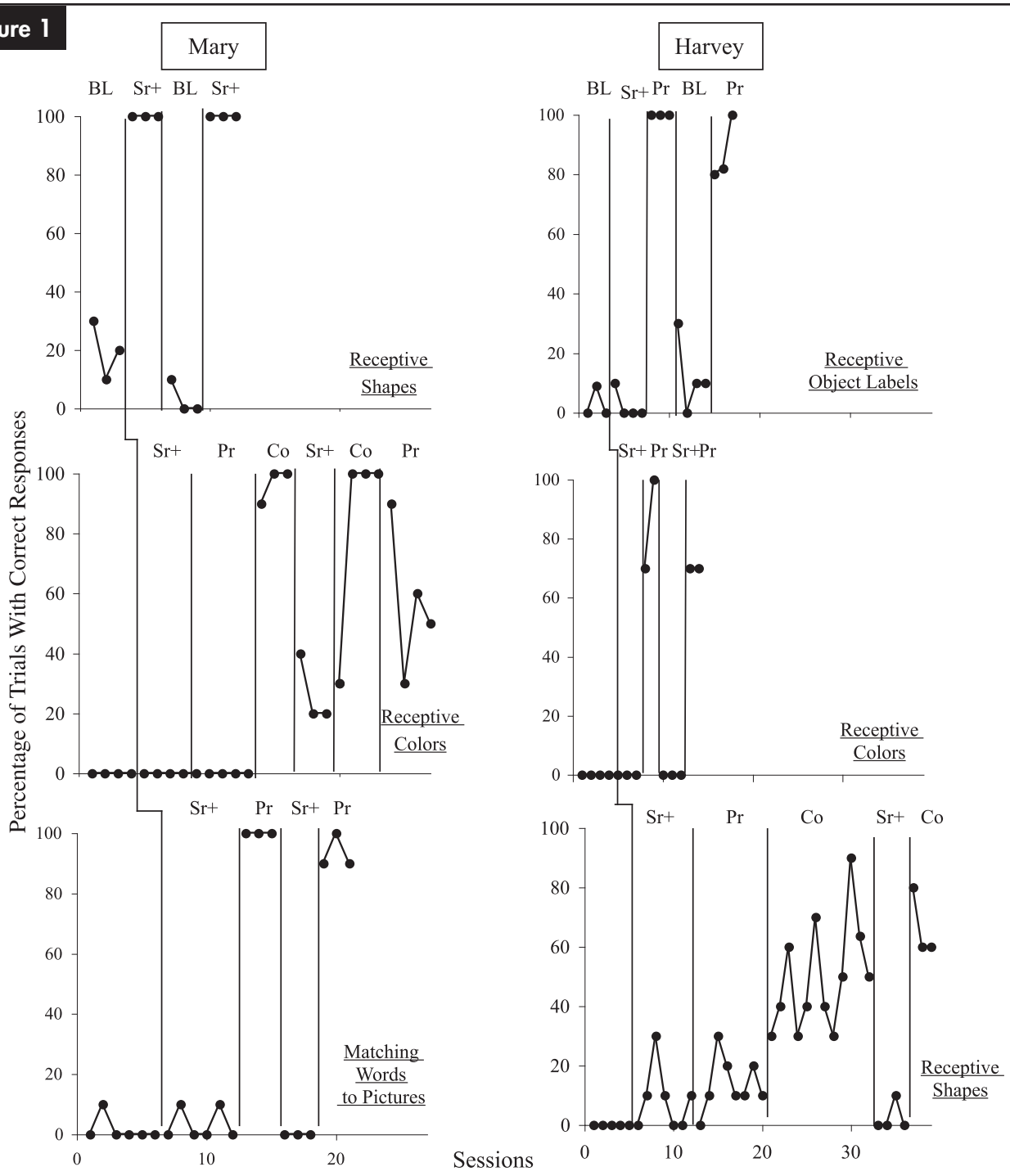
A variety of pre-academic skills (identifying shapes, numbers) and receptive language skills (following one-step instructions, such as "roll the ball") were selected from popular curriculum guides for children with autism (e.g., Maurice, Green, & Luce, 1996). Correct responding on these tasks was defined as initiating the requested action within 5 s of the experimenter's instruction and completing the response within 10 s of the instruction. Prior to the study, preference assessments also were conducted as described by Fisher et al. (1992) to identify highly preferred reinforcers (toys, food, attention) for each child.

How to Distinguish Skill Deficits from Noncompliance?

The child's responding on each task was evaluated under several conditions, as outlined in the table. Each session consisted of 10 instructional trials. At

Condition	Procedures	Purpose
Baseline	No consequences were provided for correct or incorrect responses.	Identify tasks associated with low (target) and high (maintenance) levels or accurate responding.
Reinforcement	Target task was alternated with maintenance task; praise plus a tangible reinforcer was delivered for correct responses; opportunities to choose tasks and reinforcers were provided.	Determine if performance would improve with motivational procedures only. If so, further direct instruction was unnecessary.
Prompts	At least two prompts (e.g., modeling the correct response; altering the task material) were simultaneously presented with the instruction on each trial.	Determine if performance would improve with prompts. If so, additional instruction with prompts and prompt fading would be appropriate.
Combined	The procedures for the Reinforcement and Prompts conditions were combined.	Rule out the possibility that the strategies evaluated in the assessment were ineffective.

Figure 1



the beginning of each trial, the experimenter placed the materials on the table in front of the child and delivered the relevant instruction (e.g., "hand me green"). The assessment began with a *Baseline* condition, which continued until we had identified two or three "target" tasks (those associated with 30% or fewer correct responses) and at least one "maintenance" task (those associated with 80% or greater correct responses). Next, a *Reinforcement* condition was conducted with each target task. If the child's performance did not improve to at least 80% correct within 2 to 3 sessions, the skill was assessed in the

Prompts condition. If the child's performance did not improve to at least 80% correct under any of the assessment conditions, the motivational procedures were combined with the prompts.

Results and Implications for Parents and Teachers

Results for all six children suggested that this assessment approach was useful for evaluating performance on educational tasks in a clear and efficient manner. For five of six children, correct responding on one or more of the target tasks immediately increased to high levels under the reinforcement condition. This finding indicated that the motivational procedures were adequate to produce mastery on these skills. Performance on at least one task for each child did not improve to a meaningful degree under the reinforcement condition yet did so when prompts were introduced alone or combined with the motivational procedures. These results suggested that the children were unable to complete these tasks independently and that additional training with prompts and prompt fading procedures would be appropriate for these skills.

Results across target tasks for two participants are shown in Figure 1 on the previous page. For Mary (left panel), performance improved under the reinforcement condition for receptive shapes, under the prompts condition for matching words to pictures, and under the combined intervention for receptive colors. For Harvey (right panel), performance on two of the three skills (receptive object labels and receptive colors) met the criterion only when prompts were used. For the remaining skill (receptive shapes), correct responding rarely exceeded chance levels under either the reinforcement or prompts conditions. Responding was variable but eventually met the criterion when the interventions were combined.

These results highlight the importance of including each targeted skill in a systematic assessment prior to program development. Parents and teachers could use this information to match targeted skills to appropriate interventions. For example, further instruction with prompts, prompt fading, and reinforcement would be recommended for skills that fail to reach mastery with reinforcement procedures but that do so with prompts. Strategies to promote maintenance and generalization (e.g., reinforcement schedule thinning, incidental teaching) would be indicated for skills that are mastered under the reinforcement condition alone. Finally, tasks that exceed an acquisition criterion (e.g., 80% correct) in the absence of reinforcement or prompts (i.e., in the baseline condition) could be incorporated into task interspersal procedures as maintenance tasks when teaching new skills.

This skills assessment also may be useful for differentiating between skill deficits and noncompliance in an objective manner. If a child has already acquired a skill but is noncompliant to the task instruction, the reinforcement package alone should lead to improved performance. On the other hand, the failure to follow a task instruction may indicate that the skill has not yet been acquired if reinforcement procedures alone have minimal effect on performance whereas prompts are associated with increases in correct responses. The reliability and validity of this assessment and the generality of this methodology should be evaluated further across other types of skills and responses.

For further details please check original article

Lerman, D.C., Vorndran, C.M., Addison, L., Kuhn, S.C. (2004). A rapid assessment of skills in young children with autism. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 37, 11-26.

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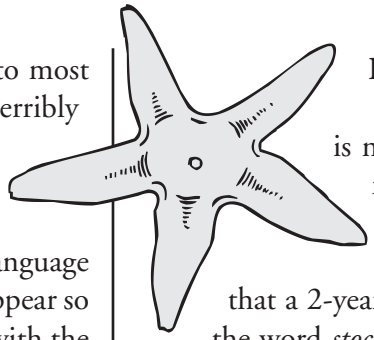
Ten Take Home Messages for Successful Language Intervention

By Diane Twachtman-Cullen

The ability to converse is second nature to most of us. In fact, it is not until something goes terribly wrong with the process that one pays any attention to what is involved in being able to understand and express oneself. Indeed, it is undoubtedly the ease with which language evolves in neurotypical people that makes it appear so effortless. Notwithstanding–and in keeping with the adage that things are seldom what they seem–language development is anything but simple. In fact, **the ability to understand and use language is arguably the most complex and multifaceted skill that human beings are called upon to learn**, a process that involves several interrelated cognitive and social-cognitive competencies.

Unfortunately, something does go terribly wrong in the development of language in children with autism. When it does, it requires not a piecemeal approach, but rather a collaborative effort among professionals from the different disciplines that serve these enigmatic children. It also requires an understanding of how communication and language develop. Fortunately, there is a rich research literature in the language development area to aid and abet the unseasoned interventionist. What follows are the **take home messages of successful language intervention**, and the principles upon which they are based.

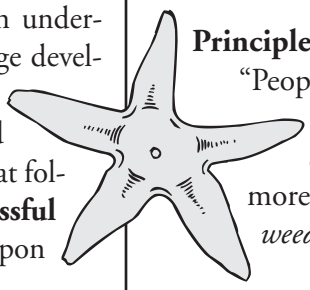


Principle 1

According to Bloom (2002), it is not possible to learn what a word means unless one has an understanding of the relevant concept. For example, it is unlikely that a 2-year-old would learn the meaning of the word *stockbroker*, regardless of the number of times he or she is exposed to it, since its conceptual basis would be out of the child's reach. Moreover, even if the child could learn to pronounce the word, he/she would still not be able to comprehend it.

Take Home Message 1

In order to develop an understanding of the conceptual basis of words, children with autism need lots of "time in" with basic level names of things that are relevant and comprehensible to them.



Principle 2

"People cannot learn words unless they are exposed to them. . . . No matter how smart babies are, their first words are more likely to include *milk* and *spoon* than *weed* and *gene*" (Bloom, 2002, p. 90).

Take Home Message 2

When establishing a base vocabulary for children with autism, it is important to use words that are both *useful* to them, and embedded in their day-to-day experiences. To maximize understanding, they should be used in a context that supports meaning.

Principle 3

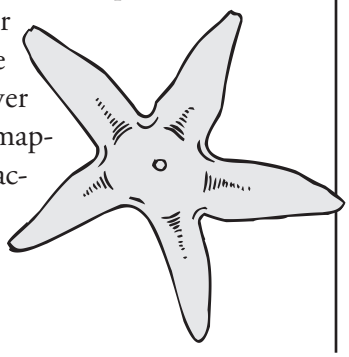
"It is not how often the adult says the word that matters; it is how often the child processes it" (Bloom, 2002, p. 90). This could qualify as a truism, and yet it is a point that can easily be overlooked in rapid-fire speech drills.

Take Home Message 3

Intake* is more important than *input. Hence, it is important to work within a motivating context, and to use augmentative means such as manual signs to direct attention and facilitate processing.

Principle 4

"Learning a word involves mapping a form such as the sound 'dog,' onto a meaning or concept, such as the concept of dogs. . . .To learn a word you not only need to hear the form and possess the relevant concept; you have to put the two together" (Bloom, 2002, pp 89-90). Clearly, meaning would not be well-served if the child with autism mapped the sound *rabbit* onto the concept of *dog*. And yet mapping errors frequently occur in autism because of the associational learning style that children on the spectrum manifest. For example, if at the moment of receiving a desired stuffed animal the child hears his/her parent say, "Look at that," the name for that particular toy, in the child's mind, may forever remain, *lookathat*. Indeed, mapping errors may well be a factor in idiosyncratic language use in autism.



Take Home Message 4

Adults need to make the word-to-object connections for children with autism that they are unable to make for themselves.

Principle 5

"Children do not learn words by employing mechanical mapping procedures. Children learn words as an integral part of their social interactions with other persons as they attempt to understand what adults are trying to get them to do and as they attempt to get adults to do things for them" (Tomasello, 2001, p. 113).

Take Home Message 5

Children with autism need **guided in-context interactive experiences** delivered by a master "language craftsman" if they are to crack the complex language code.

Principle 6

According to primate language researcher, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh (1994), "comprehension [is] the essence of language, and [is] far more difficult to explain and to achieve than production." (p. 174).

Take Home Message 6

Comprehension is the power that fuels expression. Hence, far greater emphasis needs to be placed upon comprehension as the basis for *meaningful* expression in children with autism. Unfortunately, **comprehension is usually given little attention in comparison to verbal expression, since it is easier to observe the external structure of spoken words and sentences than the processes that go into comprehension**.

Principle 7

"When we are able to add emotional input into learning experiences to make them more meaningful and exciting, the brain deems the information more

important and retention is increased." (Wolfe and Brandt, 1998, p. 13).

Take Home Message 7

Positive emotional experiences provide a motivating context for language learning in children with autism. **The opposite is true as well–negative emotional experiences can have a detrimental effect on language development.**

Principle 8

Sylvia Ashton-Warner coined the terms "inorganic" and "organic" language to articulate the dramatic difference between language that is imposed upon the child, as in the case of the former, versus language that is internally motivated, as in the case of the latter. **Since organic language is internally motivated (i.e., flows from the child's own needs and interests) it is considered a vital, growing form.** Inorganic language, however, is essentially lifeless and hence meaningless to the child, given its imposition from outside.

Take Home Message 8

In autism there is a great deal of emphasis upon inorganic language. This can result in "cosmetic" gains–superficially impressive, but skin deep. **For language to have staying power in children with autism, it must be functional, and as such, it must serve *their* needs and interests, not ours.**

Principle 9

Children need to develop an internal, largely unconscious understanding of how language works before they can be expected to understand and use it. For example, they need to know that words stand for things and that when people use words they intend them to mean very specific things. This type of knowledge may be thought of as "inner language"–the internal scaffolding, if you will, that supports meaning.

Take Home Message 9

Understanding how language works enables children to use language as "the symbolic currency [for the] exchange of meaning" (Sacks, 1989, p. 39). This is a critical step in the language learning process.

Principle 10

In learning any skill, experience precedes understanding and understanding precedes performance. We know that this is true in math and in other skill areas, but we disregard the importance of experiential learning when it comes to language development.

Take Home Message 10

When it comes to language learning, **children with autism need contextually relevant experiences, and a great deal of "time in" with them before they can be expected to understand and use language.**

For the most part, the above-stated principles are based upon solid research in the area of language development. They are also rooted in the not-so-common commodity of common sense. The individual take home messages represent an attempt to translate these research-based principles into actual practice. The type of language intervention needed in autism is not rocket science, as the saying goes. Unfortunately, the actual provision of such therapy may be as difficult to come by as rocket science. No one discipline has cornered the market on all aspects of intervention in autism, and a one-size-fits-all mentality is inappropriate, even in the garment industry. Speech-language pathologists should not discourage professionals from other fields from giving their input regarding the development of communication and language. What is needed in language intervention for individuals with autism is for the professionals from various disciplines who serve them to come together and collaborate on their behalf. Indeed, that is the ultimate take home message.

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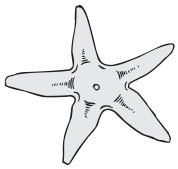


Using 'Social Building Blocks'— *from play into academics...*

Thoughts on how social skill deficits also relate to academic performance.

By Michelle Garcia Winner

Doug has difficulty playing during recess. He walks around the playground talking to himself, not being invited to play by students. He clearly is "different" from others in that he has not intuitively developed skills for playing, even with the assistance of special teachers. Relating to kids his own age continues to be a primary focus for his educational team. Doug has difficulty observing what other people are thinking. *During play and social interactions*, Doug's peers have been learning social thinking skills such as:

- *the ability to think about others*
- *observe what they were doing*
- *use of eye contact*
- *predict what others will do next*
- *determine the feelings of others*
- *get an idea how social play is organized*
- *keep their bodies at appropriate distances to interact*
- *form language to add to the play*

Other kids can figure out if they are welcome to join a group, what the group would do next, how the group is organized and how each feels about one another. Doug does not even realize how important these skills are: **thinking about others and their thoughts**. He does not understand why kids think it is so much fun to play together. Verbally, Doug loves to talk about things of great interest to him. For a fourth grader, he has amazing knowledge about space and NASA. He happily talks to adults and children alike about this topic, even if they do not have the time or interest in what he is saying. Doug thinks that communication is talking about what ***he*** likes to think about.

Doug's parents are aware that he is quite different in his social development from their other children. However, he appears to be so smart and determined to learn information that is of interest to him that they do not perceive him as a child with learning disabilities. The school district gave him tests that indicate a solid intelligence, and language and academic skills at grade level. While everyone recognizes that Doug is not like most other kids in class, his peers think Doug is quite "odd." It is difficult for his educational team to figure out if he needs further special education services and if so, what exactly the services should be. It is agreed that the speech language pathologist will work with him on developing social skills and the occupational therapist will work with him on developing better penmanship since he has difficulty with his fine motor skills.

Play skills are incredibly important in helping students learn how to interpret social information embedded in their academic studies. Reading comprehension of literature, social studies and history all require an understanding of other people's motives, intentions and emotions. Math estimation and word problems require a student to move beyond the facts and provide some level of interpretation and analysis. Written expression can even be impacted when a student has difficulty getting his thoughts organized around a topic that is not intrinsically interesting to him.

One thing that Doug's teachers do notice is that 4th grade for Doug is a lot harder than 3rd grade. He is noticeably more anxious during class, he is not learning how to organize his many materials well and his classmates seem increasingly aware that he is not someone they could easily work with. During an IEP meeting for Doug, his parents express growing concern about his lack of abilities. They think he feels left out of social interactions with his peers. They request Doug learn the "rules" of conversation with others as the focus of his speech and language sessions.

Doug's IEP team (speech language pathologist, school psychologist, occupational therapist and classroom teacher) agree with his parents' descriptions of Doug's lack of "social connectedness." However they want to take a different approach to helping him. They recommend exploring what **"social thinking building blocks"** Doug is missing.

He also continues to struggle with written expression and overall organization of his materials.

The team recognizes that Doug does not fully understand how he is supposed to think about others, whether he is playing, talking or reading about characters in a book. Short term goals are written to explore what kids are likely thinking during play, what teachers are likely thinking when they ask kids to work in groups and/or what characters are likely thinking when he reads about them in books.

As their discussion continues, they realize how many skills spring from *thinking about others* during play and within a classroom setting. It is determined that Doug needs to become better at *learning to watch or observe others*. A goal is written to help Doug figure out *what students and teachers are planning to do next*. Benchmarks are written to help Doug learn to *"read" other people's eyes so that he can see where people are looking often relates to what they are thinking about*. A benchmark is also written to help him *read people's body gestures and body actions so that he can figure out what messages are communicated through posture and movement*. The team discusses that this is the same type of information students use to interpret and comprehend written information or when they want to play and interact at recess.

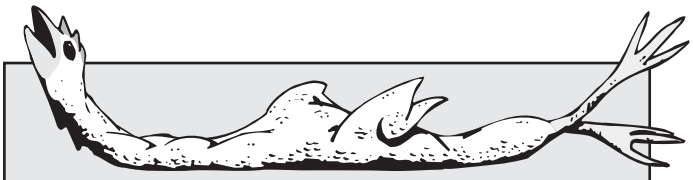
They also decide to encourage Doug to use language to explore what other people are thinking/talking about so he can learn that social interaction and communication are more than just talking about one's own interests. A benchmark is written to help Doug learn strategies to remember things about others, since it *is much easier to ask people questions if you can remember things that they like to do or that they are planning to do*.

The team cautions everyone to be aware that when a child is dealing with significant weaknesses in social thinking their social learning can be slow but steady. Progress can be achieved. They help the parents to be comfortable with goals that are not just focused on an ultimate end product - of achieving

success in the 'big ticket social items' such as spontaneous group play and conversation. For Doug, a student with a very significant **social thinking learning disability**, the short term goals, for this year and probably next year, will be in helping Doug to gain and utilize some basic building blocks of social thinking and knowledge. These goals will help him to slowly, but surely, develop skills towards *understanding and interacting with peers, learning more about how to participate within a group in various settings and being able to interpret and understand more abstract information* in his required reading in literature, social studies and even science. Other goals focus on his needs in the area of occupational therapy, behavioral attention issues in the classroom and his need to learn to ask for help in class. It is recommended that the resource teacher become more involved in his case. (It is important to remember that these goals were drafted specifically for Doug; each student will have their own unique set of goals based on their presenting skill levels.)

It is acknowledged that while the speech language pathologist, classroom teacher and the occupational therapist are important members of this educational team, each person who works and lives with a child with difficulty in social thinking and social interactions is responsible for following through with these basic social lessons. Thus the special educators need time not only to work with the child but to also work with teachers and parents, helping them to learn to teach these unique, but very important, skills to children on the high end of the autism spectrum or with similar diagnostic labels. The ultimate goal is to help Doug, and other children like him, to become a better social thinker by becoming more aware of his social surroundings and expected responses across the home and school day.

Michelle G. Winner, MA, CCC is a Speech Language Pathologist in private practice in San Jose, California. For more information visit her website: www.socialthinking.com. ♥



Humor can be helpful in situations that may otherwise be embarrassing. Michelle Garcia Winner sold rubber chicken (quite dead looking!) and indicated, that banging them on her head in social skills groups was used to teach making mistakes in social situations from a humorous side ("Oops I goofed again"). Please use idea with sensitivity though!!!

INCLUSION: The Construction and Maintenance of Comprehensible Social and Educational Environments

By David J. Monkarsh

Schools are educational settings that are made up of individuals who share a set of common beliefs and practices. In these learning environments, there are many social behaviors and expectations that individuals have of one another. Well before they enter school, typically developing children have a foundation of shared social knowledge that children with autism do not possess. This knowledge guides the development of social adaptive behavior by identifying appropriate goals for conduct in a variety of situations. Learning to use specific skills and strategies for reaching personal goals allows individuals to generate behavioral plans to meet their personal needs and build a sense of social competence. This is possible only when individuals are able to participate in social and learning environments that are comprehensible and meaningful.

Most children display the innate capacity to share in this process of acquiring social knowledge and adaptive behavior without any formal teaching or

direction. However, children along the autistic spectrum present with neurologically based difficulties that inhibit their ability to informally learn and use these skills. Since they do not intuitively acquire social understanding of others, individuals along the autistic spectrum often do not grasp the rules of social conduct which govern their interactions. This "social blindness" makes it particularly difficult to understand the unspoken behavioral and communicative expectations others have of them. For this reason, social and educational settings need to provide autistic individuals with structured environments that provide visible and explicit rules to guide the processing of information and social conduct.

Visual Schedules
- Identify sequence of daily routine
- Facilitate transition
- Promote predictability
- Aid in the development of independent work

Communities rely upon schools to teach both formal knowledge and a framework of shared social understandings to all students. Since children in a community present with a broad range of skills and deficits, determining an appropriate educational placement for a child is a highly individualized process. Proper placement requires matching an individual's existing skills and learning style with a suitable learning environment. This match assures that students have the opportunity to understand the timing and sequencing of the school day. Visual schedules and checklists can be used to promote a student's understanding of daily activities, transitions, assignments, and rules governing classroom conduct. They help construct a predictable learning environment that allows students with autism to anticipate and plan for what comes next. A good match results in students experiencing a sense of personal empowerment, and it diminishes their need to try to improperly control events and others.

Structured Environments provide/support
- Visible rules
- Organizational skills
- Framework for spontaneous skills
- Independent work

Finding an educational setting that is a good match is a task that is multi-dimensional in nature. An understanding of an individual's academic and information processing abilities is a necessity. Structured educational environments must promote a student's ability to learn skills which are used in an independent and spontaneous manner. Appropriate placements also need to provide a systematic basis for transferring and generalizing learned skills to new situations with new people. This requires a plan for rehearsing and practicing skills in new settings as soon as a skill has been mastered.

When a child and an educational setting are properly matched, the impact upon a student's thoughts and actions is easy to see. An increase in appropriate behavior and social interaction is observed. Since behavioral problems in the classroom reflect skill deficits that diminish a child's efforts to behave competently, a proper placement results in students displaying more acceptable behaviors.

Guidelines for Attention and Focus
- Identify what others find important
- Help with shifting attention from one activity to another
- Aid in interpreting the meaning of classroom events

Structured programs of instruction need to assure that students are able to learn through both direct observation and personal experience. Children need to be specifically taught what's important to look at during class and on the playground. Teaching children how to shift attention upon spoken direction helps them to actively participate with others in the classroom's activities. Learning to use this skill in a timely manner allows a child to share a sense of joint attention with others. This ability enables a student to comprehend and engage in the spoken and unspoken realms of communication and action that quietly direct classroom conduct.

It is also important to match a program to a student's capacity to process and integrate tactile, auditory, and visual stimuli within the learning environ-

ment. A good placement requires that an individual's sensory capacities can process and integrate the demands of an educational setting.

A child's sensory profile needs to be developed, and a sensory diet should be implemented if a child is over or under stimulated by classroom activities. Children need to be taught how to use a program of self-monitoring that actively involves them in adapting their sensory needs to the classroom's daily routines and activities. Supports that enhance a learner's ability to function independently and require fewer external prompts are fundamental to this process.

Sensory Considerations
- Match child's sensory profile to class environment
- Prevent overload through "Sensory diet"
- Arrange for preferential seating

Sometimes a proper match of a student with a classroom program requires the direct support of an instructional assistant who is a paraprofessional. This individual should have adequate training in helping students to organize, produce work, and self-evaluate behavior and academic performance. Teaching the assistant how to utilize visual checklists to promote a student's ability to self-monitor is vital. Efforts must be made to enhance a child's independence so that reliance upon the instructional assistant does not diminish personal initiative and the establishment of self-confidence.

Appropriate placement in a learning environment results in nurturing a student's capacity and desire to learn independently. .....To participate successfully in a structured learning environment, an individual does not need to learn everything that is being presented to all members of the class. Priorities and goals for each child must be established so that it is possible to identify how to seek out individualized learning opportunities to meet a student's broad range of needs.

Schools and educational programs reflect a community's need to provide all group members with a shared base of knowledge and social behavior. Since we are all "included" in the community at birth, it is a grave mistake to question whether any individual should be fully included within one of the community's formal programs of learning and instruction. How to include all members of the community in appropriate programs of education then becomes a practical rather than a philosophical consideration.

David J. Monkarsh, Ph.D., is a Clinical Child Psychologist in private practice in Orange County. ♥

Acceptance
Belonging
Community

Orange County Department Of Education's 2003 Teacher of the Year

In our last issue of the Autism News of Orange County we introduced you to the agencies supporting the newsletter. This issue we'd like to take the opportunity to tell you about Diane Gallagher, a teacher at the Interagency Assessment Center (IAC) in Laguna Niguel.

The IAC is a specialized program providing assessment, intervention, transition planning, parent education and support for children 24 – 36 months old with a suspected diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Diane was voted the Orange County Department of Education's Teacher of the Year in 2003. She began her interest in supporting the disabled community after fulfilling a community service requirement while in high school. After her graduation from the University of Alabama, she

taught a variety of ages and abilities from high school to the little ones she now teaches daily.

By the time children find their way to her classroom, the families are in the delicate time of initial discovery and confirmation that their children will face additional challenges in their lives. Her natural compassion and depth of knowledge about autism and special education is a winning combination that allows her to help parents understand what lies ahead for them. She is a strong supporter of parent education. She works hard to develop a relationship of trust with parents and provides the support needed to create a sense of empowerment.

Equally important to the work she does with children and their families, Diane is a role model for the para-educators she works with, as well as other teachers. She has been with the Orange County Department of Education since 1984 and has served as a Model Classroom Teacher and a Mentor Teacher. The young adults that assist her in the classroom have learned valuable lessons that will help them as they move forward with their own careers. ♥

Welcome to Gilles Tréhin's World

Hello, let me introduce myself, my name is Gilles Tréhin, I'm 28 and live in Cagnes sur Mer, near Nice, in the south-east of France.

I'm told I have autism, some say I have Asperger's Syndrome (it's very similar). Maybe it is the reason I have been drawing since the age of 5 and I have always been fascinated by big cities and aeroplanes.

In 1984, I started to be interested by the conception of an imaginary city called Urville. The name came from *"Dumont d'Urville"*, a scientific base, in a French territory of the Antarctic. Since then, I made many drawings of Urville, and wrote a historical, geographical, cultural and economic description. I also have a book project, called "Urville Sightseeing Tour" that will be in print this month. My greatest

pleasure is to be invited to give a lecture on Urville because I can make it exist! **Gilles Tréhin** ♥

Gilles is the son of Paul Tréhin, Vice President of Autism Europe. At the age of 8 years he was diagnosed as autistic by the Yale Study Center. Early on Gilles' parents noticed various talents in their son, such as perfect pitch, early fascination with multiplication tables and prime numbers, as well as 3 dimensional drawings. All of these occurred before he was five.

Combined with a fabulous imagination, drawing has been his strength ever since. He has invented an imaginary city called Urville picturing it in about 300 drawings, comparable to the one on our cover. He also has invented names of personalities and events that made its history.

His parents are trying to help Gilles, who would like so much to make a living out of his art. Gilles is selling his pictures at very reasonable prices at his website. He likes to travel to new cities to make presentations about his imaginary city. He has done so at several autism congress and conferences. His presentation of Urville is a real show, even though he is not aware of it... One can just walk through the streets of Urville as if it was real.

We hope that you will find his work interesting. ANOC will be featuring Gilles' artwork in future editions.

http://urville.com
http://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org/savant/gilles.cfm ♥

Understanding How Sensory Issues affect Behavior

By Jennifer McIlwee Myers

Greetings. My name is Jennifer, and I am an adult with Asperger's Syndrome, which is a type of high-functioning autism. I really enjoy talking to parents and teachers who have children with autism in their lives, since they are often missing important pieces of information that would help them co-exist more happily. I would like to provide you with a little information about sensory issues which I hope will do just that.

Parents and teachers alike often say things to me like, *"My child is trying to drive me up the wall!"* or *"Why does this child enjoy getting me angry?"* They don't understand that many "behavioral problems" are often just the child's reactions to sensory issues that often come with autism. The resulting conflicts, between the child with autism and the adults around them, are usually unnecessary and counterproductive.

What I would really like to give you is a little bit of goodwill towards the people in your life who are on the "autism spectrum." I very much believe that cultivating **goodwill** through understanding is vital to typical and autistic people who need to live with each other. I want you to know that those of us who are on the spectrum are truly not trying to make you crazy, nor do we enjoy it when you come close to having a nervous breakdown. We are usually just trying to cope the best we can with a very strange set of sub-disorders that affect our behavior in odd ways.

Many of you reading this already know a bit about sensory issues, and understand that people with autism can have hypo-sensitivity or hypersensitivity in any of the five senses. For example, you may know that the noise of a school bell can cause real pain for the sensitive ears of a child with autism; another child might get upset about having to sleep on new sheets, since the crisp new fabric feels like sandpaper to her hypersensitive skin.

While many non-autistic people do understand the above-described basics of sensory issues, most aren't able to understand what it means to live with dramatically different senses on a day-to-day basis.

For example, what would you do if you had a really hard time telling how hot or cold you were? What if your brain could signal to you that something was wrong, but you had no way of knowing that the problem was that you were really overheated. On a really hot day, you might be out wearing jeans and a turtleneck while everyone else was wearing shorts and tee shirts. Since the feeling of air on your skin might be truly painful, you wouldn't want to change into other clothes, and without any sense of how overheated you are, you are walking around sweating profusely, getting very overheated and dehydrated – and you don't know it. Your body and brain would be reacting to the physical stress of dehydration almost "behind your back," so you would feel really rotten without having any idea why. You might just, under those circumstances, find yourself in a less-than-charming mood.

It can be very hard for a child to cope with these kinds of mixed-up internal signals. It's really confusing to not be able to feel low-grade hunger, thirst, internal pain, or tiredness in a normal way. Me, I'm 38 and I know my own sensory issues pretty well, so I have strategies: when I find myself feeling upset or angry, I run over a mental checklist, asking myself when I last ate, if I had enough sleep, if I'm starting to have an allergy attack, etc.. Without that checklist, I would pretty much feel anything that is wrong with my body as purely mental PAIN and ANGER.

For a child who has the above problems, being punished for "acting up" when it is just tired, hungry, and stressed beyond what it can handle is overwhelming and scary. Children with autism are not trying to cause other people problems, but they may not have the innate ability to deal with the pain they are going through. They may not know that they are pushing you to the edge of a screaming fit; they just HURT and react accordingly.

How can this information help **you** to interact with your child (or student) better? And what about that "Goodwill" thing I mentioned at the start of the article?

Goodwill, as I use it here, simply means assuming a certain level of humanness in your child with autism. When you assume that your child is being mean spirited and deliberately behaving badly, you are creating a situation where the two of you are working against each other. If you see a child trying to hurt you and if you punish them for things they can't control, they won't understand what you are doing, and you seem to them to be acting in a mean and hostile way. It makes things tough for you both.

I know that children with autism do need consistent and appropriate discipline, just like all children. But if you see their difficult behaviors as coming from a person who is struggling to find a way just to be in a world that isn't really built for people with autism, you can act in a positive way to help yourself and the child, instead of acting out of anger, frustration and misunderstanding. You can then work on the very important task of determining what behaviors the child can and can't control, so that you don't waste time on the ridiculous task of trying to discipline a disability when you need your energy for the difficult task of reaching and teaching a child.

If you cultivate goodwill through understanding, you can also do something very wonderful that all of us on the autism spectrum really need you to do: see that very different, very unusual child as a real, honest-to-gosh, feeling human being!

As a child, Jennifer McIlwee Myers was the classic 'little professor', with many of the variations now known to be typical of Asperger's Syndrome. She showed exaggerated facial expressions at home but very little affect outside of her immediate family and she exhibited self-stimulatory behavior. She had poor play skills and had difficulty relating to other children. Intellectual precocity was accompanied by unusual social and emotional immaturity. Jennifer received a host of conflicting diagnoses from various sources but was finally diagnosed with AS at the age of 36. She is involved in the Autism Society of America, as the Secretary of the North Orange County chapter, and in the Interagency Autism Group. She also gives presentations on issues in autism for various school and parents' groups in and around Orange County.

Jennifer McIlwee Myers ♥

The Trip of a Lifetime

By Susan Armitt

In January 2003, my husband, Mark, and I decided to attend a family wedding in New Jersey later that year. The trip would be made in September, and we were going to take our 12-year old son, Matthew, for his **very first plane ride**. Matthew was diagnosed with autism at age 4 and currently attends a non-categorical special day class as a sixth grader. He is an only child, but he is the leader of the pack with my home day-care children. He is a happy child, who talks extensively about topics of his interest (mostly fire station stuff), but who has difficulties when his routine is disturbed. Here we were wanting to take this very long trip with Matthew, but he had never flown in a plane or taken a vacation in his life. We were excited and scared because Matthew's routine would be interrupted, and we were unsure about his reactions.

Early in the year we made our reservations and began to prepare Matthew for the big trip. We began by showing him photos of his Aunt Teresa's house where we would stay, as well as photos of the family and friends we would see during our visit. Matthew and I went to the library and checked out books on New Jersey, New York, the 911 disaster, firemen and airplanes. We made trips to the airport to visit the terminal and to look at the airplanes. We looked up what kind of airplane we would be flying on and reviewed the seating diagram with Matthew so he would have a visual picture of what would be happening along the way. As a precaution we added a prescription for three valium in addition to two bottles of DMG[1].

All of our planning was worth it. We arrived at the airport, found our seats and prepared to begin our trip. Matthew looked out the window and chewed gum during takeoff. He panicked for a few seconds when the breakfast trays were passed out, so the flight attendant quickly removed the trays and Matthew was able to walk around until he calmed down. The rest of the trip went well, and he even slept for two hours.

While in New Jersey, we stayed at Aunt Teresa's house and everyone was interested in helping Matthew feel at home. Since Matthew is fascinated with fire trucks, fire houses and the like, his cousin's boyfriend, Steve, who is a fireman came over and let Matthew wear his fire helmet. Matthew got to go to the fire station and climb all over the fire trucks and try on all the fireman's gear. **Matthew was one happy kid!**

Matthew did very well at the wedding ceremony. The only big problem came at the reception where we were seated by the DJ; the music was just too loud. My husband and I took turns with Matthew outside which helped him remain calm.

The best part of the vacation came after the wedding when we took the long anticipated trip to New York City. When we arrived in Manhattan, Matthew held on to my hand tightly. The first thing he said upon seeing all the tall buildings and traffic was

"Wow, this is awesome." As we walked towards Times Square, he finally began to loosen his grip. What followed were trips to Toys R Us, the ABC Television Network Building, Rockefeller Center, CBS, FAO Schwartz, and Tiffany's. Matthew melted down at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Perhaps he was tired or the vastness of the church was unsettling. We took him outside, gave him his DMG and caffeine and he recovered without further incident.

Our next stop was at Fire Station 23, where the firemen let Matthew climb on the fire trucks and engines; try on their special gear, and even gave him a t-shirt with their logo. They made Matthew feel very special.

The rest of the day was spent taking a carriage ride through Central Park and a subway ride to view Ground Zero. Matthew had many questions related to 911. We stayed a while to look at the devastation and then finished up by visiting Chinatown and Little Italy. Later in the week, we visited the Statue of Liberty, something Matthew had learned about in school.

We never believed we would be able to enjoy such an eventful trip with so little trouble. I think all the planning made a big difference. Each day we wrote in a journal so we could keep track of our experiences. We had very few surprises, and when we did, we dealt with them and moved on. Matthew did so well. **He talks constantly about his experiences, and how much fun he had on the trip.** It was certainly worth all the effort and planning it took to pull it off. The trip gave us a chance to share our very special boy with people in our extended family, for them to get to know Matthew and to enjoy his enthusiastic approach to life.

Susan Armitt ♥

Editor's Notes:

1. *DMG is an amino acid prepared as a dietary supplement.*
2. *A copy of our newsletter has been sent to Fire Station 23.*

Some Ideas for Summer Fun in Orange County

Summer season is upon us. If you're looking for fun activities for your child, consider the following ideas. The parents, who staff Comfort Connection Family Resource Center (FRC) in Santa Ana, would be happy to assist you with exploring other summer activities.

Check out your city Parks and Recreation Department to find out about day camps and other recreational activities that may include children with disabilities. Most city Web sites are listed as follows: www.ci.CITYNAME.ca.us. You can also link to your city's Web site from the County of Orange Web site at www.oc.ca.gov, click on "OC Links," then click on "Local Regional Government." And, of course, you can find your city's telephone number in the Government Pages at the front of your phone book's White Pages.

For other camping opportunities, check out the California Camping Guide at www.acasocal.org.

Another idea your child might benefit from is Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. For Girl Scouts, look in the White Pages under "Girl Scouts," or call (800) 478-7248 or look at www.girlscouts.org. For local information about Boy Scouts, call the Orange County Council at (714) 546-4990 and find out more about the organization at www.scouting.org.

Contact your local library for a schedule of story time activities. Visit the Orange County Public Library Web site for event information at www.ocpl.org/.

Big Fun Gymnastics offers a variety of gymnastics programs at locations throughout Orange County for children with special needs. Call (310) 837-7849 or visit the Web site at www.bigfungymnastics.com.

Visit Heritage Park in Irvine where most of the play equipment is wheelchair accessible. The address is 4601 Walnut, Irvine, CA 92604. (949) 724-6750.

Visit the Santa Ana Zoo where children can enjoy a petting zoo. (714) 836-4000.

The resources listed here should help spark your creativity for summer fun with your child. If you would like additional assistance, please feel free to call on the staff at Comfort Connection FRC or check out the wealth of books, brochures, and videotapes as well as other reference materials. You are welcome to stop by Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. at Regional Center of Orange County, 801 Civic Center Drive West, Santa Ana, or call at (714) 558-5400.

Compiled by Regional Center of Orange County.

SEE PAC

Support, Educate and Empowerment for Parents of Autistic Children is a program developed in collaboration between For OC Kids, Regional Center of Orange County and the Assessment and Treatment Services Center of Newport Beach. The project goal is to provide parent training to families struggling with early diagnosis and treatment of their children with autism. Information and support is pulled from best practice. The project's multidisciplinary team focuses on parent empowerment through education.

SEE PAC training covers the following topics:

- Understanding the diagnosis and how children with autism develop
- Therapeutic interventions
- Behavior management techniques
- Parental advocacy regarding treatment and interventions
- Planning for transitions
- Developing resources for ongoing support and
- Managing family dynamics and autism.

The next opportunity to attend SEE PAC begins in late July. A bilingual (Spanish/English) class will meet for 10 weeks from 6:30 to 8:00 PM on Tuesday Evenings at For OC Kids in Orange. For questions regarding this program contact For OC Kids at 714 939-6118 or by e-mail at forockids@uci.edu.

Event Highlights

Learned Optimism:

On November 4, 2003, Mark Durand, Ph.D., University of S. Florida, spoke to a mixed audience of parents and professionals at Regional Center of Orange County about ways to address sleep problems and other behavioral concerns. One of the surprises of his presentation was when he asked the question, "What do you think was the best predictor of later problems?"

- It is not severity of a disability
- It is not severity of the behavior problem
- It is Parent Pessimism! (Albany Prevention Project- longitudinal study, Questionnaires on Resources and Stress- Short Form - QRS-F Friedrich, Greenberg, & Crnic, 1983)

Following the initial work by Martin E. Seligman (1996, 1998, 2002), Mark Durand is continuing his research in this area by helping teach families how to think with optimism.

According to Durand:

Pessimists believe:	Optimists believe:
• Bad things will last a long time • Bad things will influence everything I do • It is my fault	• Bad things are temporary setbacks • Bad things are confined to this situation • It is not my fault
• My child is disabled • Shopping with my child is a disaster • I will never have a life of my own	• My child needs help learning • My child is not yet ready for long shopping trips • I am working toward more time for myself

Graduates who have been part of this line of research are organizing approaches to help families gain the optimism that helps them cope. The approaches are as follows:

Approaches to Teach Optimism

• General Family Support
• Providing Intervention Strategies
  • Recognize and change reactions to stress
  • Recognize and change problem thinking
  • Recognize and change the obstacles
• Positive Family Intervention

This is a growing area of research. There will be more on this topic in the future!

Invitation to Meetings of the Autism Society of Orange County

Monthly support groups are held on the second Monday of each month from 6:30 – 8:30 PM.

Coming Dates:

July 12th • August 9th
September 13th

Place:

5591 Yuba Avenue
Westminster

For further information and driving directions please visit the website: http://www.asaoc.org.

Patti Arnold, President, ASAOC

Upcoming Staff Development, Conferences and Parent Trainings

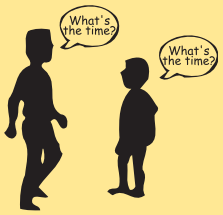
(Partial Listing — September to December 2004)

There are several opportunities for continuing education and support that will be offered by various organizations. The S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project of Orange County strives to provide affordable fees to both families and staff. Most of the sessions are held at the Orange County Department of Education in Costa Mesa. Each session has a specific focus, some pertaining to early interventions, some with more of an emphasis on the older aged student. Registrations may be limited, therefore call early!

Date/Time/Place	Topic/Speaker	Dev. level	Approximate Fee	Contact
Sept. 15 4:00-8:00 PM OCDE	Overview Social Thinking *M. Garcia Winner*	Older students – +8yrs and older	$25	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Sept. 16 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	Day 3 Perspective Taking *M. Garcia Winner*	Older students – +8yrs and older	$55	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Sept. 17 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	Day 4 Organizational Skills *M. Garcia Winner*	Older students – +8yrs and older	$55	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Sept. 20 & 21 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	Links to Language Training *Pam Payne &* *Dr. Lauren Franke*	Early to Middle age developmental levels	$245 (includes manual)	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Oct. 29 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	Coaching Comprehension – Creating Conversation *Dr. Lauren Franke*	All ages	$55	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Nov. 2 4:00-8:00 PM OCDE	Overview 'Icon to I Can' – Using Visual Supports within Structured Teaching *Barbara Bloomfield*	All ages	$25	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Nov. 1 & 2 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	'Icon to I Can' – 2-day training *Barbara Bloomfield*	All ages	$100	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Nov. 3 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	Advanced Day for 'Icon to I Can' (those who have attended first level) *Barbara Bloomfield*	All ages	$55	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
Dec. 6 8:30-3:30 PM OCDE	Refresher Day for Links to Language (those trained in Links) *Dr. Lauren Franke*	All ages	$55	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137

SOME EXAMPLES OF AUTISTIC BEHAVIOR
ALGUNOS EJEMPLOS DEL COMPORTAMIENTO DE PERSONAS CON AUTISMO

Avoids eye contact
Evita el contacto visual



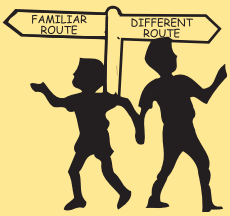
Copies words like a parrot ("echolalic")
Repíte las palabras como un loro ("en forma de echo")

Shows preoccupation with only one topic
Demuestra preocupación/interés en solo un tema/asunto

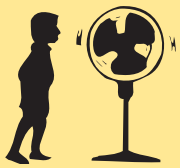
Lacks creative "pretend" play
Carece el juego creativo

Shows indifference
Demuestra indiferéncia

Displays special abilities in music, art, memory, or manual dexterity
Demuestra capacidades especiales en musica, arte, memoria or destreza manual



Does not like variety: it's not the spice of life
No demuestra interés en variedad



Shows fascination with spinning objects
Demuestra fascinación con objetos que gíran

Laughs or giggles inappropriately
Risa/reír inadecuadamente

Shows one-sided interaction
Demuestra interacción que es unilateral

Shows fear of, or fascination with certain sounds
Demuestra miedo de/ó fascinación con ciertos sonidos

Some Examples of Autistic Behavior
Algunos ejemplos del comportamiento de personas con autismo

- Difficulty with social interactions.
  Tienen dificultad para socializar con otras personas.
- Problems with speech.
  Tienen problemas con su lenguaje.
- Disturbed perception.
  Tienen una percepción anormal de los sucesos que acontecen a su alrededor.
- Abnormal play.
  Su forma de jugar es anormal.
- Resistance to change in routine or environment.
  Se resisten a cambios en sus actividad rutinarias ó a su medio ambiente.

Does not play with other children
No juega con otros niños