RUNNING HEAD: Asperger Syndrome

Changing the Future for Amazing Children: How to meet the needs

Of Students with Asperger Syndrome

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Abstract
W.A. Lance once said “No person can be a great teacher unless he takes genuine joy in
the successes of those under him.” This sums up the role of education today. Teachers
should want to work as hard as they can to support every student in becoming successful.
For decades educators have been trying to find ways to meet the needs of every
individual. Special Education students propose an interesting conflict for the educational
system. Should they be mainstreamed? How should we teach them? Who should teach
them? Asperger’s Syndrome, a milder case of autism, is a fairly recent discovery that
educators and administrators are having a difficulty deciding how they should be
educated. The major concern is that since it is such a new discovery not a lot of research
has been done explaining what causes this syndrome, and how severe it should be. Those
who have Asperger’s Syndrome are very capable of being in schools and should receive
the same education as any other student. These children are very intelligent and should
not be underestimated. The educational system has already started creating facilities,
accommodating their needs and providing opportunities that will help benefit not only
children with Asperger’s syndrome but all children who have a learning disability. After
all, everyone who wants to be educated should be educated and it is the schools job to
insure that every person is educated.
Changing the Future for Amazing Children: How to meet the needs of Students with Asperger Syndrome

Children with disabilities have been challenging the educational system for many decades. Where to put these students? Should they be in a “regular” classroom? Who should teach them? Are these students harmful to the other students? Is it possible for them to learn? How will people respond? However, it should be noted that children with disabilities are gifted individuals that are forced to deal with many challenges but along with these challenges come many rewards as well. People who are suffering from disabilities are truly amazing people that see the world in a light that people without disabilities can never imagine. Many of them see the good in everything and love life for what it is. They are not caught up in opinions and stereotypes, people who have disabilities are truly remarkable people. People need to look beyond the physical and mental disabilities and look into the hearts of these people.

Asperger’s syndrome, a syndrome very similar to autism; is one of these cases by which people stereotype and underestimate their capabilities. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV), Asperger’s syndrome is defined as “ qualitative impairment in social interaction as manifested by marked impairments in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction, failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level, a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g. by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to other people) lack of social or emotional
reciprocity.” It is a disability that is characterized by difficulty in social relationships, especially with verbal and non-verbal communication and by restrictive and repetitive behavior (Barnhill, 2001). It was discovered by Hans Asperger of Austria in 1944, but English speaking nations were not aware of it until the 1980’s (Barnhill, 2001). Additionally, the American Psychological Association did not recognize this syndrome until 1994, causing this syndrome to be very recent and unknown. Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) is very similar to autism in that both disabilities cause children and individuals to have much difficulty with social interaction. However, it is a much milder case then autism and is placed at the more “functioning” end of the spectrum. Individuals with AS have a difficult time understanding and comprehending rules that are not written down in front of them. They tend to challenge teachers for using figurative language for they take words very literally. “Since social behavior is the most central and important of characteristics of human beings, people that have AS are at a huge disadvantage when coping with the social world. (Barnhill, 2001).” Since people who have AS have a difficult time adapting to social behavior it makes AS very traumatic in teenagers and adolescence greatly, this also often causes depression and anxiety in some cases. Other huge concern with Asperger’s syndrome is that many doctors do not diagnose it until later in life thus individuals are not receiving proper treatment (Gillberg and Ellers, 1998). As with any disability, each individual case is completely different. The mannerisms of each person are different from every other case and the behaviors also are on a wide spectrum.

An interesting aspect of Asperger’s Syndrome is that the diagnosis is based on behaviors that are often inconsistent. Since AS is so recent, researchers are still
uncovering and discovering the mysteries of AS. Additionally, since it is so recent, many researchers have discrepancy defining the actual behavior of an individual with this particular disability. However, if a child is diagnosed early in life it will allow them to adjust easier to school and allow educators to provide the type of education that they need. These students are capable of many things, educators, psychologists and parents just need to believe in these amazing children and attempt to see the world the way that they do.

One misconception that many people make about Asperger’s Syndrome and other Autistic syndromes is that the individuals are not intelligent. They could not be more wrong. Children with autism are often very intelligent, however, sometimes have difficulty communicating his or her knowledge. They tend to have difficulty following directions only because the English language is so complicated and they typically take the language very literally. Children with Asperger’s Syndrome also tend to understand math and science a lot easier than free thinking subjects such as English and literature (Adreon, 2001). The unfortunate thing is that although these students are very bright and intelligent and have the capabilities to excel and do very well in school, the behavior problems and difficulties with socialization will hinder them to be successful. For example, a student may find mathematics to be very simple and can do computations without a lot of difficulty, however, often children with AS have difficulty understanding lesson plans which prevent them to continue to do well. Often how well AS students do in school is not measured by an IQ or intelligence level, but in some cases how well a student can follow instruction and communicate (Adreon, 2001).
Another concern with AS is that many individuals tend to have obsessive-compulsive like behaviors. These students need to follow an exact routine. Due to these behaviors it makes it extremely difficult for students to change schools and sometimes to even change classroom from period to period. The change from middle school to high school is especially difficult for children with AS (Adreon, 2001). This may due to the fact that these children are not only dealing with the challenges of AS but are also going through puberty and wanting to fit in. Studies indicate that scores in science and social studies go down drastically when students enter middle school and when entering high school scores also decrease in science and social studies but also reading (Adreon 2001). Reasoning behind these test score drops might be due to more departmentalized teaching, larger schools and the motivational techniques that teachers often use at the middle school level such as competition.

In high school and middle school a strong stress is placed upon social interaction and relationships. Those with AS have a very difficult time expressing emotion and being compassionate to other people’s feelings (Adreon, 2001). They tend to have trouble making eye contact, using facial expressions and using gestures with individuals and interacting with others. Although many of them want to maintain social relationships, it is very difficult to keep them for long periods of time. Instructional lesson plans are also complicated because many children with AS tend to take the English language very literally. They do not follow unwritten or verbal rules and directions very well. It is important not to be sarcastic around them as well because they will take you seriously. In addition, it is difficult for those with AS to communicate what they are feeling or to communicate using words or verbalization. It is important to remember that
many children with AS and other forms of autism have very sensitive sensory responses and stimuli such as whispering and other visual and auditory stimuli tend to cause them pain.

So now the question is with all of these hindrances and difficulties are children who have AS capable of an education? How? What measures should be taken to make sure that they are being educated? The first thing that should be done is education. If teacher, administrators, advocators and students are aware of what AS is and what can be done then appropriate action can be taken to help the child in every which way possible. The earlier that teachers are able to catch and detect students with AS the more helpful they can be and the easier it will be for students to adjust to the difficulties that they will be facing. Unfortunately AS is not detected in students until late adulthood because the social interactions due not become clear until late into the education life of a child and often teachers do not understand the interesting behavior that AS children often have (Adreon, 2001). It is important that teachers and parents work together to create the best situation for the child. Create meeting groups so that everyone involved in the life of these students are aware of everyone else’s efforts.

The second effective idea is to include children. Yes, it is true that studies have been done indicating that autistic children and other strains of these syndromes do have difficulty with social problems, however, sheltering these children could be the worst option for these children. The more interaction these children have the better they will become at adapting to certain social situations. For example, if there is a child who is diagnosed with AS and is in a special education program and has no interaction with students who are non-special ed, then how can we expect them to be able to relate to
society if they have never been forced to deal with common every day situations? The more exposure these children have to common activities the easier socialization will become for them (Adreon, 2001). Many people believe that by keeping them separate it will protect them from the harsh realities of the world, this is a false preconception. By sheltering these students you are making their adult life more difficult with more complications.

Although most AS students should be able to be “mainstreamed” or be able to attend regular classes there should be some modifications made in the classroom. Simple things such as where they sit in class can highly affect how well that they due. For example, if a student sits in the front of the room there will be fewer distractions. Additionally, visual aids are extremely helpful in helping them to understand concepts and lesson plans. AS students often get overwhelmed, make sure that these students are on schedule and on track. Some students might also require a reduction in assignments, however, not all students will need fewer assignments because they will be capable of the traditional workload. However, in some cases it must be taken into consideration that it often takes individuals with AS longer to focus and recall information (Adreon, 2001). They often lack the ability to creatively think and communicate opinions, thus making paper writing and other activities more difficult. In addition, students should also receive extended testing time. If they have more to say or explain, time should not hinder their grade. Let him or her take as much time as needed to explain his or her reasoning.

Since AS children have a difficult time following rules and communicating, it might be beneficial for them to have a note taker. It takes a lot more effort for them to concentrate on subjects, so by having a note taker a student can fully concentrate on what
the teacher is explaining. Again, it must be stressed that a lot of time children with AS are not “slow” or unintelligent, they just have a difficult communicating the knowledge that they have.

Also, it might be beneficial for the student if they have outside assistance for academics as well. Often one-on-one help will insure that students understand material. Repetition is known to help students learn information stronger. The more that these students hear the material may increase the chance of them actually recalling it. Places such as resource rooms will create a smaller environment where AS students can feel more comfortable. At the same time, the large classroom forces students to interact with one another. The two contrasts will help students to adjust and challenge them at the same time. It is strongly recommended not to underestimate their abilities, as educators it is our job to challenge them.

Many AS children tend to have one thing that they are very passionate about (Bock, 2001). It might be suggested that teachers attempt to incorporate these interest into lesson plans. If a lesson plan has something to do with something that they are interested in it is often understood and recalled much easier. Simple ideas such as using word problems that have to do with baseball if they like baseball, or reading books on sports. These ideas often take little effort, but help student’s o enjoy the learning process much more. The last thing that teachers want to do is to make school painful for the students.

As stated before students with AS have a difficulty with change and things that are not typical or habitual. It is very important that students create a schedule that they are used to and that works for them. The end of the school day fatigues many students,
so schedule difficult classes in the morning. Also, attempt to keep schedules from day to
day very similar. If a child knows what to expect then they will also be able to focus
more.

Above all, listen to these students. They are amazing individuals with so much
energy and intelligence. These children have hopes and dreams and want to be just like
everyone else. They want to have boyfriends and play on sports teams. Do not let their
learning disability effect every aspect of their life. Believe in them and see the world
through their eyes because it truly is an amazing experience. A generous man once said
“It does not matter the kind of car I drove or how much money I had in my bank account,
but I did make a difference in the life of a child, and that made all the difference.”

Educators have the wonderful gift to change the world one child at a time, a challenge it
might seem, but in the end, when one sees that smiling face, one knows that it was a job
well done.
References


