

Teaching Communication Skills to Students with Severe Disabilities (Third Edition)

By **June E. Downing, Amy Hanreddy and Kathryn D. Peckham-Harden**

Reviewed by SINEAD MC LOUGHLIN, a special class teacher in St. Mary's Special School, Delvin, Co. Westmeath.

This book is intended for professionals working with individuals who have significant difficulties around the area of communication. More specifically, the content and information contained in this book focuses on a group of learners with communication and learning disabilities between the ages of three and twenty-two who receive appropriate education in a mainstream setting and have the opportunity to interact with and learn from their peers without disabilities. With this in mind, it is important to note that this book is also very applicable to special class settings.

The first chapter discusses the term 'communication' and its characteristics. It describes how individuals with autism, developmental delay and significant physical disabilities can find even the most fundamental interactions challenging. It also examines how students with sensory impairments who have not been exposed to visual or auditory stimuli often encounter delays in acquiring communication skills.

Chapter 2 highlights the importance of a collaborative approach when ensuring the communication needs of each individual are being met. Recommended practices are explored to facilitate the optimum use of the expertise of each group member.

After reading Chapter 3, teachers will find themselves equipped with a communication checklist which can be readily adapted to any student with significant communication difficulties. There is a completed sample checklist included to illustrate how to maximise its benefits in the classroom. Interview questions are also provided in this chapter which teachers can use to determine a student's communication skills and strengths. Such questions encourage

teachers to identify areas in their teaching that can be adopted to enhance their students' communication skills. This chapter is written with the intention of highlighting the purpose of assessment, i.e. identifying a student's strengths and using these to work towards achieving new targets. The ability of a student, the conduciveness of the physical and social environment and the availability of communicative opportunities are among the considerations that one must be mindful of when conducting an assessment of communication skills.

At the end of each chapter, one will find a FAQ section, a list of resources and an extensive list of references should one wish to further explore the topics covered in a particular chapter. In addition to this, each chapter also concludes with recommended activities to enhance learning and practice in your setting. This is the third edition of this book which includes two new chapters; the first chapter exploring the relationship between communication and challenging behaviour, and the second chapter examining the link between communication and literacy. The greater emphasis placed on technology throughout the book is also a welcome addition.

In conclusion, this book is very informative and would prove very beneficial as a reference guide for teachers of students with general learning disabilities who have significant communication difficulties. While the context of this book is American, the content is transferable to all Irish classrooms and settings. This book is a valuable resource that enables teachers of students with such communication difficulties to reflect on their day to day teaching. The recommendations and suggestions as to how one can incorporate more opportunities for meaningful interactions between students and their communication partners are practical and can be generalised to different areas of the curriculum.

TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES (THIRD EDITION) by June E. Downing, Amy Hanreddy, Kathryn D. Peckham-Hardin, is published by Brookes Publishing Co, Baltimore, 2015 and costs \$49.95.

Copyright of Reach is the property of Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.