

Teaching Adolescents with Autism: Practical Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom

By Walter Kaweski

Reviewed by Áine Moloney, a teacher in St Michael's House Grosvenor School, Leopardstown, Co. Dublin.

The author, Walter Kaweski, in partnership with Sacramento State University, trains teacher candidates pursuing the special education credential. He has worked as a teacher, autism specialist, and inclusion coordinator in California. Contributions in the book are from Jean Gonsier-Gerdin PhD, at California State University. In the preface the author states that this book is born from the experience of raising a son diagnosed with autism and is informed through research and many years of teaching experience.

The book is written in support of teachers who seek to understand and improve intervention strategies for students with ASD across a variety of middle and high school settings. His intended audience comprises of general education teachers, support specialists, administrators, parents and others interested in research-based interventions for adolescents with autism and other developmental disabilities. It is the author's view that, despite research studies that continue to warn of uninformed support for students with developmental difficulties, teachers are held responsible for supporting students with complex needs in general education settings. This book aims to be a resource that addresses the needs of this large and diverse population of young people.

Inclusive education is described as being firstly an attitude, a value system from years of research that strives to include students with disabilities in all aspects of the school experience, with reference to the American federal law, IDEA. The author gives four principal criticisms of segregated placements, and strongly supports inclusive education as it applies to the American system. However, there are no supports for special education settings given, which could be interpreted by the reader as special schools being a poor second best option for an individual student.

The book is organised into eight sections, which can be read sequentially or referred to individually for specific content. It provides a good summary of current theory and practical classroom strategies in an inclusive setting, for example ideas about arranging of classrooms to accommodate students with ASD.

This book is easy reading, with a narrative style. It has clear explanations of concepts such as sensory characteristics which can be difficult concepts to understand when written in more specialised terminology. The table of contents is well laid out for ease of reference. A chapter on organisation has many practical suggestions to support the student for physical organisation and thought organisation. A chapter on behaviour has interesting ways of looking at behaviour, for example it states that the three most important factors in behaviour support are “1. Relationship, 2. Relationship, 3. Relationship” (p. 46). It also invites the reader to consider nine respectful notions when thinking about what to do about challenging behaviour, for example, self-determination and survival strategies for students.

This book has a good interspersed of illustrations and photographs throughout. Tables and figures are user friendly. An appendix has a glossary of frequently used terms which are well defined and particularly useful for teachers. The resources section at the end of the book has inclusion support resources, with permission from their authors, which are very user friendly for a general education classroom, for example a behaviour checklist for yard and break, and a positive behaviour support analysis. Of particular interest to me was an easy to follow social engagement chart, which could be used also to chart progress for communication I.E.P. goals. In addition, there is a link to an internet site with useful, printable checklists which could be helpful for special needs assistants (SNAs).

This book is very useful for the intended readership, allowing for the fact that it refers to the American school system. Kaweski achieved his goals for writing this book in that there are indeed many practical strategies for use in the classroom. The book also lives up to the author’s explanation in the preface that it is written from the heart of a father combined with the experience of an educator, with focus on the individual not the disability.

My overall recommendations are that this is an easy to read, practical and thought provoking book. It provides a good resource for general education settings, special schools, student teachers, parents and related professionals.

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