

## **Developing Play and Drama in Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders**

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The introduction to this book underpins the whole philosophy of the authors and their well thought out presentations. A question is asked, “Why is it that educationalists know that children learn through play, yet seem to lose sight of this when it comes to children with special needs?” Their aim then, “is to put some fun back into education, with the knowledge that children learn best when they are enjoying themselves, and teaching too becomes so much more pleasurable.” I must say, I most heartily agree with this sentiment.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with a rationale for drama and a theoretical basis for the importance of play. This section is a bit ponderous at times, but it allows the authors to display their research in a readable way. Chapter 3 goes on to explore the role of the teacher and offers some practical examples of how a teacher’s intervention can play such a pivotal role in classroom play structure. Chapter 4 shows how play can be incorporated into a learning medium through drama. The authors explain that all levels of ability can benefit from a constructive progressive approach. I found Chapter 5 especially interesting, due to its offering of various opportunistic engagements which assist children with autism to expand their social horizons, in other words to understand the consequences of their actions and behaviours. The authors explain that make-believe play provides a safe structure within which behaviours and their consequences can be explored. It is claimed that a learning through drama approach can be directly beneficial in addressing the “triad of impairments.”

How social meanings are constructed, and drama presentations which allow children with autism to understand their place in the scheme of things, are threads that weave through Chapter 6. The authors explain the necessity of pitching drama at an appropriate level, if the control is to be understood and acted upon. Excellent examples are given of how to do this. Chapter 7 deals with narrative and text, exploring how to use script, text, and children’s writing of their own plays. Anything that stimulates and encourages imagination, the authors maintain, provides a great step up the learning ladder. The book concludes with a series of appendices that elaborates on practical strategies and guidelines for teaching play and drama. They are useful and will be of benefit to teachers.

This book is thoroughly researched and presented with detail. While at times I found the style somewhat expansive it was useful in supporting theory with practical examples. There is something in this book for every teacher who currently uses or who wishes to use drama in their curriculum work. It will now be a well-used reference for my drama requirements. I recommend that teachers make this an addition to their reference library.

**DEVELOPING PLAY AND DRAMA IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS** by Dave Sherratt and Melanie Peter is published by David Fulton Publishers, London, 2002, and costs Stg£15.00.