Inventing Tomorrow
Improving Transition Services for Students with Autism
Carolyn Long, MCD SLP-CCC
Bozeman High School, Bozeman MT

The term ‘high functioning autism’ refers loosely to individuals on the autism spectrum with average or above average intelligence that are able to complete activities of daily living independently or with minimal assistance.

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association rolled Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS under the official term Autism Spectrum Disorders in the DSM-5.

Autism Spectrum and High Functioning Autism Association (ahany.org)

The Controversy with Labels--Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, Low Functioning Autism

- Many individuals with autism and their families do not appreciate additional 'labels' related to function; they prefer to have individual descriptions of specific skills
- On the other hand, many individuals with autism do identify with specific 'groups' such as Asperger’s
- The skill set we are identifying includes students in regular education or a combination of reg ed and supported classes, independent with basic daily living skills (dressing, eating, etc.) but struggle with executive function type tasks (time management, initiation, etc.). They have difficulty with social interactions and may or may not have sensory needs, obvious anxiety, and/or obsessive/compulsive tendencies.

Thinking Autism Guide--Blog (www.thinkingautismguide.com)

Current Statistics on Autism and Employment

- 85% unemployment rate for individuals with autism (looks at individuals currently seeking employment which leaves out many individuals who have given up
- Disabled people comprise about 20% of the population and have an unemployment rate of 10.5% in 2016 which decreased to 9.2% in 2017.
- The U.S. unemployment rate as of June 2018 is 4%
- People with intellectual disabilities have an estimated unemployment rate of 21%

Employment

- Communication Skills
- Problem Solving Skills
  - Companies are being more open-minded about a candidate having all of the qualities they are looking for and taking in the 'big picture' instead
  - Willing to do more 'on the job' training

Forbes.com--We Are Nearing a New Paradigm in the Job Market Where Employees Will Have the Power (Jack Kelly)
Companies are launching ‘autism hiring initiatives’ across the country. There are new programs and companies working within their interview process and training programs to hire individuals with autism.

Dan Marino Foundation—has worked with clients on the autism spectrum for 25 years—developed ViTA, a software program for developing interview skills.

Experts predict a 230 percent increase in the number of adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the next eight years, with 35 percent of 18-year-olds with ASD attending college. This presents an opportunity both for people with ASD to integrate into the workforce and for employers to tap into the talents of a sizable population.

Marcia Scheiner, President, Integrate Autism Employment

Much of the work done at Google, and in many organizations, is done collaboratively by teams. The team is the molecular unit where real production happens, where innovative ideas are conceived and tested, and where employees experience most of their work. But it’s also where interpersonal issues, ill-suited skill sets, and unclear group goals can hinder productivity and cause friction.

The researchers found that what really mattered was less about who is on the team, and more about how the team worked together. In order of importance:

- **Psychological safety:** Psychological safety refers to an individual’s perception of the consequences of taking an interpersonal risk, or a belief that a team is safe for risk-taking in the face of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive. In a team with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea.

- **Dependability:** On dependable teams, members reliably complete quality work on time (vs the opposite - shirking responsibilities).

- **Structure and clarity:** An individual’s understanding of job expectations, the process for fulfilling these expectations, and the consequences of one’s performance are important for team effectiveness. Goals can be set at the individual or group level, and must be specific, challenging, and attainable. Google often uses Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) to help set and communicate short and long term goals.

- **Meaning:** Finding a sense of purpose in either the work itself or the output is important for team effectiveness. The meaning of work is personal and can vary: financial security, supporting family, helping the team succeed, or self-expression for each individual, for example.

- **Impact:** The results of one’s work, the subjective judgement that your work is making a difference, is important for teams. Seeing that one’s work is contributing to the organization’s goals can help reveal impact.
re:Work by Google

The researchers also discovered which variables were not significantly connected with team effectiveness at Google:

- Colocation of teammates (sitting together in the same office)
- Consensus-driven decision making
- Extroversion of team members

It's important to note though that while these variables did not significantly impact team effectiveness measurements at Google, that doesn't mean they're not important elsewhere.

College

- 2016 estimates on enrollment of students with HFA range from 0.7% to 1.9%
- Colleges estimate these numbers will continue to rise as laws and services promote enrollment (IDEA, ADA, etc.)
- Delayed diagnosis or reluctance to disclose diagnosis until a major problem has occurred
- 'Goodness of fit that is achieved and the planning that goes into transition to college' are key indicators of student success (Barnhill, 2016)

What our students offer...

- Honesty
- Fresh Perspectives
- Tenacity
- Tolerance for Repetitive Tasks or the Same Topic
- Memory/Working Memory, Strong Recall of Routines, Strong Will

What our students struggle with...

- Executive Function Skills (Attention, Organization, Initiation, Problem Solving, Memory, Impulse Control, Emotional Control, Planning and Prioritizing, Metacognition)
- Anxiety and Anxiety Related Disorders
- Social Communication
- Self Awareness
- Self-Esteem
Bridging the Gap through School Based Services (IEP)
Social Emotional Behavioral
Self Help and Independence
Communication
Speech/Language
Vocational

SEB continued

As anxiety increases the following skills decrease:
- Working Memory
- Attention
- Problem Solving
- Initiation
- Self-Control
- Language Skills
- Finding your car in the parking lot,
- Refraining from putting your cell phone in the washer, Pretty darn much everything

SEB continued

After diving into hundreds of research articles spanning the effects of stress on health and diseases, Theodore Dumas, Ph.D., (Associate Professor of Molecular Neurobiology at George Mason University presentation 'Calming an Overactive Brain' 2018) identified the following non-pharmacological factors that have the greatest biological impact on our physiological response to stress:

- Predictability—Successful prediction minimizes anxiety...
- Sense of Control (Real or Perceived)—Control minimizes anxiety...

Social Emotional Behavioral

- Addressing anxiety
- Addressing identifying emotions
- Preparing a student to navigate healthcare services independently (you may not need it now but here are these great people always waiting to serve…)—who, how, and when to access it...
- Increasing Student Independence

SEB continued

Anxiety—We can't prescribe medications and we're not therapists, so how do WE teach skills that address anxiety?

- Self Awareness
- Compensatory Strategies
- Stress Reducing Techniques (meditation, sensory breaks, EXERCISE)
SEB Activity
How can you build predictability and a sense of control into a student’s daily experience?
Lunchroom--
Going between classes--
Assemblies--

Self-Help and Independence
- Living arrangements--apartment, dormitory, family/relative’s home
- Roommates--identifying the skills an individual possesses (their habits, likes/dislikes) and the skills or attributes they would want in another
- Making medical and personal appointments
- Law Enforcement / Justice System

Self Help Independence continued
“No absolute truth exists about this or any other issue. The truth lies somewhere in-between the many sides of a story, buried amongst all of the facts and rhetoric.”
Autism Society of Indiana

The abstract for the article Persons with Autism and Criminal Justice: Core Concepts and Leading Cases states “Persons with mental illness or mental impairments are represented in U.S. criminal justice institutions at a disproportionately high rate.” In contrast to that statement, the abstract for the article A Systematic Review of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Criminal Justice System states “…it can be concluded so far that people with ASD do not seem to be disproportionately over-represented in the CJS.”

Self Help Independence continued
“The legal issues that commonly arise when individuals with autism are defendants in court cases, according to Mayes, include a defendant’s “competence” to stand trial and their “capacity” to commit a crime. In addition, if found guilty, the circumstance of a defendant’s ASD becomes a mitigating factor during the sentencing phase of a trial.” Autism Society of Indiana

Communication
First, let’s not forget that Autism is, by definition, a communication based disorder.
American Psychiatric Association – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) 2013

Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive, see text):

1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.

Communication
2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication.

3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.
Communication

ILAUGH Model--INITIATION of language, Listening, Abstract and Inferential Thinking, Understanding Perspectives, Getting the Big Picture, Humor and Human Relatedness (Michelle Garcia-Winner  www.socialthinking.com)

Social Competence Model (www.socialthinking.com)

Social Attention
Social Interpretation
Social Response
Social Problem Solving

Communication

The Lenses of Social Diplomacy

- Offer a way to break social information into quantitative information
- Offer insight into where the breakdown is in higher level individuals -- the students where it's super hard to pinpoint specifically what to work on
- Offer a teaching strategy that doubles as an independent strategy across settings

Communication

"My name is X, or Y as what my science classes address me by. I am a Junior with the dream of being a Journalist, to be able to show my own creativity and ideas. But I didn't always feel creative or thoughtful like I am now, I used to be "Troubled." When I started out on the ACSS, (Advanced Communication and Social Strategy's) I thought that this was a sign of how much lower I was compared to "The Average." I was angry for this and always thought I needed to fight for my rights, until I realized I was wrong. When the teachers presented the "Icons of Social Diplomacy," it made me start to think that actually, it is hard for everybody, not just me or even the class. Using these "Icons," I was able to calm down and become more agreeable. It helped me get out of "Ditches" in other classes, too. In this Presentation, I will show you three of the different Icons I prefer to use when doing Homework, Projects, Labs, etc, and hope you will think about them in a better way, not a negative demand."

Speech / Language

- Accurate and current speech/language evaluation (CELF-5, TILLS, OWLS, etc.)
- Vocabulary
- Narrative Skills –
  - Recounts: Elicited factual reports of past events
  - Accounts (a.k.a. "personal narratives"): Spontaneously produced verbalizations about past events
  - Eventcasts: Descriptions of on-going or anticipated events
  - Scripts: General descriptions of typical event Fictionalized Narratives (a.k.a. "stories")

Vocational Services

Interviews
- Time Constrained
- Interviewers are looking for specific body language (eye contact, open body position, pleasant facial expression)
- No feedback following the interview

Mock Interviews
- Provide specific questions
- Untimed
- Video
- Provide immediate opportunity for self-reflection and feedback
- With familiar person then with unfamiliar or less familiar person

Vocational Services

Job placements--self evaluation and employer evaluation (you should have checklists) (refer to self-concept wheel and ACSS class)
Could also apply these components to a summer job if they're not likely to do one during the school year or as part of an IEP.
Vocational Services
Resume Development—can include a statement about autism and special skills the individual possesses as a result
Cover Letters—state the position you are applying for and your reason of interest
Work Based Assessments—Self Rating Scale and Employer Rating Scale
Mentor Training
Disclosure and Legal Responsibility of the Hiring Entity

Vocational Activity
Identify 5 accommodations the interviewer could have made on the spot to improve Sheldon’s interview.

Discuss the double-edged sword of disclosure through the lens of an individual with autism. Identify 3 pros and cons to disclosing a disability.

Resources
Society for Human Resource Management-- www.shrm.org
http://collegeautismspectrum.com
https://nationalautismassociation.org
https://www.autism-society.org/
www.aane.org
AANE offers a program called LifeMAP coaching which offers training courses in becoming a coach for individuals with high-functioning autism

Resources continued
www.researchautism.org
www.hireautism.org
www.fraser.org