Chapter 5 Activities

Web activity WA5.1

Considering the use of PECS

A useful summary of PECS is to be found on the UK PECS website at: <https://pecs-unitedkingdom.com/pecs/> (accessed 23.03.2020).

Please access this now. Have a look at the description of PECS.

Think of a young person with profound difficulties in communication. How might you use PECS to support his/her communication skills?

Do you have enough information to design an activity for him/her using PECS? If so, you might like to try this out.

Web activity WA5.2

Considering the use of Widgit symbols

Widgit symbols are designed in sets with consistent visual structures. Each set comprises colourful simply-drawn symbols that each illustrate a single concept and, thus, provide a visual representation of it.

‘Symbol Sets are comprehensive collections of images that […] often follow a schematic structure, or set of “design rules”, that help the reader independently grow their *[sic]* own vocabulary.’

(<https://www.widgit.com/about-symbols/intro_to_symbols/index.htm>, accessed 23.03.2020).

Please access this web site now. Have a look at the description of Widgit symbol sets.

Think of a young person with profound difficulties in communication. How might you use symbol sets to support his/her communication skills?

Web activity WA5.3

Understanding the history of identification of ASD

If you are interested reading about the history of autism as a condition in brief, you might choose to read the summary below.

Leo Kanner was an Austrian-American psychiatrist who was born in Austria, educated in Germany and later established a psychiatric clinic at the Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore, Maryland, in the USA. Based on his observation of 11 children with similar behaviour, Kanner (1943) identified a common profile that seemed to centre on excessive focus on the self. This was characterised by inability to relate to people and social situations from early life and profound ‘aloneness’, failure to use language to communicate, an obsessive desire to maintain sameness. Some children were also fascinated by objects that needed to be handled with fine, skilful motor movements, had a good rote memory, and were over-sensitive to stimuli. He called it ‘early infantile autism’ from the Greek αυτος (autos) meaning ‘self’.

Several years before Leo Kanner’s 1943 paper on autism, Hans Asperger used the term ‘autistic psychopaths’ to describe a group of children with distinct psychological characteristics. In 1944[[1]](#footnote-1), he published a comprehensive study on the topic (submitted to Vienna University in 1942 as his postdoctoral thesis). However, this was the period of the Second World War when Vienna was governed by the Nazis, and Asperger’s work did not become internationally acclaimed until the 1980s subsequent to a seminal paper published by Lorna Wing (1981). From then on, the term ‘Asperger syndrome’ increasingly gained recognition of his outstanding contribution. As Wing (1996) notes, this syndrome included extreme egocentricity and an inability to relate to others, speech and language peculiarities, repetitive routines, motor clumsiness, narrow interests, and non-verbal communication problems. Asperger identified features additional to those already seen by Kanner. These were, firstly, sensory sensitivities and unusual responses to some sensory experiences: auditory, visual, olfactory (smell), taste and touch.

Asperger (1944) also noticed an uneven developmental profile, a good rote memory and circumscribed special interests, and motor coordination difficulties. He noted, too, that one in ten people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have what appear to be extremely well developed skills in one specific area. These skills are often found in areas such as music, art, mathematical calculations, and calendrical calculation.

For many years the ties that Hans Asperger may have had with Nazism in Germany does not seem to have been discussed in the literature on Asperger syndrome. Just how far Asperger was an active supporter, or opponent, of Nazism is a matter of some debate. If you are interested in this issue you might choose to access the following article: Czech, H. (2018) Hans Asperger, National Socialism, and “race hygiene” in Nazi-era Vienna. *Molecular Autism*, 9(29), (<https://molecularautism.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13229-018-0208-6>).

1. Asperger H. (1944) ‘Die “Autistischen Psychopathen” im Kindesalter. *Arch Psychiatr Nervenkr*., 117, pp. 76–136 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)