

Asperger Syndrome and Elementary School Culture

How to help students with Asperger Syndrome succeed

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Abstract

This paper examines the definition of the autism-related condition of Asperger Syndrome (AS) and its effects on elementary school children. It will identify the populations affected by the syndrome, the symptoms, and when they appear. This paper argues linguistic, emotional, behavioral, and social interventions are necessary for children with AS to overcome the weaknesses associated with the condition. It also suggests that, for interventions to be successful and for the children to succeed in school, they must receive sufficient aid from parents and professionals alike.

Introduction

Asperger Syndrome (AS) is a potentially debilitating condition that negatively impacts a person's ability to understand the hidden curriculum (the dos and don'ts of everyday living that are not spelled out or directly taught but that most people pick up on) and to effectively communicate with peers. This syndrome can have an affect on an elementary school student's ability to be successful in a typical classroom environment, leaving him or her unprepared for typical social interactions and learning experiences due to his or her deficits in social and cognitive skills. However, with effective linguistic, emotional, behavioral, and social interventions provided by teachers, school employees, and parents, the elementary school student with Asperger Syndrome can be successful in his or her scholastic endeavors.

What is Asperger Syndrome?

In 1944, an Austrian pediatrician, Dr. Hans Asperger, was observing several young boys who all shared the same unique collection of traits (Pyles 66). He wrote extensively about these characteristics and the resulting condition, which he called “autistic psychopathy,” but his papers and documentation of these characteristics went unnoticed until they were translated decades later (Pyles 66). Asperger’s work on this condition was largely ignored until 1981 when researcher Lorna Wing discovered her own group of children with the same symptoms described by Asperger (Pyles 66). It was Wing who coined the name “Asperger Syndrome” and contributed to the growth of interest in Asperger’s research (Gillberg 3, Pyles 66). However, the syndrome was not recognized as a “specific diagnostic entity” until 1994 when it was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (Gillberg 3) as a condition separate from autism.

Differing Definitions of Asperger Syndrome

Despite Asperger’s papers, there are many definitions of the characteristics of the syndrome due to varying opinions of each particular researcher. One helpful source on these varying definitions is Christopher Gillberg’s book A Guide to Asperger Syndrome. Gillberg mentions three different sources that provide varying definitions of the syndrome, the first of which is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Edition IV (DSM-IV). According to the DSM-IV, the criteria for Asperger Syndrome (AS) are as follows: