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Book Review: Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Canadian Context: An Introduction

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Keywords

Autism spectrum disorder, education, Canadian context

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Maich, K., Penney, S., Alves, K. & Hall, C. (2020). *Autism spectrum disorder in the Canadian context: An introduction*. Canadian Scholars. ISBN 978-1-77338-201-2, softcover, 447 pages.

Edith van der Boom

As we continue to live through the challenges of the pandemic, educators' awareness of the importance of children's social emotional health has become heightened. Strategies and interventions are considered indispensable as social emotional health is understood as a prerequisite to students' learning. Understanding how to support individuals with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), who struggle even without the challenges of a pandemic, is needed more than ever as a means to set them up for success. To give us a shared understanding of ASD, the authors wrote that it is "characterized by impairments in social communication and the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviours" (Veatch et al., 2014, p. 276 as cited in Maich et al., 2020, p. vii). In this book, the authors provide a thorough review of ASD as an ongoing spectrum disorder that is complex. In the conclusion of this review I suggest that this book not only provides a rich source of information but also engages the reader, challenges their understanding of ASD, and suggests multiple contacts and resources from across the country.

Understanding how to support individuals with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), who struggle even without the challenges of a pandemic, is needed more than ever as a means to set them up for success.

Throughout the text, three main themes are emphasized: "the emerging nature of the field of ASD; the importance of using evidence-based interventions in clinical, school, and community-based interventions; and the importance of supporting individuals with ASD across the lifespan" (p. ix). The content of each section is supported by many current research studies. The research presented is thorough, as it considers both past and new research as well as its reliability. The authors considered individuals with ASD not only throughout childhood, but also as they transition into adulthood.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section provides the reader with a brief history of ASD as well as a history of how the diagnosis has changed over the years and continues to be refined. Within this section, the authors expanded the perspective of ASD by including shared personal experiences from other professionals who work in the field of ASD, or who are parents of children with ASD. The authors examined some of the misconceptions and pseudoscience that have made false claims such as "curing autism" in the context of evidence-based interventions (EBIs), giving their readers a quick education on understanding research methods prior to sharing the research that is relevant to ASD. An extensive review of literature is considered to identify established, emerging, and unestablished interventions. Included is a segment that provides

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a spotlight for policies and research from across Canada.

The second section provides characteristics and interventions based on three categories: social communication-based interventions, behaviour-based interventions, and the sensory domain. Details about common characteristics of challenging behaviours are identified, in addition to an overview of intervention strategies that are supported by research. Specific steps are provided on a number of teaching methods for early intensive behaviour intervention (EIBI). The authors continually emphasized the need for only evidence-based interventions to be used with individuals with ASD. The understanding of sensory and its effect on individuals is still emerging and as such sensory interventions and research for individuals with ASD are currently in its infancy stage. The authors explored the limited literature related to the sensory needs, assessments, and interventions for the reader to consider.

The stories shared about adults with ASD provides a clearer picture of post-secondary education options, employment opportunities, financial support, and housing considerations. In addition, a chapter about parents and families of individuals with ASD gives one a more complete understanding of the support system as a whole.

The third section reviews the characteristics and challenges associated with ASD, according to specific time periods in one's life, specifically, the early years, the school years, and the adult years. Early ASD screening checklists for the early years of childhood are included as well as an overview of intensive interventions, programs, and supports for young children within different jurisdictions of Canada. Specific details about what support and funding is available in each province and territory across Canada is shared. This section concludes with information about the challenges and

experiences of individuals with ASD as they transition into adulthood. The stories shared about adults with ASD provides a clearer picture of post-secondary education options, employment opportunities, financial support, and housing considerations. In addition, a chapter about parents and families of individuals with ASD gives one a more complete understanding of the support system as a whole.

"I highly recommend this book as an excellent resource and text to use for those who desire to build their understanding of ASD. I believe that this text will not only serve to inform one of the latest research in ASD, but will be retained as a resource to continue to support individuals with ASD as they grow into adulthood.

The book is well-designed, as it builds readers' knowledge about ASD chapter by chapter. Each chapter begins with stated learning objectives, which provides a quick and succinct overview of what will be read in the pages ahead. Throughout the book, "vocabulary boxes" are used, whereby technical vocabulary is specifically highlighted with definitions to ensure full understanding by the reader. Within each chapter, readers will find sections titled, "Read about it. Think about it. Write about it," where the authors asked one to three questions meant to engage the reader in what they have learned in their reading, challenged them to think about further implications, and applied their learning to their own context. The questions are open-ended and engaging, challenging the reader to apply the information shared to their own context and connecting with their own personal experience and opinions. In addition to the thoroughness and flow of the book, I find these questions to be a highlight of the text. They inspire intentional connections between the text and the reader. Short summaries are included at the end of each chapter, as well as a list of additional resources including websites and short descriptions of their content. Most chapters

conclude with summaries of the ASD research that is being done across Canada, highlighting the province in which the research is completed.

I highly recommend this book as an excellent resource and text to use for those who desire to build their understanding of ASD. I believe that this text will not only serve to inform one of the latest research in ASD, but will be retained as a resource to continue to support individuals with ASD as they grow into adulthood.

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