Autism: Working with Sensory-Movement Differences

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Learning Objectives

- Is autism a thing?
- What do we know about sensory and movement differences in autism?
- What are the implications?
- Is autism better accommodated when understood as a neurological difference?
- What are self-advocates telling us?
- Why should we listen?

Disclosure

I have nothing to disclose.

Is Autism a Thing?

cognition
neuromotor
seizures
sensory
mental health/behavior
Movement Ranges from Purposeful to Autonomic

Conscious
- Purposeful
- Intentional
- Highly practiced
- Habitual
- Automatic
- Reflex
- Spontaneous
- Autonomic

Unconscious

What do we know about sensory and movement issues in autism?

- Many of the assumptions which are fundamental to the current paradigm of autism can and should be examined:
  - Performance does not equal intelligence. You can’t meaningfully test intelligence in people who don’t have a fluent form of expressive communication
  - Not all behavior is communication—some behavior is not volitional, but an artifact of difficulty organizing and regulating sensation and movement, even if it appears intentional.
  - Intelligence isn’t a fixed trait or capacity
What are the implications of these differences?

- Choosing therapeutic approaches needs to be individualized.
- Use caution when applying “evidence.”
- Working with sensory and movement differences is more effective than working against them.
- Everybody needs a fluent form of expressive communication. That needs to be an early, top, priority. Don’t give up.
- Because of unconscious bias, people are routinely underestimated.

How to apply evidence?

- Is my client similar to the subjects of the study? (merely having an “autism” diagnosis isn’t enough)
- Are the outcome measures meaningful?
- Are the methods used valid?
- Is the therapy available?
- What are the risks?
- Is the treatment consistent with individual and community values?

What are self-advocates telling us?
Rethinking Autism and Therapeutic Approaches
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohVvXcwTgtw
Why should we listen?

- It leads to better education, opportunities and communication.
- It reduces burnout of parents and staff.
- Parents, therapists, schools, and students who are presuming competence and working with sensory and movement issues are getting remarkably good outcomes. See for yourself:
  - https://unitedforcommunicationchoice.org/user-blogs/