



education review // reseñas educativas

editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

January 14, 2011

ISSN 1094-5296

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the National Education Policy Center <http://nepc.colorado.edu>

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Volkmar, Fred R. & Wiesner, Lisa A. (2009) *A Practical Guide to Autism: What Every Parent, Family Member, and Teacher Needs to Know*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Pp. 610

ISBN 0470394730

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In the current state of education, autism has become increasingly common in school settings. Legislation recognizing developmental disabilities has led to the increased attention on autism and related disorders. The increased attention on autism has also led to many questions from parents, teachers, and health care providers about educational services that are available for children with autism. There are concerns about diagnostic tools and their accuracy and usefulness, causes, access to services, behavior problems, medical and family issues. This book addresses many of those concerns.

Volkmar and Wiesner's text *A Practical Guide to Autism: What Every Parent, Family Member and Teacher Needs to Know* is designed to provide parents and teachers with

Citation: Latunde, Yvette Cormier. (2011 January 14) Review of *A Practical Guide to Autism* by Volkmar, Fred R. & Wiesner, Lisa A. *Education Review*, 13. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1022.pdf>

basic information that can help diagnosis and treat autism and related disorders. Obviously the authors are experts in the fields of medicine and psychiatry. What may not be expected is the practicality of the uses for the information they provide.

The main text is 551 pages and is divided into 19 chapters. A chapter summary and frequently asked questions and answers section follows each chapter. This end-of-chapter information is a useful resource for the health care providers, parents, novice and veteran teachers wanting to know how to distinguish between autism and other conditions. It is a great resource for providing useful information for parents wanting to advocate for their child as well as helping teachers with appropriate educational programming. A four page “Resources Lists” section follows the 19 chapters. This section includes a list of books, websites, state specific resources, and books and journals dedicated to autism. The appendix contains a six page criteria for autism.

The first two chapters entitled “What is Autism?” and “What causes Autism?” broadly define autism, related disorders and “causes” of the disorder. Volkmar and Weisner do not believe that we have evidence that autism is increasing. They state that genetic factors are very influential in autism. The most frequently used system for the diagnosis of autism is the Diagnosis and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or DSM-IV. Much of this chapter is very technical and based upon formal references to research and literature. Health care professionals would gain the most of these chapters.

In the third chapter, “Getting a Diagnosis,” opens with a strong statement that dispels any myths that obtaining a diagnosis for autism is easy. This chapter describes the most common and frequent areas of concerns for parents which act as an impetus for a diagnosis. The authors outline places parents can go for an initial screening and assessments for autism. The chapter provides brief overviews of the most commonly used screening and comprehensive assessments, evaluation procedures and disorders that may mask themselves as autism. Parents and health care providers will find this chapter very helpful as they work to obtain or rule out a diagnosis.

In “Getting Services,” the authors detail the legal rights and key concepts relative to educational services for children with autism. The authors summarize Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and their implications for children with autism. Volkmar and Weisner include a brief history of special education; key terms, and explains the provisions of IDEA in a nutshell. The chapter ends with 8 pages on dealing with insurance companies, and helpful websites. Parents and teachers will find this and the following two chapters extremely helpful as they advocate and implement services most commonly delivered in public schools.

Volkmar and Weisner start the fifth chapter, “An Overview of Educational Programs,” with the statement that the goal of education is the same for all children: helping them develop their potential and independence. This chapter summaries 10 research-based model programs for serving children with autism. Chapter 6, “Educational Interventions,” introduces common school-based interventions. Fifteen pages are dedicated to social skills interventions for young children to adulthood. The end-of-chapter offerings include examples of teaching methods, augmentative communication strategies, and tips for teaching self-help.

Chapters 7, 8, & 9 address the developmental stages from early childhood to adulthood and offer specific resources and strategies for each. Each chapter includes helpful case studies that are based on actual cases to demonstrate the complexities of programming for persons with autism. The authors use research to support information on gender differences in autism and autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and to express concern with the limited research on girls with these disorders. Diverse parents would be better-served if there were more research on racial differences in the identification, early intervention and outcomes after receiving special education.

Volkmar and Weisner summarize helpful resources for managing a wide-range of medical issues in Chapters 10 through 18. The major idea for all of these chapters is prevention. A table is provided outlining stages of Rett’s Disorder. Thirty pages are dedicated to the discussion of

the use of medicine and mental health issues as well as an entire chapter on alternative treatments.

In a 22-page concluding chapter, “Managing Sibling and Family Issues,” Volkmar and Weisner present what they feel is one of the most important ideas about autism, and that is that families are an essential part of effective programs for persons with autism. The authors use research on parental stressors to warn parents that before they “go into problem-solving” mode and try different therapies, some of which require large amounts of time and money, to confirm the effectiveness of the treatments. The authors’ points of view are that siblings are adversely affected by autism. The chapter ends with a reading list geared towards siblings of persons with autism.

The book provides some of the most up-to-date resources for parents, teachers and health care providers. Pre-service and in-service teachers will find many helpful resources as they attempt to implement appropriate services for children and adults with autism and ASD. Indeed it is a practical guide to autism.

About the Reviewer

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