

Spring 5-1-2017

## **Puzzled - A Children's Book**

Ann Conroy  
conroya@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects>



Part of the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

---

### **Repository Citation**

Conroy, Ann, "Puzzled - A Children's Book" (2017). *Honors Projects*. 742.  
<https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/742>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

Puzzled – A Children’s Book

Ann Conroy

Bowling Green State University

HONORS PROJECT

Submitted to the Honors College  
at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for graduation with  
UNIVERSITY HONORS

28 April 2017

Dr. Trinka Messenheimer; School of Intervention Services, Advisor

Dr. Colleen Boff; University Libraries, Advisor

Abstract

*Research for this project was conducted through online journals accessed via EBSCOhost. The findings contributed background information about Autism, which provided as the guide for writing the script of the children’s book Puzzled. The research also explains the importance of literature for young children.*

The purpose of this project is to create a children’s literature book that can be used within and outside of the classroom to educate young children about autism. Children as young as preschool typically initiate interaction with peers who have similar characteristics as them, and as a result, many children who develop typically often form negative biases towards their peers with disabilities because they are different from them (Hong, Kwon & Jean, 2014). Children’s attitudes and behaviors towards peer’s with disabilities can be formed based on their understanding of the disability, their exposure to disabilities or their parent’s attitudes towards disabilities. According to Hong, Kwon and Jean, research shows that children who have more contact with individuals with disabilities tend to have more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Likewise, the more children understand or learn about a disability, the more positive attitudes they will have towards individuals with disabilities (2014).

Providing young children with accurate information about autism, in a positive way, could shape that child’s perspective of their peers with disabilities. One way to educate young children is through children’s literature. According to Harris, literature has the potential to change individual attitudes and values, and it can be educational to people of all age groups (2015). Likewise, Artman-Meeker, Grant and Yang explain that literature presented in the classroom has the potential to counter biases, prevent bullying and expose the young minds of children to diversity among different groups, including but not limited to different ethnic groups, disabilities and different races (2016). For these reasons, exposing young children to autism and to characters with autism through literature, may allow children without autism to understand the developmental disorder in a more positive way.

As it stands, children’s literature today does not offer a large variety of literature about children with disabilities, more specifically, it is even less common for literature to contain a main character with a disability in a positive way (Harris, 2015). This is not to say that there are no books that cover the topic of disabilities in an accurate, in fact, Artman-Meeker, Grant and Yang analyze the 15 winners of the Dolly Gray Award, which is an award that recognizes children and young adult literature that accurately displays individuals with disabilities (2016). However, children’s literature selections including characters with disabilities are still underrepresented.

The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is a federal law in place to ensure students with disabilities are provided with an equal education. As required by IDEA, students with disabilities must be taught in the least restrictive environment, and as a result, more and more students with disabilities are being included in general education classrooms or are in classes with their peers who do not have disabilities. In relation, community programs increasingly serve diverse groups of young children, particularly those with disabilities, including developmental delays, autism, attention deficit disorders, and visual and hearing impairments (Harris, 2015). Because of this increase in inclusion throughout our society, it is of great importance that children without disabilities are educated about these differences. Providing an educational opportunity for children at a young age could provide an opportunity for these young children to grow up to become more educated, understanding and inclusive individuals.

I chose to write a book from the perspective of a child with autism for two reasons. The first reason is because of a personal connection I have with autism. I grew up with a very close family friend who has autism, and he has been the inspiration behind this creative project. The

second reason I chose to write about autism is because of how prevalent the disorder is in society today. According to Kroncke et al., autism is the fastest growing developmental disorder today (2016). Rates have increased over the years to diagnosis of 1 in 68 children in the United States (Anagnostou, Brian & Ohio, 2015) (Kroncke et al., 2016). During their course of research, Kroncke et al., state that during the 10 year span from 1993-2003, rates of autism in schools increased by an astounding 800% (Kroncke et al., 2016). Because of how widespread autism has become, and its continued growth throughout society, I believe it is a very relevant disorder to educate young children about. Moreover, that is why I have chosen to create a children’s book from the perspective of a child with autism. In addition to the prevalence of autism as a whole, I have chosen to write from the perspective of a male character. Again, I have two reasons for this choice. The first is the personal experience I have with autism. The main character of this book will reflect the family friend whom I grew up with, who is a male. In addition, autism is five times more likely to be diagnosed in males than it is in females (Lai, Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2014) (Bradley, 2010).

As stated prior, autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the fastest growing developmental disorder today, but how is it defined? According to Lai, Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, “autism is a set of heterogeneous neurodevelopmental conditions, characterized by early-onset difficulties in social communication and unusually restricted, repetitive behavior and interests” (2014, p. 1). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) published by the American Psychiatric Association (2013), autism is diagnosed based on two criterion. The first criterion is that social communication and interaction discrepancies must be present in several contexts. These discrepancies may include nonverbal communication, difficulties forming or maintaining relationships and lack of social and emotional reciprocity.

The second criterion includes restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests. This includes a need for routine or fixated interests, and hyper or hypo reactions to sensory inputs (Kroncke et al., 2016) (Lai, Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2014).

In summary, the most common defining characteristic of ASD include difficulties with social communication and social interaction. Contributing factors of this include abnormal behaviors, fixated interests, troubles with speech and communication, and sensitivity to sensory inputs. Autism is a spectrum, meaning individuals can have any combination of or all of these common characteristics at different intensity levels. Some individuals with autism are capable of living and working independently, while others are much lower functioning and require assisted living throughout their life. In addition, many individuals with autism have comorbid diagnoses, the number one being anxiety disorders, which occurs in nearly 40% of individuals with autism (Kroncke et al., 2016). Other less common characteristics include, but are not limited to: epilepsy, gastrointestinal problems, sleep disorders, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders, schizotypal personality disorder, and avoidant personality disorder (Lai, Lombardo & Baron-Cohen, 2014).

For the purpose of this children’s book, I have chosen to focus on the most common, diagnostic traits of autism, as defined by DSM-5. Not only are these characteristics the most frequently seen in individuals with autism, but they are also traits that would be most likely to affect the development of relationships with peers. For example, lack of receptive communication, nonverbal behaviors and difficulty understanding relationships are all barriers that could prevent typical children from interacting with children who have autism. Likewise, restricted or repetitive behaviors, fixated interests and hyper or hypo-reactivity to sensory input can be traits that are very hard for young children without autism to understand (American

Psychiatric Association, 2013). Because these traits have the potential to directly or indirectly hinder peer-relationships between children with autism and children without autism, it is critical to educate young children without autism about these behaviors. Creating a children’s book with this information could achieve the goal of educating young children about autism so they are more aware and understanding of the disorder.

Crafting a main character with these common characteristics ensures that the character with autism is authentic and represents true traits of the developmental disorders. “If a teacher’s goal is to nurture a sense of community among students with diverse abilities, it is important that literature show disability in an authentic and accurate way” (Artman-Meeker, Grant & Yang, 2016, p. 2). Because the purpose of this book is to educate children without disabilities about autism, it is of utmost importance that the character with autism is represented in an accurate and real way.

Through my research, I was able to identify common characteristics among such a complex developmental disorder. By using the information found through my research, I was able to write and illustrate a book for preschool and early elementary school aged children. As stated previously, children as young as preschool begin to initiate interaction with their peers that are similar to them (Hong, Kwon & Jean, 2014). This book will provide as an educational tool within and outside of the classroom for preschool and elementary students so they can begin to understand autism at a young age, and hopefully, by understanding the disorder, they grow to become more accepting and inclusive individuals.

## References

- Anagnostou, E., Brian, J., & Ohio Library and Information Network. (2015). *Clinician’s manual on autism spectrum disorder*. Cham: Adis.
- American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition: DSM-5*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Artman-Meeker, K., Grant, T. O., & Yang, X. (2016). By the Book: Using Literature to Discuss Disability with Children and Teens. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48(3), 151-158.
- Bradley, R. (2010). Screening for autism spectrum disorders. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 6(4), 304-305. Doi: 10.1016/j.nurpra.2010.01.002
- Harris, K. I. (2015). The Unexpected Journey Shared by Families: Using Literature to Support and Understand Families Raising a Child with Disabilities. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 43(6), 473-484.
- Hong, S., Kwon, K., & Jeon, H. (2014). Children's Attitudes towards Peers with Disabilities: Associations with Personal and Parental Factors. *Infant & Child Development*, 23(2), 170-193. doi:10.1002/icd.1826
- Kroncke, A. P., Willard, M., Huckabee, H., Reinhardt, J.S., & Ohio Library and Information Network. (2016). *Assessment of autism spectrum disorder: Critical issues in clinical, forensic and school settings*. Cham: Springer.
- Lai, M., Lombardo, M., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2014). Autism. *Lancet*, 383(9920), 896-910. Doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61539-1.

