

Preface

This book is the sum of the past 18 years of my professional career. When I was a special education teacher, I worked with young children across a broad range of the autism spectrum – from students with social and behavioral issues who spoke fluently to those with “classic autism” traits who could neither speak nor write in a manner that was understandable. I was and am most drawn to these children, for whom it seemed needed a key or an “a-ha” moment to unlock effective communication. I attended all the training opportunities I could and apprenticed under my more experienced colleagues to learn how to best teach these children. For children who could not speak, it became clear to me that aided augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) could be that key. However, I met with much resistance from some of my students’ parents who were afraid that aided AAC would give their children an easy way out of having to talk. Unfortunately, at that time, there was little research to support the idea that aided AAC could serve as an effective means of providing the ability to communicate to children with autism and that it would not inhibit speech. Yet, my, albeit limited, experiences had convinced me that this could serve as a way for these children to communicate and that, for some children, the concrete nature of AAC may provide a link to unlocking speech and understanding of communication in general. Thus, I embarked on graduate school and then my career in academia, where I have tried to determine the impacts of AAC on people with autism and synthesize the body of literature in this area. Although much research has been published by myself and many others, and many types of aided AAC have come to be recognized, I believe there is much work left to do. This book is my attempt to further pull together the state of the art and to suggest where the field should go from here.

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