# UTLIZING CONTENT ANALYSIS IN TEACHING

# MATERIALS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

# SPECTRUM DISORDER

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**JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO**

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

It is important to look at how education materials for students with disability view disability itself. Raising the general public's awareness on autism is crucial because of the rise in the anti-vaxx and anti-science movements, particularly in the United States.

This thesis utilizes Content Analysis to explore how a set of teaching materials for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) understands ASD and the agency of the ASD child and creates trust with the readers. I analyze two argumentation styles to understand how those forms of argumentation create trust with the readers. This study is qualitative and relies on philosophical and cultural definitions of agency and personhood. In addition, this thesis also gives a brief background on the history of autism diagnosis and disability terminology. The cultural setting of the thesis is the United States.

This research helps shed light on the content of education materials for disabled children and how that content can shape the general public's opinion on Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

APA: American Psychological Association

CA: Content Analysis

DSM: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

EBP: Evidence Based Practices

KASA: Kids As Self Advocates

MMR vaccine: Measles, Mumps, and Rubella vaccine

NYLN: National Youth Leadership Network

SoA: Sense of Agency

TEACCH: Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Impaired

Children

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is something that is highly misunderstood among the general population. Due to media and social discourses, autism is often perceived as something that must be cured. This has implications on how people with autism are treated in education and in the society, in general. As a result, discussing how autism is talked about and raising awareness of the general public are of high importance. Therefore, my research will be focused on education materials from an Applied Linguistic perspective. It is crucial to look at how autism is presented in teaching materials because that greatly shapes the impact these materials have on conceptions of autism. The data of my study were educational materials targeted to parents, educators, and therapists. The educational materials were easy to understand because the materials are accessible to be read by people who do not have a background in child psychology or education. Since these materials were created by people who have been in the field of education for many years, there is an expectation that the language describing children with ASD is inclusive.

By examining the language used in teaching materials, I seek to understand how autism is represented by educational experts of the field. In addition to displaying how conceptions of autism are highlighted in the selected materials, the aim of my thesis is to show how authors create trust with the reader. Some discourses are made obvious and others are more hidden. By closely looking at the texts and how autism is represented in them, we can gain a better understanding of the messages and ideologies the material presents. Discourses that are made obvious are done so to attract the reader's immediate attention, but the discourses that are hidden are the ones that can make the most impact.

Discourses are part of everyday life.  One way to persuade an audience is through the use of emotional language. This can be especially true when targeted to parents.

Generally speaking, arguments from emotion are the least strongest form of argumentation (Scarantino et.al., 2018), but with children, and especially children with disabilities, the use of emotion can be an exceptionally powerful tool ("Philosophy 203: Scientific Reasoning Appeal to Emotion", 2003).

Arguments from authority are also a strong tool that can be used to make a particular organization, speaker, or website appear to be legitimate by appealing to power, prestige, etc. ("Philosophy 203: Scientific Reasoning Appeal to Authority", 2003). Appealing to authority is non-fallacious specifically when it makes sense to believe the person offering the information is *reasonably expected* to be knowledgeable in the field. However, arguments from authority must also be analyzed critically. Like arguments from emotion, the use of particular language can make something or someone appear more legitimate than they are. With the use of carefully selected rhetoric, appeals to authority can make outlandish beliefs seem rational. Readers must carefully analyze argumentative structures as well. Sometimes called the "argument from prestige", this fallacious argumentation style appeals to statements by an authority outside their field and is based on the belief that prestigious people cannot be wrong ("Philosophy 203: Scientific Reasoning Appeal to Authority", 2003).

I will be conducting my research within the American context since the context most familiar to me. The books I will be analyzing were produced in the United States and the target audiences are parents of autistic children, educators, and therapists who work with ASD children. The method used to conduct my research is Content Analysis that also pays attention to textual features of my data.

It is important to see where fears regarding autism originated, and how those fears have developed over time in the United States. For the background of my study, I will summarize disability terminology and the history of autism diagnosis in sub-chapters 3.1 and 3.2. After that, the concept of agency will be introduced. Agency is an important

concept especially when we talk about the action possibilities of people who are seen disabled. In my thesis I want to examine how the agencies of the students are represented in the data.

## 2 AIMS OF THE THESIS

The aim of this thesis is to analyze, how autism is discussed in a series of the teaching materials targeted to parents, educators, and teachers. By doing that, this thesis also has the goal of raising general awareness of the autistic community. As such, my research questions will be the following:

1. How is trust being built between the readers and the authors in the text?
2. How are ASD children perceived in the teaching materials?
3. How is the ASD children's agency supported in the teaching materials?

## 3 BACKGROUND

The cultural context for this thesis will be the United States since that is what I am most familiar with. Since there is no singular laboratory test for ASD, diagnosis heavily relies on observed behaviors. These observed behaviors and what is considered acceptable and unacceptable can vary from region to region. However, this can be quite problematic. What is considered "normal" in one part of the Americas can be considered "abnormal" in another. For example, "in native communities in the United States, Central and South America, children are much less likely to establish eye contact with adults than are children of European descent" (Bauer, Waxman, & Winegar, 2016).

Therefore, from a cultural perspective, it is difficult to grasp a homogenous idea of what qualifies as concern for an ASD diagnosis. As mentioned previously, there is a medical definition of ASD that must be met for a diagnosis, but how that definition is interpreted can depend greatly on one's own background. As such, it is important that people from the child's same cultural community work together to understand what expectations need to be met and it is important to discuss how autism is understood and means within that community (Bauer,Waxman, & Winegar, 2016).

It is imperative to look at Autism Spectrum Disorder intervention programs from both a macro and micro perspective because ultimately what happens at the micro-level, in terms of language use in specific contexts, shapes what is viewed and discussed at the macro perspective where the policies are made and vice versa. The disciplines of medicine, psychology and psychiatry provide the official scientific explanations of what autism is. Scientific discipline-specific jargon can be like a maze. Translating the disciplinary languages of science into a comprehensible vernacular is not easy and can lead to misunderstandings. What is presented in the macro perspective can have a serious impact on how the general public views Autism Spectrum Disorder since the macro perspective is often what is presented in schools, in print, on television, and online. Medical discourse on disability can serve a variety of functions, but there is no singular definition of what disability neither is nor is not. Nor is there a singular definition of what "academic disability discourse" is. What disability is defined as seems to depend on the purpose for which disability is being discussed, for example disability as it relates to politics, society, or theoretically. Disability is a multifaceted topic that reaches into many disciplines and how disability studies are discussed can greatly vary culturally too. In the United States, disability studies tend to conceptualize disabled people as a cultural and ethnic minority. In the United Kingdom however, disability studies regards disabled

people as an oppressed social class. In Scandinavia, disability studies views disabled people as beneficiaries of welfare programs funded by the state (Grue, 2015).

By utilizing Content Analysis and paying attention to the language used, conceptions of autism and building trust in Autism Spectrum Disorder education materials can be examined through thematic analysis of autism intervention plans such as TEACCH. TEACCH is also in the background of the teaching material I analyze in this study. In the following subchapters, I will first introduce appropriate and inappropriate terminology when talking to and about people with disabilities. Following that is a short overview of the history of autism diagnosis. The key concept of Agency is introduced next. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by explaining what TEACCH and the Structured Teaching Method are.

## 3.1 Disability Terminology

It is essential to be sensitive to the disabled community and always alert on what terminology is considered appropriate and what is insensitive or outdated. The intent of others to seem caring and supportive may, in fact, come off as insulting, demeaning, and patronizing. The National Youth Leadership Network, in partnership with the project Kids As Self Advocates, discusses appropriate and inappropriate ways to talk about disability. One example of an inappropriate way, but often used way to discuss disability is when people without disabilities say that those with disabilities are "brave", "courageous", or "special" (NYLN, 2006: 2). The intention on behalf of the person without disabilities may not be malicious at all, however this type of languages makes it appear that those with disabilities are somehow different than people who are not disabled. It is essential to keep in mind that it is not unusual for people with disabilities to have talents, abilities, and skills. It is considerably important to remember that people with disabilities are the same as everyone else (NYLN, 2006: 2).

In the UK, the government has a devoted publication online about inclusive communication (UK Government Office for Disability Issues, 2018). On the webpage titled "Inclusive Language: words to use and avoid when writing about disability", there are three sections each focusing on a different aspect of language. The first section is titled "Language Guidelines", the 2nd section is called "Words to use and avoid", and the 3rd section is titled "Some tips on behaviour". This page also seems to be regularly updated because the last update was made on 13 December 2018. In the US, the California government has a similar publication available online too (California Government, n.d.). These inclusive communication guides published by the UK and California governments are something that is missing in much of the US unfortunately.

## 3.2 History of Autism Diagnosis

Defining autism is not straightforward (Hagan, 2017). Explaining the troubling history of autism perception and diagnosis from initial conception until today can serve as a window into how far the understanding of what autism is in medical science has progressed. Giving a short historical background can also illustrate how general perceptions of autism have changed, or even stayed the same, over time. Furthermore, the recent history, which will be laid out, will pertain specifically to the US context of autism diagnosis.

The history of autism goes back to the early 1900's when the word *autismus,* in German, was first coined by the Swiss Psychiatrist Paul Bleuler, who is most noted for his work on schizophrenia (Ashok et al., 2012). In 1943, Leo Kanner, an Austrian-American psychiatrist and physician, published an article in the news journal *Nervous Child* that gave a description of the modern concept of autism while borrowing some attributes from Bleuler's description of schizophrenia. Kanner, however, believed that autism was distinct from schizophrenia, in that, he gave consideration to the idea that

autism was a developmental shortcoming rather than a regression of mental fitness as per

the conception of schizophrenia at the time. He was also of the belief that autism was

genetically driven and that it could be, potentially, influenced by parenting.

Unfortunately, this had led to the belief that autism is caused by lazy or poor parenting

(Cohmer, 2014).

Until the publication of the first and second editions of the Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in the 1960s, childhood schizophrenia was

the only medical term available to therapists used to diagnose children with autism. In the

United States, autism was considered a form of schizophrenia until the 1970s. In the

1980s, autism was classified as its own diagnosis completely separate and unrelated to

schizophrenia. Today's data suggests that various genetic and biological factors can leave

a person more inclined towards being autistic, and that autism is typically observed

across many generations of families, regardless of race or ethnicity (Goldstein &

Naglieri, 2013; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

An article by Godlee, Smith, and Marcovitch (2011) discusses how the link between the

MMR vaccine and autism was fraudulent. This article gives insight into how this

operation was completed and how it caused a ripple effect throughout society that can

still be felt today.

The article published by Andrew Wakefield in 1998 claiming that the MMR vaccine caused

autism, was a way for him to capitalize on the MMR scare that was happening during the 1990s.

Wakefield took patients files and altered the facts about them so he could make his claim about a

supposed connection between the MMR vaccine and autism (Godlee, Smith, and Marcovitch,

2011:2). It should be noted that the article was redacted by the General Medical Council (GMC) 12

years after its publishing. What is unfortunate is that this connection, though proven to be incorrect

many times over, has been fuel for those against vaccinations. This one example of how discourses

form dialogues that have created a lasting effect on a remarkably serious issue and on how people

act. As of writing this, the U.S. is currently experiencing a measles outbreak in 22 states at over 700 confirmed cases according to the Center for Disease Control and the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Division of Viral Diseases (Center for Disease Control, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Division of Viral Diseases, 2019) and according to both organizations "The majority of people who got measles were unvaccinated" and "Measles can spread when it reaches a community in the U.S. where groups of people are unvaccinated". They also state, "This is the second-greatest number of cases reported in the U.S. since measles was eliminated in 2000, second only to the 667 cases reported during all of 2014. In the coming weeks, 2019 confirmed case numbers will likely surpass 2014 levels" Center for Disease Control, 2019).

**3.3 Definitions of Agency**

Agency can be a difficult concept to exact because it seems that each discipline has its own definition and these definitions have evolved over time. Philosophy has been asking agency related questions since the Enlightenment. However, using a purely individualistic, psychological or philosophical approaches overlook the social and sociocultural aspect of agency. On the other hand, using a strictly cultural definition of agency would not suffice either because although individual agency is constructed in and constrained by social interaction, it is also individually experienced. The definition of agency I have chosen for this work blends both Enlightenment philosophy and culture studies because individual agency of an ASD child is affected by the way autism is seen in any cultural context and how it is constructed in specific social interaction. First, I define what culturally generated agency is, and then I go further to define what constitutes personhood because individual people are understood to have agency.

Barker (2005) presents a definition of agency that combines both Philosophy and the social sciences. He claims that the concept of agency has been typically associated with individual

freedom, free will, action, and the possibility of change through the actions of free agents (Barker, 2005: 236). However, he also discusses the idea of culturally generated agency. He claims,

> culturally generated agency is enabled by differentially distributed social resources. This gives rise to various degrees of the ability to act in specific spaces. For example, that an aspect of my identity is tied up with teaching and writing is not something that a pre-lingusitic 'I' simply chose. Rather, it is the outcome of the values and discourses of my family and educational experiences that in turn enable me to carry out those activities as an agent (Barker, 2005: 236).

Culturally generated agency is an important nuance in the typical notions of agency because culturally generated agency gives people the ability to exert their agency in specific spaces within particular cultural contexts (Barker, 2005: 236). Here the author uses himself as an example, stating that due to the outcome of discourses in family values and educational experiences, he is able to express his agency as a writer and educator. More to the point, how people can and cannot express their agency in certain spaces is socially produced. In the workbooks, the students and parents express their agencies in specific ways because society has groomed them to do so. Discourses in educational values are central to the workbooks because the society the workbooks were created in has to place some type of value on education, and in particular the education of disabled children, for these workbooks to have been considered necessary.

Sense of Agency (SoA) is a term that means one is able to understand that they are the cause of an action (Gallagher, 2000). SoA is also connected to motor control and self-awareness (Lafleur, A., et.al., 2016). Within modern philosophy, in the thinker John Locke delegates a person as "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places" (1700: II.xxvii.9). Withheld in this notion is that self-consciousness is an essential aspect of personhood. More specifically in Locke's view, the capacity to re-identify oneself at different times is what is most important. This 18th century idea still holds today. A study performed by Williams and Happé (2009) identified that ASD children had no difficulties monitoring their own actions/agency when using an online action monitoring task. This

task required the participants to differentiate between person-caused or computer-caused changes in visually presented squares (Happé, Williams, 2009). In a 2010 study by Williams and Happé, "children with ASD were less able to recognize their own knee-jerk reflex movements as unintentional, or their own mistaken actions as unintended, than age- and ability-matched comparison participants, which suggests a diminished awareness of their own intentional states" (Lafleur, A., et.al., 2016).

Therefore it can be concluded that even though ASD children appear to have a diminished sense of their own internal states, they are still capable of monitoring their own agency/actions. Locke's definition of personhood is still applicable today because the participants in the two studies by Williams and Happé (2009; 2010) were able to re-identify themselves in each of the studies. In my data, agency is represented through constructs such as play and other guided social situations.

Further, Locke's definition of personhood is still applicable today because it makes no mention of empathy being a marker of humanity, unlike the definition of humanity Cambridge Professor Simon Baron-Cohen gives wherein he excludes autistic people from the notion of humanity via the criterion of empathy (Baron-Cohen, 2003; 2003). By creating specific principles of empathy that, by definition, autistic people are unable to meet, and arguing that empathy is core to humankind, Baron-Cohen (2011) banishes autistic people from being completely human.

**3.4 TEACCH and the Structured Teaching Method**

**The Five Principles of TEACCH**

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children) was founded in 1972 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by Dr. Eric Schopler. TEACCH can be used for people of all ages and abilities, and, importantly, one of the program's aims is not seeking to cure autism (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2013: 75). TEACCH is related to my research

because this method puts scientific research and methods into action. TEACCH is a clinical service and professional training program that uses the Structured Teaching method. TEACCH and the Structured Teaching method implements five basic principles. They are,

> first, physical structure refers to individual's immediate surroundings. Daily activities, such as playing and eating, work best when they are clearly defined by physical boundaries. 2nd, having a consistent schedule is possible through various mediums, such as drawings and photographs. 3rd, the work system establishes expectations and activity measurements that promote independence. Ideal work systems will communicate objectives with minimum written instructions. 4th, routine is essential because the most important functional support for autistic individuals is consistency. 5th, visual structure involves visually-based cues for reminders and instruction (Applied Behavior Analysis Programs Guide, 2018).

The five principles of TEACCH and Structured Teaching are to help those living with ASD, live more independent and fulfilling lives from the classroom and beyond.

From 2007 to 2017, studies were conducted in China, Germany, Italy, Northern Ireland, Japan, Spain, and the United States. These studies looked at the effectiveness of the TEACCH method. Specifically, the research was aimed at understanding how effective the TEACCH method is at reducing autistic symptoms in children and stress in adults. The results of these studies found that, overall, the TEACCH method was effective in improving the children's' development and reducing their parent's stress levels. In some cases, the parent's stress levels did not reduce significantly, but this result is still encouraging because reductions of stress levels have a positive improvement on parent-child interactions and the parent's overall wellbeing (Sanz-Cervera, Fernández-Andrés, Pastor-Cerezuela, & Tárraga-Mínguez, 2018).

**TEACCH Regional Centers**

There are currently seven TEACCH centers all across North Carolina where TEACCH was developed. These centers appear to only be in North Carolina and there does not seem to be plans at the moment to expand to other states. All seven centers offer services for treatment planning and

implementation, diagnostic evaluations, consultation, education, research, and training opportunities.

As stated before, TEACCH is a program designed to help people in all stages of life and they appear to be upholding that claim. On the TEACCH website there is a section called "Adult Services" where there are links to employment help, ongoing research projects, and the T-STEP-TEACCH program. This is a program that that aims to help young adults transitioning to employment or/and tertiary education for those who have received a high school diploma or a GED, which is a high school equivalency certificate.

Further, while researching about these centers, I noticed that the only center with services available in Spanish is the Chapel Hill center, and even then the phone number was just to a voicemail service. This is rather concerning because Spanish speakers make up a large population in the United States. Having TEACCH services only available in English could make Spanish speakers, or others who are not confident in their English abilities, feel disenfranchised and nervous about reaching out for help.

Another area of interest is how people are expected to pay for their services. Upon looking at the "Fee for Services" page, there is a link for accepted insurance plans. Unsurprisingly, TEACCH centers accept both Medicare and Medicaid. Medicare and Medicaid are two government-funded programs that provide health coverage for seniors over 65, disabled people under 65, and low-income families. The most plausible reason that TEACCH accepts both government healthcare plans is because, as of 2017, 21.2% of children in North Carolina live in poverty compared to the national average of 18.4% (UNC School of Law). These statistics are even grimmer when broken down by race/ethnicity, and median income. In a country where a person's health insurance plan is dictated by their employer, for TEACCH centers to not accept government provided health insurance would be disenfranchising an already disenfranchised section of the population.

# 4 DESCRIPTIONS OF DATA

The intervention program that I will be doing my analysis on is a book series titled "Tasks Galore" by Laurie Eckenrode, Pat Fennell, Kathy Hearsey, and Beth Reynolds published in the years 2009 and 2013. The tasks in the books utilize the TEACCH program and Structured Learning method. These books were chosen because the target audience is people with professional backgrounds as well as the everyday person. These books are the result of the micro perspective being translated into the macro perspective.

There are four books in the series and the books are written so they can be implemented for children of all ages and all abilities. The books targeted reading audiences are parents, therapists, and teachers. "Tasks Galore" is a series of books that can be used by both parents and professionals and is aimed at children of all ages and abilities. As such, the books reach a very wide audience.

The book in the series with the yellow cover is titled "Tasks Galore" and this book aims to help children develop their skills in language arts, math, and play. This book contains a wide variety of color photographs and each photograph shows how sensory, manipulative, and visual elements can be included into various educational tasks in such a way that the students' attention is captured and learning is made fun and exciting. This book also contains an "encyclopedia" of ideas to help parents, teachers, and therapists create more individualized tasks for each child. The red colored book in the series is called " Tasks Galore for the Real World". This book, like the first book, makes use of photographs. However, these photographs center on depictions of vocational and jobsite activities, domestic, and independent functioning. The visually structured tasks in this book help by taking complex everyday life skills and making them simpler and more meaningful in learning situations.

The blue colored book, "Tasks Galore: Making Groups Meaningful" takes the knowledge of the authors, who draw on their experiences as teachers and therapists who have utilized TEACCH, and describes measures and tasks used to make group learning successful. The authors describe how aspects of Structured Teaching, such as schedules, physical structure, and work systems, are applicable to groups. Furthermore, the authors explain how routines related to turn-taking procedures, task completion, and transition between classrooms eases students into group participation. The authors list various activities such as physical education, music, and dance as situations where tasks can be completed. This book also gives numerous examples of how tasks can be individualized for students within groups, and how those aspects of group cooperation can be transitioned from school to a birthday party, for example. Like the previous books, this book also makes use of many photographs.

The green colored book in the series is titled "Tasks Galore: Let's Play". Like the blue book, the authors draw upon their experiences as therapists and teachers and explain structured steps that the reader can take to assist children in social engagements and play. The authors put forward ideas on how to teach children to gain interest in people, as opposed to objects, how to play with toys, playtime management, and how to instruct children on making choices and ending them. The authors also illustrate how to teach children to play pretend, and how to play with others. One chapter of the book is solely dedicated to listing popular toys that can be used for teaching. This book includes printable visual supports as well as contains color photographs.

This book is broken down into seven chapters and within each chapter there are subsections. As with the first book, this book also contains an About the Authors section, a Table of Contents, an Introduction, and ends with a References and Recourses section. What is rather interesting about the *Tasks Galore* series is that the books do not need to be read in a sequential order. If a parent or teacher wants to only read the second book of the series, for example, they could and not feel

disoriented. Naturally, the first book provides some foundation information that can then be applied to the second book, but it is not necessary to read the first book in order to understand the second one since the foci are quite different.

Before analyzing the data, the format of the books must be discussed because the layout is quite unique from other traditional learning materials. The format of the books is not a traditional hardcover bound book. All of the *Tasks Galore* books are printed in landscape view and spiral bound. This formatting is done for possibly a few reasons. The landscape format allows for larger printed text that can make reading easier for those who suffer from visual impairments. The landscape format also allows for more pictures to be included in the book, thus maximizing the amount of activities that can be included for therapists and parents to work on with their children. By maximizing the amount of possible activities, this allows for more options to make individualization of the TEACCH program possible. Individualization of the program for each child is something that is repeatedly emphasized in the Introduction and throughout the book series as a whole.

While the topic of this thesis does not focus on the use of color, it is worth mentioning that the colors used for each book cover are either primary colors (red, yellow, blue) or secondary colors (green, purple, orange). The use of these colors could be considered of importance because it can help children discern which activity book contains which activities and thus make organization easier for them. The use of primary and secondary colors is also worth mentioning because in many elementary school art classes, one of the first lessons children are taught is what the primary and secondary colors are in color theory. Although the use of these colors might not have been intentional on the publisher's part, the use of these colors can symbolize the need to get "back to basics" and learn about the foundations so as to possess the ability to build on what has been previously taught.

# 5 RESEARCH METHOD

## 5.1. Content Analysis and Textual Analysis

The method that I use for the analysis of the selected books is qualitative Content Analysis. Content Analysis is a research method that is used for making valid inferences from texts and other mediums based on the context of their use (Krippendorf, 2013: 24). In other words, Content Analysis summarizes as opposed to reporting on details concerning sent messages. As stated before, Content analysis is applicable to all mediums, not just written text. Content Analysis can be utilized in interpersonal exchanges, group settings, digital media, and even art. Content Analysis can be applied to nonverbal communication of subjects too (Neuendorf, 2017: 25).

Content Analysis is based on several readings of the data and organizing the data into themes by tracking similarities and differences in it. The use of CA with more detailed textual analysis will also assist in uncovering any potential hidden discourses as well which may have, intentionally or unintentionally, been ignored or overlooked altogether. One of CA's strengths is that it is very broad and can be applied to a multitude of situations, but its broadness is also one of its weaknesses because there are certain areas of application, such as in medicine, where the use of language is imperative to professionals in the field and those outside it. Therefore, CA is a strong starting point for observing the larger picture for the thesis. The linguistic details help to build and shape ideas and perceptions about, for example, ASD as a whole. Textual analysis is an important aspect of Content Analysis and I will be analyzing the texts in the "Tasks Galore" series. Textual analysis takes large pieces of documents or texts and modifies them so they can be organized and described. (Duke University Libraries, 2017). Textual analysis can be done through various processes such as by hand or with the assistance of computer software programs. In this thesis, the textual analysis component of CA will serve the task of bringing forth the various types of linguistic components used to build

trust to with the reader. Textual analysis will also highlight discourses by looking at sentence structure, tone of voice, and tense used in ASD intervention program documents.

By utilizing Content Analysis, these questions and concerns can be uncovered and examined more thoroughly. How ASD is discussed in medicine can have a considerable impact on social perception, educational policy concerning students with disabilities, and discourses in diagnosis and intervention. CA will be crucial in looking at the fine details that create the larger discourses that exist for those with ASD and, more broadly, those with other disabilities as a whole.

CA is especially well suited to assist research for ASD because more critical approaches can scrutinize harmful discourses of ASD, power structures in society, and the scientific language used to describe the disorder (O'Reilly, Lester, & Muskett, 2015).

## 5.2 Conducting the Analysis

I read through each book carefully and highlighted passages, words, phrases, etc. which stood out to me. I took notes in the page margins and in a notebook. Once I was done with the first read through, I then went back and re-read the books a second time. During the second read through, I began categorizing my notes and highlighted texts into themes to see if anything stood out as significant.

The first theme that was decided on, conceptions of autism, was predetermined. While looking through the text, I tried to find instances where the authors discuss particular characteristics of autism and how they describe said characteristic. The second theme, creating trust, was also predetermined, but the ideas of how trust is created came while organizing my notes. Due to the books being educational materials, the two main themes were already thought out, but the nuances of the themes came while reading the text and organizing notes. The third theme, ASD children's agency emerged during the

readings of the data.

Visual analysis is one method that could be implemented for the thesis, however due to the large quantity of text presented in the books, doing a visual analysis would be too ambitious for the current constraints of the thesis. CA will be critical in uncovering trust narratives presented in the texts. By examining these texts, discourses and ideas about the authors' views of autism can be uncovered. Possible discourses at the university level can be uncovered too since TEACCH was created at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and some of the authors of "Tasks Galore" are currently staff members at the university.

## 5.3 Themes

I will now proceed to the analysis, which will look at how the following themes emerge over the course of the 2 books. The themes are:

- Perceptions of autism
- Creating trust through:
  - Emotive language
  - Arguments from authority
- Representing agency of ASD children

## 5.4 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues need to be considered when writing this thesis. One of the items to consider is the sensitivity and degree to which I will discuss how autism has affected my life. For privacy concerns regarding others, and myself I have not listed people's names or any other identifying information about them such as relation to me, age, sex, gender identity or profession.

The books use photographs of the children, however the children's names, ages, and other identifying information have been left out for privacy and safety reasons. This is also applied to the parents and teachers. Since my data is not collected from primary sources, for example holding interviews or taking photographs of the participants myself, the ethical issues I need to consider are not as complicated or sensitive.

Use of the data presented in the thesis falls under Fair Use protected by United States copyright law (see 17 U.S.C. §106, §106A, and §107). My research follows TENK guidelines as well as guidelines given by the University of Jyväskylä.

# 6 ANALYSIS

I will now proceed to the analysis, which will look at how the following themes emerge over the course of the two books. The themes are conceptions of autism, creating trust though 1. arguments from authority and 2. emotive language, and agency of the ASD children. In section 6.1 I will discuss perceptions of autism and in 6.2 I will discuss how trust is created in the material. Within 6.2 I will talk about arguments from authority, what the authors say the books are not, levels of authoritative voice, persuading children's emotional interest, giving instructions, making choices, persuading through empathy, and emotive language. In 6.3 I will discuss ASD children's agency as presented in the books.

## 6.1 Perceptions of Autism

The authors' perceptions of autism become visible when they describe the ways autistic children act and react in play situations. The book titled *Tasks Galore: Let's Play* focuses on teaching children how to participate in social engagement and symbolic play. This book also educates parents and teachers on how to make playtime structured and meaningful. By breaking down aspects of

playtime and various types of play children can engage in, the authors help to explain in clear and concise terms what aspects of play ASD children most often struggle with and how to help them overcome those struggles. The authors go into great detail about how to properly engage children so that playtime is meaningful to them via a process of building up their social skills. In doing so, the authors also describe typical traits of autistic children, which show in a very pragmatic, but not in an explicit way, their understanding of the ASD children.

**ASD Children are Individuals with Varying Shared Traits**

The authors stress that the examples need to be modified to fit the particular child's needs and interests, but that the ideas presented in the book can be a jumping off point for parents and teachers to engage with their kids. This shows that the authors see ASD children as individuals, not just as representatives of a group with shared diagnosis.

The Introduction of *Tasks Galore: Let's Play* is broken down into four paragraphs. The first paragraph discusses how the link between symbolic play in kids with ASD has positive effects on their language, social, and imitation skills. Play is the medium of learning and the authors state that one issue that educators need to understand is that children with ASD do not necessarily find play to be natural. Specifically they express,

> As educators, we sometimes bypass direct teaching of play skills as we conscientiously work on improving abilities that our young students eventually need for academic learning and independent living. It is often easier for children with autism spectrum disorders to learn school skills, such as matching, counting, and reading, than it is for them to play naturally (Eckenrode et al., 2009: v)

This excerpt shows that autistic children are seen as lacking skills that can be developed by direct teaching.

**ASD is not Caused by Bad Parenting**

The discourse that autism is caused by apathetic parenting, which has been pervasive in media and culture, is demonstrated to be false by the authors, even though this discourse is not explicitly expressed in the text. Children with ASD have the ability to be emotionally connected and interested in their parents, but the parents are the ones who must give their child a reason to pay attention to them.

In the previous data excerpt, the phrase "As educators", is important to the text because in this instance, the authors are speaking the reader, whomever that person may be. The authors are showing the reader that they too have an important role to play in educating their child. The continued use of the third person plural "We" carries on this idea. The use of "We" also reinforces the idea that many people are involved in the education process and that no one should feel they have to tackle the obstacles that come with ASD alone. Therefore, the authors are showing that the children need extra support and that the extra support they receive is important to the educational process.

The second paragraph carries on this idea by children to be the center of the playtime activity while also recognizing that the adults involved serve as a vital starting point for playtime to happen. If the adults do not properly plan ahead, then the children's ability to engage in play can be hindered. Ultimately, the focus is on the children and their development through play, but the authors recognize that the adults involved shape that development by how much they plan ahead and organize for certain activities. It is not a far stretch to say that the development of children through playtime is contingent on how willing the adults are to participate in that developmental process. This book can only serve as a guide; how effectively that guide is implemented is up to the adults. This paragraph builds a connection with the adults by allowing children to be the center of the playtime activity while also recognizing that the adults involved serve as a vital starting point for playtime to happen. Again, the authors emphasize the idea that the children need extra support due to their unique differences.

**ASD Traits and Positive Development**

ASD traits do not need to be seen as merely negative. The next data excerpt I will analyze

comes from the subsection titled *Creating Toy Appeal.* The example I will be

deconstructing focuses on a student who loves tactile play. The excerpt from this chapter

is as follows,

> This student loves tactile play. His interest is evident in his overfocus on these
> types of materials to the exclusion of others. Instead of disregarding this interest
> when we try to teach the student to attend to something different, however, we
> utilize the interest. He finds colorful noisemakers when enjoying a tactile
> experience. He pauses to attend to these and begins to add visual and auditory
> exploration to his repertoire of skills (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 12).

The teachers realized that this student was overly focused on one form of play

and so it became evident that this focus could also incorporate something else. This

example highlights a typical trait of an ASD child and the authors use a down-to-earth

approach of combining of the familiar with the unfamiliar. This created a gradation

effect, which eased the student into exploring something new. The authors give real

life examples of typical traits of ASD children and offer practical solutions to help

overcome obstacles.

Another example of how an ASD trait can be the starting point of positive

development of a child comes from the subsection called *Use Familiar Routines.* In

this section, the authors give examples of children who need routines. Having strict

routines is typical of ASD and trying to break an autistic child from a routine can

cause tremendous stress for both the child and the adult. Instead, the authors suggest

trying to incorporate familiar routines into playtime. "Routines can add predictability.

Knowing what to expect and feeling competent to tackle an activity always increases

appeal" (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 16).

The authors state earlier that other people can be too unpredictable and confusing for ASD children. It is the case that toys can be too unpredictable and confusing too. In this example,

> Putting materials into containers is a familiar routine for this student. While lying on a big ball, he puts colorful plastic eggs into a container. Combining the put-in routine, a skill about which he feels confident, with the big ball, an unusual position eases him into this different experience (Eckenrode et al., 2009:16).

Like in the first example, the teacher sees something this child is familiar with and decides to incorporate a new aspect to the routine.

**ASD Children Need Support from Adults**

The next example is form the subsection *Helping Students Get Started in a Play Center* in chapter 3. This example shows that many ASD children often need help with getting started with a toy because they may be too stressed by the social demands or overwhelmed by all of the choices. Being overwhelmed by too many choices is a typical trait of ASD children and by making simple modifications to play centers in a classroom or at home, such as setting out toys so they are ready to play or providing visuals to promote ideas, can help children overcome feelings of stress or exhaustion. Since no setup is required on behalf of the child to use the toy, the child is more likely to play with a toy that is already setup for them (Eckenrode, Fennel, Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 34). This second example focuses on a teacher who has set up a toy for a child to play with. The example states, "When this teacher lays out ready to go toys, she often labels the bin with a photo of her student's playing with that toy. When the student sees her picture on this box in the play area, she initiates play wit the zoo animals" (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 34).

The use of the phrase "ready to go toys" is important because it highlights the need for adults to help facilitate playtime by planning ahead and setting up toys for the kids to play with. "Ready to go toys" is an important phrase because if just the word "toys" were present, the emphasis on the adult helping their child by setting up the toys would be lost.

**ASD Children Have Cognitive Differences**

Chapter 5, *It's Pretend,* discusses the importance of symbolic play and how symbolic play is critical to children's cognitive development. Symbolic play allows children to think abstractly, integrate ideas, and be spontaneous -- all the things children with ASD struggle with. By identifying the cognitive differences children with ASD have, those differences can be used as a guide to help teach core concepts that can someday boost creativity in both the pretend world, and in the real world of school and independent living. The children in the books are seen as individuals with their own cognitive abilities. "If we looks closely, however, we realize that they [children with ASD] are more adept at memorizing play scenarios and at using prompts than at thinking creatively and spontaneously. The cognitive differences identified in individuals with ASD have bearing on the development of pretend play, just as they have bearing on academic learning" (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 47). Again, this shows that the books present ASD children as individuals with different cognitive abilities, not as a homogenous group having the very same challenges.

**ASD Children Have Difficulty Reading Emotions**

The second example from the chapter comes from the subsection *Associate Emotions.* Many children with ASD have trouble reading and understanding facial expressions and body language. By creating activities that teach students to match emotions to facial

expressions, students can understand the relationship between the two. The example task

provided shows a teacher creating an emotional scavenger hunt for her students. The

example is as follows,

> These students go on an emotions scavenger hunt. Their teacher gives them a card with the emotion pictures they are to find. When the students locate an emotion picture, their teacher points out changes in the facial expression. The teacher then acts out the emotion. Here, she hands students tissues so they can pretend to be sad also. After each student pretends to be sad, happy, mad, or shocked by something yucky, he removes the face with that emotion from his card. When the children remove all the cards, they have pretended each emotion and know the game is over (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 58).

The underlying idea here is that one of the key markers of autism is a lack of

understanding emotional expressions.

## ASD Children Have Difficulty in Imaginative Scenarios

The final example from this chapter comes from the subsection *Pretend To Be Someone*

*Else.* In the introductory paragraph, the authors say that playing dress-up, for children

without ASD, can be a fun and exciting experience. Children who do not have ASD are

easily able to integrate new ideas and concepts into their playtime with ease. The idea of

dressing up as, and pretending to be, a princess or a doctor requires little effort and

almost comes intuitively to children who do not have developmental disabilities.

However, for children who have ASD, playing dress-up may be more challenging. "Most

young children love to dress up; children with developmental challenges, however, may

need to first become accustomed to wearing something other than their own clothes

before we ask them to assume a pretend role" (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 67). There is a

widespread range of reasons why children with ASD may not like dressing up. One idea

is that the material children's costumes are made from might contain textures, such as

Velcro, or fabrics which children with ASD might be averse to. Another reason why

children with ASD might not like dress-up is that the clothes are unfamiliar to them. By slowly integrating dress-up props into fun and meaningful activities, children can become less anxious to the idea of dressing up. This is one example of how ASD children are shown to be different from children who do not have ASD.

In this example, "Another student pretends to jump over a log and into a lily pond. To help him understand that he is pretending to be a frog, he wears a frog hat and holds a frog puppet. Based on a rhyme he hears frequently during circle time, he knows how a frog might act" (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 67). In this example, the child is being allowed to use his imagination in trying to figure out what things he could do when pretending to be a frog. The child is able to recall a rhyme and uses that as a way to help him guide his role-playing. The props provided for him aide him in his role-playing experience. The phrase "Based on a rhyme he hears frequently during circle time, he knows how a frog might act" is an important sentence in this scenario because the student is using his deductive reasoning skills to figure out how to act in this play scene. If this sentence were left out, then the reader does not know how wearing the frog hat and holding the frog puppet aide this student. It is also important to highlight that by saying "based on….", the authors are making the point that children with autism are capable of using reasoning and deductive skills. This might seems like an obvious point to make, but sadly not all people believe this to be true. Research has show that individuals with autism typically have significant problems in areas of conceptual reasoning and problem solving despite having average or above average intelligence (as cited in Williams, et.al., 2014). However, just because a person has trouble with problem solving and reasoning, does not mean that the person is incapable of doing such tasks at all.


**ASD Children Can Become Easily Anxious**

Another typical trait of ASD children is aversion to certain textures or not knowing what to do with certain materials. Introducing new textures or materials can make ASD children anxious. The authors say, "Some of our students shy away from Play-doh because they do not like the texture, or they do not have ideas of what to do with the play material. Giving them clear directions about what to do and for how long encourages many of these students to give Play-doh a try" (Eckenrode, et al.,2009: 115). In this statement, the authors highlight the fact that some textures are not appealing to certain children. The children "shy away from" the clay. If the authors had said the children were scared of the Play-doh, then the meaning of the sentence would change. Shying away from something does not automatically mean to be scared. Shying away from something also does not rule out the possibility of trying whatever it is one may be nervous about. The authors also acknowledge the fact that some students would have no idea what to do with the material unless they were given ideas on what to do with it.

This same issue is highlighted again in the section *Drawing and Painting.* The authors state, "Drawing and painting play a role in curricula for young children, but organizing the materials and deciding what to create can be problematic for many children with ASD. Segmenting materials, offering suggestions that incorporate interests, and clarifying starting and ending points make these materials more understandable and help the students build a repertoire of drawing skills" (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 116). The authors use of the phrase "build a repertoire of…" is nice imagery because it shows that skills the students learn all build one on top of another.

In the examples above, the ASD children are seen as needing support in developing their social skills, as benefiting from routines, as not feeling comfortable with using imagination or utilizing new play materials.

The conceptions of autism presented in the data show that the authors view children with ASD as being just as capable of participating in "normal" childhood

activities, so long as their autism is accommodated for. Accommodating for a child's autism can be vital in making sure that they do not become overwhelmed and that playtime is a successful, positive experience.

## 6.2 Creating Trust

In this next section, I will be examining the two main ways in which the authors create trust with the readers. They are arguments from authority and emotive language. Creating trust in the educational materials seems to be of great importance to the authors, as I will demonstrate in sections such as *Persuading Through Empathy* and *Emotive Language*. Since these materials are for educational purposes, the authors need to demonstrate their qualifications as educational professionals. They must strike a balance as to not sound overly clinical or overly sentimental. Taking one side over another can give the appearance of diminishing their credibility, which could be detrimental to their reputations as reliable authors.

## Arguments from Authority

The readers must be convinced that the authors know what they are talking about and that they have the best interesting in mind for autistic children. By building up their credibility through arguments from authority, they are highlighting their knowledge and expertise, which in turn shows the reader that they have the tools and credibility necessary to be giving the advice laid out in these books.

The "About the Authors" Section in *Tasks Galore* outlines a brief summary of who the authors are, what their careers have encompassed, and what their connection to TEACCH is. This section helps to further qualify the authors as reliable sources for those who may be wondering how and if they have the credentials to have written this particular series. Two of the authors come from a teaching background. One of the authors, at the time of this book's publication, is a psychoeducational therapist, and the final author, as per the publication of the book, is a TEACCH

therapist and former director of the TEACCH supported employment program. The inclusion of this section if vital to show that the authors are indeed qualified and have experience with the program. This section can serve to put to rest any doubts parents or therapists might have when deciding on whether or not to use this book with an autistic child.

The arguments from authority are stated in a "matter-of-fact" style and not overly aggressive. If the authors had been more aggressive in their language, it is possible that they would have come off to their audience as condescending or impolite. By using arguments from authority stated in a more approachable, softer way, the authors are not alienating the readers by making them feel unintelligent or insulted. By using a softer authoritative voice, the authors are also avoiding the possibility that they come off to the reader as if they know the readers' autistic children better than the reader knows their children.

**Stating What the Books Are Not**

The third paragraph of the Introduction in *Tasks Galore: Let's Play* outlines the goal of the book. However, it is noteworthy that the authors being by stating what that the goal of this book *is not*, which is a rather unique approach.  By drawing this boundary, the authors are limiting the scope of the content to areas the authors are experts in. They say the goal of the book is to, "not to teach play. Play is created and spontaneously initiated by the child; it cannot be taught" (Eckenrode, Fennel, Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 1). As the authors say, the goal of the book is to use play to enhance learning by teaching children the processes that bring about play. By starting the paragraph with what the book is not is necessary. This is the case because the authors are directly addressing a particular group of people who may be inclined to think that this book will somehow teach their children to play and, as such, perhaps they (the adults) do not have to be involved. By stating what the book is not is also allowing the children to be the center of the activity by saying that

the children are the ones who create play. Children use their mental faculties to facilitate playtime and make it unique and meaningful to them. If play were to be taught, the children's creative abilities would be taken from them because they are being told what to do with their imaginations, how to do it, and in what scenarios. This would severely impede the children's development because instead of being allowed to foster their creative potential, the adults would be re-enforcing the preference for rigidity and patterns by telling the children that they can only use their creativity in a set way.

The final paragraph of the Introduction dives further into outlining strategies parents and teachers can use to make playtime meaningful and interesting for ASD children. The last sentence of this paragraph reminds the reader to always be monitoring the children's development continuously by looking at ongoing areas of improvement and celebrating in children's playtime achievements (Eckenrode, Fennel, Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 2). By having parents in charge, they can feel they are involved in the developmental process of helping their children learn and grow.

**Soft Authoritative Voice**

The next example comes from a subsection in titled *Joining Children in Actions They Initiate and Find Fun* in chapter one. The last 2 sentences of this excerpt are another example of the authors using a soft authoritative voice. In this subsection, the focus is on examples of children leading playtime activities and their teachers or parents joining them. The example I will be looking at concerns a teacher who wanted her student to focus on using bean bags with letters printed on them to work on his academic goal. However, the child was not interested at all. The paragraph describing this exchange is as follows,

> Another teacher wanted her students to use alphabet bean bags to work on
> academic goals, but he had no interest. When she allowed him to play with the

bean bags as he wished, the teacher saw his enjoyment in stacking them on his head. She copied his idea to the student's delight. She recognized that social engagement was also an important goal for this student. The teacher abandoned the academic goal temporarily to join in with an activity her student deemed fun and shared his enjoyment. In doing so, she drew attention to herself and helped her student have fun with someone, not just with things (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 4).

The authors are telling the readers what they can do in a rather ambiguous way by using this teacher as an example. If the authors had used the imperative mood, the example would lose its strength because the imperative mood is too harsh sounding for such a fun example. The mood of the example is very light and playful and the authors need to keep the mood light and playful when giving their instructions to the readers.

Furthermore, this dialogue is establishing trust on two different levels. The first level concerns the trust between the teacher and the student and the second level of trust concerns the authors and the reader.

The trust between the teacher and the student is shown when the teacher makes the decision to abandon the academic goal in exchanging for doing something the student likes. This teacher is establishing trust with her student by showing him that what he likes is important and fun. The student is learning by doing something he likes and is working on social engagement. Trust is an important aspect of social engagement, particularly between a teacher and student. The authors express that trust with word choices such as "she allowed him", "She copied his idea", and "The teacher abandoned the academic goal temporarily...".

The second level of trust is between the authors and the reader. The authors are showing the readers that the TEACCH program is fun and can be effective by giving examples, like this one, wherein learning and play go hand-in-hand. This is the idea throughout the entire book, but this example shows how individualization of a

task can be beneficial to a student who was not interested in what the adults had planned originally. The authors demonstrate this trust when they state, "The teacher abandoned the academic goal temporarily to join in with an activity her student deemed fun and shared his enjoyment" (Eckenrode, et. al., 2009: 4).

Another way the authors build up their credibility is by how they state what the roles of adults should be to accommodate autistic children. One of the roles adults hold is setting up and being organized so playtime is effective. As stated,

> Children with ASD have a need for sameness, evident their preferring to use toys in rigid and set patterns, and may have over interest or aversion to various sensory stimuli. These trains of thought limit their toy interest and experimentation. By planning ahead, organizing steps sequentially, and thinking imaginatively, most children are able to integrate ideas easily into play scenarios – complete with props and different characters (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 1).

The authors are using an authoritative voice in this paragraph, but how they do so is quite unique. Rather than using the imperative mood, the authors are being authoritative in how they choose to start their sentences. They are being with firm, matter-of-fact statements when starting sentences with "These trains of thought…" and "By planning ahead…". In this way, the tone is not as harsh as the imperative, but rather a softer authoritative voice. If the authors had chosen to use the imperative mood, the text would read as if the authors were yelling through the pages. However, the softer authoritative voice gives directions while not reading quite so aggressively. The authors need to find a balance between being too commanding and too lax and the softer authoritative voice achieves this balance.

**Building Trust Through Examples**

One way the authors build trust with the readers is by giving simple, down-to-earth examples that have been shown to work. The following example comes from the

subsection titled *Incorporating Sounds.* The students in both examples are learning to take an interest in people and not only objects. The teachers are acting in such a way to make the child the center of the activity while encouraging them to work on social interaction. In this example, a teacher makes sounds of disgust as a student suggests that she eats a worm (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 8). The association of sound with an action or a person is important for children to recognize and use to engage with their teachers. The sound grabs the student's attention and makes him laugh (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 8). This interaction is described as, "Another student love his teacher's yucky sound when he suggests she eat a worm" (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 8).

These examples are easy ideas that readers could do at home with their kids. By showing that the examples work, the authors are helping to build trust with the readers.


**Giving Straightforward Instructions**

Chapter 3, *Managing Playtimes,* is a relatively short chapter, but is significantly important to successful playtime. Time management is a skill that children will need to know in academics and in their everyday lives, therefore starting time management learning early can allow for success in the future. One way to teach time management is by using the phrase "First____, next___". Again, the authors are using simple examples that the reader could easily incorporate in their children's routines. By using these simple examples, the authors build trust with the readers by showing that teaching important life skills does not have to be a daunting, impossible seeming task.

Example 1 comes from the subsection titled *Teaching Students How to Use Play Sequences.* By teaching the concepts of *first/next,* and *all done,* transitioning from one activity to another or during an activity can be made easier. In teaching *first/next,* children are able to learn that sometimes, people must delay the things they *want to do* because they must first complete a task that they are *expected to do* (Eckenrode, Fennel,

Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 30). By using the phrase "First____, next___" repeatedly, the concept can be utilized across all settings and is an important life lesson. By incorporating familiar with the unfamiliar, a gradation effect is in place again. The students can see what is coming next and they can trust that what is said will come next actually happens.

**Persuading Through Empathy and Soft Authoritative Voice**

In the next example, the authors of the books show how a soft authoritative voice can be used to persuade ASD children in play activity. The authors, in this example, describe how play is such a complicated task for an ASD child and they are trying to bring the reader down to the child's level.  Chapter 6, *It's Playtime,* centers on children learning to play with their peers. By using the skills children learned from interacting with their parents and/or teachers, peer interaction is the next step in the development process of social skills. The introductory paragraph states that,

> Playing with others is so complex. Unlike toys, peers are neither constant nor consistent. While playing, children initiate and respond based on what their playmates do. At any time, a playmate may suggest changes in a turn-taking game or role-playing scenario. With words, they try to convince us to do something their way. They may also tell us, "No", when we ask them to play with us, give us a turn, or suggest a change. Through direct teaching, routines and visual strategies, we attempt to help our students with these ever-changing interactions. We set up activities, so students can learn how to share, take turns, and communicate with others. Then, we closely observe students when they play in natural settings with peers to determine what other skills to teach and what routines or cues to restructure. We want our students to experience successful interactive play, so they can see how fulfilling it can be to share and collaborate with playmates. These lessons learned at play become essential social skills useful in all aspects of life (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 77).

This excerpt is a lengthy example of the authors using a soft authoritative voice. This form of the soft authoritative voice expresses instruction through empathy. Empathy can

be a strong tool when trying to get readers to understand their child's situation. When the authors say, "At any time, a playmate may suggest changes in a turn-taking game or role-playing scenario. With words, they try to convince us to do something their way. They may also tell us, "No", when we ask them to play with us, give us a turn, or suggest a change", it becomes easier for a reader to imagine a time in their childhood playing with friends. By using the soft authoritative voice, the authors are also trying to bring the readers down to the emotional level of a child and remind them how hurtful it can feel to be told "No" or rejected by our peers. Compound that with the social and emotional difficulties ASD children face and playtime can easily become stressful and overwhelming.

Correspondingly, the authors emphasize the point that "lessons learned at play become essential social skills useful in all aspects of life". This paragraph is also seems to be putting an emphasis on verbal communication when the authors state "With words, they try to convince us to do something their way. They may also tell us, "No", when we ask them to play with us, give us a turn, or suggest a change." This seems to contradict the pre-existing discourse that there is no one "right" way to communicate, however the authors return to the idea that there is no one "right" way to communicate in the subsection *Giving Students Practice in Communicating.* In this subsection, the authors state, "…they [autistic children] may excel at communicating with adults, but not with their peers. Because communicating can be so difficult for students with ASD and other developmental challenges, we design play activities that encourage communication both with caregivers and peers" (Eckenrode et al.,2009: 86).

**Emotive Language**

Chapter one of *Tasks Galore: Let's Play* is titled "People Can Be Fun". The introductory paragraph of the chapter uses strong visual and emotional language such as "infants' first

smiles", "delight in hearing their [parent's] babies' laughter", and "sharing their [children's'] enjoyment enthusiastically" (Eckenrode, Fennel, Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 3). The use of emotive language conveys feelings of innocence and joy. The feelings of love and care that parents have towards their children are used to draw in the reader and help them relate to the topic of the chapter. For parents reading this book, the use of strong emotive language may stir up happy memories and even pride as they see their child growing up in front of them. The use of emotive language builds trust with the readers because readers are led to believe that the authors truly have their children's best interest at heart.

The introductory paragraph almost reads like a storybook because the language is not overly complex and addresses the matter of ASD children not being engaged with their parents in a simple and easy to understand way. This use of language also helps to foster trust because the authors are demonstrating to the reader that they can imagine what it is like to see a small child grow up in front of them. Then, after the authors have established a connection with the reader, they move on to the issues facing ASD children. The authors say that "parents are the source of so much fun" and "For these children, people may be too variable and confusing to be fun. [play] begins with giving them [children] reasons to attend to us" (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 3). The authors are showing the reader, in simple terms, why children with ASD may have trouble connecting with their parents. This also underscores the idea that the parents are not at fault for their children not being interested in them.

The arguments from emotion here are well disguised in the examples, but what the authors are doing by stating how the students and teachers interact is to create an image in the readers' mind of hearing and visualizing those scenarios. Seeing a child having fun learning would raise positive emotions in most parents. If a parent can imagine their child enjoying himself or herself, then a parent may feel more inclined to

try out some of the activities in the book so the image in their heads of their kids having

fun can be materialized.

The Acknowledgements section ends with the following sentiment, "Finally, a

special thanks to "our children" who light our way each and every day" (Eckenrode et.

al., 2013: 2). The use of the word "our" in both instances creates a feeling of

responsibility and emits an image of familial structure. The use of the word "our" builds

an emotional bridge between the authors and the readers so as to help in forming trust.

The use of the word "our" is intentional because it makes the readers feel supported in

their journey to helping their child.

In the two instances of the use "our", there is a sense of responsibility created by forming

that familial hierarchy in which the authors, and maybe even the parents are included as well, are

shown to be the ones caring and providing for their ("our") children. However, there is reciprocity

happening in this sentiment that should not be overlooked. The authors and parents are providing

for the children by use this book as an educational tool, but the children are also providing the

authors and the parents a metaphorical "light" to help guide the way "every day" in terms of

education and who the children are as people. The emphasis initially is on the authors, but the core

focus shifts back to the children at the end of this section. The "light" metaphor is an emotional pull

that helps bridge a gap between the readers and authors. The "light" metaphor also closes the

hierarchical gap between researcher, educator, and layperson.

**6.3 Agency of ASD Children**

Effectively exerting agency can lend to more successful and enjoyable playtime experiences, not to

mention reducing precious learning time wasted. In the example that begins with "Another teacher

wanted her students to use alphabet bean bags to work on academic goals, but he had no interest,"

the student is exerting his agency by showing that he is not interested in the activity that his teacher

had planned out for him. Not explicitly written, but rather implied is that the student and teacher both were self-reflecting on the activity and making decisions internally about whether or not the activity was worth spending time on. Once those internal decisions were made, they were expressed externally, with the student showing his teacher that he is not interested and with the teacher altering the activity to make him more engaged. Instead of forcing the student to do something which he clearly was not interested in, the teacher acknowledged the student exerting his agency by showing displeasure and changing how she expressed her agency by doing a different, more interesting activity so the student would stay engaged and learning time would not be wasted. When the authors are using a soft authoritative voice in this example, they are demonstrating to the readers how they can alter how they express their agency if an activity is not going according to plan. The adults must be flexible in how they exert their agency so the students can see that they are just as interested as them.

**Agency in Play Scenarios**

In the example that begins with "Playing with others is so complex," the authors go on to describe how variable playing with other people can be. The authors are trying to express how other people exert their agencies in play scenarios and how those agencies are inconsistent and inconstant. Anyone at anytime can decide they want to or not want to do something. The authors are thus trying to show that others changing their agencies can be very difficult and confusing for ASD children who rely on constants and consistency to inform their actions. Since children with ASD have a diminished SoA, for them comprehending how and why they do certain actions is challenging enough. Combine that with trying to understand how and why others are acting the way they do is even more perplexing.

The authors are once again, using a soft authoritative voice to help guide the reader in how they can effectively exert their agency when playing and monitoring their children. The authors try to bring the perspective from short-term playtime to the long-

term future when they state, "These lessons learned at play become essential social skills useful in all aspects of life." The authors want the reader to understand how exert their agency in their child's life will affect the long-term future of their child's development.

One factor to consider is that the children in the data are at a TEACCH Autism Center in North Carolina and this is a "safe space" where the children do not have to worry about how an outsider will react to them exerting their agency. By starting out in a "safe space", the children are able to practice their social skills with others before having to utilize those skills in the outside world. The children should feel safe and supported in their environment and the TEACCH Autism Center is one place where children can build up their self-confidence to make decisions and interact with others.

**Agency and Have to/Choose to Scenarios**

In the next example, a teacher set up a schedule with "have to" and "choose to" activities. A student looks at his schedule and sees that he has to go to the blocks activity, but later he can choose to do an activity of his choice. He goes to the container with blocks in it and sees on printed cards that he has to make a car, house, and flowers before he can do his "choose to" activity. Previously, the student only had an interest in trains and only created trains with the blocks or other manipulative objects. This activity allows his play to become more flexible as he was more willing to explore new themes and activities (Eckenrode, Fennel, Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 99).

During this next example, the activity allows the student to learn the concept of First/Next by instructing him to complete a list of tasks before he is allowed to freely choose what he wants to create. By using the cards with the specific image he is supposed to create, he is being instructed on making something different with materials he is familiar with. This child's agency is being limited by the supplies he is given and by what tasks he must complete first before he can continue on to the next task. The ability for the

child to see and make things other than trains with blocks can help him in understanding

that toy blocks can be used in a variety of different ways. By limiting his agency, this

child is learning time sequencing, flexibility, and creativity. He is being allowed to

exercise his independent, creative thinking once he completes the "have to" requirements.

The "have to" exercises serve as cues for him to get ideas on what other things he can

make with the blocks. Limiting this child's agency briefly, in turn, assisted him in finding

new ways to use his creativity.

Another example comes from the section *Establishing Routines That Encourage*

*Flexibility While Respecting Prized Possessions.* Establishing routines is important for

ASD children and many children with ASD tend to be fixated on one particular toy and,

as such, will want to play with it exclusively. By adding daily routines that allow children

to know when they can play with their favorite toy, this might allow them to be open to

playing with new toys and trying new play activities. A previously mentioned technique,

First/Next sequencing, can be applied when making routines.

> Because of strong ideas and interests, students with ASD may not understand
> the necessity of following these schedules, however, and become frustrated
> when asked to leave what they prefer. For a schedule to become meaningful,
> students with ASD often need an individual one that they manipulate and one
> that specifically shows when they can participate in their favorite activity"
> (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 99).

The authors are showing the readers though the text that the students are allowed to do

what they want, but that they must first do things that they prefer less. By showing the

students that they will be allowed to do their favorite activity once they complete the

mandatory one, the students exert a certain degree of agency in their activities.

**ASD Children are Capable of Making Choices**

The topic and introductory paragraph to the fourth chapter, *Making Choices and Ending Them,* focuses on ways to help children realize the choices they can make as well as helping children understand what making a choice means. How children communicate their choices is important too, since choice making may involve the help of an adult. By creating choice making opportunities for children, thinking about choices becomes part of their daily routine. With creating choices comes the need to end them as well. For children, the ability to put away a toy or end an activity they are really enjoying is difficult. Children with ASD have trouble in shifting their focus onto a new activity if they are intensely enjoying the activity they are currently involved in. By creating finishing routines, the stress that comes with trying to end one activity and start a new one can be lessened.

The authors again reemphasize the fact that certain aspects of play are not intuitive to many ASD children. They state, "visualizing options, acting spontaneously, and thinking flexibly are not inherent skills for children with ASD and other developmental challenges, they have difficulty realizing their choices" (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 37). The authors try to bring the adult readers down to the level of the child by explicitly stating what aspects of play are difficult for ASD children. The authors then state, "It is our responsibility as caregivers to make sure we instruct our children about choice-making skills. We begin this task by assessing whether students understand what making a choice means….We also pay attention to how they communicate their choices (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 37).

The following example comes from chapter 4 in the subsection *Ensuring Students Understand What Making A Choice Means.* In this subsection, the authors begin by stating that, because of adults' eagerness to teach their children, sometimes adults forget that some children do not understand what making a choice means when having to do so. The authors then go on to say that adults need to "remember to assess whether they

understand what making a choice means. We realize that the children do not know how to choose when they pick any object offered without showing a preference, attempt to choose all options, or do not attend to any of the toys (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 38). If a child does not understand what making a choice means, then one way to help is to present the child with two options. Option one would be an object that the child would have no interest in. Option two would be an object the child has some possible interest in. This exercise also teaches children that communication can get them something they really want to have. This, according to the authors, also increases the likelihood that the child will communicate independently in the future without having to be prompted to do so (Eckenrode, Fennel, Hearsey, Reynolds 2009: 38). The authors state, "Learning that communication gets you something you really want increase the likelihood you might communicate more independently in future exchanges (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 8).

**Agency and Communicating Needs**

In another example, two students need to complete their coloring sheets and must use specific crayons to do so. The students understand, via direct teaching, that, "…if they do not have a crayon in their cup, they can ask their friend. The children either use the "I need" visual to prompt what to say or give the posted crayon as a way to request the color they need" (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 86).

The students are able to exercise independence in this activity because coloring is an independent activity in itself. On the other hand, when having to share materials with others, the children must come out of their comfort zones. Allowing students to decide if they want to communicate verbally or nonverbally lessens possible communication anxiety with others. In this activity, the students are allowed to color the picture however they want, but their options for what color crayons to use is limited so as to possibly prevent the children from feeling overwhelmed with so many options. The authors are

continuing the idea that there is no one "right" way to communicate when they say "students…decide if they want to communicate verbally or non-verbally".

# 7 RESULTS

On the basis of my analysis, I will give here short answers to the research questions of this study.

## 7.1 Research Question 1

As an answer to my first research question, "How is trust being built between the readers and the authors in the text?", the data clearly demonstrates that trust is being built in two important ways. Among those ways of building trust are, use of emotive language and arguments from authority in a sometimes-ambiguous way. This is done by using phrases such as, "delight in hearing their [parent's] babies' laughter", and "sharing their [children's'] enjoyment enthusiastically" (Eckenrode, et.al., 2009: 3) and "The teacher abandoned the academic goal temporarily to join in with an activity her student deemed fun and shared his enjoyment. In doing so, she drew attention to herself and helped her student have fun with someone, not just with things (Eckenrode et al., 2009: 4). The authors build their credibility up as professionals in the field to the readers by implementing arguments from authority. They also show, through emotive language, that they can be trusted as adults who care for children with disabilities. The authors also show how emotive language can be used to persuade the children to participate in the activities introduced in the books. The authors also use an authoritative voice, but they do it in such as a way as to not sound patronizing.

**7.2 Research Question 2**

The second research question, "How are ASD children perceived in the teaching

materials?" is answered in the following ways. The children are perceived as having the

ability to problem solve and use reasoning skills as individuals, however they need some

guidance from adults. Some students are very shy around new materials or have set

routines. In these cases, the children also need guidance from adults to help them learn to

play with new materials or incorporate a new task in a schedule. The children may have

dulled reasoning and problem solving skills, however they do not lack these skills

entirely and each of the students is viewed as an individual.

**7.3 Research Question 3**

ASD children's agency is displayed through play and other guided social situations. The books put

the children at the center of the activities with the adults as supports. As the authors state, "Play is

created and spontaneously initiated by the child" (Eckenrode, et al., 2013: 1). The children are

allowed to exert their agency in various spaces and situations. One concern of people in the disabled

community is the intent of others to seem caring and supportive when in fact they are insulting,

demeaning, and patronizing. Since the children in the data are in a "safe space," then their agency

does not have limited based on what outsiders might possibly say or do to them. Furthermore, by

having the authors instruct adults on how they can support and facilitate playtime with their

children, the authors letting the parents know that they are supported. As such, the authors are

giving the adults ideas on how they can effectively exert their agency when trying to support their

children. In some cases, limiting a child's agency by limiting what supplies they can use can

actually help in building a child's creativity and help them not become overwhelemed.

# 8 DISCUSSION

The importance of looking at how language is used in educational materials cannot be underestimated. By analyzing the language used in educational materials, discourses of power struggles, ideological struggles, and cultural biases come to light. Whether or not a child has a disability, the uniting factor in all children is that they are human beings. Locke's definition of personhood is still viable today because it does not mention empathy as being a marker of humanity, unlike the definition of humanity Professor Simon Baron-Cohen proposes where he excludes autistic people from the notion of humanity via the criterion of empathy (Baron-Cohen, 2003; 2003). By making specific principles of empathy that, by definition, autistic people are not capable of meeting, and arguing that empathy is central to humankind, Baron-Cohen (2011) disallows autistic people from being completely human.

It is easy for people to go into research trying to find something wrong to can talk about. However, it cannot be underestimated how important it is to discuss what is being done well and what is shown to work. Discussing what is being done well allows the researcher to see how far research in an area has come and what remarkable discoveries have been made. There will always be room for improvement, but looking at the positive aspects of a subject can also be highly motivating.

The data shows that largest of the themes is trust. Trust between all parties involved is shown time and time again. The authors are demonstrating to the readers that they can be trusted because of the linguistic choices they make in both books. The teachers are showing that they can be trusted by interacting with their students in the activities. The readers get a very strong sense that the authors' care and concern for the wellbeing of autistic children is real and it is genuine. The use of emotive language in an educational text was vital in conveying that the authors' care is genuine. In addition, if the emotive language had not been as prominent in the text, then the authors ran the risk

of their books sounding too clinical and removed from the reader. The authors create a strong balance between not being overly clinical or overly casual. The balance they have created hits a middle ground throughout both books.

Furthermore, people who do not have backgrounds in psychology or childhood education are supposed to be able to understand the contents of the books (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 4). If the contents of the books are understandable to the average person, then the translation from scientific jargon to layman's language was successful. If the books do not make sense, then the translation was ineffective.

The themes presented in both books play off one another and it was very important that I kept the context so as to demonstrate how important context for the themes are. Organizing my analysis thematically would have been too messy and confusing because the context would have not been there to support my ideas and arguments. Individually, the books present the themes strongly, but to achieve the larger picture, which is that treating autism requires enormous amounts of patients, time, and repetition. The themes had to be repeated again in the second book to emphasize this point to the readers. As the authors mentioned, these books are not intended to be a "fix all" solution, but repeating the themes of trust, arguments from authority, and emotive language seems to be the authors' way of reminding the reader they cannot give up in helping their child (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 4-6). Placing emphasis on those three themes in particular helps the reader to feel like they are not alone in helping their child and that there are others who care and want to help.

The language of the data should not be patronizing or promote cure culture because that would be unethical and irresponsible. Promoting cure culture would be irresponsible and unethical because by promoting that discourse, what is being said is that autism is a disorder that needs to be cured. The need for a cure innately implies that autism is a defect and perpetuates the idea that people with autism are mentally deficient

and less than human (Hagen, 2017: 41-42). Promoting that discourse would encourage discrimination rather than tolerance and understanding.

Education materials have the ability to strongly shape discourses about the way the general public views a particular topic because teachers are seen as being the shapers and creators of future generations. The dialogues that happen within classrooms have the ability to greatly affect dialogues outside classrooms and vice versa. Educators have a particularly important responsibility to teach tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of those who are different from us (Eckenrode, et al., 2009: 4). It is important that educators review their classroom materials carefully to spot any possible messages or dialogues that could be problematic.

The contributions this thesis brings to research in Applied Linguistics, discourses in medicine, and social sciences are relevant. Arguably one of the most hurtful things to tell a child with ASD is that they are not able to do something *because* they have ASD. The lack of materials available in Applied Linguistics in medical discourses is concerning because the way people communicate about their health is important. It is imperative to look at power dynamics and parse out where those dynamics hurt or help people, especially those who are disabled. By ignoring the relationship between medicine and communication, there is a precedent set that says that communication and health care are not related, not important, or that whatever language the medical community uses is the most appropriate (Hagen, 2017: 34). What the medical community and the public at large cannot forget is that many genetic and biological factors can make someone more inclined towards being autistic, and that autism is usually observed across many generations of families, regardless of race or ethnicity (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2013; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**Limitations of the Study and Areas of Other Possible Research**

One limitation in my research concerns the availability of resources on autism that use evidence based practices. Many articles were disguised as medical sounding, but upon further research, some of those articles turned out to be claiming non-medically accurate or sound ideas. The process of researching took quite a bit longer than expected due to having to sift through cleverly crafted, but medically inaccurate articles. Some articles unquestionably promoted "cure culture" agendas or were sponsored by entities that are of the "cure culture" mindset

There are many different aspects of research that can be looked at even more in-depth. One of the limitations in the research process is the scarcity of background studies that would have focused on ASD from the Applied Linguistics point of view. As a result, much of the research process relied heavily on reading and understanding complex medical articles. Without a background in basic biology, chemistry, and human anatomy, reading those journals would have been an even more monumental task. The language used in those articles was particularly complex and there were many words and concepts that I needed to define to make those articles more comprehendible.
Research on the relationship between the social sciences and medicine still needs to be studied in certain areas and Content Analysis can be an excellent tool for looking at power relations in the field of medicine.

There are many areas of the health care industry where culture and communication problems and dynamics could be researched. For example, there is a medical definition of ASD that must be met for a diagnosis, but how that definition is interpreted can depend largely on someone's cultural background (Bauer,Waxman, & Winegar, 2016). This area has so much potential and it is concerning to see this potential not being explored more thoroughly.

# 9 CONCLUSION

From the beginning of the 1900s people with autism were treated as social outcasts, mentally deficient and subhuman. The treatment of autism as schizophrenia showed a comprehensive lack of understanding for the unique attributes of the disorder. In the early 1900s, the only term there was available to describe autism was autismus, but due to a lack of research, technology, and consideration, people with autism were treated as being severely mentally ill (Hagen, 2017: 27). However, autism is not a mental illness and it is not like schizophrenia, as we understand schizophrenia in a modern sense. Autistic people and people with schizophrenia face completely different problems in their lives and the decision to make autism its own separate diagnosis in the 1980s was revolutionary.

Autism was finally given the recognition it deserves as its own diagnosis and without this diagnosis; the research, technological developments and medical discoveries that have been made would not be possible. This further proves that education in all fields, from education to science to informing the general public, is crucial in raising awareness for ASD. Simply because a person has a genetic predisposition to autism does not make them less deserving of equal treatment.

Autism awareness starts from the ground up. Educating children from a young age about autism is critical in creating tolerance, care, and respect for those living with ASD. If children can learn that their peers with ASD are just as unique as they are, then the path to eliminating discrimination can begin and lays the foundation for a future where people with ASD do not have to fear being outcast from society. Social inclusion for people with ASD is vital.

The promotion of cure culture is dangerous and creates a dialogue where by people with ASD are viewed as being somehow deficient. In turn, this dialogue suggests that autism is a defect that should be eliminated. The dialogues cure culture creates do not

encourage tolerance and social acceptance. The dialogues that cure culture creates are the exact opposite and will only hinder the ability for people with ASD to feel they are a part of society (Hagen, 2017: 19). Another aspect of cure culture dialogues is that they do no take into account the fact that some people with autism feel that their autism is a critical part of their identity, and without autism, those people would lose an important part of who they are.

The Tasks Galore series allows children explore their agency by allowing them to initiate activities and learn through play. Learning through play allows children to have fun while also learning important skills they will need to use throughout the rest of their lives. Playtime encourages children to be creative, use their thinking skills, and learn to interact with others. Playtime also teaches children how to effectively manage their time and organize items so they can be used most effectively. The roles that adult figures hold in playtime is absolutely to the successful outcomes that playtime can have.

Adults have to be active and encourage children to expand their world by showing them how toys can be used in various ways or how exploring new textures, spaces, and materials can be exciting and fun. Encouragement is absolutely necessary.

Autism has impacted my life greatly and I have seen firsthand how misdiagnosis and misunderstanding can affect a person. A close person to me was misdiagnosed for many years. It made me so angry to know that this person was being treated differently because of something they could not help. It also made me furious that some of the people who were being so horrible to this person were their own teachers and I wanted this person to know that his autism was not a burden.

It is possible for people with ASD to live fulfilling and rewarding lives. The process of writing this thesis has been a rollercoaster of emotions. The goal of this thesis has been to raise awareness about ASD and that those impacted by autism should not be discriminated against for something they did not ask to have.

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