

Go SDI! PUTTING SOCIAL WORLD ON OUR RADAR  
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Understanding the Nest's unique approach to supporting students' social communication starts with nothing less than a paradigm shift in our thinking. Identifying challenges is only part of our job. We will begin an expansion of our thinking about autism and social communication by learning about the full scope of our work in social development through:

- **The Neurodiversity Movement.** Yes, it is actually a *movement*, which offers us a more expansive way of supporting and communicating with our students.
- Working from **The Middleground.** This is a flexible structure to guide our supports and encourage true two-way communication.
- Understanding our roles in social communication as both **guides and guests.**

Training in an autism program always includes attention to building social "skills." But why is this, and what is the reason the Nest program places a strong emphasis on Social Development Intervention (SDI)? Here we will explore the rationale behind a social invention for autism in the school setting through:

- **The DSM-5:** How does a diagnosis of autism guide an intervention?
- **IDEA:** What the law tells us and why we should be model citizens.
- **CCSS:** Who knew? For students with autism to achieve the Common Core State Standards, they require social pragmatic language support.
- **Research:** Studies show that our students need more than social skills training, they require a social awareness that can generalize to other contexts.
- **Our Students:** If we listen to our students, in their own way they will tell us what they need. By encouraging social awareness and self-advocacy our students are the future...
- **Experts:** Autism only speaks when someone with autism is talking. Adults with autism are the true experts in the field of autism and in the Nest their input is essential to continually improving SDI.

With an understanding of the rationale behind SDI, we now utilize our theoretical foundation to expand our own neurotypical brains. Because we cannot expect our students to develop something we do not do ourselves, we:

- Explore **Theory of Mind** and other cognitive theories to increase our own perspective taking.
- Make the subconscious conscious. **Context** gives meaning to all things great and small, particularly in communication. Understanding our own dependence on context to make sense of the world, and comparing this to our students' way of processing information, we will look at what Peter Vermeulen calls **Context Blindness.**

It's time to get down to brass tacks and see how SDI is essential to the Nest model. Here we will look more closely at the social world of school and SDI's twist on building awareness and self-advocacy. Remember:

- **School is Social.** Our supports are twofold in that social communication happens both around and within academic learning.
- SDI itself is **part of a greater whole** and cannot stand alone.
- To truly support our students, we recognize that social competence is hard work and is best built through **intrinsic motivation**.
- Our students are not a checklist of challenges. They have **strengths** that can drive their communication and **interests** to motivate their social learning.

All of this is very smart yet means nothing if our students can't use it outside of the therapy room. SDI is dedicated to 'flexing' our student's social understanding so that it generalizes to multiple contexts. Here is what **generalization** looks like:

- No team member shall be left untrained!
- What's gonna work? That's right, teamwork... and coming together to collaborate on differentiated supports.
- Generations, cultures, cities, clubs, teams, groups of friends all share a common language that link them in a special way. We use our own Nest language to find our common ground.
- Because we are asking you to do some serious building, we will give you some excellent tools. SDI has tailored strategies that you will learn over the next few months.
- Social supports are essential to our Nest students, and interestingly are beneficial to all kids.

We will wrap things up by hearing once again from the experts.

We know we are not always easy to get along with. Neither are you. Don't limit us by reducing us to stereotypes. We are individuals. Autism is a bit like the Kennedy assassination—the closer you look the less you know. If you're hip, you will learn to dismiss labels and stereotypes and expect the unexpected. If you're square, you will keep chasing an elusive solution to a problem you can't quite define. Einstein said, "If you cannot explain something simply, you do not understand it well enough." Can you explain autism simply, without resorting to Rain Man comparisons? I didn't think so. Don't try to understand autism, try to understand us.

—John Scott Holman