



AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST

EPISODE 71: ADDRESSING PRAGMATICS-DR. KABOT

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode71>

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve for more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education, but my real love is helping special educators. Like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Chris:

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I am super excited to have you here today to hear the second part of my interview with Dr. Susan Kabot about pragmatics. If you missed last week's episode with the beginning of this interview, I highly recommend going back and listening at autismclassroomresources.com/episode70.

Sue is a special educator with her doctorate in education, as well as a certified and licensed speech pathologist. I've worked with her for years. She's my writing partner, and she is clearly a huge expert in the area of pragmatics and has some great information to share.

Last week she told us what pragmatics were. And we talked a little bit about how it impacts the lives of our students with autism, who are on the higher cognitive end of the spectrum. And today she is going to talk about what educators can do to really address those pragmatic issues. And about things that we should think about in the classroom to help those students. And she concludes with the one thing that she thinks that is important for everybody to remember about pragmatics and autism. I don't want to take up any more time, so let's get started.

Chris:

Last week we talked about pragmatics and what it was. And can you clarify just a little bit how pragmatics plays with social skills and the hidden curriculum, which we've talked about previously on the podcast. And how do you tease those concepts apart? Are they really all kind of wrapped up together? Can you tease them apart?



Sue:

Yeah, I think you can't. If you think the pragmatics part of it is using appropriate language and speaking appropriately for the environment that you're in and the people that you're interacting with. We talk about people with autism not using good pragmatic skills with law enforcement, for example, and getting in more and more difficulty because of that. We talk about children, all the time, who go to church and don't have the appropriate pragmatics. And have this booming voice and aren't able to self-regulate and think the priest is talking to them. And they're talking back and answering rhetorical questions. And again, people are not that tolerant. And so not knowing the right pragmatic language elements in different environments or with different people can create a lot of difficulty for these individuals.

Chris:

Yeah. What can educators do to help students improve pragmatics? What do you think educators, speech pathologists should really be thinking about to work with these students?

Sue:

Well I think, like anything, we don't always remember that because they're smart, it's not enough, that they continue to need direct instruction. I think that we need to think about some elements of direct instruction, modeling, coaching them, rehearsal, are ways to build these skills. I think we can do it through some fun activities. I mean, if we're talking about not knowing how to use your body to create gestures, even playing a game like charades, can be a really good activity for individuals on the spectrum. If they're having problems with question asking, a game like Guess Who is a great game.

We talk about barrier games, which are really useful for individuals who are not good at giving directions, at describing what they want someone to do. And whether we've got a barrier between two children, just like a big piece of cardboard or something. With Legos or with drawing, one child is the direction giver and the other child has to follow the directions. And if they don't understand the direction, they have to kind of repair that conversation and ask them to repeat it. So at the end of the series of directions, they've either built the same model with Legos or they've drawn the same picture. But it allows them to practice those kinds of skills in an age appropriate, entertaining way.



Chris:

So working together and working on using their language in a more social way, but in ways that they can practice and get feedback from other students, but also from adults. Would you recommend starting with adults, starting with kids?

Sue:

Well, I think if we think about pragmatics, right? A child is going to have a different way. There's going to be a more acceptable way for an individual child to interact with an adult versus with another child. So if we don't attack both of those as conversation partners, communication partners, they're never going to learn that difference.


I think one of the reasons early on that Asperger called his population Little Professors is because they were talking like they were little adults. I think we have to be really careful. Because when they're talking like little adults, they're not going to be accepted very well by their peer group. I think that they need both, work with adults, work with children. Understanding there are differences between the way we communicate to different groups. It's probably easier to start with an adult because they can carry the load. And they can kind of shape it and respond appropriately versus another child that's not going to be so good at that, especially if they're semi-young children.

Chris:

Well, I know one of the things you and I have talked about too, is that we've got to train the peers to work with the student. Because even if it's something as simple as follow the leader, they're not going to know you're going to have to wait for him. He's not automatically going to follow you. I always think of a child that I had that we had to teach them to wait for the student to follow them in follow the leader. Because they got halfway across the building before they realized there was no kid following them.

Sue:

That's right, it does require that. But again, our teachers also need training. If you've got even a speech language pathologist that was trained a while ago, they may not be that familiar with the area of pragmatics and functions of communication and things like that. It is about everybody kind of getting on the same page about what these skills are. And figuring out which ones are number one, the most interfering. If you have a student who's coming right up into people's faces. The technical word for that is the proxemics, which is the amount of social distance between people of certain relationships with you. That's going to make



people really uncomfortable. That is going to be a big interference in interaction with other people. So we need to figure out which are the most interfering of those lack of skills or inappropriate skills, and really teach those that are more likely to get the child into trouble or rejected by other people.

Chris:

Is there one thing that you think you would like people to walk away with in thinking about pragmatics?

Sue:

I think that they have to really see it as a set of skills that can be significantly impaired in our higher functioning individuals with autism. And that like other skills, they really need to be taught. And they need to be taught through direct instruction. I think that is really the most important message about pragmatics.

Chris:

Thank you so much to Sue for coming on and sharing all of that information with us. I hope it's given you some good ideas and some things to try with your students.

I would love to hear your thoughts about how you manage pragmatics with the students on your caseload. So feel free to hop over to our free Facebook group at specialeducatorsconnection.com and sign up by answering the questions, and we'll be sure to let you in if you're an educator. If you are interested in learning more about social skills, we have a whole course on them in the Special Educator Academy. We would love to have you come check that out with a seven day free trial at specialeducatoracademy.com. You can reach Sue at suekl224@comcast.net, and you can find a transcript and all this information at autismclassroomresources.com/episode71.

Thanks so much for joining us. I hope you'll join us again next week. And until then, thank you as always for everything that you do for your students.