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SPEAKERS

Chris, Dr. Myles

C Chris 00:00

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.

C Chris 00:33

Hi, everybody, welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm super excited that you are here with us today. And in this episode, I have a very, very special guest. Dr. Brenda Smith Myles is going to be joining us today to talk about the hidden curriculum.

C Chris 00:50

Dr. Myles was formerly a professor at the University of Kansas. She is the recipient of the Autism Society of America's Outstanding Professional award, the Princeton Fellowship Award, the Global and Regional Asperger's Syndrome Divine Neurotypical Award, and the American Academy of Pediatrics Autism Champion.

C Chris 01:12

Brenda has made over 3000 presentations all over the world. And she's written more than 300 articles and books on ASD. And in addition, she's collaborated with the three organizations that identified evidence based practices in autism. And to top all that off, in a survey conducted by the University of Texas, she was acknowledged as the second most productive applied researcher in ASD in the world.

C Chris 01:38

And I just want to add that I've had the opportunity to work with Brenda on different projects and get to know her, as well as attending her amazing presentations. And so I am super excited for you to hear her talk about the hidden curriculum, about which she has written a number of books that we'll talk about as well. And I can't wait for us to jump in. So let's get started.

C Chris 02:02

So as I said in our introduction, I'm very excited to have Dr. Myles with us today. And I'm gonna go ahead and let her tell us a little bit about herself and what she's doing.

D Dr. Myles 02:13

Thank you very much, Chris, I am absolutely delighted to be here. And I have followed your career as a friend and professional. And I'm delighted that you are helping so many teachers in such a positive, common sense way.

D Dr. Myles 02:28

Few people could do it the way that you do it. But Okay, on to me, I don't like talking about myself. As you know, I'm a former professor at the University of Kansas, I ran a doctoral program in a master's program in autism. I was fortunate enough to run a summer camp for kids who are autistic who were kicked out of camps. I've written about 300 books and articles on autism and have made about 3000 presentations.

C Chris 02:57

Great. Thank you. I'm so excited to see you and to have you here today. And one of the things that I talk about and I don't think we really talk about it enough in education is the hidden curriculum, which you obviously have written a number of different books about. And your new book is on its 25th anniversary, which blows my mind. Absolutely blows my mind. But tell us a little bit about the hidden curriculum, and what exactly it is. And what does that mean?

D Dr. Myles 03:28

Okay, well, the hidden curriculum are the set of rules or guidelines that are often not directly taught. Anytime that you hear the word assume or expectations regarding knowledge, you're probably talking about the hidden curriculum. It is information that has dropped from the air, it seems and has hit neurotypical people, but it's missed autistic people. And it can also include things like teacher pleasing behaviors, employer or employee pleasing behaviors, who to interact with who to stay away from, how to attract positive attention, you know, idioms, metaphors, and all of these things, if you don't know them, will result in you having not as high a quality of life as you would deserve to have.

C Chris 04:22

So can you give us an example of what that might be? Or, or kind of how that what it might look like?

D Dr. Myles 04:29

Well like for example, if I would say, Get off my back to a friend of mine, a neurotypical person would understand that that means I'm being a little irritated. And I think that I would like you to quit talking to me right now. But for a literal learner, such as an autistic person, they would think, Oh my gosh, you know, I'm not on your back. Why are you saying something so ridiculous.

D Dr. Myles 04:55

It could also include something that how to identify as someone who is likely to be unkind. What is a friend? Someone can walk up to a literal learner and say I am your friend, and then proceed to bully them. And if you don't understand what a friend is, you will think that that is what friendship is about.

D Dr. Myles 05:19

If you don't understand the hidden curriculum, you could mess up on a job interview, you could mess up on the job, you can make a mistake in handing in a paper in a class. If a teacher says, I handed your work and put it on my desk, well, chances are, there is a tray labeled homework on the desk. But the teacher didn't say, put it in the tray labeled homework. And so the student who lays it on the desk, the teacher may not see it and think the student didn't turn it in and may even say to the student, I don't think you turn in your assignment. Well, if you're a literal learner, you will think I turned in my assignment. And you are calling me maybe a liar. And the student may get upset. And it's just because that student was not directly taught the unwritten rule for that teacher. When the teacher says on my desk, what I really mean is look for the tray.

C Chris 06:23

Right. Well, and like I've seen with so many students with homework, it's, the teacher says, you know, your homework is due every day. And the student does all their homework, and they keep it in their backpack, because they don't realize everybody's turning it in. But they never got that message like other kids went, Oh, we have to go turn this in at the end of class. And he never got that message. And so we get to the well, you're failing because you haven't done any of your homework. And mom's like, he does his homework every night.

D Dr. Myles 06:52

Exactly. And when when a teacher says like during a lecture, this is important, or everyone

exactly. And when when a teacher says like during a lecture, this is important, or everyone should know that. That typically means it's on the test. But for the autistic student or the literal learner, it doesn't mean that it just means that the teacher thinks it's important. Well, Lah dee dah, Okay, well, that's great that she thinks it's important. That's great.

C Chris 07:15

She has that opinion. Right? Yeah. Right. That's a great example. That's a really good example.

D Dr. Myles 07:20

I mean, it's like, what do you do if you spill a drink at a friend's house? You know, I mean, if you're able to problem solve through it, and remain calm, you know what to do. But for autistic people who don't pick up information implicitly, or pick up information automatically from the environment, even if they've been in the presence of someone who's done that in the past, and was able to take care of the situation, the autistic person won't know, unless someone directly says, Here is the protocol if you happen to spill something.

C Chris 07:56

Right. Yeah, that's another really good example. So many things that we take for granted that we all just kind of knew, but never really thought about how we knew it. So how do we teach the hidden curriculum? How do we help individuals, literal learners to be more successful with it?

D Dr. Myles 08:19

Well, there's several ways I think that you can teach the hidden curriculum. One is what Diane Adrienne calls living out loud. And that is, you know, when you have a thought in your head, and you're around autistic students, just to say what you aren't thinking. Like, for the teacher to say, I am so rushed, I am, I'm becoming a little anxious, I need to take a deep breath. I'm not anxious at anything anybody has done. I'm just feeling a little anxious.

D Dr. Myles 08:55

Well, by saying that, and even saying, How many of you have felt anxious, you can start to share that information. Also, I like the one a day item where if you will take one item from the hidden curriculum, and review it during the first three minutes of class. And that will allow you to in school cover 180 different items.

D Dr. Myles 09:20

Like for example, you may say, for one hidden curriculum item to the entire class, if you get a gift that you do not like, the appropriate thing to do is to say, thank you. You may talk to your parents about giving it to someone else later or exchanging it. But during the party, it is your

parents about giving it to someone else later or exchanging it. But during the party, it is your job to say thank you. Now, we covered that item. You could ask a couple of questions to the students if they've ever had that happen before or what they would say and you've covered one item.

D Dr. Myles 09:56

There have been some principles that will cover one item During the morning announcements, and have teachers follow up on it. And in that way, the student gets more than one opportunity to hear that hidden curriculum item.

D Dr. Myles 10:12

I also like having a hidden curriculum calendar. Future Horizons is going to be coming out with one in 2025. I am so excited.

C Chris 10:22

So happy to have that back.

D Dr. Myles 10:24

Oh, I am too. But the teacher or principal will have at their ready, a hidden curriculum item per day also for families. And if families can cover one hidden curriculum item at breakfast, or as the students heading out the door or right before bedtime, they can cover 365 items. And you know if, in school, if a teacher, even once a week would talk about the definition of an idiom or a metaphor, think how much we could enrich lives.

D Dr. Myles 11:00

I was talking to a young autistic person last week, and he was getting ready to go for a job interview. And we had developed with his parents a list of questions that might be asked. And so I was acting like the interviewer. And I was asking the questions, and his parents were taking notes to give him feedback. And so the first thing that I did was, I said, Hello, I'm Brenda Myles, I'll be interviewing you for the job of x. And I stuck my hand out to shake hands. And he took his fist to fist bump me.

D Dr. Myles 11:39

Okay, now, a fist bump is a lovely, lovely way to interact with people informally or during COVID. But now we are back to the handshake. And you know, if he would have fist bumped, the person who was interviewing him that might have in, that person's mind stopped the interview from being positive. And something as little as that information is so important.

D

Dr. Myles 12:09

I have a friend who lost a job. And she had it was quite a nice job. She was autistic. And it was in the accounting realm. And it was during tax accounting season, they had a rule that you can't take anything home, from the office, no office supplies can go home. And she was so diligent, you know, not even a paperclip went home, no pen, you know, the things that we make mistakes on, she made sure she didn't.

D

Dr. Myles 12:39

But because she was basically working around the clock during tax season, she didn't have time to get to the grocery store. And she was running out of toilet paper. So she figured since it wasn't an office supply, she would take a roll of toilet paper from work. And her intention, of course was to replace it later, when she was able to get to the store. She was accused of stealing. And her response was, but I took something that I needed, I was going to replace it. And it's not an office supply. I mean, the hidden curriculum can contain some items that are difficult to think of until after a hidden curriculum error has occurred. But the more items that you cover, the less likely this is to happen.

C

Chris 13:27

Yeah. And I think those are really good examples of some of the really significant impacts that it can have, as our autistic individuals interact with the community, with their jobs. I think one of the things and you and I've talked about this, and I've seen you speak about this before, it's just so many times for individuals who are who have disabilities, but particularly autistic individuals, they are more likely to lose a job for social situations than they are for being able to do the work. You know, many times their bosses will say they can do the work. That's not our issue.

D

Dr. Myles 14:07

You know, I am hopeful that someday, when autistic people are employed, or even anyone who has a tendency to be literal, and I do myself sometimes. Wouldn't it be nice if we could have you know, hidden curriculum item of the day at work? And wouldn't that help everybody? You know, like, sometimes you'll see you make sure that you smile at the customer. Okay, that is a hidden curriculum item that usually isn't taught to us, we just automatically know that but those little reminders if they occurred on a daily basis, I think would help everyone.

D

Dr. Myles 14:42

You know, when you asked me for some topics to discuss surrounding the hidden curriculum, I had just quickly jotted up, who does teaching the Hidden Curriculum help? And I was all set to say autistic people. But as I thought about it, teaching the Hidden Curriculum helps everybody. Because if autistic people can better understand the world, can be more comfortable in it, they will be able to take their unique skills, interests, and use them to benefit society.

D

Dr. Myles 15:21

But if our autistic folks don't understand idioms, or metaphors, or unwritten rules or assumptions, and we don't teach them, who loses? We do. The Autistic person, of course, loses so does his family or her family. But it's a bigger issue. Because of hidden curriculum mistakes, how many people are not employed? How many innovations? How many pleasant people, you know, are not greeted by someone who is diligent in their job? So I think the hidden curriculum is something easy that most of us if we would just try to understand the autistic perspective, could be helpful in.

D

Dr. Myles 16:06

Peter Vermilion talks about context and prediction. And I have been trying to read and understand that science. And one of the things that we know is that sometimes autistic people can't understand the environment they're in and how it differs from another environment, not understanding the things you can say to your teacher, are not the same things that you know, you can say to your parents, or peers. And so when we teach the hidden curriculum, we also have to teach the environment in which it's most important, does that make sense?

C

Chris 16:44

That makes total sense, because it's all about the context. You know, so many things are, it's okay in this situation, but in that situation, you wouldn't do it. And you're right, that's something that we've so often just kind of know, like, we walk into an unfamiliar situation, we're going to behave in a different way than we would if we walked into, you know, a situation with family. And there isn't always that understanding. That's, that's a piece of the hidden curriculum that I think can easily be missed. That context is really important.

D

Dr. Myles 17:12

You and I, when we go out to dinner, the things that we talk about, you know, maybe even the way that we sit, the gestures we use, so totally different than when we are giving a presentation. And I don't know about you, but I was never taught presentation behaviors. I just picked them up, because I have the neurology that can do that. But for many autistic people, they need to know you're making a presentation. These are presentation behaviors, and these are hanging out with your friend behaviors.

C

Chris 17:45

See I was taught presentation behaviors, but I'm not sure they were really the right ones. They were when somebody asks you a question, answer the question you want to answer and move on to someone else. That was Ted's advice. And I don't think that's going to work Ted.

D

Dr. Myles 18:02

Dr. Myles 18:02

Okay, that is absolutely hilarious. Yeah. Okay. And that is also a very unique perspective. I've never thought of that before. Yeah, thank you for asking that question. I'm going to answer another one instead.

C

Chris 18:16

Right. I'm going to answer what I have in my head the answer. Right.

D

Dr. Myles 18:20

Well, and also, prediction, I have recently become more aware that autistic people have difficulty predicting what is going to happen next. And according to Vermillion and others, anytime that we go to have a conversation with someone, we basically know what's going to happen. So if you are in school, and the teacher walks down the aisle, and he has kind of a stern look on his face, you are the student, you know what that teacher is going to say.

D

Dr. Myles 18:54

But if you are autistic, your ability to predict is challenged. And so that means that we need to teach as a part of the hidden curriculum, how to predict. And you know, things like, look at the person's facial expression, look at their body language, look at what you are doing. Compare that to what you are supposed to be doing. Because those are the way that you know, neurotypical kids get the information. So we have to teach prediction as a part of the hidden curriculum also.

C

Chris 19:29

That's a really, really good point. And there's so much that goes into it in terms of, you know, we can teach the items, but it's also teaching, how to use them where to use them. And I love the idea of of thinking about prediction of being able to kind of read the room essentially.

D

Dr. Myles 19:50

Okay, I haven't thought about it in terms of read the room, but you are absolutely right. You know, and I mean, if you think about if you taught for 10 years, let's say 180 hidden Curriculum items, you're covered, what 1800 or I don't know, sorry about the math, a whole lot of hidden curriculum items. Think how you would greatly enrich everyone in the room, not just the autistic person, because, you know, the neurotypical can benefit from hearing that information, you know, even if they know it, because, you know, we are not always on our best behavior, none of us. And so you know, it, it helps us to understand.

D

Dr. Myles 20:30

And I think that the hidden curriculum, part of which includes manners and etiquette, we taught

And I think that the hidden curriculum, part of which includes manners and etiquette, we taught back maybe like in the 50s, and 60s, but it's kind of just dropped out of our conversation for some reason. And the hidden curriculum, I think, is a one way to begin to pick up those social niceties and understanding other people. Because I don't think that those old days are ever going to come back. And I'm not sure we want them back. But we want our folks to have that information.

C Chris 21:01

Yeah, well, and I like that you make the comment to that it's going to benefit everybody, because part of that is obviously recognizing the neurodiversity of the population across the board, which really allows us to reach individuals who, maybe they aren't diagnosed, maybe they just are very literal. Maybe their background is such that, you know, maybe they have a different culture, which hidden curriculum is very tied to a lot of culture, types of things. And so by broadening that scope, you, you can capture a lot of individuals who may have problems with the hidden curriculum, but not might not be identified as someone who needs that type of instruction. So that's a really, really good point.

D Dr. Myles 21:45

I've been asked to give a talk about challenges experienced by individuals who have trauma, who have Down Syndrome, dyslexia, who are autistic, and who have ADHD. And so I've been looking at the commonalities. And it's exactly what you said. A lot of these folks are not available from learning because of anxiety, for example. And that's just one characteristic. And so that means if they are highly anxious, they're not observing the environment, they are not reading the room. And so they are not absorbing the hidden curriculum.

D Dr. Myles 22:24

And then if you talk about people who live in poverty, you talk about people who don't get enough sleep. So many people are not available to pick up information from the environment, just because of what has happened in their life or because of their neurology. And you're exactly right, the Hidden Curriculum benefits everyone. And I even think that as an adult, when I teach the hidden curriculum or a hidden curriculum item, it helps me because it just reminds me what it is that I perhaps should be doing.

C Chris 22:58

Well, and it also, you know, it's also something that I think about, where we have a coping skill of, I'm not sure about the situation, I can reach out to a friend, I could look it up. I have strategies I can use. So if I, you know, I got invited by families, not a very high society kind of family. Our weddings, occasionally were formal, but mostly they were like, Let's have a barbecue. And so I got invited to a black and white wedding. And so you know, my first thing is, well, I'll call somebody and find out like, What should I wear? Because I know this is an unfamiliar situation to me. And I know that there is a hidden curriculum to it that I'm not sure I really get. And so those coping skills become really important too.

D

Dr. Myles 23:44

Well and even to recognize that there's a hidden curriculum behind something. I mean, oh, my gosh, I mean, you had that information and so you could seek it out. And all the ways that you could seek out information are also part of the hidden curriculum. You know, it's like, phone a friend, oh, my gosh, I can do that. I can look online, all of that I need to look online. Really, I need some additional information. And you're right, and here you are, okay, you have a PhD, you're going to a black and white wedding. Okay. You've had years of education, you know, a lot of hidden curriculum items, but you didn't know that one. And that happens to all of us all the time. But I don't think we honor it the way that we should, and realize how fortunate we are to implicitly know how to get the information and to respect the fact that autistic people work so hard, and they are not automatically given that information neurologically.

C

Chris 24:44

Right. Well, and even even those of us who are neurotypical have situations that are unfamiliar to us. My favorite example that I use when I train is I moved into a house that had a pool. I didn't really want a pool. I don't never had a pool. We'll learn how to take care of a pool. I didn't think I needed like any kind of special knowledge about it. And I had somebody that was like doing the chemicals and all that kind of stuff. So I'm like, I got it covered. And suddenly my pool pump broke. And when they came to fix it, they were like, well, because your pool ran dry, like you've gone down below the filter, and water is not coming in. And so I called my friend Sue, who has had a pool for years. And she's like, well, didn't you fill up your pool when your pool fell below the tile? I'm like, No. And didn't you think you needed to tell me that as part of the hidden curriculum of pool ownership?

D

Dr. Myles 25:34

Yeah, no. And is that information important? Absolutely. Yeah. And so not only do you have to know the hidden curriculum, you have to know it at the right time. Because if you would have been taught that when you were, let's say, 15 years old, and you had no exposure to a pool, if you were like me, you would completely forget that information would not be available to you.

C

Chris 25:56

That's right. That's exactly right.

D

Dr. Myles 25:58

So relevance has a lot to do, I think also with the hidden curriculum as far as people picking it up. And when we teach it, we have to really think, How do I explain it so it will motivate you so that you realize this will benefit you?

C

Chris 26:14

Chris 20:17

So given that, I would think you'd also want to think about what hidden curriculum items you're teaching, at what grade level or to which students that are going to be the ones that are going to impact them most recently, does that make sense?

D

Dr. Myles 26:28

Oh no, I think that absolutely does. Because the hidden curriculum that you teach to a second grader is different than the hidden curriculum that you're going to teach to, you know, someone who is in the 10th grade. And I don't know of a hidden curriculum list that has been developed by grade level or age.

D

Dr. Myles 26:45

But one of the things that I like to do is observe children interacting when adults are not around. Because that is where you pick up a lot of unwritten rules that, you know, kids use with each other.

D

Dr. Myles 27:00

And you mentioned culture, which I think is so important, and it's something that we do not discuss enough. And one of our schools in this area that I've done some work with, is for kids who primarily speak Spanish. And it has been interesting how much I have discussed the hidden curriculum with these, you know, kids who are just learning English. And it's anything from eye contact, how to request something from an adult, how to put your supplies away, what is homework, how to organize your backpack, what to do, if you don't know what to do. It's amazing that something as that you might think, and I might think it's so simple as raising your hand isn't something that is in everybody's culture. So, ya know, it's so important.

C

Chris 28:02

That's another good one. That's very context based. Because it's one of the things I talk about, you know, we teach little kids to do that. And as our students get older, you know, yes, there are situations I find myself and where I would raise my hand, but I'm not going to stand at the DMV waiting in line, and raise my hand because I need help. That's not going to get me anything.

D

Dr. Myles 28:19

Well, and even if you're in a cooperative group with kids, and you want to speak, you don't raise your hand in a cooperative group. And again, that's part of that context, which makes everything so very difficult. But interesting.

C

Chris 28:34

The world is more complex than we realize, oh, my

D Dr. Myles 28:37

gosh, I was looking at homework. And you ask someone, okay, well just complete these three problems. This is your homework. What are you asking that person to do? You're asking them to remember what three problems there are, to be able to remember where they put that piece of paper so they can put it in their backpack, so that they can find it, then they need to be able to schedule the time to do it. I mean, it's just the world is so complex. And for our autistic people also who are visual learners, one of the things we have to consider is teaching the Hidden Curriculum visually, either writing it on like the whiteboard, or even showing a brief video because our kids sometimes you know, will say yes, I understand when we've said something to them, because they know if they say that we will go away and so they don't have the benefit of understanding the material.

C Chris 29:33

Right? It's a lot.

D Dr. Myles 29:36

It's overwhelming and if you think about the area of sexuality, okay, and I just say I don't know anything about sex, so please don't ask me. But yes, does it does Yes always mean Yes. Does no always mean no. What does maybe mean? I do like from what I have observed that In sexuality, I think people are starting to be more open about things like for example, saying, May I kiss you?

D Dr. Myles 30:07

But if you think about how do you know to hold hands with somebody? How do you know that they like you versus they're just being nice to you? How do they how do you know if somebody thinks you're being creepy? What questions can you ask someone that you're interested in? I mean, you cannot say to them, well, like, how much do you weigh? Or are you sure you want that second ice cream cone? You know what I mean? I mean, both of which things have been said to me. And I did the ice cream cone. I said, Oh, yes, I definitely need it. No, but there's, I mean, sexuality is so confusing. And I think one of the good rules about hidden curriculum is also the more difficult it is to talk about, the more it should be discussed.

C Chris 30:58

So many good points. So much to do.

D Dr. Myles 31:01

Aren't we still learning every single day? And isn't it so exciting?

C Chris 31:07

It is. It is. It's there's just so much to take in. And I really, really appreciate your time. So I'm gonna go ahead and wrap up. But can you tell us a little bit about your book and where people can find it and where they can find you?

D Dr. Myles 31:21

Okay, Oh I actually brought a copy of the book. Yeah, hey, it is on amazon.com. And it's also at Future Horizons. And it just The Hidden Curriculum by myself and two of my colleagues, Melissa Trautman and Rhonda Schelvan.

C Chris 31:41

Awesome. And I will make sure those links go in our show notes as well.

D Dr. Myles 31:45

You are so lovely. I know. It's amazing to see you. And thank you for everything that you are doing to help our kids who have limitless potential.

C Chris 31:53

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for everything you've taught me over the years, including helping me write our first book that I don't think it would ever gotten written if we hadn't like come and stayed at your house for three days.

D Dr. Myles 32:04

I was talking to someone the other day about what a wonderful time that was and how much I learned. So thank you for giving me that opportunity too.

C Chris 32:17

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and Video Tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at autismclassroomresources.com/free. That's F-R-E-E or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.