

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTINUUM OF DISCRETE-TRIAL TRADITIONAL BEHAVIORAL TO SOCIAL-PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES IN COMMUNICATION ENHANCEMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM/PDD

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ABSTRACT—Clinicians are faced with the challenge of making informed decisions amidst heated debates over the most effective treatment approaches for young children with autism. This article provides a more specific focus to this debate by considering the practice of enhancing spontaneous language and related social-communicative abilities of young children with autism/pervasive developmental disorder (PDD). First, a historical perspective of the evolution of different approaches for enhancing communication and related abilities is presented, followed by a description of characteristics of the approaches. The approaches are described along a continuum from massed discrete trial, traditional behavioral to social-pragmatic, developmental. The current state of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of early services for children with autism/PDD is examined and conclusions are presented with consideration of the need for more meaningful outcome measures than are currently used for the next generation of outcome research.

KEY WORDS: communication enhancement, autism, pervasive developmental disorder

This article is being written at a time when there are passionate debates regarding the most effective ways to support the development of young children with autism/pervasive developmental disorder (PDD).

These debates, involving both professionals and family members, occur in professional peer-reviewed publications and informally in the popular media, at conferences, and online. In some cases, litigation initiated by

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