

Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals

Carolyn Bowen and Pamela Snow

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In the age of Internet experts and “Dr Google,” *Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* by Carolyn Bowen and Pamela Snow, is both timely and needed. As any professional or parent knows, many people are willing to offer anecdotal “evidence” or pseudoscientific programs to parents desperate to help their child.

The authors’ have developed this book from extensive literature reviews and decades of experience in the field as well as in academia. It’s clear that the book also draws upon the authors’ vast professional networks due to the inclusion of expert input. The reader is supported to navigate through the information and misinformation concerned with interventions for children with developmental disorders, and come to an understanding of what works and what doesn’t. The authors’ purpose is to provide a repository of evidence-based information, and to soundly debunk many of the non-evidence-based practices that waste money, resources, and valuable developmental opportunities.

The first chapter describes the intersection of science, practice and “small p” politics in the selection of interventions, and how practices can become accepted by mainstream professionals without an evidence base. The book also provides a succinct explanation of the processes and procedures used to manipulate parents into “crank interventions”.

The topics covered are well chosen, beginning with Chapter 2, on acceleration of early childhood development. Chapter 3, *Executive Control, Attention, and Working Memory*, explains working memory, links to ADHD, and best practice interventions, alongside other highly spruiked methods. The chapter finishes off with a detailed evaluation of prevalent neuromyths and current fads, a format which is followed for most of the remaining chapters. Chapter 4, *Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, provides extensive detail, as expected, given the plethora of interventions available for children with ASD. Chapter 5 covers behaviour, social, and emotional factors. It makes note of comorbidity and treatment of mental health concerns – often not considered for those with developmental disorders. Chapters 6, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* and chapter 7, *Voice Language and Speech Fluency*, will be of interest to psychologists who usually don’t have training in these areas. Chapter 8, *Auditory Processing and Learning*, provides a thorough discussion of a vexed topic, with a very clear summary for practitioners at the end.

Chapter 9, *Reading*, provides a summary of the evidence and current state of play in the field, followed by a detailed analysis of the plethora of programs claiming to

assist those with reading difficulties. It is telling that the latter section is longer than the former.

Chapter 10, *Diet, Supplements and Nutrition*, is an interesting read that covers an area that may come up in psychological practice. However, this was an unusual place to find an explanation of cognitive testing, under the heading “What does IQ mean?” Psychologists will be concerned at the errors in the description of score ranges, repetitive detailed arguments about variability, lack of accuracy, a focus upon “IQ tests”, and repeated negative statements about such testing. This runs contrary to what psychologists understand as best practice. To further add to this brief section’s arguments of inexactitude, it concludes with a discussion of the limited evidence base for Multiple Intelligences, somehow conflating the two. A badly missed opportunity to discuss the usefulness of cognitive testing, which is an area of concern and confusion for parents who may be misinformed by alternative practitioners.

The final chapters, 11, *Parents Navigating the Marketplace* and 12, *Treatment Choices in Everyday Practice*, provide good reading. Although the final chapter is focused on Speech and Language Pathologist/Therapists, the epilogue contains helpful tables that list therapies and identify which ones need more evidence or have no evidence at all.

For the well rounded Educational and Developmental Psychologists, able to keep abreast of new research, much of what is outlined in this book will not be anything new. However, the thoroughness, brevity and clarity of the book is commendable, and the vast majority of the book presents useful and helpful content to aid and support our work, especially with respect to communicating our knowledge to the families we work with.

I would recommend parts of this book to school principals, education and health administrators and other decision-makers, who make crucial decisions about money and resource allocation. Schools and health systems are susceptible to embracing practices that aren’t always based on sound evidence. Sometimes with disastrous consequences, and always at great cost.

Overall, *Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* provides a good resource for educational and developmental psychologists, however, readers should be wary of the controversial coverage of cognitive testing, which in my opinion is a strange anomaly in an otherwise evidence-based book.

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