
The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism

As a teacher, it is inevitable that one will encounter various students in his or her classroom. *The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism* discusses how a child with autism views the world. This text is an eye-opening experience for educators and family members/friends that allows a further understanding of the behaviors of a student with autism. In our course, we have had many discussions surrounding the differences in the ways educators teach children as well as the multitude of students that we will teach. We have also discussed that as educators, we cannot simply teach all children in the same way but we need to mold our instruction for each individual student. Naoki Higashida reiterates this point in his novel. My initial interest in this book came from a student I had this last school year with autism and experienced a lot of what Higashida talks about in his book and wanted to get a better understanding on students like him going forward. As a teacher, it is imperative I take the time to gain knowledge on how to best educate each child.

Naoki Higashida is a remarkable thirteen-year-old boy who discusses his strengths and weaknesses as a child living with autism. He provides the reader with his perspective on his thought process, daily life and gives the reader an explanation for why he behaves in a different manner than others. Higashida addresses the common behaviors that people often wonder about when they encounter a person with autism. He allows others into his perception of the world and how his actions oftentimes cause problems between a person with autism and a person without this disability. For example, Higashida discusses the reasons a person with autism might not make eye contact with other people when having a conversation and how for him, this is not disrespectful but it is sometimes perceived this way. This text is written as an interview format, in which Naoki provides thoughtful answers to questions that people without a disability often want the answer to. Throughout the book, the author describes daily life through anecdotal stories and experiences. Higashida is well aware of how he functions differently than others, which made me wonder if other people with autism have the metacognition that he does. As I read this book, I thought about how much autism varies and wondered if the answers given by a different student with autism would vary greatly or not much at all. By reading this novel, I was able to gain more insight on how to better help students like Naoki be successful in my classroom.

It is clear to Naoki that he is not like his peers and is not developing at the same pace that his classmates are. According to the Woolfolk text (2019), a child who is Naoki's age should be in the identity v. role confusion stage of Psychosocial Development as developed by Erik Erikson.

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In this stage, it is important that the child maintains and develops relationships with peers. Children at this age are developing abstract thinking and understanding others' perspectives. While many of Naoki's peers are entering this stage of development, Naoki is not yet there. He is likely in the stage of industry v. inferiority. Naoki is still learning to trust adults, act autonomously in situations and initiate his own actions (Higashida 2017). The challenge in Naoki's current stage of psychosocial development he is working on developing more complex relationships with their peers as well as risking failure. For a child with autism, it is important for their educator or parent to help develop these skills in order to help him move to the next stage of psychosocial development. There are several ways to support this development in children like Naoki; encourage the student to make and act on choices, provide support for students who seem discouraged and give students a chance to show their independence from teacher support.

Another important topic from the book is that Naoki often talks about being lonely and that he doesn't feel like other people really have a sense of who he truly is beyond his disability, many of his peers shy away from him because of his autism. The interviewer then asks Naoki why people with autism often exclude themselves from playing with others. Naoki states that he does not like to be alone but that he feels as if his actions cause trouble for others and get on their nerves so this is why he separates himself from others (Higashida, 2017). As Woolfolk (2019) mentions in her text, student-teacher relationships have a large effect on student success. With a student like Naoki, it is vital for his education to build a strong relationship with him so that he feels as though he is being understood and validated. As Naoki's teacher, I would devote some time to get to know him on a personal level outside of his academic progress and his learning needs, which I feel would help him be more at ease in the school setting with others. I would also encourage conversations between Naoki and his peers, so they could find things in common and ultimately create a relationship. This would help Naoki feel more comfortable at school and less lonely as he mentioned.

As part of being able to build relationships with other students, a childlike Naoki would also benefit from social-emotional learning instruction. By incorporating these lessons, Naoki would be able to learn more about social-emotional skills in order to better understand and relate to his peers. In his text, Naoki remarks that at times, conversations are difficult with others because of his various tendencies. Some of these include: lack of eye contact, talking loudly and weirdly, minimal facial expressions, and taking too long to respond (Higashida 2017). Woolfolk expands on this in her book and states that a child with autism should have early and intense interventions in communication with others and social relations. She also shares that if this does not occur, the child's various mannerisms and lack of social skills with others will continue to increase over time. A teacher of Naoki could introduce lessons in eye contact and respond appropriately to a person when having a conversation. It would also be beneficial for a child with autism to participate in morning meetings in order to find commonalities between themselves

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and other classmates to spark conversation.

Woolfolk (2019) informs us that as teachers, we need to have high expectations for all of our students. Not just the gifted students, or the teacher pleasing students but each student in our class needs to be held to a high standard. As I was reading Naoki's book I was reminded of this. Oftentimes, as educators, we see a child with a disability and want to make it easier on them in some way or may lower our expectations due to this disability to help them be more successful in our classroom. However, when we do not continue to have these high expectations, our students will underperform. Students will adopt this less high expectation for themselves, too. While it is important to adhere to and implement all aspects of the student's IEP, it is also important to show a student with autism, and all other students in your class, that you still have high expectations for them and that they can create goals and rise to this occasion. In his book, Naoki also references this. He speaks about how oftentimes because he cannot communicate by using his speech as other students do, this causes people to think that he is not smart. And he notices that others treat him in this way (Higashida 2017). Building high expectations will help a child with autism be successful in the classroom.

Every child has a variety of interests and these interests often become intensified in children with autism. In his book, Naoki speaks on several points about how people with autism have intense interests in things because it provides them comfort, and can provide them with a connection to past joyful experiences. Naoki comments that he appreciates when someone takes notice or a liking to something that he does (Higashida, 2017). Woolfolk (2019) suggests that teachers of students with autism build on the students' interests. She adds that teachers of students like Naoki should utilize his/her intense interests to guide their lessons. For instance, an educator could incorporate their interest into an interdisciplinary project, the teacher could use it as a piece of the lesson to help peak enthusiasm for the subject matter or if incorporating the interest is not possible, the teacher could use their interest as a type of reward. This strategy would help a child with autism feel comfortable and better engage and focus on the lesson.

After reading *The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism*, I feel that I have more awareness of how students with autism view our world and what their behaviors mean. In combining what I read in his novel with the Woolfolk textbook, I now have a better understanding of my role as an educator in assisting a child with autism in my classroom. As an educator, it is vital to the success of my students to give them the highest quality education that I can deliver. In order to do this, I must recognize my students' strengths/weaknesses and their background; whether that be a learning disability, a different culture or an emotional past. This text allows educators to better interpret the behaviors of students with autism. Naoki Higashida tells an extraordinary story that paints a picture of the life of a child with autism and allows the reader to gain a great deal of understanding for a child who

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has a daily internal struggle as he does. Reading this book has changed my perspective on educating a child with autism and I hope to continue to develop my appreciation of each child's uniqueness to make an impact, both personally and educationally.

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