

Autism as an atypical development

*Far from harming me,
you complete me when you differ from me*
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in *Lettre à un otage*

Autism as an atypical development
The characteristics in the total person

Martine F. Delfos

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Dedicated to:

Erik Gerritsen, for the courage to stand up for my work as Secretary General of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport of the Netherlands.

Paul Roosenstein, my publisher who makes everything possible every time.

And to all those people with an atypical development.

Autism as an Atypical Development offers a compelling invitation to rethink autism – not as a fixed collection of deficits, extreme strengths or outward behavioural symptoms, but as a fundamentally different and yet completely natural pattern of human development.

Monique Post

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Preface

Although I had often made clear that in my opinion the characteristics of autism as used in the manuals were incorrect, I did not list what the characteristics were from my perspective. Strangely enough, that lasted until 2020, 20 years after the birth of the theory, that enjoyed already substantial support. In support of the Delfos Academy, I gave a webinar on autism. I did the usual topics. And suddenly I thought: normally I just do what people ask me, including the books I have written, why don't I do what I feel like doing now? And then I thought: I will give a webinar about the characteristics of autism!

In our culture certainty is not valued highly. As a true scientist, certainty is not necessarily welcomed. When a relatively 'new' theory is presented as we do here, this is even more important. We present what we found in science and practice with passion to allow the readers to test their insights and deepen their understanding of the reality of autism and hopefully to let go of prejudices.

The webinar of May 2021 was designed with five topics, five characteristics of autism, see figure 1, left. The sixth was not there yet, it had not yet found its name in my work, but now it has: *the lack of knowledge about daily social interaction*. This characteristic has of course also found its place in this book, see figure 1 left, see figure 1 right.

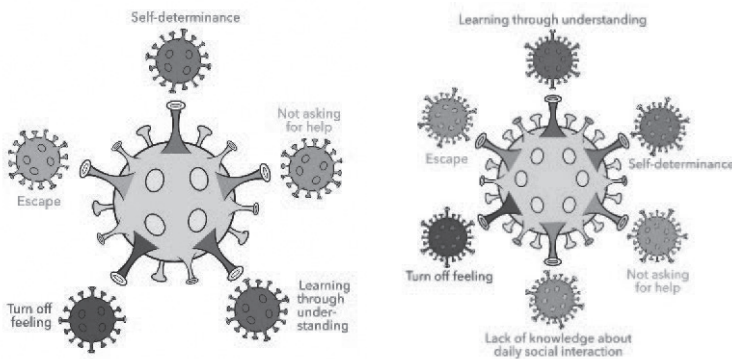


Figure 1: Left: The logo of the webinar Corona Cycle 2, Characteristics of autism, in May 2020; Right: The logo of the webinar Corona Cycle 3, Characteristics of autism, in February-March 2021

In my daily practice, however, I used the characteristics frequently, to discover if there was autism, but especially to explain to people what I mean by autism and to give them the opportunity to think about what they thought about it

themselves. The nice thing was that they recognized it instantly and did not go into denial, as often happens with people who are diagnosed with 'autism' in the form of *Autism Spectrum Disorders*, ASD. They recognized themselves in the characteristics I mentioned and their environment recognized it as well. Parents suddenly had no trouble saying that they recognized the characteristics in themselves. The same happened during the webinars. People recognized it. One of the participants, John Huijbregts, was so overwhelmed by the explanation and recognition that he recognized in his class in special education with children with ASD, but also in his son, that he immediately started working on a different approach with children with autism. This had astonishing consequences: children who felt heard, seen and understood, an increased ability to regulate emerging aggression and satisfied parents. His experience in education was a very pleasant addition that I gratefully used in this book. It became chapter 12: *Summary of Application in education by John Huijbregts*. That is why the book consists of two parts; 1: my explanation of the characteristics, and 2: his explanation of the consequences of the changed insight and the different approach, or rather, simply the human approach to children in (special) education.

It was an overwhelming experience that someone described my webinar in such detail, literally put it on paper, and started applying it in practice. I am therefore very grateful to John Huijbregts for his enthusiastic commitment! This time there were again people who wanted to read along and comment while I was writing the book. I mention them here with enthusiasm: John Huijbregts, Paul Stoffer, Benjamin Huysmans, Willemijn Nispel, Lies van Holm and Norbert Groot. I am very grateful to them; it helps me to explain more clearly where I appear to be enigmatic!

I am writing this book in the first person, while my books are always written in the scientific 'we'. I always do this in imitation of Newton, who discovered gravity and said: *'If I could see further, it is because I stood on the shoulders of giants!'* Because many great thinkers lived and contributed to knowledge preceded me, whose lessons are precious and so easily lost in the wind, I write 'we'. The use of 'I' is not because the theory of autism is designed by me, or that my theory about the Socioschema and the MAS1P (S-MAS1P) would not be substantiated, on the contrary, there is solid substantiation and more and more research shows that. I use the 'I' because for the first time I choose to address the reader directly when explaining my perspective on autism; I use 'you' for the reader, because I want to get close to him or her as in a personal conversation.

Martine F. Delfos Utrecht

1 What is autism?

Because people often skip the preface I repeat an important remark: I use the we-form. The use of 'I' is also not because the here presented theory on autism is designed it is by me, or that that my theory about the Socioschema and the MAS1P (S-MAS1P) would not be substantiated, on the contrary, there is solid substantiation and more and more research shows that. I use the 'I' because for the first time I choose to address the reader more directly when explaining my ideas; I use 'you' for the reader, because I want to get close to him or her as in a personal conversation.

The book contains many examples; I do this to promote the reader's sense of situations and I write down examples quite literally as they happened, so that people can see how it works. The examples come from my practice, unless otherwise stated. The names have been changed and in the case of a single example, if it did not matter, the gender has also been changed, to guarantee privacy and promote anonymity. Afterwards I saw that in this way, this book has almost become a biography of how I work. The examples come from different countries where I have worked; the countries are usually included to ensure that the universality is clear. It is not really different to work with people with autism in Latvia or Ecuador or in the Netherlands. There is something universal about people with autism and something universal about making contact.

Dear reader, you may think: I can skip *this* chapter, I have already read so much about autism and perhaps also much of what Martine Delfos has written about it. That is of course possible, but I would find it a pity.

It does contain familiar things that are already in other Delfos books, but also many new things and above all it is stated more clearly and the change in mentality in the perspective on autism is clearer than ever. I hope that the book will lead to being able *to sense* and *recognize* what autism is. It will also stimulate the development of diagnostic material, so that instead of the tests aimed at the Kanner line, 'half the person', there will be test material for the 'whole' person with autism. Just as Hans Asperger said: "One cannot without the other."

For those who are not familiar with my work, it will hopefully be a 'party of recognition', as a director of a school for special education who recently heard me mention the characteristics said in surprise: *It's right! I have a son with autism and I recognize it!*