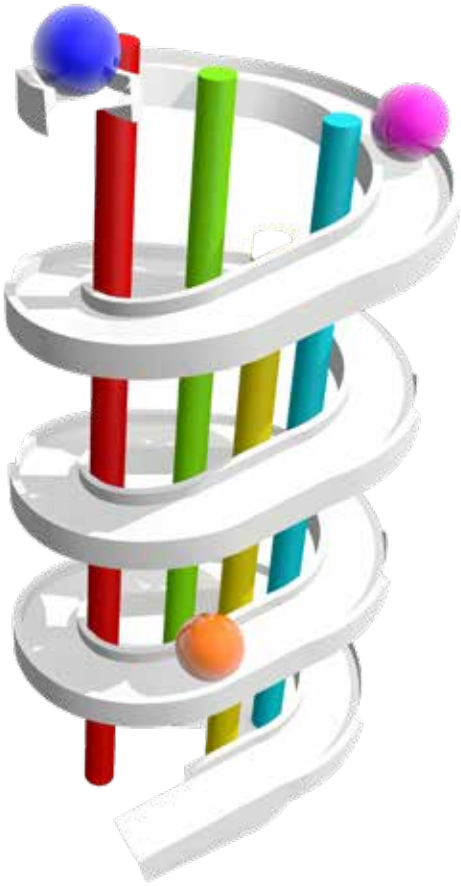
62 Means 'THANK YOU'

by Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.



Remember Daniel? A preschooler with sensory processing challenges and delayed language, he taught his teachers and classmates to communicate with him through music and numbers. (See "Daniel's Xylophone," AASD, Nov. 2019 - Jan. 2020.) Harmony all around.

Daniel's receptive language was excellent. He understood everything he heard, he could read, and he was interested in learning to print. But his expressive language was greatly delayed.

> Receptive language is the ability to understand how words express ideas and feelings. It is the language that one takes in by listening and reading. Expressive language is the spoken or written words and phrases that one produces to communicate feelings and thoughts to others.

At school, winsome Daniel felt safe with me, as did his worried mother who visited the music room often to observe and ask questions. I loved them both, so when school ended, I invited them over for a sensory playdate.

The first activity that June afternoon was playing with a marble chute. We knelt on the floor, and I showed Daniel how to place the marbles on the top row, starting at the left. Murmuring, "One, two, three...," he selected and placed marbles where I pointed. He was enraptured, watching them cascade to the bottom and clatter into a box.

> Make the northwest corner the starting point for marble chutes, train sets, and hand-drawn mazes. One reason is to accustom the child to direct his eyes upward and leftward to the place where sentences and paragraphs begin. Another reason is that most children are right-handed, and placing marbles on their left side encourages them to cross the midline, which is a crucial perceptual motor skill. (Crossing the midline is using the eye, hand or foot of one side of the body in the space of the other eye, hand or foot. One must cross the midline to read, to scratch one's elbow, and to hit a tennis ball.)

While Daniel counted marbles, I counted the sensory systems involved in his play: tactile, auditory, proprioceptive, vestibular, and especially visual. Five senses — pretty good.

> The more important for survival an activity is, the more senses are involved. We use all eight senses to eat. We use only two to watch TV.

> Young children are expected to have an attention span of one second for each year. A typical three-year-old's attention span is about three seconds; a four-year-old's is about four.

Daniel's attention span for the marble chute was remarkable. After about 20 minutes, he rocked back on his heels. He nodded and grinned, his silent way to say, "Loved it! Thanks!" Next, we trip-tropped to the piano to play a Keyboard Story, "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." Daniel's class had enacted this tale many times as they crossed the rude Troll's bridge to get to where the sweet plants grow. What a luxury for this musical child to have all the time in the world to play this entrancing game, with nobody else awaiting a turn!

While I narrated the tale, Daniel pounded on the keyboard's lower notes to "speak" for the Biggest Billy Goat and tinkled on the higher notes to squeak for the Littlest, with the Troll and Middle Billy Goat in between. (For this activity, the five senses he engaged were tactile, proprioceptive, visual, vestibular, and especially auditory.)

Billy goats and boys get hungry. A snack, with its olfactory, gustatory, and interoceptive sensations, came next on our sensory afternoon's agenda. Daniel perched on his mother's lap at the table. I hoped to cajole him to nibble an apple slice. As I cut open an apple, I mentioned that billy goats love apples but that seeds are not good for them or for people. We needed to remove the seeds.

"One, two, three...." Daniel picked out the seeds and arranged them into a smiley face on a napkin while his mother arranged apple slices on a plate.

Offering him the plate, I said, "Please choose a piece of apple and give it one lick. Then you can have Cheerios."

Daniel shoved the plate out of my hand. The apple slices went flying, and the plate skittered on the floor. Horrified at his own behavior, he pressed his face against his equally horrified mother.

"Hmm. That wasn't such a great idea, Daniel," I said. "Did you mean to say, 'No, thank you'?"

He nodded miserably.

"Here's an idea. Maybe you could say a number, like a secret code. When you don't want something, but you don't want to be rude, what number could you say that would mean, 'No, thank you'?"

To our considerable astonishment, Daniel shouted, "Sixty-three!"

"Okay! We hear you! Now, how about if somebody gives you something that you like? Instead of 'Thank you', you could say ... umm...."

Daniel shouted, "Sixty-two!"

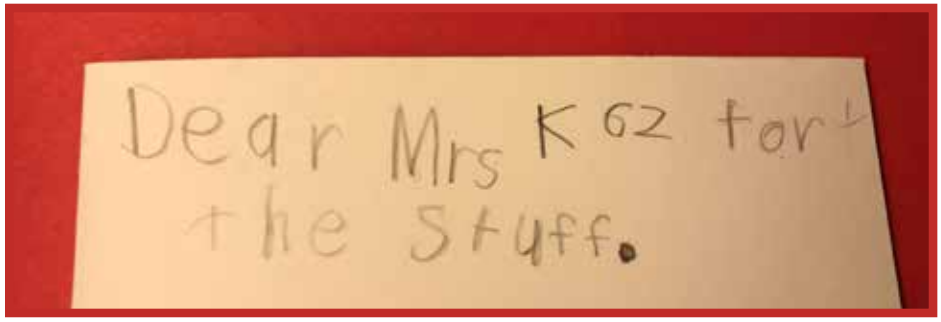
Yay!

All smiles now, Daniel popped countless Cheerios into his mouth while his mother and I chatted about our summer plans.

At the door, I gave Daniel a little bag of marbles and another bag of Cheerios. Wordlessly, he hugged me. His mother whispered to him, "Please say thank you to Mrs. Kranowitz for a fun afternoon." But no, he just could not do that.

I didn't need his spoken words. The three of us had enjoyed a lovely afternoon, and that was reward enough.

So imagine my delight a few days later when I received this in the mail:



How A Mother Learned to Speak Her Son's "Language"

Stephen Shore, internationally known educator, author, presenter, and advocate on issues related to the autism spectrum, suddenly stopped developing language when he was eighteen months. He writes:

Initially my mother tried to get me to imitate her. When her attempts failed she imitated sounds and actions I made. She joined me where I was in my world before bringing me into hers. I became aware of her in my environment, and she was able to move me to a point where verbal interaction started to return at age four. The important implication is that building a trusting bond or relationship with the autistic person is a prerequisite for doing meaningful work. And I think that holds true for everyone; autistic or otherwise.

—Stephen Shore, EdD.

Prof. of Special Education, Adelphi University

CAROL STOCK KRANOWITZ:

is the author of the "Sync" series, including *The Out-of-Sync Child*, *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*, *The Out-of-Sync Child Grows Up*, and *The Goodenoughs Get In Sync*. With Joye Newman, she wrote, *Growing an In-Sync Child* and *The In-Sync Activity Cards Book*. Carol is available for workshops on how sensory processing challenges affect children and teenagers, and on fun and functional sensory-motor activities to get kids in sync.