

The Outcomes of a Training Programme to Support Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Mainstream Schools

Kenneth Poon and Fann Tay

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- The compacted training programme was useful and helped increase educator efficacy in managing disruptive behaviours as well as reduce ratings of behaviour problems.
- The training programme had less success in increasing inclusive attitudes and positive views towards collaboration, suggesting that these need to be targeted in a separate programme.
- For more impactful practice, participant feedback indicates that a more sustained and scaffolded professional development programme is needed.

BACKGROUND

Some students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) pose a challenge to many teachers, contributing to their levels of stress and burnout. There are indications that professional development programmes may help teachers to better support students with ASD. A likely strategy that is needed for the support of students with ASD is a programme utilising multiple evidence informed strategies (Sansosti, Powell-Smith, & Kincaid, 2004) delivered in a coherent programme.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This study seeks to examine the outcomes of a teacher professional development programme to support students with ASD in secondary schools.

KEY FINDINGS

Most of the dependent measures did not statistically change with the implementation of the professional development programme:

- The participants in this study reported lower levels of problematic behaviours after the intervention, but objective ratings by unbiased observers (i.e., other teachers) were unavailable.
- There was no significant change in the level of ASD knowledge over the duration of the course (note: the participants had started with high levels of knowledge).
- There was no significant change in the level of general teacher self-efficacy, but further analyses indicated that the participants reflected increases in their self-efficacy towards managing the disruptive behaviour of students with ASD but not in terms of feeling more effective in collaboration or inclusive education.

- There was no significant change in teacher inclusive sentiments, possibly because the professional development programme focused predominantly on strategies to understand and support students with ASD.
- There was no significant change in teacher psychological wellbeing as its impact may be too distal a measure.

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Analyses of post-workshop evaluations revealed participants reporting both being satisfied as well as finding the workshops useful. Content analyses of the feedback are suggestive that professional development programmes may need to be more sustained and contextualised.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Overall, the findings of this study provide indications that professional development programmes of such nature can impact upon teacher management of

students with ASD. It is also likely that other professional programmes targeting inclusive dispositions or skills required for inclusion need to be designed. Programmes seeking greater impact in areas beyond simple behaviour management may need to take on a more sustained and collaborative format.

PARTICIPANTS

Thirty-six professionals participated in the study. Of these participants, 19 were in the intervention group and 17 were in the waiting list control group.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a quasi-experimental design. Across the four runs of the professional development programme, participants were allocated to either the intervention group or the waiting list control group.

REFERENCE

Sansosti, F.J., Powell-Smith, K.A., & Kincaid, D. (2004). A research synthesis of social story interventions for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(4), 194–204.

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