October 2022 Webinar
AIR-P is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under award UT2MC39440, the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health. The information, content, and/or conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS, or the US Government.
Laura Crane

Evaluating the use of flexible seating for neurotypical and neurodivergent children
Centre for Research in Autism and Education

At CRAE, we...

• Conduct high quality scientific research that has a positive impact on the lives of autistic children, young people and adults

• Meaningfully engage with the autistic and broader autism communities to shape the future direction of autism research
Dramatic rise in autism publications
...but a huge translational gap
Is there a role for more participatory research?

Commentary – bridging the research and practice gap in autism: The importance of creating research partnerships with schools

Sarah Parsons
University of Southampton, UK
The Pan London Autism Schools Network - Research

Autism practice in Bangladesh

Getting Young Autistic People Back Into School

Sleep wise

Lesson Study

Performing Arts

Forest School

Who's involved?

Current PLASN-R School Members

Current PLASN-R Research Members
The Development and Feasibility Study of a Multimodal 'Talking Wall' to Facilitate the Voice of Young People with Autism and Complex Needs: A Case Study in a Specialist Residential School
Mayflower Primary School
Moving away from ‘good sitting’…

Commonly associated with:

- Crossed legs
- Not leaning back or slumping
- Folded or still arms
- Sitting in your assigned place
What adaptations can we make for ALL learners?

• What is available to some children usually benefits all.
• Whole school inclusive approaches could meet the sensory needs of more children.
• Adaptions to buildings are expensive and sometimes not possible.
• Already established the benefits of different seating for some children as recommended by the occupational therapists.
• Could these seats benefit everyone and how could this be evaluated?
What is flexible seating?

Using a range of seating options in the classroom, typically alongside less rigid rules about moving around the classroom and less reliance on seating plans or assigned seating.
What do we know from the literature?

• Much research has focused on flexible seating as a specific adaptation for neurodivergent children (especially autistic children)

• Findings have been mixed. Why? Different seats may vary in effectiveness, and different children may respond differently to different seats.

• While flexible seating does not always show positive effects, detrimental effects do not seem to have been reported.

• Fairly little known about what those in the classroom think about flexible seating...especially children’s views.
Our aims

• To conduct a case study in Mayflower Primary School.

• To seek staff views on if/how flexible seating may have influenced teaching delivery and their provision of educational support in the classroom, as well as the opportunities and challenges of flexible seating.

• To seek pupil views (both neurotypical and neurodivergent) on what they liked and didn’t like about flexible seating.
Our study...
Thank you to the chair committee!
DIFFERENT CHAIRS

Wobble Cushion

Floor Desk

Standing Desk
Sketching Desk.  
Sensory Cushion  
Floor chair
• Regular Classroom Chair

• Rocking Chair
Data collection (pupils)

- 3-4 days
- 315 pupils surveyed (57= neurodivergent)
Accessible surveys and activities
Pupil data analysis
Results

• Quantitative data: Children had clear preferences for certain chairs over others

• Qualitative data: When choosing chairs, the factors most important to children were...
  • Concentration (the extent to which a seating option helped them manage any potential distractions)
  • Movement (the extent to which options facilitated additional movement in the classroom, i.e., via rocking or wobbling)
  • Comfort (the extent to which they felt comfortable, or could reduce discomfort in the classroom).
Teacher data analysis
Results

• Of the 33 staff who took part, 30 reported that they would recommend flexible seating to other schools (most as a cross-school strategy, for all age groups).

• Like children, teachers had clear preferences for certain chairs over others.
Results

• Staff reported that flexible seating
  • did not prove difficult to adjust their teaching to.
  • did not make managing behaviour in the classroom more challenging.
  • made teaching and supporting pupils easier.

• Staff felt that pupil engagement, behaviour, comfort, mood, motivation and peer-to-peer collaboration improved upon the introduction of flexible seating.
Reflecting critically...

• Would it work in all schools?

• What about older children?

• Does it work in isolation?
Views of the staff taking part in the research

• It was so exciting to be part of such an innovative and forward thinking project! I honestly wasn’t sure what the outcomes would be and there were no expectations for it to ‘work’ or ‘be successful’. The fact that it has been makes it even more exciting!

  Teresa

• I think it was exciting and inclusive and all children wanted to join. If I could join a research project like this again I would!

  Kirsty
Next...

Evaluating the use of ear defenders
Concluding messages

• If we want to achieve autism education research that is beneficial to schools, we need to work in partnership at all stages of the research process.

• Ultimately, by adopting a collaborative and participatory approach, our work will also have more direct benefits on the educational experiences of autistic children and young people.
Using flexible seating...

- A promising model for meeting the sensory needs of young people in schools.

- Needs to be part of a broader programme of inclusive practice.

- Crucially important to get all stakeholders involved – making decisions about issues that affect them.
Thank you for attending!
A link to view the recording will be emailed to all registrants.
We hope to see you next month!

Tuesday 11/8/2022
4-5pm EST

AIR-P Presents: The role of minority stress for autistic peoples health

Presented by Dr. Monique Botha (they/them)

In this talk, Dr. Botha will discuss the relevance of the Minority Stress Model for understanding health outcomes in the autistic community. The minority stress model posits that marginalized groups have an additional stress burden to contend with related to living in unequal society. This stress burden can translate into health inequalities. Yet, there are also factors which may buffer against these effects such as community connectedness, collective resilience, and positive identity, and the creativity of marginalized communities in facing minority stress should not be ignored.
Follow us on social media!

@AIRPnetwork  Facebook.com/AIRPNetwork
@AIRPNetwork  https://twitter.com/AIRPNetwork
AIR-P Network  youtube.com/channel/UCJSPq_zFHftl-q4WFQ6s1rg
Subscribe to our mailing list  https://www.aucd.org/template/page.cfm?id=1209
Website  airpnetwork.ucla.edu