



The Strengths and Barriers to Successfully Including Students with ASD: School Personnel and Parents Perspectives

Michelle Dean, Ph.D., Linh N. Huynh, Ph.D., and Connie Kasari, Ph.D.

University of California, Los Angeles

INTRODUCTION

- The Least Restrictive Environment mandate requires local education agencies to make best efforts to educate students with disabilities in a general education setting (IDEA, 2004).
- Simply placing students with ASD into the general education setting does not guarantee an inclusive environment, or positive academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Mitchell, 2004).
- Several factors are known to interfere with the successfully including children with ASD into the general education setting: lack of awareness about disability, training, and environmental supports (Ravet, 2009).
- Inclusion places new demands on special and general education teachers, thus changing job descriptions or making professional responsibilities ambiguous (Billingsley, 2004).
- Parental involvement is widely acknowledged to be the critical best practice in the education of young children with ASD (National Research Council, 2001).

Research Question: What are the strengths and barriers to successful inclusion programs for children with ASD in under-resourced schools in Los Angeles?

METHODS

- Secondary Analyses
 - Community-based participatory research
 - Larger multi-site study of services for ASD in urban schools (LAUSD Only)
 - Focus groups and key informant interviews
- Participants
 - Title 1 schools in Los Angeles (n=3)
 - Focus Groups (n=9)
 - 6-8 participants per group, 1.5 hour, in schools
 - One-on-One Interviews (n=7)
 - Key Informant, 30 minutes, in schools
 - Types: Parents, Educators, Paraprofessionals, Related Service Providers and School Administrators
- Qualitative Analysis: Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006)

PARTICIPANTS

Table 1. School demographic information

	School 1	School 2	School 3
Total population	792	715	523
Total ASD	40	25	30
General education*	3	2	1
Special education classrooms	37	23	29
TITLE 1	Yes	Yes	Yes
Racial Breakdown			
% Hispanic	96	98	83
% Asian	0	1	3
% African American	2	1	3
% Caucasian	1	0	1
% Other	1	0	10
% Students with disabilities	12	13	11
% Economically disadvantaged	93	100	94
% English learners	41	59	37
% Reclassified**	13	16	27

*Students with ASD receiving special education services in the general education classroom

** Formally English language learners, who were later reclassified as English proficient

PARTICIPANTS

Table 2. Demographic information about the participants

	Parents	Teachers	Paraprofessional	Administrator	Related Service
N	14	26	18	8	3
Gender					
Female	13	23	16	5	3
Male	1	3	1	3	0
Age (years): M(SD)	35.4 (4.9)	43 (9.89)	37.47 (10.46)	43.86 (10.45)	31.67 (2.08)
Ethnicity					
African-American	0	1	1	0	0
Hispanic	14	6	14	2	0
Asian	0	1	0	0	0
Caucasian	0	11	0	6	3
Other	0	5	2	0	0
Highest Education Level					
High School	7	0	0	0	0
Some College	2	0	6	0	0
College Diploma	1	5	6	8	0
Graduate/Professional	1	21	4	0	3
Not reported	3	0	1	0	0

EMERGING THEMES

1. Educating the general education students about ASD is a successful inclusion strategy.

Paraprofessional	Principal
"We introduce ourselves and explain why they flap a little bit, why they scream a little bit, so they're kinda okay about it."	"...once you talk to students, and you explain to them as to why Johnny is acting different, and they, they get it! And, they are less fearful when they see different behaviors."

2. Schools do not provide time for collaboration, and school personnel do not make time to collaborate.

General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher
"I don't necessarily know that I'm doing the best job I can for the mainstream student or the full inclusion student. I'm not sure what my expectations are."	"... Marie and I, we have worked together all year. This is the first time we have probably had a conversation, because there is no time for collaboration. We meet in grade levels...And, there's other topics. It's not special ed"

EMERGING THEMES

3. Parent advocacy and parent -teacher collaboration can have a powerful impact on the school climate.

Paraprofessional	Parent of child with ASD
"The parents are doing what the teachers can't do. They're in the classrooms, but the parents are doing more on the outside, like community."	"we gain more knowledge in each meeting. We became more capable and competent, we trained ourselves morally, psychologically, and academically for our children."

DISCUSSION

- Educating general education populations about autism is beneficial in building peer acceptance.
- Teachers may view collaboration as a low priority, and may not go out of their way to interact with co-service providers due to the lack of emphasis and low dedication from school personnel.
- By failing to form partnerships and to collaborate, children can fall through the cracks, or programs can be inconsistent.
- Parent empowerment is important. When schools are supportive of parent involvement, parents and school partnerships can have a significant impact on autism awareness and acceptance.
- Additional training of general education is needed. A systematically approach to test effects of training general education students about autism is warranted.
- More research is needed to examine the barriers to establishing partnerships and collaboration across services providers and parents.

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