



Inclusive Education for Preschoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the best practices for educating preschool-aged students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive classroom. A literature review has been completed through The College of New Jersey, and several professionals in related fields were interviewed for this project.

Literature Review

Within the scope of the literature, it has been determined that there are three overarching aspects in educating young children with ASD in an inclusive environment. These aspects are as follows: programs must allow for individualization as per the child's needs, programs must target several developmental areas for growth, and programs must set goals for skill generalization and independence. Programs researched included: Applied Behavior Analysis, Group Early Start Denver Model, TEACCH, Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention, and Mixed Interventions.

Interviews

For this research, interviews were conducted with directors of mainstream preschool programs, directors of Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities (APSSD), a special education preschool teacher in a public school district, and a professor of Special Education at a higher institution.

From these interviews it was concluded that while mainstream preschools are willing to enroll students with ASD in their programs, they often lack the necessary components in teaching these students. For instance, many of these programs were not equipped with certified special education teachers, they lacked the budget to provide extra services, and often their programs did not follow the three important aspects outlined in the literature review. However, APSSDs and public preschool programs are equip with the aspects said above, showing that these programs may be the optimal setting for students with ASD.

Discussion

In conclusion, in order to effectively and appropriately educate young students with ASD in an inclusive environment, programs must: be individualized, target multiple skills, promote skill generalization, employ trained special education professionals, provide additional therapies and adaptive technology, as well as set goals to transition these students into fully mainstreamed classrooms when appropriate. Additionally, a director of a preschool program looking to include students with ASD must also take into consideration: staffing, budgeting, physiccil spacing, and special education laws.