

TEACHERS' REPORTS ON TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: PLANNING AND REPORTING

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BACKGROUND



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that significantly alters social communication, behaviours and functioning (APA, 2013)



The complexity of ASD calls for specialized educational practices including individualization, visual supports and environmental adaptations (OME, 2007).



In Quebec, various options are offered to meet the specific needs of this population such as inclusion in mainstream education and enrollment in specialized classrooms or schools (MELS, 2007).

OBJECTIVE

This study is one of the few that addressed the **experience of teachers** working in a **specialized educational setting** with **high school students** (12-18 years old) living with ASD (Level 2; moderate level of severity).

More specifically, this study will outline their **planning and reporting** methods.

RESULTS

Planning

Most teachers employ the regular education program and use various techniques to teach their students presenting with ASD.

All teachers write an intervention educational plan (IEP) for their students in collaboration with professionals from a variety of disciplines (n=12).

Participation of principals vary across schools (n=6). Teachers' perception of students and parents' participation is mixed.

About half of the teachers (n=6) are willing to invite their students during this process, parents are rarely involved (n=1).

Teachers feel that the IEP reflect the goals of the school curriculum (n=12). Some mention, however, that IEPs rely more on the functioning of the student than on the academic component. Most teachers report implementing the suggested interventions.

Reporting

Most teachers (n=13) reveal using the traditional report card, while others indicated modifying the objectives to tailor to the individual needs and level of their students.

About half of the teachers (n=7) feel that parents do not fully understand the scoring method and often need to provide numerous explanations to promote their comprehension.

Only a handful of teachers (n=5) invite parents to meetings to discuss the report card during which most frequently discussed topics are the students' strengths and needs in terms of learning, the rating of the report card, the objectives of the program and the IEP.

When meetings are held (n=7), most students are invited (n=6). Some teachers explain that this is not a common practice for the students to attend in their community, others mention that parents prefer that their child not be present, due to anxious behavior or inability to understand.

METHODS

Research design.

Mixed quantitative and qualitative

Participants.

Fifteen teachers working in mainstream high schools with adolescents on the autism spectrum enrolled in a specialized program participated in this study.

Instruments.

- Sociodemographic questionnaire
- Semi-structured interview protocol

Data Analysis.

- Descriptive quantitative analyses were performed
- A thematic content analysis method (Patton 2002) was used to perform the qualitative analyses.

DISCUSSION

Preliminary results indicate differences among methods used by teachers working in specialized education settings. Even though special education teachers are required to offer the regular education program, their reporting and planning procedures appear to vary, not only from school to school but also from one class to another. It appears that the reporting method may not be the most suitable tool to demonstrate the students' progress as it may require adaptations and lead to parents' lack of comprehension. It would be useful for teachers to set up meetings with parents to discuss the progress and ratings. As for the IEP, it seems that teachers are well supported by their school team and principal but are not necessarily encouraged to involve the students or parents in the earlier phases of the process. Despite years of education and experience, teachers are constantly looking for ways and resources to develop and feel more competent in their work to meet the diverse needs of their students, demonstrating a high level of engagement. Future research should focus on the communication mechanisms and facilitators between teachers and students in order to promote students' autonomy and accountability in regard to their learning as well as to support students' involvement in the development of the objectives targeted in their IEP. The ultimate goal is to better support teachers working with individuals with ASD in specialized education settings and to help students' reach their full potential.

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