Assignment Two

Literature Review

by

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for

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EST 300 Researching Classroom Practice

Introduction

The number of people identified with autism has increased by about double between 2009 and 2015 for people aged under 25 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017). The greatest increases are seen in younger people below 25 years old. Due to this increase and the shift to incorporating students with special needs in mainstream schools it is more likely that teachers will encounter autistic students than ever before. I am completing secondary education, majoring in digital technologies and minoring in health and physical education. I intend to teach in Darwin.

Personal Background

In 2019, my youngest son, aged six, was diagnosed with autism. Since the diagnosis, we have jumped through the hoops of mainstream education with EAPs and ILPs, a single amazing teacher that supported our son without any fuss and others that were unable to connect with or engage him in the classroom, resulting in numerous removals from the classroom and school. For too long, the school sought to modify his behaviour and place the responsibility of his actions, squarely on him, a six- to seven-year-old, we explored various methods to engage and enable his identity to flourish.

Throughout the two-year process, after diagnosis, we advocated and fought to keep him in mainstream education, often against educators. From this personal experience and how I have seen student-teacher interactions in schools, I seek to refine my ability to engage these students in the classroom and model that behaviour for others.

How can teachers' generative and reflexive professional development improve autistic student experiences in mainstream secondary schools?

1.	• Parents feel like they are the only advocate for students in mainstream secondary schools. (Harrington, 2014)
Square Pegs in Round Holes. Harrington, 2014.	• Parents self-censored their demands or requests to avoid alienating teachers and staff. They were unwilling to risk their child's inclusion to meet their educational needs. The onus of responsibility for student participation was on parents (Harrington, 2014).
	• How can I change this perception and experience individually and at a broader level? Initially, I only think I'll be able to model behaviour for others, before being able to effect meaningful change at a collegiate level. Further, only interested teachers that practice reflexive development are likely to invest change within themselves.
	• Autism Queensland (AQ) is a non-profit that is the only provider delivering specialised education, therapy and support to autistic people and their families, in Queensland. It has two accredited schools delivering specific education and therapy to students aged six to eighteen (Harrington, 2014).
	• AQ placement outcomes were low. Mainstream and AQ learning outcomes differed therefore AQ impeded academic progress. Three of eight students later exited mainstream schooling. In contrast, Aspect satellite program success rate was higher, where students can access ASD specific education, training and therapy within their mainstream school environment. However, this was only available in in NSW and SA for 2023, with limited participating schools. (Harrington, 2014).
	• Programs such as those delivered by AQ and Aspect are scarce and are often on a first come first served basis, rather than highest need or greatest

	good. Therefore, parents are more likely to take the opportunity, where little or no research and evidence is provided or available.
	• Communicate Autism (CommAut) is a program, that my son is currently enrolled, based in Darwin. Program teacher was not able to provide evidence of success rate, but only provided colloquial personal "evidence". The teacher could also not provide basis of research that the program was built on. Worse still, there is no easily available information through Department of Education.
	• I want to be able to engage, genuinely and in a meaningful way to understand how students' behaviour can be accepted and managed in a constructive manner, in consultation with their parents.
	• From my personal experience, I want to identify better programs that are bedded in research and are able to provide evidence of success for students and families.
2 **Direct Instruction for** **Reading Comprehension.** **Flores & Ganz 2007.**	• Flores and Ganz (2007) discuss the results of conducting direct instruction for three students, two with autism and one with a significant developmental delay. The boys aged 10 and 16 were both diagnosed with autism, therefore is the focus of this analysis.
	• The 10 year old was given direct reading instruction during regular class hours of two sessions per day, of 30-minute periods, five days per week. Whilst the 16-year-old boy was given instruction after school. (Flores & Ganz 2007)
	• There was a clear improvement and benefit to the students, however the sample size was very small, therefore more research or evidence needs to be found.

	• This increased responsibility may also be too large for a school to use, especially with a lack of more evidence. • I have also experienced a lack of interest by educators, students and parents in improving basic literacy and numeracy skills. With no support from any other these three areas, I cannot foresee this kind of additional support succeeding. • Although parents of autistic students regularly identify a need for increased participation in their education and behaviour moderation. Given proper guidance to parents, I could encourage certain parents to assist in direct instruction for learning. • Also, if students are unable to remain at school, video and other communication platforms can be used to provide aid. • The potential benefits far outweigh the cost of a teacher's time. Naoki Higashida was able to write the book The reason I jump: One boy's voice from the silence of autism, after an "ambitious teacher" taught him to spell words through a Japanese alphabet grid (Higashida, 2013). Naoki is a non-verbal autistic Japanese man, that published the book during junior high school.
3 **Autistic Students: Your Voice Counts.** **Saggers, B., Hwang, Y. S., & Mercer, K. L. (2011).**	• Saggers et al., (2011) advocates a voice for autistic students, by directly quoting their lived experience and opinions. Attempting to understand how autistic students differ can be pivotal in understanding their lived experience and how I can better engage with them. • The key areas I want to explore from this article is the curriculum and workload.

- Handwriting, when directed within the curriculum, can be divisive for any student. A relentless pursuit of this skill can motivate students' self-withdrawal from mainstream schooling or emotional withdrawal from the classroom. Provided I can encourage students to understand the requirement to generate a minimum standard, there is no need for deliberate handwriting practice, at any level of schooling. NAPLAN from Year 5 is solely conducted online through desktop computers.

- Most schools have ICT devices, such as desktops, laptops or tablets. I need to make a concerted effort to make these devices available for use in the classroom and educate students how they can be best used to enhance their learning. I want to identify other devices that can support student development, for example the alphabet grid described in Higashida (2013).

- Managing student workload within the curriculum is critical to supporting autistic students throughout their schooling experience. Eight of the nine students identified difficulties with time and workload management (Saggers et al., 2011). Increased pressures are mounted onto students, as the final years of high school are regarded as critical into gaining employment in the workforce or further study.

- I want to be able to manage their expectations and to monitor their progress to ensure their success, with parents.

- "Home Room" or similar classes, where students are collected somewhat randomly and limited formal curriculum delivery occurs.

- Home Room teachers can engage with students without the shadow of curriculum requirements. However, I have experienced the Home Room class shared other subjects and teacher. This regularly resulted in the classroom,

	designed for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), being disregarded for the other subjects. To stop this from occurring, Home Room classes did not all share the same subject and teacher, but also mixes year levels, at another school. • Again, it is unlikely I will be able to affect this in the early years of my practice, however would like to explore further research to support the inclusion of SEL. • Sagger et al. (2011) also discusses the volume of work that creates anxiety among the students interviewed. A role of Home Room teacher is to use in-school programs such as Compass to understand the overall workload of students and manage those expectations with other teachers. The inclusion of applications such as Compass, allows teachers to understand a student's subject, grades, timetable, additional learning needs or external factors, that may affect their education. Provided sufficient training and enthusiasm, teachers can easily understand their students' stressors, enabling an informed conversation with students to determine appropriate courses of action. • Whilst I will be able to use new programs effectively, conveying the requirement to manage other teachers' expectations may be difficult. • If the opportunity arises, I will volunteer to have Home Room classes to engage students' SEL.
4 **Technology support tools for secondary students with autism.** **Hedges et al., 2017**	• Autistic students can engage more comprehensibly with the curriculum, using digital devices, such as tablets, phones, computers, et cetera. It is well established that autistic children are innately drawn to technology (Colby, 1973; Goldsmith & LeBlanc, 2004, as cited in Hiltz, 2017).

- I could identify ways to use technology devices to motivate autistic students, as this is a preferred method of learning. It would require close monitoring, so that the devices are not used for other purposes.

- By engaging critically with the use of these devices, I believe autistic students will benefit more holistically, as they will learn to use these aids to advance other skills, beyond schooling.

- Whilst most students used devices for completing assignments and learning, some used them for "relaxation". This relaxation included watching videos on YouTube, which could quickly become a distraction to their and others' learning (Hedges et al., 2017).

- It is common for autistic students to use music to avoid other sensory agitators, I would need to identify how to monitor or regulate its use. This can be done through pre-programmed timers or other monitoring applications. One of the biggest obstacles to this, within NT Government schools, is the whitelisting of programs and applications, that heavily restricts their use on government funded or purchased devices.

- Whilst I have witnessed the lack of control in a classroom using mobile phones in the past, I have also experienced students deliberately using it to regulate their emotional stress and to mitigate their exposure other distractors.

- This student was not participating in the classroom activity, however, did not create additional distraction.

- Another obstacle to the use of personal devices is the recent NT Government decision to ban all mobile phones within NT Government schools. This may be enforced by the school; however, the ruling allows teachers to

	permit the use of mobile phones for the purpose of learning (Department of Education, 2022). • Hedges et al. (2017) also identifies benefits of increasing independence, as students can regulate or initiate activities, by establishing routines with alarms or reminders. Technology enables social interactions, that may otherwise be too confronting for autistic students, within alternative media. • This reinforces my earlier point that students will be better prepared for life beyond school, by engaging with devices that improve their ability to navigate life.
5 **Perception of friendship.** **Carrington, S., Templeton, E., & Papinczak, T. (2003).**	• Students with Aspergers syndrome would masquerade their social deficit by reporting higher friendship numbers and regular and persistent contact, whilst describing friendship in shallow and unemotional terms (Carrington et al., 2003). • The key message in this article that drew me to it was that the research was aimed to provide teachers with an insight to a student's perspective with Asperger Syndrome. • I believe the motivator for these students to mask their deficit, when compared with non-autistic students to be quite normal. Their denial of their own isolation and lack of deep, meaningful relationships would be natural, as identifying them would be very confronting for any person. • This poses much deeper questioning of the social structure within schools to me. How can I motivate a school culture to accept autistic students, when broader society does not?

	• The ability to connect with any student about personal relationships is difficult, however, if I can cultivate specialised settings, such as Aspect satellite classes, I may be able to understand individual student perspectives and needs.

Personal and Professional Goals
1. Develop a personal framework to engage with new autistic students and families joining mainstream secondary setting.
2. Identify and develop ICT tools to enable and engage ASD student and family integration into secondary education.
3. Generatively develop a framework or process to engage with new autistic students and families before commencing in the secondary mainstream setting.

I intend to use my personal experience, specialty skills, in digital technology and health and physical education, to research and develop support mechanisms for autistic students in mainstream education.

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