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Puppets in Education

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Puppets in Education

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Introduction

• Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a group of related brain-based disorders that affect a child’s behavior, social and communication skills.
• In 2009, approximately 1,000 Vermont students received special educational services for ASD.
• Puppets in Education (PiE) is a non-profit group that teaches kids how to keep themselves safe and healthy and to appreciate each other’s differences.
• PiE’s Friend 2 Friend Program (F2F) addresses ASD in fun and interactive puppet and workshop presentations, promoting empathy for individuals on the autism spectrum by modeling, labeling, explaining and normalizing differences, and teaching prosocial communication and friendship skills.
• Last year, UVM COM students collaborated with PiE to determine how the use of puppets could best educate the community regarding ASD.
• This year our goals were to elicit:
  ➢ the perceived effectiveness of current ASD education in the classroom;
  ➢ the perceived effectiveness of including children with ASD in the classroom; and
  ➢ the most important aspects of ASD to address in the Puppets in Education (PiE) curriculum.

Methods

A survey was emailed out to a total of 1,420 VT educators and 5,671 community members on 10/10/10, creating a total survey population of 7,091 individuals from all counties across the state of Vermont.

Population surveyed:
1) Families with a child with ASD (ages 2 to adult)
2) Families without a child with ASD
3) Educational professionals

Data Analysis

• Quantitative data was analyzed using Chi squared distribution and multinomial logistical regression where appropriate. Qualitative data (responses to open-ended survey questions) were evaluated using a simplified qualitative data analysis technique and included the reporting of trends.

Survey Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family with ASD</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family without ASD</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Professionals that teach Students with ASD</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Professionals that Do Not Teach Students with ASD</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Puppets in Education” (PiE) is an innovative/effective approach to delivering content; entertaining and inspiring to both children and adults

Discussion

Universally, parents and educators felt that more education was necessary to effectively work with students with ASD.
• There are curriculums currently available that teachers can adopt.
  Including works by Michelle Garcia Winner.
• The issue of confidentiality in the classroom becomes an issue when working with a child with ASD.
• Teachers and Parents need to work together to not inadvertently “out” a student with disability when presenting social skills programs.
• Families are the main source of information on Autism Spectrum Disorder in their schools.
• Effective communication between families and their teachers can help bridge the gap, and families should be involved in educating their teachers about the needs of their specific child.

• There is no “One-Size Fits All” approach to working with a student on the autism spectrum.
• Each student is different, programs need to be flexible and tailored to the needs of the child.
• There are curriculums currently available that teachers can adopt. Including works by Michelle Garcia Winner.

Further Study Recommendations

1. Survey the children who participate in PiE’s Friend 2 Friend program to document their understanding of ASD and their behavioral response to peers on the autism spectrum.
2. Find a way to target more parents of children with and without autism to gather further information from their perspectives.
3. Write survey questions that fit more clearly into a formal matrix for qualitative data analysis.

Results

• Divisions were noted across all sampled populations on the topic of inclusion. Educational professionals discussed difficulties of knowing when and how to implement inclusive practices.
• While more educators than families felt the current approach to inclusion (students with disabilities and non-disabled) was effective, all sample populations expressed a desire for more information and education on how to implement it effectively.
• While curriculums for inclusion within the schools exist, parents of children with ASD feel that they are the main source of information on the disorder.
• There is a further need for ASD and social skills education.
• Issues with confidentiality were cited as a potential barrier to further collaboration.
• Educators felt more confident about their school’s ability to balance the needs of children with ASD and their peers than families.
• Families with ASD felt more confident than families without ASD addressing the topic of autism spectrum disorders with their child’s school.
• Families with ASD felt more confident addressing the topic of autism spectrum disorders than educators did addressing the topic with parents of typically developing peers.
• Educators who teach with ASD felt more confident addressing ASD with parents.
• Families who felt that their school effectively included children with differences/disabilities were more likely to be confident in their school’s ability to balance the needs of children with and without ASD.
• As each child with ASD is different, having flexibility in structured support systems improves classroom behaviors for children with ASD.
• Families and professionals can share in the challenges and successes in educating children with ASD.

Puppets in Education

Endnotes

- There is no “One-Size Fits All” approach to working with a student on the autism spectrum.
- Each student is different, programs need to be flexible and tailored to the needs of the child.
- There are curriculums currently available that teachers can adopt. Including works by Michelle Garcia Winner.