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Ten Effective Teaching Practices for Students with Asperger's Syndrome

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Ten Effective Teaching Practices for Students with Asperger's Syndrome

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Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

MS in Special Education

Department

Education

Subject Categories

Education

RUNNING HEAD: Ten Effective Teaching

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Table of Contents

Abstract	Page 2
Introduction	Page 4
Literature Review	Page 5
Methodology	Page 20
Results	Page 21
Discussion	Page 23
References	Page 27
Appendix	Page 28

Ten Effective Teaching Practices for Students with Asperger's Syndrome

Introduction

In today's classrooms teachers have to differentiate their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students. Teachers have to find a way to reach students of all levels and abilities. Lessons have to be modified and individualized so that each student is getting the instruction that he or she needs. There are certain strategies and practices that have been researched and are available to help teachers meet individual student needs. For example, for students with Asperger's Syndrome there is a lot of research to assist teachers in helping their students feel more comfortable in the classroom environment. School can be especially stressful and scary for students with Asperger's Syndrome. There are ten practices that show up repeatedly in the research as the best ways to help students with Asperger's Syndrome succeed in the classroom. Literature on effective teaching practices for students with Asperger's Syndrome falls into the following ten categories:

- Use social plans or role playing
- Have a plan for transitions
- Create a plan for meltdowns
- Use visuals
- Use a word processor for writing assignments
- Strategic positioning of the child in the classroom
- Strategies to help the student deal with stress
- Reduce sensory input
- Break assignments into manageable parts

- Buddy system

Each practice or strategy addresses the specific needs of students with Asperger's Syndrome. These practices are suggested because they work to help children with Asperger's Syndrome develop the necessary skills to be successful socially and academically. They are easy to implement and they are supported by parents and teachers. The goal of each strategy is to aid students so that they are comfortable in the classroom and to give each student the skills they need to be successful well after they leave our schools.

In order for teachers to best assist students with Asperger's Syndrome in the classroom they need to be aware of the recommended practices. This raised the question about whether or not teachers are using these effective teaching strategies in their classrooms. As a result, a study was conducted to determine what strategies teachers are using to help students with Asperger's Syndrome succeed in the classroom. The purpose was to determine if teachers are using the ten strategies that the research shows to work. A questionnaire was developed that asked teachers what strategies they used for certain situations. How many of the strategies were teachers using? Was there a strategy that teachers found very helpful that should have been on the list? I analyzed the questionnaires and compared them with the ten strategies found in the literature. This study helped to identify what research based strategies teachers were using to help their students with Asperger's Syndrome.

Literature Review

Definition

Teachers need to have a good understanding of what Asperger's Syndrome is so that they can better help their students. Asperger's Syndrome is a neurobiological disorder that is on the Autism spectrum. It is considered to be "at the less severe end of the autistic spectrum

(Edwards, 2001, p. 82). According to Gibbons (2008), “Asperger’s Syndrome is a disorder characterized by social skills deficits and display of repetitive behaviors” (p.1). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) states the diagnosing criteria as the student must display “qualitative impairment in social interaction, restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities, clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000, p. 2). Most people with Asperger’s Syndrome are very bright, have good memories, and when looked at on the spectrum are considered to be very verbal (Minchew, 2005). Edwards (2001) states that, “people with Asperger’s Syndrome usually have average to high intelligence but are regarded as odd or eccentric” (p. 82). Asperger’s Syndrome is used to “describe those with autism who have extremely good verbal skills and are far less withdrawn than other autistics” (Edwards, 2001, p. 83). Most students with Asperger’s Syndrome will have a type of obsession or be very good at something. For example, they may be able to tell you all the different kinds of Dinosaurs, when they lived, what they ate, and just about anything else about Dinosaurs (Minchew, 2005). Students with Asperger’s Syndrome struggle socially because they take things very literally and do not comprehend normal social activities (Edwards, 2001). Students with Asperger’s Syndrome can be successful in the classroom environment if the teacher takes certain steps to assist them. The following ten teaching practices provide ways for teachers to assist students with Asperger’s Syndrome.

Teaching Practice Number One: Using Social Plans or Role Playing

The first practice that teachers use to assist students with Asperger’s Syndrome in the classroom is social plans or role playing. Students with Asperger’s Syndrome do not understand how to act in certain social situations and they do not know how to read other peoples’ body

language or facial expressions. Role playing allows teachers to address certain situations that may come up in the classroom or on the playground. Teachers can prepare the child how to ask their peers questions and how to respond appropriately. Be sure to model for the student how to have a conversation with another person. Emphasize that to have a conversation you have to listen and then respond to the other person. The role playing and social stories should be repeated in hopes of decreasing the stress of the situation. Having a plan helps the child feel more confident and comfortable in situations such as, assemblies or on the playground (Gibbons, 2008). One teacher in the video *Asperger's What Teachers Need to Know* used social plans five minutes before recess (Minchew, 2005). She would ask the student what they wanted to ask another student on the playground. They would then practice how to ask the question and how to respond if the other child said yes or no. Social plans also can be helpful when working with academics. If the child is growing frustrated while writing an assignment they can learn appropriate ways to show and deal with that frustration. The teacher can practice with the child how to react and show their feelings in a way that is less disruptive. Gibbons (2008) suggests that each social story be short, concise, and clearly demonstrate the desired response. One study done by Susana Bernad-Ripoll had students with Asperger's Syndrome watch themselves on videotape reacting to a situation. The teacher and parents would use social stories to show the child more appropriate ways to react and handle frustrations. They also worked on assisting the child in identifying exactly what emotion he was feeling at the time of the tantrum. The study found that, "using videotaped segments of emotions and Social Stories to explain those emotions was effective in teaching a child with AS to recognize and understand emotions in himself and to generalize them to other situations" (Bernad-Ripoll, 2007, p.3). Social stories will be different for each child and should target a specific need (Sansosti, & Powell-Smith, 2006). Another

study by Sansosti and Powell-Smith (2006) showed that, “social story interventions were effective in increasing specific social engagements skills” (p. 7). In this study the children carried around a social stories book and the parents would go through it with them every night. The children whose parents went over the book with them every night did show a decrease in the target behavior. Bock (2001) proposes that teachers and parents write down some reminders for students on a note card that they can carry with them. Social stories and role playing are a way to better prepare students with Asperger’s Syndrome for situations in the classroom and beyond.

Teaching Practice Number Two: Have a Plan for Transitions

The next teaching practice for students with Asperger’s Syndrome is to have a schedule, planner, or timer to help the student deal with transitions. Students with Asperger’s Syndrome like everything to have its place and they need a routine. When a change in routine arises they often become confused and upset (Minchew, 2005). Minchew (2005) recommends that each student have a daily planner that lists each activity for the day. This will help them to anticipate what is coming next. Teachers need to tell the students with Asperger’s Syndrome of any changes as soon as they become aware of them. Minchew (2005) recommends that teachers write it in the daily planner and they need to discuss the change with the child. It is very important to make sure they understand the change so they know what to expect (Minchew, 2005). Minchew (2005) suggests putting a timer on the desk of the child to help with daily transitions. Set the timer to go off with five minutes left until transition time. This will allow the child to wrap up what they are doing and to prepare for the transition. If a timer is not possible the student needs to be warned of every transition before hand. For students who are younger and do not know how to read, Minchew (2005) proposes using pictures for a daily planner which will help them see the day and what is coming next (Minchew, 2005). Simply writing up the

daily schedule will help students with Asperger's Syndrome succeed in the classroom environment. They can prepare themselves for each change and they will know what to expect. Teachers need to provide the daily schedule first thing in the morning. They should review the day with the child and answer any questions the child may have. Making sure the child is at ease and understands what is going on that day will help decrease anxiety and stress during transition times. Minchew (2005) stresses the importance of sticking to a schedule. By creating a daily schedule teachers help prepare the child for the day and make them feel more comfortable.

Teaching Practice Number Three: Have a Plan for Meltdowns

Another teaching practice that is effective when working with student's with Asperger's Syndrome is having a plan for meltdowns. Most students with Asperger's Syndrome will have a meltdown sometime while they are in the classroom. Some students may have them more often than others. Minchew (2005) advises teachers to have a plan in place with the child and other necessary school personnel that will help make these events less stressful for everyone. Set aside time to discuss with the child where they feel safe and where they would like to go if they have a meltdown that starts in the classroom. Pyles (2002) proposes that this place be quiet, where the child feels safe, and it should be free of sensory stimulation. Children with Asperger's Syndrome have meltdowns when their brains become overloaded or overwhelmed. They can be caused by an unknown transition, trying to avoid something, or maybe a rule was broken or changed. These children are not misbehaving, it is an inappropriate fear response (Minchew, 2005). Teachers need to get to know each child and try to anticipate triggers. Minchew (2005) suggests that teachers develop a signal with the student that tells them when the child needs to leave the room. This allows the child to be excused from the room and go to a quiet place to cool down. The child now has privacy and does not have to be watched by their peers. Teachers

should leave the child alone until they have cooled down. Try to discuss with the child after the meltdown how they were feeling and what caused them to act that way. This may help you predict more triggers. Minchew (2005) recommends that teachers have a plan in place for their students with Asperger's Syndrome that will allow them to be excused when necessary. This helps decrease disruption and it gives the child the privacy they need (Minchew, 2005).

Teaching Practice Number Four: Use Visuals

Using visuals as much as possible is the next teaching practice for students with Asperger's Syndrome. Many students and, "people with autism are visual thinkers" (Grandin, 2002). Jackson (2002) explains that building words with sounds can be a difficult task for some students. These students may be better off memorizing the look of the whole word rather than trying to sound it out (Jackson, 2002). It is important to remember that all students with Asperger's Syndrome do not learn the same way. Some of them will benefit from a phonics approach and others will benefit from a whole language approach. It is up to the teacher to determine what course is best for the student. Jackson suggests that for each vocabulary word and assignment teachers provide a picture to accompany the words or activity. Students with Asperger's Syndrome need to be shown exactly what to do and what the end product should look like. Having a visual to go along with teacher directions will help the child to better understand what is expected of them. Bernad-Ripoll (2007) discusses teachers who show a video of students working. The video can show the step by step process for the assignment. This allows all of the students in the classroom to see exactly what is expected of them. Teachers should "avoid long string of verbal instruction" (Grandin, 2002, p. 1). Students with Asperger's Syndrome have trouble "remembering the sequence" (Grandin, 2002, p. 1). As a result, Grandin (2002) advises teachers to print out written directions for each assignment so the student can follow along. As

mentioned earlier, using pictures for a daily schedule is beneficial. Picture cues can be helpful when giving directions. For older students who struggle with organization Willey (2003) suggests having picture cues in their lockers. For example, if a student has trouble remembering a pen or pencil they can have a picture of the writing utensil on the top of their notebook to serve as a reminder. It is also helpful when presenting abstract ideas to provide visuals and written words to describe the concept. Kirby (2008) suggests using hand signals as a way to tell the child to stop, wait their turn, or adjust their voice level. This gives the student a visual cue. Provide the child with graphic organizers and maps to help them with their notes and categorizing information. Incorporating visuals along with verbal instruction helps students with Asperger's Syndrome better understand what is being asked of them.

Teaching Practice Number Five: Use a Word Processor for Writing

A very effective teaching practice to help students with Asperger's Syndrome with any type of writing assignment is to allow them to use a word processor. Luke Jackson is the author of Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome. He gives wonderful explanations about what school is like for students with Asperger Syndrome. He knows because he has Asperger Syndrome. He suggests using a word processor for all writing. Students with Asperger Syndrome may have a hard time holding a pen or pencil. Jackson struggles with writing because, "holding a pen makes my hand ache and what I actually think never quite appears the same on paper" (Jackson, 2002, p. 121). Students with Asperger Syndrome may get very frustrated because they have a hard time getting their thoughts out onto the paper. Jackson (2002) also struggles because if he makes a mistake he has to start all over on a new piece of paper. To help alleviate the child's frustrations they should be allowed to use a laptop or desktop (Jackson, 2002). Using a computer will help the work get done faster. Jackson (2002) likes using the word processor because he

gets his work done quicker, it is easier for him, and he feels he produces better work on a computer. Students with Asperger Syndrome will also struggle with written homework assignments. Pyles (2002) suggests that teachers allow all homework to be typed. Willey (2003) proposes that teachers upload graphic organizers and any other worksheets onto the child's computer. This will allow the student to take notes with the rest of the class on the computer. The child will be able to better keep up with the class and the notes (Willey, 2003). The teacher can provide a copy of her notes if necessary. Willey (2003) advises teachers to assign a scribe for the child to assist with writing if a computer is not always available. Teachers can tape record their lessons so the child can listen to them when needed. Using a word processor will help students with Asperger's Syndrome to get their work done faster, easier, and with much less stress.

Teaching Practice Number Six: Strategic Positioning of the Child in the Classroom

The next teaching practice for students with Asperger's Syndrome has to do with strategic positioning of the child in the classroom. Students with Asperger's Syndrome can become overwhelmed by noise and bright lights. Certain things that most people do not think twice about can be very distracting for these students and can lead to sensory overload. Pyles (2002) lists some triggers as: noise from outside, the hallway, and bright lights from outside. Teachers have to take each of these factors into account when they are making their class seating chart. Pyles (2002) reasons that students with Asperger's Syndrome would do best if they were seated away from doors and windows. They should also be towards the front of the room. Having the student sit up front allows the teacher to gently redirect them when they may be off task. Pyles (2002) recommends teachers work out a quiet signal with the student to help them refocus. Make sure there is plenty of room around the child's desk. They should be able to

stand and move around freely if needed. They need to have space. According to Pyles (2002) there should also be a quiet corner of the room available with “a bean bag, soft couch or pillow area with a few books” so the child can go there if they begin to feel stressed (p.137). Seating the child away from distractions and keeping the classroom calm is essential in helping them feel more comfortable in the classroom.

Teaching Practice Number Seven: Strategies to Help the Student Deal with Stress

Having little tricks in the classroom to help the child deal with stress is another effective teaching practice. Depending on the child different things will help them deal with their anxiety. Gibbons (2008) suggests that the child be given a stress ball to keep in their desk. They can take it out and squeeze it anytime throughout the day (Gibbons, 2008). This is a quiet way to help them get rid of some of their frustrations without any one in the class even knowing. Pyles (2002) lists several other trinkets that may help students with their anxiety. They include “a bendable figure, knobby ball, koosh ball, uninflated balloon filled with flour, and other small toys” (Pyles, 2002, p.138). Whatever the child uses it should be quiet and small enough that it can be carried with them. Pyles (2002) suggests that teachers can also send the child on an errand to remove them from the stressful environment and let them get out some energy. The errand should be to a quiet place with low sensory stimulation. The teacher can set up the destination before hand with the nurse or school resource teacher. These people can have something ready for the student to assist them in reducing his or her stress level. Students can also stand while doing their work to relieve anxiety (Gibbons, 2008). Williams (2001) suggests another idea that involves creating steps with the child that will help them relax. For example, closing their eyes and taking a deep breath. Write the steps that they will take on an index card for them to carry with them each day. This gives the child a step by step plan for how to deal

with a stressful situation (Williams, 2001). It empowers the child to take control of their own actions. Each child may want to use something different to help them relax. Teachers should know the different options and let the student choose which one they want to use. Teachers can have a variety of different stress busters in their classrooms to help all of their students deal with stress and anxiety.

Teaching Practice Number Eight: Reduce Sensory Input

Reducing sensory input as much as possible is another very effective teaching practice. If a classroom is too stimulating this may cause children with Asperger's Syndrome to have a meltdown, become very uncomfortable, or it may increase their anxiety level. There are many simple steps that teachers can take to help ensure their classroom is not over stimulating. For example, Grandin (2002) recommends closing the blinds and fixing any rattling noises coming from fans or the heating system. These kinds of consistent noises can be very distracting and can increase the child's anxiety. If the school has a loud speaker system turn it down or off. According to Grandin (2002), "in many cases the child will be able to tolerate the bell or buzzer if it is muffled slightly by stuffing it with tissues or duct tape" (p.1). It depends on the child whether or not the speaker should just be muffled or if it should be completely turned off. The sudden unexpected announcements can scare the child and disrupt their work. Pyles (2002) also suggests the following:

- Remove clutter from the room.
- Keep desks and shelves neat.
- Always keep the pathways clear.
- Stay away from really bright and distracting posters on the walls. Keep the walls as plain as possible.

- If the chairs in the classroom squeak be sure to put a cushion or something soft on the bottom of the legs to stop the noise.
- If it is really loud in the hallway keep the door shut.
- If the lights are not needed turn them off for a little while. Make sure the lights that are being used in the classroom are low wattage so they will not be as bright.

Taking these steps to help reduce sensory stimulation in the classroom will help decrease the anxiety felt by the child. The goal is to ensure all of our students feel comfortable and welcome in our classroom. Decreasing sensory input will help students with Asperger's Syndrome feel more at ease. The more comfortable they feel in the classroom the more successful they will be in the school environment.

Teaching Practice Number Nine: Break Assignments into Smaller Parts

Breaking assignments into manageable parts is another effective teaching practice. Students with Asperger's Syndrome may become overwhelmed when given a multi-step project or assignment. They may also become discouraged because it can take them longer to complete assignments. Williams (2001) recommends that teachers break down big assignments into manageable pieces. If possible try to "introduce new activities in small sequences of subtasks and in gradually longer periods of time" (Menear & Smith, 2008, p. 5). Explain each section as the child is working on it. Do not overwhelm them by giving them directions for the entire project at once. Teachers should give constant feedback and redirection to the child as they are working on the different steps. For some students Williams (2001) advises timed work sessions. They are given a certain amount of work to do in a specific amount of time. This helps them become more organized. They have a very specific task that they must complete in a time limit. Williams (2001) suggests that the student keep a clock or timer on their desk to help them keep

track of the time. This also helps the student work on their time management skills. Pyles (2002) implies that some homework assignments will take students with Asperger's much longer than their classmates to complete. If this is the case, break the homework down and give it to the student in sections. Pyles (2002) found that some homework assignments might need to be cut in half to prevent frustration from the child and their parents. Teachers need to break most assignments and class work into smaller parts. Each part needs to be accompanied by clear directions and teacher support. Students with Asperger's Syndrome benefit from having projects broken down so they are not so overwhelming.

Teaching Practice Number Ten: The Buddy System

The buddy system is another strategy that shows up repeatedly in research. Peer buddies can be used for multiple purposes and at different times during the school day. Teachers should think carefully about who they select to act as the peer buddy. Willey (2003) describes the buddy as someone who is patient, compassionate, a good student, consistent, and disciplined. Teachers need to sit down and discuss the role the buddy will play and what exactly is expected of them. Williams (2001) advises teachers to role play different scenarios so the buddy will know how to react. According to Williams (2001) the buddy can have responsibilities like looking "out for the child with AS on the bus, during recess, in the hallways and so forth, and attempt to include him or her in school activities" (p. 2). It is imperative to make sure the student with Asperger's Syndrome likes and is comfortable with the buddy. The buddy should be someone who offers support and helps remove some of the child's anxiety. Walking in the hallway in between classes can be very stressful for students with Asperger's Syndrome. This is a time of transition. The hallway is full of noise and movement that can be very overwhelming. Gibbons (2008) suggests having the peer buddy walk in the hall with the student. Having that

person there with them to talk to and focus on may help to keep the child calm. Gibbons (2008) proposes that the peer can remind the child to bring books and any other material they need for class. The teacher can sit the two buddies next to each other in the classroom. Williams (2001) found that peer buddies can be helpful in the classroom for the following reasons:

- Help the student stay on task.
- Take notes for the student.
- Assist the child with forming ideas and they can answer their questions.
- Assist with homework and big projects.
- Assist with organization.
- Make sure the student puts their work in the right folders and hands in the right papers.

Another place buddies can be useful is on the playground. Students with Asperger's Syndrome can be easy targets for bullying. The buddy can serve as a support system. Minchew (2005) alerts teachers to keep a very close eye on children on the playground. If any hint of bullying is noticed it should be dealt with immediately. Students with Asperger's Syndrome are usually not comfortable doing physical activity like playing on a playground. If they have a buddy with common interests they can sit on the side and read, discuss fun topics, or play a game. Williams (2001) suggests that having a buddy on the playground also helps the child become more a part of school activities. The child is not alone they have someone who connects with them. Willey (2003) suggests a peer buddy on the school bus. The school bus is loud and chaotic. It is exactly the type of situation that students with Asperger's Syndrome dislike. Teachers can assign a student from the class that rides the same bus as the student to be his or her buddy. The buddy can sit with the child and this will hopefully make the child feel more comfortable. In most cases, nothing will make the bus riding experience a good thing for

students with Asperger's Syndrome. However, assigning a person they can lean on and count on will help relieve some stress. Willey (2003) also suggests a buddy for the lunch room because it is a loud place with strange smells that may bother children with Asperger's Syndrome. The peer buddy can sit with the student and talk to them and try to make them more comfortable. This makes the child with Asperger's Syndrome a part of the lunchroom. Willey (2003) proposes that the peer buddy can also model appropriate social skills. This allows the child with Asperger's Syndrome to practice their conversation skills (Willey, 2003). Assigning a peer buddy to a student with Asperger's Syndrome is a good way to help the student feel more comfortable. They now have a friend they can rely on. This can help them feel more like a part of the classroom. Peer buddies are a wonderful teaching practice to help students with Asperger's Syndrome become more successful in school.

Other Suggestions

The ten teaching practices that were discussed are not the only strategies for students with Asperger's Syndrome. These specific strategies were chosen because they came up most often in literature. There are several other practices that may be helpful to classroom teachers. As previously mentioned students with Asperger's Syndrome often have an obsession of some kind. Minchew (2005) advises teachers to be aware of what the obsession is and to use it to connect with the child. As a result of their obsession some students with Asperger's Syndrome may refuse to do any work that does not relate to their subject of interest. Williams (2001) suggests that the teacher can "initially individualize all assignments around their interest" and then "gradually introduce other topics into assignments" (p. 3). It is the teacher's job to encourage the student to branch away from their obsession and learn new information. This may prove to be a difficult task. However, Williams (2001) recommends that teachers be firm and consistent in

expecting that the class work gets finished. Another piece of information teachers should keep in mind is that children with Asperger's Syndrome sometimes look like they understand the information but in fact they do not. Williams (2001) states that teachers should "not assume they understand what they so fluently read" (p. 5). Ask the student questions and monitor their comprehension closely. Some students with Asperger's Syndrome have visual processing problems. Grandin (2002) suggests that children with this problem may "find it easier to read if black print is printed on colored paper to reduce contrast" (p. 2). Teachers will need to experiment with different colored paper to see what the child likes best. It is also important for teachers and school staff to realize that students with Asperger's Syndrome take everything very literally. Most children and adults with Asperger's Syndrome do not understand sarcasm or common sayings. For example in the movie *Asperger's Syndrome What Teachers Need to Know* one mother said that she asked her child with Asperger's Syndrome to "pick up the pace" and he started to look around at the ground and asked "where is the pace? What is pace?" (Minchew, 2005). Teachers need to be very explicit and clear in their directions. They need to say exactly what they want the child to do. There are a lot of good practices and strategies that teachers can use to assist their students with Asperger's Syndrome.

Conclusion

The ten teaching practices that were discussed show up repeatedly in research. Each practice is easy to implement and targets specific struggles for students with Asperger's Syndrome. The strategies provide the students with the knowledge and skills to better function in school and society. In each piece of literature the authors state that it is important to remember that each student with Asperger's Syndrome is going to be very different. What works for one child may not work at all for the next child. A strategy may work for one student

at the beginning of the school year and by the end of the year it may have no effect. Children change and as they grow up the strategies that help them will change. The ten strategies discussed are not the only practices for students with Asperger's Syndrome. There are many strategies and ideas available. Teachers need to stay familiar with up to date research. Minchew (2005) suggests that teachers get to know their students as individuals and talk to the child's parents. Parents know their child the best and they will be full of helpful advice. The goal of these strategies is to help students with Asperger's Syndrome reach their full potential. The focus should be on helping the student become successful socially and academically. Teachers need to help students learn how to react and deal with social situations. The ten effective teaching strategies will help students with Asperger's Syndrome become more comfortable in the classroom. The chosen practices will help students with Asperger's Syndrome succeed in the world outside of the classroom.

Methodology

A study was conducted to determine what strategies teachers were using to assist students with Asperger's Syndrome in the classroom. I wanted to find out if teachers were using the recommended strategies to help students with Asperger's Syndrome.

Setting

The participants answered the questionnaire at the beginning of their shifts at a Learning Center in Rochester, NY. The center serves students in grades kindergarten through twelve who attend private and public schools.

Participants

The participants in this study were special education and general education teachers who have worked or were currently working with students with Asperger's Syndrome. The questionnaire

was distributed in person to teachers in a tutoring center located in Rochester, NY. I randomly selected teachers who worked Tuesday and Thursday evenings at the learning center.

Procedure

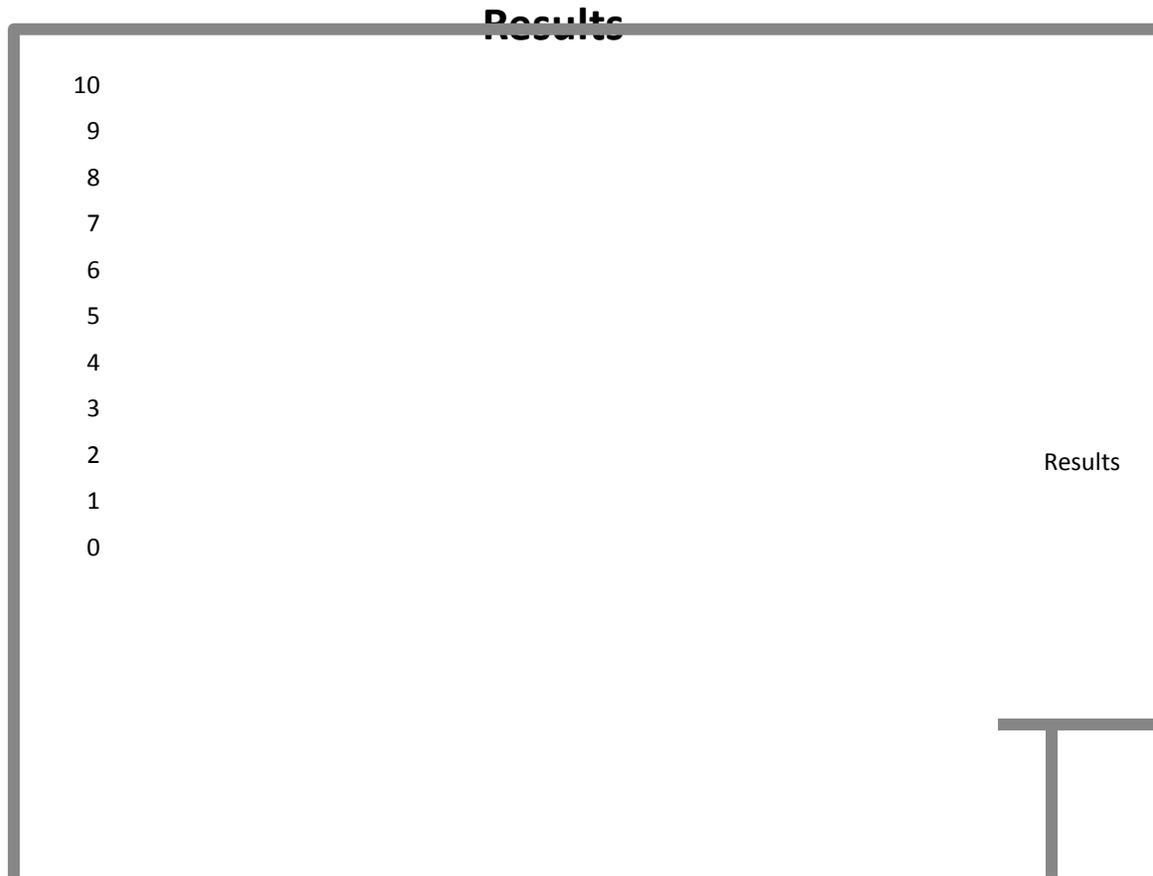
For this study, a qualitative data collection method was used. A questionnaire consisting of 14 questions was developed that asked teachers what strategies they used for certain situations.

Participants had to identify what strategies they used for such things as homework, long assignments, and transitions. Teachers were asked to identify the strategies that they have found to work best with students with Asperger's Syndrome. The questionnaires were sent out on January 29, 2009 and they were returned February 14, 2009. Twenty surveys were handed out and eleven were returned. To analyze the data I graphed the results. This was an easy way to see exactly how many teachers used each strategy. I was also able to tell which strategy was used the most and which one was used the least. Graphing the data helped me to see the results clearly.

Results

The questionnaires that were returned provided great information and insight into the strategies teachers use to teach students with Asperger's Syndrome in their classrooms. Out of the twenty questionnaires that were distributed, eleven were returned on time. Table one is a graph that represents the results of the questionnaire. Teachers were asked what strategies they used for students with Asperger's Syndrome. The ten strategies listed showed up most often in the research. Each strategy was used by at least two teachers who took the survey. The results show that the strategy used most often by teachers in the questionnaire was the use of visuals. Nine out of the eleven teachers who were surveyed said that they used visuals to assist students with Asperger's Syndrome in the classroom.

Table 1



There were four strategies that seven out of the eleven respondents said that they found useful in their classrooms. These seven teachers reported creating a plan for transition times and a plan for meltdowns. Seven out of eleven teachers who responded also used strategic positioning of the child in the classroom and they have worked with the student to develop strategies to deal with stress. Social plans and role playing strategies were next, with six out of eleven participants using them. Five out of eleven participants responded that they reduced sensory input and broke assignments down for their students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Only

two out of the eleven teachers reported using the buddy system as a way to help students with Asperger's Syndrome in their classrooms.

The strategy that the most participants reported using in their classrooms was the use of visuals. The strategy with the least number of responses was the buddy system. All of the other strategies range from having five to seven out of eleven participants using them. Participants were also asked what strategies have not work well with students with Asperger's Syndrome. Four out of eleven respondents reported that sudden changes or surprises have very negative effects. Three out of eleven participants reported noisy activities and non verbal language were strategies or situations that will not benefit students with Asperger's Syndrome. By looking at the results of the questionnaire you can tell that teachers do use the ten strategies to assist students with Asperger's Syndrome in the classroom.

Discussion

Ten teaching strategies for students with Asperger's Syndrome showed up repeatedly in the research. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not teachers were using these strategies in their classrooms. By looking at the results of the study one can determine that the teachers who responded to the questionnaire are using these strategies in their classrooms. Some respondents do not use all of the strategies. However, that is understandable because as the research reported, not all strategies will work with all students with Asperger's Syndrome. The one strategy that is used most by the participants is the use of visuals. Providing visual cues or written directions for the student is probably one of the least time consuming strategies on the list. It is not a surprise that using visuals is the strategy that the questionnaire found the respondents used the most.

The strategy that participants reported using the least was the buddy system. This may be due to the dynamics of the classroom or the age level of the students the participants have worked with. Two out of the eleven teachers who responded did report using the buddy system for students with Asperger's Syndrome. This is a strategy that will not work with all students. Some children will like the idea of having a buddy, while others may not feel comfortable with the idea. The buddy system can also be time consuming for the teacher. The buddy needs to be trained and know exactly what is expected of him or her. Teachers have to think very carefully of which student to use as the buddy. The personalities of the two students need to go well together. Teachers also have to think of a way to closely monitor the relationship to ensure that the buddy system is working. Also, there is the complication of what to do if the buddy is sick. Teachers have to make sure that the student with Asperger's Syndrome does not become too dependent on the buddy. In some situations if the buddy was absent that may leave the student with Asperger's Syndrome lost. There is a lot to consider when using the buddy system in the classroom. The fact that only two out of eleven teachers have used the buddy system is not surprising.

The participants also stated that sudden changes to the schedule and noisy places are situations to avoid if at all possible when working with students with Asperger's Syndrome. This is in direct agreement with what the research states. If there is one thing that is proven about students with Asperger's Syndrome it is that they do not like surprises. The fact that a number of the respondents listed this as something that does not work well with students with Asperger's Syndrome suggests that the research is correct. The teachers who work with children every day know better than anyone what works and what does not. What this group of participants reported was in direct correlation with the findings in the research.

The participants in this questionnaire were familiar with the strategies that appeared most often in the research. Each respondent listed how exactly they used each strategy with their students. The participants are using these strategies because they work just like the research says. Not all of the participants reported using all of the strategies because depending on their students not all of the strategies would have worked. Certain strategies will work for certain children. It is up to the teacher to decide what they think will be most beneficial for each student. This study shows that teachers are using the strategies that the research reports to work with students with Asperger's Syndrome. Every one of the ten strategies was used by at least two of the participants. This study supports the literature in that it shows that teachers are using the ten strategies that the research shows to work with students with Asperger's Syndrome.

Conclusion

This study shows that there is a positive correlation between the strategies that the research shows to be effective for students with Asperger's Syndrome and what teachers are actually using in their classrooms. The information found in this study confirms that teachers are using the strategies that the literature supports. However, there are a few limitations of this study. One limitation was that the researcher did not track which participants were special education teachers and which were general education teachers. This could have affected the number of strategies that they have used. Also, there was no question that asked where or how the participants were trained. Depending on who trained them and where this took place they could have been exposed to different ideas and strategies. The questionnaire could have been more specific when asking the participants about which strategies they have used. It was very open ended. Next time the researcher could list the specific strategies for each topic and have the participants check which strategies they have used. There could also be an others section to

determine if they are using other strategies than those listed. Another limitation was the number of participants. The number of respondents was very small so it is hard to generalize the results to the larger population of teachers. This study found that the teachers who participated did use the strategies. However, with the sample size being so small it is difficult to say how many teachers in general use these strategies.

The next steps in this line of research would be to take a larger sample size. One idea would be to focus on one school district at a time and hand out the questionnaire to all of their teachers. Then it might be possible to compare what strategies the different districts are using in a given area. The study could also be done on a much larger scale. All of the districts in a county could be studied to determine what strategies are most effective for that area. It would be interesting to see if a variety of school districts find different strategies to be useful. Another aspect that might be considered is the age of the students who the participants are working with. The researcher could try to determine if certain strategies are more successful with certain age groups. This topic and study could be taken in many different and exciting directions!

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Appendix

Asperger's Syndrome Questionnaire

- 1) How many years have you been teaching?
- 2) Have you worked with students with Asperger's Syndrome? If so, for how long?
- 3) Please list the ages of the students you have worked with.
- 4) What strategies have you found useful when working with students with Asperger's Syndrome?
- 5) What strategies have you found that have not worked well with students with Asperger's Syndrome?

More specific strategies:

Please list any strategies that you have used for the following topics (please attach additional paper if necessary).

- 6) Social development (ex. Role-playing, buddy system)-
- 7) Transitions-
- 8) Meltdowns-
- 9) Presentation of material (ex. visuals)-
- 10) Writing assignments-
- 11) Arrangement of the classroom or positioning of the student-
- 12) Classroom Environment/Reduce sensory input-
- 13) Long assignments-
- 14) Any suggestions to help the child deal with stressful situations-