



Review article

Collaboration between teachers and parents of children with ASD on issues of education



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the views of teachers and parents on critical issues concerning their collaboration in the education of children with ASD. For the purposes of this study, a total of 171 teachers and 50 parents of children with ASD, attending mainstream or special primary school units, were randomly selected in Greece in order to respond to a structured questionnaire.

The majority of teachers and parents were found to be of the opinion that communication and collaboration between teachers and parents are rendered as critical [$n = 165$ teachers (96.5%), $n = 50$ parents (100%)].

Postgraduate academic studies and working experience with children with ASD are seen to be the most important factors shaping the attitudes of teachers towards collaboration with parents. On the other hand, the types of working unit teachers were employed in are seen to rank in lower importance.

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1. Introduction

The number of individuals recognized with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is seen to follow an intensifying upward trend over the last few decades (Croen, Grether, Hoogstrate, & Selvin, 2002; Croen, Grether, & Selvin, 2002; Constantino & Todd, 2003; Fombonne, 1999, 2003; Gillberg & Wing, 1999; Reichenberg, Bresnahan, Rabinowitz, Lubin, & Davidson, 2006). According to relevant Greek laws (Law 3699/2008), the right of children with ASD to participate in the education process at all levels is widely recognized and supported. The right of parents to participate in their children's assessment and education as well as collaborate with the relevant services is also recognized (Government Gazette, 2008, Issue 199A). As this law states, "collaboration between teachers and parents is a crucial factor in the formation of students' educational experiences". In this setting, it is worth investigating a set of critical issues concerning the collaboration between teachers and parents of children with ASD.

Benson, Karlof, and Siperstein (2008) find that the level of involvement of parents of children with ASD is directly related to the number and quality of the activities offered by their child's school. In addition, the severity of children's behavioural problems is been found to have an inverse effect on the level of parental involvement (Gavidia-Payne & Stoneman, 1997). Furthermore, in cases of poor performing children, respective parents are found to have had a limited involvement in school activities. Parents' participation frequency in school meetings is seen on a declining trend as the children get older (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kasari and Sigman, 1997; Renty and Roeyers, 2006). Spann, Kohler, and Soenksen (2003) mention the need for parental involvement and participation in their children's education. Ftiaka (1996) mentions that, for children attending mainstream schools, parents' attitudes towards the school vary and depend on their socio-economic and educational status. Less educated parents usually feel stressful, weak and even frightened in front of educationally superior teachers of their children. However, the bulk of empirical research on the issue of parents' involvement in their children's homework remains extremely limited. Parents are more likely to participate in their children's homework, when they are informed by the child or the teacher (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Jayanthi, Sawyer, Nelson, Bursuck, & Epstein, 1995). Heller, Spooner, Anderson, and Mims (1988) mention the significant parental role on the completion of homework given to special education students, as well as the high levels of parents' and teachers' willingness to work together. Bryan and Nelson (1994) find that parents' involvement in homework is higher at the lower levels of the education system and tailed off at the higher levels.

Parents' participation is necessary in the construction of an individual educational plan (Smith, 1990; Turnbull, Wilcox, & Stowe, 2002). An individual educational plan refers to the functional, measurable, assessable and educational targets for an individual child. Such a plan facilitates the presentation of a child's development and progress over time in relation to defined targets, allowing parents and teachers to revise it and make adaptations to the individual educational plan or curriculum (Kohler, 1999). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) maintain that parents who play an active role in their children's education have relatively higher levels of satisfaction with regard to the process of constructing an individual educational program for their child.

The purpose of this paper is to theoretically study, empirically investigate, and critically evaluate the key views on the critical collaboration between Greek teachers and parents of children with ASD on important educational issues. To our knowledge, this is a pioneer first empirical study that attempts to tackle these vital issues in a systematic and integrated academic research framework. The study focuses on a variety of special education units, namely inclusive classes, parallel support systems and special schools. An important motive for this research project relates to the recent legislation introduced into the Greek education system. Law 3699/2008, in particular, recognizes the right of children with ASD to be integrated as much as possible into the education system and mainstream educational settings. Parents are recognized as being important participants in the assessment process, as well as in the process of constructing individual educational programs. In addition, parents should continue the educational program implemented during normal school hours and carry out special individual instructions received from teachers and special educational staff. Hence, parents can play the pivotal role of a co-teacher at home. However, the importance of the collaboration between teachers and parents of children with ASD had already been legally recognized in the national curriculum for students with autism devised by the Greek Ministry of Education since 2004. This empirical paper attempts to partially fill the gap in the study of this underresearched but still critical subject.

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