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Successful Integration of Children with Autism into Inclusive Classes

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Abstract

This research focused on developing, implementing and evaluating a set of guidelines for key personnel who work with children with autism with the aim of successfully integrating children with autism into inclusive classes. An examination of the international literature indicated that the collaboration of key personnel is the main influence on the scholastic achievement of children with autism. The key personnel identified in the literature include teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, school principals and peer tutors, all of whom contribute to the process of integrating children with autism into inclusive classes. However, in Thailand there is limited information to assist these key personnel in this task.

The purpose of the research study was to develop a set of guidelines for assisting children with autism in Thailand and refine them using an iterative process. The guidelines specifically aimed to provide knowledge and strategies to support key personnel to integrate children with autism into regular classes. In order to provide a suitable context, the guidelines were implemented in an inclusive school in Thailand.

The three research questions the researcher sought to answer in this study were: i) what strategies should be included in the guidelines to assist key personnel to integrate children with autism into inclusive classrooms? ii) how effective are the guidelines in supporting key personnel to integrate children with autism into inclusive classes? and iii) how effective are the strategies used in the guidelines in developing behaviours that help children with autism to integrate into inclusive classes? A qualitative case study approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the use and effectiveness of the guidelines. Nine children with high functioning autism were chosen for this study: three of kindergarten age, three of primary school age and three of secondary school age. Five key personnel for each child, including teachers, peer tutors, paraprofessionals, parents and school principals were asked to trial the guidelines. The opinion of five selected experienced Thai people involved with children with autism was also sought in order to determine the content validity of the study. The effectiveness of the guidelines was evaluated using triangulation of data including: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The Deming cycle PDCA model was used to organize the process of implementation and development.

The booklets for key personnel which contained the guidelines and strategies were structured as follows: information about children with autism, 20 difficulties with associated strategies for helping children with autism and ideas for developing inclusive classrooms. It was found that key personnel were generally satisfied with the suggestions from the guideline booklets, and that using the guidelines helped key personnel to collaborate in helping children with autism integrate into inclusive classes. Also the strategies were effective in helping children with autism develop positive behaviour and attitudes.

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
IIP	Individualised Implementation Plan:
IEP	Individualised Educational Plan
KK	Khon Kaen
KKU	Khon Kaen University
RDCAI	Research and Development Centre of Autistic Inclusive Education
P-1 to P-4	Plan stage
D-1 to D-4	Do stage
C-1 to C-4	Check stage
A-1 to A-4	Action stage

Glossary

Term or Abbreviation	Description
ASD: Autism spectrum disorder	Encompasses a number of disorders which are characterised by problems with impairments in understanding and using verbal and non-verbal communication, in social behaviour and in the ability to think and behave flexibly (NZ ASD Guideline, p.243).
Autism	Characterised by more profound impairments in communication, social and restricted interests, activities and behaviours. May include intellectual impairment (NZ ASD Guideline, p.243).
HFA: High functioning autism	Those people with autism without any intellectual impairment, who do not meet the diagnostic criteria for Asperger Syndrome because they had significant delays in language development, even though their current language ability may be average to high (NZ ASD Guideline, p.250).
IIP: Individualised Implementation Plan	The individual lesson plans written by inclusive classroom teachers.
IEP: Individualised Educational Plan	The individual planning process which is the basis of collaborative planning between home, school and specialist services. Goals are based on the school curriculum (NZ ASD Guideline, p.251).
KK: Khon Kaen	Province in the northeast of Thailand
KKU: Khon Kaen University	University Centre in the northeast of Thailand
Paraprofessional	Person who supplements or supports the work of a professional such as a teacher eg, teacher's aide, support worker (NZ ASD Guideline, p.254).

Term or Abbreviation	Description
Peer tutor	The child's peers used as tutors or teachers (NZ ASD Guideline, p.254).
Physiotherapy	Assessment and treatment interventions conducted by a physiotherapist, e.g., exercise, adaptations to support physical participation in the curriculum (NZ ASD Guideline, p.255).
RDCAI: Research and Development Autistic Centre of Inclusive Education	The first autistic centre in the northeast of Thailand.
SI: Sensory Integration	A theory of brain behaviour relationship which explores the organisation of sensory input in order that individuals can effectively interact with the environment by making adaptive responses (NZ ASD Guideline, p.258).