

# Perceptions of Educators Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evaluation of a Behavior Analysis Approach

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## Abstract

Educators supporting students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) face unique challenges in the mainstream classroom setting. In response to these experiences, a unique model of service delivery was developed using Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) instructional methods to support educators and students with ASD in an elementary school in southern Ontario, Canada. An Outreach Team was formed to share this model of service delivery with other elementary schools within this school board. A formal investigation of the extent to which this training model influenced the perceptions of educators had not yet been conducted. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to understand the perceptions and teaching strategies of educators of students with ASD before and after their involvement with the Outreach Team. Online surveys were administered to educators before their involvement and approximately six weeks later. Educators were significantly more optimistic and more self-assured about supporting a student with ASD in their classrooms following the Outreach Team's involvement. Implications of the findings from this research are discussed.

## Introduction

- Because of a high proportion of students with ASD in a school within the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB), a unique model of service delivery for these students was developed.
- ABA-based teaching methods formed the basis of this model.
- An Outreach Team including a teacher and an educational assistant was formed to share this model of service delivery to other schools facing similar challenges with students with ASD.
- A formal investigation of the extent to which this ASD Outreach Team has influenced the perceptions and teaching strategies of educators had not been conducted.

## Study Purpose

The purpose of this project was to understand the perceptions and teaching strategies of educators of students with ASD before and after their involvement with the Outreach Team at schools in the UGDSB.

## Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of educators toward ABA instructional methods, structured teaching and their affective reactions to students with ASD?
2. Do these perceptions change following involvement of the Outreach Team?

## Method

Utilizing a survey research design, educators completed online: (1) prior to the first day of involvement of the Outreach Team at the school (Pre-Survey) & (2) approximately 6 weeks following this initial involvement (Post-Survey).

## Measures

**ASD Educator Questionnaire** (Treadaway, 2009): educators' perceptions of learners with ASD across 6 domains:

- **General knowledge** of ABA-based strategies & ASD  
E.g., "I understand how ABA principles are applicable to a classroom setting."
- Understanding and managing **challenging behaviours**  
E.g., "It is easier to implement reactive strategies versus proactive strategies."
- Promoting **independence**  
E.g., "Without someone close to the student, learners with ASD will have difficulty remaining on task."
- Using **visual supports** to teach students with ASD  
E.g., "I use a daily schedule for the students with ASD in my classroom."
- Knowledge of effective **prompting**  
E.g., "Prompts often don't work with my students with ASD."
- Understanding **motivation/reinforcement**  
E.g., "Often there is nothing that motivates my students with ASD."

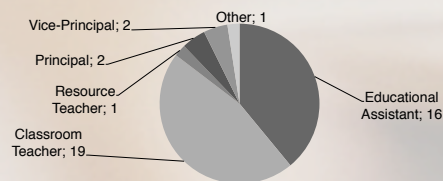
Each item was rated on a scale of 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*)

**Emotional Reactions Scale** (Avramidis et al., 2000): educators' anticipated emotional reactions to a hypothetical situation in which a new student with ASD would soon be joining their classes. Items were rated on the following scale:

Negative Feeling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive Feeling
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## Results

**Participants:** 41 educators completed surveys



## ASD Educator Questionnaire

DOMAIN	PRE-SURVEY	POST-SURVEY
General Knowledge about Autism	2.09 (0.80)	1.93 (0.68)
(Difficulties with) Challenging Behaviour	4.18 (0.72)	4.78 (1.78)
(Promoting) Independence	2.12 (0.52)	2.33 (0.43)
(Endorsing) Visual Supports	2.51 (0.57)	2.15 (0.69)
Prompting	3.30 (0.66)	3.18 (1.17)
(Understanding) Motivation/Reinforcement	2.49 (0.53)	2.27 (0.52)

## Emotional Reactions Scale

EMOTIONAL REACTION	PRE-SURVEY	POST-SURVEY
Uncomfortable-Comfortable	5.4	5.3
Negative-Positive	5.0	5.2
Unconfident-Confident	5.1	5.1
<b>Pessimistic-Optimistic</b>	<b>5.1*</b>	<b>5.9*</b>
<b>Worried-Self-Assured</b>	<b>4.7*</b>	<b>5.4*</b>
Disinterested-Interested	5.8	6.0
Unhappy-Happy	5.5	5.4

\*p < .05

## Discussion

- Educators reported moderate understanding of: ASD, ABA- and structured teaching instructional methods; promoting independence; visual supports; prompting; & motivation/reinforcement (no changes over time)
- Educators reported a good understanding of managing challenging classroom behaviours (no changes over time)
- At post-survey, educators rated themselves as being more optimistic and self-assured if they were told that a new child with ASD might come into their classrooms
- ABA-based training for educators supporting students with ASD in mainstream schools may positively influence attitudes toward having these unique learners in their classrooms
- Further research examining educators' adherence to this intervention model would be beneficial

