VIEWPOINTS AND ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS (K-5) WHO HAVE STUDENTS
WITH ASPERGER’S DISORDER

by

Carla Terese Sinz

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in
Guidance and Counseling

Approved: (2) Semester Credits

[Signature]
Dr. Barbara Flom, Ph.D.
Research Advisor

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

June, 2004
The purpose of this study was to be able to determine the viewpoints and attitudes of educators (K-5) who encountered students with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting. In addition, it sought to determine if educators feel their needs are being met with support and appropriate resources to effectively teach children with Asperger’s Disorder, as well as to reach their ultimate potential academically and socially. A survey was distributed to 62 elementary educators currently working in a middle class suburb in Minnesota.

The subjects of this study were general and special education teachers (K-5), specialists, and administrative staff from an elementary school located in the suburbs of a
large Midwestern city, during the 2003-2004 school year. These educators were surveyed to gain knowledge and information about the following research objectives:

1. To determine teacher experience in working with students with Asperger’s Disorder.

2. To determine teacher comfort, confidence, and anxiety levels related to teaching students with Asperger’s Disorder.

3. To determine the level of support and resources provided by the school district and outside sources regarding students with Asperger’s Disorder.

Of the 36 respondents who participated in the study, the majority stated they felt additional support in assisting with the education of students with Asperger’s Disorder was necessary. The participants also felt support was necessary not only to benefit students with Asperger's Disorder, but also to meet the needs of the entire student body. Additionally, the majority of educators surveyed felt ill-equipped to service Asperger students due to lack of training from their university or college coursework. There was also a theme of a lack of confidence or elevated levels of anxiety when having to assist students with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting among this group of educators.

The findings from the current study suggest the majority of educators (K-5) do not feel prepared by the support and resources offered through their school district or outside resources to meet the needs of their students with Asperger’s while meeting the needs of the other students.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my dear friend and colleague, Renee G. Arrowood, and my best friend, Amanda J. Flosbach for supporting, and encouraging me, as well as boosting my confidence when needed.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asperger's Disorder</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Experiences Related to Asperger's Disorder</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Selection and Description</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV: RESULTS</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-tabulations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Procedures</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for the Field</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Participant Consent Letter</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Survey Instrument</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The concerns regarding today's and tomorrow's education are escalating. One of these many concerns is of the welfare of students with autism and Asperger's Disorder, as well as the educators who aim to provide them with a successful and effective education. Many have at least heard of the term "autism," and relate it to the 1988 movie Rainman (Jordan & Powell, 1995).

Asperger's Disorder, first described by Hans Asperger, is considered the mildest and highest functioning subtype of autism (Griswold, Barnhill, Myles, Hagiwara, Simpson, 2002; Sewell, 1998; "Autism," 1997). Before a significant amount of research was documented regarding autistic children, the condition was referred to as childhood schizophrenia. This was due to unclear criteria necessary to make an appropriate diagnosis of autism (Jordan & Powell, 1995; Klin, Volkmar, and Sparrow, 2000). On account of various factors, the most pertinent being the increase in knowledge of parents, healthcare providers, and educators, the rate of children being diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder is climbing (Kaufman, 2002; Pyles, 2002; Yeargin-Allsopp, 2003). Correlated with this increase of diagnosis has been an increase in the number of students with Asperger's Disorder in the mainstream and special education classrooms each year. In 1990, autism was added as a distinct special education category to those served under Public Law 94-142 as a part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Wood, 1993). According to Griswold, Barnhill, Myles, Hagiwara, and Simpson (2002), Asperger's Disorder is diagnosed in 48 of each and every 10,000 births.

Perhaps because of a lack of teacher training about autism, and an increase of Asperger students being incorporated into the regular classroom, there is a frustration
among teachers who have students with Asperger's Disorder (Kaufman, 2002; Sewell, 1998; Unok-Marks et al., 2003). Teachers may be familiar with the term autism, as it is commonly mentioned in university classrooms and course work; however, the past and present training to prepare teachers (regular/special education) with expertise in Asperger's Disorder or any other form of autism has been insufficient (Kaufman, 2002; Sewell, 1998; Unok-Marks et al., 2003).

Dunn-Buron (2003) describes Asperger's Disorder as an invisible disorder or an emotional blindness. According to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), Asperger's Disorder is a qualitative impairment in social interaction. People with Asperger's Disorder have restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. Their intelligence is considered to be average to above average despite the fact that they commonly have difficulty with functional skills as well as no clinically significant language delays (Dunn-Buron, 2003). Asperger's Disorder is classified as being neurologically based. The disorder is associated with anxiety/sensory issues, obsessive and compulsive issues/interests, and behavior interpreted as rigid or inflexible about issues. The two principle disabilities associated with Asperger's Disorder are language and communication skills and social interactions (Attwood, 1998; Jordan & Powell, 1995; Wood, 1993).

Asperger's Disorder is considered to be a severe social deficit that typically surfaces during the first three years of life. Socially this population has difficulty meeting the expectations of understanding others' speech (especially when sarcasm is used), facial or body language, intentions, and ability to interpret what others are
thinking, feeling, wanting, or believing without them specifically stating it (Attwood, 1998; Jordan & Powell, 1995; Wood, 1993).

People with Asperger's and other types of autism understand how things, but not how people work. This social gap becomes most evident in the upper elementary grade levels. Asperger’s Disorder is more commonly diagnosed at the third and fourth grade level (Dunn-Buron, 2003; Pyles, 2002). This is due to the widening social gap between individuals with Asperger's and their peers. The social dynamics in a primary classroom (grades kindergarten through second) are significantly different than the dynamics of middle to upper elementary grade level classroom. In the primary grades it is commonly found that students are friends with all of their classmates. Most students at this age play with all of their classmates and are unaware of any social developmental delays among their peers. However, as students continue to progress to higher levels of education, they are beginning to define their peer groups more specifically. Many times cliques and groups of friends start to develop in third or fourth grade.

Students with Asperger’s Disorder are commonly thought of as the ones who are withdrawn, odd, weird, not cool, or “just don’t get it,” and unfortunately may not be welcome into the typical social circles that occur in the classroom (Attwood, 1998; Pyles, 2002). They have a challenging time finding ways to relate to their peers’ interests, because many times people with Asperger’s have just a few extremely specific interests (Pyles, 2002). It is quite common that their interests escalate to obsessions, making it challenging for them to hold a conversation on various topics. People with Asperger’s also have difficulty in being flexible with others when working through a conflict. In addition they may have poor organizational skills (Dunn-Buron, 2003). All of these
factors can be obstacles when attempting to make friends at any age. They can also add stress to the academic achievement of students with Asperger's.

Socially speaking, developmentally as children reach age 9 or 10 they are acquiring an awareness of their differences and how they differ from their peers. Once a student reaches middle school this need and desire for fitting in among peers is even more crucial to his/her social development ("Autism," 1997). Students with Asperger's Disorder may not develop socially at the same rate as their peers. This can affect their academic motivation and success at school. Typically when stress occurs in one's life, seeking the support of a loved one is used as a coping mechanism; students with Asperger's Disorder are also challenged with expressing their troubles as well as accepting the support of the people around them who care about them (Jordan & Powell, 1995).

In many cases children with Asperger's Disorder do not feel this need to fit in or may not even be aware of it (Pyles, 2002). However, this does not mean their classmates are not aware of their different peer, making the student with Asperger's Disorder prone to bullying (Pyles, 2002). As a result many students with Asperger's Disorder are loners beginning at an early age and possibly continuing throughout their entire lives. Three percent of Asperger’s population live alone as adults (Dunn-Buron, 2003).

From a teacher's perspective, having a student with Asperger's Disorder can create extremely challenging social dynamics for the classroom (S. Johnson, personal communication, July 15, 2003). One of the primary responsibilities of a classroom teacher is to develop a comfortable, welcoming, and accepting atmosphere for all students. However, with just one student with Asperger’s Disorder the dynamics of a
regular classroom can become challenging, resulting in frustration for the teacher, for the student with Asperger's, and for the entire class. This frustration is magnified even more when the teacher does not feel there is support to assist him/her in helping this special student find a fit in the classroom both socially and academically.

Unfortunately, many teachers are unaware of the complexities that accompany a student with Asperger’s Disorder in their classroom. On account of these complexities, it is necessary that the proper modifications and accommodations be made in the classroom, not only for the benefit of the student with Asperger’s Disorder, but also for the other students making up the classroom. Action must be taken to support regular classroom and special education teachers with specific instructional strategies for assisting children with Asperger’s in their classroom settings.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the viewpoints and attitudes of regular and special education classroom teachers (K-5) who have children with Asperger’s Disorder in their classrooms. In addition, it sought to determine whether teachers feel they have the necessary support and resources to teach children with Asperger’s Disorder effectively, allowing them to reach their ultimate potential academically and socially. The subjects of this study were regular and special education teachers (K-5) from an elementary school, located in the suburbs of a large mid-western city, during the 2003-2004 school year. These K-5 teachers were surveyed to gain knowledge on a number of aspects on Asperger's

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study was to gain insight and knowledge behind the viewpoints and attitudes of educators (K-5) who have encountered students with Asperger’s Disorder. In addition to discovering educator insight, the level of preparedness, support offered by their school district (as well as outside resources), and education when working with this population were determined. Specifically, the research objectives were:

1. To determine teacher experience in working with students with Asperger’s Disorder.

2. To determine teacher comfort, confidence, and anxiety levels related to teaching students with Asperger’s Disorder.

3. To determine the level of support and resources felt provided by the school district and outside sources regarding students with Asperger’s Disorder.

Assumptions of the Study

The first assumption of the study was that of the educators participating in the study would respond at an adequate level for proper data analysis. The second assumption was that the participating educators would honestly answer each item on the survey.

Definition of Terms

Autistic Disorder. “The essential characteristics of Autistic Disorder are the presence of markedly abnormal or impaired development in social interaction and communication and a markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests” (APA, 1994, p. 66).
Asperger’s Disorder. “The essential features of Asperger’s Disorder are severe and sustained impairment in social interaction and development of restricted, repetitive, patterns of behavior, interests, and activities” (APA, 1994, p. 75). The disorder must result in clinically significant impairment of social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (APA, 1994, p.75).

Limitations of the Study

One limitation regarding the results of the survey was the possible variability in previous knowledge of Asperger’s Disorder. In addition, only K-5 teachers were surveyed, as opposed to incorporating middle school or high school teachers within the study. Another limitation was the setting of the suburban mid-west; results would not reflect support provided in another state or an urban or rural area. Lack of a one hundred percent return rate of the survey was also a limitation.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature discusses two important concepts. The first section will be an introduction to the characteristics, assessment, and unique needs of children with high-functioning autistic disorder, specifically Asperger's Disorder. The second section will be a review of the current findings of teachers, their experiences and perceptions, and useful strategies used for students with the developmental disability of Asperger’s Disorder.

Asperger’s Disorder

Asperger’s Disorder is considered a pervasive developmental disorder that falls under the same category as Rett’s Disorder, Fragile X Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Development Disorder (Attwood, 1998; "Autism," 1997). On many occasions the term Asperger’s Disorder is used interchangeably with high functioning autism. In early childhood years, the traits associated with diagnosis of autism are nearly identical to features associated with Asperger’s Disorder. However, when a child is previously diagnosed at an earlier age with autism, and eventually develops capacities for complex sentences, basic social skills, and a normal range of intellectual capacity, the disorder is then considered high functioning autism or Asperger’s Disorder. Researchers believe that with the term Asperger’s Disorder, being relatively new, it is without negative connotation for the public, as well as for the professional audience (Attwood, 1998).
Asperger's Disorder, like all of the other disorders incorporated under pervasive developmental disorders, is classified under a category of the autism spectrum disorder. According to Jordan and Powell (1995), there are three principal areas of impairment: social, language and communication, and thought and behavior. All of these areas can produce anxiety in the child’s life especially in the classroom setting. Under these three arenas of impairment (social, language/communication, and thought/behavior) students with Asperger's Disorder may find it challenging to:

a). predict the behavior of others, leading to finding people aversive

b). produce empathetic or emotional expression

c). comprehend what can be expected of others to know, making language incomprehensible

d). understand how their actions are affecting how others think or feel, leading to no conscience, motivation to please, communicative intent, and/or a lack of spontaneity in interactions

e). share their attention to multiple outlets

f). understand social conventions such as, conversational strategies (i.e. eye contact) (p. 3-4).

According to Swedish researchers Carina and Christopher Gillberg, who in 1989 directed their studies to the social and nonverbal communication impairment that encompasses the symptoms correlated with Asperger’s Disorder, a child must have two social impairments (Attwood, 1998). These impairments include an inability to interact with peers, a lack of desire to interact with peers, a lack of appreciation of social cues, and socially and emotionally inappropriate behavior (Attwood, 1998, p. 28).
In addition to having two social impairments, there must be one of the following non-verbal communication impairments: limited use of gestures, clumsy body language, limited facial expression, inappropriate expression, and peculiar, stiff gaze (Attwood, 1998, p. 29).

In many instances, multiple learning difficulties accompany Asperger’s Disorder. A child’s learning history, personality, and degree of autism are all circumstances that play into the possibility of a learning disability for this group of students. These learning difficulties usually do not affect the student’s intellectual ability, but refer to social challenges. Students with Asperger’s Disorder may seem withdrawn or be described as odd. Many times this group with Asperger’s Disorder desire and initiate social interaction; however, they do not understand how to do it appropriately. In elementary years, though, it is not uncommon for children with Asperger’s Disorder not to feel a need to have social interaction they need at the same chronological age as their peers (Pyles, 2002).

According to Jordan and Powell (1995), language and communication skills are considered to be a fundamental problem for the group with Asperger’s, which can be associated with learning challenges as well. Examples of possible significant impairments include muteness, and difficulties with structural language skills. Motor development, specifically gross and fine motor movement, can also be impaired in students with Asperger’s Disorder. Due to these learning difficulties, many students with Asperger’s Disorder are eligible for special educational services and are placed on an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). A teacher unknowing of Asperger’s Disorder, many perceive or describe their student as being rude, lazy, or unmotivated, having emotional
and behavioral difficulties, or having a short attention span. In addition to being classified as having Asperger's Disorder, there is commonly a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Kennedy, 2002).

Students with Asperger's Disorder have an average to high intellectual ability as demonstrated by their vocabulary and knowledge of facts. However, it is not unusual for standardized intelligence test scores produced by this population to be lower than anticipated. These lower test scores are related to a lack of comprehension, picture arrangement, absurdities, and problem solving skills (Attwood, 1998). Due to these difficulties, it is important to consider more than one IQ test score. Attwood (1998), stated that it is more important to review the test taking pattern rather than the number of the score. Modifications should also be made for students with Asperger's Disorder when testing to ensure that their results are as accurate as possible.

*Teaching Experiences Related to Asperger's Disorder*

The school setting encompasses both academic and social demands. This is problematic for a child with Asperger's Disorder. Since Asperger's Disorder is a neurological condition, this group of students must learn how to socialize as well as develop an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others, skills that come more naturally for their peers. Students with Asperger's Disorder experience hardships with natural conversation, as well as developing an intense fascination with a specific area of interest. Developing friendships can already be challenging for youngsters; adding difficulty with human tendencies that are associated with Asperger's Disorder, as well as possible clumsiness, can make the school setting miserable for a child with Asperger's (Attwood, 1998). This is why Jordan and Powell (1995) suggest obtaining the input of an
autism expert as early as possible. The support of a specialist will ease future integration in settings such as school.

Around age four, children begin to develop a sense of awareness that others have thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, and desires that will affect their behavior. Children with Asperger’s may not have this ability, or if they do, may have difficulty with it. In the classroom, students with Asperger’s commonly do not understand sarcasm, joking around, or personification. For example using phrases like “having a frog in your throat,” or “telling a white lie,” would only be confusing to this population. Some experts on Asperger’s Disorder refer to this difficulty as “mind blindness” (Attwood, 1998).

According to the Saskatchewan Education Special Education Unit (1999) as well as Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, and Kincaid (2003), there is no specific curriculum for educating students with autism. Effective programs are those that focus on the individual’s unique needs and abilities. There are six essential themes/components inclusive to an effective educational program, focusing on the individual student and family involvement (Iovannone et al., 2003, p. 5). These six components are as follows: individualized supports and services for students and families, systematic instruction, comprehensible and/or structured environments, specialized curriculum content, a functional approach to problem behaviors, and family involvement.

Attwood (1998) references many helpful solutions and strategies for teachers who have students with Asperger’s Disorder. Students with Asperger’s find the most success at school once they have learned the process of understanding the behavior of others (Attwood, 1998). In addition, awareness on the part of their teachers is crucial. Teachers can help bridge this gap by acting out scenarios to help students comprehend
the perspective of another, teaching consequences before they act (stop, think, do: stop and think how the person will feel before you do it,), and by encouraging visualization as well as the use of diagrams (Attwood, 1998; Iovannone et al., 2003). Not only is it necessary for students with Asperger’s to learn the proper skills to be able to function appropriately, it is advantageous for their classmates to know the most effective way to interact with their classmate who has Asperger’s (S. Johnson, personal communication, 2003). Since students with Asperger’s respond more effectively to routine and consistency, it is helpful also if these strategies are connected between home and school.

Jordan and Powell (1995) highlighted another aspect from the classroom perspective. It is not only problematic in controlling the behavior of a student with Asperger’s, but it also can be disruptive to the learning of the other students within the classroom. Teachers can take a proactive approach to controlling the behavior of this group of students by developing a clear, simply stated, and consistent discipline plan. It is helpful for the discipline plan to be verbally stated periodically as well as visible at all times. However, many times when students with Asperger’s Disorder behave inappropriately, they are unaware it is disruptive or unacceptable, which is why teachers must be mindful of the student’s intent of behavior before issuing a punishment. The most helpful tool a teacher can use when educating a student with Asperger’s Disorder, is making he or she as the teacher knowledgeable about the disorder, so there is not a misunderstanding of behavior (Jordan & Powell, 1995).

In addition to a consistent discipline plan, Attwood (1998) offers a number of other realistic solutions for teachers to use in their classrooms when incorporating a student with Asperger’s Disorder. These strategies include encouraging cooperative
games and prospective friendships, modeling to other children how to relate to the student with Asperger’s, and explaining to the student with Asperger’s Disorder alternative ways to seek help.

An effective and popular teaching tool when educating student with Asperger’s Disorder is using the Social Stories technique (Attwood, 1998; Iovannone et al., 2003; "Autism" 1997). The Social Stories technique helps students with autism learn how to comprehend and react appropriately to specific social situations. Social Stories is a technique that uses the role playing of social scenarios to help students with Asperger’s respond appropriately within the school setting. Attwood also comments that since developing friendships for Asperger’s students can be rigorous, elementary teachers can provide “friendship worksheets” to train and emphasize the qualities that go into developing friendships at an early age.

In summary, to ensure that students with Asperger’s Disorder have a positive and successful experience at school, both academically and socially, it is crucial for teachers to have an accurate understanding of social, emotional, and physical behavior among their students with Asperger’s Disorder. This degree of understanding is not feasible without the proper training while preparing to enter the field of education as well as continuing education once a professional within the field. Students with Asperger’s can have a successful school experience; however, this will not occur without the support of adequate teacher training.

Nevertheless, with the proper teacher training, support from home, and the self-motivation from the student with Asperger’s, many positives can result from having this type of student in the mainstream classroom. By increasing a student with
Asperger's visual thinking skills, a different and unique type of thinking can be introduced to the classroom. Students with Asperger's are usually primarily visual thinkers. Attwood (1998) explains that many times this type of thinking is misunderstood, but it is not defective and may be highly inventive. In fact, due to strong visual skills, many people with Asperger's Disorder have made huge advances and changes in the professional fields of arts and science (Attwood, 1998; "Autism," 1997).
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the individuals who participated in this study and how they were selected. Additionally, the survey instrument that was used will be discussed. Procedures for administering the survey will be described. Finally, the data analysis procedures will be outlined.

Subject Selection and Description

The researcher requested the cooperation of 62 educators (55 females and 7 males) currently working at an elementary school in a suburb of a Midwestern city to assist in the completion of the questionnaire. The elementary school is a K-5 school that educated 826 students during the 2003-2004 school year. The school is located in a southwest suburb in Minnesota. The school opens its door to a diverse student body, including affluent socio-economic levels and low socioeconomic levels. Eight point seventy-nine percent of the school's student body took advantage of free and reduced lunch during the 2003-2004 school year. Those who are eligible for free and reduced lunch also have the option to take advantage of a free breakfast before the school day begins.

All of the subjects selected to complete the questionnaire were elected because at one point in their educational career path they earned a K-5 elementary education degree and K-5 teaching certification in general education, music education, art education, physical education, or special education. The researcher also requested the cooperation of the principal and instructional assistant in completing the questionnaire. In addition to being certified K-5, 75% of the subjects participating in the survey had earned at least a master's degree in one of the following areas: administration, special education, art
education, and curriculum and instruction. Of the 62 surveys distributed, 36 were completed and returned, yielding a return rate of 59%.

Instrumentation

The purpose of the self-reported questionnaire was to gain information relevant to the participant’s previous experience, knowledge, and current outlets of support in relation to their involvement of students with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting. The instrument used to survey the subjects was a 12-item questionnaire (Appendix B), modified from previous Asperger’s Disorder research (Sewell, 1998). The instrument was compiled in three sections. The first two sections were presented in a multiple-choice format relating to information about the demographics and experience/behavior of the participants. Questions addressed the participants’ gender, years of teaching experience, educational background, and current role in the setting of their workplace. The purpose of the third section of the questionnaire was to gain information on the opinions, points of view, and attitudes of the participants and their experience with Asperger’s Disorder. This portion of the survey was constructed with a Likert scale.

To support the content validity of the questionnaire (Appendix B), pilot-testing procedures were done prior to the distribution of the actual research survey. This pilot test was distributed to a small-scaled sample group of experts in the field of Asperger’s Disorder and to K-5 teachers.

Data Collection Procedures

The surveys were delivered to the elementary school on January 9, 2004 by the researcher. The researcher distributed the 62 surveys into each of the personal mailboxes belonging to each subject. Along with the survey a box was placed in the main office for
the subjects to deposit completed surveys into by January 23, 2004 to be picked up by the researcher on that date. A cover letter (Appendix A) was provided with the survey explaining the purpose and importance of the survey, why the subject was selected for the survey, a date of completion for the survey, as well as information explaining how and where to return the questionnaire. Also stated in the cover letter was assurance of confidentiality. The questionnaire was completed by the subjects, at their convenience, within the two week period from January 9th through January 23rd.

Data Analysis

The survey was intended to be descriptive in nature. The data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The participants' responses to each of the items were scored. Mean scores and standard deviations for the three Likert scale items were determined. Scores indicated response patterns of regular education teachers, special education teachers, and the administrative staff regarding their experiences, viewpoints, and attitudes addressing Asperger's Disorder. Further item scores allowed for the ability to describe the resources currently offered to teachers of students diagnosed with Asperger's. Because of the relatively small sample size, no further statistical analyses beyond descriptive data were performed.

Limitations

A limitation to the results of the survey was previous knowledge of Asperger's Disorder; subjects may have had a wide range of exposure to information about Asperger's. Another limitation of the survey was the fact that only K-5 teachers were surveyed and not middle school or high school teachers. Another limitation would be the setting of suburban Minnesota; it may not be representative in terms of either incidence
of Asperger's or support provided. In response to the survey a limitation also occurred.

Significantly more females (33) completed the survey than males (3), although in the
field of education it is not uncommon to have more females than males. Lack of a one
hundred percent return rate of the survey was also a limitation.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter will describe the results generated from the 12-item questionnaire used to survey the subjects (Appendix B). Demographics of the survey will be described, and an item analysis will be discussed within this chapter. Finally a discussion will highlight the objectives of the survey in relation to the viewpoints and attitudes of elementary educators (K-5) who have students with Asperger’s Disorder in their classroom setting.

Demographics

Participants of the survey were asked to indicate several demographics in the questionnaire on items one through four. Of the 62 surveys distributed, 36 were completed and returned, yielding a return rate of 59%. Of the participants, 33 of the respondents were female (91.7%) and 3 were male (8.3%). The respondents ranged in teaching experience from 0 to 21 years or longer, with the majority falling in the range of 0-5 (30.6%) and 11-15 (27.8%) years of teaching experience.

A majority of the respondents (66.7%) indicated they had obtained a master’s degree. The remaining respondents indicated their highest level of training at a bachelor’s degree level (25.0%) and multiple graduate degrees (8.3%).

More than half of the respondents (63.9%) had the role of a classroom teacher. 13.9% were special education teachers and 11.1% were specialists. Another 5.6% had an administrative role. One person (2.8%) checked all the roles including classroom teacher, special education teacher, specialist, as well as administrator. Another participant (2.8%) listed specialist as well as administrator as roles.
Item Analysis

Item five asked respondents how many students with Asperger’s Disorder they have had in class to the present time. Out of all of the respondents, seven (19.4%) documented at one point within their teaching career having six or more students with Asperger’s Disorder, six (16.7%) reported having 4-5 students, 10 (27.8%) stated they have had 1-3, and 13 (36.1%) reported never having a student in their classroom with Asperger’s Disorder.

Items six through eight asked respondents how prepared they believed they are to deal with educating students with Asperger’s Disorder, with previous and current training. The perceptions regarding how prepared each of the respondents felt to educate students with Asperger’s Disorder within their classroom, how prepared they felt through their university/college training, and how the school district prepares them for having students with Asperger’s Disorder were inquired about through a Likert scale. The majority of the respondents (55.6%) felt somewhat prepared to have a student with Asperger’s Disorder in their classroom, 33.3% feel completely unprepared, and the remaining 11.1% feel completely prepared.

According to the results of the questionnaire, none of the respondents felt completely prepared to have a student with Asperger’s Disorder immediately after their university or college training. The majority of the respondents (88.9%) felt unprepared, and 11.1% felt somewhat prepared after college. More than half of the respondents (55.6%) felt the school district only somewhat prepares them with support for educating students with Asperger’s Disorder. Of the 36 respondents, 36.1% feel unprepared, and 5.6% feel completely prepared. One person did not respond to the question (2.8%).
Items 9 through 12 asked the participants to respond to four yes/no questions regarding their own personal opinions of how to meet the needs of students with Asperger’s Disorder. On item nine, of the 36 respondents, exactly 50% were aware of other resources targeted for teachers with students with Asperger’s other than offered by the school district. The other 50% did not. It is notable that missing data existed for this item (13.9%).

Item 10 asked respondents to exhibit their perceptions as to whether they felt the quality of education for other students suffers or not dependent on having a student with Asperger’s Disorder in the mainstream classroom. The majority of the respondents (47.2%) indicated they did not feel the quality of education suffers, whereas 38.9% felt it has. In addition, 13.9% did not respond to whether or not they felt the quality of education for other students suffers, when including a student with Asperger’s Disorder in the mainstream classroom.

When asked in item 11, due to the lack of training in working with students with Asperger’s Disorder, is it challenging to assist students with Asperger’s reach their fullest potential, the majority of the participants (72.2%) felt it was challenging. Only 22.2% of the participants felt it was not challenging, and 5.6% did not respond to the question.

Item 12 asked the participants if they believed additional training was needed to completely meet the needs of students with Asperger’s Disorder as well as the needs of the rest of the class. Most of the respondents (94.4%) felt they need additional training to completely meet the needs of students with Asperger’s Disorder in addition to the other students within the class. A mere 5.6% felt no additional training was necessary to meet the needs of their students.
Cross-tabulations

To determine educators' viewpoints and attitudes of students with Asperger's Disorder, cross-tabulations were done with the number of years of teaching experience compared to: (a) number of students to date they have encountered with Asperger's Disorder, (b) level of preparedness in working with students with Asperger's Disorder, (c) level of preparedness felt received through university or college training, (d) how well the school district prepares them in working with students with Asperger's Disorder, (e) whether or not they are aware of other resources outside the school district to provide support to students with Asperger's, (f) whether or not they feel the level of education for other students suffers when students with Asperger's Disorder are integrated into the mainstream classroom, (g) due to a lack of training in working with students with Asperger's Disorder that it is challenging to assist these students reach their fullest potential, (h) feeling there is a need for additional training in Asperger's Disorder to completely meet the needs of students with or without Asperger's Disorder. These cross-tabulations produced frequency counts only because the sample was too small for correlational analysis.

The results from the first cross-tabulation (years of teaching experience to number of Asperger's Disorder students encountered) showed that 77.7% of the teachers with less teaching experience (0-5, 6-10, and 11-15 years) felt they had worked more with students diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder. The remaining 22.3% did not feel they had had much first hand experience in working with students with Asperger's Disorder.

When the number of years of experience was crossed with the level of preparedness in working with students with Asperger's Disorder, overall the number of
years did not reflect the feeling of preparedness. The majority (about 75.0%) felt unprepared to somewhat prepared to have a student with Asperger's Disorder when assisting them in reaching their greatest potential in the school setting. A very small number of the participants (11.1%) felt completely prepared.

Based on these findings, it appears that educators (K-5) do not feel adequately prepared to have a student with Asperger's Disorder in their classroom regardless of their years of experience. However, based on the findings when comparing years of experience to level of preparedness received through university or college training (Item 3), teachers with five years of teaching experience or less felt somewhat prepared to have a student with Asperger's Disorder in their classroom, compared to the majority who felt completely unprepared.

The level of support offered to educators who have students with Asperger's Disorder by the school district (Item 4) appeared to be unrelated to the number of years of teaching experience. Overall, about one half (57.1%) of the employees, regardless of their years of experience, felt the school district somewhat prepares them for this type of student. The results compiled from the participants' awareness of resources outside the school district (Item 5) to provide support to students with Asperger's Disorder suggested that the participants with 11-15 years of teaching experience do not seem to be well acquainted with outside resources. However, when considering all the other years of experienced educators, about half feel they are aware of outside resources.

Examination of the cross tabulations also suggested that the more teaching experience one has, the more one believes the quality of education suffers for the other students in the classroom due to integrating a student with Asperger's. Nearly 75.0% of
the participants surveyed with 0-5 years of experience felt the quality of education does not suffer. The cross tabulation also showed that, regardless of years of teaching experience, 69.4% of the participants felt it is challenging to incorporate a student with Asperger’s Disorder into the school setting. The final cross-tabulation showed an overwhelming majority or respondents, including most at each level, believe they need additional training.

Discussion

The results of this chapter will now be summarized in terms of the research objectives outlined in Chapter One.

Objective one. The first research objective was to determine teaching experience in working with students with Asperger’s Disorder. Item five was the only question related to this objective. The majority of the educators surveyed stated they had had one or more students with Asperger’s Disorder in their classroom. A significant population of the respondents reported having 1-3 students with Asperger’s, others reported having 4-5 students, and a slight group of respondents reported throughout their teaching career having six or more students with Asperger’s Disorder in their classroom. About one third had never had a student with Asperger’s Disorder but may have worked indirectly with one.

Objective two. The second research objective was to determine the comfort, confidence, and anxiety levels related to teaching students with Asperger’s Disorder. Items 6, 7, 10, and 11 were related to this objective. It was determined that a vast majority of the educators surveyed, felt unprepared to teach students with Asperger’s Disorder with only their university or college training. About 1 in 10 felt somewhat
prepared, and none of the participants felt completely prepared with simply their college training to fully educate a student with Asperger’s Disorder.

In spite of the lack of training reported by the majority of educators surveyed, most felt the quality of education does not suffer for other students when incorporating students with Asperger’s Disorder. Educators did comment that their role was challenging in teaching students with Asperger’s Disorder and there is a lack of training offered. It was determined that more than half of the respondents felt only somewhat prepared to work with Asperger’s Disorder. In addition, a significant amount felt completely unprepared. However, it is significant to note 1 of 10 of the respondents felt completely prepared to work with students with Asperger’s Disorder. These few can be described as comfortable and confident when working with students with Asperger’s Disorder.

**Objective three.** The third objective was to determine the level of support and resources provided by the school district and other agencies regarding students with Asperger’s Disorder. Items 8, 9, and 12 were related to this objective. Well over half of the respondents felt either somewhat prepared, or totally unprepared regarding the amount of support and offered resources by the school district to working with students with Asperger’s Disorder. There was slight percentage that felt completely prepared by the support and resources provided by the school district to incorporate a child with Asperger’s Disorder into their classroom. One of the participants did not respond at all to the question. It was determined that the respondents were exactly split when offering feedback as to whether or not they are aware of other outside sources regarding the education of students with Asperger’s Disorder. Out the 36 respondents, one half of the
participants felt they are aware of resources outside of the school district, and the other half felt they are not aware of any outside resources offered to assisting educators and their students with Asperger’s Disorder. The most overwhelming response in the survey was the need for additional training. The majority of the respondents (94.4 %) felt a need for more training than what is presently offered to adequately meet the needs of their students with or without Asperger’s Disorder.

In summary, the findings from the current study show the majority of educators (K-5) from a suburban school district in a Midwestern city, do not feel completely prepared by the support and resources offered through their previous educational training to properly educate students with Asperger’s Disorder. In addition, these educators also feel inadequate resources are offered by their school district and outside resources to meet the needs of their students with or without Asperger’s Disorder. It is significant to the field of education to note, educators are eager and wanting more training on the subject of Asperger’s Disorder and on meeting the needs of their students with Asperger’s Disorder and those without.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter will briefly review the purpose, methodological procedures, and findings of the study. The results will then be considered as they compare to previous research. This will be followed by a detailed examination of the limitations inherent to the study as well as suggestions to future research and practice.

Purpose of the Study

This study was done as a comprehensive investigation to determine the viewpoints and attitudes of educators (K-5) who have encountered children with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting. In addition it also sought to determine if these educators feel they have the necessary support and resources to effectively teach children with Asperger’s Disorder to reach their fullest potential academically and socially in their classroom setting.

Methodological Procedures

Data for this investigation were collected via a survey distributed to 62 educators at an elementary school located in a large Midwestern suburb. Of the 62 surveys distributed, 36 were completed and returned; of these, 3 were male and 33 were female. Descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the data.

Conclusions

The present study examined educators’ (K-5) perceptions, viewpoints, attitudes, experiences, and preparedness when encountering children with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting. Results indicated that educators (K-5) currently working in suburban Minnesota generally feel unprepared when working with students with Asperger’s
Disorder. Due to a lack of training in university/college program, in addition to a lack of support from their school district as well as outside sources, educators did not feel completely prepared to work with students with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting.

Findings from the current study suggest that the majority of educators (K-5) believe that due to the fact they do not feel adequately trained or prepared to service students with Asperger’s Disorder, it is challenging to assist these students in reaching their fullest potential. Educators feel they cannot fully meet the needs of their students with Asperger’s Disorder in their classrooms. Findings from the current survey also suggested educators cannot fully meet the needs of the other students in their classroom setting. As a result, participants felt there is a need for additional training in working with students with Asperger’s Disorder to completely meet the needs of the entire student body.

Findings from past studies have discovered a positive correlation between the level of knowledge and familiarity increasing within the medical field regarding Asperger’s and the rate of children being diagnosed with the disorder (Kaufman, 2002; Pyles, 2002; Yeargin-Allsopp, 2003). Previous research has also suggested that with the escalating rate of children with Asperger’s incorporated in schools today, there is a frustration among teachers to appropriately meet the needs of this student population as well as the other remaining students in their classroom (Kaufman, 2002; Sewell, 1998; Unok-Marks, 2003). This frustration is a result of a low teacher comfort and confidence levels when encountering this type of student in the classroom setting. It was this researcher’s hypothesis that today’s educators (K-5) do not feel completely prepared to
educate students with Asperger’s Disorder in their classrooms, and continue to meet the needs of the other students within their class. Therefore, the current study set out to extend past research by surveying educators in the elementary school (K-5) setting who have encountered students with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting as well as worked with children with Asperger’s Disorder in their classrooms.

The current study found that the majority of educators (K-5) do indeed feel unprepared to integrate a student diagnosed with Asperger’s Disorder into their classroom. Based on the findings, it would appear that regardless of teaching experience (based on number of years of service to the field of education), the majority of teachers today feel ill-equipped to service Asperger students due to lack of training from their university or college coursework. The findings from the current study also suggest the majority of educators (K-5) do not feel prepared by the support and resources offered through their school district or outside resources to meet the needs of their students with Asperger’s (while meeting the needs of the other students). In addition, the majority of educators (K-5) feel a lack of confidence or elevated levels of anxiety when having to assist students with Asperger’s Disorder in the school setting.

Recommendations for Further Study

As current literature and research is continuing to find an increase in the diagnosis of Asperger’s Disorder among today’s youth, future research should aim to find ways to support today’s educators when facing these students in their classrooms.

One of the biggest limitations to the current study was the small sample size. Conditions that could have contributed to the small sample size include the comfort level among participants with the content area of the survey and lack of follow up with those
individuals who did not respond promptly. If a similar study were conducted, this researcher would suggest the recommendation that an introduction to Asperger’s Disorder be stated, as well as a question addressing the background knowledge of the disorder among the participants. In addition, individuals who do not respond would be contacted again.

A second limitation to this study was that the sample was not representative of educators nationwide or of another urban or rural area of Minnesota. Likewise, educators at the middle and high school levels were not included in survey. Educators (K-5) working in suburban Minnesota were over represented. Due to the limited sample size and inaccurate representation of the general population of today’s educators, the results of this study cannot be generalized to educators nationwide. Future studies should aim to reach a national sample of educators (K-12) so that the information obtained may be applied to all educators.

A third limitation to this study was that the participants were not introduced to the term Asperger’s Disorder at the beginning of the survey. Providing a definition, or introduction to the terminology, would have ensured that all of the participants were knowledgeable of the disorder. Perhaps some of the participants were completely aware of the definition of Asperger’s Disorder (i.e., a qualitative impairment with human social interaction), but some may not have been. As a result, this lack of knowledge may potentially have affected the findings of the study. Therefore, as a recommendation for future research, educators should be provided with a definition of Asperger’s Disorder so that all participants use the same criteria when reporting their perceptions, viewpoints, and attitudes.
Recommendations to the Field

Inexperienced educators entering schools today, as well as seasoned teachers, should be provided with adequate support to properly allow their students with Asperger’s Disorder to fully reach their potential in the school atmosphere. To build comfort and confidence levels among educators who have students with Asperger’s Disorder, many steps can be taken to enhance the profession of education to suitably prepare today’s educators.

One recommendation would be the responsibility of the administrators, who should provide appropriate training and in-services regarding the topic of students with Asperger’s Disorder. An additional recommendation falls on the shoulders of today’s educators. As the trends in education change, it is the responsibility of educators to stay up to date by making themselves knowledgeable. As stated earlier, more and more students with Asperger’s Disorder are entering today’s classrooms. With this new trend, educators can gain more support by seeking out information from a variety of sources regarding Asperger’s Disorder. Finally, colleges and universities can make a greater effort to prepare aspiring educators for working with students with Asperger’s Disorder.

Summary

As today’s schools are growing and changing, a significant percentage of students are entering school with Asperger’s Disorder. From the study administered, it can be said that today’s educators feel a lack of support, as well have a low comfort and confidence level when working with this population of students. In conclusion it can be said that overall, regardless of the number of years of teaching experience, today’s educators need the appropriate support to reach the needs of students with Asperger’s Disorder.
References


Saskatchewan Education Special Education Unit. (1999). *Teaching students with autism: A guide for educators*. Saskatchewan Education Special Education Unit: Author.


Appendix A: Participant Consent Letter

January 9, 2004

Red Pine Elementary
530 Red Pine Lane
Eagan, Minnesota 55123

Dear Red Pine Teacher:

As a graduate student in the guidance and counseling program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, it is my goal to gather information about teacher viewpoints regarding “Asperger’s Syndrome,” an autistic disorder. Please take your time in the completion of this survey. It should take approximately 5 minutes of your time. I realize it is a busy time of year for all involved, and would like to thank you in advance for your assistance. Your responses will be used to determine the viewpoints, attitudes, and support teachers (k-5) feel they have regarding their teaching of students with Asperger’s Syndrome.

The completion of this survey implies voluntary participation in this study. No identifying will be used and confidentiality is strictly guaranteed. By returning this survey completed the basic nature of the survey is understood as well as the agreements of any risks are exceedingly small. It is also understood that potential benefits might be realized from the successful completion of this study. You have the right to refuse participation and may withdraw from participation at anytime during the study.

Located in the office is a blue box labeled “Asperger’s Syndrome Surveys,” for your convenience in returning the survey upon completion. Please deposit your questionnaire into the blue box sometime before 4 p.m. on January 23, 2004. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at (651) 689 6869, email me at sinzcn@uwstout.edu, or contact my advisor Dr. Barbara Flom at (715) 232 1343. I thank you in advance for your prompt cooperation in gathering this information.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed to the researcher, research advisor, or Sue Foxwell, Human Resources administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Vocational Rehabilitation, Menomonie, Wisconsin, 54751, phone (715) 232 1126.

Sincerely,

Carla T. Sinz
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Graduate Student-School Counseling (k-12)
Appendix B: Survey Instrument

A Research Survey for Teachers of Students with Asperger’s Syndrome

Please circle the multiple choice item in which pertains to you.

1. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have, counting this school year?
   0-5 years
   6-10 years
   11-15 years
   16-20 years
   21+ years

3. What is your highest level of schooling completed at this point in time?
   Bachelor of Science
   Graduate Degree (please specify content area)
   Multiple Graduate Degrees (please specify content area)
   Doctoral Degree (please specify content area)

4. What is your current professional role at Red Pine Elementary?
   Classroom teacher
   Special Education teacher
   Specialist
   Administrative

5. To date how many students with Asperger’s Syndrome have you had in class? Please include students whom you helped to diagnose as well as students you are aware of being diagnosed after your experience with them.
   0
   1-3
   4-5
   6+
Using the following scale please circle how prepared you believe you are to deal with the following issues pertaining to Asperger’s Syndrome.

1 (unprepared) 2 (somewhat prepared) 3 (completely prepared)

6. I feel prepared with working with students with Asperger’s Syndrome. 1 2 3

7. I felt prepared with working with students with Asperger’s Syndrome before teaching in ISD 196 through my university or college training. 1 2 3

8. I feel ISD 196 prepares their employees with support to teaching students with Asperger’s Syndrome. 1 2 3

9. I am aware of avenues other than the resources provided by ISD 196 to provide support to students with Asperger’s Syndrome.
   Yes
   No

10. I feel at times the quality of education for other students suffer due to Asperger’s students integrated into the regular classroom.
    Yes
    No

11. I feel due to lack of training in working with students with Asperger’s Syndrome that I find it challenging to assist students with Asperger’s reach their fullest potential.
    Yes
    No

12. I believe I need additional training in Asperger’s Syndrome to completely meet the needs of students with Asperger’s Syndrome as well as the needs of the rest of the class.
    Yes
    No