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SPE 613A: Exceptional Education Etiology
25 October, 2020

Journal Article Summary

McDougal, E., Riby, D. M., & Hanley, M. (2020). Teacher insights into the barriers and facilitators of learning in autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 79, 101674. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101674>

Emily McDougal, Deborah Riby, and Mary Hanley, researchers in the Department of Psychology at Durham University in the United Kingdom conducted research that looked into the different dynamics that influence learning for students with autism in the educational environment. In their study, the three researchers explored both positive and negative impacts on students in primary school, who had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The research was conducted to identify barriers to learning, and give insight into ways to support autistic students in the classroom.

The research for *Teacher Insights into the Barriers and Facilitators of Learning in Autism* was conducted through interviews of ten educators working with the autistic students. The interviews were then subjected to review through a process described as thematic analysis; Steven Buetow, in his article on thematic analysis reconceptualization, explains that “thematic analysis is characteristic of most qualitative research. Themes are groups of codes that recur through being similar or connected to each other in a patterned way” (Buetow, 2010). The analysis of the teacher interviews showed that three main themes that impacted learning which were student behaviors, learning environment, and the teacher-student relationship. These themes led the researchers to ten barriers to student learning, which were “difficulty with social interactions and communication, cognitive rigidity, attention and learning difficulties, sensory differences, and emotional distress” (McDougal, et. al, 2020).

The findings of the study conducted by McDougal, Riby and Hanley concluded with a number of recommendations, which included using visual cues and aides, such as color coded schedules, to be used to mitigate issues with student executive function deficits and difficulties with transitions. The article brought to light teacher perspectives in relation to the challenges that autistic students face in the learning environment, which can be used to offer insights into how to create classrooms that address barriers to learning for students with autism.

References

- Buetow, S. (2010). Thematic analysis and its reconceptualization as ‘saliency analysis.’ *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, 15(2), 123–125. <https://doi.org/10.1258/jhsrp.2009.009081>
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