

Perspectives of Parents and Teachers of Autistic Children on the TEACCH Intervention Programme used at a Special School in Barbados

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Abstract: This research investigated the views of parents and special education teachers about the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) intervention programme used at a special school for children with autism in Barbados. The purpose was to provide an understanding of the barriers as well as the facilitating factors as perceived by these two stakeholders as they attempt to implement the intervention programme used at the school. A sample of four special education teachers and twelve parents were involved in the study. Focus groups and face to face semi-structured interviews were the procedures used for collecting data from the participants. The results of the study revealed several barriers and facilitators as perceived by participants regarding the implementation of the TEACCH intervention programme at the school. Themes that emerged regarding barriers and facilitating factors were focused on: implementation of the intervention programme; collaboration; bureaucracy; curriculum; frustration; and training.

Key Words: Parents; Teachers; Autism; TEACCH; Barriers; Facilitators

1. Introduction

1.1 Education for Children with Autism in Barbados

Children with autism in Barbados are educated in special schools or special classrooms at regular schools. The programme recommended

by the Ministry of Education for teaching children with autism is the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) intervention programme. TEACCH is an autism support and training programme that



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was developed by researchers at the University of North Carolina in the 1970s. TEACCH stands for: Teaching and increasing the skill level of practitioners; Expanding knowledge to provide high-quality services; Appreciating the uniqueness of autistic children; Collaborating and Cooperating with colleagues and parents; and, a Holistic approach to the autistic child, their family and community. Components of the TEACCH programme include: physical structures; daily timetables; work systems; visual structures; and encouraging independence (Mesibov et al., 2004). Teachers of autistic children in Barbados are required to use TEACCH but are able to modify this by means of Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) to suit the needs of individual children.

The aim of this research was to investigate the perspectives of parents and special education teachers on the TEACCH intervention programme used at a special school for children with autism and thereby provide an understanding of the barriers and facilitating factors experienced by teachers as they implement intervention strategies, and views of parents about the programme and on their working relationships with teachers.

1.2 Background to the Study

An electronic search of the international literature revealed that there have been several studies conducted regarding perceptions of intervention programmes, and related barriers and facilitators, of parents and teachers of autistic children. Studies have indicated that collaboration between teachers and parents is important for students' improvement at school (Hebel & Persitz, 2014; Thompson et al., 2007; Whitbread et al., 2007). Other studies have shown that a good relationship between the school and home has positive outcomes for everyone involved (Carter, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Schmid & Garrels, 2021). Therefore, the importance of the need to have parents and teachers involved in a joint effort to execute intervention programme for children with autism is evident.

International research on the education of students with autism and other disabilities has emphasized the importance of involving parents in the planning and implementation of intervention programmes tailored to meet students' needs (Angel, et al., 2009; Hebel & Persitz, 2014; Hobbs & Silla, 2008; Huang & Mason, 2008). Engagement by parents in intervention

programmes is reported to help them develop a healthy attitude towards their children's abilities and, in the process, aid in promoting family wellbeing (Jinnah & Walters, 2008). It has also been suggested that when the partnerships between teachers, parents and students are strong the resulting positive outcomes benefit not only the children but parents and teachers as well (Hornby, 2011).

Although the literature has documented the benefits of partnership and collaboration between home and school it has also identified barriers to parental involvement in implementing interventions for special needs students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A study of parental perceptions conducted by Angel et al. (2009) found that the leading barriers to parental involvement were the limited times during which teachers were available to meet with parents as well as ineffective communication between parents and teachers. Another barrier is that many school principals and teachers do not receive adequate training on organizing, conducting and employing practical strategies to develop and maintain partnerships with parents (Hebel & Persitz, 2014).

The current research investigated the perspectives of parents and special education teachers who teach children with autism at a special school using the TEACCH intervention programme.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What do teachers of autistic children perceive to be the barriers to and facilitators of implementation of the TEACCH intervention programme and what are their views on parent involvement with this?
2. What do parents of autistic children think about the TEACCH intervention programme and how do they view their involvement in the programme and their relationships with the teachers of their children?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research study was conducted in order to investigate participants' perspectives regarding the use of the TEACCH programme and the relationships between parents and teachers (Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2001).

2.2 Location, Recruitment and Participants

The only government special education school for

children with autism in Barbados was involved and the participants were parents of twelve autistic children who attended the school and four special education teachers who taught at the school. The participants were purposively selected because of their involvement with the TEACCH programme. Connection with the participants was established through the principal of the special school. The principal was informed about the aims of the research study and was asked to identify potential participants, both teachers and parents.

For the special education teachers, the criteria for inclusion were that teachers were certified in special education, they had been teaching children on the autism spectrum for a minimum of three years, and were implementing the TEACCH intervention programme in the classes that they taught. The four teacher participants were two males and two females. All had university level qualifications in special education and their teaching experience ranged from 15 to 25 years.

The criteria for involvement of parents was that their autistic child fully resided with them and was a full-time student at the special school. There was one father and 11 mothers. All of the parents had completed secondary school, one had an undergraduate qualification and three had postgraduate qualifications. They all worked, either full-time or part-time. The participants' children with autism consisted of two girls and ten boys whose ages ranged from 9 to 13 years.

2.3 Procedures, Interviews, Focus Groups

2.3.1 Research procedure

Prior to formally contacting the Principal of the special school approval was gained from the Barbados Ministry of Education, the University of West Indies and the Barbados Ministry of Health Research Ethics Committee Institutional Review Board. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus, Barbados (IRBNO 2000301, dated 5th August 2020).

Participation of the special education teachers and parents was based on the initial recommendations of the special school principal. Teachers and parents were informed about the purpose of the research, which was intended to investigate the implementation of the

TEACCH intervention programme for children with autism. Ethical standards regarding privacy, anonymity, informed consent and data preservation were followed.

2.3.2 Tools used for collecting data

Focus groups were used with parents and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with teachers for the gathering of data. All focus groups and interviews were audio-taped for later analysis. The focus groups conducted with parents consisted of three groups of four parents. Focus groups were used as it was considered that parents would feel more comfortable sharing their views in this format (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The four special education teachers were interviewed individually, as this was their preference.

The focus of the interviews and focus groups was related to the two research questions noted above. The main interview questions used with the teachers were: "What are the barriers to and facilitators for implementing the TEACCH intervention programme?"; and "What are your views on parental involvement in the TEACCH programme?" The main questions used in the focus groups with parents were: "What do you see as the positives and negatives of the TEACCH intervention programme?"; "Do teachers involve you in the programme and if so, how?" and "How do you view your relationships with your child's teachers?"

To make the participants relaxed and comfortable general questions were asked at the beginning to stimulate discussion. Prompts were used to help participants communicate their views and some responses from participants were followed up by probing questions to ensure more in-depth answers. For example, "What made you come to that conclusion?" "Do you mind expanding on that?" The questions and prompts were used to get the participants to share their thoughts, which helped in gaining greater insight into their perspectives.

3. Analysis of the interviews

3.1 Transcription

The analysis process started with transcribing interviews, reading and re-reading all transcripts and making sense of the textual data from the audio-taped interviews and focus groups (Braun, & Clarke, 2022). Notes were made after each interview and focus group to assist in understanding any nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions and body language). These notes

helped to achieve a fuller sense of the participants' perspectives about their experiences. To avoid bias and presuppositions the process of epoche or bracketing was invoked to prevent previous biases, assumptions, and presuppositions impacting on the phenomena of interest (Creswell, 2015).

3.2 Coding

To effectively code and categorize data, spreadsheets and matrices were used, one for the teachers and one for the parents, to record their comments. The matrices served as a visual display of the data analysis process and assisted in comparing similarities, contrasting differences and establishing patterns and themes. Significant statements were highlighted and grouped into specific codes, and any repetitive codes were classified under specific categories. All selected categories were grouped into specific themes and sub-themes. Identified themes were organized based on the research questions. The themes were used to write a textual and structural description of what the participants had expressed (Creswell, 2015).

3.3 Validity and Credibility

Enhancing validity and credibility in qualitative research is a critical aspect for researchers. Qualitative research requires that the researcher goes through additional steps to ensure confidence in the results of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2008). Credibility refers to confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility for this study was achieved by using the validation strategies of peer debriefing and member checking.

Peer debriefing: Feedback from colleagues was used to help improve the quality of the findings (Creswell, 2015). The first author worked with two reviewers who have experience in qualitative research and are postgraduates in the area of special education. Each colleague reviewed the transcripts (participants' names were coded) and identified general themes and sub-themes. The second author, who was the research supervisor, also provided feedback.

Member checking: Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that qualitative researchers discuss data and interpretations with participants, also known as member checking. The researcher had several sessions with participants to ensure accuracy of the findings. The researcher used member checking as an additional

step to elicit participants' feedback concerning their input during the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Member checking occurred when participants were asked to check their interview comments on the transcripts that were emailed to them to review their responses, so that any confusions could be clarified.

4. Research Findings

Six major themes emerged from the data analysis, concerned with: (1) Implementation of the intervention programme; (2) Collaboration between special education teachers and parents; (3) Impact of bureaucracy; (4) Curriculum issues; (5) Sources of frustration; (6) Training of parents.

Theme 1: Implementation of the Intervention Programme

Teachers reported that they modify the TEACCH programme to suit the needs of children within the Barbadian education system, while maintaining most of the basic tenets of the TEACCH model, in particular physical structures, visual schedules, predictable sequence of activities, routine and flexibility, and a structured work and activity system.

According to Mesibov et al. (2004) the TEACCH model considers all of the characteristic traits of autism. It stresses setting individual goals for the uniqueness of every child on the autism spectrum and encouraging talented features of autistic students, thus supporting the children's areas of strengths and skills. Teachers reported that they organize their classrooms for students to expand their strong areas as well as develop their weak ones so that each child can have successful learning experiences. Visual methods are employed to communicate with the children, providing understanding and decreasing the level of stress to promote independence. Teachers stated that the TEACCH model recognizes the role of parents, so is not only centred on the child's learning needs but also on teaching parents how to assist with individual learning at home.

All the teachers in the study had been trained to implement the TEACCH model and were familiar with its tenets. One of the four teachers in the study was a little doubtful about the model's claim to develop independent living when persons are not in a structured setting as adults. Also, three of the parents opined that

there should be more than one intervention programme available since all autistic children are not the same and 'one size does not fit all'. The quotations below give voice to the participants' perceptions of the intervention programme and practices used.

PARENTS: *examples of comments*

"I have read quite a lot about intervention programs. The one that is being used seems to be very popular around the world for children like ours. It is my belief that there will be some measure of success with my son."

"I took the responsibility to check this information on the internet about the intervention programs which confirmed that it was reliable and if I want my son to get the best, I have to get involved."

"There should be a choice of intervention programs; one size fit all, should not be the case and we as parents should have a choice."

TEACHERS: *examples of comments*

"The intervention plan that has been given for use with the students in the autism spectrum in the government's special schools in Barbados is the TEACCH model. However, there is a lack of funds and input from specialized personnel such as, speech therapists, occupational therapists psychologists and others".

"Cultivating strengths and interests, rather than dwelling solely on deficits, is important for me in the execution of the intervention program for my students. For example, many students on the autism spectrum have strong rote memory skills, or even an enhanced sense of colour or visual perception. I use these to motivate, interest or even give the students a chance to shine."

"Quite a few students in my class have specific interests. What I do is to encourage and create an environment and opportunities for those students to use and display their interest, rather than trying to curtail their interest, I build on it".

Theme 2 – Collaboration between special education teachers and parents

The theme of collaboration was evident in the data that emerged from both parents and teachers. They both expressed the view that the strong relationships between them was very beneficial and they fully endorsed the idea of collaborative partnerships. They reported that there was trust and support, and each

party was comfortable speaking to each other and considered that this makes a huge difference since it allows learning from school to be worked on at home and vice versa. All the parents were enthusiastic about: parent-teacher conferences; Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings; volunteering on field trips; planning events and sports meetings. They spoke positively about this even though two of them had experienced barriers to participating in school activities. All the parents spoke positively about assisting their children with homework and purchasing resources, even though they had limited financial resources. They all felt that volunteering was a form of involvement that assisted them in contributing to their children's intervention programme. Some examples of comments that supported this theme are as follows.

PARENTS: *examples of comments*

"I go to PTA meetings and I go with them on field trip to help out with all the activities the school have."

"I question my daughter's teacher about what they are doing and she gives me guidelines to use at home to assist her."

"If I am having behavioural issues with my daughter, the teacher and I discuss how to overcome these challenges. I have a lot of respect for him."

TEACHERS: *examples of comments*

"Parents can provide constructive feedback, to us teachers on the intervention practices we use with their children. They notice even the slightest change in behaviour and we can use this information to make adjustments to the children's IEPs."

"When parents are involved in the intervention programme of their children, they can see firsthand the needs of their children and especially what factors can hinder or help them."

"Parents can help to reinforce the intervention or training being done at school. Strategies used at home will be consistent with those used in the school setting when there is a partnership between parents and us."

Theme 3 – Impact of bureaucracy

Bureaucracy was also a major barrier identified in the data from the parents and teachers.

Parents' data revealed a high level of frustration, resulting from the fact that, after receiving the initial diagnosis, which was itself a long process, there was an even longer process to obtain appointments with

specialists. They considered that input from specialists such as speech therapists and psychologists was vital to the success of the intervention programme with their autistic children, but considered that this seems not to have been understood by the Ministry of Education.

The interviews with teachers revealed a similar sentiment that there were no provisions for follow-ups with specialists. This was viewed as a major barrier to the success of the intervention programme since the continuous engagement of their areas of expertise was crucial to a more effective execution of the intervention program. Difficulties in getting finance for electronic apparatus and teaching aids was reported to be long drawn out. The data reinforces the influence of the bureaucratic process on the implementation of the intervention programme.

Parents: *examples of comments*

“I find that the Ministry do not understand that the quicker the children get to see the professionals the faster the teacher can adjust the children’s IEP.”

“The Ministry needs to do what they are doing differently because too much time is wasted in us getting feedback to the teacher to assist in adjusting our children’s IEPs.”

“The people at the Ministry tend to drag their feet and are always making excuses.”

TEACHERS: *examples of comments*

“Having input from the other professionals continuously should be part of the policy of the Ministry of Education. I think that the other professionals should be signing off on the end of term/year progress reports and not just us teachers.”

“As a special needs teacher our work can be very overwhelming since we do not have teacher aids to assist and funding for teaching aids is undersubscribed.”

“In order to attempt to successfully implement an intervention programme we need to have teacher aids who are trained in autism.”

Theme 4 – Curriculum issues

Participants’ views about the curriculum used at the school was a major theme that emerged from the investigation. The one that is used at the school is the National Curriculum for Barbados. Schools are permitted by the Ministry of Education to modify this curriculum to accommodate their students. Parents do

not currently contribute to what is taught at the school, and they voiced their opinions that they should be able to contribute to the content of the curriculum. In fact, the curriculum was an area of concern for both sets of participants. There is no specified special education curriculum but the teachers in the research all revealed that they made use of curriculum differentiation, which involved changing the content of lessons, and the way it is taught, as well as the way progress is evaluated.

Parents were all in agreement that their autistic children were taught a curriculum that emphasized mainly academics, even though for their children academic progress would be slower than that of typically developing children. Therefore, after leaving school they would be more likely to be excluded from further education, training or even employment. Other sentiments expressed were that insufficient emphasis was placed on the development of appropriate behaviour and social skills, as well as work skills, which parents considered to be essential for their children to live independent lives after school and be integrated into society.

PARENTS: *examples of comments*

“I want to see more done on behaviour and socializing.”

“As parents we should have a say in what our children are being taught.”

“I would like to see more focus on the practical skills that will help them to become employable. Presently, there is too much academic content.”

TEACHERS: *examples of comments*

“I am of the view that the students who are autistic should have a curriculum that is based on the culture of autism that is specific to them and geared towards their characteristic way of thinking and behaving. We use curriculum differentiation of the National Curriculum, this allows me as a special needs teacher to adjust content, methods and assessments to meet the needs of students.”

“The present curriculum is a hodge -podge of bits and pieces borrowed from the general education curriculum syllabi. I use the National Curriculum, but I make changes to my approach, materials, teaching aids and even my methods of assessments.”

“There is a pressing need to create a curriculum for persons with special needs including those on the autism spectrum instead of trying to make them

achieve the same goals as other children. We use what is referred to as a differentiated curriculum. We make accommodations to facilitate the challenges of our students. This entails adapting content, teaching styles, the environment and even our assessment techniques”.

Theme 5 – Sources of frustration

Frustration was expressed by most of the parents in the focus groups. Their frustration ranged from: lack of support from family members; lack of time for themselves; lack of timely services from support staff at the Ministry of Education; unsympathetic bosses who did not allow them time off work for meetings with teachers; lack of acceptance from the community; feelings of inferiority.

Teachers were frustrated over the lack of support for the TEACCH Intervention programme in the form of having no input from specialists, such as speech therapist or psychologists, after diagnosis. This was considered to be needed for the continuous modification to the students’ IEPs and the intervention programme in general. Teachers also voiced their frustration with having insufficient funds to purchase teaching aids, especially in assistive technology. Having no support staff, such as teacher aids, was seen as a barrier to implementing basic components of the TEACCH programme. Having to deal with bureaucracy often resulted in long waits for appointments, diagnoses and referrals which impacted negatively on the intervention programme.

PARENTS: examples of comments

“I wish at times that my son could play with the other children in the avenue but they avoid him and he does not get to practice some of the things he was being taught at school, like waiting his turn to bat.”

“I had to wait so long to get an appointment with the psychologist, I ended up having to pay for the assessment. My son’s teacher said that feedback from that professional would help quite a bit in an adjustment that he felt should be made to his IEP.”

“I love my daughter but at times I am so frustrated and stressed out that I feel to run away.”

TEACHERS: examples of comments

“One of my main frustrations is the lack of not having regular input from specialists. Regular feedback from these persons would greatly assist me in the modification of IEPs, and I think that parents would

welcome regular feedback about their children’s progress. Having to deal with bureaucracy and all its hierarchy and policies is very frustrating.”

“It is not effective to ask special needs teachers to implement the TEACCH programme and not give them the tools that complement the intervention. There is always inadequate apparatus, a lack of special rooms and areas, insufficient teaching aids especially in assistive technology and certainly there are no teacher assistants or aids. We do not have regular input from specialists. They should be involved in termly reports and not just us teachers. The bureaucratic process followed by the Ministry of Education lends itself to criticism and inefficiency.”

“Here in Barbados, services from the welfare and home visits are almost non-existent, services from these personnel would go long way in helping to address some of the deficits for this group of persons. Having to deal with bureaucracy can be very frustrating because the system or processes involved take a long time and are drawn out. In many instances, when what is sought is realized it is too late.”

Theme 6 – Training of parents

The need for training of parents was a theme for all the participants. Having training and workshops for parents related to autism was a desire expressed by all the teachers. Parents too were very keen about getting training for themselves and wanted workshop sessions that would provide activities, techniques and guidance in dealing with behavioural issues, use of technology and specific challenges in parenting a child on the autism spectrum. All the teachers expressed the view that training for parents would help to empower them to be better able to assist teachers in implementing the intervention programme.

PARENTS: examples of comments

“Training would give us the knowledge to assist us so that we could help our children with the challenges that they have.”

“Training is necessary if we are to assist in the success of the practices at school. I would want the teachers/school/Ministry to make it a policy to organize training sessions for us parents. There are lots of skills and drills that I see in the IEP that I am not clear about.”

“Workshops and seminars would really go a long way in helping us to provide the right type of environment

for our children.”

TEACHERS: *examples of comments*

“We need to have training for the parents so that they can reinforce what we are doing”.

“The TEACCH intervention programme requires that there be input from the parents for it to succeed and just like we as teachers had to be trained; parents too need training.”

“Workshops should be organized for parents to attend and not just lectures or be given literature to read.”

5. Discussion

The findings revealed that parents embraced the idea of collaborating with their children’s teachers in order to effectively implement the TEACCH programme. They made it a point to attend parent teacher meetings, assisted with homework and consulted with teachers about behavioural issues. Even the four parents who had problems with attending meetings because of their work schedules commented that they supported the school’s efforts in implementing the intervention programme by buying teaching aids and assisting with homework.

Comments from both teachers and parents were very critical of the bureaucratic functioning of the Ministry of Education, since it was reported to result in long waits for services and funds, with autistic students suffering as a consequence. They agreed that the nature of autistic children demands they should have their needs addressed speedily, and bureaucratic red tape was considered to make this very difficult.

The curriculum was a major issue that emerged from the investigation. It was an area of concern for both sets of participants in the research. At present there is no specific curriculum specified for children with autism by the Ministry of Education. A modified version of the general curriculum for all schools was therefore being used and teachers were allowed to make modifications and adjustments. For parents in the study, teaching of the current curriculum is not adequately resourced, either by personnel, or teaching equipment. Several parents commented that autistic children experience day to day living and sensory difficulties as well as social difficulties, and that these are not addressed by the current curriculum. Most parents expressed the view that they should be involved in the curriculum modification process. For them their inclusion

would help them to better understand their role in the implementation of the TEACCH intervention programme. This is supported by Slattery (2013) who stated that parents have an important part to play in making the curriculum more effective. He suggested that an effective curriculum should fully encapsulate parents’ roles including monitoring, resource provision and a good rapport between parents and teachers.

The intervention programme (TEACCH) selected for use in the school was generally viewed positively by parents and teachers, even though parents commented that they should perhaps have had other models to choose from. Teachers reported that the TEACCH programme was modified to suit the Barbadian education context. They kept most of the basic tenets, like structure, visual learning, individual focus, as well as goals for students that were within students’ areas of strength, talents and interests. These were reported to be stressed in the preparation of lessons and IEPs. Findings revealed, however, that an important element of the programme, adjustments and modifications of IEPs, could not be realized unless parents consulted with specialists and the information shared with teachers. Based on comments from teachers, they lacked much-needed teaching aids and equipment that support the TEACCH programme, which were not acquired because of lack of funding.

Another major inadequacy related to the implementation of the TEACCH programme was the absence of training for parents. The research literature indicates that parenting a child with autism can be a stressful and challenging experience (McStay, et al., 2015; Montes & Cianca, 2014). Findings from the current research revealed that many of the parents had elevated stress levels and problems in various areas of family functioning, including marital and family socialization. Both fathers and mothers expressed views about the social burden and stigma of having autistic children. Most of them reported being overwhelmed by the initial diagnosis, the daily struggle related to providing care, and worrying thoughts about their children’s development and future. Mothers, who were reported to typically be the primary caregivers, were forced to make career sacrifices and find employers who were more understanding about the demands of raising an autistic child.

Several parents also expressed a difference in their

spouse's behaviour following the birth of their autistic child. One parent described a lack of commitment on the part of the other parent to the home care of their child. In terms of stigma, parents, mainly mothers, preferred to stay at home rather than going out because they did not want to be called a bad mother who could not control their child. Five of the twelve parents reported that their children were not welcomed in their neighbourhood to play with the other children and were treated differently.

The literature suggests that training parents of autistic children can help them to support their children (Dawson-Squibb et al., 2020). However, findings from the current study revealed that there is a lack of training for parents of autistic children in Barbados. All of the parents in the study reported that there was no training offered following the diagnosis of having a child on the autistic spectrum. Much of what they learned about autism was from the internet and support groups online. They all considered that the Ministry of Education should have training programmes for parents to assist them in supporting language development and appropriate behaviour and other areas so that they could help their children to achieve realistic and meaningful steps in their development. This includes assisting with homework, reinforcing what is taught at school and being better equipped to assist their children and teachers implementing the TEACCH intervention program.

6. Conclusion

The study provided information on the perspectives of special education teachers and parents regarding the implementation of the TEACCH intervention programme with their autistic children. From the data provided there were facilitating factors as well as barriers identified by both sets of participants that impacted the effectiveness of the intervention programme and practices used. These were related to: challenges involved in implementing the programme; collaboration between parents and teachers; the unnecessary bureaucracy of the Ministry of Education; lack of focus on some important areas in the curriculum; frustrations experienced by teachers and parents; and the lack of opportunities for parent training.

Findings revealed that the bureaucratic procedures

followed by the Ministry of Education were a major barrier cited by both sets of participants to the effective execution of the intervention programme. Other frustrations expressed by parents were about lack of support from family members and from staff at the Ministry of Education, and a lack of acceptance of autistic children from the wider community. Teachers expressed frustration over the lack of support from specialists and teacher-aides and having insufficient funds to purchase needed teaching aids.

With regard to the relationship between teachers and parents, both parties indicated that a partnership existed that was based on trust, respect and communication. Both sets of participants commented that there should be choice regarding the intervention programme used at the school, but since the TEACCH programme was an international scientifically-based and recognized programme, it was deemed generally appropriate. Major concerns expressed by parents were the lack of focus on some important areas in the curriculum, such as life skills and work skills, as well as the lack of opportunities for parent training.

Consideration of these findings could be used to strengthen existing intervention programmes used at schools for autistic children, as well as assist in planning professional development for staff and collaboration with parents.

7. Limitations

The study was limited to one special school in Barbados, and involved only four special education teachers and twelve parents. The findings of the research therefore may not be representative of views about the TEACCH programme of all special education teachers and parents of children with autism, so should be considered tentatively until further more extensive studies are undertaken.

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