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Teaching Autistic Children in the Classroom

What methods can be used to teach Autistic children both inside and outside of a school environment? With the millions of teaching methods being used across the nation, it's hard to narrow down which are the most effective in the classroom. It gets even harder when working with special needs children. Autism, "a disorder that severely impairs development of a person's ability to communicate, interact with other people, and maintain contact with the outside world"(Wikipedia) , is being seen more and more throughout the country. Autism occurs during infancy and the child often shows little or no interest others. The child often will engage in repetitious activity or become upset with minor changes in routine.

There is a common misconception about children with Autism. The misconception is that children with Autism can not learn how to read. While children with Autism may have a difficult time with phonics instruction and comprehension, they can learn to read. They can also learn how to do many other things that they may not have the ability to do as children. Learning to communicate and write are also two big things that autistic children are working on daily. This brings up the question of how literacy skills should be introduced in a classroom with autistic children.

A study was conducted in 2005 with preschool children with Autism. They found that providing a literacy rich environment for preschoolers with communication impairments, the children increased their understanding of literacy behaviors. Starting early with autistic children is the main key needed to ensure that their skills will improve. Because it is now known that the earlier you start working with autistic children, the better the chance of them leading a completely normal life. To help intervene in the child's educational activities, there are four main methods of teaching autistic children while still starting early. They include: Applied Behavior Analysis, Phonics-Instruction approach, sign language and Milieu teaching.

Applied Behavior Analysis means to teach the prerequisites to make it possible for an Autistic child to learn 'naturally.' This can be used to increase or decrease a particular behavior, to improve the

quality of a behavior, to stop an old behavior, or to teach a new. In order for this type of program to run smoothly there are six essential elements that need to occur. The program should be applied, behavioral, analytical, technological, systematic, and it should display some generality. Overall, this program is a basic effort in teaching all the necessities and building blocks of communication.

Next, is the Phonics-Instructional approach. This is basically strengths in visual learning and decoding skills. This might include something called Analytical phonics. This means that children learn through building bank of known words and creating new ones. There are a few objectives when using the Phonics-Instructional approach. The first objective is to distinguish the onset and rhyme in spoken and written words. The second, distinguish words that belong to the same rhyme onset analogies. The last objective is to Substitute consonant sounds in context to form new words in a given word family. An example of this may be using the traditional phonics programs while being helped along the way.

The next method is using sign language. Teaching sign language along with speech will likely accelerate a person's ability to speak. Self-injury and tantrums in children with Autism is sometimes related to their inability to communicate. This can be eliminated through ASL. Sign language has been used for many years and it has never failed in teaching children another way of communicating. The great thing about sign language is that it can be learned as an infant. Some are teaching their babies sign language even if they do not have any problems communicating.

The next method of teaching autistic children is called Milieu Teaching. This is An early intervention method that involves one-on-one services for both the child and the parents. It builds the first stage of communication. It also builds motivation and awareness of a communication partner. The goal is to help a child make frequent, clear requests and comments with gestures and to look at the person they are communicating with. To help enforce this method, teachers use social games, follow the child's lead, and set the stage for communication. Milieu teaching is a new, but frequently used method that more and more people are becoming familiar with.

The methods for teaching autistic children are growing but it is till hard to find the most effective methods. This is why teachers of special education children often share what methods seem to be working the best in their individual classrooms. There is no stopping point when it comes to learning and this is why it is extremely important to continue the search for effective methods of teaching autistic children.

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Reflection:

Throughout this Literacies in Today’s World class, I have learned so much that has not only helped me in everyday life but also in all the other classes I am taking. Through this signature assessment project I have learned more about the field that I am interested in. I came into the education program thinking that I might possibly want to do special education. This project gave me some insight into some of the things I would be handed as a special education teacher. Not only will the main topic of my paper, methods of teaching autistic children, help me to realize if I am really interested in teaching special education, but it will also inform me some detailed methods of doing it. Overall, this project in specific was very convenient and helpful for me and my schooling. The entire class of Literacies in Today’s World was also very helpful. I also found myself knowing things for other classes that I learned in this one. Because literacy is so broad yet so important, it is hard not to use the information in every day life. Some specific things that I used outside of the classroom was the information about politics and literacy and the information about ASL. I was both interested in these subjects and surprised at how often it came up in the other classes I was taking this semester. I felt that this class was made to be helpful in several areas

because of the broadness of the course. This is the main reason that I was never uninterested in the subject matter of this class. Overall, I believe that both the signature assessment and the entire course were extremely helpful to me not only in the class but outside of the classroom as well.