

# The use of visual aids for children with autism within a preschool setting: A teacher's perspective

## Abstract:

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the use of visual aids with children with autism within both autism specific preschool classrooms and mainstream preschool classrooms from a teacher's perspective. Both classrooms had children with autism attending when the research was conducted. Qualitative interview schedules were conducted with participants from both settings. The research sample consisted of three autism specific preschool teachers and three mainstream preschool teachers. Results showed that there was a significant difference with the use of visual aids between the two preschool settings. Findings suggest that the autism specific preschool teachers showed a higher degree of knowledge and experience with all visual aids within the preschool setting.

## Introduction

The research proposed is important because it will investigate the use of visual aids to see if they are as important as previous research have found (Flippin et al, 2010, Banda, 2009, Pierce et al, 2013). It also looks to gain a complete understanding of visual aids across two settings and to see if there are any differences.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the development of the brain during the first 3 years of a child's life. Autism affects a child's communication skills, social interaction skills and can cause restricted, repetitive and stereotype patterns of behaviour.

The primary use of visual aids is for communication and understanding of tasks. The most prominent visual aid used to increase communication is the augmentative communication system known as Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) (see figure 1.1).

A visual schedule helps provides predictability for a person with autism and also helps them transition effectively throughout the day (see figure 1.2).

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## Results

Themes which emerged fro the data included:

- 1.Types of visual aids
- 2.Use of visual aids
- 3.Teacher's experience/knowledge of visual aids
- 4.Teacher's ideal environment for teaching children with ASD

## Discussion

This piece of research looked to gain a better understanding of the use of visual aids for children with ASD in both a mainstream preschool and an autism specific preschool. The conclusion of this research proved that visual aids have a significant affect on the daily lives of children with ASD. Not only do they act as a communication tool, they also provide stability and structure for the individual with ASD. The conclusion stated that there is a clear need for visual aids to be integrated into preschool settings for children with ASD.

## References

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Figure 1.1: PECS book



## Method

The method used for this piece of research was qualitative analysis. Interviews were used as they allowed for in-depth information to be obtained.

The interviews were recorded using a mobile device, transcribed verbatim and analysed by the researcher.

The participants include 5 females and 1 male between 22 and 33 years of age. They were all working in a preschool setting with at least one child with autism attending.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings were analysed and of distinct themes were constructed.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, debriefing and all interviews were stored on a password protected USB.

Figure 1.2: Visual schedule

