

PDIG Final Report

Project Description:

The *'evidence-based practices for students with ASD'* PDIG has resulted in a trajectory of professional learning. It has provided a structure and setting to create stronger awareness with regards to the ASD learner, in line with evidence-based practices. Overall, benefits were observed in terms of networking, the sharing of materials (including data sheets, examples of assessment tools and skills tracking sheets) and the opportunity to learn more about the characteristics of ASD and evidence-based practice.

The evidence gathered through pre and post-tests, as well as participant feedback, would indicate that the team has increased their awareness and efficacy with the principles of behaviour (i.e. reinforcement and extinction) and evidence-based teaching techniques.

Two of our team members ended up on leaves in the middle of the PDIG and so we were down two members. This proved to be a challenge, as the teammates found it really helpful to speak with and bounce ideas off one another. Another relative challenge was in the area of data collection. Progress was made in this area, however the group did demonstrate a need for further opportunities with bringing evidence back to the table, in order to come up with effective interventions. As it is requisite to meet learners where they are at, we spent more time exploring more manageable ways to collect data.

The meeting protocol of our sessions was consistent throughout the PDIG. They consisted of pre and post-test 'check for understanding', delivery of new information, examples/activities, debriefs and interpretation of data. Our fifth day looked different, as we used that day to observe certain specialized classes at Crestview Elementary School, in order to see some of the strategies and ideas that we spoke about in person.

Topics that were included in our sessions included: characteristics of individuals with ASD, misconceptions of applied behaviour analysis, principles of behaviour, functions of behaviour, antecedents and consequences, factors that affect the effectiveness of reinforcement, schedules of reinforcement, functional behaviour assessments and how to come up with an effective behaviour intervention plan, generalization and maintenance of newly acquired skills, evidence-based teaching strategies and techniques to promote communication in our learners. For a more comprehensive description of our time together, please see the journal entries attached.

Project Goals:

Some of the goals in this project were met, in that participants gained much valuable knowledge on evidence-based practices and feel that they are able to better understand challenging behaviours in their students.

In future collaborations, the goal would be to increase the amount of data collection in order to guide our interventions. The team members found it difficult to track data in the moment and to get their school-teams on board, as they did not understand the benefit. This goes to show the work that needs to be done in both collaboration within school teams and education on best practice.

The teachers expressed that it would have been beneficial to incorporate more hands-on opportunities to observe behaviour tracking in real time, as well as to try out teaching strategies and receive feedback.

Project Outcomes:

Teachers who participated in the PDIG reflected that they are able to incorporate some of the evidence-based strategies discussed into their teaching, as well as to act as a resource for other teachers in their schools. It has been observed that the participants have a much better understanding of the functions of behaviour and how to use reinforcement in order to increase target behaviours.

Having teachers coming from diverse backgrounds (regular setting, resource, special education and CASP) was very helpful from a capacity building standpoint. They were able to see different classroom realities and learn how different needs are being met.

Reinvestment:

The learning achieved through this project will benefit the educational community at large through a ripple effect. The teachers involved in this project have already been promoting strategies discussed within the PDIG with other teachers, attendants and special education technicians at their schools, in order to encourage best practices.

It would be recommended that other teams carry out a similar project. We know that the needs in our educational communities are growing and so is the need for evidence-based practice. As we know, time is valuable for our learners and we must use the best available evidence that we have to guide our interventions.

This project could be improved in two ways; first, it would be beneficial to include other members of the school-team, such as attendants and special education technicians. The teachers who took part in the PDIG felt that it would have been really helpful for their colleagues to receive the training and a chance to discuss how they can bring these strategies back to the classroom together. Second, it would be beneficial for the sessions to take part at a school in order to provide the participants with more hands-on opportunities.