

One-to-One Assistant Engagement in Autism Support Classrooms

Emily Ramos-Niaves

Ball State University

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“In education one-to-one assistants can be defined as paraprofessionals who work under the supervision of licensed professionals to deliver direct services with special health care needs,” as stated by the article *One-to-One Assistant Engagement in Autism Support Classrooms* (Azad, Gazi F. pg 339). This article is relating the importance of classroom and one-to-one assistants within an Autism support classroom. It examines the percentage one-to-one assistants are engaged in instruction and support for those students with Autism. It seems that most schools do not know how to effectively utilize their one-to-one assistants and problems or complications occur because of this. Without the knowledge of what the one-to-one assistants are meant to do, they make it up as they go and it affects the classroom dynamic. This can easily be solved with an education on what one-to-one assistants do and how to utilize them. Explaining the expectations of one-to-one assistants can improve the relationship between professionals and the cohesion of the classroom. One problem that occurs most often is the intimidation that one-to-one assistants feel towards licensed teachers and tend to go to classroom assistants for help due to the commonality they feel with them.

The article then breaks down the study it conducts over the issue presented. The study consisted of 46 kindergarten-through-second-grade (K-2) autism support classrooms (Azad, Gazi F. pg 339). Within those classrooms are 46 teachers, 46 classroom assistants, and 46 one-to-one assistants. They included an observation of the classroom and detailed notes on how the classroom was set up along with a survey that the teacher, assistant teacher, and one-to-one assistant were to complete. They were also required to fill out certain a Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)–Education Form and be recorded on video for data analysis. The results concluded that while the teacher and the assistant teacher spent over 90% of the time engaged in the instruction and with the student, the one-to-one assistant spent only 58% of the time engaged

with the students. This means that the other 30% of the time they were sitting around without any students or material involvement. This can be explained by the one-to-one assistant not having the proper training or supervision (Azad, Gaizi F. pg 341).

From what I read in this article, it seems to me that one-to-one assistants are underutilized and lack proper training needed for the job. Without the proper training and supervision, the one-to-one assistant cannot effectively do their job. It is stated in the article that, “special education teachers spend about 2% of their time to individual supervision of one-to-one assistants” (Azad, Gaizi F. pg 341). Training the teacher as well can help to improve the engagement of the one-to-one assistant. If the teacher is trained on how to instruct and supervise the one-to-one assistant, then the classroom dynamic will be more cohesive and it will help both professionals to be more involved with the students. In some cases, the accountability may be low based on the school system and how it is run.

The engagement is key, but engagement is also hard to determine. This is because they are there for the student, but they also try to interact less and less with the student for social benefits among peers. According to the article, better trained classroom assistants serve as role models to the one-to-one assistants (Azad, Gaizi F. pg 342). Just like teachers, if they show control of the classroom and engage the class the students will participate more. The same applies to the one-to-one assistants. I have seen this within the classroom when peer mentoring the high school students in my school. When the teacher is engaged, the students tend to pay more attention. The teacher and one-to-one assistants work together to keep an eye on the students and each other to keep everyone focused.

There is very little research being done on this subject. There are many factors that come into play when conducting research on this topic. It is hard to accurately measure the test

subjects' personalities and desire to learn. It can also be hard to determine whether the one-to-one assistant is purposefully giving the student space to interact with their peers or if they are just not doing their job sufficiently. In my own experience, it is difficult to teach a student who doesn't want the help or attention drawn to them. When a student doesn't want to learn they will not focus and it takes other strategies to get them to work. Some students feel uncomfortable and don't want any attention drawn to them. This makes the job of the one-to-one assistant difficult and they have to work with the student as well as give them their space.

If utilized correctly, one-to-one assistants can greatly and efficiently impact the classroom. For this to be done, there needs to be education on what one-to-one assistants are and how to use them. One-to-one assistants also need to be supervised along with the students. Students, teachers, and one-to-one assistants all working together can benefit the classroom at its entirety. When one-to-one assistants aren't efficiently used or monitored some students can be left behind. There are simple fixes to this problem, teachers and assistants just need to make the time to be properly trained. Without this training one-to-one assistants aren't as effective as they should be and the students are the ones suffering for it.

Works Cited

Azad, G. F., Locke, J., Downey, M. M., Xie, M., & Mandell, D. S. (2015). One-to-One Assistant Engagement in Autism Support Classrooms. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 38(4).

