

Public Abstract

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Title:A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES FACING EDUCATORS OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of various educators charged with the task of educating students with ASD within three public Midwestern school districts. Through the lens of social justice theory, this phenomenological study sought to further the understanding of the unique and varied needs of both the ASD student subgroup, and the multiple school stakeholders charged with providing equity within ASD education. The researcher examined the views and perceptions of special education administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals with regard to challenges and obstacles to ASD equity, and methods used to overcome those obstacles.

Participant responses demonstrated that the social justice principles of distribution, recognition, and opportunities (Hytten & Bettez, 2011), are reflected in the practices of ASD educators at varying levels. However, within certain school personnel, a lack of knowledge and valuation of students with ASD is still prevalent. Therefore, the implications of this study demonstrate a need for K-12 school districts and higher education institutions to offer more opportunities for educators of students with ASD to learn about their unique traits and strategies the study findings and research have shown improve learner outcomes for students across the autism spectrum.