Learning About One’s Self: Experiences of Students with ASD in a University Intro to ASD Class

Presenters:
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Cody (Last name hidden)
Franklin (Last name hidden)
John (Last name hidden)

Introduction to ASD Course

• Radford University
• 400-level course
• 22-24 students
  • Special education
  • General education
  • Psychology
  • Speech language pathology
  • Other
  • OCTP
• Six students from OCTP have taken the class since 2010.

On-Campus Transition Partnership

Goal: To expand inclusive placement and service options for local public school students with disabilities, ages 18 – 22, through participation in a wide range of activities on the university campus and on-going transition planning.
This is a Post High School experience for students who continue to qualify for Special Education Services.

OCTP Program Components

• University Coursework
• Employment Experiences
• Paid Employment
• Recreation & Fitness
• Peer Mentorships
• Independent Living Skills
• Community Experiences
• IEP & Transition Planning
• Collaborations:
  • Music Therapy
  • Occupational Therapy
  • Recreation Therapy

Franklin’s Insight: Why did you want to take the class
Accommodations available

For every student
- Overhead lights off, windows/natural lighting
- Fidget toys
- Candy bag
- May leave whenever a break is needed
- Pace, rock, etc. at back of room

For students from the OCTP (and others with ADA accommodations)
- Adapted tests and assignments
- Read aloud/Private testing
- Support staff (provided by the local school division)

John’s insight:

- Leslie asked: Does anything worry you about taking this class?
  “Kind of hope I am not too loud when I get happy I get louder I hope I don’t interrupt so much I have to leave the building and go to school”

I reiterated...ok to leave...

His OT interpreted: John was worried I would send him out of the room/make him leave due to his loudness
- NOPE...We are a learning community
- John replied to me:
  “Thanks to. Saying that yes
  Only if the kids want my goodness.
  Suits me to be the teacher’s Pet”

Since then: John does get loud.
- Aide rubs his back, etc.
- I prompt him (and others) to take deep breaths.
- John chooses to take breaks.

Follow up conversation with John (after being in the class for 2 weeks)

- Johnna: Now that you are in the autism class, how do you feel about it?
- Johnna: Does anything worry you about the class?
- John: Do I go anywhere after this...I kind of think I should go to more class about it....one isn’t enough.

Help me understand my autism: Cody’s insight

Did the class help you understand autism?
- Yes.
If yes, do you remember how?
- Being smart. Being real loud. It’s ok to be loud.

Everyone benefits: Cody’s insight
Classmates’ perspectives

• Tiffany – Supported Cody “I actually took the autism class with Cody - he showed me up on a regular basis!” Every time someone asks how I got to where I am I always share about Cody!

Everyone benefits: John’s insight

• I only have good dreams of being normal and living a united? Life proud inheriting host. Of Angels protecting me as if I can do matter?
  • Some great thing to help the rest of them see us as they see other kids nothing nothing Autistic

NOT about being the focus:

Leslie asked John: If appropriate may I share that you have autism and perhaps some things about you? For instance, you just told me you get louder when you get happy. That would be a good example for the class.

Help please. Instead of: Kind of Dissection. Of me And my behaviors only piece in puzzle. Of who I got inside my active soul
Long to move More into goodness. To Share knowledge and. Really goodness much

Rebekah’s perspective as a classmate

• “Paul” offered a lot of insight and he gave pretty explicit examples which helped us understand the content Dr. Daniel was teaching
• Would have been better if we had a “stock” 5 minutes “What applied to you today” so Paul wasn’t put on the spot
• Not for him to be a mannequin
• I would always prefer to have someone with a disability in my EDSP classes
• Group work: I learned more having him there.

Perspectives from this semester: 20 for credit + John auditing

1. How did having a person with autism in the class affect your educational experience?
   • All students reported this to be a positive experience and many noted that it would help prepare them for teaching.
   • Descriptors included: first-hand experience, enlightening, fun, insightful, realistic learning, personal, eye-opening, helpful

2. How did having a person with ASD in the class affect your understanding of autism?
   • All students reported that it significantly enhanced their understanding of autism.
   Descriptors included
   • It made what we were learning more real and more understandable.
   • He could tell us his own experiences, stories.
   • It allowed me to open up and not judge someone for being a little different.
   • Allowed me to understand how much support a person might need.
   • Positive energy, funny, connections, realistic
3. Would you change anything about the experience?

- 13 students said they would not change anything about having John in the class.
- 4 students said they would like to have heard from him more.
- 1 student said they would have preferred that he only be in the class “sometimes.”

Favorite quote: I loved being able to be in this class and experience this.

Our evolution as teachers

- Leslie: I realized I should be asking these students what they wanted to get out of the class
- Johnna: I realized that my students might take the class content personally and I needed to prepare them for what they might see and hear. I also realized that having my students in the class could afford the more typical students opportunities to see instruction and accommodations in action.

Modification samples

- Class participation
  - Story about John
- Tests

1. Why does it seem easier to write than to speak?

“Talking is harder to get the right words in order Typing forces my mind to focus on one thought right now I get excited and my mind dreads to slow down to get the words out really slowly how good it feels to just go cool think of water from a sink trying to go in the glass And trying to go in the bottle It spills out all over the bottle Then you lose half of it but you get it all in the glass Helps my mind get out same thought but focused aned understandable like so people can hear my heart”

Closing words from Cody

- From his autobiography project

“As I end my paper I want you to know kids with autism are smart. Having autism is like having your first Christmas gift; you want what everyone else is getting but when you open it, it’s not it. That just means of course you want to be like everyone else, but you still love the gift you get. I know I got the “special or different” gift but this is me, still a real person.”

Homework and Projects