

This essay will consider a case study of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), by firstly describing what ASD is, and the traits in which autism presents, focussing on the communication barriers in which are evident in children with ASD. Working from the conceptualisation that the term ethnocentrism relates to a particular group of people within a population, this essay will focus on a child with ASD and the barriers that they face within society due to segregated schooling, exploring how communication challenges create a separate culture between children with ASD and neurotypical children. Rudy (2020) describes 'neurotypical' as a child who does not have a diagnosis of autism or "any other intellectual or developmental difference", who has the ability to think, perceive and behave in a way that is considered 'normal' by society and it is in this way it will be used throughout this essay. This essay will give particular attention to the argument between children with ASD being in a mainstream school setting, or being placed within a segregated unit, and whether it is this segregation that creates social exclusion as opposed to the children themselves.

The U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2012) (USDHHS) explain that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a formulated spectrum that encapsulates a set of developmental disabilities that can cause challenges including social, communication and behavioural, in which, a person with ASD processes information within their brain differently to those who do not have ASD. USDHHS (2012) continue to explain that ASD presents differently within each individual, affecting them in different ways although they may share symptoms, which includes difficulties with social interaction. There are differences in when symptoms start, how severe they are and whether they are presented with other symptoms (The U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). ASD can present before the age of three, although severe ASD children can present signs of future problems within the first year of their life. Paul (2008) explains that ASD does not have a preference on race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, however, ASD is five times more common among boys than among girls. USDHHS (2012) also explain that children with ASD are often self-absorbed, displaying the appearance that they are in their own private world with the inability to effectively communicate or interact with other children and adults. Furthermore, Paul (2008) highlights that children with ASD can have difficulty developing language skills, and decoding what other people say to them, whether this be verbally or non-verbally, such as through the means of hand gestures, eye contact and facial expressions. Considering that ASD is a spectrum, not all children will have difficulty with language, as communication presents in a variety of ways depending on the child's intellectual and social development. At one end of the spectrum, a child may present

without the ability to speak, whilst on the other end, a child may have a mature vocabulary with the ability to talk about subjects in great detail (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). From a communication perspective, children with ASD present with little or no problems pronouncing words, however, the complication presents when attempting to use language effectively when communicating with other people. USDHHS (2012) suggest that this is because children with ASD struggle to understand both the meaning and the rhythm of the words and sentences, however, they may also struggle to understand body language and nuances of vocal tones. Labov and Torres (2020) explains that those who are on the autistic spectrum can only evaluate the surface form of language, without understanding the more abstract, structural features that language presents itself with. The National Autistic Society (2021) demonstrates that a child with ASD can find it difficult to ‘filter’ conversation, suggesting that when a child listens to a conversation, he or she will find it difficult to filter out the “less important information”, or if there is too much information, children can experience an ‘overload’ which halts all further information being processed, allowing for the complexity of communication within autism to be understood.

Autism is a disorder that is present all around the world, it is not confined to climate or class structure, it is important to consider autism as a cultural aspect, that is autism as a ‘culture within a culture’. Deweerdt (2012) documents that in rural South Africa, autism can often be missed because of cultural ‘norms’ that share similar traits with autism. Deweerdt (2012) explains that it is not accustome for children to look adults directly in the eye because it is considered disrespectful, however, when considering the traits that present within children with ASD, it can be seen that a lack of direct eye contact is a symptom of ASD and is in fact something that clinicians look for when diagnosing children. Deweerdt (2012) also suggests that finger-pointing in order to draw attention to something or conversing with an adult as a peer which are commonplace within the Western culture, are also included when children are being screened for autism. Norbury and Sparks (2012) explains that the majority of autism research takes place within the West, where researchers and professionals have a particular view of what autism is, how it presents, the child’s behaviour and how they interact with adults, with other cultures perhaps having a very different view of how children behave. Deweerdt (2012) explains that it is this viewpoint that makes it difficult to use behavioural diagnostic tests for autism in countries where the traits of autism may look or be different from the Western culture, continuing to examine the relevance of culture to autism, Deweerdt (2012) explains that the very relevance was ignored, with some researchers suggesting that autism had

a direct link to modernity and westernisation, ignoring other cultural areas because of their customs, however, Daley (2002) argues that autism is a biological disorder and its expressions are the same everywhere around the world, even if it is not as obvious.

Becerra, Ehrenstein and Ritz (2014) consider ASD and their perceived connections to race, Ethnicity and Nativity, explaining that it is the maternal race/ethnicity and nativity that are all associated with a child's ASD diagnosis and severity with an increased risk of being diagnosed with ASD in children of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) mothers, compared to white mothers. With children born to BAME mothers being at a higher risk of exhibiting an ASD phenotype with both high functioning and low function abilities. Becerra, Ehrenstein and Ritz (2014) explain that epidemiology has a long-term tradition of using studies into migration to gain knowledge into how environmental and genetic factors that contribute to disease risk in the population, however, in contrast, Furfaro (2017) argues that ASD is becoming more common, this is regarded less of socioeconomic class, with overall black and Hispanic children being less likely than their white peers to have an autism diagnosis, suggesting that in America, persistent racial disparities are considered, as white children are assumed to have access to good schools and medical care, arguing that autism is not diagnosed within children from BAME backgrounds because they are in a lower social class, without the same access to health care professionals that would provide an ASD diagnosis, creating a unfair assumption that autism is more common within a certain ethnicity.

Although ASD is well researched, there is very little theory as to why children are born with ASD. It appears that more effort has been placed to understand early interventions, with Goldstein (2002) and Rogers (2006) considering possible theories for interventions of children who present difficulty with communication within the early years of life. Autism communication interventions are separated into three categories, didactic, naturalistic and developmental/problematic. Goldstein (2002) and Rogers (2006) describe didactic methods to be based on behaviourists theory, taking advantage of behavioural technologies to reinforce the frequency of the desired target area. Naturalistic method attempts to incorporate the behaviourist principles within natural environments, however, exchanging the tangible reinforcers of the didactic method, referring to the neutralist method as "intrinsic" which includes achieving a certain goal through communication, prompting the child to initiate conversation rather than creating a responder only role. Developmental or pragmatic methods emphasise the more functional component of communication rather than have a sole purpose

of speech as a goal. This method focuses on the use of gestures, gaze and vocalisation, with Goldstein (2002) believing that it is these gestures that are necessary precursors to speech production, allowing their theory of teaching and encouraging speech from a young age can have positive effects when the child gets older.

Rhea Paul (2008) explains that communication deficits are some of the core symptoms of ASD. Children with ASD can be slow at learning to talk or may not talk at all, with the functional language used at school age providing a better example of what level of the communication aspect of autism the child may have. Paul (2008) suggests that both fluency and flexibility of expressive language are 'key components' when distinguishing between 'high functioning' and 'low functioning' within school aged children and it is because of the centrality of the communication barriers within the expression of children with ASD that it is imperative that it is addressed within the educational setting. Reagan (2012) considers that children who have ASD commonly experience a barrier to education, suggesting that they exhibit "preservative and self-stimulatory behaviours". Reagan (2012) explains that it can be difficult to incorporate ASD children within mainstream classroom teaching, suggesting that it is the individual list of symptoms that each child with ASD possess that determines whether they can be taught in a 'traditional' way, or whether their symptoms marginalise them in a way that requires them to have a greater support system within their educational journey. Goodman and Williams (2007, p.53) explains that children who have ASD with a low cognitive ability not only need a structured support system within their educational journey in order to benefit them, it is also because children with ASD within the mainstream school setting could potentially create barriers for neurotypical children. Goodman and Williams (2007, p.53) suggest that the 'deficits' of children with ASD "can jeopardise student learning, not only because they interfere with relationships, but also because they interfere with the learning environment". Reagan (2012) argues that students with ASD are too often placed within a segregated 'special' school, suggesting that because these schools only contain other children with disabilities, children with ASD are only learning from other children with disabilities as opposed to their non-disabled peers, creating a further barrier to education for both the child with ASD and also their neurotypical peers. Eldar, Talmor and Zukerman (2010, p.98) argues that not only do the children with ASD benefit from being included within a general educating setting, but also their peers are benefitted from being 'exposed' to children who have different temperaments and learning styles to themselves.

Brede *et al* (2017) argue that all children have the right to an education and to be included within a school setting, yet children who are on the autistic spectrum, already burdened with poor social outcomes and susceptible to poor health, are at an increased risk of school exclusion. Simonoff *et al* (2008) suggests that it is issues like these that contribute to the poor mental health often recognised within children with ASD, in turn creating negative consequential behaviour that they will take into their adult life. Brede *et al* (2017) suggest that children with ASD are more likely to be excluded for a fixed term or permanently excluded from mainstream schools, which Moore (2016) indicates is a school's response to being ill equipped or not trained to provide education to a child with ASD. By excluding them from school, Moore (2016) suggests that it is only encouraging children to move schools or be educated at home, both of which are made increasingly more difficult by the communication and social difficulties of ASD, contributing to the negative connotations that a child with ASD has, creating a further disadvantage and consequential factors, including their mental health. Hui Min and Lay Wah (2011) understand the difficulty of ensuring that children with ASD are not marginalised from their educational needs, explaining that the successful inclusion of children with ASD in both regular and special educational settings is becoming a critical issue that needs to be addressed, putting specific emphasis on the importance of the child's ASD diagnosis not being a barrier to their education, rather the importance of people who do not have ASD to understand how communication is the critical element within teaching. Hui Min and Lay Wah (2011) suggest that teachers from both mainstream and special educational schools should develop and use compensatory strategies in order to facilitate a child with ASD to create a better understanding with important implications on promoting sustainable inclusive education for all children.

Locke *et al* (2010) discuss communication barriers as not only being within the educational setting, but also on a personal level to children with ASD, suggesting that by default, children with ASD have poor peer relationships despite their age or ability due to their lower communication and linguistical skills. Locke *et al* (2010) Explain that children with ASD have spent the majority of their childhood at a disadvantage, as they may have had limited experiences with their peers, with a subordinate understanding of the meaning of friendship. Considering Goldman and Williams (2007) theory, that children with ASD should be kept in mainstream school in order to have equal education and to learn from their peers, and vice versa, Locke *et al* (2010) suggests that this can often have a negative effect. Children and adolescents with ASD within the mainstream school setting may have daily opportunities to

socialise with their neurotypical ‘class-mates’, building up their social networks (Staub and Peck,1994). However, Locke *et al* (2010) explains that these opportunities are not always positive, as the social setting may be overwhelming to both children with ASD and neurotypical children because they both have different cultures in respect of the way that they view the world.

Decker, Seitz and Kulwicksi (2015) explore the need for children with ASD to attend ‘charter schools’ or ‘special units’ which are dedicated specifically to children with autism. Focussing on the level of support provided. Decker, Switzerland and Kulwicksi (2015) consider ‘applied behaviour analysis’ to tailor an educational package to each child within the school, based on their individual abilities. This is an example of a ‘niche charter school’, which is a specified charter school that is designed around a particular culture, in this case, the culture is autism, Fox and Buchanan (2014) identified that within the niche charter school definition there are sub-categories. One in which is “ethnocentric niche charter school”, arguing that they provide a nurturing ethos within which aim to educate a particular group of children. Niche charter schools create a segregation between children with autism and neurotypical children, creating a formal separation between two cultures, children with ASD being one culture and neurotypical children being another culture. Fox and Buchanan (2014) argue that the need for an ethnocentrism niche charter school is a response to an ‘underserved traditional school’, by providing education within a service gap to children who are culturally different. This allows culturally different children to learn in a safe environment, highlighting the failure of mainstream schools in their accommodation the cultural learning patterns of their student bodies, arguing that the majority of mainstream schools are Eurocentric, following Western European curriculum, which traditionally assumes that all children learn in the same, ‘traditional’ way.

Haiduc (2009) closely researches the prevalence of children with autism in Romania, considering that children with ASD in Romania are invisible within their society. Haiduc (2009) believes that children with ASD should not be segregated into niche charter schools, they should however, be integrated into the mainstream educational system. Haiduc (2009) argues that although children with autism are different in many ways from neurotypical children, they are not in fact culturally different, they only have different educational learning needs, suggesting that their learning differences are not wrong and that children with ASD should not be excluded from mainstream education and segregated within social institutions.

Haiduc (2009) believes that mainstream school is an essential institution for the development of any child, closing the gap between the cultural differences between children with ASD and neurotypical children, even if the child with ASD is typically 'different' from a neurotypical child, considering the viewpoint that neurotypical people should learn to value the differences between the two in order to integrate the children with ASD fully into their society and community. Smith (2006, p.435) declares that it is fundamentally imperative that children with ASD experience "normative, programmed and supported interactions with typically developing peers" suggesting that this will provide the child with ASD with 'appropriate role models' allowing them to observe and learn 'normal' behaviour and learn how neurotypical children interact with each other.

Amanda Baggs (2007) documents her life centred on her diagnosis of autism, explaining that the 'language' that she uses is not based on determining specific words or visual symbols for others to interpret her, but instead her 'language' is about "being in a constant conversation with every aspect of her environment". Baggs (2007) Further explains that translating autism is a foreign culture that is strange and unusual to neurotypical people, it is because they "do not understand its norms, and do not want to learn its norms" (Baggs, 2007), creating the cultural difference between those with ASD and those who are neurotypical. Silverman (2008) explains that social scientists have presented a biosocial construct of 'autistic culture' combining medical definitions of ASD, the ideology of those individuals who have a diagnosis of ASD, descriptions of autism within publications, both peer reviewed and not and also the representation of autism in population culture. Research by the Intercultural Education in the Post-primary School (2006) argues that in order to value diversity, we must first accept and respect difference. This is prevalent when considering "that intercultural education is the education which respects the diversity of human life and makes humans aware of the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and world view" (Intercultural Education in the Post-primary School, 2006), suggesting that by doing this, humans are able to educate themselves culturally and enrich their own individual viewpoints, awakening their pro-social behaviour (Schwartz, 1999).

Autism may be one of the last great prejudices that we, as a society must understand and respect. Historically we have been taught that the 'norm' is a person who is neurotypical, able-bodied and educated, however, in an environment of autism, autism is the norm. Distinguishing between the cultural differences of ASD and neurotypical, in many aspects, cultural differences

create a spectrum of its own, despite the ethnocentrism that is displayed within society today, autism is not a foreign culture to those who deal with it on a daily basis, yet cultural relativism seems perplexed as intolerances take generations to overcome, with autism framed as a disability and mainstream theories presenting autism as a deficit, the autistic strengths are often overlooked. Cosden *et al* (2006) argue that there is a realistic hope that children with autism can not only have positive experiences within mainstream school settings, but also have fewer adverse experiences, by focussing on their strengths not their weaknesses, a child with ASD has the ability to excel in areas other than communication and socialisation, for example, Albert Einstein, perhaps the most famous scientist and mathematician, displayed a number of telling characteristics which experts today believe that he was somewhere on the autism spectrum (Applied Behaviour Analysis, nd). Charles Darwin, a leading psychiatrist, had traits of someone on the autism spectrum, Andy Warhol, Sir Isaac Newton, Steve Jobs, all considered geniuses within their own rights, yet hold the stigma of being considered ASD (Applied Behaviour Analysis, nd). Thus, concluding that no matter what diagnosis an individual receives, it is the perception of that diagnosis that interprets the life choices, the beliefs of those that are put in a position to make decisions on their behalf, can map the future, the school that is attended, can create barriers between cultures instead of embracing differences, the 'norm' is to marginalise and other, creating further barriers in which children with ASD must face.

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