



Autism Intervention Research
Network on Physical Health

October 2022 Webinar

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Laura Crane

Evaluating the use
of flexible seating
for neurotypical
and neurodivergent
children



Centre for Research in Autism and Education

At CRAE, we...

- Conduct high quality scientific research that has a positive impact on the lives of autistic children, young people and adults
- Meaningfully engage with the autistic and broader autism communities to shape the future direction of autism research



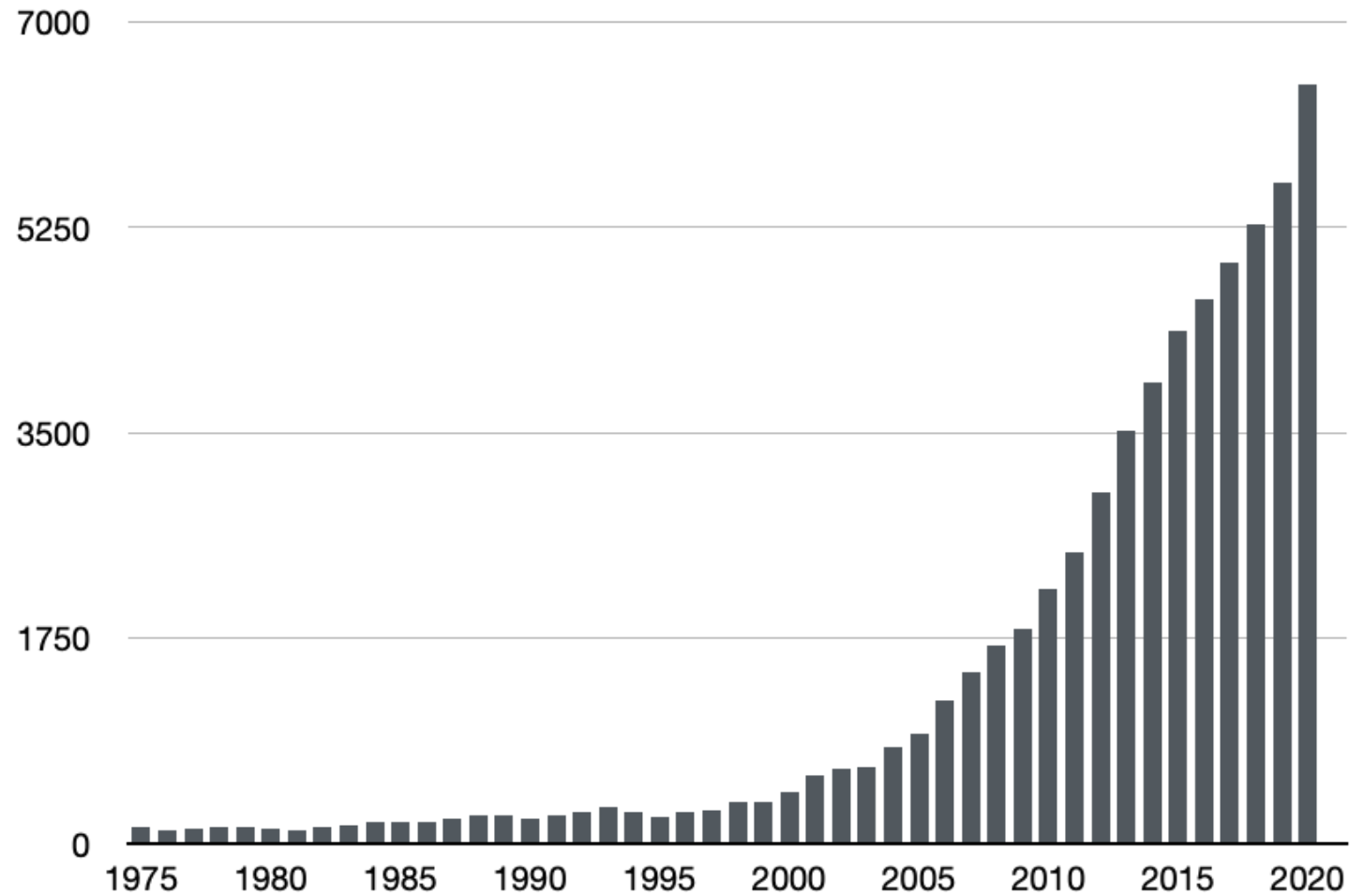
A FUTURE MADE TOGETHER

SHAPING AUTISM
RESEARCH IN THE UK



Dramatic rise in
autism
publications

...but a huge
translational gap



Is there a
role for
more
participatory
research?

Special issue article

**Commentary – bridging the
research and practice gap in
autism: The importance of
creating research partnerships
with schools**

Sarah Parsons
University of Southampton, UK



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Pan London Autism Schools Network-Research

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"It should not be beyond education authorities, teachers and school staff to create greater opportunities for autistic children..."

inside plasn-r

The Pan London Autism Schools Network (PLASN) is a network of schools from across London that all specialise in autism. The PLASN-Research group is a subgroup of PLASN that provides links between schools and autism researchers (from a range of universities). This research-practice link enables us to identify topics for research that have a positive impact on the educational experiences of autistic children and young people. By working collaboratively, we ensure that we provide evidence-based practice in our schools.

In this second issue of the PLASN-Research newsletter, research members describe the latest findings from some of the studies they are currently working on within their schools...

Autism practice in Bangladesh



Veronica Armiss and colleagues from Phoenix were able to visit Bangladesh in January this year, on a jointly funded project with AHRC charity in Tower Hamlets, to work with mainstream schools in Sylhet, Northern Bangladesh, setting up a school

management of work areas in their schools, where visiting mainstream schools, inclusion was discussed and training offered to teachers regarding challenging behaviour.

The Phoenix team met with the Minister of Education when in Dhaka to discuss the building of the National Academy, establishing links with Phoenix. In the hope to develop a provision based on Phoenix school's practice. A seven-day training package has been put together for teachers to come and visit Phoenix from Bangladesh and work alongside teachers in school. The training is specifically around the development of their new Academy provision, which includes residential care.

Teachers, exploring curriculums and

Veronica Armiss, Phoenix School

Getting Young Autistic People Back into School

New research highlights damaging impact of exclusion on young autistic people.

A new report from the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE) argues that educational authorities and school staff should do more to prevent exclusions by improving their understanding of autism and providing tailored support.

Over a six-month period, CRAE researchers worked with nine young people aged 16-19 years. The young people had been excluded from education and re-integrated into school life within the Inclusive Learning Hub at the National Autistic Society's Robert Ogden School.

The report found that the young people reported often harrowing accounts of their previous educational placements, which meant that they missed out on school. This had serious consequences for their mental and emotional wellbeing.

"[mainstream school] was a very depressing time for me because it was just, I was ill, as in the way of, not as in coughing all the time, just in who I was. I wasn't right. Students

In contrast, the young people and their families greatly appreciated the hub because its dedicated staff understood and accepted the students' individual needs and challenges. This helped to rebuild their confidence and encourage them to stay in education.

"It should not be beyond education authorities, teachers and school staff to create greater opportunities for autistic children well before they reach specialist provision like the Hub. That kind of education would be attentive to the needs of individual children and would be accepting of their differences. It would foster relationships between young people and their parents, and work with other agencies, including health and social care, to promote the wellbeing of autistic students.

"This is not just good practice in autism education, but good practice in education more broadly

Professor Liz Pelligrano, Lead Researcher

Liz Pelligrano, Director of the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE)

plasn-r news

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inside plasn-r

Sleep wise

Rates of sleep disturbance among autistic children are known to be higher than in the typical population. Studies have reported that sleep disturbance has been linked to reduced daytime functioning, increase in challenging behaviours and increase in family stress levels. Reports from parents at Querronsmill School



demonstrated that this was one major area of concern for our parents and pupils. The school trialled the Sleepwise programme (O'Connell 2006), for ten pupils (between the ages of 8-16 years old) and their families at Querronsmill School to see whether it could help improve their sleep habits. The programme was delivered by Querronsmill staff who were well known to the pupils and families.

Performing Arts

Performing arts is a core part of education for pupils at Sybil Elgar School. In partnership with the National Autistic Society and Research Autism and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Daisy Loyd evaluated outcomes and teaching approaches for ten pupils involved in performing arts work over one year.

Her research found that performing arts work enabled pupils to interact, communicate and think flexibly and illustrated both how these areas developed over time and contrasted across contexts. It also uncovered teaching

Forest School



Tanya Zepic, College Park School

The programme included two three-hour workshops (one week apart) exploring the issues around sleep and what parents could do to help their children. Parents completed a diary of their child's sleep habits in between the two training sessions and staff met with families in their home to complete a comprehensive sleep assessment. Parents were asked to undertake the actions agreed in their individualised sleep programme over the course of three months.

Overall areas of improvement included:

- Falling asleep within 30 mins of going to bed
- Falling asleep in a parent/siblings' bed
- Fear of sleeping alone and away from home
- Awake more than once in the night

"The sleep diary was really good, as it allowed me to reflect back on previous days and the weekly. It was useful to see it all written down rather than just remembering."

Caroline Bulmer and Charlotte Spencer, Querronsmill School

approaches that facilitate interaction, communication and flexible thinking and identified particular opportunities presented by the performing arts. Pupils were involved in the research throughout and gaining their consent and views formed a central part of the research process.

Daisy Loyd, Sybil Elgar School

"I would encourage all parents to take part. Querronsmill are the only extended family who really understand your child's individual needs. The sleep plans and home visits were most useful in providing strategies and support in the areas of sleep you need help with."

Lesson Study

Teachers at Russet House have been developing their outstanding classroom practice by using the Innovative UCL Institute of Education model of Lesson Study. Originating in Japan, Lesson Study encourages teachers to work collaboratively to research and study the impact of specific teaching strategies on learning.

At Russet House, we have chosen to focus on areas of the curriculum that can be tricky for autistic children to master, such as scientific enquiry, problem solving skills and the creative arts. The Lesson Study process involves teachers researching ideas on how to teach chosen topics effectively and then plan lessons together, incorporating ideas from the research findings. The teachers in the research group then observe each other's lessons and watch how certain children respond to the learning opportunities they are given.

Following each study lesson, the research group meets to discuss the impact of the strategies on the learning of the focus children. This enables them to identify successful strategies and add to the research knowledge which, in turn, informs the next cycle of Lesson Study.

"This has been a very thought-provoking and inspiring process for our teachers, as they have seen children making fantastic progress in subjects they have previously struggled with. If you would like to know more about our Lesson Study projects, our findings and how we have adapted the Lesson Study model to suit our specialist setting, please email Rachel Walker: walker.rachel@russethouse.ed.ac.uk

Rachel Walker, Russet House School

news

Who's involved..?

Current PLASN-R School Members

 Hatton School North London	 Eagle House School North London	 Sybil Elgar School Middlesex	 Durants School North London	 Phoenix School East London	 Prior's Court Berkshire
 Spa School South London	 Treehouse School North London	 Springhall School West London	 Russet House School North London	 Querronsmill School West London	 Manor School North London

Current PLASN-R Research Members

 Catherine is a Senior Research Associate in Education & Psychology, specialising in inclusive education, at UCL Institute of Education.	 Laura is a Senior Teaching and Engagement Fellow conducting research at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education, Institute of Education.	 Patricia is Professor of Clinical Child Psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, in autism and other developmental conditions.
 Liz is a Developmental Cognitive Scientist and Educational Psychologist. She is Director of the Centre for Research in Autism & Education, Institute of Education.	 Vicky is a Senior Consultant Speech and Language Therapist at the Newcomen Centre & Honorary Senior Lecturer at King's College.	 Kerstin is a Lecturer and Researcher in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, specialising in autism.

plasn-r news

This newsletter was produced by the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), UCL Institute of Education in collaboration with PLASN-R

Visit us at querronsmill.com/plasn-r





Prior's Court

Embracing autism
Transforming lives

The Development and Feasibility Study of a Multimodal
'Talking Wall' to Facilitate the Voice of Young People with
Autism and Complex Needs: A Case Study in a Specialist
Residential School



Mayflower Primary School



Moving away from 'good sitting' ...

Commonly associated with:

- Crossed legs
- Not leaning back or slumping
- Folded or still arms
- Sitting in your assigned place



What adaptations can we make for ALL learners?

- What is available to some children usually benefits all.
- Whole school inclusive approaches could meet the sensory needs of more children.
- Adaptions to buildings are expensive and sometimes not possible.
- Already established the benefits of different seating for some children as recommended by the occupational therapists.
- Could these seats benefit everyone and how could this be evaluated?

What is flexible seating?

Using a range of seating options in the classroom, typically alongside less rigid rules about moving around the classroom and less reliance on seating plans or assigned seating.



What do we know from the literature?

- Much research has focused on flexible seating as a specific adaptation for neurodivergent children (especially autistic children)
- Findings have been mixed. Why? Different seats may vary in effectiveness, and different children may respond differently to different seats.
- While flexible seating does not always show positive effects, detrimental effects do not seem to have been reported.
- Fairly little known about what those in the classroom think about flexible seating...especially children's views.



Our aims

- To conduct a case study in Mayflower Primary School.
- To seek staff views on if/how flexible seating may have influenced teaching delivery and their provision of educational support in the classroom, as well as the opportunities and challenges of flexible seating.
- To seek pupil views (both neurotypical and neurodivergent) on what they liked and didn't like about flexible seating.



Our study...





Thank you to the chair committee!

DIFFERENT CHAIRS



Wobble Cushion



Floor Desk



Standing Desk



Sketching Desk.



Sensory Cushion



Floor chair



Wobble Stool



Floor Rocker



Ball Chair



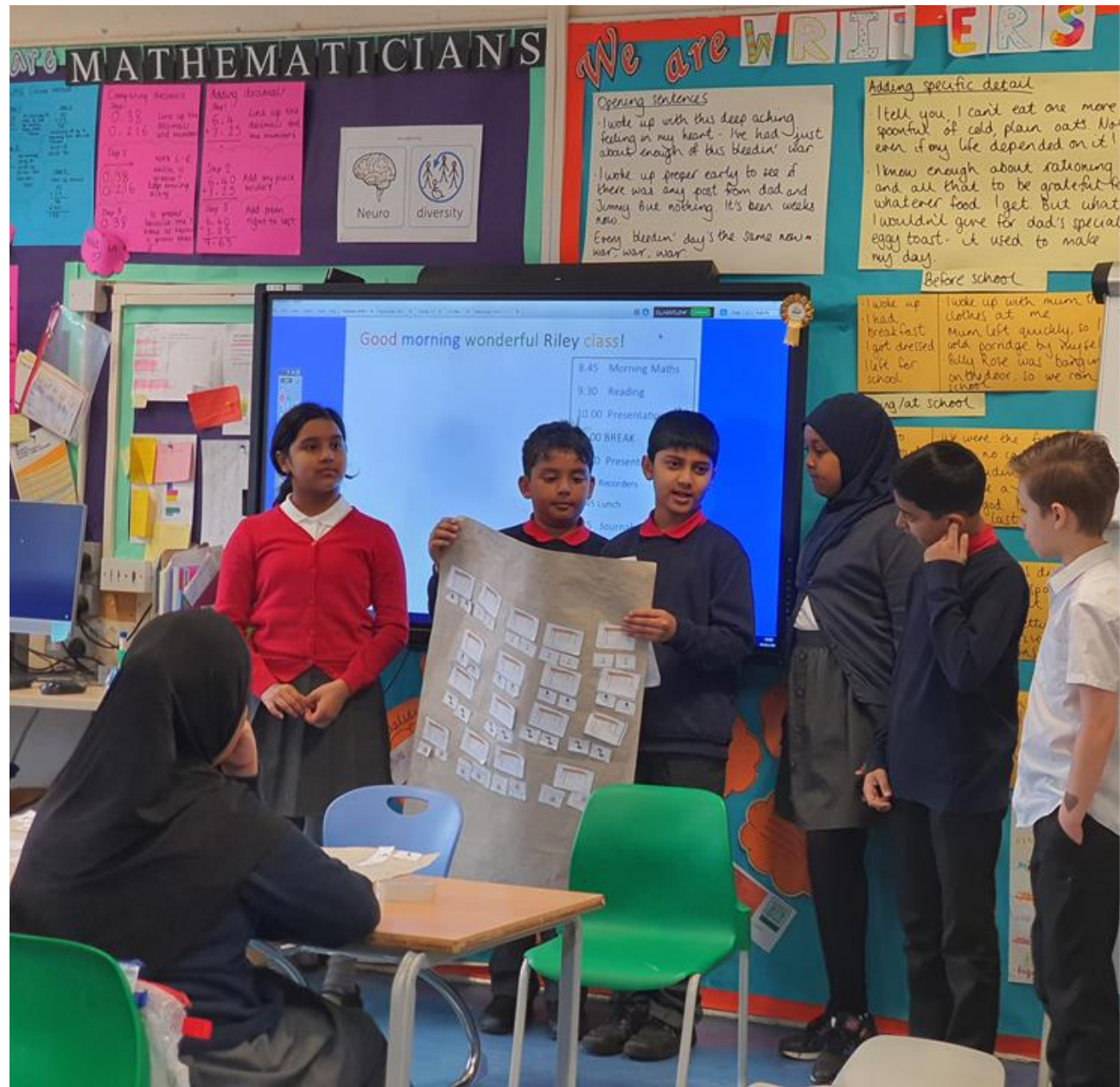
- Regular Classroom Chair
- Rocking Chair

Data collection (pupils)

- 3-4 days
- 315 pupils surveyed (57= neurodivergent)



Accessible surveys and activities



Pupil data analysis



Results

- Quantitative data: Children had clear preferences for certain chairs over others
- Qualitative data: When choosing chairs, the factors most important to children were...
 - Concentration (the extent to which a seating option helped them manage any potential distractions)
 - Movement (the extent to which options facilitated additional movement in the classroom, i.e., via rocking or wobbling)
 - Comfort (the extent to which they felt comfortable, or could reduce discomfort in the classroom).

Teacher data analysis



Results

- Of the 33 staff who took part, 30 reported that they would recommend flexible seating to other schools (most as a cross-school strategy, for all age groups).
- Like children, teachers had clear preferences for certain chairs over others.

Results

- Staff reported that flexible seating
 - did not prove difficult to adjust their teaching to.
 - did not make managing behaviour in the classroom more challenging.
 - made teaching and supporting pupils easier.
- Staff felt that pupil engagement, behaviour, comfort, mood, motivation and peer-to-peer collaboration improved upon the introduction of flexible seating.



Reflecting critically...

- Would it work in all schools?
- What about older children?
- Does it work in isolation?



Views of the staff taking part in the research

- It was so exciting to be part of such an innovative and forward thinking project! I honestly wasn't sure what the outcomes would be and there were no expectations for it to 'work' or 'be successful'. The fact that it has been makes it even more exciting!

Teresa

- I think it was exciting and inclusive and all children wanted to join. If I could join a research project like this again I would!

Kirsty



Next...

Evaluating
the use of ear
defenders



Concluding messages

- If we want to achieve autism education research that is beneficial to schools, we need to work in partnership at all stages of the research process.
- Ultimately, by adopting a collaborative and participatory approach, our work will also have more direct benefits on the educational experiences of autistic children and young people.



Using flexible seating...

- A promising model for meeting the sensory needs of young people in schools.
- Needs to be part of a broader programme of inclusive practice.
- Crucially important to get all stakeholders involved – making decisions about issues that affect them.



Thank you for attending!

A link to view the recording will be emailed to all registrants.
We hope to see you next month!

Tuesday 11/8/2022

4-5pm

EST

AIR-P Presents: The role of minority stress for autistic peoples health

Presented by Dr. Monique Botha (they/them)

In this talk, Dr. Botha will discuss the relevance of the Minority Stress Model for understanding health outcomes in the autistic community. The minority stress model posits that marginalized groups have an additional stress burden to contend with related to living in unequal society. This stress burden can translate into health inequalities. Yet, there are also factors which may buffer against these effects such as community connectedness, collective resilience, and positive identity, and the creativity of marginalized communities in facing minority stress should not be ignored.



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