

**BAR ILAN UNIVERSITY**

**Collaboration between Educational and Therapeutic  
Teams in Kindergartens for Children with ASD – A  
Case Study**

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## **Abstract**

**Study aim:** to examine the components of collaboration between educational staff – kindergarten teachers and assistants and therapeutic staff – occupational therapists and speech therapists in special education kindergartens for children in the Autistic spectrum. The arrangement of collaboration in these kindergartens is complex and encompasses personal and professional perceptions, different role definitions, limited time and human resources, interpersonal relations and other variably significant components that are all included in the complex arrangement and affect it, each in its own way. A review of the literature which revealed a lack of research in this specific field led to the choice of this topic. A general understanding of the complexity of the subject and a will to deepen and to reach as many dimensions as possible led to the choice of a qualitative methodology in order to examine the topic.

**Study importance:** this study has academic, professional and economic importance. The sharp rise in the number of children diagnosed with Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in recent years has led to a need to find an appropriate therapeutic response for these children. Therefore, many resources are invested in treating them and they are entitled to a broad health care program. The high level of financial resources invested in this population, multiple staff members that are part of the treatment and the complexity of the disorder require thorough research into treatment options and their efficiency. Since the daily educational and therapeutic work with these children is multidisciplinary, it is highly important to study as many dimensions as possible in this type of work.

**Method:** Two kindergartens for children with ASD in the center of Israel participated in the study. Both kindergartens belong to the Ministry of Education and a number of authorities are involved in their therapeutic work – in one kindergarten the Association for Children at Risk and in the other the management of a child development institute, in which the kindergarten is located. Five observations and seven to eight semi-structured interviews with therapeutic staff members (occupational therapists and speech therapists), educational staff members (teachers and assistants) and coordinative staff members were conducted in each kindergarten.

**Main findings:** the main findings of this study are related to the different staff members' will to collaborate and their understanding of the importance of this issue. Along with this understanding, in their opinion the existing collaboration is not sufficient, particularly the collaboration between the therapeutic staff and the teacher's assistants. This collaboration is the most complex due to the significant difference in knowledge and expectations as well as a lack of common professional language and time together. This collaboration can be mediated by the teacher, who is acquainted with both sides' knowledge and spends large amounts of time with each sector. Another main finding is the gap between the importance of the position of the teacher's assistant and the attention this position receives from decision makers.

**Study contribution:** an important finding in the study is the recognition of the unique difficulty in collaboration between the therapeutic staff and the teacher's assistants in the kindergarten. This difficulty, beyond technical factors, is caused by a knowledge gap – type and extent of knowledge, a difference in the way of thinking and a lack of common language. The measures that should be taken in order to decrease this gap are related to proper training of the assistants, training focused on collaboration for therapeutic staff and teachers and allocation of sufficient time for indirect treatment. At the kindergarten level, it is recommended that as many ways as possible be found to involve the assistants in all stages of therapeutic and educational thinking and not only in the execution stage.