

Institution: Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU)		
Unit of Assessment: 23 – Education		
Title of case study: Participatory approaches to instil understanding and action in autism education		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Clare Lawrence	Senior Lecturer in Teacher Development	2015 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Engagement with autism stakeholders has led to a range of impacts, including forms of co-creation. Parents have been influenced through presentations, social media and publications, leading to greater understanding of issues which affect them and their children, and providing practical advice for engendering more positive outcomes. Teachers have been supported, adding to their awareness of issues relating to the inclusion of autistic children in educational contexts, and including tools to aid teachers in their classroom roles. Institutional policy has been influenced to create an autism-friendly campus. Wider impact has been secured through the media, local networks, and an arts-based project.</p>		
2. Underpinning research – References in section 3 are indicated by number (e.g., R1)		
<p>Lawrence's interest in Shared Education (or 'Flexischooling') is discussed in her monograph <i>Autism and flexischooling: a shared classroom and homeschooling approach</i> (Jessica Kingsley, 2012), and further explored as the subject of her PhD (2017). Building on the work of Roland Meighan and pioneering educator John Holt, her research considers the impact of involving parents of autistic children as active co-educators, working with schools as partners. Co-creation runs through Lawrence's research activity and sharing the autistic child's education has been shown to have potential to personalise that education, empower parents, support schools, and ameliorate for some the perceived shortcomings in the education system for autistic pupils. Lawrence's work has been shared through considerable social media presence, conference presentation and publication (R1).</p> <p>Lawrence's research with parents has developed since 2016 to include research on autism education as positioned regarding teachers. A key finding of her empirical study into trainee teachers' perceptions was that descriptions of autism focused more on communication and less on social aspects, when articulated by those who identified as having personal experience of autism. Perceptions among this group were also found to be more positive, varied and specific, as well as less generalised (R2). In response, Lawrence has embedded the voice of autistic individuals in both her on-going research and in her teaching, and has embraced personal recount of experiences of autism as valid methodology. Her edited research-based collection, <i>Teacher Education and Autism: A Research-Based Practical Handbook</i> (Jessica Kingsley, 2019), showcases individual educators' experiences of autism in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and is a 'valuable handbook [that provides] guidance in how a child who has autism is different to their peers and how a teacher can understand and accommodate these differences to ensure that school provides the opportunity to learn both the academic and social curriculum'; a 'fascinating insight into autism for trainee teachers and practising teachers wishing to increase their understanding of autism'; and identified as 'engaging, extremely informative and highly accessible'. In line with best practice, as suggested by the draft</p>		

framework for inclusive social science autism research (Chown *et al.*, 2017), Lawrence includes practitioner researchers as intrinsic to her work.

Lawrence's work further contributes to an otherwise under-explored element of research through focus on the understanding of education by the autistic teacher. In 2017, Lawrence received an internal research grant (BGU Student Engagement Innovation Fund) to explore the perceptions of education with an autistic trainee teacher (R3). Inclusion of the autistic voice in her research continues with a study exploring reading of literature from an autistic perspective, co-researched with an autistic English teacher (R4), together with portrayal of autistic characters in classroom texts as understood by both autistic and non-autistic readers (R5). An exploration of the presentation of autistic dysfluency in the classroom, co-researched with artist Dr John Rimmer, and an autistic researcher, further considered the efficacy of teacher education in autism (R6).

3. References to the research

Independent peer-reviewed journal articles

1. **Lawrence, C.** (2018) 'Parents' perspectives on flexischooling their autistic children', *The Home School Researcher*, 34, 1, online.
2. **Lawrence, C.** (2018) 'The effect of familiarisation with autistic individuals on trainee teachers' attitudes', *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal*, 11, 1, 37-45.
3. **Lawrence, C.** (2019) "I can be a role model for autistic pupils": Investigating the voice of the autistic teacher', *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal*, 11, 2, pp. 50-58.
4. **Lawrence, C.**, 'Celia', Collyer, E., and Poulson, M. (2020) "Howling at the scrabble-board": exploring classroom literature from an autistic viewpoint', *English in Education*, 1-13.
5. **Lawrence, C.** (2020) 'Is Lennie a monster? A reconsideration of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* in a 21st century inclusive classroom context', *Palgrave Communications*, 6, 1, 1-8.
6. 'Fauxparl'(Pseudonym), Rimmer, J., **Lawrence, C.**, and Mahon, L. (2020) "I can't understand a word he says": a personal exploration of autistic dysfluency in film', *Disability & Society*, 1-5.

4. Details of the impact – Sources in section 5 are indicated by number (e.g., S1)

Impact is reflected in a widening range of activities, particularly locally and regionally, and an emerging national and international reach.

The central aim has been:

- Contributing to the attitudinal shift that moves perceptions of autism from being a purely medical condition (the 'Medical model') to being understood as a societal issue ('Social model').

Impact types have included:

- Stimulating engagement in research;
- Developing professional/practitioner practice and networks;
- Enhancing understanding;
- Shaping awareness;
- Media contributions;
- Teaching.

Partnership and co-creation have been essential, with principal beneficiaries including:

- Parents;
- School teachers;
- Professional networks;
- Event audiences and media readerships;

Impact case study (REF3)

- Home HEI institution;
- Students;
- Autistic individuals (who may be in any of the above).

Influencing parents

Impact has been upon parents who may be in considerable distress regarding their autistic child's education, and would like to be more confident in their full involvement in that education. This is reflected in feedback and comments from different correspondents, participants and readers (**S1**), one testimonial adding that Lawrence's "significant, credible academic rationale" regarding shared education has "impacted and supported thousands of families with ASD youngsters, giving them not only tangible explanations, but practical advice and hope" (**S2**).

Engagement activities directed towards parents and other potential beneficiaries have utilised various social media outlets, for example, *Flexischooling Families UK*, *Flexischooling Practitioners*, *Centre for Personalised Education*, *Light on Education Research Network*, and *Home Education and Flexischooling Research group*). There have also been public events and learning exchanges; and evidence of the *Flexischooling Handbook* (2018) estimated to be 'beyond 40,000 people' (**S2**).

Influencing teachers

Lawrence supports trainee teachers to develop their understanding of autism, having direct reach to over 300 students each year and witnessing a 'ripple effect' as these teachers enter the profession. Her work gives 'greater awareness of autism' and provided 'tools to effectively differentiate [and to support] understanding' (personal correspondence). Similarly, lecturers within the university recognise help given through the Staff Development programme and individual support, commenting, for example, 'there was no better person to talk to than Dr Clare Lawrence. I now know how to hone and improve my teaching skill to suit and accommodate all learners' and 'I just wish to thank you for ... my growing understanding of autism and related issues' and that she has 'certainly raised awareness of autism' (**S3**).

Engaging the home institution

In 2017, Lawrence instigated the *Autism Friendly Campus* project through BGU's Centre for Enhancement in Learning and Teaching (CELT), which sought feedback from autistic students at the University. This resulted in significant changes to university policy and practice through the *Bishop Grosseteste Autism Friendly Campus Action Plan* (**S4**). The University has, since the 2019-20 application cycle, offered smaller campus tour groups including the option to have a campus tour on an alternative day to open days, programmed additional daytime social events during Freshers' Week and beyond, written guidance regarding the informal rules that govern movement around campus, and made explicit the provision for students to remove themselves from situations in lectures or seminars that they find stressful.

Through joint funding by CELT and the SU, several 'Quiet Spaces' on campus containing sensory equipment have been created, accessible to all members of the university community who require them.

Engaging with local networks

Impact has been achieved in roles as East Midlands Convenor for the Participatory Autism Research Collective (PARC) and Lincolnshire County Council Autism Champion. These promote interventions in health, social care services, business, as well as education settings.

Other impact utilising different media included contributing to the film *Broken*, exhibited as part of the 'Trunk Call' Residency, General Practitioner Studios, Lincoln, 9-30 November 2020, with public on-line event (due to Covid restrictions).

Engaging with the media and wider sector

A number of public impact outputs have been commissioned by sector networks and media, for example, articles for:

- National Autistic Society, online forum *Network Autism* (typically, 5.5 million visitors per year), on *Autism and Flexischooling* (2018);
- *SEN magazine* (typical readership 36,000 per issue);
- *The Big Issue* (typical readership 400,000 per issue). (S5)

In addition, book publications aimed at general readerships have a widening international influence (publication in the UK, US, and Australia; translation into Dutch, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish). *Teacher Education and Autism: A Research-Based Practical Handbook* (see section 2 above) was ranked in the top 1% of all books sold by Amazon in its publication month, and was in the 100 Bestseller Rankings in three categories. As well as 102 views in the UK, a BERA blog has had international reach been read in India (15), and the US, China, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa (15).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1: Testimonials

- 'I want to thank you so much for your excellent book on flexischooling. ... I ... am so appreciative of the way you are bringing such compassionately and thoughtfully arranged information to parents and teachers. ... You have been a huge source of inspiration to me in formulating our request for flexischooling. Thank you!' (Hardeep: personal correspondence, July 2019);
- 'Hi Clare - Mary from Ireland. We met at conference ... Just thought I'd let you know things going fantastically at the moment ... I have a different child. He laughs, he sings around the house and he's even volunteering to bring in shopping from car!! It's unbelievable the change with the anxiety of school taken off his shoulders ...' (Mary: personal correspondence, September 2016);
- 'I attended the Alternative Educational Futures Conference in Birmingham the other week, searching for inspiration to help my son who is autistic ... I just wanted to let you know that I have a second meeting with my son's School Headteacher, and I'm absolutely thrilled to say that they are going to give shared schooling a go... Thank you so much for your advice and support. You have helped me tremendously.' (Alice: personal correspondence, June 2016).

2: Testimonial

- Peter Humphreys, former Chair, Centre for Personalised Education, and Lecturer/Tutor, Teacher Education, Birmingham City University (26 October 2020).

3: Testimonials

- Personal correspondence from teachers: Ms Simons, Mrs Poulson, and Mr Collyer (5 November, 4 November, 25 October 2020, respectively).

4: Policy document

- Bishop Grosseteste University (2019) Autism Friendly Campus Action Plan, Centre for Enhancement in Learning and Teaching.

5: Media circulation statistics

- National Autistic Society at:
<https://s4.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/1573224908/61601754638/width=-1/height=-1/format=-1/fit=scale/t=443891/e=never/k=7f319972/Annual-Report-2019.pdf>;
- *SEN Magazine* at:
<https://senmagazine.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/SENMediaPack2020.pdf>;
- *The Big Issue* at:
<https://www.bigissue.com/about/>

6: Social media feedback

- BERA Blog, 6 October 2020.