

9th Congress of  
Baltic States SLTs'

# Understanding each other

12-13 April, 2024



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# **Empowering learners: combination of flexible learning environments, the role of the educator and educational support**

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## AIM(S) AND METHODS

Our research **focuses on** understanding and supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive primary school.

**The object** of the research is empowerment of the learner in inclusive classroom.

**The participants** of the study were primary school teachers and educational support specialists working at inclusive school and having pedagogical experience educating pupils with ASD. During the research the number of the participants varied from 8 to 17.

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## AIM(S) AND METHODS (2)

The study employs elements of **action research methodology**, including *case analysis, observation, interviews, and document analysis*, conducted in an inclusive school in Lithuania with the participation of teachers and educational support specialists experienced in educating students with ASD.

**The aim of the first stage** of the research was to find out how pupils are engaged in learning, how teachers and educational support specialists are getting to know their pupils and promote learning-to-learn skills. For this reason, 8 primary autistic pupils' cases were analyzed. Semi-structured individual and group interviews were carried out with teachers and educational support specialists. After the data was analyzed, conclusions were presented to the participants in order to validate the results. The duration of the first stage lasted from March to October 2023.

**The second stage** of the research aimed to present seminars for primary school teachers and educational support specialists on the topics of personalized learning, education of students with ASD. Seminars were followed by reflections and discussion about the changes in educational practice.

The duration of the second stage lasted from November to December 2023.

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# Understanding each other

12-13 April, 2024



## SHORT INTRODUCTION

In the context of an educational transformation that empowers every learner, with their unique abilities, strengths as well as difficulties and learning needs, it is important to have the right combination of the appropriate environment, support from specialists, and the educator acting as a "guide" for the learner. The updating of the content of the curriculum also leads to changes in the interaction between the teacher and the learner in the teaching/learning process. The process of scaffolding, aimed at overcoming barriers to learning, is becoming crucial to the success of each learner in learning to the best of his or her ability (Bishop et al., 2020).

Modelling a flexible and intuitive learning space is crucial to protect some learners from being separated in the learning process. This ensures a successful participation of each child in the overall learning process by eliminating barriers in the learning environment through a variety of educational methods and tools. The diversity of children in educational institutions covers linguistic, cultural, social, health and other differences, as well as special educational needs. Empowering learners to act in the educational environment and to use the knowledge they have acquired develops the ability to anticipate, achieve, monitor progress and use experience in different contexts. A well-designed and planned learning environment is a learning tool in the service of the learning process, not the other way around (Bernacki et al., 2021).

The research explores personalized learning approach that can facilitate engagement with autistic students and enhance their learning outcomes. This study explores learners with ASD in primary schools due to their vulnerability to exclusion (Petersson-Bloom & Holmqvist, 2022).

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# Understanding each other

12-13 April, 2024



## RESULTS

1. Results of the research revealed that while educational support specialists tend to be more knowledgeable about ASD, teachers often lack sufficient understanding of the disorder.
2. Collaborative efforts involving teachers, students, parents, and specialists from other institutions are critical in understanding the children and fostering their learning-to-learn skills.
3. The study also identified various methods that can empower autistic children in their learning, such as artistic or physical activities, individual conversations, group work, and motivational activities.
4. Context based learning environment helps to develop language skills of children and also help them to express their experiences and form new insights by creating common stories.
5. Creating an autistic-friendly environment within the school was also highlighted as crucial for promoting the learning capabilities of these students.
6. Participants of the research provided recommendations on what helps to understand autistic children as learners according to personalized learning approach. Recommendations are provided in the following slides.

# Understanding each other

12-13 April, 2024



## RESULTS (2)

**Ways of understanding your pupil to get most out of your child's learning abilities.**

Observation in various activities;  
Conversations with colleagues;  
Cooperation with parents;  
Completion of a student profile (with parents, teachers, school staff);  
Experimentation;  
Recommendation from the Psychological Education Service;  
Collection of information about the disorder, seminars, analysis of the information;  
Cooperation with pre-school (teacher, specialists).

**Who and how can I collaborate with to get to know my student with ASD and improve his/her learning abilities?**

With parents: individual conversations, messages, agreements, "walking notes";  
With teachers;  
With other professionals who work with the child (outside the school) through conversations;  
During the School Child Welfare teams' meetings;  
With the pupil himself: conversation, observation, practical activities of the child, play of the child with the group in the classroom, discussion of learning with the child himself;  
With practitioners (counseling unit for children with developmental disabilities);  
With professionals: discussion of seminars;  
With group leaders by interview or observation (if in school).

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12-13 April, 2024



## RESULTS (4)

**What learning activities and techniques allow you to get to know a pupil with ASD in order to improve his/her learning abilities?**

During a individual interview;  
Group work / pair work;  
Individual work;  
Through drawings;  
The clear structure of the activity;  
Through games;  
Motivation through revealed interests;  
Targeted selection of learning tools.

**What environments are beneficial for getting to know a pupil with ASD in order to improve his/her learning abilities?**

Extra-curricular/ out-of-class activities;  
Collaboration with another class (e.g. 2nd graders with 3rd graders);  
Group work;  
Targeted methodological tools;  
Specialist classrooms;  
Classrooms for different subjects;  
Different zones (learning, resting) in the classroom;  
Adapted and safe environment;  
Rest rooms;  
Workbooks.





## CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the importance of not only recognizing the disorder but also understanding the child as an individual learner. Recommendations for personalized approaches in education, crafted by practitioners themselves, are seen as valuable contributions to educational practice.



# Understanding each other

12-13 April, 2024



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