



Summary of Year Two Evaluation of tips for autism by Massey University

What were the evaluation team asked to do?

The purpose of the research was to inform the future development of tips for autism and to provide lessons for other professional learning and development initiatives around ASD.

The Ministry of Education asked the evaluation team to answer 9 questions relating to quality professional learning and development over a 3-year period with some of these questions ongoing throughout the 3-year period. This followed a 1-year evaluation of a pilot which was a joint project between the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Health; and Child, Youth and Family, a service of the Ministry of Social Development.

Who are the evaluation team?

The evaluation team from the Massey University College of Education, led by Dr Jill Bevan-Brown, were selected and contracted to do this research following a request for proposal process in 2007. One of the researchers is no longer employed by Massey, but is still involved in the project. The researchers are: Dr Jill Bevan-Brown, Winston Bevan-Brown, Dr Roseanna Bourke, Philippa Butler, Dr Janis Carroll-Lind, Dr Alison Kearney and Dr Mandia Mentis.

How did they do this?

The Massey team used a mixed-method approach with respect to the data collection, which included a needs assessment, case studies, collection of surveys and questionnaires from participants; observations; interviews with participants, facilitators and others; document analysis; and consultation with an Advisory Group (consisting of parents, facilitators, teachers, respite worker, former course participants, speech and language therapist, Resource Teacher – Learning and Behaviour and a worker from Absolutely Autism). They also conducted a literature review in the first year.

The evaluation team analysed data from the sources listed above to identify indicators and to come up with 57 themes that would become their merit criteria (ie, the criteria to be used for the evaluation of the course). This criteria was then sorted into Process (34) and Outcome (23) criteria and each sorted into 4 categories. The merit criteria included:

Merit criteria and categories		Team focused	Needs based	Knowledge based	Pedagogically sound
Process					
Organisation, content and design	Delivery and implementation	6 criteria	8 criteria	7 criteria	13 criteria
Outcome					
Knowledge, skills and attitude gains	Application of knowledge, skills and attitude (sustainability)	3 criteria	7 criteria	5 criteria	8 criteria

The data was analysed against these merit criteria and the scores were converted to a percentage. The team identified a rating scale to identify relative merit:

% score	Rating	Explanation
91-100	Excellent	Clear example of exemplary performance
71-90	Very good	Very good performance on virtually all aspects, minimal weaknesses
31-70	Good	Reasonable good performance overall, some weaknesses
11-30	Barely Adequate	Fair performance, some serious weaknesses
0-10	Poor	Unsatisfactory performance, serious weaknesses across the board



What are the major findings to date?

In the Year Two report, the programme scored 91% overall (clear example of exemplary performance – see table above for rating scale).

Merit criteria and categories	Team focused	Needs based	Knowledge based	Pedagogically sound	Total
Process	89% VG	88% VG	100% Ex	85% VG	91% Ex
Organisation, content and design					89%
Delivery and Implementation					92% Ex
Outcome	100% Ex	90% VG	93% Ex	83% VG	90% VG
Knowledge, skills and attitude gains					92% Ex
Application of knowledge, skills and attitude (sustainability)					87% VG
Total	95% Ex	89% VG	97% Ex	84% VG	91% Ex

The evaluation team has completed reports on the Year One and Year Two questions and data. They have almost completed collecting data for the Year Three report. The Year Two report concludes that *tips for autism* is:

“showing high levels of participant satisfaction in all areas. It includes a wide range of relevant, evidence/research-based, practical information which provides participants with a variety of effective methods and strategies they can use when working/living with children with ASD. Additionally the programme facilitates collaborative teaming and interaction with team members which contributes to participants extending their knowledge of the target children in many different areas including their strengths and interests.” (page 112)

“...the programme is squarely focused on meeting the needs of the target children, is taught by knowledgeable and skilled facilitators who are cognisant of the principles of adult learning in the content and delivery of the programme.” (page 113)

The report notes two areas of weakness. Firstly, 36% of the target children were identified as belonging to 13 different ethnic groups and the report suggests that the course needs to ensure that it reflects the multi-cultural nature of the children it targets.

Secondly it notes that a significant number of teams were missing team members – either a parent, a school representative or (most often) a key worker. It suggests that the *tips for autism* project team identify barriers to attendance for participants and attempt to address these.

What will happen next?

The Year Two data is based on the courses held during 2008. The Massey team have continued to collect data in 2009 courses and this, combined with the data from the other two years, will provide the basis for the final year report which will be completed in the first half of 2010.