

“Don’t give up on them”:
Managing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in Schools - What
teachers and parents believe and know

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This thesis is submitted as part requirement for the degree of

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Conference Presentations

Portions of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have been presented at:

Murray, E. K., (2009). An assessment and intervention program for pre-service teachers regarding knowledge of and attitudes toward children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Abstract presented at *The European Conference for Educational Research Pre-Conference* (September 25 2009), Vienna, Austria.

Abstract

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most prevalent childhood and adolescent behavioural disorders affecting children worldwide. This research investigated teachers' and parents' knowledge of, attitudes and behaviours toward children with ADHD. Findings from this investigation then informed the development and evaluation of a pilot ADHD intervention program for pre-service teachers designed to enhance their own knowledge and skills, and to frame intervention as a shared endeavour between parents, teachers and the broader school community.

Study One provided local confirmation of the broadly reported needs of teachers, pre-service teachers and parents for improved knowledge and change in attitudes toward children with ADHD. Both pre-service and in-service teachers held comparable views, though the former generally reported being less confident in their skills and abilities to manage these children. A small sample of parents of children with ADHD provided rich insight into their parenting experiences and the challenges faced in the school environment. Uniquely this study also included parents without a child with ADHD, in recognition of their importance in influencing the broader school environment for children with ADHD. Consistent with previous research, parents were somewhat informed about the characteristics of ADHD but less so about treatment. Descriptive comparisons between parents and teachers suggested that there were some similarities and some differences in what was known and what myths were held by the two groups.

Study Two is in two parts. Part one of the study further investigated pre-service teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward children with ADHD. Seventy-seven pre-service teachers were surveyed whilst completing their third or final year of an Education degree at a university in Western Australia. There was a moderate correlation between a perceived competence factor on an Attitude Scale and scores on a Knowledge Scale. There was no greater knowledge amongst those reporting previous ADHD training at university, but there was a trend toward more unfavourable attitudes amongst respondents reporting no prior training. Descriptive analyses also showed a strong desire by pre-service teachers to engage in further ADHD training, irrespective of whether they had previous exposure to training or not.

This evidence base was then used in part two of Study Two to develop and evaluate a pilot intervention for pre-service teachers to improve knowledge, attitudes and self-confidence in teachers in responding to ADHD. Forty-five attended the intervention program. Of these, twenty-eight participants completed identical measures at pre, post and follow-up time points. Pre-service teachers showed a significant improvement in their knowledge scores and perceived knowledge and skills after the workshop.

Taken together, these studies suggest that while teachers have some knowledge about ADHD, there is a need for further training in order to better equip them for managing children with this condition in the classroom. Furthermore, parents with a child with ADHD desire further education about the disorder and those who do not have a child with ADHD are also likely to benefit also from education about the disorder and its corollaries in the school environment. Differences in understanding of ADHD between the groups emphasise the importance of developing a collaborative stance between teachers and parents in the school community. Finally, the pre-service pilot program was found to be an enabler for teachers to

understand and work more effectively with children with the disorder. Methodological limitations and directions for future research for each study are discussed.

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