

Advocacy for Children with Learning Difficulties and Communication Support Needs – the use of Peer Advocates and the Effect of the Role of the Advocate.

Professionals, including Educational Psychologists, may find it hard to gather the views of children with communication support needs and learning difficulties on their educational provision. This research looked at the use of advocates, including peer advocates with learning difficulties, to gather these views. The research aimed to establish whether advocacy was affected by the role of the advocate and whether peers with learning difficulties could enrich the information obtained. The research also looked at the reported feelings of the advocates on giving advocacy

Twenty advocates were interviewed, four for each of five focus children with communication support needs and learning difficulties. All of the advocates knew the focus child well and were drawn from a teacher of the child, a teaching assistant from the class, a parent of the child and a peer from the same class.

Advocacy was obtained from 4 advocates for each focus child about their educational provision. Semi structured interviews were used to ask how they felt about giving advocacy. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The main results were that: a) The role of the advocate appeared to affect the advocacy given; b) peers with learning difficulties were able to enrich the information gathered and c) giving advocacy was a positive experience for the peer advocates.

This study was small scale and exploratory but points to the usefulness of using a peer advocate with learning difficulties for children with communication support needs and learning difficulties. It also points towards the fact that different people may offer differing advocacy according to their role in the focus person's life.

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