

Promoting Social Interaction and Peer Understanding in the Inclusive Preschool Classroom

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Why promote social interaction and peer understanding?

For children with special needs

- *Foster peer acceptance and friendship*
- *Protect against peer rejection and bullying*
- *Promote skills learning*

For typically developing children

- *Learn important values and prosocial skills*

What does research say?



Observations of preschoolers with and without special needs in inclusive settings:

- ◉ *When left on their own, children with and without special needs rarely interact with one another.*



What does research say?



- ◉ *Compared to their typically developing peers, children with special needs...*
 - *Receive fewer social bids*
 - *Make fewer social initiations*
 - *Have fewer friends or have no friends*
 - *Face higher risk for peer avoidance/rejection*
 - *Are more likely to be bullied*



(Buisse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Hestenes & Carroll, 2000; Koegel et al., 2001; Lindsay & McPherson, 2011; Odom et al., 2006; Reszka et al., 2012)

What does research say?



- *Purposeful intervention is necessary to facilitate and promote social interaction between children with and without special needs.*
- *Social skills intervention...*
 - *Aims to promote the peer interaction and social skills of children with special needs*
 - *Improves the sensitivity, perception and acceptance of typical peers towards children with special needs.*



A multicomponent intervention

...for promoting social interaction

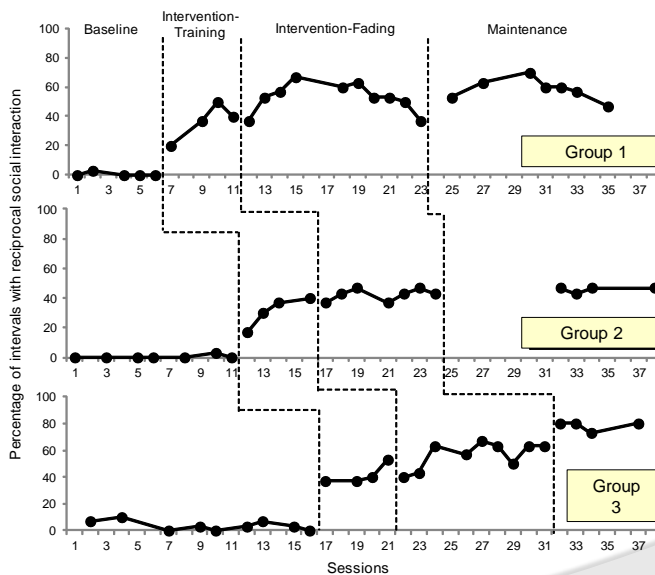
- ◎ **Setting**
 - **An inclusive preschool in Penang**
- ◎ **Participants**
 - **3 target children with autism or at risk for autism**
 - **9 typically developing peers**
 - **3 teachers**



3 study groups - each group consisting of a target child, 3 peers and a teacher

A multicomponent intervention

- Peer-mediated procedures
 - Social initiation training
 - Correspondence training with visual schedule
- Environmental arrangements
 - Point-and talk on food poster
 - Food sharing



Percentage of intervals with reciprocal social interaction across conditions

Findings from teacher interviews

- ⦿ Increase in children's social interactions
- ⦿ Improvement in target child's social and communication skills
- ⦿ Increase in peers' awareness, social initiations and concern towards target child
- ⦿ Improvement in peers' communication skills and self confidence
- ⦿ Intervention using environmental arrangements is more feasible than peer mediated strategies



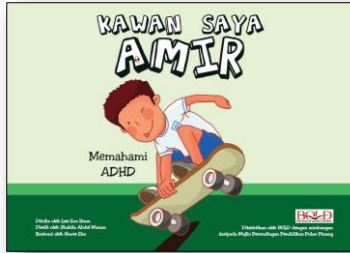
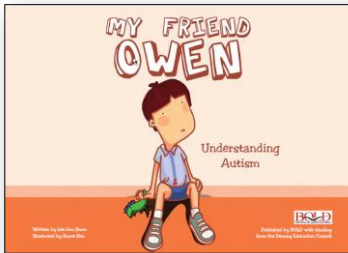
Social skills interventions for the inclusive classroom

- ⦿ Environmental arrangements:
 - Identify/set up activities
 - Select toys/materials
 - Identify peer groups
- ⦿ Teacher facilitation during naturally occurring activities
 - Prompt peers/target child to initiate/respond
 - Model interaction with the target child
 - Give praise



“We Are Friends” Project

Promoting Peer Understanding Through Stories



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Themes of Books

- Everyone has different traits.
- Everyone has things they are good at and things they are not so good at.
- Even though people are different, they also have similarities.
- Teach positive values like accepting differences, helping each other, and being tolerant.

Pilot Testing in Preschools

AIMS

1. Evaluate the suitability of the books in terms of:
 - *Physical presentation*
 - *Children's comprehension*
2. Identify appropriate activities for increasing understanding and impact of the stories.



Pilot Testing in Preschools

- ◎ Pre-story Activities
 - How are people different from one another?
 - Walking in someone else's shoes
- ◎ Post-story Activities
 - Discussion about the story
 - Drawing a picture
 - Role play



Observation and Feedback

- ◉ Children are drawn to the attractive illustrations.
- ◉ Children show understanding of the story.
- ◉ Older preschoolers (6yo) show better understanding and participation.
- ◉ Children can identify the main character with their classmate with special needs.
- ◉ Children generally show willingness to help the main character/classmate with special needs.

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