

**Using a Peer-Tutoring Intervention to Increase Positive Social
Interaction of a Student with Mental Retardation**

Bander N. Alotaibi

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Introduction

Peer contact is an important issue facing classroom teachers and researchers. How can they get individuals with mild disabilities (MD) successfully involved in academic pursuits and social activities with other nondisabled students. One method that can provide direct, individualized instruction to individuals with MD in regular classrooms that enhances self-esteem, and increases social interaction between individuals with and without MD is peer-tutoring (Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard, & Delquadri, 1994).

Peer tutoring is a strategy that has proven to be effective in enhancing the academic achievement and social interaction of individuals with and without disabilities. It requires a peer who can be directed to use a variety of skills to increase the targeted behaviors. This procedure has become increasingly popular in recent years because it is easy to implement and can address both the academic and the social needs of low-achieving students with disabilities (Kohler, Greenwood, 1990).

Therefore, this project is an attempt to design a social interaction program for a student with MD and to evaluate this program effectiveness in improving the positive social interaction during recess.

Method

Subject

Dan is a 9 year old male student with mental disabilities enrolled in a special education classroom in a suburban elementary school in Maryland. He is selected based upon: a) teacher concern regarding social interaction, b) aggressive behavior and low rate of positive behavior, and c) the student's willingness to participate in the study. The subject had an IQ score of 66 and performed academically below third-grade level. He demonstrated appropriate language skills in that he used complete sentences. Dan's behavior is volatile; for example, he tends to scream at peers during play. He spent part of his day in the special education classroom and the other part in general education with nondisabled students. According to his teacher, Dan preferred to stay alone and showed no sign of response to peers' initiations. Finally, the subject has no physical problems or disabilities, nor does he takes any type of medication.

Setting

Since the opportunities for social interaction in the classroom are limited, the peer-tutoring model will be implemented during recess. Recess takes place outdoors on the school playground when the weather permits. The playground consisted of a grassy area and a basketball court. All play is unrestricted, therefore, Dan will be free to choose what

he wants to do. On rainy days, recess will be held in the school gymnasium. All recess sessions observed during this study would take place on the school playground.

Tutor Training

The peer tutor is selected for this study from a group of elementary students who participated in a cross-age tutoring program. The tutor was chosen based upon positive teacher ratings and willingness to work with students with mental retardation. The tutor will enroll in a training session for five days prior to the intervention. He will be required to learn a combination of modeling and role-playing techniques. Also, he will be instructed to: 1) encourage Dan to take part in activities with other children during recess time, 2) remind him to act positively and to interact with other students, and 3) reward him with points when he showed positive behaviors, and, 4) model positive social behavior such as having a friendly conversation with others.

Baseline

Since the program will be implemented on one subject, a reversal design (ABAB) will be used to analyze the effectiveness of the single independent variable (peer tutoring). The purpose of using this design is to help determine whether or not a functional relationship exists between the dependent variable (social interaction) and the intervention (peer tutor). Data collection will take place during recess via videotaping. The

ultimate goal is to determine rates of the positive social behavior demonstrated by the subject. Dan will be monitored to obtain the frequency rates of the following specific positive social behaviors: 1) participation in activities with others, 2) attempts to initiate conversations, and 3) verbal responses to others. Dan will be videotaped for three consecutive days, prior to the first intervention. His ability to initiate a conversation, verbal responses to others, and participation in activities with other children will be monitored to provide baseline data of positive social interaction. The percentage of his positive social interaction compared to nondisabled peers during the baseline over the three days will be calculated. An intervention will be introduced after subject stability of trend and level was obtained under the baseline condition. The intervention will continue until the criterion for the targeted behavior is reached. A return to the original baseline will be obtained. The aim is to determine if a causal relationship exists between peer tutoring intervention and social interaction. If the student no longer initiates a social intervention during the recess, an immediate reintroduction of the intervention to assist in increasing the social interaction.

Intervention

On the first day of intervention, Dan's tutor will be instructed to behave appropriately during recess and to remind him to follow the rules.

The tutor will also be instructed to initiate conversations with Dan and to encourage him to respond verbally. The purpose of this is to begin establishing a positive social relationship that could serve as a model for the child in building other relationships. The tutor will encourage Dan to become involved in activities with other children and to call peers by their names. (i.e., “Give me the ball, Sam,” “ Let me play with you, Ryan,” “Come with me Tony.”) Dan will be rewarded every time he exhibits one of the three positive behaviors. He will start every recess with 3 points and gain two points more with every positive social interaction. Dan will be told that at the end of every recess, his total points could be exchanged for concrete rewards such as stickers, candy, and various toys and games.

Results should represent a significant improvement in Dan’s rates of positive social interaction. An evaluation of the success of the program can be obtained by comparing points that Dan earned when he exhibited a positive social interaction with points he lost when he exhibited a negative social interaction.

Reference

Kamps, D. M., Barbetta, P. M., Leonard, B. R., & Delquadri. (1994). Classwidw peer tutoring: An integration strategy to improve reading skills and promote peer interactions among students with autism and general education peers. *Journal of Behavior Analysis*, 27 (1), 49-61.

Kohler, F., Greenwood, C. (1990). Effects of collateral peer supportive behaviors within the classwide peer tutoring program. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 23 (3), 307-322.