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Socially Including Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
in Early Elementary Classrooms:
A Children’s Literature Kit

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Abstract

Because of the increasing prevalence of autism and the push for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, there are a growing number of students with autism being included in general education classrooms. Despite their best intentions, many of these inclusive school programs do not ensure that students with autism are not being socially included. Due to their deficits in social and communication skills, students with autism often need assistance with social interactions, and peers play a vital role in the social development process. Before peers can establish friendships with the children with autism, they must be educated about autism. It is therefore the job of the general education teacher, to teach their students about autism. Designed to help early elementary general education teachers educate their students about autism and promote friendships between the students with autism and their peers, the Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism contains children’s books, which address characteristics of autism, corresponding literature lesson plans, and informative lists.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder (ASD), children’s literature, disability awareness, elementary, social inclusion
Chapter 1

Introduction

The continued increase of students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has created significant stressors on public schools as well as on the educators who are responsible for them (Ryan, Hughes, Katsiyannis, McDaniel, & Sprinkle, 2011). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2012 report estimates that 1 in 88 children has autism. This is a 23% increase from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2009 report and a 78% increase from their first report in 2007 (CDC, 2012). It is necessary to know the prevalence of autism in order to increase awareness and help service providers and educators plan for and support the rising number of children with autism in the school systems. Educators are required to learn autism specific teaching skills to meet the needs of the growing number of students with autism in their classrooms (Loiacono & Valenti, 2010).

In the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, a federal law mandating special education services for children, inclusive education, in terms of a least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE is defined by IDEIA as:

In general. --To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only
when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Sec. 612(a)(5))

Since the initial Least Restrictive Environment mandate in the 1975 initial authorization of IDEA known at the time as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, there has been a steady push towards inclusive education for students with ASD and other disabilities (Villa & Thousand, 2005).

Quality inclusive education means that students learn about diversity in their community, as well as how to work with one another in school, and students with disabilities take on more active roles in the community (Schwartz, 2006). In an inclusive school, a general education setting should offer students a chance to belong in a natural setting, opportunities to create friendships, a rich curriculum, high expectations, and typical peers as age-appropriate models (Parents Reaching Out, 2005). Villa and Thousand (2005) identify four categories in which goals of public education fall: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. A truly inclusive education would mean that all students are achieving these outcomes.

Yet, despite good intentions, many inclusion models fail to successfully socially include students with autism and other disabilities. According to Dybvik (2004), two of the worst mistakes schools make when implementing inclusion are merely physically including a child with a disability in the classroom and neglecting to teach typical peers about disabilities and how to interact with their peers who have disabilities. Simply placing a student with a disability into the general education
classroom does not guarantee social inclusion (Meyer, Park, Grenot-Scheyer, Schwartz, & Harry, 1998; Villa & Thousand, 2000).

According to Friedlander (2008), while the social aspects of childhood come easily to most children, those children with autism often fail to make social connections. Chamberlain, Kasari, and Rotheram-Fuller (2007) found that children with autism tended to be less centrally involved in the social structure of the classroom, and the children with autism received lower peer acceptance than their typical peers. Compared to their typical peers, students with autism were rated by their classmates less often as being someone whom they would like to work with and more often as someone they would not like to work with (Jones & Frederickson, 2010). Talking about her brother with autism one child said, “Most of my friends are fine but it’s quite hard when people act different around him because he’s autistic. I like when people see him as a person” (Petalas, Hastings, Nash, Dowey, & Reilly, 2009, p.388). Kluth (2010) states that students with autism are expressing that they need more than to just be included in the general education classroom. They are asking their teachers to assist them in developing friendships with their typical peers. Morton and Campbell (2008) argue that introducing peers to a student with autism is essential to successful inclusion.

Being accepted by peers can be complicated by the fact that students with disabilities such as autism often require special accommodations and modifications, and peers of students with disabilities may begin to resent the students with disabilities due to perceived special treatment by school staff. An explanation from
the teacher is needed to explain why these accommodations and modifications are necessary and that fair is not always equal (Meyer et. al, 1998). Without thoughtful inclusion, children with disabilities may become the target of bullying. Bullying can cause additional educational difficulties for students with disabilities including the inability to concentrate, school avoidance, and a loss of interest in school (Pacer Center, 2012). Children with autism are twice as likely as their typical peers to experience bullying, and having fewer friends at school puts children with autism at a greater risk of experiencing bullying (Cappadocia, Weiss, & Pepler, 2012).

According to Pacer Center (2012), more than 50% of bullying stops when a peer acts as an advocate and confronts the bully, and peer advocacy works because the peers are more likely to witness the bullying than the adults are. In addition, a peer telling the bully to stop has more impact than an adult telling the bully to stop. Although children can be mean to one another from time to time, they can also be taught to be kind, supportive, and empathetic (Sapon-Shevin, n.d.).

**Purpose of Project**

More students with autism are in general education classrooms then ever before, and these students often have social difficulties and, therefore, require additional support in creating friendships and becoming socially included in the general education classroom (Eldar, Talmor, & Wolf-Zukerman, 2010). Before friendships between students with autism and their peers can develop, the typical peers need to be educated about autism spectrum disorders. According to Sapon-Shevin (n.d.), diversity in the general education classroom should be valued, not
ignored. Diversity education can even become a part of the curriculum itself.

Teachers have identified the need for training of strategies for preparing the students without disabilities to welcome the students with disabilities (Villa & Thousand, 2000). The purpose of this project is to provide early elementary teachers with a children’s literature kit they can use to educate their students about autism spectrum disorders, encourage friendships between students with autism and their peers, and prevent bullying of students with autism.

**Definitions**

**Accommodations.** Accommodations are practices put into place to assist students with special needs and help them access the general education curriculum without actually changing the curriculum. Examples of accommodations would be color-coded notes, larger font, or extended time to complete tests.

**Atypical behaviors.** Atypical behaviors are behaviors that do not occur in typically developing children. Examples of atypical behaviors related to ASD would be flapping hands, rocking, avoiding eye contact, and self-injurious behaviors such as biting hands or banging head.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).** Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) sometimes referred to as autism is a spectrum of developmental disorders that affect the individual’s socialization and communication. The term ASD is used to refer to a range of similar disabilities including autistic disorder, Asperger’s syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder (CDD), Rett’s syndrome, and pervasive
developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). People on the autism spectrum may exhibit mild to severe disabilities (Ryan, et al., 2011).

**Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).** Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): is a requirement under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 protects the rights of people with disabilities who are involved in programs that receive federal funding, and it requires school districts to provide FAPE regardless of the severity of the disability. An appropriate education includes education services that meet the student’s education needs, and education of the student with their peers to the maximum extent appropriate (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

**General education classroom.** A general education classroom: a classroom composed mostly of general education students without disabilities, taught by a general education teacher

**Inclusion.** Inclusion is a term used to refer to the teaching students with disabilities together with their typical peers (Eldar et. al, 2010).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA).** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA): is a federal law mandating free appropriate public education for all students with disabilities between the ages of 3-12 in the least restrictive environment appropriate to meet their needs

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).** Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the term in IDEIA the refers to children with disabilities being educated with
those who do not have disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate while still meeting their educational needs.

**Modifications.** Modifications are alterations to the general curriculum that make the curriculum more accessible to the person with a disability or any individual who needs such alternations.

**Social inclusion.** Social inclusion means giving and encouraging opportunities for social interaction between the child with the disability and his or her peers.

**Typical peers.** Typical peers those people without disabilities who are the same age group as the person with the disability.

**Preview of Literature**

It has been well documented that successful inclusion involves more than just physically assigning a student with disabilities to a general education classroom (Boutot, 2007; Meyer et.al, 1998; Villa & Thousand, 2000). Students with disabilities, such as autism, need support being socially included in the classroom community. This support needs to come from peers as well as from teachers. In order for the peers to be effective in facilitating social interactions between themselves and the students with autism, the peers need to be educated about autism (Boutot, 2007). A variety of disability programs and projects, that focus on educating peers about students with disabilities, have been created for use by teachers. However, many of these programs have limitations when it comes to promoting awareness and acceptance of students with autism. An alternative instructional
strategy, the use of children’s literature to teach disability awareness, has been found to be an effective way to educate peers about appreciating similarities and differences (Anti-Defamation League, 2005).

**Preview of Methodology**

Teaching children about autism through the use of children’s literature is the focus of this project. During the planning phase of this project, children’s books were reviewed and selected, lesson plans for each of the books were written with standards-based goals, and resource and reference lists were made as supplemental aides to the lesson plans. The chapter on project methodology will include more detail regarding: a description of the project design, the setting the project was designed for, the instrument used to evaluate curriculum, the procedures utilized to create the project, and the evaluation process used.

**Significance of Project**

This project is designed specifically to help general education teachers of early elementary school students teach about autism spectrum disorders in their inclusive classrooms. Through the use of children’s books, lesson plans, and activities, this project helps teachers establish friendships between peers and students with autism. Indirectly, the general education teachers will also be learning about autism spectrum disorders while using the kit to instruct their students. This kit is unique in that it allows general education teachers to teach about autism spectrum disorder while teaching to the Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, which have been adopted by 45 out of the 50
states. In other words, the lessons and activities included in this kit can be used as part of language arts or social studies instruction. The kit is not “one more thing to teach,” but rather a resource for how to build respect for diversity, acceptance for students with autism, and friendships within the classroom through standards-based language arts and social studies instruction.

Summary

With more and more children being diagnosed with autism, and a push for inclusive education, there are increasing numbers of students with autism in general education classrooms with their peers (Ryan et. al, 2011). However, without an effort to work towards socially including these students into the classroom community, the students with autism will simply be present physically. Or even worse, without careful considerations during the inclusion process, the students with autism could potentially be bullied. In order for friendships to develop between peers and students with autism, respect for diversity needs to be part of the curriculum and peers need to be educated about autism spectrum disorder specifically. This kit is designed for use in teaching primary age students about autism spectrum disorder through the use of children’s literature.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

While research shows that inclusive education is beneficial to the students with autism as well as their peers (Timmons, et. al, 2006), it also shows that an effort must be made to make the inclusion one that is social in nature (Meyer et. al, 1998; Villa & Thousand, 2000). Unfortunately, many students with autism are physically placed in general education classrooms without being socially included. Teaching peers about autism is the first step in promoting acceptance and friendship (Boutot, 2007). There is a need for an autism awareness curriculum for teachers that can be easily integrated into their current curriculum and used throughout the year. The following literature review will discuss what studies have found regarding successful social inclusion, describe current disability awareness programs and projects as well as the strengths and limitations of these programs and projects, and finally, review the benefits of using children’s literature to teach disability awareness.

Overview of the Context of Literature

In order to determine the importance of socially including students with autism, a review of literature on successful inclusion practices is discussed. A variety of books, written by experts in the field of inclusive education, as well as research studies are considered. Information about promoting social inclusion of all students with disabilities is researched, however, the emphasis is on information regarding the
inclusion of elementary age students with autism spectrum disorder into general education classrooms.

An investigation into the disability awareness programs that are currently available to teachers yields a variety of programs and projects. These disability awareness programs and projects are described and reviewed to determine if an effective autism awareness program is currently available to the public. The strengths as well as the limitations of each program are analyzed. These strengths and limitations are determined based on qualities such as if a considerable portion of the program has a focus on autism, whether or not the program includes age-appropriate and accurate information, and how practical the program is for teacher use. Overall, the programs’ potentials to teach elementary age peers about autism in a meaningful, accurate, and friendship-promoting way is analyzed.

The use of children’s literature to teach disability awareness is investigated to determine if it is an effective method for promoting disability awareness and acceptance in young children. Findings of studies on educating peers about autism through the use of children’s books are cited. The positive outcomes of using children’s literature to teach disability awareness are listed, and the benefits of including this type of instruction in the current project are backed by the findings from this research.

**Literature Review Areas**

**Successful social inclusion.** Physically including students with autism in the general education classroom is not enough (Boutot, 2007). Students with autism need
to be socially included in order to fully benefit from an inclusive education. Yet, according to Boutot (2007), people with autism may have trouble initiating conversation, reading social cues, or behaving appropriately. Stereotypic behaviors such as hand flapping, body rocking, or repetition of words, can alienate peers, and this social isolation can prevent social relationships (Lee, Odom, & Loftin, 2007). It may be no surprise then that Rotheram-Fuller, Kasari, Chamberlain, and Locke (2010) found that in all grade levels students with autism had fewer reciprocal relationships than their peers. It is promising, however, that the social and communication skills as well as behavior of students with autism can improve when they are socially included in general education classrooms (Boutot, 2007). Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller, Locke, and Gulsrud (2012) found, in their study on two peer interventions for improving social skills in children with autism, that working with peers may be the most effective approach for improving the social outcomes of children with autism. Students with autism can benefit from their peers in an inclusive classroom setting when an effort is made to promote social interactions.

Improving social skills and communication of children with autism is part of working towards the life-enhancing goal of friendship. Boutot (2007) found that parents often list friendship as an important goal for their children with autism, and she recommends that teachers encourage peers to talk to and play with the students with autism. Bevan-Brown (2010) surveyed parents of students with autism and found that they desperately want their children with autism to have friends and to be accepted by their peers. These parents wanted the teachers to teach the peers that just
because the students with autism think and act differently does not mean they do not deserve to have friends. In addition, the parents believed educating peers about autism spectrum disorders would lead to the development of more friendships (Bevan-Brown, 2010). Parents recognize their children’s need for friendship, and they realize the establishment of these friendships is dependent on the efforts of the teachers and peers to understand and support their children with autism.

The first step in initiating friendships between students with autism and their peers is for teachers to educate their students about acceptance of differences (Boutot, 2007). The diversity within the inclusive classroom should be honored, not ignored, and differences in abilities should be celebrated (Sapon-Shevin, n.d.). Peers of students with autism can benefit from inclusion because they learn empathy and acceptance for those who are different from themselves (Timmons, et. al, 2006), and when children experience diversity early in life, it makes it easier for them to be natural around people who are different from themselves (Schwartz, 2006).

Preparing the general education students, as well as students with autism, for inclusion is an important aspect of promoting acceptance and friendships or “social inclusion” of children with autism (Boutot, 2007). Messiou (2008) found, in a study on listening to students’ voices as a way of fostering inclusion in schools, that teachers play a vital role in the way children think and feel about one another. Sapon-Shevin (n.d.) expresses that while it is important to teach about differences, it is equally as important to teach about similarities because it is those similarities that help students to build common ground which is the foundation for relationships. The
teacher’s role of educating peers about accepting differences, and recognizing similarities, is essential to the development of friendships between peers and those students with disabilities such as autism.

**Current disability awareness programs and projects.** To teach awareness and acceptance of differences, various disability awareness programs and projects are available for use in inclusive schools. All of the programs reviewed, in some capacity, aim to teach peers about disabilities. However, each program or project is unique and offers different activities and resources. For the purposes of this review, the focus will be on the autism awareness aspect of these programs.

Autism Speaks (2011) offers a comprehensive 255-page school guide titled, *School Community Tool Kit*, designed to teach staff and students about autism and promote acceptance and inclusion. Autism Speaks (2011) lists some suggestions for teachers to help improve social interaction and development of students with autism: welcome the student with autism and make him or her feel like they belong, meet the student where he or she is as far as interest, be aware of any bullying and teasing that may be occurring, model social interaction, pair the student with a peer who has strong social skills, support peers and the student with structured social experiences, and educate peers about being supportive and collaborative learning. According to Autism Speaks (2011), even though not all students will show an interest in supporting the students with autism, “they can almost all benefit from efforts at improving understanding and building sensitivity and acceptance.”
The *School Community Tool Kit* created by Autism Speaks (2011) also offers a sample 30-minute assembly agenda followed by a description of a 30-minute breakout session in the classrooms. It is advised that a team of parents and siblings of students with autism, teachers, and school psychologists help to plan the assembly and the breakout sessions. For the lower grades, the *School Community Tool Kit* suggests focusing on teaching the word “autism” and emphasizing the importance of teaching all people with respect despite differences. Students in the upper grades may learn more about the specifics of autism such as the signs and ways that they can help their peers with autism. The sample assembly agenda covers information about autism, video biographies of people with autism, being a parent of a child with autism, treatments for autism, social aspects of autism, and school social support club membership. The breakout sessions consist of a general discussion and question and answer sessions. Handouts to reinforce how to be a friend are also provided for the breakout sessions.

The Autism Society of America (2008) developed a 3-page booklet titled, *Growing Up Together*. This booklet is designed to teach elementary age students about the similarities and differences of students with autism. The booklet explains some of the ways that students with autism may act, and it teaches peers why the students with autism may act the way they do. It is noted that students with autism are not misbehaving, but rather they are trying to make sense of the confusing world around them. Additionally, the booklet explains how to become friends with someone with autism. The Autism Society of America (2008) has the following
suggestions for the peers of children with autism: accept their friend’s differences, protect their friend from things that bother him or her, talk in short sentences, use pictures or write down information, join their friend in activities that he or she likes, be patient, invite their friend to play with them, and help others learn about autism. As an additional resource, the last page of this packet offers a list of picture books recommended for more information on autism.

Timmons, Breitenbach, and MacIsaac (2006) created a module titled, *Educating Children about Autism in an Inclusive Classroom*, which addresses the idea that “inclusive environments can provide opportunities for children with autism to increase their social interactions and in turn improve their social skills” (Timmons, et al., 2006 p.8). According to Timmons, et al. (2006), in order for peers to be able to assist with teaching social skills to children with autism, peers must be trained and teachers must facilitate the social interactions between the peers and the students with autism. It is recommended, by the authors of this module, that teachers meet with the parents of the students with autism before teaching lessons about autism to the classmates. Some of the skills listed to teach peers are: to greet the students with autism, model appropriate responses, share toys, offer help, give compliments, and explain activities in simpler phrases (Timmons, et. al, 2006). A basic lesson template is provided for general education teachers to use while teaching their students about autism. The template includes an introduction about diversity, general information about autism, specific information about a student such as his or her interests and
challenges, specific suggestions for how peers can help support that student, and a closing discussion.

Timmons, et. al (2006) also provides several basic lesson plans to be used by general education teachers to educate their students in grades one to twelve about autism. Objectives, materials, activities, and additional resources or activities are listed for each lesson. Lesson objectives include topics such as respect, similarities and differences, autism, learning styles, and giving compliments. Various methods of instruction are represented in these lessons from brainstorming sessions and video biographies to creating computer-generated assignments. The appendix provides several other resources such as handouts, definitions of terms, book lists, booklets, and brochure samples.

In the booklet by Adcock and Remus (2006), Disability Awareness Activity Pack, information as well as activities are provided to teach students about disabilities such as autism, communication disorders, and learning disabilities. The information given about autism includes a list of some of the challenges a person with autism may have: understanding what other people say, letting others know what they want, understanding social rules, knowing how to play, dealing with changes, and ignoring sounds, lights, or moving objects. Adcock and Remus (2006) describe autism as a spectrum disorder in which not all individuals with autism are the same. In addition, the Disability Awareness Activity Pack explains some of the atypical behaviors that people with autism exhibit as calming techniques. The suggested activity is designed to simulate a person with autism’s inability to ignore extraneous noise. In this
activity, students are assigned group roles; three students are making noise, one student is reading a passage, and the fifth student is assigned the role of the student with autism who is trying to ignore the extraneous noise and attempting to pay attention to the passage being read. Students rotate roles so that each student has the opportunity to play the role of the student with autism. After the activity, discussion questions such as “How did it feel?” and “What would have helped?” are suggested (Adcock and Remus, 2006).

Mickel and Griffin (2007) describe a teacher workshop titled *The Kids Like You, Kids Like Me Program*, which was designed to promote teacher and student understanding and acceptance of people with disabilities. Central to the theme of this program is the message that “all children and adults need and want to have friends and enjoy fun experiences, but each may go about this differently- some because of their disabilities” (Mickel & Griffin, 2007 p. 4). The program starts with a three-day workshop for teachers to challenge their attitudes and teach them how to successfully include students with disabilities. Simulations and panel discussions are part of this workshop. During the simulation portion of the training the teachers use wheelchairs to navigate the city, wear goggles to simulate a visual impairment, and use an assistive technology device to communicate. For the panel discussion, community members with disabilities are invited to speak to the group of teachers about their accomplishments as well as the challenges they face. At the end of the workshop, teachers are given teaching manuals that include fact sheets on disabilities, classroom awareness activities, and information about disability awareness curriculum.
A disability awareness puppet program to use with children, *The Kids on the Block Program on Autism*, addresses topics such as misconceptions about autism, temper tantrums, inappropriate behaviors, behavior modification, reinforcement, and employment possibilities through the use of puppet scripts and follow-up activities (The Kids on the Block, n.d.). The puppet characters of the story scripts include a boy with autism, his brother, and a neighbor girl who is curious about the boy with autism. Information about autism is taught through the puppet representing the brother of the boy with autism. In one script, the neighbor girl is upset when the boy with autism has a temper tantrum because he is not given their cookies. In another script, the boy with autism demonstrates his skill of sorting socks, and is given a cracker as reinforcement for this task. His skill of sorting is connected to job possibilities in the future.

*Disabilities Awareness Curriculum*, is a packet created for third grade teachers by the San Mateo County Commission on Disabilities (n.d.). This packet includes information about how to talk to children about people with disabilities, a five-day lesson plan with disability awareness activities, and a suggested reading list. The section on talking to children about disabilities emphasizes the importance of finding similarities between people, not just the differences. For example, one teaching point is that all human beings need friendship and acceptance. Some of the disability issues included to be discussed with children are: a disability is not contagious, people are not “bad” because they have a disability, usually disabilities cannot be cured, and people with disabilities do not necessarily need to be cared for
all of the time (San Mateo County Commission on Disabilities, n.d.). The lesson plan opens with a reading a book about someone with a disability followed by a discussion. The next suggested activity is sharing stories about real or imaginary people with disabilities. This activity could include having a person with a disability come in to speak to the children. Another recommended activity is to have disability stations that simulate experiences a person with a disability may have. Simulation activities include smeared glasses to simulate a vision impairment and earplugs to simulate a hearing impairment. In addition, the packet recommends using *Kids on the Block* puppets to perform scripts about characters with disabilities.

**Strengths and limitations of current disability awareness programs and projects.** Some of the current disability awareness programs and projects described above focus on physical disabilities, however, they do not adequately address autism spectrum disorders. For example, the packet titled, *Disabilities Awareness Curriculum* (San Mateo County Commission on Disabilities, n.d.) as well as the teacher workshop titled *The Kids Like You, Kids Like Me Program* (Mickel and Griffin, 2007) do not include simulation activities for autism. Their simulation activities focusing on physical disabilities such as visual impairment and hearing impairment are engaging, but not helpful in teaching peers about autism.

In addition, some disability awareness programs attempt to explain complicated information in simple terms using only one character or example. Unfortunately, this can lead to oversimplifying and generalizations. For example, *The Kids on the Block Program on Autism* uses one puppet character to represent
people with autism (Kids on the Block, n.d.). Sophisticated ideas such as behavior modification and reinforcement are oversimplified and therefore not properly described. Timmons, Breitenbach, and MacIsaac (2006) created a module titled, *Educating Children about Autism in an Inclusive Classroom*, which provides only one lesson, with one example of someone with autism, for each grade level. In the booklet by Adcock and Remus (2006), *Disability Awareness Activity Pack*, the simulation experience for hearing sensitivity is the only simulation activity suggested. The lack of variety of autism simulation activities oversimplifies and generalizes what it is like to have autism. The one-day, one activity approach to teaching about autism spectrum disorders is not enough to promote acceptance and friendships among peers and students with autism.

Some programs focus on autism spectrum disorders and offer a lot of good information, however, they do not provide tangible resources for teachers to use. For example, The Autism Society of America (2008) developed a 3-page booklet titled, *Growing Up Together*, which describes autism accurately and in an age-appropriate manner, but there are no follow-up activities or additional resources included in the packet. When the teacher is done discussing the information in the packet with the students, the teacher is left to find the recommended books or create activities on his or her own. The lack of materials for follow-up activities would likely discourage many teachers from continuing to use autism awareness lessons throughout the school year.
Autism Speaks (2011) offers a comprehensive 255-page school guide titled, *School Community Tool Kit*, which gives valuable information about including a child with autism into the entire school community. However, the use of this guide requires buy-in from the entire school community. This guide would not be as helpful to a general education teacher without the entire school adopting the guide as a resource for promoting acceptance of students with autism in their school community. Even though the information could be useful to the teacher, the length of the document alone would discourage most busy teachers from using this guide.

**Using children’s literature to teach disability awareness.** Using children’s literature is one way to teach peers about disabilities such as autism. Picture books about people with disabilities can be an effective way to teach why some people behave differently and to begin discussions about differences (Boutot, 2007). Therefore, these books should be integrated into the curriculum (Sapon-Shevin, n.d.). Books can also be a powerful way to develop empathy and appreciation for those who are different (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). Using children’s books to promote awareness of disabilities such as autism, is appropriate for primary-aged children (Maich & Belcher, 2012). “Introducing young children to literature with diverse and textured depictions of people with disabilities can help to offset societal prejudices” (The Anti-Defamation League, 2005 p. 1). Trepanier-Street and Romatowski (1996) found that using children’s literature that focuses on disabilities in combination with activities relating to the literature can be an effective teaching strategy for promoting positive attitudes among classroom peers. Bibliotherapy, the process of using
literature in therapeutic ways, is useful for helping children with disabilities to understand themselves in addition to helping the children without disabilities understand the lives of those with disabilities (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008). Furthermore, Beecher & Darragh (2011) believes that using quality literature that realistically and positively depicts people with autism can help teachers to have a more positive view of students with disabilities and therefore be more likely to be effective in including students through their teaching.

**Connections to the literature.** It has been documented that the social, behavioral, and communication skills of students with autism are positively affected by their social inclusion in the general education classroom (Boutot, 2007). In order for students with autism to achieve positive outcomes in social skill and friendship development they need to be afforded opportunities to socially interact with willing and supportive peers. According to a study by Bevan-Brown (2010), the parents of children with autism recognize that the willingness of peers to establish friendships with their children is dependent on the efforts of the teachers and peers to understand and support their children. Boutot (2007) agrees that the social inclusion process of initiating friendships between students with autism and their peers begins with teachers educating their students about acceptance of differences. “Mere contact is not enough to promote positive responses to differences; teachers must systematically address student differences and structure learning activities that encourage positive social interaction” (Sapon-Shevin, n.d., p.39).
Despite the fact that the number of students in general education settings with autism is on the rise, many of the current disability awareness programs and projects available to teachers do not adequately address the social inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders. Of the programs that do address autism awareness, many have a single “token” activity or simulation lesson that is supposed to teach the students all about what it is like to have autism. However, trying on the shoes of a person with autism for 30 minutes is not sufficient enough to promote acceptance and friendships among peers and students with autism. Some programs offer valuable, age-appropriate information for teachers to use when educating their students about autism spectrum disorders, however, they lack materials and resources for follow-up activities to engage the students in a year-long learning about and appreciation for people with autism. The sheer length of some of the disability awareness guides would be enough to make the head of any overwhelmed teacher turn the other way. General education teachers need a practical autism awareness curriculum that can be easily integrated into their daily routines and used throughout the year. Children’s books are read aloud daily in most early elementary classrooms, and according to Sapon-Shevin (n.d.), children’s literature that focuses on disabilities should be integrated into the curriculum as a means of promoting awareness and acceptance of similarities and differences.

**Summary**

All people, including those with autism, deserve and need to feel like they are part of a social community. Simply having a chair and a desk set aside in a general
education classroom for the child with autism does not equate to successful inclusion. Children with autism need the support of their teachers and peers to develop their social skills. Supporting social interaction is considered to be important to the student with autism’s overall progress (Autism Speaks, 2011). Friendships will not form unless peers are educated about autism and explicitly taught how to support their classmates with autism. Therefore, general education teachers need a practical, age-appropriate, and engaging autism awareness curriculum that they can use within their daily routine to promote autism acceptance and friendship.
Chapter 3

Project Methodology

Introduction

Many students with autism are being included in general education classrooms without adequate support for social inclusion. The peers and teachers of the students with autism need to be informed as to how to best create a sense of belonging as well as reciprocal friendships between the students with autism and their peers. This Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism, was designed to educate teachers and peers about autism with a focus on being a friend to someone with autism. The following information regarding the project methodology will include: a description of the project design, the setting the project was designed for, the instrument used to evaluate curriculum, the procedures utilized to create the project, and the evaluation process used.

Design

The Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism was created to assist teachers in educating their students about autism and to promote social inclusion of students with autism in a simple, manageable way. It has been noted that using children’s literature is an effective way to teach children about disabilities (Boutot, 2007; Sapon-Shevin, n.d.). Therefore, this kit was designed around the idea that children’s books are (a) an effective way to teach peers about disabilities, (b) a familiar fixture in primary classrooms, and (c) easy to incorporate into a teacher’s daily routine.
Setting

Teachers have identified the need for training of strategies for preparing the students without disabilities to welcome the students with disabilities (Villa & Thousand, 2000), and with a growing number of students being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders there is a real need for teachers to prepare their students for the inclusion of students with autism (Ryan et. al, 2011). To address this need, the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* was designed for general education teachers who teach the primary grades in public schools across the United States of America. The lessons can be used for primary age students all over the world, however, the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies Science and Technical Subjects* for grades kindergarten through second, which were written by National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers were used when creating the lessons and activities. Therefore, the focus was on the education standards of the United States of America. Resources, books, and activities were chosen based on these standards as well as their appropriateness for primary age students.

In addition, the kit was designed to be used in inclusive general education classrooms in which one or more students with autism spectrum disorder is being included. Teachers may use this kit to teach their students about autism spectrum disorders without the presence of a student with autism. However, the purpose of
creating this kit really was to help teachers socially include children with autism by teaching the peers about acceptance and befriending a classmate with autism.

**Instrument**

The Anti-Defamation League (2005) recommends that educators look carefully at literature that portrays people with disabilities to ensure that the people with disabilities are depicted in a positive way. The Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award, established in 2000 by the Division on Developmental Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children, is awarded to authors who portray characters with developmental disabilities in positive and appropriate ways (Dyches, Prater, & Leininger, 2009). Two picture books that portray characters with autism have won this award: *Ian’s Walk* by Laurie Lears and *My Brother Sammy* by Becky Edwards. *Ian’s Walk* along with other books that meet the criteria listed in Table 1, were selected for use in this kit.

**Table 1**

*Guidelines for Selecting Children’s Literature which Address Disabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choose books that…</th>
<th>Avoid books that…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Show the character with disabilities participating in a reciprocal relationship</td>
<td>Portray the character with disabilities as a victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate examples of inclusive settings</td>
<td>Depict the character with disabilities as dependent on others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portray abilities and strengths in addition to the disabilities</td>
<td>Show the character with disabilities to always be in passive roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emphasize the similarities between characters with and without disabilities  | Portray those who are friends of the character with the disability as “saints”
---|---
Promote acceptance and respect for the character | Depict the character with disabilities’ personality as overly sad or angry
Use person first language | Add stereotypically positive characteristics to the character with disabilities
Promote a feeling of understanding for people with disabilities using accurate information about a specific disability | Represent the character with disabilities’ ordinary actions as amazing or heroic

*Note.* Adapted from The Anti-Defamation League (2005).

**Procedures**

The planning process for this kit began with a review of the children’s books available to teach children about autism. An Internet search was performed on children’s books recommended in *Growing Up Together* (Autism Society of America 2008). Recommended related books, which came up during the search, were also considered. On-line customer reviews as well as the criteria listed in Table 1 were used to determine which books to purchase. In order to determine which books to use in the kit, the purchased books were read and scrutinized for their content using the list in Table 1. The books were also analyzed for their ability to teach the topic of autism to young children in a way that would promote social inclusion.
Children’s literature lesson plans were developed for each of the five selected books (see Appendices A, B, C, D, and E for complete lesson plans). A five-step lesson plan process was used to plan the lessons. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects were utilized in preparing the lessons. Standards were selected based on the book’s ability to lend itself to teach a particular standard. Lesson objectives (learning outcomes) were created based on the standards for the lesson as well as the autism related message prevalent in the story. Lesson discussion questions and activities were chosen based on their ability to teach the autism related message and standards in an engaging and collaborative way that promotes friendship. Some ideas for activities and lessons were found in Just Give Him the Whale!: 20 Ways to Use Fascinations, Areas of Expertise, and Strengths to Support Students with Autism (Kluth & Schwarz, 2008), Joyful Learning: Active and Collaborative Learning in Inclusive Classrooms (Udvari-Solner & Kluth, 2008), and Pedro’s Whale (Kluth & Schwarz, 2010).

Children’s books and books for teachers relating to the topic of including students with autism were consulted when creating resource lists (Kluth & Schwarz, 2008; Lowell & Tuchel, 2005; Sabin, 2006; Veenendall, 2009). Resource lists of recommended children’s books, recommended reading for educators, and web resources for educators were compiled (see Appendices F and G). Resources were selected based on the quality of information provided, the age-appropriateness, as well as the presence of teacher friendly information.
The section titled “Quick Facts about Autism for Kids” was included in the kit as a brief overview of autism for teachers to read and share with their students (see Appendix H). It was designed to be a supplement to the information learned through the literature lessons. The section started as a list of common characteristics of autism, which have been personally observed in classroom settings. Then, a review of other autism fact lists was conducted to ensure that no key ideas were left out (Autism Society of America, 2008; Bishop, 2011; Sabin, 2006). Facts were selected based on how common they are among children with autism as well as how important it is that peers understand the fact. The facts were written in simple terms to make them easily understood by teachers as well as children.

“How to be Friends with Someone with Autism,” a list of tips for children who want to be friends with a child with autism, was developed in a similar fashion as the “Quick Facts about Autism for Kids” (see Appendix H). The “How to be Friends with Someone with Autism” list began as personal ideas of what friendship qualities students with autism would appreciate. These ideas were compared to the ideas of other authors (Autism Society of America, 2008; Lowell & Tuchel, 2005; Sabin, 2006) to determine if any important friendship qualities were left out.

Finally, a reference list was produced to cite all of the resources used to produce this project (see Appendix I). References for the children’s books used for the lessons were included in this list. Other books used to assist in the development of the lessons and resource lists were also added to the reference list.
Evaluation of Process

Throughout the decision making and planning of this kit, careful consideration was made to create a kit that is teacher and child friendly. To make the kit teacher friendly, lessons were designed to fit into everyday routines, and the lessons were developed to use materials regularly found in the classroom. In addition, the information provided in the kit is kept short and simple to encourage rather than discourage teachers from using the kit. To ensure that the kit was child-friendly, only age-appropriate books, activities, and information were chosen to be included in this kit.

Summary

In order to provide general education teachers of the primary grades with an easy way to teach their students about autism, this Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism was developed. The kit was designed to teach children about autism and promote friendships between children with autism and their peers through the use of children’s literature. Careful considerations were made when selecting the children’s books, writing lesson plans, and forming resource lists. A variety of children’s books as well as resources on autism were sifted through in order to find the resources and information that best contributed to the goal of this kit. Ultimately, the Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism was completed and provides useful information about autism, engaging lesson plans for young students, and resource lists for teachers.
Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

Teachers need a simple way to help their students with autism become socially included in their general education classrooms. In an effort to equip early elementary teachers with an easy way to promote the social inclusion of their students with autism, the Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism was formed. The contents of this kit, including the tri-fold guide and lesson plans with corresponding children’s books, are described in the project presentation section of this chapter.

Children’s Literature Kit Description

The Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism is composed of two main parts. The first part is a laminated tri-fold guide, which includes lists of information about autism, recommended children’s books, resources for educators, and references. Children’s literature lesson plans and the corresponding children’s books make up the second part of the kit. Together, the two parts of the kit are housed in an open top, plastic file box.

The thin, laminated, tri-fold guide is designed to assist teachers in socially including students with autism by providing information about autism as well as resources for further information. A graphically represented table of contents makes up the cover page of the guide. This cover page lists the contents: “Quick Facts about Autism for Kids,” “How to be Friends with Someone with Autism,” “Children’s
Literature Lessons,” “Recommended Children’s Books,” “Recommended Reading for Educators,” and “Web Resources for Educators.”

“Quick Facts about Autism for Kids” and “How to be Friends with Someone with Autism” are bulleted lists that make up the inside cover of the tri-fold guide (see Appendix H). These lists are to be used by teachers to help educate their students about autism. They provide additional information, which can be used as supplemental aides to the literature lesson plans. “Quick Facts about Autism for Kids” contains facts such as “autism is not contagious” and “many people with autism have a hard time talking to others.” “How to be Friends with Someone with Autism” includes tips such as “get to know your friend’s fascinations” and “ask before you give your friend a hug.” These facts and tips are written in simple terms so they, with a brief explanation from a teacher, are easy for young children to understand.

The middle inside page of the tri-fold guide has pictures of the children’s books, which are used in the kit. Presenting teachers with a quick visual of the children’s books makes it easier for teachers to locate the books in their classrooms. This also provides a more interesting way to display the names and authors of the books. For organizational purposes, these pictures act as placards for the children’s literature lesson plans, which may be stored within the folded tri-fold guide in front of this middle page.

On the right inside page of the tri-fold guide is the list of “Recommended Children’s Books.” This list contains the titles, authors’ names, and publishing information of ten recommended children’s books (see Appendix F). Five of the
books are included in the kit and five are not. All of the books are recommended for teaching young children about autism and for promoting friendship between children with autism and their peers. The books were reviewed to ensure that they depict autism in a realistic way and do not portray the character with autism in an overly negative manner.

On the back of the tri-fold guide are three lists: “Recommended Reading for Educators,” “Web Resources for Educators,” and “References.” The list of recommended reading for educators has the titles, authors’ names, and publishing information for four books (see Appendix G). All of the books are related to teaching students in an inclusive classroom. Most of the books have a specific focus on including students with autism in the general education classroom. The list of recommended web resources for educators includes websites for national autism organizations such as Autism Speaks as well as other informative websites for teachers of inclusive classrooms (see Appendix G). References are listed on the back of the guide to give credit to those sources used in the production of this kit as well as to provide readers with sources of valuable information (see Appendix I).

A collection of five children’s books and their corresponding lesson plans, comprises the second part of the Children's Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism. The lesson plans include discussion questions, collaborative, guided practice activities, and independent work that engage the learner and promote autism awareness through the use of children’s literature (see Appendices A, B, C, D, and E for complete lesson plans). Each five-step lesson plan, with optional follow-up
activity, is displayed on the front and back of one laminated sheet. Having the entire lesson on one piece of paper helps with organization and prevents pages from getting misplaced. These lessons may be stored inside the folded tri-fold guide, or they may be each stored with their corresponding children’s book.

Summary

The *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism*, composed of the tri-fold informative guide and the lesson plans with corresponding children’s picture books, is an all inclusive kit for early elementary school teachers to use to promote autism awareness and the social inclusion of students with autism. Through the characters in the stories as well as the informative lists, teachers and students will learn more about autism thereby enabling them to better understand the students with autism in their classrooms. This understanding is a necessary step in the development of friendships between students with autism and their peers.
Chapter 5

Discussion

As presented in the previous chapters, the product for this project - the Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism - provides teachers with the resources needed to educate their students about autism and promote social interactions between the students with autism and their peers. Children’s books, lesson plans, and informative lists together make this project an all inclusive autism awareness kit. This chapter discussion will include: a summary of the project, future plans for use of the project, global implications of the project, limitations of the project, a proposed future project, as well as concluding remarks.

Summary of Project

Providing early elementary school teachers with a tool for educating their students about autism as well as promoting the social inclusion of their students with autism is the goal of the Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism. Children’s literature has been recommended as an effective way to teach children about disabilities (Boutot, 2007), and this kit uses characters in children’s literature to teach students about the characteristics common in autism spectrum disorders. Literature lesson plans corresponding to each of the children’s books as well as engaging follow-up activities provide opportunities for the students to gain deeper insights into the experiences of someone with autism as well as knowledge of how individuals can support their friends with autism.
Limitations of Project

Despite the careful considerations made during the development of this project, there are a few limitations. First, this project focuses on providing autism awareness curriculum through children’s literature for teachers of the primary elementary grades. The books, lessons, and activities are appropriate for the young learner. References to kindergarten through second grade standards are presented in the lessons and activities. However, the lessons included in this kit could be used with upper elementary school students with some slight modifications such as the use of more sophisticated books, more in-depth conversations, and more challenging lessons and activities. Therefore, any upper elementary teachers who wish to teach their students about autism awareness would likely need to find their own resources or modify the primary *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* in order to make it more age-appropriate for their students.

A second limitation is that the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* has not yet been tested out by teachers or students. Therefore, there is currently no data on the effectiveness of the use of this kit on promoting the social inclusion of primary students with autism.

Another limitation to this project is that the success of this kit is dependent upon teacher buy-in. It is not a required instructional tool, so teachers must be personally motivated to use the kit with their students. In order to encourage rather than discourage the use of this kit, the kit includes easy-to-follow lessons that can be easily incorporated into the regular school day. Because the lessons are standards-
based, teachers can use the lessons to teach about autism spectrum disorder and provide language arts or social studies instruction simultaneously. This “time saver” will encourage teachers to use the kit.

**Plans for Implementing the Use of the *Children’s Literature Kit***

The first use of the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* will be in Kindergarten through second grade inclusive classrooms at an elementary school in North San Diego County, California. At a school site staff meeting, the rationale behind the creation of this kit as well as a description of the kit will be presented to the teachers. Teachers who have students with autism in their classrooms will be encouraged to use the kits to teach their students about autism and promote the social inclusion of the students with autism. The *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* will be available at the beginning of the school year for teachers who volunteer to use the kit. Using the kit at the beginning of the year is encouraged to enable the students with autism to feel a sense of belonging from the start of their school year.

After two months into the school year, the teachers who volunteer to use the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire presented in Table 2. The results of this questionnaire will provide information about the extent to which the teachers actually use the kit as well as insight into the success of the kit on socially including students with autism. This information will then be used to determine what changes (if any) need to be made to the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* in
order to make it more teacher-friendly or more effective in teaching primary students about autism.

**Global Implications**

Even though the use of the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* will begin in one school, it has the potential to be a tool for inclusive education teachers throughout the country. In order to meet the educational needs of a wide group of students, the kit is designed to meet national, rather than state, standards in literacy. Therefore early elementary teachers across the country will be able to use this kit to help spread autism awareness and promote friendships between children with autism and their peers. Districts and states may choose to adopt this kit for their teachers to use in their classrooms.

**Future Extension of the Project**

In the future, an extension of this project to the upper elementary grades is recommended. The creation of a *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism in the Upper Elementary Grades* would provide upper elementary level teachers with the tools they need to teach the older students about autism through the use of age-appropriate books and lessons. It is important to continue to educate students about autism throughout their years in inclusive schools in order to send a message to the students that the social inclusion of students with autism is important at every grade level.
Table 2. Teacher Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have used the <em>Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism</em>.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot (if “not at all,” then skip to question 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overall my students were engaged during the readings of the children’s books.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The books were appropriate for the age group I teach.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overall, my students were engaged in the lessons.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The lessons were appropriate for the age group I teach.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I did the optional follow-up activities.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot (if “not at all,” then skip to question 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Overall, my students were engaged in the optional follow-up activities.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The optional follow-up activities were appropriate for the age group I teach.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Based on my informal observations during the use of this kit, my students seemed to learn about autism.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I have students with autism in my class.</td>
<td>not at all----------some----------a lot (if “not at all,” then skip to question 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Based on my informal observations of my students’ social interactions, there has been an increase in positive interactions between the students with autism and their peers since the implementation of this kit.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I have witnessed students using the “How to be Friends with Someone with Autism” tips.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I plan to use the <em>Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism</em> next year.</td>
<td>not at all----------somewhat----------a lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Social inclusion is important to all children and those children with autism are no exception. Yet, without help from their teachers many students with autism would be left to simply physically exist in their classrooms. The *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* offers teachers the tools they need to make a difference in the lives of not only their students with autism, but all of their students. Discussions about the children’s books as well as the collaborative literature lessons and activities present in the *Children’s Literature Kit: Socially Including Students with Autism* promote autism awareness and the development of reciprocal friendships between the students with autism and their peers.
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http://daddcec.org/Publications/ETADDJournal.aspx


Maich, K., & Belcher, C. (2012). Using picture books to create peer awareness about


Pacer Center. (2012). Bullying and harassment of students with disabilities. *Pacer*


doi: 10.1080/10349120903306715


Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
Appendix A

Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Ian’s Walk* by Laurie Lears
Children’s Literature Lesson Plan - *Ian’s Walk* by Laurie Lears

**Title:** Understanding Atypical Behaviors: *Ian’s Walk* by Laurie Lears

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

**Required Materials:** The picture book, *Ian’s Walk* by Laurie Lears, marker, whiteboard or chart paper, writing utensils and paper for the students

**Lesson Duration:** 40 minutes

**Rationale/Goals:**

Students will listen to a story about a boy with autism and describe the main characters in the story. Students will answer comprehension questions about the story. They will develop an understanding for the atypical behaviors exhibited by people with autism and participate in a discussion about how it is okay to be different. Students will discuss and draw (and/or write) about what they could do if they went for a walk with someone who wanted to walk their “own way.”

**Objectives (Learning Outcomes):**

Students will:

- Identify and describe the main characters in the story
- Develop an understanding about atypical behaviors exhibited by people with autism, and that it is okay to be different
- Describe how a major event changes a character’s attitude

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading Standards for Literature: Key Ideas and Details
K.3: With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story

1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details

2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges

**Anticipatory Set:**

- Allow each child a chance to share one of their favorite things that they like to do when they go for a walk (search for bugs, collect rocks, talk, smell flowers, etc). Encourage students to share even if another student already shared their same idea. Put tally marks next to repeated ideas.

- Discuss how there are many different things that people like to do when they go for a walk. Some things many students like to do and other things only one or two students like to do. Ask the students if it is okay to do something different when you go for a walk. Discuss that there is no right or wrong way to take a walk (unless of course you are not being safe).

**Methods/Activities (Instructional Procedures):**

**Teacher Input:** Read the story *Ian’s Walk* by Laurie Lears, stopping periodically to ask questions.

- Who are the main characters? Describe Ian. Describe Julie.

- How does Julie feel about Ian’s way of taking a walk?

- How does Julie feel about losing Ian?
• How is the walk different on the way back? Why do you think so?

**Guided Practice:**

• Students will turn to the student next to them and tell them what they could do if they went for a walk with someone who wanted to walk their “own way.”

• Give the students an opportunity to share out some of their ideas.

**Independent Practice:**

• Students will draw a picture (and/or write) to show what they could do if they went for a walk with someone who wanted to walk their “own way.”

**Checking for Understanding/Assessment:**

Students will be assessed informally by teacher review of work samples as well as probing questions during class discussions and independent work time.

**Closure:**

Students will simultaneously stand up and “forehead share” their pictures (put their pictures on their foreheads and turn slowly around) or volunteer to read their writing to the class.

**Optional Follow-Up Activity:**

Survey the students to learn about their interests, skills, and talents. Ask questions such as “What do you like to do for fun?” or “What are some of your favorite things?” Use the information that you learn about the students to build connections between the students through similarities. Use the sample student survey “About Me” from *Just Give Him the Whale!: 20 Ways to Use Fascinations,*
Areas of Expertise, and Strengths to Support Students with Autism by Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz.
Appendix B

Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Looking After Louis* by Lesley Ely
Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Looking After Louis* by Lesley Ely

**Title:** Varying Needs: *Looking After Louis* by Lesley Ely

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

**Required Materials:** The picture book, *Looking After Louis* by Lesley Ely, butcher paper, writing utensils and paper for the students, music (any)

**Lesson Duration:** 40 minutes

**Rationale/Goals:** Students will listen to a story about a boy with autism and answer comprehension questions about the story. They will develop an understanding of how students’ varying needs require varying responses and amounts of support from the teacher. Students will discuss and draw (and/or write) about a time when they received “special treatment” because they needed extra support or help.

**Objectives (Learning Outcomes):**

Students will:

- Ask and answer *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how* questions to demonstrate understanding of key details in the story.

- Develop an understanding of how students’ varying needs require varying responses and amounts of support from the teacher.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading Standards for Literature: Key Ideas and Details

K.1: With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text
1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text

2.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**Anticipatory Set:**

- Ask the students to share verbally what they like to do at recess.
- Help the students to notice that some people like to do the same things and some people like to do different things.
- If you have done the “Literature Lesson Plan for Ian’s Walk by Laurie Lears,” then remind the students that it is okay that some people like to do different things. We are still the same in many ways.

**Methods/Activities (Instructional Procedures):**

**Teacher Input:** Read the story *Looking After Louis* by Lesley Ely, stopping periodically to ask questions.

- Why do you think some of the students look after Louis?
- What do the students do when Louis repeats what they say?
- Why do you think the teacher was not mad when Louis repeated, “Sit up straight, everybody?”
- When did Louis seem to be happy?
- How does the girl feel when Louis is allowed to go out and play soccer during class time?
- Why do you think the teacher let him go out to play soccer during class?
Guided Practice:

• Have a discussion about what the girl meant when she said, “I think we’re allowed to break rules for special people.” Discuss that being fair means giving the supports needed to achieve success. For example: Is it fair that some people get to sit in a wheelchair? Wear glasses?, etc.

• Students get into small groups and draw/write on butcher paper examples of “special treatment” that is really just giving additional supports to those who need them.

Independent Practice:

• Students draw/write about a time when they received “special treatment” because they needed extra support or help.

Checking for Understanding/Assessment:

Students will be assessed informally by teacher review of work samples as well as probing questions during class discussions and independent work time.

Closure: Students will take their papers and slowly walk around the room until the music stops. Whoever they are standing next to when the music stops is their sharing buddy. Each student shares what he or she drew or wrote with his or her buddy. Repeat as many times as desired.

Optional Follow-Up Activity:

Have the students sit in a circle on the carpet. Remind the students that Louis almost smiled when he was given the compliment, “Great game, Louis!” After
giving the students examples of compliments, have the students think about a
compliment that they can give the person sitting to their right. Ask for a
volunteer to start. Begin “passing the compliment” around the circle and
continue until all students have had a turn. (This activity was adapted from
Joyful Learning: Active and Collaborative Learning in Inclusive Classrooms
by Alice Udvari-Solner and Paula Kluth.)
Appendix C

Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Pedro’s Whale*

by Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz
Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Pedro’s Whale*

by Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz

**Title:** Fascinations: *Pedro’s Whale* by Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

**Required Materials:** The picture book, *Pedro’s Whale* by Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz, paper, clay, writing utensils

**Lesson Duration:** 40 minutes

**Rationale/Goals:** Students will listen to a story about a boy with autism who is fascinated by whales, and the students will answer comprehension questions about the story by participating in collaborative conversations. They will develop an understanding about how some students develop fascinations with things, and that teachers and students can use these fascinations to connect with and help the student. Students will create representations of their personal fascinations.

**Objectives (Learning Outcomes):**

Students will:

- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about a story in small and larger groups.
- Develop an understanding of how some students develop fascinations with things, and that teachers and students can use these fascinations to connect with and help the student.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**
Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade level topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

K.1: (a) Follow agreed-upon rules for discussion (e.g. listening to others, and taking turns speaking) (b) Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges

1.1: (a) Follow agreed-upon rules for discussion (e.g. listening to others with care and speaking one at a time) (b) Build on others’ talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges (c) Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion.

2.1: (a) Follow agreed-upon rules for discussion (e.g. gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, and speaking one at a time) (b) Build on others’ talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others (c) Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.

Anticipatory Set:

- Have students think of their favorite animals. Have students get up, walk around, and find someone who likes the same kind of animal that they do. (Be sure to tell students ahead of time that it is okay if they do
not find someone with the same favorite animal, you will pair them up if necessary).

• Have them partner up with that student and share why they like that animal and if they like the animal a little (they just think it is cute) or a lot (they have pictures on their bedroom walls, they read books about it, etc.)

• Help the students to notice that some people like the same animals and some people like different animals. Some people like their animal a little and some people a lot. This is all okay.

Methods/Activities (Instructional Procedures):

Teacher Input: Read the story *Pedro’s Whale*. Focus on collaborative conversations by using sentence starters such as “I agree with ___ because...”

• Why do you think Pedro cried when the teacher took away his whale?
• Why did the principal tell the teacher to give Pedro back his whale?
• What are some of the ways that Pedro’s whale helped him?
• Do you think giving Pedro back his whale was the right thing to do? Why? Or why not?

Guided Practice:

• Discuss as a class, “Should all children be allowed to have any toy in class?” Use sentence starters such as “I dis/agree with ____ because...”

Independent Practice:
• Students think about a fascination that they may have. The students choose how they want to represent their fascinations (drawing, clay sculpture, poem, or skit).

Checking for Understanding/Assessment:

Students will be assessed informally by teacher review of work samples as well as probing questions during class discussions and independent work time.

Closure: Students walk around the classroom to see the other students’ representations of their fascinations. Those who chose to create skits act their fascinations out in front of the class.

Optional Follow-Up Activity:

“Brainstorm as a group” is an activity suggested in the back of the book *Pedro’s Whale*. Choose one student in the class who has a fascination, and have the students help brainstorm some ways that you can use the student’s fascination to calm, teach, or amuse the student.
Appendix D

Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload* by Jennifer Veenendall
Children’s Literature Lesson Plan- *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload* by Jennifer Veenendall

**Title:** Sensory Overload: *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload* by Jennifer Veenendall

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten – 2nd Grade


**Lesson Duration:** 40 minutes

**Rationale/Goals:** Students will listen to a story about a girl who is dealing with sensory overload and answer and ask comprehension questions about the story. They will develop an understanding of what it is like to have sensory overload problems. Students will work in groups and individually to draw/write what they would do to help someone like Izzy who has sensory overload issues.

**Objectives (Learning Outcomes):**

Students will:

- Ask and answer questions about key details in the story.
- Recount or describe key ideas or details from the story.
- Develop an understanding of what it is like to have sensory overload problems.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration
K.2: Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

1.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally through other media.

2.2: Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally through other media.

**Anticipatory Set:**

- During this set, briefly “overload” the students’ senses by talking too quickly or loudly, spraying the class with a strange scent before they enter the room, or flipping through pictures very quickly (be mindful of students who have sensory sensitivities and choose accordingly).

- Ask the students if anyone knows what the five senses are. Write or draw pictures to represent each of the five senses.

- Discuss the “overload” the students just experienced. Briefly explain that some people, including the main character in this story, have very strong senses and may experience a sensory overload often.

**Methods/Activities (Instructional Procedures):**

**Teacher Input:** Read the story *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with*
Sensory Overload by Jennifer Veenendall, stopping periodically to ask questions (questions adapted from the suggested questions at the back of the book).

- Do you think Izzy was trying to be bad when she threw tantrums and went under the table to hide?
- What are some of the things that make Izzy feel scared, mad, or uncomfortable?
- What are some of the changes that Izzy’s teacher made to help Izzy?
- What are some of the tools that Izzy uses to calm herself?
- What are some questions that you have about the story? Were there any details in the story that you do not understand?

Guided Practice:

- Have a discussion to begin to brainstorm answers to the question, “How would you help Izzy if she were in your class?”
- Students get into small groups and draw/write (on butcher paper divided into five sections labeled with the five senses) examples of things they could do to help Izzy if she were in their class.

Independent Practice:

- Each student chooses one of the senses and creates a poster by drawing/writing one way they would help Izzy. (Make sure the students write their names on the papers.)

Checking for Understanding/Assessment:
Students will be assessed informally by teacher review of work samples as well as probing questions during class discussions and independent work time.

**Closure:** Half of the students will fold up their papers any way they wish (paper airplane, origami, etc) and place them in a basket. The other half of the students randomly select a folded paper from the basket. They go find the person who made that poster, and give the poster to the poster creator who then talks about the poster he or she made. The process is now repeated with the other half of the students.

**Optional Follow-Up Activity:**

Have students think of examples of an uncomfortable experience that they have had for each of the senses. For example, tasting a mushroom, hearing a fire alarm, touching sandpaper, sunlight in eyes, smelling a dirty diaper. Discuss how some people with autism have super strong senses and are bothered a lot by things.
Appendix E

Children’s Literature Lesson Plan - *My Best Friend Will*

by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel
Children’s Literature Lesson Plan - *My Best Friend Will*

by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel

**Title:** Friends Who are Different: *My Best Friend Will* by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

**Required Materials:** The picture book, *My Best Friend Will* by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel, chart paper, marker, paper, writing utensils

**Lesson Duration:** 40 minutes

**Rationale/Goals:** Students will “read” the pictures of the book prior to listening to the story read aloud. Students will listen to the story about a girl who has a friendship with a boy who has autism. Students will answer comprehension questions about the story, and develop an understanding of what it is like to have a friend who is different. Students will collaboratively and individually chart ways that they are the same as their friends and ways that they are different from their friends.

**Objectives (Learning Outcomes):**

Students will:

- Use the illustrations in a story to describe and better understand the characters, setting, and plot.
- Develop an understanding of what it is like to have friends who are different from themselves.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**
Reading Standards for Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

K.7: With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g. what moment in a story an illustration depicts).

1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

Anticipatory Set:

- Point out the title of the book and have the students look at the picture on the cover. Ask the students what they predict the story will be about.
- Without reading the words, do a quick “picture walk” through the story. Tell the students to silently “read” the pictures.
- Afterwards, ask the students to tell you some things they noticed in the pictures. Be sure to discuss the kind of friendship the two main characters seem to have.

Methods/Activities (Instructional Procedures):

Teacher Input: Read the story My Best Friend Will by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel. Afterwards, ask these questions:

- What does the girl like about her friend Will?
- How is Will different from his friend?
• How is Will the same as his friend?

• Are Will and the girl good friends to each other? How do you know?

**Guided Practice:**

• As a whole class, make two brainstorming charts by having each child contribute to at least one chart. One chart is titled “My friend and I are the same in these ways…” and the other chart is titled “My friend and I are different in these ways…”

**Independent Practice:**

• Each student folds a piece of paper in half and writes, “My friend and I are the same in these ways…” on the top of one half and “My friend and I are different in these ways…” on the top of the second half.

• Have each student choose a friend and either remember the name in his or her head or write the name on the bottom of the paper.

• Students write/draw a list of the characteristics that are the same and different between themselves and their friends.

**Checking for Understanding/Assessment:**

Students will be assessed informally by teacher review of work samples as well as probing questions during class discussions and independent work time.

**Closure:** Give students a chance to share their ideas. Add any new ideas to the charts created during the earlier brainstorming session. Be sure to discuss that it is perfectly normal and okay to be different in some ways from your friends.

**Optional Follow-Up Activity:**
Play the game “Ways We are the Same.” Students fill in the five boxes (using words or pictures) with facts about them relating to the topics: eye color, hair color, number of siblings, favorite food, and favorite sport. Students walk around and try to find someone who has a matching box for the same column. That person writes his or her name inside the matching box.
Appendix F

Recommended Children’s Books
Recommended Children's Books


Appendix G

Recommended Reading for Educators and Web Resources for Educators
Recommended Reading for Educators


Web Resources for Educators

Autism Speaks: www.autismspeaks.org

Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org

Raising a Sensory Smart Child: http://sensorysmarts.com/

Organization for Autism Research: http://www.researchautism.org/

Paula Kluth: Toward Inclusive Classrooms and Communities: http://www.paulakluth.com/
Appendix H

Quick Facts About Autism- for Kids and How to be Friends with Someone with Autism
Quick Facts about Autism—For Kids

- Autism is not contagious. If you play with someone who has autism you will not get autism.
- People with autism are not bad people, but sometimes they may act or think differently because they see the world in a different way.
- People with autism may scream, run away, or hurt someone if they are confused, mad, or feeling bad. They are not trying to be bad or mean.
- Many people with autism have a hard time talking to others, and they may use pictures to help them communicate.
- People with autism may have a difficult time playing games with others because they do not understand the rules of the game.
- Many people with autism like things to stay the same. They may get upset if things change.
- A person with autism may have a hard time understanding how other people feel.
- Many people with autism have very strong senses and may do things like cover their ears if it is too loud.
- People with autism can be very smart, and they may be really good at something like puzzles, video games, playing an instrument, or reading.
- Some people with autism have a fascination (one thing they like a lot). A person with autism may be an expert in that thing they like a lot.
- People with autism want to have friends.

How to Be Friends with Someone with Autism

- Accept your friend’s differences.
- Simplify your language by using short, simple phrases.
- Help your friend to cope with sensory overload.
- Get to know your friend’s fascinations, skills, and talents.
- Help prepare your friend for what is happening next by telling him or her what is next on the schedule.
- Use pictures or written words to communicate if that helps your friend.
- Model proper social behavior by setting a good example.
- Pay close attention to the things your friend likes and dislikes.
- If you notice something is bothering your friend, then ask an adult to help you make things better.
- Remember that even if your friend is not talking to you, it doesn’t mean that he or she does not like you being around.
- Keep in mind that your friend may not understand how you are feeling.
- Ask before you give your friend a hug. He or she may not like being touched.
- Invite your friend to play with you. Teach him or her how to play the game.
Appendix I

References for the Kit
References


