

Adapting a Social Skills Curriculum for Use in a Moderate Severe Classroom: Effectiveness of Added Visuals

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ABSTRACT

Many individuals with autism have deficits in social behavior and social cognition. During middle school, students with autism more frequently encounter situations that require the use of social skills which highlights the need for social skills training interventions. The PEERS intervention program is a well-researched social skills intervention for adolescents with ASD (Laugeson et al., 2014). However, the PEERS curriculum has limitations when working with students who are in a moderate/severe classroom due to their lower adaptive, social, and cognitive functioning. This limitation highlights the need for adapting the curriculum to fit the needs of students in moderate-severe classrooms through the addition of visual supports. Two middle school students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, were identified to receive the intervention. Two types of data were collected over five intervention sessions: the percentage of mastery of starting conversations and starting phone calls without visual supports and with visual supports. Data showed that both the student's percentage of mastery of starting conversations and starting phone calls were higher when visual supports were implemented.

INTRODUCTION

Social Skills training is a critical intervention that aims to improve the student's ability to interact with the world around them. When considering the use of social skills curricula for the moderate-severe population, educators must consider the limitations of the interventions and the abilities of the students in the classroom. For students with Autism, incorporating visual supports into the curriculum could be helpful in increasing their mastery of social skills.

PARTICIPANTS

Classroom Student Information

Student	Ethnicity	Grade	Age	Area of Disability
JK	Korean	6th	12	Autism Verbal communication
RH	Chinese-White	7th	12	Autism Verbal communication

METHODS

The PEERS curriculum was modified to include visual cues of the steps for starting conversations and starting phone calls. The special education teacher would teach the curriculum to the whole class. Afterwards, the school psychology trainee worked individually with the two target students to collect data. The students were asked the same way each week, if they remember how to start a conversation and phone call, once without the adapted visual and another time with the adapted visual. For both starting conversations and starting phone calls, there were five chronological steps that the students had to follow. The number of successful attempts that the student independently demonstrated was recorded and divided by the number of total steps in order to get a percentage of mastery of the skill.

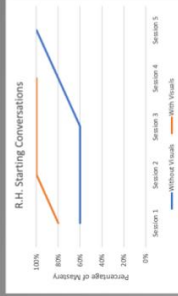
STARTING CONVERSATIONS

- Eye contact
- Ask a question
- Listen
- Make a comment
- Follow-up Question

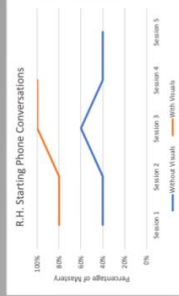
Starting Phone Calls

- Ask for the person you are calling
- Say who you are
- Ask how they are
- Ask if they can talk
- Tell them why you are calling

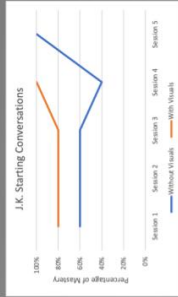
RESULTS



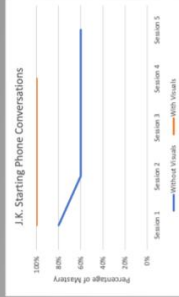
When the PEERS curriculum was implemented, RH's average percentage of mastery of starting conversations without visuals over 5 sessions was an average 72%. When the visuals that highlight the steps of starting a conversation were introduced, RH saw an increase in the percentage of mastery and eventually achieved 100% mastery. Overall, RH attained an average of 95% mastery for starting conversations when using a visual. RH met his starting conversation goal.



When the PEERS curriculum was implemented, RH, without visuals, demonstrated an average of 44% mastery when starting a phone conversation. When presented with a visual, RH demonstrated an average of 90% mastery when starting a phone conversation. RH met his starting phone conversation goal.



When the PEERS curriculum was implemented, JK's average percentage of mastery of starting conversations without visuals over 5 sessions was an average 64%. When the visuals that highlight the steps of starting a conversation were introduced, JK saw an increase in mastery over time. Overall, JK attained an average of 85% mastery for starting conversations when using a visual. JK met his starting conversation goal.



When the PEERS curriculum was implemented, JK, without visuals, demonstrated an average of 64% mastery when starting a phone conversation. When presented with a visual, JK demonstrated an average of 100% mastery when starting a phone conversation. With the visual aid, JK was able to successfully follow all five steps of calling a friend accurately and independently. JK met his starting phone conversation goal.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the special education teacher partnering with a school psych trainee were able to evaluate how a teacher could utilize and modify an evidence-based intervention to implement in a moderate/severe middle school classroom. By incorporating an added visual to the PEERS curriculum, the dyad was able to effectively increase the social independence of two students with social skills deficits. In addition, based on the collaboration of the special education teacher and school psychologist trainee, the strategies and processes used to modify the PEERS intervention provided equitable social skills instruction for an entire moderate/severe classroom including students with a spectrum of abilities.

REFERENCES

Laugeson, E., Ellingsen, R., Sanderson, J., Tucci, L., & Bates, S. (2014). The ABC's of teaching social skills to adolescents with autism spectrum disorder in the classroom: the UCLA PEERS program. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 44(9), 2244–2256.
<https://doi-org.libproxy.sdsu.edu/10.1007/s10803-014-2108-8>

INTERVENTION GOALS

- Given a PEERS adapted visual for starting a conversation and a preferred peer or staff, JK and RH will follow a 5-step procedure to independently initiate a conversation with 80% accuracy in 4 out 5 opportunities as measured by teacher data.
- Given a PEERS adapted visual for starting a phone call, a preferred peer or staff and a cell phone, JK and RH will follow a 5-step procedure to independently start a phone call with 80% accuracy in 4 out 5 opportunities as measured by teacher data.