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Video modeling : play skills for students with autism spectrum disorder via peers

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Abstract

The purpose of this small-scale inquiry project was to investigate the effects of peer modeling and video modeling as an instructional support for the development of social skills amongst the population of kindergarten students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive setting. The participants in this project were seven Kindergarten students with ASD, and four regular education students in an inclusive setting. The teachers were three general education teachers as well as myself, the teacher of the modified autism program. The data collection included teacher observations, email communication, and video created by teachers and teaching assistants. This study proposes the use of video modeling as a tool to teach social skills and to close deficits in peer play. The findings after six weeks of implementation demonstrate that video modeling improved ASD students' social skills literacy and taught deficits in peer play. It also benefited the regular education students by helping them accept ASD students in a normal social discourse. Limitations and recommendations are discussed. The researcher recommends further research to document findings using a larger group of participants and data collected over a longer period of time.

VIDEO MODELING:
PLAY SKILLS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER
VIA PEERS

A Graduate Review
Submitted to the
Division of Instructional Technology
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
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The purpose of this small-scale inquiry project was to investigate the effects of peer modeling and video modeling as an instructional support for the development of social skills amongst the population of kindergarten students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive setting. The participants in this project were seven Kindergarten students with ASD, and four regular education students in an inclusive setting. The teachers were three general education teachers as well as myself, the teacher of the modified autism program. The data collection included teacher observations, email communication, video created by teachers and teaching assistants. This study proposes the use of video modeling as a tool to teach social skills and to close deficits in peer play. The findings after six weeks of implementation demonstrate that video modeling improved ASD students' social skills literacy and taught deficits in peer play. It also benefited the regular education students by helping them accept ASD students in a normal social discourse. Limitations and recommendations are discussed. The researcher recommends further research to document findings using a larger group of participants and data collected over a longer period of time.

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Introduction

Video modeling as an instructional method is growing in popularity within schools. Video modeling is an intervention technique often used for social skills training which involves participants watching a video of someone modeling a desired behavior and then imitating the behavior of the person in the video (Bellini & Akkullian, 2007). Odlyurt (2013) stated that video modeling is a technique for teaching social interactions to children with disabilities, and more specifically children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)). ASD is a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.y.). Individuals with ASD often have problems in exhibiting social interaction skills and in learning sophisticated game skills. Because children with ASD have a greater propensity to learn through visual means than auditor-based teaching techniques, Ganz, Earles-Vollrath and Cook (2011) suggested that visually-based strategies such as video modeling hold promise in positively impacting the learning of children with ASD. Video modeling has been successfully used in teaching social skills in special education setting. According to the report of “Evaluating the Social Behavior of Preschool Children with Autism in an Inclusive Playground Setting”, however, it is found that although students with autism are placed in an inclusive setting, they rarely interact with their peers to experience naturally occurring social encounters.

In order to fill this gap, this small-scale inquiry project was developed to investigate the impact of peer video modeling for kindergarten students in an inclusive education setting in a large urban district in the state of Iowa. The school district is committed to inclusive education to “educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and

classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child ... and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class rather than having to keep up with the other students” (Rogers, 1993, p. 4).

The results of this project will provide new insights about how to make video modeling a purposeful instructional tool to benefit students with ASD and regular students in inclusive classrooms. The results of this inquiry can also guide professional development within the Iowa City Community Schools District to best use and apply this method, resulting in better outcomes for our students. Additionally, the results can further guide general education teachers to formulate instructional plans and create a purposeful learning plan in the elementary inclusive classroom.

This inquiry project addressed the following research questions:

1. What role do peers play in using video modeling to teach social skills literacy?
2. How does social skills literacy transfer into the inclusive setting?
3. How does video modeling eliminate social literacy skills barriers for students with ASD?

Literature Review

The literature review focused on pertinent information to those in the educational setting, specifically those working with students with ASD in order to get an overview about what has been done on the use of video modeling to teach social skills literacy. The reviewer used three electronic databases: ERIC, Google Scholar, and Rod Libraries One Search, to search for sources. These databases were selected based on their academic reputation and using keywords. The search descriptors included: video modeling , *elementary setting, instructional tool, and various combination of the descriptors, such as video modeling in elementary settings, video modeling as an instructional tool, video modeling for ASD, video modeling compared to direct instruction, and using video modeling.*

Once the sources were located, the analysis of the articles for this review took place. For a source to be used in this review it must meet the following criteria: it must have been written in the last 15 years, the author must have been published multiple times in this area (demonstrating his/her academic understanding of the subject), and lastly the reviewer researched the author of the article to make sure there was not any public awareness of challenges with material the author has published. If the author to meet each of these specific criteria then the source would be considered valid and would be used in the review.

“Modeling is the process in which an individual demonstrates a skill or exhibits a behavior after observing it from the performance of a model” (Odluyurt, 2013, p. 537). The premise for video modeling is the same as the aforementioned definition of modeling; it is simply using a tool that will record, instead of an individual in the circumstance. The use of such a tool allows for the video then to be watched by individuals when needed, and as often as needed without the model having to continually demonstrate. Tools used within video

modeling may include: a phone, a camera, an iPad, a flip camera, etc. The purpose of this tool is to record the act of appropriate modeling for viewing by another.

Mechling (2005) summarized the benefits of video modeling as: (a) repeated observations of the same model, (b) reuse across a variety of instructors, (c) review at later dates, as often as needed, for maintenance of skills, and (d) use outside of the classroom, in a variety of settings that may include home environments.

“Peers support the play of children with autism in unique ways that cannot be duplicated by adults. Most notably in play with peers, children co-create social and imaginary worlds within which they share meanings” (Bottema-Beutel, DeWitt, and Wolfberg, p.64). This imperative role peer’s play in the development of one another’s social and language skills is critical. Social play is a developmental stage; some say it cannot be taught. The teaching must come from the peers, which is where peer modeling must be used.

A peer is the character in the video model that is doing the correct modeling of the activity. Within video modeling itself the person doing the modeling may be a teacher, a professional, a peer, or a parent. Peer modeling is just as it sounds, the act of a peer to the target population modeling the expected skill set to specific criteria that the learner may view and learn from. Within peer modeling the “target student” is the student you wish to learn a new or change a current behavior. The expected skill is the skill you desire to be taught to a predetermined set of criteria that clearly define what demonstrates the skill as successful. This process allows for an individual to learn and develop through peer supports, and disassociates the adult as the continual role of “helper” or “teacher.” (Wilson, 2013)

As the necessity of video modeling as a tool is discussed in Introduction, I will focus the next section of the literature review on specific implementation procedure of video modeling.

There are three components to video modeling: identify the target skills, produce the video, and implement the video modeling intervention (Ganz, Earles-Vollrath, & Cook, 2011, p. 11). According to the researcher: “The first step contains several sub steps: assessment, listing and prioritizing skills, defining the skill, and collecting baseline data.” They suggested that to purposefully use this strategy, it is important to first identify the targeted skill that ASD students need to improve. Once this skill has been decided upon, it is important to get the baseline data for a comparison between where the student start and where they should end. During Step Two—implementing—the actual creation of the video, equipment, model types—either self or others (Wilson, 2013), setting, the video script and production are a sequence of the steps.

Once the video has been produced it must be implemented as an intervention. This intervention is advantageous for its flexibility, and with that flexibility the ability to be able to differentiate as each student’s needs dictate. The video should be watched consistently before and/or during the targeted skill, it may also be watched immediately after as a supported learning tool (Ganz, Earles-Vollrath, & Cook, 2011). Students may watch the videos as a group if needs dictate or individually. Data should then be collected consistently to guide instruction, and opportunities for generalization should be presented.

In discussion of these results the reviewer will organize as the procedure for video modeling dictates; first identifying the target, second the tool, and lastly the implementation and data.

Inquiry Project Report

Incorporating video modeling into the inclusive setting is the only purposeful way in which a skill can be taught. For the student to generalize the skill the model must teach the skill under the circumstances in which general education peers hope for it to be learned. For example a student is taught to slide, the modeling would preferably happen on the slide placed outside for recess. As revealed by student observation in inclusive settings

This program is designed specifically for kindergartners with ASD. In the following section, first, it describes how the project was initiated. Second, it documents the design and implementation process.

Needs Assessment

The program was designed to support students with social skill deficiencies and provide supports through the implementation of a peer helper program. The district that housed this school was a large urban district in the state of Iowa. The school itself was a diverse setting with approximately 75 Kindergarteners of mid socioeconomic status primarily. The initiative extended across three kindergarten classrooms, which included seven students with ASD. The elected students were expected to view this role as a privilege, and as a privilege their role could be revoked if the students were not behaving in a manner reflective of our school norms.

Inquiry Methodology

Prior to the introduction of this research project a need was detected. The Autism program at School A was primarily segregated with the exception being shared recesses and lunch. However, these shared times too reflected this segregation as students were given a wide berth by their general education peers. Upon initial observation (observation 2/3/2014)

students in the autism program could be found pacing the outside of the recess structure, sitting on the ground and sweeping their hands back on forth on the pavement, or simply staring into an unknown area of things seen or imagined that we do not. It was clear that social literacy was a deficiency and must be taught.

Project Initiation

Having identified the need, and further reflected and researched proposed strategies I found a method that would meet the needs of the students. For further research to be conducted there was the necessity to include the kindergarten general education teachers. I approached the general education team by sending an invitation email:.

I would like to introduce a peer program that would focus on taught social literacy through the use of video modeling. The idea, should you agree, would be this. We would each conduct a series of three observations at recess to gather a firm base line on the discrepancies of kindergarten peers with Autism in direct comparison to the kindergarten general education population. Once this base line was established we would identify areas of need or deficiency. Having then established deficits we would create a six week plan to teach social skills literacy in the format of inclusion. I would ask to have selected peers based on an established criteria that with teacher assistance would create video examples (video modeling) of appropriate play of the identified deficiency areas. We would then introduce these videos in a social skills situation where we would watch, analyze, and discuss the first week, and the second week would be the implementation of the taught skills in an inclusive setting (recess).

(2/3/2014)

The team agreed to this idea and our research team was founded.

Student Participants were seven kindergarten students, all of whom had ASD, plus four regular students selected from each kindergarten class, making a total of eleven general education students. For students to take part in this initiative they first had to have a signed permission form from a guardian, on this form the initiative and the role their child would play was explained, as well as contact information in regards to any further questions or concerns. The students also had to take a survey that assessed their skills as a leader, as well as personality attributes such as compassion and empathy. Upon receipt of the surveys and permission forms the kindergarten team then reviewed the applicants and decided upon twelve students we felt met majority of the criteria stated below.

Criteria for Participation in Peer Modeling:

1. Leader Characteristics
2. Demonstrates Compassion/Empathy
3. Diverse Play in Various Social Groups
4. School Norms: Responsible, Caring, and Citizen of Character

Pre-Observations

Observations were taken by three kindergarten teachers and me. Each of my observers was a highly qualified teacher, having taught for a minimum of five years, and each holds a Masters of Education. The following observations are a brief look into each student's social literacy skills prior to this research project:

Student A came out to recess crying and immediately threw himself onto the ground. After about 5 minutes student A got up and began to run to

the other side of the playground. Student A then began to walk around the outer perimeters of the playground for the remainder of recess. (2/5/2014)

Student C came out to recess much like his peers walking out with his class and seemingly excited to play. Upon accessing the playground he immediately sat down and began to rub his hands back and forth on the ground. The aide with him repeatedly offered visual and verbal reminders to go to swing or slide, but this was to no avail. This continued for all of recess. When the bell rang, the student walked to his line spot and preceded back to class with his peers. (2/7/2014)

Student E made his way quietly out to recess far behind the rest of her classmates. Upon arrival she yelled “tire swing.” However, after yelling “tire swing” she instead made her way to the far side of the playground where she paced back and forth. At no point did the student attend to the tire swing. The bell rang and student had to be prompted several times by an aide to line up before slowly making her way back to class. (2/13/2014)

Three general education kindergarten peers are able to successfully use all playground equipment, although they typically have favorites. Peers are able to engage with friends on a social level using appropriate play words as well actions. Peers will sometimes mimic one another or engage in parallel or imaginative play. This overview of peers was gained from observations (2/13/2014). Given the observation data collected the research team concluded the following areas of deficiency and current findings. See tables below:

Figure 1

Appropriate Social Initiations

Social Initiations	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
Verbal	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Gestural	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Physical	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 2

Appropriate Recess Peer Play

Recess Play	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
Swings	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Slide	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
JungleGym	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The targeted skills demonstrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2 as determined to be a mid-year expectation for a kindergarten peer. Targeted skills were gathered and developed based on a peer norm referenced skill set of targeted mastered skills for a general education teacher. These norm-referenced skills were determined via observation by three separate kindergarten teachers, and me. It was then determined in which areas the seven target students had deficits via observation by initiative team. The targeted skills were scaffold as follows:

1. Appropriate Social Initiations by Target Individual to Peer Model
 - a. Verbal Social Communication (either by voice or assistive device)
 - i. Saying hello
 - ii. Asking friend to play
 - b. Social Gesture
 - i. Waving to peer

- ii. Pointing to object
 - c. Appropriate Physical Initiation
 - i. Holding hands
 - ii. Hugging
- 2. Appropriate Recess Peer Play
 - a. Swings
 - i. Swinging next to friend
 - ii. Pushing or being pushed by friends
 - b. Slide
 - i. Appropriate turn taking on slide
 - ii. Following slide rules
 - c. Jungle Gym
 - i. Parallel play on jungle gym
 - ii. Follow jungle gym rules

Peer Modeling of Targeted Skills Using Video Modeling

Once the targeted skills were assessed it was necessary to determine what tool would be used to instruct and the instructional plan we would implement. It was determined by the team that we would introduce a social initiation in correlation with a recess skill every other week, with the bi-week acting as a continuation of practice and implementation. Therefore the scheduled intervention was as follows:

Week 1: Verbal Initiation/Swings

Week 2: Implementation and Review of Week 1

Week 3: Gestural Initiation/Slide

Week 4: Implementation and Review of Week 3

Week 5 Physical Initiation/Jungle Gym

Week 6: Implementation and Review of Week 4

Once the plan for intervention was complete each team member took 3 of the peer models and reviewed the standard for each taught skill. It was previously discussed by the team that we would use iPads as our tools, as we each had access to this device. Each team member took an associated two weeks and worked with their peers to create an appropriate video model. The peers used in these videos would also play the role of facilitator as the students implemented their newfound skill set in the second week of their learned skills.

Video Modeling in Action

Once the teacher created the videos, the target students were asked to watch the videos in several incidents each day; their individual social skills time, and prior to each of their three recesses. The first week that the play skill was being taught, the students were asked to watch the video model during social skills and prior to recess. Students were not given any further expectations the first week. The second week the students were asked to practice what they saw in the video, though many had independently begun this process the first week without being asked. During the implementation phase (the second week of each skill set) the peer models were asked to support the students as needed in following the video models prompting. Students also had access to the videos throughout recess to watch the video as a reminder of expectations. This process served as an appropriate and socially acceptable tool in which peers were helping peers play.

Major Findings

Throughout the six-week period the research team again participated as observers to see what growth the students were making. The same criteria was used to define success and failure, the following observations are a synopsis of the results found.

Significant Increase in Social Skill Literacy

There was a significant increase in social skills literacy for all the seven students with SDA as a result of peer via video modeling. Such increase was observed from verbal/nonverbal communication. The following is one of observation records:

Student A, a kindergartener who loves trains, is approached one day by a classmate with a brand new train set. The classmate asks student A if he would like to come and play with his new train set. Student A responds saying “choo-choo.” The classmate then proceeds to play with the train, taking it around the track and blowing the whistle while student A observes. The next day this encounter continues in much the same fashion. That afternoon having observed this encounter Student A’s teacher makes a video on the iPad of her playing with the train using appropriate language and gestures, as would be expected of a general education peer. She then sits down with student A at the back table, puts a train and tracks in front of him and shows him the video. Student A proceeds to play the video three more times. Student A then begins to mimic the play he saw in the video. (3/3/2014-3/7/2014)

This incident showed that Student A was not segregated from other students in the inclusive classroom as reported in “Evaluating the Social Behavior of Preschool Children with Autism in an Inclusive Playground Setting”. Rather, Student A had the opportunity to

naturally interact with his peers to gain social experiences. Rather, he was invited to play by his regular education peer who took the initiative to include this ASD student in his activity. It seems that inclusion is a nature part of the social learning experiences benefiting the ASD and the regular education students. The teacher-created video made the learning more meaningful.

This finding is also supported by the assessment data by a team of four teachers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Appropriate Social Initiations

Social Initiations	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
Verbal	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%
Gestural	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Physical	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%

In terms of social initiations, five out of seven students with ASD master 100 percent of target social initiations in verbal, gestural and physical aspect comparing to (pre-observation results). Although two students with ASD did not master verbal and physical aspects, they showed a significant difference in gestural aspect.

Transferring Social Skills Literacy in an Inclusive Setting

Similarly, the seven SDA students could transfer the learned skills in the inclusive setting. The following are two examples to show how two SDA students demonstrate appropriate social behaviors when getting access to the playground.

Student C came out to recess transitioning with the rest of his class in an appropriate fashion. Student C then requested to go to the swing set and swing. Student C walked over to the swings but they were all full of other students. The adult helping gave student C other options including slide and monkey bars, but

the student remained at swing. Student C waited in line with other peers and did gain a turn on the swing. Student C swung for the rest of recess then promptly went to the correct place when the bell rung. (3/11/2014)

This incident reveals many positive changes in regards to student C. Students with Autism frequently fixate on an item, as exhibited by student C only wanting swings. Typically however when that item becomes unavailable this will result in either physically or verbally aggressive behaviors on behalf of the student. Student C was able to wait, as dictated by peer norms, until the swing was available. Student C was then able to use the swing appropriately and transition back into the school with the remainder of her class.

Student E arrived at recess late due to a bloody nose. She walked across the playground and seemed to be looking for something, what I cannot be certain. She then located a group of girls playing on the playground pretending the ground was lava. Student E walked over to them and waved, said hello, she then asked if they wanted to play with her. The students ignored her at first, the teacher then stepped in and encouraged play. Once the teacher encouraged plays student E said hello to the group of three girls. The girls then began to simulate “house” with a mom, dad, sister, and puppy. The girls continued to play house until the bell rang. Once the bell rang, the girls held hands transitioning inside. This physical contact was a great show of improvement for Student E as this is something she had avoided before. (3/12/2014)

The table below is a synopsis of teacher observations and findings over a six-week period of time. The table is representative of recess play in terms of swing, slide and JungleGym. .

Figure 4

Appropriate Recess Play

Recess Play	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
Swings	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Slide	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
JungleGym	100%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%

As you can see above in the above table all seven students with ASD were able to demonstrate play skills, as previously defined by the research team, on the swing and slide. Similarly, all but two students were able to demonstrate play skills on the jungle gym.

Beyond these numerical results the initiative team noticed an increase in socialization amongst general education and special education peers, as well as purposeful and meaningful relationships being formed. The belief that students with ASD have no interest in friendships was clearly waylaid by these meaningful relationships.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This inquiry project demonstrated the supportive role of video modeling for ASD students. By using video modeling via peers, it can dramatically increase ASD students' performance in social initiations and close deficits in peer play. It also benefited the regular education students by accepting ASD students in a normal social discourse within the inclusive setting. Such findings correlate with my research team's belief that this research demonstrates continued support of video modeling as an instructional intervention, although not as a sole instructional tool. Although this method is a supportive learning tool for social literacy, it should not be used as the solitary method of instruction.

I'd like to acknowledge the limitations of this inquiry project. The short period of time did not allow for many observations and data to be collected. Due to the relative inexperience my research team had in conducting research I have not systematically collected all sorts of data. My data collection came from a standardized assessment form and pre- and post-intervention observations conducted by my research team. Since I acted as both the teacher and researcher my interpretation of data may demonstrate some bias. Through this research project I experienced immense growth as a Special Education Teacher, a team member, and as a researcher. I experienced many challenges in collecting observations and data to support and guide this research. I learned how to take and interpret data. I also found for the scope of this research I would need a much longer period of time, and systematic data of all forms. I hope to continue this project defining and re-designing what social skills literacy looks like in a general education setting.

Prior research states this method is beneficial as a supportive tool, not as a solitary method of instruction, and should be viewed as such. As we continue this research the hope

is to extend beyond social skills deficits and focus instead on the inclusive setting for all curricular and social areas for the Kindergarten grade. The premise would be the establishing of criteria for all areas in conjunction with the Iowa Common Core and the use of video modeling to close barriers so that all students may participate and learn in an inclusive setting. Further use of video modeling will need to take a step-by-step approach in which all criteria can be scaffolded for appropriate modeling.

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