

# Using literacy-based therapy to address social objectives in students with ASD

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## Learner Outcomes:

- Describe a general framework for implementing group social/literacy-based interventions
- Explain how writing is a social tool for use in social action
- Discuss 3 ways that utilizing a meaning-based group writing approach can facilitate socialization among peers with ASD.

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## Agenda

- Introduction
- Background/Relevant Literature Review
- Framework & Video Demonstrations
- Conclusion/Q&A

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ASD

- (APA, DSM-V, 2013)
  - Social communication and interaction
  - Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, activities

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**vulnerability for impaired social interactions**

American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

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Background

- 80's-90's: shift in direction to focus on social aspects of development in IASD.
- Coincided with a movement in the field toward:
  - the social aspects of language (i.e., USE)
  - and addressing them in more authentic contexts
  - (e.g., "Pragmatic Revolution," Duchan, 1984; Duchan, Hewitt, Sonnemeier, 1994)
- **Manifest primarily through oral language and play-based approaches**
  - (e.g., Greenspan & Wieder, 2006; Rydell, 2012; Schuler & Wolfberg, 2002)

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Literacy?

- Here, we focus on literacy, especially writing, as an intervention context for facilitating social interaction with school age children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- Though literacy is increasingly acknowledged as an important scope of practice for SLPs (ASHA, 2001), the focus is often on literacy as a set of skills to be taught step-by-step, rather than as a tool for meaning-making in social action.

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### Strengths-based Framework

- Damico & Nelson 2005
  - Vocal creak & sparkle hands
  - Strategies (likely unconsciously) used to change clinician's behavior/focus or indicate a desire to request object, shift activity or location
- Herrera, Seeberger, Nelson, & Abendroth, 2009
  - Finger flapping in shared reading contexts
  - Behavior was: systematic and served specific functions

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### Writing: A tool for socialization

- “Through participation in play children construct shared meanings and transform their understanding of the skills, values, and knowledge inherent to society and culture at large (Schuler & Wolfberg, 2002, p. 256).”
- Writing, like play, must be considered an additional modality for individuals to engage in, build upon, and share social-cultural knowledge.
- Olsen (2001) argues that more important than learning to transcribe, are the culturally embedded ways of interpreting and producing written texts. These influence our understanding of ourselves and our environment.

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### Writing: A tool for socialization

- Much like oral and gestural language, which “serve children first and foremost as a means of social contact with other people (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 28)”...
- ...writing, as a manifestation of underlying language capacity, is both a demonstration of social action and a means of social action (e.g., Bruner, 1986; DeFord, 1980; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).
- Writing, as a symbolic tool, mediates our interactions, and demonstrates the relationship between the development and use of written language and social relationships—especially between peers (Dyson, 1999; 2003) .

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### Typically Developing Writers

- DeFord (1980): Writing develops through participation in meaningful social and situational contexts.
- Harste, Woodward, Burke (1984): advocated that children “can communicate—and do so quite creatively—whether or not [their] speech or writing is conventional” (p. 27).
- Additionally, they observed that writing is a social action, “mediated through and with language” (p. 150).
- Dyson (1999, 2003): studied children’s’ written language “not simply in organized print, but in the nature of participation in communicative events” (2003, p. 126).

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### Writing: A tool for socialization

- Lensmire & Beals (1994):
  - Interested in **what** material children use for there writing, **where** they get it from, and **how** it is appropriated.
  - The POINT: To ignore WHAT and HOW of a writer’s products is to overlook the purpose of writing: to express something to someone (p. 422).

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### Why does what we know about typically developing children matter?

- **“All children are special; some have more needs than others. More needs – not different ones” (Waterland, 1989)**

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Meaning-Based Literacy: What do we mean by this?

- Marie Clay, Reggie Routman, Brian Camobourne, the Goodmans, etc.
- Continuum of mediation
- Focus on meaning
- \*Shared writing and read alouds gave us the most mediational “bang for our buck” with this population, so this was a large portion of our sessions.

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Putting this into practice: Example 1

- Damico, Damico, Nelson, Weill, & Maxwell (2017)
- Literacy project with preschoolers with ASD
  - Used literacy as the vehicle for development of play, language, socialization
  - Based on 5 practice-oriented principles:
    - Emphasis on meaning
    - Contextual embeddedness
    - Contractiveness
    - Active engagement
    - Recurrence

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Putting this into practice example #2 (and 3): A Pilot Study

- (Maxwell, 2015; Maxwell, Damico, & Weill, 2017)
- Primary goal of the intervention: to enhance the socialization skills of the participants
- Purpose(s): To use literacy as a vehicle to target socialization; to investigate how students with ASD used literacy-based contexts to engage in socialization

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### Typical Session

- 3 main “sections”
  - Reading Aloud
  - Shared Writing
  - Cooperative Learning Activities
    - Author’s Chair
    - Science Projects
    - Small group projects

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16

### Social Aspects of the Read Alouds

- Through read alouds we were able to:
  - Highlight feelings and affective states of characters when appropriate
  - Model think alouds and demonstrate metacognitive strategies for talking about the reading
  - highlight characters motivations, feelings, authors choices
  - Relate readings to personal experiences
  - Encourage and facilitate interaction with peers during discussions
  - Provide model of writing processes as well (look at what authors do, provide ideas for writing topics, etc.)

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### Social aspects of writing events:

- Social aspects:
  - Sharing work with others
  - Talking about readings/writings
  - Sharing writing with writing buddies (product, but also the process)
  - Peer collaboration on literacy-based activities
- Looking at writing as a two-sided manifestation of language:
  - Language processes at work during composing process—mediational effect of writer’s workshop
  - Social processes at work during sharing of both writing task during writer’s workshop and sharing the finished product in author’s chair.

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### How can writing facilitate socialization?

- Shared writing process as an opportunity for dyadic interaction and joint attention
- Opportunities for social monitoring behaviors
- Opportunities for emerging audience awareness
- Opportunities to socialize/affiliate with peers

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### What did we see?

- **A difference in regulation...**
  - **Social monitoring**
    - Appropriation
    - Monitoring the response of his peers
    - Revised presentation when he did not get the response expected
  - **Audience awareness**
    - Writing meant to be shared
    - Writing structure clearly implied a specific audience (the group)
  - **Opportunities to socialize/affiliate with peers**
    - Active engagement of the peers in the audience
- THIS WRITING IS A SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH HIS PEERS**

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### Clinical Implications

- Embrace the chaos! Importance of authenticity of task and student choice in writing topics
- Emphasis on writing process versus product
- Importance of dialogue during the composing process and emphasis of sharing/discussing written products (Dyson, 2003, p. 138)
- Given the core deficits of this population: They may need increased opportunities to perform their writings in authentic settings to emphasize the pragmatic functions of writing

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Allowing students to choose their own topics

<p><u>Pros</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows students to write about what they know</li> <li>• High interest/motivation</li> <li>• Creating space for affiliation, appropriation, social interaction with peers, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Cons</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background knowledge</li> <li>• Awareness             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billy</li> <li>• Kameron</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Difficulty with repairs</li> <li>• Difficult to provide appropriate mediation</li> </ul>
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Setting Appropriate Expectations

- EMBRACE THE CHAOS!
  - Not EVERY session had demonstrations of brilliant socialization.
  - There was dysregulation...
  - There were days where engagement, attention, & topic maintenance issues prevailed...
  - There were days where we, as clinicians, GOT IT ALL WRONG!

It's about the PROCESS!

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Implications

- Looking at writing through a wider lens (PROCESS VS PRODUCT)
- Importance of the peer group
- Dialogue during composing process
- Sharing/discussing written products Emphasizes the pragmatic functions of writing
- Mediational implications of a strengths-based approach
- Dual potential: socialization AND literacy
- Grouping/workload

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