

# **Child and Family Centre**

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## **EVALUATION OF AN INCLUSIVE PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR AUTISTIC**

### **CHILDREN:**

#### **Poster presentation**

#### **(strategies to promote social and emotional development)**

This presentation will outline the establishment and evaluation of an inclusive pre-school program for children on the autism spectrum (ASD) based on an adaptation of the Learning Experiences: An Alternative Programme for Parents and Pre-schoolers (LEAP, Strain and Cordisco, 1994) model in an international pre-school in Hong Kong. The presentation will include information from single subject design research and other methods used to evaluate the programs effectiveness over a 4 year period including follow-up data tracking 4 separate cohorts of children after one year in the program. The LEAP model utilises small class sizes (a total of 12 children) with a breakdown of 8 typical children and 4 on the autism spectrum with social skill development as a primary focus. A comprehensive approach is utilized drawing from applied behavior analysis, The Treatment and Education of Autism and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEAACH) program as well the existing research base showing the benefits of utilizing typical peers in enhancing the social skills of children on the autism spectrum (Pollard, 1998, Owen-DeSchryver et al, 2008). A previous review of the LEAP

programme has demonstrated the benefits of inclusion for both typical children and children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The evaluation of the project which originated in the Pittsburgh area of America noted positive effects for both normal developing and ASD children (Hoyson, Jaimeson & Strain, 1984).

Specific objectives of the presentation are as follows:

- Gain an understanding of the curriculum and service delivery model in the adaptation of the LEAP programme in an international pre-school in Hong Kong.
- Review of some of the specific methods of social skills training utilized in the LEAP pre-school (Knight, 2000) in a step by step format and how these methods may be adapted to other pre-school or elementary school settings.
- Understand the short and long term research methodology that can be applied to measure the outcome of combined and peer mediated social skills training programs.
- Increase knowledge of how to gather and analyze data that includes rating scales as well as quantitative and qualitative observation techniques to measure changes in children's social behaviour using a single subject design.

Participants will be provided with information on the utility of widely available standardised measures for socialisation as well as the presenters own informal methods of assessment. Materials will also be made available to facilitate observational data gathering on social behaviour with a step-by-step description of how to use them.

Participants will benefit by increasing their knowledge of the necessary components to

implement and evaluate an inclusive pre-school programme for ASD children as well as the issues in providing this service delivery model in a multicultural setting. Participants will also gain expertise in how to implement and evaluate social skills training programs through exposure to current practice based on previous research.

## **References**

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Knight, C., (2000). Direct and peer mediated social skills training for children with Aspergers Syndrome, unpublished manuscript.

Owen-DeShryver, J. S., Carr, E, Cale, S., Blakely-Smith, A. (2008). Promoting social interactions between students with autism and their typical peers in inclusive school settings. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 23, 15-28

Pollard, N.L. (1998). Development of Social Interaction Skills in Pre-school Children with Autism: A review of the literature. *Child Behaviour and Family Therapy*, 20, 1-16.

Strain P. S. & Cordisco, L. (1994). LEAP pre-school. In S Harris & J. Handlman (Ed.s), *pre-school education programs for children with autism* (pp. 225-52). Austin, Tx: Pro-Ed.