

## Building an Inclusive Community, One Friend at a Time

Vicky Vu, MA, OTR/L, MBA, BCP, CNT

American Career College, Los Angeles, California, United States

DOI: [10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO114](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO114)

Date presented: April 21, 2023

Primary Author and Speaker: Vicky Vu, [vickyvu06@gmail.com](mailto:vickyvu06@gmail.com)

**PURPOSE:** The non-randomized experimental research aimed to determine if neurotypical 5th-grade students who undergo an inclusivity program based on play with direct mentorship would effectively improve peer attitudes towards playing with children with autism.

**DESIGN:** Fifth-grade students completed a seven-week program with an occupational therapist (OT) that integrated their learnings of autism and applied their understanding of play, communication, inclusivity, and diversity within a classroom of preschool children with autism. During the seven-week program, fifth-grade students were paired with preschool children with autism as part of a Big Buddy and Little Buddy program. Utilizing the Integrated Play Group (IPG) model philosophy of using play to bridge the interaction between neurotypical children and children with autism, the 5th-grade children completed the curriculum to develop empathy and acceptance towards the preschool children.

**METHOD:** The 5th-grade students completed the Shared Activity Questionnaire (SAQ) and Activity Checklist (ACL) before and upon completion of the program.

**RESULTS:** Statistical significance ( $p=.048$ ) was found with participants choosing less unfavorable qualities towards children with autism after participating in the inclusivity program using the ACL as the outcome measure.

**CONCLUSION:** The pilot study demonstrated that neurotypical students participating in a seven-week inclusivity program with a mentoring component are more accepting of children with autism by attributing fewer negative qualities towards children with autism. The program aimed to break down occupational injustice by removing limitations on children with autism's social participation with those of neurotypical children in the mutual occupation of play.

### References

- Campbell, J. (2008). Brief report: reliability and validity of the shared activities questionnaire as a measure of middle school students' attitudes toward autism. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders*, 38, 1598-1604. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-007-0534-6>
- Demetriou, K. (2020). Do you want to play with me? Acceptance and preference dilemmas in choosing playmates with physical disability. *Early Child Development and Care*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1825406>
- Kent, C., Cordier, R., Joosten, A., Wilkes-Gillan, S., & Bundy, A. (2021). Can I learn to play? Randomized control trial to assess effectiveness of a peer-mediated intervention to improve play in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51, 1823-1838. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04671-5>
- Vignes, C., Coley, N., Grandjean, H., Godeau, E., & Arnaud, C. (2008). Measuring children attitudes towards peers with disabilities: a review of instruments. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 50(3), 182-189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8749.2008.02032.x>