

# Teaching group work to students with autism

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States. According to the American Psychiatric Association, this disability is characterized by "persistent deficits in social communication and social interactions across multiple contexts."

Children with autism have an obvious disadvantage in starting and carrying meaningful conversations with their peers, which hinders their performance in academic life and later in their professional careers. If left unaided, ASD children withdraw from social interactions and fail to socialize properly.

In her article "Teaching the Hidden Curriculum of Group Work for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder," published in the De Gruyter journal *Open Education Studies*, Kristina Scott, of Salem State University, presents the results of a study carried out over a period of several months on a group of four children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, aged 10-11. These children had been largely excluded from any social interactions in their peer group. Through a structured protocol of group work with typical peers, they were able to increase significantly their social interactions, at least for the duration of the protocol.

Once the maintenance period ended, three of the four subjects went back to their baseline, meaning they were once again withdrawn and sidelined from their peer group. Only one girl maintained the higher level of meaningful interactions after the experiment, averaging 10 conversational attempts (range 7-13) per session during the Return to Baseline phase.

This study provides suggestions as to what an inclusive environment could look like and argues that school instruction should incorporate the social aspect into curriculum on a permanent basis, since children with ASD can function well within their [peer group](#) given proper assistance.

Communication skills and group work could be taught alongside regular curricula and a structured protocol, which promotes communication, can go a long way to help children with ASD to socialize with their peers, thereby aiding their development.

"Peer-to-peer learning strategies are often used in classrooms, but without structuring this learning activity many individuals with ASD will have difficulty remaining on task. Overall, this article has implications on how social skill development can happen alongside academic content knowledge for all students in the classroom," said Laurie Dickstein-Fischer, Ph.D. of the School of Education at Salem State University.

**More information:** Kristina Scott. Teaching the Hidden Curriculum of Group Work for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, *Open Education Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1515/edu-2019-0008](https://doi.org/10.1515/edu-2019-0008)

Provided by De Gruyter

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