Title: SPIC- Preschool Peer Social Intervention: Promoting social Play Interaction and Conversation in ASD

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Abstract

Longitudinal evidence shows that individual variations in playing and conversing with peers at early ages predict later social competence. Although peer relations comprise a core deficit in ASD, relevant evidenced-based social curriculum for preschoolers with ASD are scarce. This talk provides descriptions of a novel, innovative manualized preschool peer social intervention (SPIC) including three major social interventions in key deficits areas of ASD: play, conversation and interaction. The talk will be focused on the description of each intervention's (play, conversation and interaction) manualized curriculum, study design and novel outcome data that is based on a multidimensional assessment procedure to evaluate intervention efficacy. Altogether, 65 preschoolers with ASD participated in four groups: three interventions (play, conversation and interaction) and a waitlisted control group. Based on the ecological model, each manualized SPIC intervention took place in the preschool environment, in 45-min meetings three times weekly for six months, in small mixed groups (n=3) of 1 ASD and 2 typical peers, led by trained, supervised therapists. The "play" curriculum followed Howes's (1980) stages of social play and social pretend play (Howes, Unger, & Matheson, 1992). Assessment procedure included pre-post *Peer Play Observation Scale (PPS)*, (Sigman & Ruskin, 1999) assessed during a free-play situation within their assigned small groups and therapists' and blind teachers' report on the *Peer Play Questionnaire* (PPQ) (Hoshmand & Bauminger-Zviely, 2015). The "conversation" curriculum focused on teaching social conversation stages and age-appropriate conversational types (Zadunaisky-Ehrlich & Blum-Kulka, 2010). Assessment procedure included pre-post observation on children's free spontaneous peer conversation during free-play and snack time to assess pragmatic skills (pragmatic rating scale-PRS, Landa et al., 1992) and conversational characteristics (Rajwan & Bauminger- Zviely, 2013). The "interaction" curriculum focused on teaching pro-social interactive skills. Assessment procedure included pre-post observation of children's peer interaction during a free-play situation within their assigned small groups using the Observation Scale (Eytan & Bauminger- Zviely, 2013) and therapists and blind teachers reports on the Social Engagement and Social Cognition Questionnaire (Eytan & Bauminger- Zviely, 2013). All groups were also assessed by blind teacher's reports on the Vineland adaptive scale (Sparrow, et al., 2005). Overall, as expected, children in each intervention showed higher improvement in their learned skills compared to the other groups, and especially compared with the control group. However, we also found two levels of important generalizations: 1.From one modality to the other (e.g., 20% of the children in the conversation group improved their social play complexity, and children in the interaction group improved their paralinguistic capabilities on the pragmatic scale) 2. Of the learned skills to the child's natural free-play situation in the preschool according to the blind teacher's report. Building up the ability to play, interact and converse more efficiently with peers may render a substantial impact on preschoolers with ASD immediate social experience with peers and their future social competence. The SPIC outcome can help the future design of more individualized approaches to the treatment of core deficit in peer interaction, resulting in mitigation of the social withdrawal and isolation in older ages.

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ASD Phenotypical Characteristics and Related Tailor-Made Evidenced-Based Social Interventions

Prof. Nirit Bauminger-Zviely. Full Prof., PhD in Educational Psychology from UCLA, and former head of the School of Education at BIU. Prof. Bauminger-Zviely's ASD laboratory at the school of education is at the forefront of basic and applied research on the social – emotional development and peer relations of children affected by ASD including novel manualized evidenced based social interventions. Over the last two decades Prof. Bauminger-Zviely developed multidimensional evidenced-based social intervention as well as assessment procedures and scales to evaluate the ASD social phenotype. Prof. Bauminger-Zviely is the author of the book "*social and academic abilities in children with HFASD*", and the author of numerous book chapters and journal articles as well as national and international presentations on the field of ASD and peer relations, friendship, social intervention, social emotions, social cognition and social commination.