

MALAYSIA

Education for Children with Autism in Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION: AUTISM

In line with the demands from parents of autistic children in Malaysia, the Ministry of Education and The National Autism Society Of Malaysia (NASOM) set a collaboration efforts to pilot an inclusive approach for children with autism.

THE INCLUSIVE APPROACH: SMART-PARTNERSHIP MOE-NGO

This inclusive effort was initially proposed by NASOM. It was finally implemented in one of the mainstream schools the year 2005. The main objective was to provide the children with a regular school environment. NASOM prepare children with autism for inclusion by setting a few actions during transition period.

PREPARING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM FOR INCLUSION BY NASOM

1. Transition class

A transition class was conducted by NASOM for at least 6 months. They manage their own behavior, improve their social and communication skills, as well as their academic skills. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was developed for each child. I

2. Family support services

As part of the family support services, NASOM teachers visited the children's home. During the visits, the teachers observed the children's behaviour and helped the parents to provide a structured learning environment at home. Learning material was provided to the parents so that the children were better prepared for the next school term.

3. Screening test

The children listed for inclusion sat for a series of tests given by the mainstream school and were placed in inclusive classroom if they passed. In 2007, a new set of criteria was introduced, ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) children were given an opportunity to gain knowledge and experience in the mainstream setting.

4. Initial orientation visits

At least three initial visits or stages of orientation were arranged for each child. Each stage of

orientation took a week to be completed. The students were orientated to the physical surroundings within the school compound under the guidance of the teacher aides. The first stage was conducted during the year-end school holiday where the school is empty. The second stage of orientation took place when the new school-term begins. In the second week, the children were allowed to spend time observing other children and the teaching process from a distance. The second visit usually lasted 2-3 hours a day. Third stage of orientation lasted for more than 3 hours a day.

Full inclusion were introduced after these stages of orientation. They followed the mainstream school schedule and take part in all activities with the help of teacher aids. These children were placed under a three month probation period in the mainstream school.

5. Support Classes

Children with autism attend after school support classes at NASOM to do their homework and revisions. Class play skills as well as social and communication skills are taught.

PREPARING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND MAINSTREAM TEACHERS FOR THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM BY MOE

1. Commitment and acceptance of school's administrative

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the MOE, The State Education Department of Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur, as well as NASOM was set after a series of meetings. The project committee decided to use partial inclusion setting as a starting point and preparation were also made for possible pull out session when necessary.

To address the mainstream teachers concerned on their lack of skills and knowledge in dealing with autism children, NASOM will provide assistant teachers, to support these teachers until these autistic children were able to cope on their own in the class.

Regular meetings were held, between the school and the MOE to discuss students and programme implementation progress.

2. Special training for mainstream teachers

The mainstream teachers and staff were orientated to manage the characteristics of the children with autism. To aid in the process of understanding, regular meetings were held with the school management and teachers to discuss the students' progress.

THE PROGRESS OF THE PILOT PROGRAMME

The inclusion pilot programme started in 2005 and currently there is a total of 54 children in 9 mainstream schools in peninsular Malaysia. Almost all of the children have shown positive changes in their behaviour, social and communication skills. Through interaction with peers and mainstream teachers, they have shown remarkable changes in their play skills, engaged with their peers and have learned to be flexible in expressing their feelings and needs. Most of them are able to show a variety

facial expressions and body language that are appropriate to the situation and environment.

THE RESULTS

School Administrators, mainstream teachers and students is more understanding and sensitive to the needs of the children with autism. Parents of autistic children are very cooperative in implementing any intervention suggested and more children excelled in academic and extra-curricular activities.

Table 1: the number of students with autism in inclusive smart-partnership pilot project

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Primary	8 (1 school)	12 (1 school)	25 (4 schools)	35 (6 schools)	52 (8 schools)
Secondary	-	-	-	-	2 (1 school)
Total	8	12	25	35	54

Evaluation

The principles of this project were based on cooperation between the school’s mainstream teachers, mainstream peers as well as mainstream pupils’ parents. This is to ensure that children with autism were given the opportunity to imitate peer models, interact and communicate competently. Conversely mainstream peers involved in the programme may develop positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities (Kluth, 2003). Inclusion will promote caring society and a more understanding of disabled peers amongst young children.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

This pilot inclusive project was a success. The greatest challenge is to meet the needs of all students educated in inclusive classrooms and the acceptance of inclusion by mainstream teachers.

1. Challenging behaviour

Temper tantrums, running around, loud vocalizations, self-injurious activity, repetitive motor movement, or other disruptive or distracting behaviours are common amongst autistic children in this project.

2. Mainstream system

The autistic children learn at differing rates, and with different degrees of success, depending on their personal strengths and weaknesses. It is very important for the mainstream schools to be willing to make individual arrangement, involving both academic and social programmes, together with awareness exposure to teachers and peers.

3. Parental support and expectations

Mainstream schooling is not only focused on academic achievements. The main objective is for the children to be exposed to the real life environment and learn social and communication skills from their peers.

4. Availability of qualified and dedicated personnel

People working with children with ASD need to be passionate and motivated to work in challenging conditions. Teachers need to know their students' need and adapt. Training of teachers takes time and dedicated teachers are very much in demand.

5. Insufficient Early Detection and Public awareness

Awareness plays an important role in early detection/screening for ASD or other possible disabilities, and thus early intervention can be given as soon as possible. However, many cases are not detected due to lack of awareness of the early signs, as well as the lack of professionals who are specialized and trained in the field.

DISCUSSION

This paper focus on an outcome of a pilot project recently developed to promote autistic children's social inclusion and acceptance. The partnership with NGOs in implementing inclusive approach for pupils with autism in Malaysia was piloted to support the aim of increasing participation of children with SEN in educational and social activities in mainstream schools in line with the Salamanca Statement of 1994. The study was an exploratory examination in peer acceptance involving children with autism in mainstream classes.

This Preliminary project outcome indicates that students' progress in social interaction and skills are improving. This study refutes the assumption that SEN are not accepted in mainstream classes.

Peers are willing to be involved with activities with autistic children. They were protective towards children with autism and recognized their difficulty in recognizing what is safe or unsafe. These findings show that inclusion approach demands a higher degree of coordination and planning among regular and special-education teachers.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Modus Operandi for Good Practices

An active support system is crucial and a crisis management team would be helpful in addressing arising issues. A sufficient funding is necessary to start the program and the maintenance could be carried out with collaboration between NGO's and the government. A comprehensive preparatory process would be able to introduce and expose new environment and process to better prepare parties concern.

References

Mike Conor. *Autism: Current Issues 17*. www.mugsy.org/cornor20.htm

Paula Kluth. *Supporting Students with Autism: 10 Ideas for Inclusive Classrooms*. www.positivelyautism.com/volume2issue1.html

<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Question1

The smart partnership with NGOs seems to be intensive. I would like to know the funding.

Answer1

All NGOs are partially funded by the government through Social Welfare Department and donation through individuals or organizations working in smart partnership. NASOM run tests for ASD children before sending them to the schools.

Question2

What are the contents of IEP?

Answer 2

IEP is compulsory for all teachers. It is an individualized educational plan. It includes profile of children, medical diagnosis, learning achievement in primary schools, the year-long as to what the children can achieve is translated into daily plan for children.

Question 3

Do you utilize IEP in your transition period?

Answer 3

As 70% of the cluster group is high functioning. IEP is not necessary. As for the 30% who need 'heavy' support, both mainstream teachers and teacher aide from NASOM will come to a compromise on what to learn and to do.

Question 4

- i) What kind of class is conducted for autistic children who go to general schools?
- ii) A number of autistic children are studying in mixed LD classes. Is this type of schooling conducive for the autistic children?

Answer 4

- i) Autistic children are in 3 different types of setting, integrated program, regular class (inclusive model). In the integrated program, teachers cannot pay specific attention to their needs and behavioral problem. Hence, we try out the inclusive model with NASOM.
- ii) The LD classes are not so conducive for autistic children. That is one of the reasons that we have pilot smart-partnership program.

Question 5

Do you pay additional allowance to teachers?

Answer 5

Malaysian teachers and students on special education are given allowances. Last year, teachers are additionally given RM250/62co per month. All children with disability are given allowances. A student aide (a clerical personnel) who will bring the child to the classroom and help in tidying up and is also paid allowance. We are not a Welfare Society and we give allowances as an incentive.

Question 6

Are the teachers in NGOs specialized in autism?

Answer 6

Malaysian teachers aide from NASOM are specialized in autism. NASOM have specialists to help out teachers. They are strong in this

Question 7

You gave two study cases on inclusive education. Where they cannot get along with on get friends on get around. How do they get along with other children in the regular class?

Answer 7

When they are in regular class, they learn to adjust in a normal classroom setting after a year or more.

Question 8

In the normal classroom, are the normal children being prepared to receive the autistic children?

Answer 8

They are being briefed by the teachers before the autistic child is sent. The teacher-aide from NASOM will be assisting for 6 months to help the child to the classroom setting.

Question 9

In the curriculum, is there no specific time set to help them adjust?

Answer 9

No. specific time set. This is a buddy system. Buddies are informed on what the autistic child is capable or incapable of doing. A few peers are also assigned. Orientation is very important in a three weeks program. They will get used to the facilities, mass behaviors. If they cannot, they will be withdrawn and they will be taken and back later.