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INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND CHILDREN WITH NORMAL DEVELOPMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL CLASSES WITH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE DUTIES OF TEACHERS TO INCREASE INTERACTION*

KAYNAŞTIRMA UYGULAMASI YAPILAN OKUL ÖNCESİ SINIFLARINDA ÖZEL GEREKSİNİMLİ VE NORMAL GELİŞEN ÇOCUKLAR ARASINDAKİ ETKİLEŞİM VE ETKİLEŞİMİ ARTTIRMADA ÖĞRETMENE DÜŞEN GÖREVLER

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ABSTRACT

Developments and changes in current life conditions enable children to meet with educational institutions at early ages and have an education together with their peers. This enables the strengthening of interaction between children, development of peer relationships and supports social emotional development. The development of interaction and peer relationships is important to children with normal development as well as children with special needs. The strongest interaction between children with special needs and children with normal development can be achieved in the education environment with inclusive education. Increasing the interaction of children positively effects their academic and social gains. Interaction of children with special needs with their peers, their position among their peers and structure of peer relationship effects their orientation to school in future education periods. The pre-school period is a critical period where children start to form attitudes towards individuals with different properties and develop interaction skills. Therefore, by considering factors that affect interaction between teachers and children, it is important to conduct studies to strengthen and support interaction between children. To develop interaction and friendly relationships between children with special needs and children with normal development, there is need to meet multiple opportunities planned by teachers in the class environment. Teachers must have the sensitive balance to help support interaction and standing one step back. Such that teachers must facilitate children's interaction with planning, avoid interruptions and avoid taking control. This way, plans that include all children and strategies developed to increase interaction affects the interaction of children with special needs and positively contribute to peer relationships by increasing social acceptance. This way, a sense of belonging of children with special needs develops in the class. Accordingly, in this study interaction between children with special needs and children with normal development and the duties of teachers to increase this interaction will be interpreted and explained in this study.

Keywords: inclusion, interaction, children with special needs, children with normal development.

ÖZ

Günümüzdeki yaşam koşullarındaki gelişmeler ve değişmeler çocukların eğitim kurumları ile erken yaşlardan itibaren tanışmasına ve akranları ile beraber eğitim almasına imkan sağlamaktadır. Bu durum çocuklar arasındaki etkileşimin güçlenmesine ve akran ilişkilerinin gelişmesine olanak sağlayarak sosyal duygusal gelişimlerini desteklemektedir. Etkileşimin ve akran ilişkilerinin gelişimi normal gelişim gösteren çocuklar kadar özel gereksinimli çocuklar için de oldukça

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önem taşımaktadır. Özel gereksinimli ve normal gelişen çocuklar arasındaki etkileşimin en kuvvetli olabileceği ortamlar kaynaştırma uygulamasının yapıldığı eğitim ortamıdır. Çocuklar arasındaki etkileşimin artırılması onların akademik ve sosyal kazanımlarını olumlu yönde etkilemektedir. Özel gereksinimli çocukların akranlarıyla etkileşimleri akran grupları içindeki konumları ve akran ilişkilerinin yapıları onların ileriki eğitim dönemlerinde okula uyumlarını etkilemektedir. Okul öncesi dönem çocukların farklı özellikleri olan bireylere yönelik tutumlarının oluşmaya ve etkileşim becerilerinin gelişmeye başladığı kritik bir dönemdir. Bu nedenle öğretmenlerin çocuklar arasındaki etkileşimi etkileyen faktörleri göz önüne alarak çocuklar arasındaki etkileşimi güçlendirmeye ve sürdürmeye yönelik çalışmalar yapması oldukça önem taşımaktadır. Özel gereksinimli çocukların normal gelişen çocuklarla etkileşimlerini ve arkadaşlık ilişkilerini geliştirmek için sınıf içinde öğretmenler tarafından planlanan çok fazla fırsatla karşılaşmaya ihtiyaçları vardır. Öğretmenin etkileşimi desteklemede yardım etme ile bir adım geride durma arasında hassas bir dengede olmalıdır. Yani öğretmen yaptığı planlamalarda çocukların etkileşimini kolaylaştırmalı, kesintiye uğratmamalı ve kontrolü ele geçirmemelidir. Bu şekilde tüm çocukları içine alarak yapılan planlar ve etkileşimi arttırmak için geliştirilen stratejiler, özel gereksinimli çocuğun etkileşimlerini ve akran ilişkilerini olumlu yönde etkileyerek sosyal kabulünü arttırmakta; bununla birlikte özel gereksinimli çocuğun sınıf içindeki aidiyet duygusunu geliştirmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışmada özel gereksinimli ve normal gelişim gösteren çocuklar arasındaki etkileşim ve etkileşimi arttırmada öğretmene düşen görevler ilgili literatüre dayalı olarak yorumlanarak açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kaynaştırma, etkileşim, özel gereksinimli çocuk, normal gelişen çocuk

1. INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs have the same right as children with normal development. Therefore, they must have equal experience to experience certain games and develop friendship with peers. Educational institutions adopted inclusion practices to include children with special needs in the program.

Inclusion practice is an ethical and educational topic. Inclusion practices that are applied in various countries have benefits to both children with special needs and children with normal development. In terms of increasing the diversity satisfaction potential of children, accepting personal differences, caring for these differences, learning to help and support each other, the development of peer relationship structures, position in peer groups and interaction, inclusion practices are incrementally accepted.

In this study, interaction between children with special needs and children with normal development and the duties of children to increase this interaction will be interpreted and explained based on related literature.

2. INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND CHILDREN WITH NORMAL DEVELOPMENT

The strongest interaction between children with special needs and children with normal development can be achieved in education environment with inclusive education. Inclusion is using appropriate methods and techniques in all types and levels of schools and institutions for education of children with special needs based on individual education plans with peers. Inclusion practices provide opportunities for peer interaction and increases expected success of inclusion practices (Kernan and Singer, 2013).

Three main concepts that must be considered in social relationships of disabled children and normal children are friendship, social acceptance and social rejection. These concepts are not independent and mainly, these are the points of interaction emerging in inclusion classes. Two children are friends when they choose each other more to play. Social acceptance is other children playing with this child. For example, other children are happy to sit next to this child. Friendship is a relationship; social acceptance is more passive because the child is not happy that others sit next to him. Not selecting a child to do something is social rejection (Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

As educational institutions become inclusive institutions, there has been an increase in peer relationships and friendships of children with special needs in early childhood and educational institutions (Kernan and Singer, 2013). On one hand, there is no difference in friendships between children with normal development and children with special needs. When studies in this field are considered, although children with special needs had certain physical differences, these children are preferred by peers with normal development as playmates (Dyson, 2005; Diamond, Le Furgy and Blass, 1993; Diamond and Hestenes, 1996). On the other hand, children with special needs have less frequent interaction with peers compared to children with normal development. When peer acquisition skills of children with special needs and children with normal development are compared, it is seen that children with special needs have fewer friends (Koster, Pijl, Nakken and Houten, 2010).

Since social acceptance of children with special needs in inclusive environments affects their whole life, there is a need to work on increasing social acceptance of children with special needs. The first step for social acceptance of children with special needs is a teacher who is prepared to teach children with normal development and children with special needs before coming to class. If these preparations are not completed, three problems can emerge: Child may not observe and imitate peers on his/her own, normal children may not accept disabled children, the class teacher may not intervene to increase social acceptance of children with special needs. Many children with special needs experience this problem when they start general education classes. The fundamental reason for children with special needs to face these problems is that the class teacher does not know s/he has to do something to increase social acceptance of disabled children and is not doing any work to increase social acceptance (Aral, 2011; Salend, 1998). In this case, it is important to analyse factors that effect interaction to increase the social acceptance of child.

3. FACTORS EFFECTING INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND CHILDREN WITH NORMAL DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1. Age:** One of the most important factors in interaction is age. Studies show that the highest interaction between children with special needs and children with normal development is during the pre-school period. Because younger children do not discriminate for gender, or special needs when selecting playmate, they use other criteria when selecting a friend in following years (Metin, 2012).
- 3.2. Differences from others (Visibility of Disability):** Children start to use “s/he looks like me”, “s/he does not look like me” criteria in terms of physical properties to choose their friends. Low social acceptance due to different properties of individuals might lead social rejection. These differences can be perceived as better or low academic skills, using books in Braille, using crutches or hearing aids. As visibility of disability increases, there are studies stating that this difference becomes more evident and social acceptance reduces. If class teachers and children with normal development do not have knowledge and experience for children with special needs, they can refrain from children with special needs, and do not know how to act and feel anxious. Prejudice and lack of experience of children and teachers may directly transform into prejudice. Therefore, many children may not choose their peers who are children with special needs as a playmate or class mate. Physical properties, unattractive look or similar properties may decrease social acceptance of children (Metin, 2012).
- 3.3. Academic Success:** Low academic success of children with special needs affect the social acceptance of a child and clearly shows the difference of the child. Low academic success of children leads them to be timid in the class environment, participate in classes less and move away from peers (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008).
- 3.4. Language Development Level:** Another factor that prevents children with special needs to interact is a low language level to express themselves. The struggle of children with special needs to communicate social messages, continue on the topic they started or starting communication are other factors that decrease interaction between children (Metin, 2012).
- 3.5. Behaviours:** Another reason for rejection of a child is problematic behaviour of children. In fact, although problematic behaviours occur due to various reasons, these behaviours are often attributed to the disability of the child, teachers and other children generally focus on problematic behaviour and insufficiencies and they might want to stay away from the child by disregarding competence and positive properties of the child (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008; Aral, 2011).
- 3.6. Social Skills:** Social skills are skills that are differentiated based on the exhibited environment and states to interact with others and enables us to predict social results in a certain environment. The social development of children with special needs are slow in line with other insufficiencies and these children may experience problems to understand and predict social clues and behaviours of others. Insufficiency in social skills plays an important role in social acceptance, children with low social acceptance has few friends; few friends limits social interaction, limited interaction prevents social development and social skills to be imitated, used and learned (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008; Aral, 2011; Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).
- 3.7. Teacher Attitude:** It has been accepted for years that the attitude of the teacher towards children with special needs are effective on the emotional, social and mental development of the child. The attitude of teachers towards children with special needs are modelled by children with normal development. Similarly, children with normal development tend to follow the approach of their teacher towards

children with special needs in inclusive classes. Therefore, the positive or negative attitude of teachers in inclusive classes towards children with special needs effects the interaction style of normal children with children with special needs (Aral, 2011; Metin, 2012).

3.8. Peer Attitudes: One of the most important elements of the inclusion program are children with normal development. When results of studies are considered, there are various studies that explain the positive and negative approach of children with normal development towards children with special needs. Negative approaches cause social rejection of children with special needs. Social rejection effects success, social and emotional harmony, in-class behaviour, attitude towards school and themselves in children with special needs (Salend, 1998; Aral, 2011).

3.9. Planned Approach in Inclusion: To achieve good interaction, inclusion should be planned and executed in a systematic manner. Positive interaction between children with normal development and children with special needs participation in a planned inclusion program support peer communication and social acceptance and provide experience that are necessary for the continuity of positive attitudes (Metin, 2012).

4. INCREASING INTERACTION OF CHILDREN WITH OR WITHOUT SPECIAL NEEDS AND DUTIES OF TEACHER

Although components of an educational environment are parents, children, school personnel, school management and teachers, teachers are responsible for gaining certain skills and academic success in the class. Because when needed, teachers cooperate with other components to offer opportunities to participate in the educational environment. An inclusive class environment, being in the same environment with peers may not be enough for interaction of children with special needs (Aral, 2011). There is need to support and prepare children with normal development to children with special needs in general education classes and the teacher's program should be adapted. Additionally, strategies to increase interaction between children with or without special needs must be developed.

4.1. Skills That Shape Friendship and Social Relationship

It is emphasised that social skills which are the basic skills for children to act in class, school and greater society prevent various behavioural problems and these skills are the most critical skills for success in school. Social skills are accepted as skill that increase the life quality of individuals, help individuals to achieve targets and services that can be used for life. Social skills are defined as socially acceptable and learned behaviours that enables achieving positive social results in the social environment and enables interaction with others (Aral, 2011). Children with special needs need to have various opportunities to develop their friendship and social skills. These interactions might be working on an art project based on academic skill cooperation, passing something along the breakfast table, helping a struggling friend while playing in the garden (Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

Teachers play an important role to plan and support these activities. Teaching that aims to develop social relationships and interaction should be visible in every corner and activities in the classroom. Teachers must have the sensitive balance to help supporting interaction and standing one step back. Teachers should facilitate interaction of children but avoid interrupting or taking over control (Walker, 2004).

Nonetheless, teachers should teach key skills that play a key role on positive interaction in addition to organising the class environment to support positive social interaction. Some of these skills are as follows (Walker, 2004):

Being aware of others, sharing, helping, planning games with others, inclusion to on-going game, complimenting, reconciliation, conflict solving.

Teachers must organise the curriculum to develop friendship between children with special needs and normal children and determine educational objectives to develop the interaction between children.

4.1.1. Creating Friendship and Social Relationship Development Strategies/Social Interaction Opportunities

While teachers are planning to support social relations, they must be sure that social opportunities are presented in the class. To develop this, the following planning can be made:

Events and materials that require participation of more children must be presented: some materials need more social interaction (playing with ball, dramatic play etc), however, events that are applied on their own

(puzzle, computer games etc.) should be organised to require social elements. Planned class activities must have social opportunities. When these activities are planned as small or large groups, there is more opportunity for interaction. The teacher must support with visual clues for children struggling in unstructured activities. (For example, showing a photograph during drama activity might speed up participation of children). Social relationships can be developed in routine class activities. Interaction can be encouraged by adding social concepts like games, rhymes and songs to the class routines of children. For example, “shake hands with all your friends while walking in the class” can be added to activity (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008; Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

Additional Recommendations/Strategies to Increase Interaction

- Plan dramatic game activities with certain roles and divide these roles.
- Include in friendship actions like singing, group meetings and hugging in other planned activities.
- Sabotage small group art activities by providing limited materials; encouraging children to solve problems on how to share these materials and which order they will follow.
- Create a friendship corner for free time activities, plan special activities that will require children to work with their friends.
- Assign an inclusive student and normal children together to complete class work.
- Teach systematically to follow an order with their peers in the most preferred activities.
- Teach children with normal development to invite children with insufficiencies and insisting on this invitation.
- Teach other children in the activity how to compliment children with disabilities before initiative to attend on-going activities.
- Use direct teaching methods to teach answering the question in game activities to children with insufficiencies.
- Teach certain game routines that contain peers such as playing with dolls, cars or trucks.
- Create opportunities for children to observe socially sufficient peers and to interact with these peers.
- Plan activities that require the cooperation of multiple children.
- Organize the environment to encourage two or more children to work on projects and activities.
- Offer both structured and unstructured games.
- Discusses friendship, problem solving and conflict in the class and read books (Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

4.2. Sustaining Friendship

To increase social interaction, it is important to sustain the interaction that is started in the class environment. Therefore, sustaining friendship between children must be achieved. Another strategy to increase interaction between normal children and children with special needs is sustaining friendship. To do this, teacher should provide sufficient free time, physically prepare interior and exterior environments to help the interaction of large and small groups, allowing noisy, random and moving games for children to have fun and experience unity caused by shared laughter, keep friends in the same group, share information about possible friendships and common interest areas of children with practitioners and parents (Kernan and Singer, 2013).

In the class environment, there is need for starting or increasing student interaction, but it is not sufficient. The most important matter is sustaining this interaction. While providing information to normal children about children with special needs, how to play and how to communicate must be taught as well (Salend, 1998). For example, when they encounter their visually impaired friend, they can introduce themselves, talk in normal voice or make that friend look at them before talking. If there are materials like brochures, booklet that provide information on this subject, children without special needs should use these materials. Another method to increase interaction is to ensure children with similar interests to be together and by

making small changes, including children with special needs to these activities. It is important to remember that as children learn more about their disabled friends (especially on how to communicate), communication with disabled children can increase and this communication can be sustained (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008).

Teachers should guide normal children based on the disability of children with special needs to increase interaction. The following table contains items regarding how to communicate based on disability type (Salend, 1998):

Table 1: Guide to Communicate Based on Disability Type

Type	Communication Guide
Communication with Disabled Individuals	See this individual as a normal individual. Avoid despising or degrading talk. Directly communicate with disabled individual even though this individual is using an interpreter/commentator. Be yourself, be comfortable, think politely and respectfully about the disabled individual. Use a language and talk on topics that are suitable for his/her age and development level. Do not say sorry if you use one of the general expressions towards the disability of the individual. "Have you seen Mary?" to a visually impaired individual. When you meet this individual, say hello like you do to your other friends. The environment you are in will affect communication. For example, dark and noisy environment will make interaction with speech disordered or emotional disorder harder. Do not think that disabled individual needs you, ask to him/her.
Individual with Wheelchair Interaction with Disabled Individuals	Respect the personal area that disabled individuals need to use wheelchair. If your talk will take long, sit on the eye level of disabled individual and communicate that way.
Individuals with Visual Impairment Communication with Disabled Individuals	Introduce yourself when you meet with disabled individual. Use your normal voice. Directly communicate by calling the name of disabled individual. When you are leaving or when you are done with talking, notify disabled individual.
Individuals with Hearing Disorder Communication with Disabled Individuals	Before talking, make sure you attract his/her attention. Use clear, open and short sentences. Avoid high voice or exaggerated lip movements. Avoid repeating the same sentences. If disabled individual cannot understand you, try to express in another way or write down what you say.
Individuals with Speed Disorder Communication with Children	Use gestures, mimic and body language. Focus on disabled individual. Avoid correcting or completing speech of this individual. Encourage and be patient.

Another way to support interaction is the teacher to consider the "friendship" concept as a part of syllabus and teaching friendship, what friendship is, importance and quality, valuing to have friends, effects of friendship, problems that can be experienced while making friends. This way not only students with special needs but also other students can increase interaction and sustain this interaction (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008; Aral, 2011).

4.3. Being a Positive Role Model

Another strategy that can be used for increasing positive interaction is being a positive role model to children. There are couple of ways to do this. First, the approach of teacher to other children and children with disability should be a model for communication. If teacher is forming a positive relationship with disabled child and acting as a class member rather than a guest, other children will act this way. Teachers first should respect the differences and accept individual differences (Sucuoğlu and Kargin, 2008).

When the teacher acts to children with special needs and other children in the same way, normal peers will have similar expectations and other children will have similar expectations from disabled friends. Normal children can have the interaction with children with special needs as they have with other friends (Aral, 2011).

Teachers can give responsibilities to children with disabilities like other peers in the classroom, show that they are contributing to the class and enabling this child to show the highest performance can support making normal children to understand children with special needs are valuable members of the class environment (Aral, 2011).

Mothers, fathers and siblings of children without special needs can be positive role models. As observed in some schools, if parents are saying, “don’t play with her/him, s/he might hurt you”, this will prevent development of positive perception towards having children with special needs as a friend. Therefore, when necessary, teachers must explain the social environment in class, social acceptance and desire to develop friendship and how their expressions regarding children with special needs are reflected in the class environment (Sucuoğlu and Kargın, 2008).

4.4. Curriculum Changes

Curriculum changes are changes in a class activity or material to facilitate participation of disabled children in planned activities and routines or to maximise participation. The main idea underlying this practice is that in addition to entertaining interaction with toys and peers, increasing participation will enable a child to benefit from these opportunities, develop and learn. Curriculum changes should be considered as easy interventions that require thinking and planning but not additional resources. In fact, although many teachers do not use this name, they regularly change curriculum. With careful adjustments and adaptations, these can be important tools to help the effective development of disabled children (Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

Curriculum changes are most effective when they show you which activities do children with special needs are interested in but cannot achieve full participation (Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

4.4.1. Curriculum Change Types

Curriculum changes have eight types. Explanations for these types and strategies that should be followed by teachers are given below (Sandall and Schwartz, 2014).

Table 2: Curriculum Change Types:

Change Type	Definition	Strategies
Environmental Support	Changing physical, social and transient environment to support participation, interest and learning	Change physical environment Change social environment Change transient environment
Material application	Application of materials for children to participate as independently as possible	Bring materials and class tools to most suitable position. Fix materials. Change reactions. Make materials bigger or shinier
Activity Simplification	Simplification by dividing a complex skill to smaller pieces or decreasing number of steps.	Divide activity into pieces. Change or reduce number of steps. Make sure the results are successful.
Children’s Preference	If child cannot benefit from existing opportunities, identifying preference of child and combining with activities.	Give his/her favourite toy to his/her hand. Use one of his/her favourite activities. Use one of his/her favourite friends.
Special Material Tools and Equipment	Using special or adaptable tools to increase participation and participation level of the child.	Use special materials to increase accessibility. Use special materials to increase participation.
Adult Support	Intervening of an adult to support participation and learning of child	Be a model. Participate in child’s game. Use praising and encouragement.
Peer Support	Adult intervention to help children to learn important targets.	Let peers be models. Match the child with a helper. Use praising and encouragement.
Hidden Support	Organising events that naturally occur during an activity.	Organise getting in line. Order activities in a curriculum field.

5. RESULTS

Articles such as care, respect, educational rights of children in the Convention on the Rights of the Children include not only children with normal development but also children with special needs. There are studies showing that children with special needs interact less in a inclusive environment. Additionally, it is stated that these children often experience barriers to play with peers and to participate in activities.

Children should be integrated at an early age to encourage friendship between children with special needs and children with normal development. However, teachers must have certain interventions to encourage peer relationship, friendship, interaction for children to be in the peer culture. In line with inclusion to society rights of disabled children, teachers should encourage these children and help them to socialise.

The support of teachers for peer interaction in an inclusive environment can occur when teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusion and children with special needs, have necessary information and experience about special education, inclusion and cooperate with other institutions that have children with special needs.

To increase peer interaction in inclusive education, the teacher should not be left alone; school managers, school counsellors and special educators must support the teacher. To increase peer interaction, teachers work with school personnel as well as children with normal development and their families and children with special needs and their families in a coordinated way, inform children and their families, support their communication, inform about how to communicate with them and provide guidance.

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