

Research on the Strategy of Social Story Method in Social Skills of Autistic Children

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Abstract:

In recent years, the incidence of autism has been increasing year by year. Interventions for individuals with autism exhibit the characteristics of early detection, early intervention, and good prognosis. The age of 0-6 is the golden period for early intervention in the development of young children, which has attracted the attention of teachers, parents, society, and many scholars to early intervention for autism. One of the core symptoms of children with autism is social disorder. This study combines the application of social story method in the social skills of children with autism, and provides educational suggestions for frontline preschool teachers to promote the high-quality development of integrated education.

Keywords:

Social Storytelling Method, Autistic Children, Social Skills

1. Introduction

Integrated education is considered as the main educational approach to improve the ability of children with autism to adapt to normal social environments. In the process of promoting integrated education, the country has relevant policy support, but China started relatively late, and the development of preschool integrated education is still in its early stages, facing problems such as poor education quality, educational effectiveness, and insufficient teaching staff. In order to strengthen the teaching staff, the Ministry of Education issued the "Professional Standards for Special Education Teachers (Trial)" in 2015, which put forward a series of requirements for special education teachers in terms of teacher ethics, professional knowledge, and professional ability. At present, the teaching staff of preschool integrated education in Chinese universities are mainly composed of graduates from special education majors [1].

However, the teaching staff of higher special education in China is weak, and there are very few teachers in special education majors who have obtained high degrees and senior professional titles. The number of special education teachers in local undergraduate colleges is also very small. Some universities that offer special education majors even have a phenomenon of only one teacher in a major. Therefore, it is necessary for preschool education teachers to learn some theoretical knowledge

related to integrated education and improve their professional abilities. Only in this way that the shortage of teachers in special education could be made up, promote the practice of integrated education better, and improve the quality and effectiveness of integrated education for children with autism [2].

One of the core symptoms of children with autism is social impairment, and interventions for individuals with autism exhibit characteristics of early detection, early intervention, and good prognosis. The age range of 0-6 is the golden period for early intervention in the development of young children. This study combines the application of social story method in the social skills of children with autism, and provides educational suggestions for frontline preschool teachers to promote the high-quality development of integrated education.

2. Overview of Social Story Method

2.1. The Origin of Social Story Method

Garol Gray first used social stories to intervene in the social skills of children with autism in 1991, and published information on social story teaching methods in a journal in 1993. A social story is a short story written by teachers, professionals, parents, or any caregiver living with autistic children, which involves relevant social clues and appropriate coping skills. It utilizes the visual advantage of autistic children, uses structured text or images to provide relevant information about the social situation, and is guided by teachers to learn correct social behavior, thereby improving the social skills of the intervention subjects. The main purpose is to help children with autism understand the meaning of social interaction and be able to make appropriate social behaviors in social interactions.

2.2. Theoretical basis for social story development

Since Garol Gray first used social stories to intervene in the social skills of children with autism, the social story approach has undergone nearly 30 years of development, and related empirical research has gradually enriched. At present, intervention methods for social skills in children with autism are mainly divided into two categories. One type is skill oriented intervention methods represented by peer intervention, integrated game groups, cooperative learning, etc., which originated in the 1980s and are based on behaviorism principles. It emphasizes the role of proficient mastery of specific social skills, communication skills, and emotional skills in the development of children's social abilities. Another type is cognitive oriented intervention methods represented by social storytelling, cognitive scripts, cognitive behavior correction, etc. It originated in the 1990s and is based on cognitive psychology. It believes that the processing and understanding of social information is the foundation and intermediary of social behavior. By enhancing the social cognitive ability of individuals with autism and emphasizing the cultivation of their cognitive understanding of social relationships and social communication abilities, the social behavior performance of individuals with autism can be improved[3].

3. Characteristics of Children with Autism

3.1. Physical and mental characteristics of children with autism

The physical and mental characteristics of children with autism are manifested in their early development, mainly through the emergence of language communication

skills, social interaction, and stubborn repetitive and stereotyped behaviors. These are also the three core characteristics of children with autism.

3.2. Lack of language communication skills

Lack of language communication skills, specifically manifested as a lack of eye contact, often described as "looking down on others", playing alone, not cooperating with others, not liking to embrace or interact with others, rarely smiling, difficult to get along with, and not following commands; Lack of appropriate body language, such as nodding and shaking the head, emotional attachment disorders with parents, or delayed and usually not afraid of strangers; Children with autism also have language barriers and are unable to actively communicate with peers or adults. Research has shown that there is a phenomenon of delayed language development in children with autism. Some individuals with autism may have no spoken language for a lifetime. If there are children with autism who have developed language, most of them have difficulties in pronunciation, articulation problems, lack of changes in monolingual harmony and rhythm, and lack of emotion in their speech [4].

3.3. Lack of social interaction ability

Children with autism lack the ability to interact socially, and the most crucial aspect is that they cannot fully accept and process information in the social environment. The way they express their desire to interact with others is often inappropriate. For example, when children with autism express their desire to play with ordinary children, they may lick others with their mouths, which often leads to resistance from their peers. Autistic children rarely use verbal or non verbal methods to respond to conversations, and usually choose the stimuli they pay attention to in response; In terms of eye contact, children with autism often show disinterest in others and lack eye contact; In terms of social emotions, one often chooses to interact with others in their own way and cannot think from the perspective of others. So, children with autism usually lack the ability to interact continuously with others in social interactions, unable to perceive their own emotional state, and also unable to understand the emotions or behaviors of others. In addition, the language communication function of children with autism is deficient, which greatly affects their learning and life adaptation abilities. So good social skills can help children with autism to live and learn independently.

3.4. Stubborn, repetitive, and stereotyped behaviors in children with autism

Children with autism exhibit stubborn, repetitive, and stereotyped behaviors. During observation in kindergarten, it was found that each child with autism exhibited varying levels of stereotyped behavior at different stages. Specifically manifested in stereotyped language, such as when the main class teacher takes leave, they will ask countless times throughout the day, where is the main class teacher? It also manifests in repetitive stereotyped actions, such as repeatedly opening and closing doors, repeatedly opening and closing faucets, tearing paper, spinning, etc. You may also have an unusual interest in certain objects or things, such as TV commercials, weather forecasts, a certain song, antenna babies, etc.

4. Cognitive Characteristics of Children with Autism

4.1. Advantages of Visual Processing

People have separate channels for processing visual and auditory information, but the amount of information processed by each channel is limited. According to existing research, cognitive deficits in autism have a better ability to process various information that conforms to the system, such as images, puzzles, shapes, etc., which can persist but cannot disappear immediately, compared to information with shorter dwell times (such as speaking, voice, facial expressions, etc.). Physiological studies have also shown this viewpoint. Researchers Enric Courchesne from the University of California have found that individuals with autism exhibit brain overgrowth in the early stages of life, which causes damage to multiple brain regions in individuals with autism. Anatomically, it has been found that the only normal areas are the early formed visual brain and posterior brain regions. This indicates that individuals with autism have good visual function [5].

4.2. Decomposing Task Behavior

Due to social communication barriers, young children with autism often struggle to understand complex social interaction information and acquire complex social skill tasks. However, their thinking lacks flexibility and prefers fixed and structured things, which makes them adept at accepting decomposed tasks or information. So researchers use the social story method to point out the social clues and steps in social scenes one by one, which is more in line with the way autistic individuals receive information.

5. Social Story Method Suitable for the Development Needs of Autistic Children

Social disorders are one of the symptoms of autism, as children with autism have unusual responses to sensory stimuli. Autistic patients often exhibit behaviors such as confusion, anxiety, and panic in unfamiliar environments and situations, and sometimes even avoid social responses. Therefore, when designing teaching stories, the story should include descriptions of social situations and the correct responses that autism patients should have. This is because most individuals with autism have difficulty identifying other people's behaviors and understanding social cues, leading to problems in social communication, such as difficulties in continuing and maintaining the conversation topic. Social stories can help them understand the appropriate behaviors needed in social interactions. Secondly, social storytelling has a clear structure that is closer to the characteristics of individuals with autism; For example, individuals with autism often follow structured behaviors, and social storytelling can provide a routine or convention. In addition, Smith (2001) summarized that the reasons why the social story approach is applicable to autism include:

- (1) Visualization, in addition to presenting purely text, can also include photos and charts as needed;
- (2) Persistence allows for repeated reading of individual cases;
- (3) Use simple language that meets the individual's language proficiency level;
- (4) Based on rigorous assessment, including observation and case discussion, collecting information from teachers and parents;
- (5) Handling the core needs of social interaction and communication in individual cases;

- (6) Provide information on who, what, and how the case actually involves;
- (7) Enable individual cases to understand people's thoughts and feelings, as well as how these thoughts influence their behavior;
- (8) Clues describing specific situations;
- (9) Using affirmative sentences, let the individual understand the general values or rules of society regarding a certain behavior.

6. The Writing Steps and Principles of the Social Story Method

6.1. Steps for Writing Social Story Method

Social stories are mainly designed by teachers or caregivers to meet the needs of children. Gray and Grand believe that social stories should follow the following four steps, each of which is to ensure that the social storytelling method can meet the abilities and social adaptation needs of children.

The first step is to select a theme. When writing a social story, the first step is to select the theme, which can also be said to be determining the target behavior. The themes of commonly used social stories can be divided into two categories: one is the scenario of problem behaviors that individuals with autism often exhibit, and the social story method is commonly used to reduce students' problem behaviors, that is, to reduce the occurrence of inappropriate behaviors; Another type is to use social stories to increase students' appropriate behavior. For example, allowing students to learn social skills or appropriate responses in specific environments.

The second step is to collect relevant information. After deciding on the intervention theme, it is necessary to collect relevant background information. For example, the time and place where the story theme often occurs, the participants, the reasons for the events, and the order in which they occur. These materials can be obtained through interviews with students themselves, parents, or teachers, as well as by observing the daily life of individuals with autism. It is also necessary to understand the reactions, behavioral motivations, preferences, etc. of individuals with autism in these situations, so that the writing of social stories can be more in line with the individual case [6].

The third step is to write a social story text. After collecting relevant information about individuals with autism, one can write social story texts. Social stories are composed of six types of sentences, namely descriptive sentences, viewpoint sentences, demonstrative sentences, control sentences, affirmative sentences, and cooperative sentences. Each social story should contain 0-1 guiding or controlling sentences, as well as 2-5 narrative or viewpoint sentences. The story text should include characters, events, time, location, reasons, etc. Step 4: Develop a social story title. The title should reflect the important message conveyed by the entire social story, so it is necessary to develop a clear and explicit title [7].

6.2. Principles of Writing Social Story Method

Taiwanese scholar Huang Meihui pointed out in her research that the writing of social story method should follow the following 15 principles

- (1) Meet the needs of the case.
- (2) The content of descriptive sentences should be as close to the facts as possible,

pointing out important features in the situation.

(3) Avoid using tone that is certain to occur, instead use phrases such as "sometimes, often, and can", and try to match the current situation as much as possible.

(4) Indicative sentences should be factual and described in concise and flexible sentences.

(5) The proportion of arrangement that conforms to the sentence structure of social stories, that is, each social story should contain 0-1 demonstrative or control sentences, as well as 2-5 narrative or viewpoint sentences, affirmative sentences, or cooperative sentences.

(6) Social stories include an introduction, main content, and conclusion.

(7) Each page only describes one social context.

(8) The target behavior determined by social stories should be in line with the individual's abilities, traits, and problem context.

(9) Use positive vocabulary to describe the positive behavior to be taught.

(10) Write social stories in the first person.

(11) If you want to describe someone else's wrong behavior, you should use the third person and not specifically indicate who performed this behavior.

(12) Write social stories using specific vocabulary that can be understood by individual cases.

(13) The font size is suitable for individual case reading.

(14) The title of a social story should be lively and arouse interest in reading individual cases.

(15) The length of social stories is suitable for the reading ability of individual cases.

6.3. Two social stories used in this study

(1) Social Story: How to Say Hello

I am a polite and good child. In the morning, I arrived at the kindergarten and saw Teacher Huang, Teacher Li, and Teacher Luo in Class 2. The teacher will say "good morning" to me (descriptive sentence), and then I will say "good morning, teacher" (directive sentence). This way, the teacher will be very happy, and I will also be very happy. Children also say "good morning" to me. I also want to say "good morning" to the children. This way, teachers and children will think that I am a good child.
(Viewpoint sentence)

(2) Social Story: Often Saying Thank You

In kindergarten, I eat a lot of delicious food every day. In the morning, when I arrived at the kindergarten and was hungry, the teacher would give the children breakfast and also give me breakfast. When I receive breakfast, I will say "thank you" to the teacher. When eating fruit in the middle, the teacher will ask us to pick it up ourselves (descriptive sentence), and when I pick it up, I will also say "thank you" to the teacher (directive sentence). When we have lunch at 11 pm, the teacher will give us chopsticks and also serve us rice (descriptive sentence). At this time, I will say "thank you" (directive sentence). This is good. (Viewpoint sentence)

7. Educational Suggestions for the Application of Social Story Method

(1) The content of social stories can present photos or videos of young children.

The presentation method of social stories is pure text and social clue images, which may be somewhat dull. It is recommended to combine the physical and mental development characteristics and cognitive characteristics of preschool children. In social stories, photos or videos of children making target behaviors can be combined. This not only arouses children's interest, but also serves as a form of self encouragement for autistic children.

(2) Sing the text of social stories in the form of familiar nursery rhymes for young children.

The teaching of social stories is one-on-one tutoring, often conducted through conversation or reading aloud. Preschool children are very interested in art, and it is recommended that when teaching social story texts, if students can match their favorite songs to present the text of social stories, it can not only arouse children's interest in social stories, but also help them remember the content of social stories and remind them to achieve their target behavior at any time [8].

(3) Teaching social stories through role-playing with puppets.

When presenting social stories in combination with scenario simulation, children with autism often have slow reactions or lack interest. In this case, puppets can be used in the social story presentation based on the scenario where the target behavior occurs, and children with autism can play social stories together. This not only allows children to capture their inner thoughts through role-playing, but also generates interest in practicing the target behavior.

(4) The writing of social stories should use the first person, as each social story only involves one scene.

Children with autism aged 3-6 are in the pre operational stage of Piaget's cognitive development, during which their thinking characteristics mainly include early accumulation of symbolic functions, self-centeredness, and one-sided thinking. This requires the writing of social stories to observe and understand the clues of social situations from the perspective of autistic children. A social story only involves one scene [9].

8. Conclusions

The social story method has a good effect on intervening social skills in children with autism. Teachers should pay attention to using the first person when writing social stories, and each story only involves one scene. They can use photos of the children themselves and familiar songs to present them through performance, making the application of the social story method more effective. At the same time, it can help preschool teachers who are not specialized in special education to apply the social story method in the context of integrated education, improve the quality of integrated education, and ultimately achieve educational equity.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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