

University of Groningen

Strategies of teachers in the regular classroom

de Leeuw, Renske Ria; de Boer, Anke Aaltje

Published in:
Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs

DOI:
[10.1111/1471-3802.12245](https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12245)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
de Leeuw, R. R., & de Boer, A. A. (2016). Strategies of teachers in the regular classroom. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 16(S1), 1004-1009. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12245>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

STRATEGIES OF TEACHERS IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

Renske Ria De Leeuw and Anke Aaltje De Boer

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

Key-words: Social participation, strategies, teachers, tacit-knowledge.

It is known that regular schoolteachers have difficulties in educating students with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties (SEBD), mainly because of their disruptive behavior. In order to manage the disruptive behavior of students with SEBD many advices and strategies are provided in educational literature. However, very little is known about teachers' strategies in daily practice to enhance the social participation of these students. The current study aims at revealing what teachers do to improve the social participation of students with SEBD in regular class via expert panel meetings. The data from the expert panels were half-open coded with two codebooks. The results indicate that teachers use many different strategies. However, not all strategies were directly aimed at improving the social participation. Teachers also aimed at preconditions like parental contact.

Introduction

The task of the primary teacher, at a regular school, has changed after the implementation of inclusive education. In the inclusive classroom both students with and without special educational needs are educated. To provide regular schoolteachers knowledge and knowhow, on properly educating students with social, emotional behavior difficulties (SEBD)¹ in the inclusive classroom, many educational literature provided advices and coping-strategies. However, the main focus of these advices and coping-strategies is on how to react to the disruptive behavior of the student with SEBD (Almog and Shechtman, 2007; Brophy and McCaslin, 1992; Cooper, 2011; Elliott, Witt, Galvin, et al., 1985; Evans, Harden and Thomas, 2004; Spilt and Koomen, 2009; Van der Wolf and Van Beukering, 2009). As stated by Evans, Harden, and Thomas

(2004), there are no studies available which focus on coping-strategies to promote the social participation of students with SEBD. This finding can be seen as worrisome, because students with SEBD experience problems in obtaining an optimal social participation (Guralnick, Neville, Hammond, et al., 2007; Monchy, Pijl and Zandberg, 2004; Strain and Schwartz, 2001).

Social participation refers to the following four aspects: friendship, interaction, social self-perception and acceptance by classmates (Koster, Nakken, Pijl, et al., 2009). Based on a literature study from Koster, Nakken, Pijl, et al. (2009) social participation is defined as followed: 'A students is socially participating properly when there are positive social contacts and interactions with his classmates, there are friendships among the classmates, the student is accepted in the class, and the student has a feeling of belonging in the class'. Each aspect of the social participation consist of several subthemes: Friendship network and Mutual friendships (Friendship), Playing together, (Un)acknowledged initiations (Interaction), Satisfaction at school and Loneliness (Self-perception), and Social preference (Acceptance).

An optimal social participation is important for the development of students, regardless of having a disability or not (Bierman, 2004; Blum and Libbey, 2004). Difficulties in the social participation may have negative consequences that influence the mental, behavioral and social development on the short and long run, like feelings of depression (Bagwell, Newcomb and Bukowski, 1998; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Bierman, 2004; Newcomb, Bukowski and Pattee, 1993; Parker and Asher, 1993). The negative effects of a low social participation indicate that it is of great importance to provide an optimal social participation for all students, especially for those who experience social difficulties. Teachers play an important role in stimulating the social participation, because the teacher can be seen as the director of the classroom. To support the teacher on how to manage his inclusive classroom, a lot of educational literature has been provided. However, most of this literature included advices and strategies on how to react to the disruptive behavior and not on how to enhance the social participation of the stu-

¹In line with the regulations of our national policies, the target group 'students with SEBD' consist of both student with a formal diagnosis as having a behavior difficulty (e.g. Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and students who are considered to have a behavior problem according to the teacher and/or school team and receive extra support for the social-emotional behavioral problem.

dent (Almog and Shechtman, 2007; Brophy and McCaslin, 1992; Cooper, 2011; Elliott, Witt, Galvin, et al., 1985; Evans, Harden, and Thomas, 2004; Spilt and Koomen, 2009; Van der Wolf and Van Beukering, 2009).

Despite the lack in knowledge about strategies to address the social participation, teachers do react to difficulties in social situations. Most of what teachers do in these situations comes from the knowledge that works for them, the so-called ‘tacit knowledge’ (Evans, Harden, and Thomas, 2004). Tacit knowledge is based on the individual expertise, intuition, understanding and professional insight (Gourlay, 2002; Wang, Su and Hsieh, 2011).

The current study aims to answer the research question: ‘Which strategies do Dutch regular primary schoolteachers suggest to promote the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular class?’. This research question will be answered via expert panels. The result of these panels will provide insight in teachers’ use of strategies in daily practice to promote the social participation of students with SEBD.

Method

Design

In order to accomplish the aim of this study, expert panels were held with Dutch regular primary schoolteachers. During the panels teachers discussed a real life case, focusing on students with SEBD who experienced problems in the social participation. We used deductive coding to analyze the collected data.

Participants

A total of 6 expert panels were held in January-May 2015. Each expert panel consisted of 3–10 primary schoolteachers per panel and a moderator. The moderators were the authors themselves, or one of the four trained colleagues.

Inclusion criteria for the expert panels were:

- The teacher works at a regular, primary school;
- The teacher has experience with inclusive education; meaning the teacher has or had a student with SEBD in their class.

In total 37 teachers participated (see Table 1 for demographics of the teachers). Most of the participants currently follow an applied science master (N = 34). Two teachers are graduated in Special Educational Needs and one teacher is currently following a master Educational Sciences.

Procedure expert panel

Every expert panel discussed two cases: (1) a student with internalizing behavior problems and (2) a student with externalizing behavior problems. Before the meeting,

Table 1: Demographics from expert panel teachers (N = 37)

Demographics teachers	
Gender	Male (N = 4)
	Female (N = 33)
Age	22–55 years (M = 34.62)
Teaching experience	1–30 years (M = 10.5)

all members received instruction about the cases they could bring in. It was told that a case should be about one of their own students, who specifically experienced problems in the social participation. The cases who fitted best were selected by the moderator and were introduced by the member themselves.

During the panels, the cases were discussed via the incident method (Milus, Oost and Holleman, 2006). The incident method uses tutor groups to formulate an advice to the contributor (i.e., the teacher with a case) and includes four phases: (1) information phase, (2) situation analyses phase, (3) decision phase and (4) discussion phase.

The strategies given in the decision phase were written down on post-its and collected afterwards. With the permission of the participants, the panel was recorded with a voice-recorder. One expert panel did not give permission to record. For this expert panel extra field notations were made by the moderator. The recordings of the other expert panels were replayed by the first author to collect the strategies that were not written on post-its, most of these statements came from explanations during the discussion phase.

Analyses

Data preparation. Discussing the cases, in the expert panels, resulted in 286 strategies. These strategies were digitalized and strategies that were too case-specific or covered the same content were eliminated from the data. This resulted in 245 unique strategies. To code and analyze the strategies into themes and subthemes of social participation a codebook was developed by the first author.

Development codebook: Social Participation Strategies. The first step in developing the so-called codebook Social Participation, was to operationalize the four themes and twelve sub themes of social participation from Koster, Nakken, Pijl, et al. (2009) into practical and operational descriptions. During this process we decided to remove the negative formulated sub themes, because none of these themes focused on promoting students’ social participation. During the operationalization of the sub themes ‘Social preferences’ and ‘Social support (behaviors)’, the two sub themes were compromised to

one sub theme: ‘Acceptance by the group’. Also the sub themes ‘Friendship networks’ and ‘Mutual friendship’, were compromised to one sub theme: ‘Friends’. The operationalization of the themes for social participation resulted in four themes and nine sub themes:

- Friendships: *Friends*
- Contact and interaction: *Play together, Work together, and Participation in group activities*
- Social self-perception: *Self-perception of peer acceptance, Satisfaction at school, Social self-concept, and Self-perception of social competence*
- Acceptance: *Acceptance by the group*

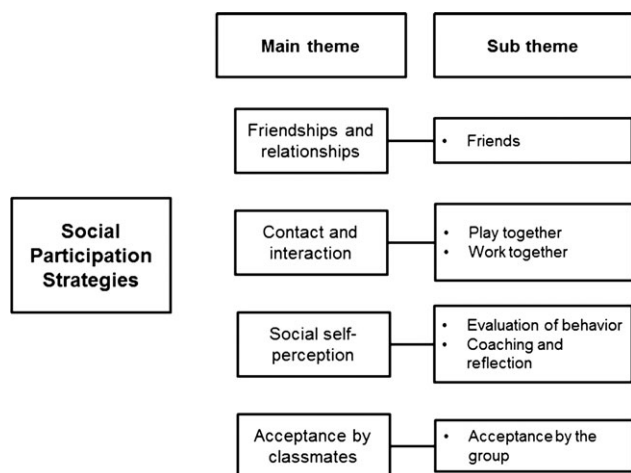
Half-open coding. After the operationalization of the themes, the 245 strategies were coded via half-open coding. During the half-open coding of the strategies, the codebook Social Participation Strategies was adapted. Some strategies could be coded under the operational description of the theme *Social self-perception*. However coding a strategy with a sub theme gave a lot of problems. Based on this, we decided to remove the four sub themes and formulated two new sub themes: ‘Evaluation of behavior’ and ‘Coaching and reflecting’.

After the first round of half-open coding, the sub theme ‘Participation in group activities’ was removed, for the reason of lack in differentiation with the other two sub themes of the theme *Contact and interaction*. There were no other adaptations needed for the codebook.

After the half-open coding the codebook Social Participation Strategies consisted out of four themes and six sub themes (see Figure 1).

The renewed social participation codebook was sufficient for coding 144 out of the 245 strategies (59%). The coding was independently conducted by the two authors.

Figure 1: Themes and sub themes of the codebook Social Participation Strategies, after coding



These 144 strategies were directly related to stimulate the social participation of students with SEBD. A content analyses of the remaining strategies revealed that these strategies mainly focus on preconditions in promoting social participation and coping with the behavioral difficulties of the student. In order to code the remaining strategies from the expert panels, an additional codebook was developed.

Development codebook: Pre-conditional Strategies. The development of this codebook was done via deductive coding and resulted in four themes based on the studies of Brophy and McCaslin (1992) and Van der Wolf and Van Beukering (2009). These themes are *Parental contact, Support, Stimulating desirable behavior, and Teacher-student relationship*. In order to make the codebook sufficiently exhaustive the following three themes were derived from the data: *Educational adjustments, Diagnostic research, and Safety of other students*. This resulted in a codebook consisting out of seven themes and eighteen subthemes (see Figure 2).

The two codebooks were used to code the strategies under the themes and subthemes as they are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Results

Strategies related to promote the social participation

As reported in the Analyses, two codebooks were developed to code all 245 unique strategies from the expert panels. The codebook Social Participation Strategies was used to code strategies that were directly relate to improving the social participation of a student with SEBD. With this codebook 144 of the 245 unique strategies (59%) could be coded. Table 2 shows examples of typical social participation strategies.

Figure 2: Themes and sub themes of the codebook Pre-conditional Strategies

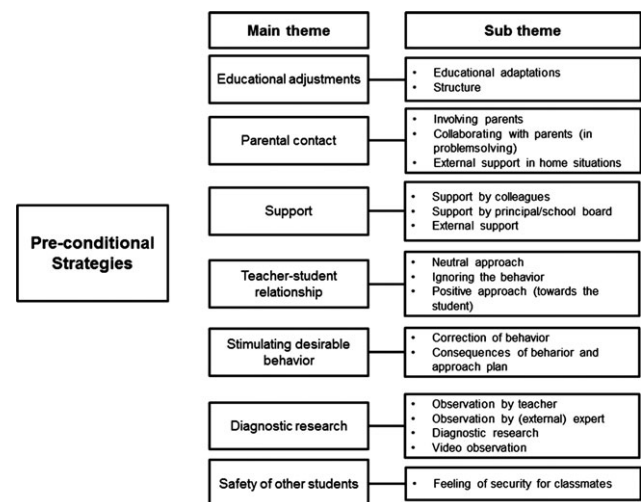


Table 2: Example’s social participation strategies

Theme	Sub theme	Example strategy
Friendships	Friends	Peer buddy-system
Contacts and interaction	Play together	Peer tutoring
Social self-perception	Evaluation of behavior	Teacher-student conversation
Acceptance by classmates	Acceptance by the group	Cooperative learning

Pre-conditional strategies to promote the social participation

The codebook Pre-conditional Strategies was developed to code the rest of the strategies, given by the expert panels. These remaining strategies (N = 101) consisted out of coping and action-orientated strategies (Table 3).

The combination of the two codes books resulted in the conceptual model ‘Teaching strategies to stimulate students’ social participation’ (see Figure 3).

Conclusion and discussion

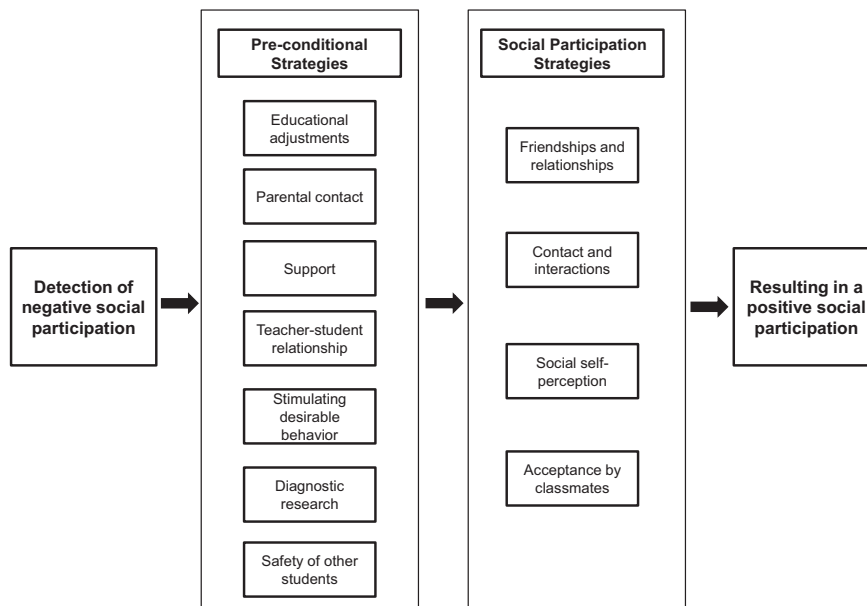
The aim of this study was to reveal which strategies teachers use in their daily practice for improving or promoting the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular class. This was done by activating teachers’ tacit knowledge via expert panels. The main finding, after analyzing 245 unique strategies, is that teachers did not mainly focus on strategies that directly relate to improving the social participation of students with SEBD. Teachers also name strategies that can be seen as preconditions or as coping strategies. The codebooks and findings of this study resulted in a first draft of a conceptual model of teaching strategies to stimulate the social participation of students with SEBD.

From the 245 unique strategies 144 strategies could be coded under one of the four themes of social participation. These four themes were described by Koster, Nakken, Pijl, et al. (2009) as the key aspects of social participation. The remaining strategies focused on preconditions, like enhancing parental contact. Even when the teachers were remembered by the moderators about the goal of the expert panels

Table 3: Example’s pre-conditional strategies

Theme	Sub theme	Example strategy
Educational adaptations	Educational adaptations	Picto’s for visualizing daily structure
Parental contact	Collaborating with parents	Setting up a joint plan with parents
Support	External support	Asking advice from a specialist
Teacher-student relationship	Positive approach	
Stimulating desirable behavior	Correction of behavior	Time out
Diagnostic research	Observation by teacher	Observation of students’ behavior
Safety of other students	Feeling of security for classmates	Securing the safety of the classmates

Figure 3: Conceptual model ‘Teaching strategies to stimulate students’ social participation’



(i.e., discussing students' difficulties in social participation), they still had problems to focus on the goal. It was noticed during the expert panels that teachers often moved to discussing other topics, like the home situation of the student, instead of discussing the problems in the social participation. Taking these findings from the expert panels, it can be stated that much improvement can be established in promoting the social participation of students with SEBD in inclusive classes.

A limitation of this study is that all the participating teachers followed or had followed an educational course or degree in special educational needs. It could be hypothesized that the findings in this study are not applicable to all primary schoolteachers. It is interesting to test this hypotheses in a future data collection.

Although the findings of this study are preliminary, this is one of the first studies with specific focus on teaching strategies to promote the social participation of students with SEBD. Further analyses will be carried out to see whether there are differences between the strategies and type of internalizing/externalizing problems, as was found in the study of Brophy and McCaslin (1992) and Van der Wolf and Van Beukering (2009). More insight in the use and effectiveness of the strategies is needed and leads to guidelines about how to support teachers in improving the social participation of students who experience difficulties in this.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Dutch Foundation Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland for funding this research.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest regarding to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Address for correspondence

Renske de Leeuw,
Department of Special Education, University of Groningen, Grote Rozenstraat 38, 9712 TJ Groningen, the Netherlands
Email: r.r.de.leeuw@rug.nl

Bibliographic References

Almog, O. & Shechtman, Z. (2007) 'Teachers' democratic and efficacy beliefs and styles of coping with behavioural problems of pupils with special needs.' *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 22 (2), pp. 115–129.

Bagwell, C. L., Newcomb, A. F. & Bukowski, W. M. (1998) 'Preadolescent friendship and peer rejection as

predictors of adult adjustment.' *Child Development*, 69 (1), pp. 140–153.

Baumeister, R. F. & Leary, M. R. (1995) 'The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation.' *Psychological Bulletin*, 117 (3), pp. 497.

Bierman, K. L. (2004) *Peer Rejection: Developmental Processes and Intervention Strategies*. New York: Guilford Press.

Blum, R. F. & Libbey, H. P. (2004) 'Executive summary.' *Journal of School Health*, 74 (7), pp. 231–232.

Brophy, J. & McCaslin, M. (1992) 'Teachers' reports of how they perceive and cope with problem students.' *The Elementary School Journal*, 93 (1), pp. 3–68.

Cooper, P. (2011) 'Teacher strategies for effective intervention with students presenting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties: an international review.' *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 26 (1), pp. 71–86.

Elliott, S. N., Witt, J. C., Galvin, G. A. & Peterson, R. (1985) 'Acceptability of positive and reductive behavioral interventions: factors that influence teachers' decisions.' *Journal of School Psychology*, 22 (4), pp. 353–360.

Evans, J., Harden, A. & Thomas, J. (2004) 'What are effective strategies to support pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in mainstream primary schools? findings from a systematic review of research.' *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 4 (1), pp. 2–16.

Gourlay, S. (2002) Tacit knowledge, tacit knowing, or behaving? <<http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/2293/1/Gourlay%202002%20tacit%20knowledge.pdf>> (accessed 26 May 2014).

Guralnick, M. J., Neville, B., Hammond, M. A. & Connor, R. T. (2007) 'The friendships of young children with developmental delays: a longitudinal analysis.' *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 28 (1), pp. 64–79.

Koster, M., Nakken, H., Pijl, S. J. & van Houten, E. (2009) 'Being part of the peer group: a literature study focusing on the social dimension of inclusion in education.' *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13 (2), pp. 117–140.

Milus, J., Oost, H. & Holleman, W. (2006) Werkvorm: Incidentmethode. <<http://dSPACE.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/13638>> (accessed 30 October 2016)

Monchy, M.d., Pijl, S. J. & Zandberg, T. (2004) 'Discrepancies in judging social inclusion and bullying of pupils with behaviour problems.' *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 19 (3), pp. 317–330.

Newcomb, A. F., Bukowski, W. M. & Pattee, L. (1993) 'Children's peer relations: a meta-analytic review of popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average sociometric status.' *Psychological Bulletin*, 113 (1), pp. 99.

- Parker, J. G. & Asher, S. R. (1993) 'Friendship and friendship quality in middle childhood: links with peer group acceptance and feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction.' *Developmental Psychology*, 29 (4), pp. 611.
- Spilt, J. L. & Koomen, H. M. (2009) 'Widening the view on teacher-child relationships: teachers' narratives concerning disruptive versus nondisruptive children.' *School Psychology Review*, 38 (1), pp. 86–101.
- Strain, P. S. & Schwartz, I. (2001) 'ABA and the development of meaningful social relations for young children with autism.' *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 16 (2), pp. 120–128.
- Van der Wolf, K. & Van Beukering, T. (2009) *Gedragsproblemen in scholen: Het denken en handelen van leraren: Intuïtie, theorie en reflectie*. (1e edn). Leuven: Acco.
- Wang, T., Su, C. & Hsieh, T. (2011) 'Accumulating and visualising tacit knowledge of teachers on educational assessments.' *Computers & Education*, 57 (4), pp. 2212–2223.