

Buddying-up in an Inclusive Preschool

Authors: Lee Wei Ling (Senior Teacher), Beverley Tan (Preschool Teacher)
Published: 3 December 2021

What is a Buddy System?

A buddy is defined as “a companion, partner, a friend” (Merriam- Webster, 2021). The word “Buddy” rings out in early childhood settings. We hear it in phrases shouted during transitions, “Hold your buddy’s hands!”, or during activity time where the teacher says, “Find a buddy!”

A structured buddy system can aid in classroom management, the development of social skills amongst children and at the same time empower children to be confident.

Kindle Garden

Kindle Garden, Singapore’s first inclusive preschool, was established in 2016 with the aim of providing an environment for children with diverse needs to learn and play together in natural settings. Providing full-day inclusive childcare programmes, our enrolment is made up of a ratio of 70% children who are of typical development, and 30% of children with additional needs.



The children learn, play and work together, and participate in the same routines within the same setting where additional support is provided on a needs basis. Individualised learning goals are set for the children after observations and dialogues amongst the team of teachers and allied health professionals.

We established a buddy system to provide the children with appropriate ways to interact with each other, enabling each child to achieve his/her learning goals. The buddy system equips children with the skills to interact and socialise with each other positively, while respecting their differences and diverse needs.

How is the buddy system implemented?

Observations on children are made based on a consideration of their strengths, areas of needs, behavioural presentation and learning goals. Below is an example of how the pairings may be made.

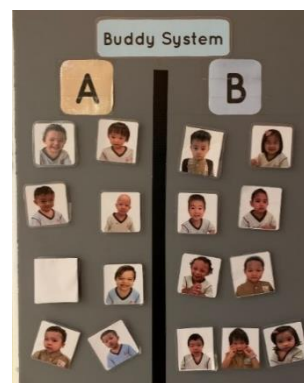
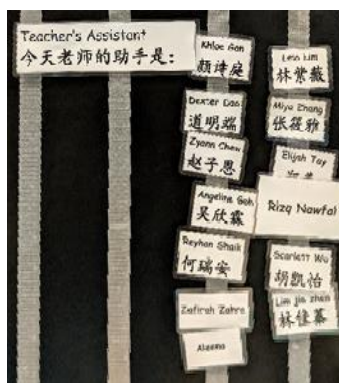
Child A	Child B
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mild Mannered• Non Verbal• Enjoys peer's company• Shy away from loud noises• Passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocal• Assertive• Independent• Helpful• Active
Objectives of pairing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn to be comfortable with peers who are louder• To seek help and initiate interaction with peers• Increased language input and opportunities to interact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage helpful personality• Speaking appropriately with proper tone and volume• Provide opportunity to express self

Next Steps

After the pairings have been confirmed, they are introduced to their buddy in the form of a visual board.

This helps the teachers in classroom management and increases the children's independence too.

It also helps teachers keep track of the pairing while allowing teachers to make changes when necessary. With older children, teachers can do a board with just their names, as they would have learnt how to read.



What is different?

The buddy system is implemented in a purposeful manner, where teachers plan and observe children with the intention of providing opportunities for children to meet their learning goals and to promote social interactions. Teachers plan activities and lessons that would allow children to work and play with their buddies, such as working on a piece of art together or working together as they navigate an obstacle course.

Benefits of the buddy system



- Children are more attuned to their peers and would approach peers to invite them for play or will provide help when needed.
- Children model language to their buddies and peers which promotes a language rich environment for the class. For example, a child can be taught to model phrases such as "I want water" for a child who is learning how to request.

- Children transfer social skills that they have learnt through the buddy system to other settings outside of the classroom. Example: when interacting with peers from other classes or with younger children, children have been observed to model appropriate language and is able to display social skills such as turn taking and sharing without needing additional prompts.



Impact of Inclusion

Celebration of diversity and learning



We see and hear how the children affirm and encourage their buddies and peers, “J is very good in drawing!” However, this respect for diverse strengths and needs of others also means that each individual child develops the same respect for himself or herself. Hence, we see the children happy, have a positive self-esteem and an openness to more learning.

Participation of whole school community

Children have had more conversations at home about the social interactions that they have with their peers in school, such as sharing anecdotes about things that happened in school with their buddy. For example, a child shared, “Today I helped A when he couldn’t open his bottle!” This leads to parents having more dialogues with the teachers about their children’s social-emotional development in school. Teachers are also able to share how they plan and structure experiences for the children, and how they could extend these skills at home. Leading to everyone in the school community (carers, staff and children) being involved, participating and feeling included.

Quick notes for Teachers

1. Teachers as a role model
Teachers act as an important model for the children and play an important role in facilitating the interactions amongst the children. This includes modelling the language and behavior when interacting with the children especially when conflicts and disagreements arise.
2. Conduct ongoing observations
It is important for teachers to have ongoing observations in order to evaluate the need to rotate buddies and peers and allow for interactions with different peers. This allows for varied opportunities for children to practice different social skills e.g. both turn-taking and asserting of self.

Reference List

Buddy. 2021. In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved August 19, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/buddy>