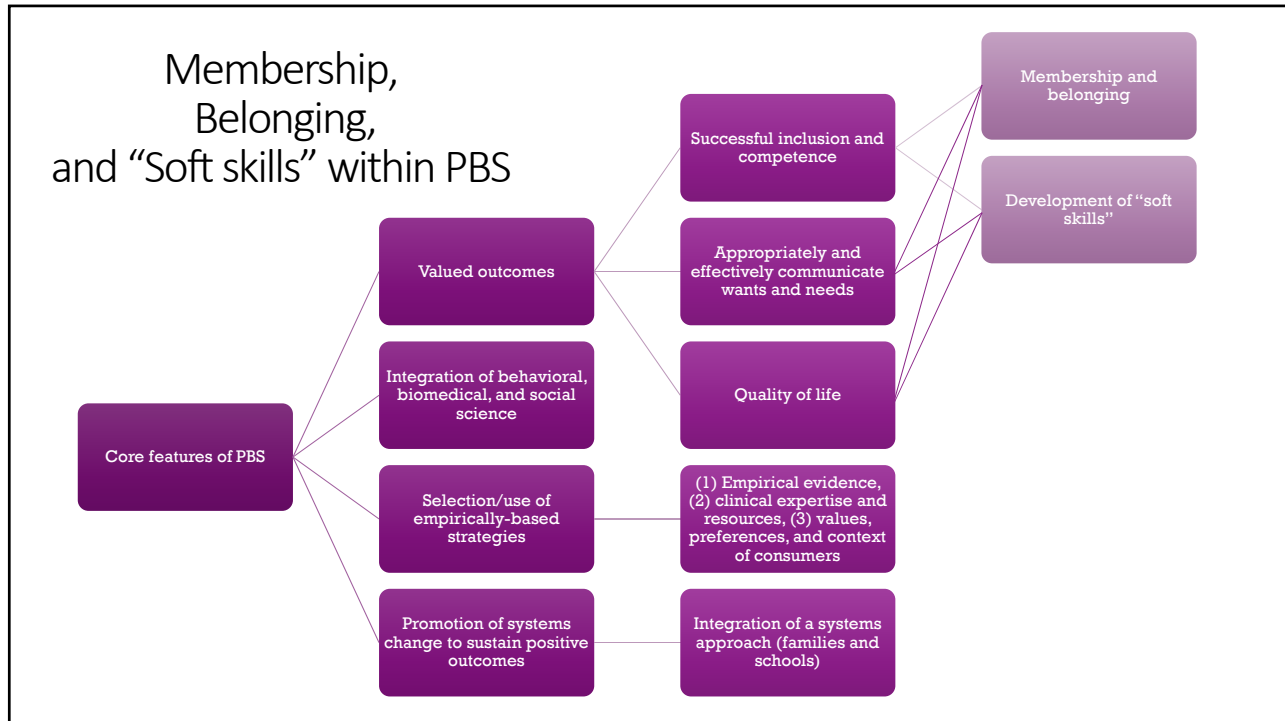# Membership, Belonging, and Development of "Soft Skills" within a PBS framework

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Agenda

- Where do the ideas of membership, belonging, and "soft skills" fit within Positive Behavior Support?

- Clarifying definitions

- Potential barriers for students with ASD

- Recommendations from the literature and individuals with ASD

- An example of using shared activities to enhance membership, belonging, and "soft skill" development

Membership, Belonging, and "Soft skills" within PBS

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Core features of PBS
├── Valued outcomes
│   ├── Successful inclusion and competence
│   ├── Appropriately and effectively communicate wants and needs
│   └── Quality of life
│       ├── Membership and belonging
│       └── Development of "soft skills"
├── Integration of behavioral, biomedical, and social science
├── Selection/use of empirically-based strategies
│   └── (1) Empirical evidence, (2) clinical expertise and resources, (3) values, preferences, and context of consumers
└── Promotion of systems change to sustain positive outcomes
    └── Integration of a systems approach (families and schools)
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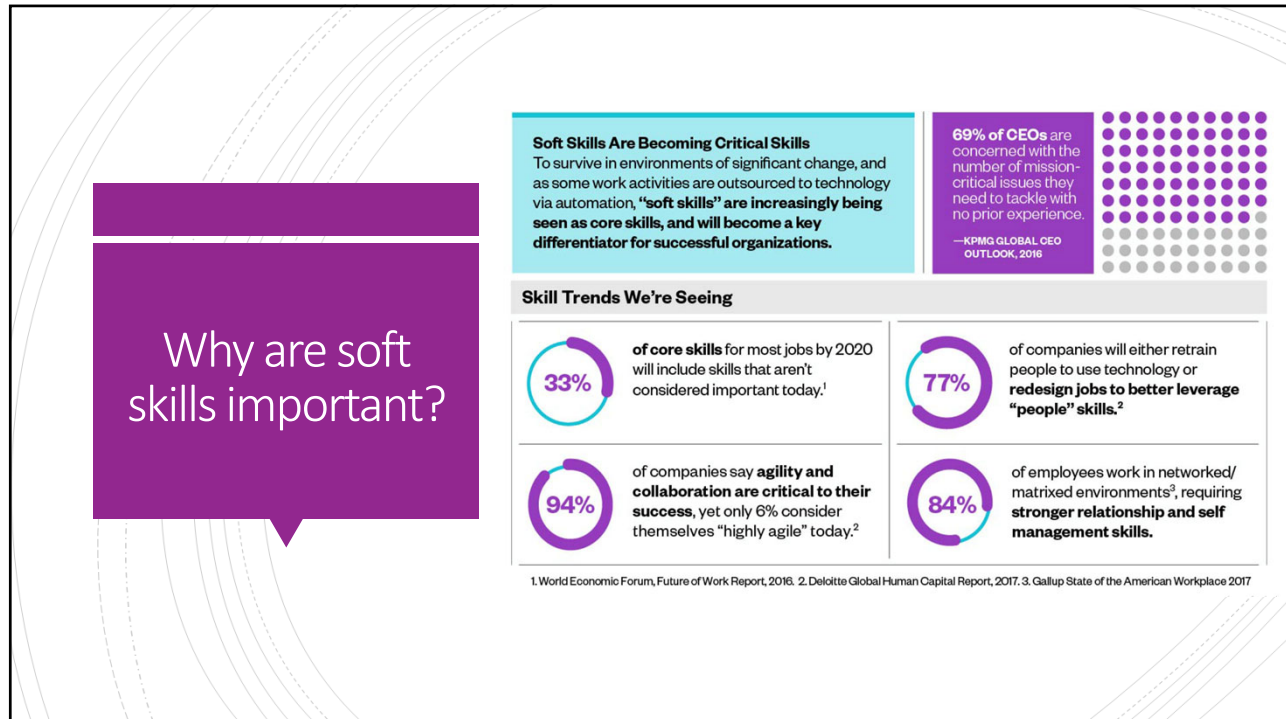## But first, some definitions....

What is membership and belonging?

- Characterized by:
  - having a sense of equality among individuals involved
  - mutual respect for one another
  - reciprocity
- When group members are willing to make accommodations to facilitate the active participation of children in the group activity
  - (e.g., children may change the rules for t-ball during recess so that everyone gets as many swings as needed to get a hit)
- The domain of membership as one of the three essential domains for successful inclusive schooling

Schwartz, 2000; Spooner, Browder, Knight, & Brosh, 2018)

What are "soft skills"?

- Communication
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking
- Positive personal and cultural identity
- Personal awareness and responsibility
- Social responsibility

Province of British Columbia, 2018

Why are soft skills important?

Soft Skills Are Becoming Critical Skills
To survive in environments of significant change, and as some work activities are outsourced to technology via automation, **"soft skills" are increasingly being seen as core skills, and will become a key differentiator for successful organizations.**

69% of CEOs are concerned with the number of mission-critical issues they need to tackle with no prior experience.
—KPMG GLOBAL CEO OUTLOOK, 2016

Skill Trends We're Seeing

33% **of core skills** for most jobs by 2020 will include skills that aren't considered important today.[1]

77% of companies will either retrain people to use technology or **redesign jobs to better leverage "people" skills.**[2]

94% of companies say **agility and collaboration are critical to their success,** yet only 6% consider themselves "highly agile" today.[2]

84% of employees work in networked/matrixed environments[3], requiring **stronger relationship and self management skills.**

1. World Economic Forum, Future of Work Report, 2016. 2. Deloitte Global Human Capital Report, 2017. 3. Gallup State of the American Workplace 2017

Barriers to social relationships

- Access to typical settings,
- Access to peers without disabilities in general education settings,
- Access to high quality curriculum and instruction,
- Skills for facilitating interactions
- Traditionally, we have emphasized two major strategies for overcoming barriers to social relationships for students with ASD.
  - 1. Cultivate the environment
  - 2. Teach specific social skills

Kennedy & Horn, 2004; Schwartz, 2000

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Recommended social supports from adults with ASD

Recommended social supports
External supports (major):
    Joint focus and shared interest activities (major)
    Structured social activities (major)
    Small groups and dyads (major)
    Facilitated social interactions and opportunities for 'tracking off' others (minor)
    Opportunities to observe/model socially appropriate behaviors (minor)
Communication supports (major):
    Alternative modes of communication (major)
    Explicit communication (minor)
    Instruction in interpreting and using social cues (minor)
Self-initiated supports (major):
    Creative and improvisational outlets (major)
    Physical and/or outdoor activity (minor)
    Spiritual practice and/or organized religion (minor)
    Mediating objects (minor)
    Alone time (minor)
Attitudinal supports (major):
    Patient and caring attitude (minor)
    Tolerance of and respect for differences (minor)
    Willingness to initiate social interactions (minor)

Muller, Schuler, & Yates, 2008

Joint focus and shared interests

- Participants most commonly stressed the importance of **joint focus and shared interest activities**
  - Enjoying activities that created a shared focus, but required minimal interaction with one's companions
    - E.g., listening to books on tape, or watching TV or a movie together
  - Participants also described their pleasure when working in **small groups that shared a common goal or task** such as dissecting a fish
    - In the words of one, he liked it best 'when something is goal-oriented, and we're as a group trying to get something done'

Muller, Schuler, & Yates, 2008

Alternative modes of communication
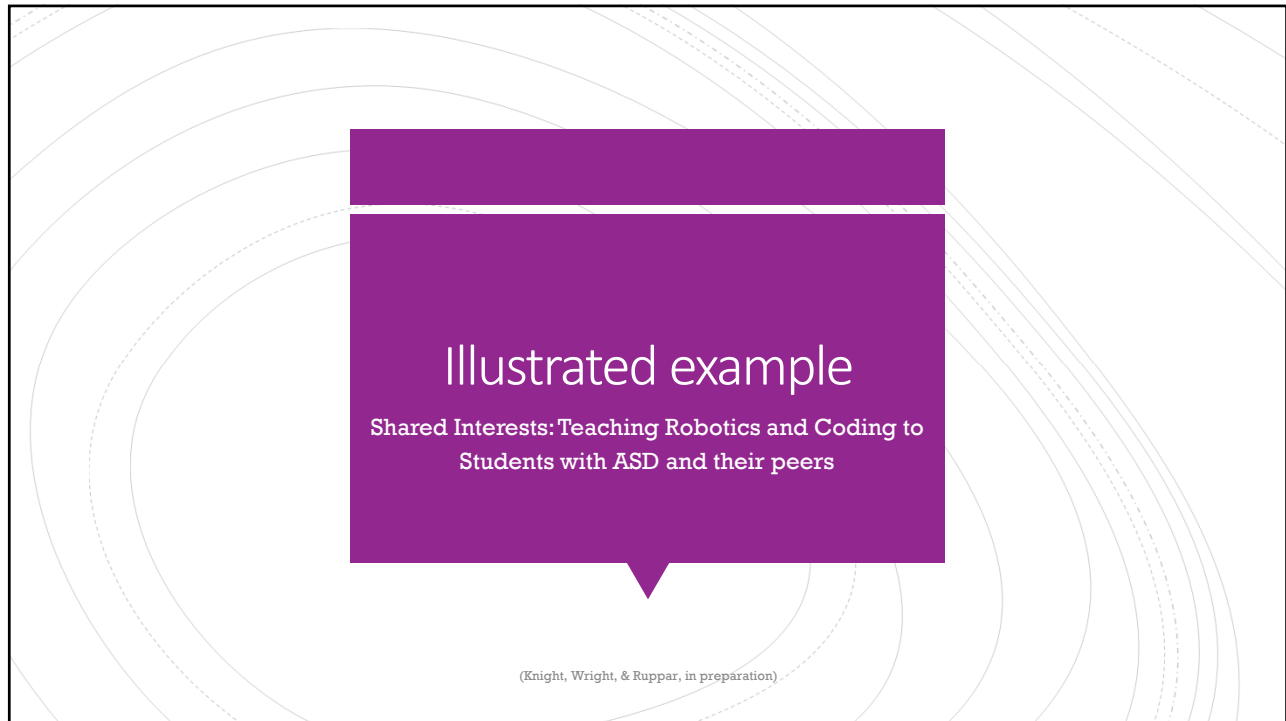
- Many described the value, for example, of Internet-based relationships
  - One participant explained that these alternative modes were preferable to conversation because 'people often say one thing with their voice, and seem to be saying the opposite with their tone . . . And when you write . . . the tone's not there, so you can't have a conflict between tone and what's written.'
- Flexibility in the classroom for a range of responses
- Flexibility in support and coaching (e.g., Sehline et al., 2018)

Muller, Schuler, & Yates, 2008

Creative outlets

- Most described creative and improvisational outlet as either a way of practicing social skills or a means of reducing anxiety
- Playing instruments, participating in theater or dance groups, communal art projects, role playing games,& clubs
  - One commented, 'by doing [improvisational theater], you realize that it's actually possible to be spontaneous, to just go with an impulse (*laugh*)'

Muller, Schuler, & Yates, 2008
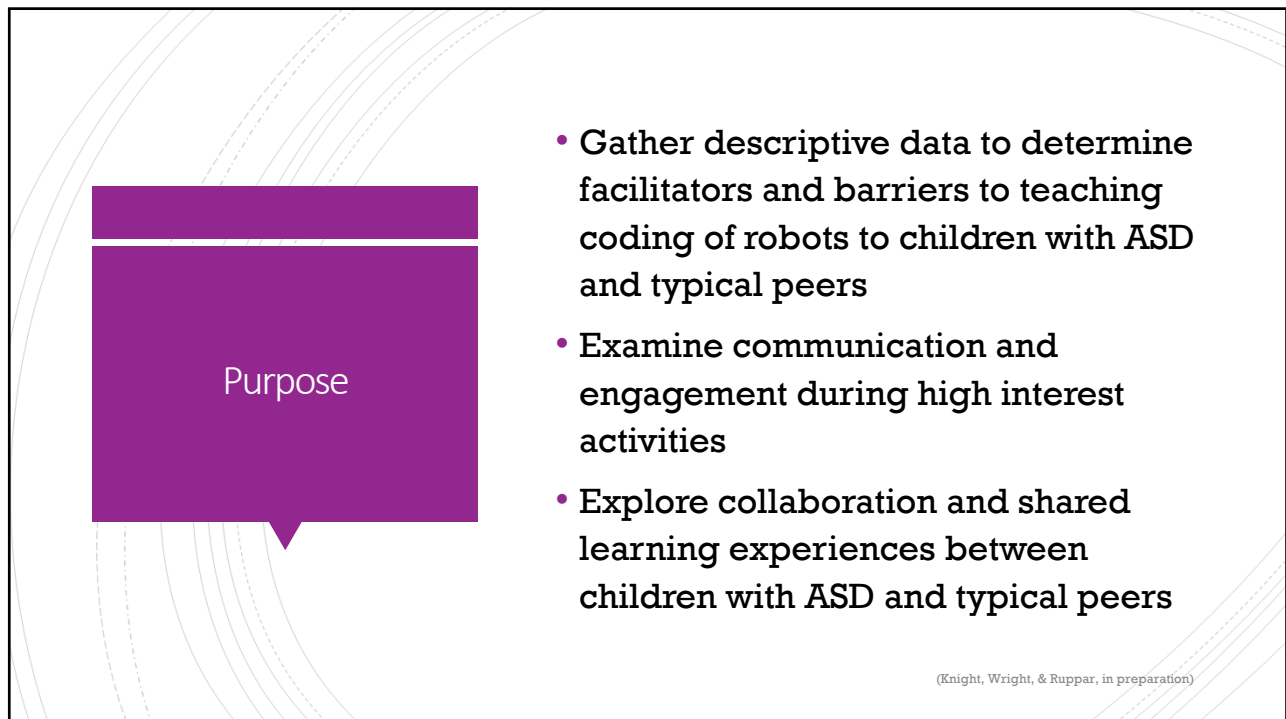
Illustrated example

Shared Interests: Teaching Robotics and Coding to Students with ASD and their peers

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

Purpose

- Gather descriptive data to determine facilitators and barriers to teaching coding of robots to children with ASD and typical peers
- Examine communication and engagement during high interest activities
- Explore collaboration and shared learning experiences between children with ASD and typical peers

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

Setting

Summer Camp

Inclusive school in Central Texas

Structured program for students with ASD

BCBA and RBTs as support staff

2 weeks

4-5 students with autism and 4-5 typical peers

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

Lesson Structure

Mini-lesson

Guided practice

Independent practice
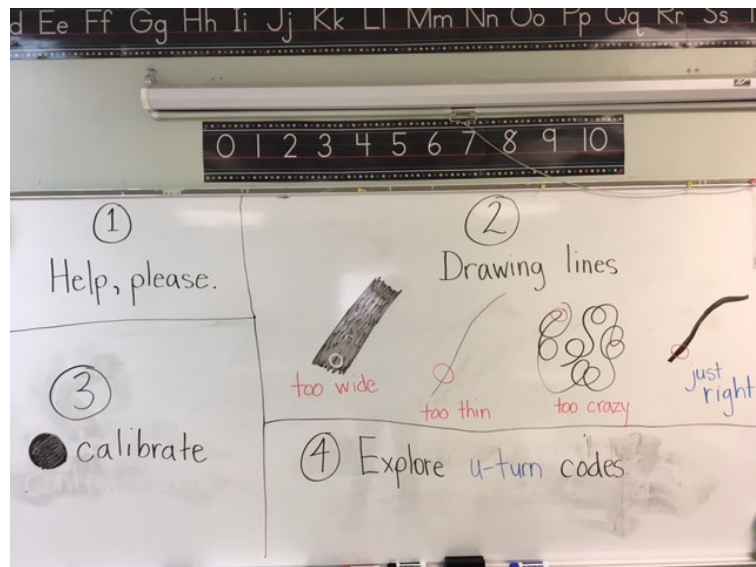
Example: Mini-lesson content

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

Lesson Structure

Guided Practice with para-educator support

Lesson on calibration & preparing the robot for coding.

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

PEERS ORGANICALLY SUPPORTED STUDENTS WITH ASD, OFTEN UNPROMPTED

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Observational Learning
occurred by the student with ASD

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Observational Learning ALSO
occurred by the peer to the student
with ASD

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)
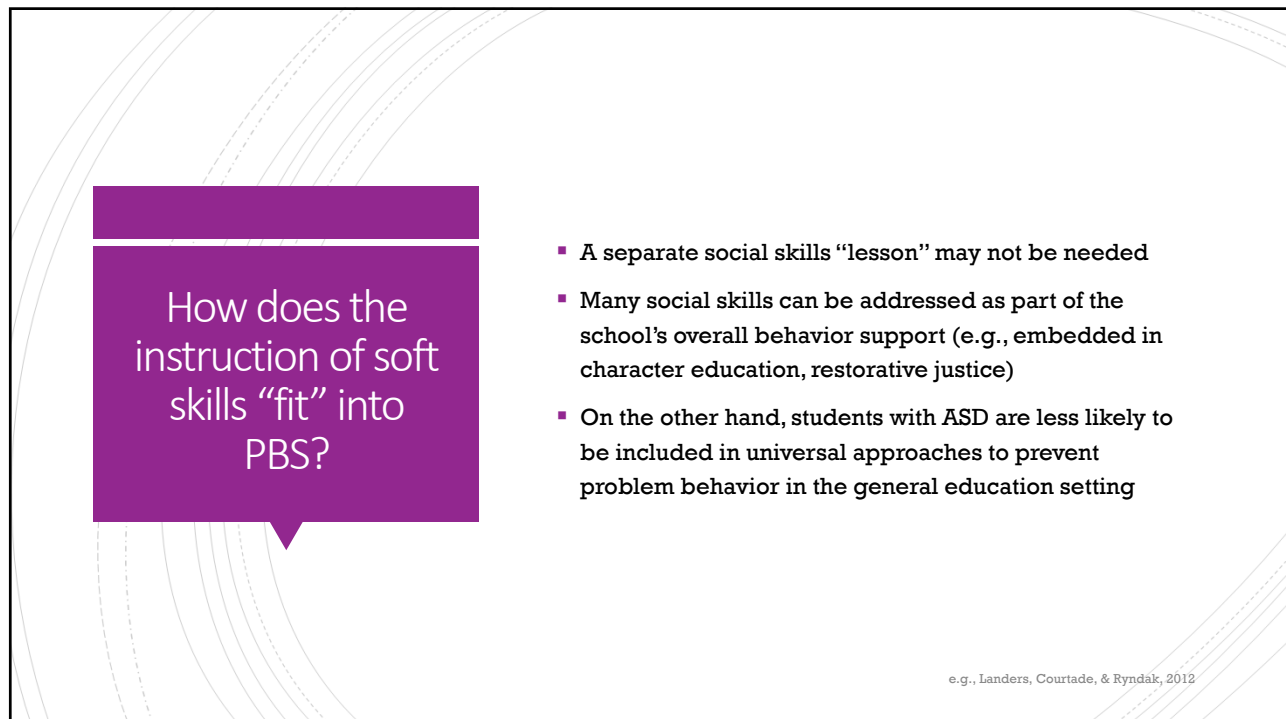
Facilitators & Barriers

FACILITATORS

➢ Same expectations

➢ High-interest materials and creative outlet

➢ Joint focus and shared interest

➢ Hands-on materials

➢ Alternative forms of communication (some)

➢ Shared space

➢ Lack of ownership of materials

BARRIERS

➢ Social initiations

➢ Motor skills

➢ Intrusive prompting

➢ Materials that promote isolation

➢ Untrained peers & assistants who help by doing

(Knight, Wright, & Ruppar, in preparation)

How does the instruction of soft skills "fit" into PBS?

- A separate social skills "lesson" may not be needed

- Many social skills can be addressed as part of the school's overall behavior support (e.g., embedded in character education, restorative justice)

- On the other hand, students with ASD are less likely to be included in universal approaches to prevent problem behavior in the general education setting

e.g., Landers, Courtade, & Ryndak, 2012

Questions or Comments?

https://artstarts.com/blog/aic2015-circlesofbelonging
Kindergarten to Grade 7 students at Bayview Elementary in Nanaimo, BC.