

## FUSION LAB AS MODEL OF COMMUNITY THERAPY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses the use of community therapy among special needs students in the Fusion Lab through music and performance intervention which include Dikir Barat and Kuda Kepang. Special needs students with Autism, Syndrown Down and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have different level of cognitive function and commonly neglected by community to explore their potentials. Thus, it is creates problems to special need students such as low self-confidents, lack of self-worth, have limited social communication skills and also been expected as wastage of human capital of the country. Therefore, underlying the theory of Social Learning theory by Bandura which individual learns from social and environment through observation, imitation and modelling, community has use as method of approach or therapy. Special need students in the Fusion Lab are taught to use the peer community through participation, observation, and interaction with others to change thoughts, feelings and behavior patterns. As the result, they improve significantly in the confident level and optimist to perform the performance in front of the crowd. The finding suggests the need of creating supportive ecosystem to explore their potential and become productive members of **society**.*

**Keywords:** *Fusion Lab, Community Therapy, Special Need Students, Dikir Barat, Kuda Kepang, Music*

### INTRODUCTION

Special need students such as students with Autism, Syndrown Down and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may have mild learning disabilities or profound cognitive impairment. They have different level of cognitive function and commonly neglected by community to explore their potentials. Furthermore, education in Malaysia still has a long way to go if the curriculum is to prepare students afflicted with various disabilities for life beyond school.

Apart from them, parents with special needs children have pointed out that one of the shifts in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 stipulates that equal access to quality education must be available to all. Even though, the Blueprint acknowledges that, although parents with special needs students have access to different schooling options, the quality of education still has

shortcomings on their expectation. The shortage of qualified teachers, speech and occupational therapists contributes to that problem. Other than that, the limited support and funding for those with Autism, Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are also among the other factors of problem.

Furthermore, communities have limit their expectation towards special need students. Their ultimate goal for special needs students are able to manage themselves as measurement of success rather than utilize their potential for country development. Therefore, it creates problems to special need students such as low of self-confidents, lack of self-worth, limited social communication skills and also been expected as wastage of human capital for the country.

### Social Cognitive Theory

According to Social Cognitive Theory introduced by Bandura (1986), “reciprocal determinism” explains that individual’s behaviour is the outcome of interaction between social, environmental and personal factors as refer to Figure 1. Environment refers to the factors that can affect a person’s behaviour because people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modelling. For example, students will adopt positive behaviour if the learning environment for them is positive and vice versa.

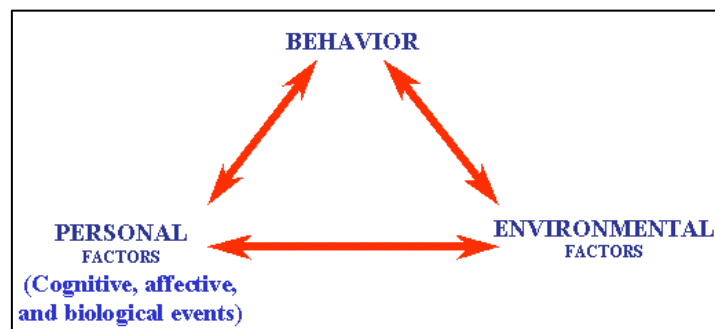
Environment divided into two which are social and physical environments. Social environment refers to society include, family members, friends and colleagues while physical environment is the size of a room, the ambient temperature or the availability of certain foods. Environment and situation provide the framework for understanding behavior (Parraga, 1990). The situation is a person’s perception on time, physical

features and activity (Glanz, K., Rimer, B.K. & Lewis, F.M., 2002) or mental representations of the environment that may affect a person’s behaviour.

Therefore, environment and situation play a significant role on controlling behaviour and emotion behaviour of special needs students. This is because, in the positive environment and situation, behaviour control is needed to control what the special needs student is actually doing to achieve the goal while emotion control is needed to control them from give up especially when the tasks could block the students’ performance (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005).

Overall, Social Cognitive Theory explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioral patterns, while also providing the basis for intervention strategies (Bandura, 1997). Evaluating behavioral change depends on the factor of environment and it provides a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating intervention programs.

Figure 1- Social Cognitive Theory



### Community Therapy

From previous literature review, community therapy is a participative or group-based approach which community including family as a method for changing the whole person (De Leon, 2000) through healing individuals emotionally, and support the development of behaviours, attitudes and values. Community therapy is designed to help individuals learn about themselves, gain self-esteem, develop self-respect, learn about others, and foster mutuality and respect for others (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015). In so doing, concepts of responsibility, authority and meaningful codes of behaviour are established.

Unfortunately, community therapy has been practice on long-term mental illness, personality disorders and drug addiction ( Vanderplasschen, W., Colpaert, K., Autrique, M., Rapp, R. C., Pearce, S., Broekaert, E., & Vandeveld, S., 2013; National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015; Vergara-Moragues, E., Verdejo-García, A., Lozano, O. M., Santiago-

Ramajo, S., González-Saiz, F., Betanzos Espinosa, P.,

& Pérez García, M., 2017). The primary goal of community therapy for them is to foster personal growth and it is accomplished by changing an individual’s lifestyle through a community of Concerned people working together to help themselves and each other. Therefore, based on the theory of Social Cognitive Theory which environment provides models for behaviour, opportunities and social support through observational learning (Bandura, 1997) and research gap on special need population, the current research intend to apply community therapy as intervention program for special needs students.

Community therapy for special need students is underlying on the Least Restrictive Environment (LSE) and defined as a pupil with an educationally disability shall be educated with children who are

not educationally disabled through a process of discovering similarities and focus on strengths. LSE provides special need students' opportunities to have meaningful relationships and experiences within their

family, school, and community lives, and enabling them to reach their fullest potential as value person. As the result, community therapy for special needs student based on concept of:

- 1) **Observational learning:** Behavioral acquisition that occurs by watching the actions of model.
- 2) **Community support:** High expectations and fully commitment from parents, teachers, role model and special need students will promote positive changes on behavioural pattern as well as emotional problem.
- 3) **Self-efficacy:** The special need students will continuously build self-confidence and trust with their own ability in performing a positive behaviour after being able to accomplish the task in LSE.
- 4) **Emotional coping responses:** Strategies or tactics that are used by special need students to deal with emotional stimuli through community support and encouragement to perform the task with non-disable students in front of the crowd.

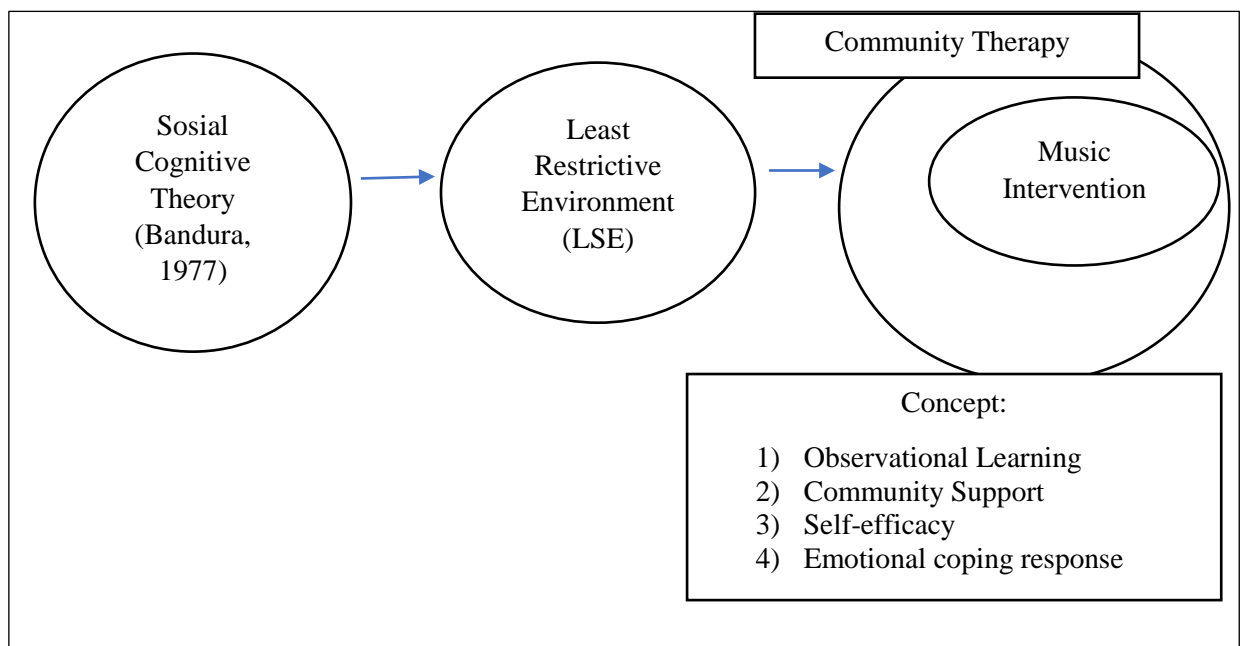
### Fusion Lab

Based on Social Cognitive Theory, the environment as the model of behaviour and concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LSE), Fusion Lab has been established as a centre for community therapy purposely for special need students with the main aim to enhance their fully potential development. The idea on the establishment also has been inspired by the successfulness of Sayuri Performance in music at Malaysia. Sayuri is a special teenager from Japan with Down Syndrome but highly potential with playing music instrument.

In conjunction with that, Fusion Lab will provide community therapy emphasizes the integration of special need students within community through various intervention such as music intervention in the Fusion Lab. However, the speciality of Fusion Lab is, besides practicing intervention using contemporary music instruments, it exposes the participants with Malaysia traditional performance such as Dikir Barat and Kuda Kepang. In addition, the practice is in group consists of 6 to 20 non-disable students for each performance.

Therefore, the purpose of community therapy will be achieved by participating special need students in this group of performances. In conjunction with that, special need students in the Fusion Lab are taught to use the peer community through participation, observation, and interaction with others to enhance self-efficacy, modify behaviour and emotional problem. Model of Fusion Lab as refer to Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Fusion Lab Model



## OBJECTIVES

There are many intervention programme under community therapy provided by Fusion Lab and music intervention has been selected as one of the early programme because music can be sources of motivation and provide multiple sensory experience for participants to encourage calmness. Therefore, the objectives of establishment of Fusion Lab are:

- 1) To create awareness among community regarding the true potential of special need students that can be discovered through community therapy.
- 2) To show evidence-based from the program under the Fusion Lab such as through music and performance intervention programme.
- 3) To bring special need students to non-disabled and provide continuous encouragement to those in the industry of music.
- 4) To give opportunity to special need students in participating community therapy through music intervention as one of the medium to help them build the self-confidence.
- 5) To encourage community in creating positive environment to improve motivation of special need students.

## Location

Fusion Lab is located in a small room at EduPark, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) equipped with music instruments, practice area and counselling room. Fusion Lab has been organized by integration of expertise from UPM in music, educational psychology, counselling and human ecology as well as assisted by postgraduate students in educational psychology. This integration aim to provide the holistic intervention towards special needs students and enhance good interaction with parents to ensure the successfulness of community therapy.

## Participants

4 special need students have been selected as participants after a general screening process and interview session with parents to ensure parents and participants are willing to give fully commitment throughout 9 sessions before special needs students are given an opportunity to perform in front of the crowd. All participants are from various disability fuctions. Two Autisme students, one Syndrome Down Students and one ADHD students. The intervention programme execute for 3 session a week and 3 hours in each session.

## Therapy Program and Activities

In 3 hour session, participants has been given opportunity to learn various music instruments such as piano, drum, marimba besides explore the excitement of joining Dikir Barat and Kuda Kepang. After that, the session follow up with the practice where they participate in performer group to practice

music, Dikir Barat and Kuda Kepang. This session requires participants to observe and interact with model or performers. At the same time, parents also need to observe participants as support system for their children. Other than that, peer support in a performance group play a vital role to ensure special need students are able to achieve goal in every practice session and manage to regulate their emotional for any obstacles that block the goal. After the session, parents and peers are required to give feedbacks for room of improvement in the next session. Lastly, after completed 9 sessions, special needs students are given opportunity to perform with normal peer in front of the crowd to improve their self-confidence and self-efficacy.

They performed in the Program Community Therapy for Students with Special Needs Fusion Lab UPM, organized by the Faculty of Education UPM in cooperation with the Thirteenth College and a special appearance of Sayuri from Japan in auditorium Faculty of Educational Studies, UPM.

## Output

- 1) Fusion Lab provide conducive space, positive environment, opportunities and help to develop self-potential disabled groups as the art of music is one of the key elements in helping to build the intellectual disabled people.
- 2) Fusion Lab prepare special needs students to function in integrated community through developing the attitudes, values, and skills. In supporting this, students with emotional behavior disorders not represent on natural growth process but the major distinguishing characteristic of students from this population is their inability to exhibit appropriate social behavior (Dunlap & Childs, 1996). They deficit in maintaining social relationships with normal students setting (Scott & Nelson, 1998). Because of this social deficit, these students endure peer rejection and isolation which, oftentimes, leads to aggressive behavior (McMahon, Wacker, Sasso, & Melloy, 1994).
- 3) Fusion lab develop a sense of belonging. By having disabilities peer in Dikir Barat and Kuda Kepang performance group, peers without disabilities learn to develop skills in dealing with others who are different from them.
- 4) Fusion Lab give opportunities to special need students grow socially and academically through peer models and exposure to a greater variety of experiences.
- 5) Fusion Lab offer greater collaboration between general education and special education personnel. This teamwork result in improved instruction for special need students and parents of the students with disabilities also become valued members of this collaborative team, sharing their dreams and aspirations for their children's futures. As the result, this

programme encourage awareness and invite communities to be part of therapy.

## CONCLUSION

As the result, participants improve significantly in the confident level and optimist during performance in front of the crowd. One of participant's mother proudly said that her children are highly confidence to perform in front of the crowd. This opportunity is an evidence based on the successfulness of community therapy. The finding suggests that the need of creating supportive ecosystem help to explore their potential and become productive members of society.

Other than that, mother of other participant also feel the excitement on the changes of behaviour pattern of her children. Participant 2 were very excited to come for every practice session without fail. Therefore, to achieve the fullest potential, it is vital to focus on strengths. Fusion Lab are characterized by a focus on the student's strengths and enables the community to look closely at areas where the participants are functioning most. These strengths are then used to facilitate positive interactions with model and stimulate supporting environment.

Lastly, Fusion Lab also support of civil rights where the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) entitles all students with disabilities to free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Therefore, students with and without disabilities as well as communities able to interact, opportunities arise to break down barriers and help people to understand each other better. Community therapy, help to create a society that accepts and values all person and encourage special need students to be value member in all aspects of community life. For future recommendation, Fusion Lab should be equipped with more various music instruments, invite many expertise to apply other intervention programme and invite more participants from several regions. With such, this programme will able to create good symbiosis system between communities and special needs students.

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