Individuals with social deficits can unknowingly, over time, engender negative reactions from their peers, and this can affect their social development in a negative way.

For example, if Paul is getting ready to sit down with his peers on the mat to watch a movie that his teacher has set up, Paul might identify the perfect spot on the carpet. But in plonking himself down, he might unknowingly sit on three other peers and block the view of two more. What Paul might not realise is that this may cause frustration and annoyance in his peers, and this could negatively affect future interactions that they have with Paul.

Essentially, an accumulation of negative and unsuccessful interactions with same-aged peers can lead then to distrust, dislike for same-aged peers, anxiety, and avoidance for new or challenging social situations. The consequence is less exposure to social interactions, fewer positive social experiences to learn from, and less practice at social skills relative to same-aged peers. And with this, the social deficits persist.

Fortunately, social skills group programs can intercept this cycle and offer children positive social experiences and successful social interactions to create meaningful change.

So what is a dynamic social skills group program? Dynamic social skills groups are not like a classroom. They shouldn't look and feel like a classroom. They should look and feel like a group of children playing together, conversing, resolving conflict and having fun. A dynamic social skills group program provides a context for that sort of activity to happen. On the surface, a dynamic social skills group program appears unstructured. Messy, even. But this design is intentional and purposeful. Dynamic groups might be project-based, with an end goal, or theme-based. They're not directed, but facilitated. And the facilitator doesn't make decisions for the group. The group makes decisions for the group. The role of the facilitator is to set up the context and provide explicit mini social lessons as moments arise.
An example of a project-based dynamic program is The Movie Makers program. Making a movie as a group requires the individuals to work together, talk, make decisions, compromise, negotiate, resolve conflict, encourage each other, consider the feelings and thoughts of others, and be thoughtful, considerate, patient, know how to listen, know how to support one another, and these skills are taught and experienced through the process of the program. A theme-based program might have an underlying theme, such as The Pizza Club. Each week, the participants meet at a restaurant chosen by the group through their discussions. While at the restaurant, social skills are observed, assessed, discussed in explicit mini lessons and then practised. Due to the spontaneous, unstructured nature of these sessions, all sorts of social faux pas and social difficulties can be observed by the facilitator. This provides moments for learning and practice. The unstructured nature and dynamic nature of these programs also ensures that students learn to transfer skills across sessions, across programs, and transfer skills across settings in their lives.

When planning and designing a dynamic social skills group program two issues are important to consider.

Firstly, children need to be ready for a dynamic social skills group program. Children that are quick-tempered or have a tendency to be violent in response to conflict may not be ready for a dynamic program. Those children may best first benefit from individual sessions or a structured social skills group program.

Secondly, children in dynamic group programs are grouped together thoughtfully. They may be grouped together based on gender, level of cognitive and language development. They may be grouped together depending on where they fall on the autism spectrum, or their interests.

In sum: Teaching social skills in a dynamic group context creates (1) engagement and enthusiasm (2) opportunities for ongoing observation and assessment, (2) genuine experiences to inform discussion and explicit learning, and (3) genuine opportunities to practise newly learnt skills across settings, promoting flexibility and transference of skills.