Peer-Mediated Support Strategies for Students in Special Education

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Benefits of Inclusive Education and Peer-Mediated Supports
 Benefits – Inclusive Education

- “among children who entered preschool with poor language skills in the fall, those surrounded by peers with better skills tended to make greater gains.”
- “the language skills of children with disabilities appear to benefit tremendously from exposure to typically developing peers”


 Benefits – Inclusive Education

- Superior outcomes for students with disabilities
  - Academic
  - Social
- Teachers feel more confident
- No negative effect
- Students without disabilities are more positive and accepting
Benefits – Inclusive Education

“When supported well, participation in inclusive classrooms can increase access to interesting and relevant curricular content, shared learning opportunities, new peer relationships, and raised expectations”


Types of Peer-Mediated Support Strategies:

• Peer Training Programs
  • Indirect approach
  • Broad focus

• Peer Support Arrangements
  • Focused on individual needs of student w/ disability
  • Peer training and ongoing facilitation by educational professionals

• “Lunch Bunches”
Peer Training

• Peers provided with disability awareness level training on a variety of topics:
  • Communication/socialization
  • Being helpful/supportive
• Peers are encouraged to seek guidance from teachers/paraprofessional and to ask questions
• Child w/ disability not necessarily identified to classmates

Research – Peer Training

• 60 target children (1st-5th grade) dx ASD and 815 typically developing classmates (3 typically developing children from each class of child w/ ASD)

• 56 classrooms from 30 different schools

Research – Peer Training

• Randomly assigned to 3 groups:
  • Child w/ ASD receives direct social skills instruction from professional (no peer training)
  • Peer training only (child w/ ASD receives no direct instruction)
  • Combination direct instruction and peer training


Research – Peer Training

• Peers given instruction on “how to interact with children who had difficulty making friends”, including lessons on:
  • Identifying isolated children on playground and engaging them in playground activities
  • How to provide social supports in the classroom and during unstructured times

Research – Peer Training

• Results:
  • Superior outcomes for children w/ ASD whose peers received peer training
    • Social network salience (popularity)
    • Playground engagement
    • Teacher perceptions of social skills


Research – Peer Training

“In summary, the educational setting of the school offers unique opportunities to teach typical peers to become sensitive and helpful toward peers with different learning or developmental needs. These results support the view that working with peers may be the most effective and ecologically valid approach for improving the social outcomes of children with ASD.”

Peer Support Arrangements

• Individualized (designed for a particular student)
• Peers selected based on both the support needs of the special education student and the particular skills/needs of the potential peer partners
• Peer partners provided w/ training & ongoing monitoring/guidance/support from educational professionals (teacher, paraprofessional, etc.)
• Formal “Peer Partner Plan” developed and included as part of the IEP

Examples of supports provided by peers:

• Academic:
  • Sharing notes
  • Highlighting important information shared by the teacher
  • Brainstorming answers to questions together
  • Helping organize assignments/materials
  • Offering additional examples of concepts/ideas
  • Redirecting student when he/she is off task

Examples of supports provided by peers:

- Social:
  - Telling jokes w/ student
  - Encouraging interactions w/ other classmates
  - Helping student “fit in” by learning social norms
  - Reinforcing communication attempts
  - Talking w/ the student about shared interests/ hobbies
  - Walking w/ student to the next class


Example - Peer Support Plan

At the beginning of class...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stephen could...</th>
<th>Peers could...</th>
<th>The facilitator could...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get out materials for taking notes from the board</td>
<td>Prompt Stephen to get out his notebook and copy down information; remind him we do this once every day</td>
<td>Encourage peers to engage Stephen in conversation and provide some conversation starters if peers are uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converse with peers about a social topic</td>
<td>If he arrives late, let Stephen copy down the board information from your notebook</td>
<td>Offer peers ideas for Stephen’s participation and answer any questions peers may have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say hello to peers</td>
<td>Ask Stephen about his day, his hobbies, or what his plans are for after school</td>
<td>Look through class materials to see if any adaptations or modification may be needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure to greet him when he arrives to class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research – Peer Support Arrangements

- Outcomes – students with disabilities:
  - Improved academic engagement
  - More frequent, higher quality social interactions
  - Less need for interventions to address problem behaviors
  - Less reliance upon paraprofessional (increased independence)
- Outcomes – peer support partners
  - Improved academic engagement
  - Greater appreciation of diversity
  - Raised expectations of classmates w/ disabilities
  - Sense of accomplishment
  - Acquisition of new skills

Peer Partners in action

WHAT ARE PEER SUPPORTS?

Equipping one or more peers to provide academic and/or social support to their same-age classmate with a significant disability while receiving needed assistance from paraprofessionals and/or educators.

Principal’s perspective
Principal – where do you start?

AN ALTERNATIVE TO "ADULTS ONLY"

Role of the Paraprofessional
General Education Student's perspective
General Education Teacher’s perspective

Parent of student receiving SPED
“Lunch Bunches”

- Specific type of peer support arrangement
- Students without disabilities given training
- Designed to provide opportunity for social skills training for student with disability in natural environment
- Interactions facilitated by staff in beginning but facilitation faded over time

“Peer support arrangements represent a **practical** and **promising** approach for supporting students’ with severe disabilities access to the rich learning and social opportunities that often exist within inclusive secondary-school classrooms”


**Who has implemented?**

- Share successes
Contact Information

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