

Topic: Develop and use instructional strategies to meet the needs of individual learners.

Yang, C-H., & Rusli, E. (2012). Teacher training in using effective strategies for preschool children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 9, 53-64.

Context

Research indicates that students with disabilities profit from inclusive settings in the following areas (a) language development, social, and academic skills; (b) behavioral outcomes; (c) friendship networks; and (d) overall happiness. For typically developing children, the benefits include character development in the areas of acceptance, tolerance, and consideration for others. The development of social interaction and peer relationships between children with disabilities and their typically-developing peers is critical to successful inclusion. Peer mediated instruction and intervention (PMII) has proven to be effective in promoting academic and social skills in children with disabilities and usually focuses on teaching peers to initiate and respond to children with disabilities in a way in which their academic and social needs can be met. In previous studies, teachers have reported that, while they are aware of and value peer-mediated instruction and intervention strategies, they do not implement them frequently or consistently in their classrooms. This gap between knowledge of research indicating positive outcomes for peer-mediated strategies and actual implementation of those strategies in the classroom is the focus of this study.

Purpose of Study

The authors extend the research on the “service gap” by addressing two questions: (1) To what extent do practitioners (including early childhood special educators, general educators, pre-service teachers, paraprofessionals, and teacher educators) value 13 peer-mediated naturalistic strategies in serving children with moderate to severe disabilities; and, (2) To what extent are these strategies used in classrooms as measured by participants’ observations of teaching practices.

Method

Surveys were sent to 50 early childhood professionals in a Midwest community in the United States. Twenty-six professionals (52%) responded to a survey that included 13 strategies clustered into two categories.

Cluster 1: Directly Promotes Peer Social Interactions

1. Makes interpretations
2. Prompt for direction communication
3. Invite participation
4. Follow through
5. Answer peer’s questions
6. Prompt for identifying peer/activities
7. Help with movement
8. Provide acknowledgement
9. Add information to the conversation

Cluster 2: Indirectly Promotes Peer Social Interactions

10. Environmental arrangement
11. Fade from interactions
12. Inform of physical assistance
13. Provide sensory input

Professionals were asked to rate the **usefulness** and **frequency of use** on a rating scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being least useful and least used and 4 being most useful and most used. They were also asked to rank the 3 most useful strategies among the 13.

Results

Respondents rated all but one of the strategies (*add information into the conversation*) useful to very useful (mean of 3.0 or higher). They reported that they did not frequently use 8 of the 13 strategies. The strategies they did not use were: *prompt for identifying peers/activities*, *add information into the conversation*, *help with movement*, *provide*

acknowledgement, follow through, provide sensory input, make interpretations, and answer peers' questions.

When asked to select the top 3 strategies they found most useful, the teachers ranked the strategies as follows:

1. Make interpretations,
2. Prompt for direct communication,
3. Invite participation.

Discussion

This study provided evidence that although educators reportedly valued the usefulness of 12 naturalistic peer-mediated strategies among a list of 13, a majority (8 out of 13) of strategies were not used frequently in classrooms. This supports previous studies indicating that there is a gap between research on best practice for promoting social skills and implementation of those skills in the classroom, and that the gap may not necessarily be caused by a lack of awareness or valuing of the practices but may be a result of teacher preparation programs failing to equip pre-service and in-service teachers with the skills necessary to implement the evidence-based strategies in their classrooms.

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

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