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The Effectiveness of Peer Support to Increase Positive Social Interaction for Students with Special Needs

Candace Pickens-Cantrell
Governors State University

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The Effectiveness of Peer Support to Increase Positive Social Interaction for Students with
Special Needs

Candace Pickens-Cantrell

Prepared in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the Masters of Arts Degree in
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of positive peer support to increase social interaction of students with special needs. This study followed a teacher action research design with data collected on a single student in two different preschool sessions within the same school and classroom. The participants included two special education students, and two typically developing peer supporters and the student's teacher. Observations and a questionnaire were used to collect and analyze data. The results indicate that special needs students benefit from having peer support from peers to help increase social interaction. Both students progress supported the evidence stated in previous research stating that peer support will increase positive social interactions. One recommendation is for schools to create and implement programs that support the increase of social skills for students with special needs.

Keywords: Special education, social interaction, peer support, preschool, video modeling

The Effectiveness of Peer Support to Increase Social Interaction for Students with Special Needs.

Chapter I**Introduction**

Social interaction between general education and special education students can be vital to the social experiences of students with special needs. As a result, there has been a growing concern about the importance of social interaction for students with special needs. Research on this topic suggests that poor social skills or having behavioral issues are closely related to low peer acceptance (Glick & Rose, 2011). Acceptance refers to being able to have a strong friendship or ability to have a relationship with peers (Glick & Rose, 2011). Knell, Wilbert and Henneman (2014) suggest that children with learning disabilities were considered less socially accomplished than their peers. As cited in Kwon, Elicker and Kontos (2011), “children with disabilities tend to engage in lower levels of social play, initiate peer interaction with peers, are less often chosen as playmates, and more likely to be rejected by peers than typically developing children”(p.268). This could contribute to problems of friendship.

Ogelman and Secer (2012) suggest that once typically developing students interact with special needs children; they become kinder and more attentive to peers with special education needs. Children become more open to learning and change. They develop tolerance and positive attitudes towards their special needs peers during inclusion (Ogelman & Secer, 2012). Carter, Cushing, Clark and Kennedy (2005) believe peer support interventions add to higher levels of positive engagement for students with and without disabilities; this helps to increase social interaction and decrease levels of problem behaviors for students with disabilities. Improving academic performance and gaining functional skills will be beneficial to students with and without special needs.

Tepstra and Tamura (2008) believe children learn many concepts from their classroom teachers, but they also learn vital academic, social and behavior concepts from their peers. Studies suggest that peers naturally affect each other's behaviors. This is suggested to be due to peers being present in many settings throughout the school day that may help promote positive behavior change (McCurdy & Cole, 2014). Schools are encouraged to make sure that all students, with and without disabilities are provided supports essential to establishing progress within the general curriculum (Glick & Rose, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Children with special needs tend to engage in lower levels of social play, initiate peer interaction, are less often chosen as partners or playmates, and more likely to be rejected by peers than typically developing children (as cited in Kwon, Elicker & Kontos, 2011). This social concern can be seen across all ages of students. According to Fink, de Rosnay, Peterson and Slaughter (2013) children who engage in effective social interaction with peers are generally well adjusted and well liked, which contribute to the long term positive outcomes. Ogelman and Secer (2012) argue that inclusive education should be supported to its fullest potential as it improves the social skills and friendships of children with educational needs. Additionally, he states that inclusive education is also beneficial for children with typical development (Ogelman & Secer, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of peer support in the general education classroom, on the social interaction between students with special education needs and their typically developing peers. The study focused on the academic outcomes of students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) after experiencing peer support in the form of remaining

in close proximity during classroom activities. Finally, it examined the level of social interactions after the support of another; typically developing peer is no longer directly involved.

Question of the Study

Throughout the study, the following questions were addressed: Does peer-support increase social interaction for students with special needs? What specific components of peer support help increase the social interaction of students with special needs? Will the level of social interaction sustain after the support of the typically developing peer is no longer directly involved?

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption of this study was that typically developing students will be willing and able to provide appropriate support to special needs students. It was also an assumption that when the peer support is taken away, the interaction of the student with an IEP may decrease depending on the needs of the student. One limitation of the study was that it was a single case study experiment. The data from the study was not a full representation of this population of students and if this method will work for all students with special needs who require increased social interaction amongst peers. The study is being completed for the Graduate Seminar course at Governor State University in partial fulfillment for the Masters of Arts Degree in Multicategorical Special Education; which had to be completed within one semester. Additionally, the training of the typically developing student supporting the special needs student may not be adequate enough to make a difference in social interaction. A final limitation of the study was that the length of the intervention may not be sufficient to be most effective.

Educational Significance of the Study

Peer support arrangements are increasingly becoming a recommendation as an alternative to relying on adult one-on-one support (Carter, Sisco, Melekogu, & Kurkowski, 2007). Peer support may have a tremendous effect on a child's ability to function in the classroom. Creating a positive peer relationship between a general education and special education student may lead to growth in both students. Studies show that, in some cases, children continue to engage in high levels of communication with other student. Children have opportunities for inclusion throughout the day, but depending on the age and the ability of the child, that may vary (Tepstra and Tamura, 2008).

Definition of Terms

The following terms guide the reader to understand the terminology used when discussing special education in the classroom.

Inclusion. Inclusion is educating children with special education needs together with their typically developing peers in the same environment (Ogelman & Secer, 2012). This allows the support services to be offered inside the general education classroom. This setting can be very beneficial to the needs of special education students.

Least restrictive environment (LRE). Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a principle stating that students with disabilities are to be educated in settings as close to regular classes as appropriate for a child. This mandate requires that students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are not disabled. Students with disabilities have a presumptive right to be educated in integrated settings. The second part states that schools can overcome this presumptive right and that students may be educated in more restrictive settings when students cannot be educated satisfactorily in the general education classroom. The general education classroom is considered the least restrictive environment (Rueda, Gallego, & Moll, 2000).

Peer support. Peer Support is an intervention involving one or more classmates without disabilities providing academic and/ or social support to a student with a disability. It also includes “student selection, peer training, peer- delivered support, and adult monitoring” (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005, p.16).

Social interaction. Social Interaction is “defined as a student acknowledging another student using verbal or non-verbal (e.g. Physical contact, pointing, and gestures) communicative behaviors. Examples include greetings, talking about upcoming events or activities, providing

information, assisting with an assignment by asking or answering questions, and introducing a student to other classmates” (Carter et al., 2005, p.17).

Chapter Summary

There has been a growing concern of about the importance of social interaction for students with special needs. The research suggests that students with special needs can benefit from peer support when in the classroom setting. Children who engage in effective social interaction with peers are generally well adjusted and well liked, which contribute to the long term positive outcomes. The study analyzes the experience of peer support through communication, turn-taking and joining during classroom activities, then examines the level of social interaction after the support from a typically developing student is removed. This information is used to determine if this would be a recommended practice in inclusive classrooms.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Legislation

Section 504 and ADA

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 have a major impact on children with disabilities and public schools (Smith, 2001). These two laws are used to prevent any form of discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and other federal legislation after 1975 prompted changes in the way schools served children with disabilities (Smith, 2001). For a student to become eligible for special education under IDEA, a student must have a disability that fits into a specified category listed in the law (Smith, 2001). When children do not qualify for special education services under IDEA (2004), they may qualify under Section 504, which requires a person to have a physical or mental impairment (Smith, 2001). Some of these impairments include epilepsy, asthma, diabetes and any other mental or health impairment that limits everyday activities (Webber & Plotts, 2008). Section 504 also applies to colleges and universities receiving federal funds, which extend the rights to college students with disabilities (Webber & Plotts, 2008).

IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) mandates that children with disabilities be educated in general education classrooms with their typical peers to the maximum extent possible (McCurdy & Cole, 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) and the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB, 2002) reinforce the concept that the general education classroom, curriculum, and

accountability system should be for all children, including those with disabilities (Rafdal et al, 2011).

Additionally, IDEA requires that schools provide free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities, and to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities be educated with children who are not disabled (Yell, 1995). “The setting, listed from less restrictive to most restrictive, are as follows: instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction and instruction in hospitals or institutions” (Yell, 1995, p. 391). For a school to survive a legal challenge to the placement of a student in a separated setting, it must show that the student would not benefit academically or socially from an integrated placement or that the student would disrupt classmates learning (Yell, 1995). It is mandated that students with disabilities are allowed to engage in activities that are available for students without any disability (Yell, 1995).

Least Restrictive Environment

Under IDEA, it mandates that students with disabilities have a right and need to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). According to research indicated by Yell (2005), students are to be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate with non-disabled peers. This is also known as inclusion. Ogelman and Secer (2012) state that inclusion is educating special needs students together with their typically developing peers in a general education setting. Inclusive classrooms are viewed as an appropriate practice for educating children with special needs (McCurdy & Cole, 2013). Proponents point to the possible benefits for students with special needs, including the increased opportunity for social interactions with typically developing peers. They can develop friendships, increase communication and social skills, and adaptive behavior skills. Lastly, students participating in age-appropriate activities that may help

enhance their social competency (McCurdy & Cole, 2013). Ogelman and Secer (2012) support the idea that “inclusive education is beneficial for both children with special educational needs and children with typical development” (p. 169). Typically developing students have a more understanding, empathetic, and compassionate attitude towards their peers with special education needs (p.173). Their point of view is also humble and genuine when it comes to others.

Service Delivery

According to IDEA, a student’s classroom placement is determined by the student’s individualized education program (IEP) team and based on the least restrictive environment (Jones & Hensley, 2012). Students in self-contained classrooms were more physically and socially isolated from the general school population. Jones and Hensley (2012) explore the differences between students in resource rooms and students in self-contained classrooms regarding their self-determination and relationship with classmates and teachers. The self-contained classrooms in the study emphasized life skills (cooking, job training, and personal hygiene) rather than core academics. These students’ interaction with typically developing peers during the school day was limited to about one hour each day (Jones & Hensley, 2012).

Resource rooms were referred to as “lab” or “pull-out class” by both teachers and students (Jones & Hensley, 2012). These students have greater access to the general education school environment through both physical location and social opportunities. “Students in resource rooms spent approximately 65 percent of their school day with typically developing peers in general education classes or activities” (Jones & Hensley, 2012, p. 37). Jones and Hensley (2012) found that beneficial outcomes included fewer behavioral problems, greater social competence, and better school adjustment (p. 37). Results indicate that students in self-contained classrooms perceived their classmates as significantly more supportive as did students

in resource rooms. Some ways to help improve the student's self-determination skills is by having more access to various school environments. These environments include: hallway conversation, lunchtime, and school sponsored clubs and activities (p. 48).

Categories of Special Education. To be eligible for special needs services under IDEA, the student must fall under one of the following categories of disability. Additionally, the student must be three through 21 years of age and be identified as having one or more of the following disabilities: Cognitive Impairment (CI), Orthopedic Impairment (OI), Other Health Impairment (OHI), Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Emotional Disturbance (ED), Autism (AUT), Speech and Language Impairment, Multiple Disabilities, Developmental Delay, Deaf, Blind, or Deaf/Blind (Webber & Plotts, 2008). These 13 categories are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Categories of disability under IDEA

Federal Disability Term	Brief Description
Specific Learning disability (LD)	A disorder related to processing information that leads to difficulties in reading, writing, and computing; the most common disability, accounting for half of all students receiving special education.
Speech or language impairment	A disorder related to accurately producing the sounds of language or meaningfully using language to communicate.
Intellectual disability	Significant limitations in intellectual ability and adaptive behavior; this disability occurs in a range of severity.

Table 1 (Continued)

Categories of disability under IDEA

Federal Disability Term	Brief Description
Emotional Disturbance	Significant problems in the social-emotional area to a degree that learning is negatively affected.
Autism	A disorder characterized by extraordinary difficulty in social responsiveness; this disability occurs in many different forms and may be mild or significant.
Hearing impairment	A partial or complete loss of hearing.
Visual impairment, including blindness	A partial or complete loss of vision.
Deaf-blindness	A simultaneous significant hearing loss and significant vision loss.
Orthopedic impairment	A significant physical limitation that impairs the ability to move or complete motor activities.
Traumatic brain injury (TBI)	A medical condition denoting a serious brain injury that occurs as a result of accident or injury; the impact of this disability varies widely but may affect learning, behavior, social skills, and language.
Other health impairment (OHI)	A disease or health disorder so significant that it negatively affects learning; examples include cancer, sickle-cell anemia, and diabetes.
Multiple disabilities	The simultaneous presence of two or more disabilities such that none can be identified as the primary disability; the most common example is the occurrence of mental retardation and physical disabilities.

Table 1 (Continued)

Categories of disability under IDEA

Federal Disability Term	Brief Description
Deafness	A hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Note. Adapted from *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers*, p. 22, by M. Friend & W. Bursuck, 2009 Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Social Relationships

Kwon, Elicker, and Kontos (2011) found that when children with disabilities are in inclusive settings, they engage with peers more than children with disabilities in self-contained settings. The children in self-contained classrooms were more likely to interact with teachers than with their peers (Kwon et al., 2011). Teachers in self-contained classrooms may rely more on indirect strategies to promote social interaction (e.g., providing games that involve more than two children) than they do direct, observable teaching strategies (Kwon et al., 2011).

Research has shown friendship experiences contribute to the development of social competency in special educational students over time. Glick and Rose (2011) argue that friendships provide a critical place for the development of skills that may be important for success in current friendships and may be close relationships later in life. Glick and Rose (2011) conducted a study to help assess the students on "help-giving" task and "help-seeking task". The study found that having high quality friendships predicted emotionally-engaged strategies that involve talking about the problem. The study found that having more friends also predicted an

increase in relating disengaged strategies, while having high-quality friendships predicted decrease in these strategies (Glick & Rose, 2011).

Carter et al (2015) believe children with autism show significant challenges in building social relationships. Many children with autism resist and reject contact and social interactions from an early age (Alzyoudi, Sartawi & Almuhihi, 2015). Children on the autism spectrum are also likely to struggle with interpreting verbal and /or non-verbal social cues, and in exhibiting appropriate emotional responses. Video modeling has been successful in helping remediate the social deficits of children with autism. Students between ages five and seven were screened for autism based on a display of deficits in socially expressive behaviors. The students watch video that indicate social initiation skills, conversation skills, appropriate non-verbal communication and answering or asking informational questions (Alzyoudi, Sartawi & Almuhihi, 2015). The results indicated the use of video modeling to be effective in improving social skills of children with autism.

Ozerk and Ozerk (2015) state that video modeling is a method used to train and teach children with ASD. This is used as a visual learning strategy, which is a two-or- three-dimensional representation of a particular concept used to communicate and teach that idea (Ozerk & Ozerk, 2015, p. 552). As cited in Ozerk and Ozerk (2015), “children with ASD display fewer behavior problems and increased compliance when visual supports are used to communicate expectations” (p. 553). In this study by Ozerk and Ozerk (2015), they studied video modeling as an intervention for bilingual students. The study included three phases of intervention including video modeling, playing basketball for social training, and playing chess to build social skills and transfer the skills. The study proved that children with ASD can learn using visual learning. It is also a way to help them gain the social skills needed to learn these

behaviors. Lastly, the study discovered that bilingual children with autism can transfer learned social skills in a second language to first language environment, typically in the home (Ozerk & Ozerk, 2015).

Avcioglu (2013) believes that social skills are the ability to perform proper behavior in social environments and play an important role in the establishment of interpersonal relationships. Social skills make it easier for people to explain positive and negative feelings in a proper way. Individuals cannot interact well with the people around them because they lack social skills (Avcioglu, 2013). Individuals learn social skills by observing their families, other adults and their peers as a model. Children with disabilities may not learn social skill by observing typically developing peers. Avcioglu (2013) used video modeling to teach five children with intellectual disabilities. Some skills taught included greeting people when they meet them. Data were collected in order to determine the effectiveness, reliability and social validity. It was determined that teaching using video modeling was effective. Students had more interactions with peers. Some implications from the study suggest that general education and special education teachers try video modeling for teaching different behaviors (Avcioglu, 2013).

As cited by Delano and Stone (2008), many students identified as having emotional or behavior disorders have social skill deficits and often display a less mature or appropriate social behavior. These students may have difficulty engaging in appropriate play or social interaction. Social stories are one way to improve social functioning for these students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). Social stories been have effectively implemented to support with autism spectrum disorder (Delano & Stone, 2008). This involves reading a brief, individualized story that helps explain how to negotiate a social situation that may be challenging for that child. As cited by Delano and Stone (2008) the social story invention was introduced by Gary and

Garand as a method of teaching children with autism how to read social situations. "The invention provides teachers with a strategy that requires minimal instructional time, and can be implemented in a variety of settings" (Delano & Stone, 2008, p. 7). These settings may include self-contained classrooms, and inclusive classrooms.

Attitudes

Fink, Rosnay, Peterson and Slaughter (2013) found that the peer Social Maturity Scale (PSMAT) is a reliable measure for teachers to use in determining children's social competency. Fink et al. (2013) used the PSMAT to examine each participant's social skills. Furthermore, they used the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) social skill scale to have participants nominate their friends. The study found that children with high PSMAT scores display more socially competent behaviors than the average child of the same age (Fink et al., 2013). Fink et al. (2013) concluded that the PSMAT is a valuable addition to assessing a child's social competency in research and applies context and that the PSMAT can be an effective first-line assessment for identifying at-risk children.

Research has also found that inclusive education practice has a positive contribution on students' peer relations and social skills (Ogelman & Secer, 2012). When provided with inclusive education during the early years of their life, children are likely to have shared interactions with peers and adults. This promotes growth, the positive change, and their desire to learn (Ogelman & Secer, 2012). Ogelman and Secer (2012) state, "Children become open to learning and change, and with their flexible point of view they are able to empathize with their peers have special educational needs, they develop tolerance and understanding towards their peers with special educational needs during inclusion" (p. 173).

Although inclusion helps typically developing students have a more positive attitude towards their special educational needs peers, research has found that this is not always the perspective typically developing children display. Research by Georgiadi, Kolyva, Kourkoutas, and Tsakiris (2012) indicates that “many primary school students with intellectual disabilities feel rejected by their typically developing peers and are rarely chosen as friends” (p. 531). Georgiadi et al. (2012) focused on typically developing children’s attitudes towards their peers with intellectual disabilities and examined the possible effects of gender and previous experiences with students who may have an intellectual disability. The researchers concluded that

Girls chose more positive adjectives to describe students with intellectual disabilities than boys, and students who expressed positive social, emotional and overall attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities were likely to choose positive adjectives to describe students with intellectual disabilities (p. 539).

Researchers continue to examine the importance of social relationships among general and special educational needs students. Hughes, et al. (2013) state that most special needs youth spend their school days socially isolated from their typically developed peers even when they are physically included in the class or other school activities. Teachers can play a vital role in how general education students feel about and treat special needs students. A study by Novak and Bartelheim (2012) supports the idea that “children tend to learn behavior by observing the adults in their world” (p. 2). Novak and Bettelheim’s (2012) study investigated the question of whether general education students adopt a more positive perception of students with special needs when taught how to interact with special needs students. They found that there was a change in general education students’ perception about students with special needs after a four-week intervention.

Prior to the study, the general education participants did not spend much time getting to know the special needs students. Novak and Bartelheim (2012) argue that students should work together over a prolonged period of time to help change views of the students with special needs. It also was suggested that children with special needs should have opportunities to interact with their general education peers before third grade for greatest benefits.

The goal of the study conducted by Krull, Wilbert, and Hennemann (2014) was to investigate the social and emotional situation of students with classroom behavior problems (CBP) and classroom learning difficulties (CLD). The researchers attempted to determine if there is a correlation between classroom problems and the social-emotional situation of students. They also wanted to determine if these findings differ across classes and schools. The results of this study indicated significantly lower social acceptance of students with classroom behavior problems (Krull et al., 2014). Krull et al. (2014) also stated that these students often felt socially rejected as a seatmate by their peers, in contrast, students with classroom learning disabilities were more accepted by their peers. These findings indicate that, even at a young age, students know which classmate they like most and which they like least within inclusion classrooms.

The social and academic benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities have been well-researched, according to Schoger (2006). In Schoger's (2006) study, a reverse inclusion program was implemented; this involved bringing general-education students out of their classrooms for short-periods of time over eighteen weeks to interact socially with their special needs peers. The special education teacher created activities and objectives for the students, which were specific to the IEP objectives of the participating special needs students. Schoger (2006) found that the special needs students began to identify the general education students as their friends. Schoger (2006) also found, "General education students reported in interviews that

they had learned that just because a student looks or acts differently, it does not mean that they can't be friends and have fun together" (p. 6). These students searched for the special needs students on the playground and greeted them with smiles and high-fives when interacting in the hallway. Schoger (2006) recommends providing support in communication for students who are non-verbal, unintelligible or inappropriate.

Peer Support Interventions

Peer support arrangements typically can be implemented without changing instructional for the whole class (Carter et al, 2015, p. 12). Hughes et al. (2013) believe that peer support interventions introduced in middle and high schools in which general education students support classmates with developmental disabilities will increase all students' social interaction. They note that, typically instructional staff should undertake responsibility to guarantee ongoing interactions between students with autism and their peers. However, Hughes et al. (2013) taught general education students a strategy to prompt them to increase their interactions with peers with autism spectrum disorder. General education students were taught how to set interactions goals, as well as analyze if they reached their goal. Hughes et al. (2013) suggest that goal setting by general education students holds significant possibilities for growing social interactions with classmates with autism and other disabilities while decreasing adult support.

Peer support continues to emerge as an alternative to one-on-one adult support from a paraprofessional. Researchers Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, and Kurkowski (2007) examined peer support of high school students and determined how peer support interventions can improve social and academic outcomes in the classroom (p. 214). Carter et al. (2007) found that peer interactions increased when students received extra support from a classmate instead of getting it exclusively from a paraprofessional or special education teacher. This individualized support

strategy allowed students to access interaction opportunities that might not exist while receiving direct paraprofessional support (Carter et al., 2007).

A study by Rafdal, McMaster, and McConnel (2011) investigated whether the Kindergarten Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (K-PALS) program, an intervention typically used for general education students is valuable for students with disabilities. This study measures whether this program will help increase the language skills for children with disabilities. The results of the study indicated that K-PALS were effective for increasing initial alphabetic principle and decoding (Rafdal et al, 2011). Rafdal et al (2011) states that there was no reliability between group differences which were attributable to levels of support. These findings are significant because it reminds educators that not all interventions may meet the needs of all students. Rafdal et al. (2011) state, “those educators should track the students’ progress to identify those students for whom the intervention is not always effective for all students” (p.312).

Bellini, Akullian, and Hopf (2007) examine the benefits of video self-monitoring (VSM) intervention when trying to increase the function of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). “Autism is a complex neurological disorder which contains broad areas of functioning: social interactions; communication; and restricted, repetitive behaviors” (p.80). Many children with ASD show social skill deficits, this often leads to social withdrawal when interacting with peers. Two preschool-aged students with ASD participated in the study. The intervention was completed in their classroom. The levels of unprompted social engagement with peers were examined through video recordings. The children watched the videos of themselves interacting with peers then were told to go participate in “free play” activities. The findings suggest that the intervention led to an increase in social engagement with their peers. This study was implemented without interrupting regular class activities.

Research continues to support the idea that video modeling has been used to teach individuals with autism skills such as purchasing, conversation, perspective taking, spelling, and daily living (Hine & Woley, 2006, p. 84). Hine and Woley (2006) believe young children with autism often have difficulty engaging in play with peers. It has also been said learning through observation and imitation of others can increase the rate of the behavior. As cited by Hines and Woley (2006), video modeling is an effective way of teaching various developmental skills to children with autism. The participants of the study included two preschool aged girls who attended a university based preschool setting. These students met the requirements to be considered autistic. The videos used for modeling included the targeted behavior. The videos included adults playing with toys to manipulate the sensory materials. During the intervention, the videos focused on gardening play and coloring play. The results indicated video modeling was effective in teaching specific actions on toys and sensory materials. This determined that video modeling can be a valuable resource to help nurture play in preschool students with autism.

Children have also been used as an effective method to support their peers with developmental disabilities. Peers can be more effective than adults at teaching age-appropriate play and leisure activities (Pierce & Schreibman, 1997, p.207). Their typically developing “peers are taught to initiate to their peers with disabilities by participating in behaviors such as play organizers or sharing” (Pierce & Schreibman, 1997, p. 207). Peer training is used to increase language use in children with autism. Peers were taught strategies to help them support their autistic peers. In the study, two children with autism and eight typically developing students were used as peer trainers. The researchers evaluated the average number of words spoken during the intervals when measuring the language. Findings indicated that students exhibited

longer sentences, and increased in verbal interactions between target child and peer trainers (Pierce & Schreibman, 1997, p. 216). Enhancing social behaviors in children with autism is a critical part of their educational process (p. 217). This is particularly vital when considering support from their peers.

As cited by Ke and Im (2013) “1 in 88 American children have ASD and 1 in 58 boys has ASD” (p. 441). Children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome or high functioning autism (AS/HFA) may be the fastest growing segment of ASD. Similar to other children with autism they have social skill deficits that cause difficulty maintaining social interactions, difficulty sharing and understanding the perspective of others (Ke & Im, 2013, p. 441). Research supports the ideas that these students need to be involved in an intervention or training program to help improve their social abilities. Various strategies have been found effective in teaching social interaction. Ke and Im (2013) believe some strategies include pivotal response training, incidental teaching, peer modeling, social stories, social scripts, and class-wide interventions (p. 441). Ke and Im used virtual reality (VR) for social interaction training in their study. This type of training involves technology integration which is an effective method for students who are visual learners. During the intervention, both virtual and physical communication behaviors of the participants were observed. The observation of the participants’ physical expressions and behaviors focused on their reactions toward the virtual learning environment. The data assessed focuses on various tasks including responding and maintaining interactions, turn taking, greeting and ending a conversation (Ke & Im, 2013). Each of the four participants showed improvements in performance during the intervention sessions. There was also an increase in facial expressions and body gesture recognition. Parents gave informal feedback that suggested that the VR- based

social interaction can potentially expand children's communication and promote positive peer friendship (p. 460).

Paraprofessionals

Socially peers may be hesitant to start a conversation when a paraprofessional is always present (Carter, Moss, Asmus, Fresperman, Cooney, Brock, Lyons, Huber and Vincent, 2015, p. 9). "Carter et al. (2015) states that "more than 400,000 paraprofessionals work with school-age children receiving special education services under IDEA" (p. 10). Training paraprofessionals to support implemented of peer support arrangement is one way of equipping them to deliver focused support strategies within inclusive settings and has the potential to benefit the entire class with their presence (Carter et al., 2015, p. 10). Schoger (2006) believes paraprofessionals may be the vital support that some children with disabilities need to be included in the general education classroom rather than in more restrictive environments (p. 2). According to Carter, Cushing, Clark and Kennedy (2005) "Over-reliance on paraprofessionals may (a) limit students' social interaction with their classmates (b) hinder student achievement (c) stigmatizes students (d) prolong unnecessary dependence on adults and (e) decrease contact between students with disabilities and certified general education teachers" (p. 15). Due to these concerns, researchers advocate for alternate supports for students with special needs. Carter et al. (2005) found that, when students with disabilities worked with two peers, there were higher levels of social interaction and contact with the general curriculum in comparison to one peer. Carter et al. (2005) also stated that once a second peer was involved, the amount of time students with severe disabilities were actively engaged in instructional activities aligned with the general education curriculum was increased (p. 22). Carter et al. (2005) concluded that students with disabilities

gain better social and academic skills when paraprofessionals shift from one-on-one to a support role.

Shukla, Kennedy, and Cushing (1998) discuss the effects of adult support of students without disabilities when in a general education classroom with students with severe disabilities. Shukla et al. (1998) found that

(a) two typically developing peers had similar levels of active engagement in the peer support and adult involvement conditions were higher than baseline; (b) students with disabilities showed differences in active engagement across the three conditions, with peer involvement conditions overall higher; (c) students with disabilities work together regularly and for longer periods of time with peers without disabilities in the peer support condition (p. 410).

This idea confirms that having an adult work with both students with and without disabilities help typically develop peers develop a more supportive viewpoint.

Inclusion has been proven to be beneficial for special needs students; however, sometimes behaviors prevent inclusion. McCurdy and Cole (2013) believe students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often display behavioral issues, which may make it difficult for them to succeed in an inclusive classroom setting. McCurdy and Cole's (2013) study implemented peer intervention supported and then evaluated the effects on off-task behavior of students with autism spectrum disorder. They found a reduction to a level similar to that of their classroom peers. McCurdy and Cole (2013) also state that students in the study reported enjoying working with their peers and considered them to be "new friends."

Once students overcome behavioral issues, it is easier for them to transition to an inclusive classroom. Research by Carter, Moss, Hoffman, Chang and Sisco (2011) focused on

social and academic support within inclusive classrooms. Carter et al. (2011) found that peer support increased the amount of social and communication possibilities within the inclusive classrooms. Carter et al. (2011) also found that peers and paraprofessionals both provide support for students with disabilities. The research concluded that, although peer support interactions increased during the study, there was a decrease in academic engagement (Carter et al., 2011).

Chapter Summary

The legislation provides an overview of the requirements, that school must take to ensure they are treating all students equally and in compliance of the law (Smith, 2001). Students with special needs have been socially and academically affected by peer support in the classroom. It seems that inclusive settings are ideal situations in which to teach social skills and social interaction strategies (Terpstra, 2008). These settings provide a forum through which children with disabilities can learn through modeling from their typically developing peers (Terpstra & Tamura, 2008 p. 409). Students with disabilities can benefit tremendously from peer support using video modeling as an intervention to support their social deficits. Peer support will continue to emerge once typically developing students are taught that their special needs peer can benefit from their support. These social deficits impact children's ability to perform a range of verbal and nonverbal communication and social interactions. This includes turn taking in conversations, taking the listener's perspective, and understanding and expressing emotions via speech prosody, gesture, and body posture (Ke and Im, 2013, p. 441). The dependence of adult involvement can decrease and special needs students can continue to receive the support they require. It is important that these relationships are encouraged and maintained to help build the social skills needed to be able to communicate effectively with peers.

Chapter III

Methodology

This study followed a teacher action research approach with data collected on a single-subject design. A peer support intervention was implemented to determine if it increased social interaction for the student with special needs. This study is an experimental research approach (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). The participants are exposed to an intervention using video modeling which shows acceptable social pragmatics. Data was collected using time sampling responses monitored through classroom observations of the student.

Participants

The participants in the student consisted of four preschool-aged students. Two of the students were classified as special needs and had an IEP. The other two students were general education students. There are two half day preschool classes. The first class is held in the morning from 8:30am to 11:15am and the afternoon class is from 12:50pm to 3:45pm. One general education and one special education student participated from each class.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data was a momentary time sampling form (Appendix F). The observation of students with special needs include their typically developing classmates. The social interactions of the student and their classmates were observed. The momentary time sampling form was used to monitor the amount of social interaction within two minute intervals. At the end of each session, the total amounts of interactions were tallied together for each day. This data was then analyzed and charted based on the amount of occurrences during the observation. Reliability data were collected by an independent observer across the entire study. The mean of the occurrences was calculated for the frequency of target behaviors. The validity of

the study was determined by the amount of time the baseline was done to establish a representation of the behavior. Additionally, the time of day and location of observation is standardized.

Procedure

The study was conducted in the spring 2016 semester for the Graduate Seminar course at Governors State University in partial fulfillment for the Masters of Arts Degree in Multicategorical Special Education. This was also the third and fourth quarter of the school year for the students. This was an experimental case study research approach used to gather information in a Chicago Public School (Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2006). A letter describing the research purpose and assurance of confidentiality was distributed to the parents of the participant, as well as their teachers. Additionally, a single student participant was selected and observational research was conducted at the school to provide more insight of the relationship between typically developing peers and their special needs peers. The student for the single-subject case study was identified by the teacher as a student who would benefit from receiving support from their peers. The student also had to have an IEP goal that addresses the need to increase social interaction with typically developing peers.

The peer support intervention implemented started with the training of the peer supporter and of the special needs student subjects who were being studied. The training was held for 10 to 15 minutes per session. There were four video clips that were used as the video modeling intervention. The training included modeling of social interactions using modeling videos; modeling included turn taking, personal space, impulsivity, and working together as a team. The peer supporter was also provided with strategies on how to use eye contact, start conversations, and offer help to the students. The observations took place for thirty-minutes three times per

week for five weeks in the classroom. Fifteen observations took place with the support of a peer, and three observations will take place as part of the baseline. Momentary time sampling was used to monitor the occurrences and types of social interactions when working with a peer supporter.

Data Collection

The data were collected over a five week intervention period. This is an A-B design (Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2006). The student was observed prior to the intervention, the intervention was administered then observations continued without the peer support. The intervention took place outside the classroom in a common meeting room. After the modeling videos were shown to the students, I instructed them to turn and talk about what they should do for each situation. Lastly, the observations continued within the classroom. The momentary time sampling form used for the observational period can be found in Appendix F. The trends in the topic and behaviors such as communicating (smiling, greeting and complementing), turn taking (sharing, cooperating) and playing (inviting, conversing) was analyzed. The data were compared from the responses of the students through observational notes.

Data Analysis

The data collected on the momentary time sampling was used to analyze the occurrences of social interaction and the quality of social interaction. The average of the data was created and compared to the means of occurrences with peer support and without peer support. The means are calculated and the data is analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference. The slope of the data was calculated to determine the rate of change in the behavior of the students. The Percentage of Non-Overlapping Data (PND) was also used to analyze the data, once a graph is created. The higher the PND, the greater the intervention was (Gast, 2010).

To calculate the PND, a line had to be drawn through the highest baseline point. The number of data points above the line were added, and then divided by the number of data points below the line. The mean baseline difference was also calculated to analyze the data. This was done by taking the mean of the intervention points minus the mean of baseline points. Then this number was divided by the mean of baseline points. Once that number is determined, it is multiplied by 100. Positive values show greater improvements.

Chapter Summary

A single-subject experimental research design data collection method was used in the study, which was designed to examine use of peer support to increase social interaction in the classroom. This is a quantitative approach to the research. The data collected include momentary time sampling, and an analysis of the data. The primary intention of the data collected was to determine, through observations, if the students with special needs social interaction increased if they had support from a typically developing peer. Additionally to determine if this support will sustain after the peer supporter is no longer directly involved.

Chapter IV

Results

Students with disabilities who participate in peer support arrangements may have more social interactions, access a wider range of social supports, maintain or increase their academic engagement and develop more friendships (Carter et al, 2015). The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of peer support for positive social interaction for students with special needs. As part of the baseline assessment, the students are observed and data were collected as it occurs without any intervention. After the training, more observations and data were collected to determine if the intervention was successful in changing the behavior. For the purposes of this research, an A-B design is used (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006). The pre-intervention condition is the baseline which is A. The intervention condition is identified as B. Data has been collected for six weeks to determine the effectiveness, and is described in Appendix G.

Demographics

The school that was used as the research site consists of approximately 220 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. According to the 2014 Illinois School Report Card, its student's population is 96.8% Black, 2.3% Hispanic, and 0.9% other. The demographics of the school include students who are 79.1% low income and 17.3% have disabilities. The study focused on two students who receive special education services described in an IEP, and used two general education students as peer supporters. Student one is a three year old male student and his peer supporter is a five year old female general education student. When looking at academic development, Student one is developing appropriately with learning concepts in the classroom, but has difficulty working with others. He often needs to be separated from the group

and has to work one-on-one with the teacher. Student two is a three year old female student and her peer supporter is a five year old female general education student. According to her teacher, Student two is able to grasp some academic concepts when working with her independently. It is difficult to assess her knowledge when in a group setting. She rarely uses three to five word sentences when interacting with teachers or peers.

Efficacy of Peer Support

The primary goal of the study was to determine if peer support increased positive social interaction for students with special needs. The data determined that there was an increase in the positive social interaction with both students. As the intervention progressed there was a gradual progression in occurrences of positive social interaction. The baseline mean for Student one started at a total of four occurrences of social interaction. The highest point reached at the end of the study reached 10 occurrences of social interaction out of 15 possible. The baseline mean for Student two, started at three positive interactions within the observation period. The highest data point reached for Student two was eight occurrences of positive social interaction out of 15 possible. The data can be viewed in the Figure below.

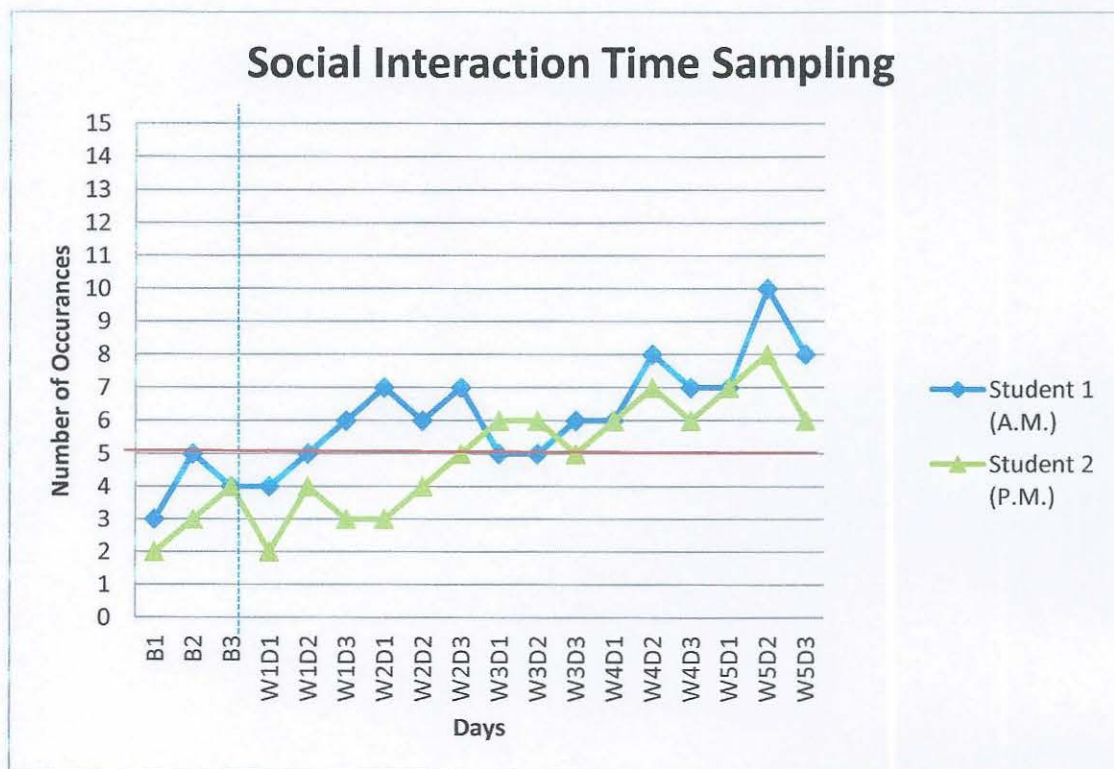


Figure 1. Momentary time sampling data collection graph shows the data for the three baseline points, as well as the five week study. Baseline is represented by (B), week is represented by (W) and day is represented by (D). The red line represents the Percentage of Non-Overlapping data (PND), which is drawn through the highest baseline point.

Components of Positive Social Interaction

Positive social interactions are interactions that take place between peers that are positive in nature and successful for both children involved (Bovey & Stein, 2003). The study set out to determine if any, what specific components/types of social interaction occurred that created the most social interactions amongst the students. The data determined that both students interacted with their peers at a higher rate when playing. Some of the interactions did not occur during a time sampling period due to the student being in time out. The data is described in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Average Social Interaction by types of Interactions

Student	Playing	Conversation	Turn-Taking	Time Out
Student 1	6.6	5.2	3.4	2.7
Student 2	7.3	4.3	5.2	1.4

Note. The data listed is the averages of the types of social interactions over the course of the intervention. Each day the type of interaction was monitored during the observation, and then the type of interaction was averaged for each student.

Table 3

Data Analysis Approaches

Student	Slope	PND	MBD %
Student 1	.26	.73	61.5
Student 2	.30	.66	73.3

Note. Adapted from *Single subject research methodology in behavioral sciences*, by D. L. Gast, 2010 New York, NY: Routledge. PND stands for Percentage of Non- Overlapping Data and MBD stands for Mean Baseline Difference. (see chapter III).

When analyzing the Percentage of Non-Overlapping Data, the percentages with 90 or more indicate that the intervention was highly effective. Percentages of 70-89 indicate fair treatment outcome. Percentages of 50-69 indicate moderately effective treatment. Less than 50

percent indicate the intervention was ineffective. The Mean Baseline Difference is a percentage of the baseline difference from the results of the intervention.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of peer support to increase positive social interaction for students with special needs. Four students participated in the study, two of them classified as special needs, with developmental disabilities. One of the students has characteristics of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the other student has characteristics of oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). This is a quantitative research study used a single-subject experimental, A-B design (Gay, Mills, and Airasian 2006). Data were collected over a six week period, and the data was analyzed in order to answer the research questions of the study. The first question addresses the efficacy of peer-support to increase positive social interaction. The data suggest that peer support is effective in increasing the amount of positive social interaction for students who have special needs and can benefit from additional support in creating friendships. The next questions discuss the components of peer support and types of social interaction that occurred most frequently. The data suggest that the peer supporters helped mediate and prompt the student subject to engage in activities with other peers. Additionally, that playing including sharing and conversation showed the greatest instances of positive social interaction. Lastly, the study considered to determine if the social intervention would withstand once the peer supporter was not directly involved. The data showed that the interactions did sustain. This is believed to contribute to the peer supporter and other classmates joining in supporting the students voluntarily.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

Children in the preschool setting have numerous opportunities to interact social with peers through play. When preschool age children interact with each other, they learn to watch, mimic, share, problem -solve and communicate. In many cases this is their first opportunity of interacting with others who are not family members. Preschool helps “build friendships that promote positive social and emotional development” (Bovey& Strain, 2003). The study investigated the effectiveness of peer support to increase positive social interactions.

Discussion

The Needs of the Students

Throughout observations of the two special needs students, the researcher was able to get an idea of how they interacted with their typically developing peers during free choice time. Both students showed deficits in creating relationships. Student one had the most difficulty in playing appropriately with his peers and sharing toys. Student two struggled the most with engaging in conversation and playing with the other children. Both students would get upset when they did not get what they wanted. Behaviors would include falling out, tantrums and crying. After observing these students social behaviors, it was evident what skills that needed to be strengthened. This helped determine which skills to stress for the video modeling intervention.

Teaching Social Skills

Teaching social skills to students with special needs can be difficult. Having a peer to support their needs makes it easier to show special needs student’s positive behaviors and help them imitate these behaviors when performed by their typically developing peers. Prior to the intervention, Student one had several interactions with other students however they were

negative. Many of the interactions consisted of him hitting, fighting, biting and not being able to share with other students. Pairing him with a positive general education student gave him an opportunity to engage with a student who was willing to support his needs and remind him of positive behaviors when needed. Pairing the peer supporter with the video modeling intervention helped him visually see the positive interactions of turn-taking, sharing, how to deal with impulsivity and having conversations with others. Prior to the intervention, Student two did well playing alone, but had very limited social interactions and communication with her peers. She was also paired with a student who had strong positive social skills and was willing to include and guide the student to be a part of the classroom activities.

Timeouts for Special Education Students

Through the observations, both students lost valuable time to interact with their peers due to being in timeout. The timeouts were warranted from behaviors such as hitting others with toys, standing on furniture on multiple occasions after being warned and running around the classroom. Although there should be some consequence in place, the timeouts given limited them from reaching their fullest potential in obtaining the highest amount of social gains. While reflecting on my data, it caused me to think about was the timeout beneficial to the students with special needs? Although, the student faced a consequence, the behaviors that caused timeouts did reappear. This could hinder the growth of friendships and other positive social behaviors which are essential to their development. Teachers can also support their students by giving verbal and non-verbal cues to indicate when the student is doing well in positively interacting with peers.

Perception of the Teacher/Role during play

The special education teacher of these students currently has 17 students enrolled in her class between the morning and afternoon class. Many of the disabilities of the students include developmental delay, speech/language impairment, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments and orthopedic impairment. She believes that the students benefit from being in an inclusive classroom setting, however some of them would benefit more being in a self-contained classroom to better meet their IEP goals. When given a questionnaire about her perception of students with IEP's in her classroom, there was a range of results. She did not believe that students in her class experienced peer rejection, lacked social deficits, or demonstrated the ability to regulate emotions. However, the observations of her students showed otherwise. Prior to the intervention, Student one could not control his behavior. He would fight and bite the other children when he could not get his way or when he had to share. The special education teacher did agree that student's with IEP's experienced difficulty taking turns with objects/materials and in conversation. She also agreed that these students experienced impulsive behavior depending on the student's diagnosis. Some areas where she felt neutral included these students associating with friends who provide positive influences and having positive social interaction most of the time. Additionally, she felt neutral about these students using language in a socially appropriate manner, them having lower self-esteem and lacking self-control.

Conclusion

The results indicated that Student two showed greater improvements than Student one. Student one had difficulty maintaining self-control and controlling impulsive behaviors. The intervention was a positive way to help improve these behaviors. As the study continued Student

one gradually showed an increase in positive behaviors. Student one's peer supporter would remind him not to do certain things when he was exhibiting negative behaviors such as running around the class and hitting. The general education peer support also reminded Student one to share when he would fight over toys. She was also very forgiving of Student one if he knocked over their block sculptures in the block area, which they played in frequently. During the course of the study, Student one drew a picture of himself and his peer supporter. Other students in the classroom also joined in supporting both student subjects. For example, Student one was running around the class, and several students told him to stop running in the class.

There was an instance with Student two, where she was crying and a peer bystander reminded her that we do not scream in the classroom. Student two seemed to wonder around the class alone while playing. There were moments where she would watch and laugh in areas where other students played. During the intervention, she gradually grew socially. Her peer supporter would invite her to play in areas where she was playing. The peer supporter would give her toys and clothes to put on while playing in the dramatic play area. This area is where she had the most social success. She would engage in conversation, sing familiar songs such as Happy Birthday, and share pretend food with her peers. Both students continued to have support from their peer supporter and other classmates during and at the conclusion of the intervention. Both students progression supported the evidence stated in previous research stating that peer support will increase positive social interactions.

Educational Implications

Based on the results of the study, students who are identified as special needs and have difficulty with social skills can benefit from this intervention. The video modeling intervention is

an opportunity to change the behaviors that are not socially appropriate. Schools should come up with more interventions and programs to support the development of special needs students that struggle with positive social interaction. There should also be more teacher professional development opportunities to help teachers learn ways to help support and increase the social interaction for students who need extra support.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are numerous steps that can be taken to help increase positive social interaction for students with special needs. In future studies, the intervention period can be held over a longer period of time. One recommendation that can be beneficial to special education students is for teachers to try to provide all special needs students with a peer supporter. Teachers should focus more on positive reinforcements rather than timeouts to discipline the child.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine if peer support increased positive social interaction for special needs students. I was able to collect data on two special needs preschool aged students and use a peer trainer for support. My finding helped me discover four important themes of social interaction. These themes included playing, conversation, turn-taking and timeout. At the beginning of the study, I discovered that these students had difficulty and fewer occurrences of positive social interactions with their peers. They both had delays in playing side by side with other students/ sharing, engaging in conversation and controlling impulsive behaviors. The next thing I discovered was the influence of timeout and how it affected their social interaction with others. When these students are taken away from their peers during play, then they cannot participate with their peers. Lastly, my study focused on the perception that the

special education teacher had about special needs students' involvement in social interacting with their peers.

The evidence provided from various researchers support the idea that modeling is a beneficial way to support the needs of special needs students that show deficits in social skills. The best way for students with special needs to develop socially to their fullest potential is to create more structured activities for them to socially interact positively with their typically developing peers. Choice time can be used regularly to train students on how to interact positively. Special education teachers can not only use video modeling to support their students but using their peers help teach their peers social skills, and build relationships with others. The research also supports the idea that choice time or "play" time can just as beneficial as the aspects of academics at the preschool level. It is encouraged through the curriculum that preschooler learn through play. This concept should extend to social skills as well. Additionally, teachers need to strategize about alternatives to timeouts specifically for the students who lack effective social skills. Once these aspects are taken into consideration and implemented then there will be an increase of peer acceptance, friendships and socialization starting at the preschool age.

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Appendix A

Ethics Training

Appendix B

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Report

Appendix C

Teacher Questionnaire

1. How many students with IEP's do you currently have in your classroom?
2. What are the disabilities of the students with IEP's?
3. Do you believe that the student's with IEP's are benefiting from being in an inclusive classroom?
 - a. Yes or No
 - b. If no, explain

Using a Likert scale please indicate how well you agree or disagree with the following statements....

Agree (1), neutral (2), disagree (3)

Students with IEP's experience peer rejection?

Students with IEP's experience social skill deficits?

Students with IEP's demonstrate the ability to regulate emotions?

Students with IEP's experience difficulty taking turns (with objects/materials and in conversation)?

Students with IEP's experience have the ability to work effectively in groups?

Students with IEP's associate with friends who provide a positive influence?

Students with IEP's experience have the same ability to make friends as their typically developing peers?

Students with IEP's exhibit greater impulsive behaviors than their typically developing peers?

Students with IEP's have positive social interactions most of the time?

Students with IEP's use language in a socially appropriate manner?

Students with IEP's have lower self-esteem?

Students with IEP's have confidence in their academic skills?

Students with IEP's have confidence in their social skills?

Students with IEP's lack self-control?

Is there any additional information you would like to share about your students?

Appendix D

Invitation Letter to Parents of Single-Subject

Dear Parent/ Guardian:

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your help and assistance. I am working towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Multicatergorical Special Education at Governors State University. As a part of my final graduate project I am trying to identify the relationship between peer support and social interaction with children with special education needs. The study will take place during my spring 2016 semester which would be during the 3rd and 4th quarter of school for your student.

I will be conducting a single case study on your child. The selection of your child was based on the need of a student recommended that could benefit academically and socially from the support of a peer. The student must also have IEP goals that address the need for an increase of social interaction. In order for your child to participate in the study, your informed consent and signature is required. Your participation is optional and will be kept confidential. Your child's name will not be recorded in observational notes. If any publication results from the research, your child will not identified by name in the study. Your child will be observed approximately 30 minutes 3 times a week for 6 weeks. Your participation will help give an insight into how we can improve in meeting the needs of our children. If you have any further questions about the study please feel free to contact me via email at

██████████ Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Candace Pickens-Cantrell

Appendix E

Invitation Letter to the Teacher

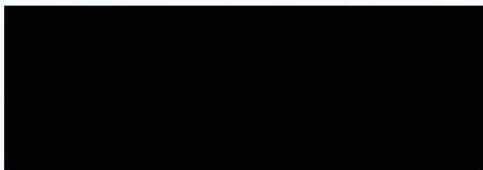
Dear Teacher:

As you may know, I am pursuing my Master's degree in Multicatergorical Special Education at Governors State University. As a part of my graduate requirement, I must conduct a final graduate project. The question of this study is: Does peer support increase positive social interaction for special needs students?

If you agree to participate in the study, I would like you to complete a brief questionnaire about the special needs student in your classroom. The questionnaire is attached to this letter. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire, as your answers will be incorporated into my project. All information will be kept confidential. Please turn in your questionnaire to my mailbox. Thank you very much. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Candace Pickens-Cantrell



Momentary Time Sampling Form

[illegible]

Appendix G

Data Chart

Social Interaction Time Sampling		
Days	Student 1 (A.M.)	Student 2 (P.M.)
B1	3	2
B2	5	3
B3	4	4
W1D1	4	3
W1D2	5	4
W1D3	6	2
W2D1	7	3
W2D2	6	4
W2D3	7	5
W3D1	6	6
W3D2	5	6
W3D3	6	5
W4D1	7	6
W4D2	8	7
W4D3	6	6
W5D1	7	7
W5D2	10	8
W5D3	8	6

Student 1 (A.M.) Student attends the morning class

Student 2 (P.M.) student attends the afternoon class

(B) Baseline; (W) Week; (D) Day