Peer Supports for Vocational and Social Success of Students with Severe Disabilities

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Post-Secondary Employment

- Unemployment rate for youth with disabilities ages 20-24 is 11.2% compared to 6.8% for youth without disabilities (BLS, 2017)
  - Paid employment = 37 – 39% averaging 25 hrs/week (NLTS2)
  - No vocational or life-skills training in school = poor transition outcomes (Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; NTACT, 2016)

- Improvement in outcomes when students have access to vocational education and inclusive employment opportunities in school (Test et al., 2009)
Skill Challenges

- Substantial difficulties with vocational skills, social skills, and social interactions in the workplace (Carter & Hughes, 2005; Cannella-Malone & Schaefer, 2015)

- Vocational and social skills are necessary for employment success (Agran Hughes, Thoma, & Scott, 2016; Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012)
Peer-Mediated Interventions in Classrooms

- Provide academic and social support for students with severe disabilities implemented by peers without disabilities in integrated academic & non-academic settings

- Evidence-based intervention
  - Improvements in academics & social skills for both students with and without disabilities (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Schaefer, Cannella-Malone, & Carter, 2016)
Peer-Mediated Interventions in Employment Settings

- Minimal research on effectiveness of peer-mediated interventions in inclusive employment settings for vocational or social skills

- No studies have been conducted evaluating the effects of peer-mediated interventions in work-based learning settings in school on both vocational and social skills (Schaefer et al., 2016)
Purpose of Study

- Purpose ➔ To examine the impact of a peer-mediated intervention on the vocational and social skills in an integrated work-based learning activity in high school for students both with autism spectrum disorder and/or intellectual disabilities and their peers without disabilities.
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age &amp; Grade</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Age &amp; Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>16, Sophomore</td>
<td>Primary – ID</td>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>17, Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary - ASD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>18, Senior</td>
<td>Primary - ID</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>17, Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>15, Freshman</td>
<td>Primary – ID</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>18, Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary - ASD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette</td>
<td>15, Freshman</td>
<td>Primary - ID</td>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>18, Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>18, Senior</td>
<td>Primary - ID</td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>17, Senior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Settings

- High School
  - One suburban high school – Midwestern metro school district

- Work-Based Learning Activity
  - Collecting recycling from classrooms and offices throughout the school building
  - Activity previously done by recycling club

- Generalization Probe Setting
  - Making copies for special educator
  - Activity previously done by students with and without disabilities
Research Design

- Multiple baseline design across participants with generalization probes (Gast & Ledford, 2014)
Dependent Variables

- Independent engagement in work tasks
- Engagement in social interactions
- Quality of social interactions
  - 5-point Likert Scale (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005)
Social Validity

- Two social validity questionnaires were adapted rating social benefits, work benefits, feasibility, and effectiveness of the peer supports training and intervention (Carter et al., 2016)
  - One questionnaire for the special educator and peers
  - One questionnaire for students with ASD/ID
Independent Engagement in Work Tasks

Kim
Beth
Nate
Jeanette
Clark
Social Interactions

Kim
Beth
Nate
Jeanette
Clark
Number of Social Initiations

Kim & Jenny
Beth & Melissa
Nate & Rose*
Jeanette & Julia
Clark & Katie
Quality of Social Interactions

Kim & Jenny
Beth & Melissa
Nate & Rose
Jeanette & Julia
Clark & Katie
Social Validity Survey Results

- Students with ASD/ID reported:
  - Enjoyed working with their peers
  - Learned new tasks on the job
  - Considered the peer their friend
  - Four out of five wanted to continue working with the peer
Social Validity Survey Results

- Peers & Special Educator reported:
  - Participating was worthwhile
  - Perceived their partner improved in independence in work tasks & increased socializations
  - Confident in being a peer mentor & not difficult to implement
  - Peer-mediated interventions could be an asset in teaching skills
  - Should have more opportunities in the school to interact

- “This project changed my views on people with disabilities immensely. Beth showed me that with a little bit of guidance, people with disabilities can conquer anything.” - Melissa
Conclusion

- Results demonstrate that peer-mediated interventions have a positive impact on the vocational & social skills of students with ASD/ID in work-based learning settings
  - Increased independent work engagement
  - Increased social interactions

- Improved quality of social interactions

- Generalization probes show potential

- Peer-mediated interventions are socially valid interventions

- 1\textsuperscript{st} study in a work-based learning setting
Limitations

- Lack of a maintenance phase ➔ peers and several students were seniors and graduated
  - Limited number of generalization probes could be interpreted as a limitation ➔ not enough data to determine generalizability of the skills & supports
- Work-based activity chosen by the special educator
- Surveys used to gather participants’ perspectives
In conclusion...
Questions?
Thank you for coming!

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