



To study the effect of peer support on classroom interaction of differently abled students

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Abstract

Many schools are committed to inclusive classrooms for students with severe disabilities. But, numerous observational studies of inclusive classrooms draw the same conclusion: Social interactions among students with severe disabilities and their non-disabled classmates remain fairly infrequent. The present research article focuses on the effect of peer support on classroom interaction of differently abled students. It highlights the major findings of various Indian and Abroad researches related to the effect of peer support on classroom interaction of differently abled students.

Keywords: Peer support, social interaction, differently abled

Introduction

Many schools are committed to inclusive classrooms for students with severe disabilities. But, numerous observational studies of inclusive classrooms draw the same conclusion: Social interactions among students with severe disabilities and their non-disabled classmates remain fairly infrequent. 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.

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)^[3]. Acceptance refers to being able to have a strong friendship or ability to have a relationship with peers (Glick & Rose, 2011)^[3].

A recent study Pickens-Cantrell, Candace (2016)^[7] in *Exceptional Children* describes the use of peer support arrangements to increase social interactions in high school classrooms between students with severe disabilities and their classmates and teachers. Providing peer support to students with severe disabilities almost immediately increased the number of social interactions the students had every day, the study found. However, peer support did not seem to lead to increased academic engagement.

Definitions

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)^[2].

Social interaction

Social Interaction is "defined as a student acknowledging another student using verbal or non-verbal 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)^[2].

Differently abled

To be 'differently abled' is to be physically or mentally handicapped or disabled but to show qualities that the able-bodied do not have.

Need and 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)^[1]. 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)^[10].

Review of related literature and researches

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

(NO. 49 OF 2016) [27th December, 2016]

An Act to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. WHEREAS the United Nations General Assembly adopted its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the 13th day of December, 2006; And Whereas the aforesaid Convention lays down the following principles for empowerment of persons with disabilities,—(a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;(b) Non-discrimination;(c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;(d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; (e) Equality of opportunity; (f) Accessibility; (g) Equality between men and women; (h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities;

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)^[4], "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)^[6] 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)^[6].

Carter, Cushing, Clark and Kennedy (2005)^[2] 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)^[10] 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)^[5]. 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)^[3].

Analysis of review

Most of the Research findings suggests that differently abled students are socially disadvantage as compared with peer group children. Differently abled students are less interactive and engaging in activities as compared to the peer group children. In some studies, it was found that peer group students are supportive and more interactive with differently abled students. In their study, Carter, Cushing, Clark and Kennedy (2005)^[2] Kohn, conducted an impressive study and found that the peer support helps to develop positive engagement and social interaction among students with and without disabilities. Further it improves academic performance and gaining functional skills among students with and without disabilities. Tepstra and Tamura (2008)^[10] investigates that the students with and without disabilities develop concepts and behavior from their teacher, and from their peer group equally. One of the reason of development of behavior is due to influence of school setting where students spends most of their time with their friends.

Conclusions

Differently abled students are engaging less with their peer group because of emotional problems they face because of the disabilities in them, these students are interacting hardly with their peer groups, but students without disabilities are more engaging and helpful to the differently abled students, this suggest that peer students provide support to the differently abled students. Further the peer support helps to develop positive engagement and social interaction among students with and without disabilities.

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