The Promise of Peer-Mediated Supports
For Adolescents with Extensive Support Needs

Erik W. Carter
Professor of Special Education
Vanderbilt University

What Should Be the Focus of Secondary Schooling for Students?

Rigor

Relevance

Relationships

• Where are the rigorous and relevant learning opportunities in your schools or community?

• What opportunities do students have to develop valued relationships with their peers?

• How might you promote social interactions and shared learning within these existing activities for students with severe disabilities?

• What roles might peers, educators, and paraprofessionals play in this process?

Some Questions to Consider


17% of students with ID spend almost all of their day in general education classes.

3% of students with severe disabilities spend almost all of their day in segregated settings.

A State of Stuck?

LOCATION

How Would You Describe the Relationships of Your Students?

- Friends with whom they regularly do things
- Family and closest friends
- People with whom they occasionally do things
- People paid to be there

A Portrait of Peer Relationships Nationally

Frequently sees friends outside of school:
- Intellectual Disability: 22%
- Multiple Disabilities: 14%
- Autism: 6%

Never or rarely receives phone calls from friends:
- Intellectual Disability: 42%
- Multiple Disabilities: 63%
- Autism: 84%

Have NOT been invited to other youth's social activities during the past year:
- Intellectual Disability: 25%
- Multiple Disabilities: 43%
- Autism: 50%

Disability category | Never visits with friends | Rarely or never receive telephone calls from friends | Not invited to other youth's social activities during the past year |
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<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
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Wagner, Cadwallader, & Marder (2003)
How Might We Foster Relationships and Learning?

Student-related barriers

Peer-related barriers

Support-related barriers

Opportunity barriers

Be Careful That Supports Do Not...

• Set students apart

• Decrease contact between students, general educators, or other group leaders

• Hinder student learning and achievement

• Encourage unnecessary dependence on adults—limit self-determination

• Limit students’ social interactions with their classmates

http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/parasupport/reviews/giangreco37-5.pdf
Some Questions to Reflect on…

• What are the advantages of relying on one-to-one adult-delivered supports?

• What are some of the potential drawbacks?

• How might peers become involved in providing some of the academic- and social-related supports students might need to participate fully in class and club activities?

Examples of Supports...

• Walking with them from one class to the next
• Helping keep their assignments and class materials organized
• Reminding them how to follow established classroom routines
• Helping them to pass out class materials
• Encouraging interactions with other classmates
• Helping them check the accuracy of their assignments and class work
• Sharing notes or assisting them to take complete guided notes
• Paraphrasing lectures or rephrasing key ideas
• Prompting them to answer a question or contribute an idea during class discussion
• Helping clarify a key concept
• Helping them self-direct their own learning and self-manage their own behavior
• Writing down answers given orally or using a communication device
• Offering additional examples of a concept or ideas
• Demonstrating how to complete a problem
• Highlighting important information in the text or on a worksheet
• Reviewing course content to ensure understanding

Peer Support Arrangements

• Facilitate student participation in class activities
• Provide frequent feedback and encouragement
• Model communication and other skills
• Promote interaction with other classmates and device use
• Support progress related to IEP goals
• Address behavioral supports, as appropriate and appropriately***

High-Impact Social-Focused Intervention Practices

The “sweet spot”

Student-Focused Strategies
Peer-Focused Strategies
Support-Based Strategies

Examples of Supports...

- Supporting involvement in cooperative group activities
- Teaching leisure and recreational activities during non-instructional times
- Helping them to “fit in” by learning accepted social norms
- Motivating and encouraging them when they get frustrated
- Prompting them to use their communication book
- Exchanging advice related to a personal problem
- Reading aloud a section of an assignment or textbook
- Redirecting them when they are off-task
- Inviting them to work together on a class project
- Showing them important classroom “survival skills”
- Reinforcing communication attempts
- Explaining how to do certain aspects of an assignment

Basic Steps...

- Identifying students with disabilities who need assistance to participate in class activities;
- Recruiting peers from within the same classroom to help provide some of these supports;
- Arranging for students to sit next to each other during class activities;
- Orienting peers to their roles, explaining the rationale for their involvement, and showing them basic strategies for supporting the academic and social participation of their classmate;
- Providing ongoing monitoring, feedback, and assistance to peers and their partners throughout the semester, as needed; and,
- Shifting paraprofessionals to a broader support role within the classroom through which they assist all students, as directed by the teacher

Paraprofessional/Special Educator Roles

- Shift to classroom versus one-to-one support
- Modeling for peer partners how to interact and promote class participation
- Ensuring course curricula, assignments, and projects can be accessed (under guidance of special and general educators)
- Supervising and monitoring the peers to ensure the student with disabilities is fully participating
- Fading proximity and direct support

Does Peer Support Arrangements Work?

Peer Support Arrangements
Where do you begin?

Implementing Peer Support Strategies

1. Intentional planning/decide on needed supports
2. Recruiting peer partners
3. Equipping students to work together
4. Monitoring and providing feedback
5. Reflection on the impact
6. Facilitating relationships beyond the classroom


1. Identifying Classroom Expectations and Needed Supports

- What are all students expected to learn?
- What are the expectations general educators or club leaders hold for all students in this activity?
- What social, communication, and other IEP goals could the student work on here?
- How will the student be supported to participate in all of the learning and social opportunities that exist in this setting?

Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009); www.brookespublishing.com/carter
Examples of Support Behaviors...

- Helping keep their assignments and class materials organized
- Encouraging interactions with other classmates
- Helping them check assignments and class work
- Sharing notes or assisting them to take complete guided notes
- Paraphrasing lectures or rephrasing key ideas
- Prompting them to answer a question or contribute an idea during class discussion
- Helping clarify a key concept
- Helping them self-direct their own learning and self-manage their own behavior
- Writing down answers (oral or using a communication device)
- Helping them to pass out class materials
- Walking with them from one class to the next
- Offering additional examples of a concept or ideas
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- Exchanging advice related to a personal problem
- Sharing class materials
- Reading aloud a section of an assignment or textbook
- Inviting them to work together on a class project
- Showing them important classroom “survival skills”
- Reinforcing communication attempts
2. Identifying Peers

- Who does the focus student want to get to know?
- Who has shown an interest in getting to know the student in the past?
- Who has consistent attendance?
- Who seems willing to help other students?
- Who would model positive behaviors for the student?
- Who has good interpersonal skills?
- Which peers share interests, hobbies, or activities with the student?
- Which peers are themselves “on the margins” of the school?
- Which peers are part of a larger friendship network?

Identifying Peer Supports

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<th>Drawbacks</th>
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<td>Peers from other settings</td>
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Example Questions for Prospective Peer Supports

- How well do you already know _____?
- What interests you most about becoming a peer support?
- What expectations do you have?
- What have been your past experiences with your schoolmates with disabilities?
- What qualities do you think make for an effective peer support?
- Are there aspects of the experience you are worried about?
- Why do you think it takes to be an effective peer support?
- What school and community activities are you involved in?
- What other time commitments do you have this semester?
- What experiences have you had that you feel would make you a good peer support?
- What questions do you have about becoming a peer support?
- Have you had similar experiences in the past?
- What do you expect to gain as a result of becoming a peer support?
- Have you ever received support from your classmates? Describe the experience.
3. Orienting Peers Without Disabilities to Their Roles

- 40-60 min orientation meeting
- During lunch or before/after school
- Ongoing monitoring and support from paraprofessionals, special educators, and/or general educators

Orientation Overview
- Introductions
- Rationale for peer support/network strategies
- Background about the student
- General goals in the class/network
- Confidentiality and respectful language
- Expectations specific to the classroom or elsewhere
- Technology and communication systems
- Promoting class participation
- Student motivation and feedback
- When to seek assistance
- Discussion and questions
- Scheduling

4. Monitoring and Providing Feedback

- How will the team communicate about future lessons?
- Who will adapt materials?
- Who will train and give feedback to the peer supports and partners?
- Who will collect data on IEP goals?
- Who will model support strategies?
- What is the plan for dealing with inappropriate behavior of the peer partners or the student with disabilities?

Providing “Just Enough” Support

- Can the student converse and participate...
  - ...on his or her own?
  - ...if given the right technology or adaptive equipment?
  - ...if provided with some focus skill instruction?
  - ...if shown basic self-management strategies?
  - ...with help from a peer, classmate, or co-worker?
  - ...with occasional help from a special educator, paraprofessional, or service provider?
  - ...with ongoing help from a special educator, paraprofessional, or service provider?
Facilitating Interactions and Participation

- Model ways to interact for both peers and student with disability
- Highlight similarities
- Identify varied strengths and differences
- Interpret behavior
- Redirect interactions to student or to peers
- Ask peers to help
- Step in and fade back

5. Reflection Questions For Students w/Disabilities

- Are you enjoying spending time with ________? Why or why not?
- What are some of the things you do together?
- What do you find most helpful? Least helpful?
- What do you like or dislike about the supports you receive?
- What have you learned from working with ________?
- How has ________ benefited from getting to know you?
- Do you consider ________ to be a friend?
- Is there any other help you think you would need in this class?
- Would you like to continue working with ________? If not, why not?
- Do you do things with ________ outside of school?
- Are there other things you would like to do with ________ outside of the class?
- Have you made other new friends in this class? Elsewhere in school?
- What would you like your teachers to know about how best to support you in class?

Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009); www.brookespublishing.com/carter

A Couple of Helpful Articles for Paraprofessionals

http://eric.ed.gov/?q=the+golden+rule+of+providing+support&id=EJ85973

Reflection Questions For Peer Partners

- How would you describe your experience working with your partner?
- Did you enjoy serving in this role? In what ways? What did you like most?
- What things have been going really well? Not so well?
- Were there aspects of this role you particularly enjoyed? Found difficult?
- In what ways have you benefited from participating in this way? What have you learned?
- How effective do you feel you are in this role? Are you comfortable with your responsibilities?
- What changes have you noticed in your partner, if any?
- Do you think this was a beneficial experience for your partner? If so, how?
- What strategies have been working really well? Not so well?
- Is there any additional support or help that you feel would help you to be more effective in this role?
- Would you like to continue in this role in the future? Why or why not?
- What makes someone a member of this class?
- How do other students in the classroom understand your role as a peer support?

Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009); www.brookespublishing.com/carter
Reflection Questions For Educators and Staff

- What has been your overall reaction to implementing peer support strategies?
- How would you describe the experiences of students who are participating in these arrangements?
- How effective have peers been at providing academic support to their classmates with severe disabilities? Social support?
- Are there strategies that peers still need to learn that would make them more effective at supporting their classmates?
- What role have peers played in contributing to an inclusive classroom or school?
- What concerns do you have about implementing peer support arrangements?
- What sort of assistance would be most helpful for you?
- In your opinion, what have been the benefits of peer support arrangements to students with disabilities? To the peers participating in the peer support initiatives? To school staff?
- What aspects of inclusion have been most challenging for you?
- Do you have specific concerns about some aspect of peer support arrangements?
- Will you continue to use peer support arrangements in this classroom in the future? How about in other classrooms?

Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009); www.brookespublishing.com/carter

Peer Network Strategies

An individualized social group established around a student with a disability that:

- Meets weekly to talk, participate in a shared activity, and discuss interactions occurring outside of the group
- Helps the student become more involved in everyday school life and be more connected to other school activities
- Receives regular feedback and guidance from an adult facilitator

Do Peer Networks Work?

Peer Partner Programs

Group-based, formal initiatives aimed at promoting the social and school participation of students with disabilities:
- Generating interest and support from administrators and other school staff
- Recruiting and selecting peers without disabilities
- Training students on their roles and responsibilities
- Supporting students as they interact and work with one another daily
- Sustaining and expanding the program over time


A Few Conclusions…

- **Relationships** matter!!!
- **Relationships and rigor** require intentionality
- **How** matters as much as **where**
- **Good support strategies should be good for everyone**
- Doing things **differently** does not always require more resources
- Support strategies should work and be doable

Where Can You Learn More?


http://inclusiveeducationpresources.com/peer-mentoring/

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