



Peers as Teachers

Letter from the Editor

You can learn anything from the Internet. If you aren't sure how to do, just Google it. I bet that YouTube has video about that.

These are common phrases that I hear no matter where I am traveling; from the smallest village to the Lower 48. It seems as though there is no shortage of ways that electronics can help us learn. Want to become a gourmet chef? Watch a video. How about learning how to ride a bike? Yup, there are videos for that too. What about learning how to play a board game? You can Google the steps to that in less than 3 seconds. But, what are all of these things missing? They are missing the human element. Yes, I can learn to cook online, but it is much more fun to learn how to cook by watching and listening to my Grampy. I can learn how to ride a bike online, but I am almost positive that the computer won't catch me as easily as my dad can. And, that board game? Not a lot of fun without a friend or two. Adding in the human element not only makes things more fun, but it also makes it more memorable and easier to learn.

For students with special needs, having a peer (or peers) help you learn a new skill can make it more meaningful and more fun. Students who are non-verbal want to interact with their peers, students who have physical challenges want to be part of the race, and students who have trouble reading want to be the leader once in a while. There are all sorts of ways to integrate peers as teachers throughout the school day. And, it isn't just the student with special needs who is benefitting, the peers benefit as well. When my cousin was alive, he had significant multiple disabilities. His classmates learned how to read by reading aloud to him in kindergarten. He did not judge them on how well (or not) they read, and he was able to hear

the story and feel them sitting right next to him throughout the day. He felt like a member of the class and his peers could stumble through those early readers without lots of corrections. This month, our specialists want to share their ideas on how to use peers as teachers in your school.

[Jennifer Schroeder](#)

SESA Multiple Disability and Deafblind Specialist

A Sped Teacher's Story

Ben Griese, SPED Teacher

Our special education team has evolved to educate and support the full spectrum of grades on their goal by using students as teachers. One student is working on improving his reading and language skills. So, he goes in and teaches art to general ed kindergarten. Sometimes that can be overwhelming, so he has started mentoring younger students in the elementary classroom by reading stories and conversing with them. Many times I find students that only deal with teachers are dependent on



the adult interaction and it hinders their social growth. Students with a sense of purpose, such as reading to younger kids, find pride in the work they are doing and improve their own skills and behavior. Our school has become a very inclusive setting because our students and parents are willing to discuss disabilities openly. This breaks down the walls and creates an open, honest conversation where kids can learn and understand things that are very foreign to them. Another student is directly involved in teaching sign language to the younger grades. The elementary students are so excited to communicate in sign to their hearing and deaf peers using sign. Not only has this helped develop the deaf student's knowledge of sign, but also created access and language immersion to help develop and refine their skills. Creating this culture of acceptance and inclusion was a monumental task, but after two years, the program leads itself. Students feel a sense of community and responsibility.

Peer-Mediated Instruction For Children With Multiple Disabilities

by Crystal Zook, SESA MD Specialist

There are many advantages to using peer-mediated instruction across many different classrooms. The most obvious and advantageous being that there are usually plenty of peers around in which to choose from. Even the smallest of villages have a few children of the same age group that can be used to facilitate this learning technique. There should be expectations for learning, clear and precise instructions, close monitoring, and explicit description of relationship between lessons. When applying these characteristics, peer mediated instruction has proven to be a successful intervention in special education, general education, and inclusion classrooms.

Other advantages include: increasing a student with special needs' social ties in a classroom or school, students can relate better to peers and are less intimidated by them, students are influenced through observational learning, and research includes all types of learners – from students with a specific learning disability to behavior or attention disorders. In fact, it is an established best practice for students with autism.

Procedures for peers of significantly impacted students:

1. Choose appropriate peer (based on language skills, social skills, classroom behavior, and school attendance).
2. Properly coach or train the peer before the relationship begins. This should include **how** to do the instruction as well as informing the student **why** the intervention is important.
3. Practice with the peer. This may include role playing or modeling.
4. Give resources to the peer which may include visual aids, training videos, etc.
5. Ensure the student and peer understand the relationship is reciprocal. A student with multiple disabilities should also be able to contribute, even if it is a small social skill or behavior.
6. Finally, once a relationship with the peer and student begins, provide on-going feedback, paying close attention during intervention/instruction time.

Here are some peer-mediated instruction strategies for which you can find online learning modules:

- [PMII – Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention](#)
- [PALS - Peer Assisted Learning Strategies \(Grades K-1\)](#)
- [PALS - Peer Assisted Learning Strategies \(Grades 2-6\)](#)
- [PALS - Peer Assisted Learning Strategies \(High School\)](#)
- [An Online Brief on Peer-Assisted Interventions](#)



Learning how to interact with others and play with your toys (without throwing them!) is more fun with a friend or two.

Social Skills Groups: Students Teaching Students

by Nicole R. Taylor, SESA ED Specialist

Everyone has probably experienced at least one social situation where they either handled it poorly or were not sure what path they should take. For students, the same situation can occur, and for some it occurs often. For those students who regularly experience difficulty in social situations, social skills groups can help.

How can we help students develop social competence -- the ability to read emotions, cooperate, make friends, and negotiate conflicts?

Students learn from their peers and by watching adults. However, there is nothing quite like practice. Thus, they benefit most when we create environments that are safe for these skills to develop.

What makes social skills group different from collaborative grouping or peer-based hangout?

Social skills groups are different because they are supervised, structured, small group meetings. They are facilitated by the teacher and the goal is to help them gain skills in social interaction. These groups are data driven and designed to assist students in handling the challenges of social situations while having positive and fun social experiences with peers.

How can teachers create these first-hand experiences?

Although all social groups vary in content and method, they all share key components and common topics:

Components of Social Skills Groups

- Strategic Small Grouping (3-5 Students)
- Conducted Frequently and Systematically
- Teacher Facilitated
- Introduce One Skill At A Time
- Tell Social Stories
- Demonstrations (Video)
- Opportunity for Student Practice
- Role Playing
- Questions and Answers
- Sum Up and Review

Common Topics for Social Skills Groups (should be adapted for age of students)

- Emotion Recognition and Management
- Listening
- Social Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Sharing Materials
- Giving and Accepting Compliments
- Conversational Skills: Topic Maintenance and Responding Appropriately
- Having Empathy
- Making and Keeping Friends
- Problem Solving

References: Collet-Klingenberg, L. (2009). Steps for implementation: Social skills groups. Madison, WI: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

Peers as Teachers for Students with Visual Impairments

by Angelique Black, SESA VI Specialist

Social integration begins very early in a child's life. Children with vision begin looking at their caregiver's face as they talk, laugh, sing, etc. 85% of social understanding and behaviors develop through vision. Children with visual impairments are often unable to do this, missing out on their first chances of developing important social skills. These children miss out on almost all typical social cues. Because they are unable to develop these skills early on, they typically only involve themselves in solitary play.

When a child enters school it can be difficult because classrooms can be noisy places full of activities that students with visual impairments may not understand. Reduced vision can make it challenging to acquire accurate information about their social environment or the context of activities. Not being able to observe physical gestures or facial expressions can also be problematic.

This is where peers as teachers comes in. Children with visual impairments don't need help in most areas (we are working towards independence after all!) but developing social skills is one area that they do need instruction. Students modeling social behaviors is a great place to start and teachers can definitely help get the ball rolling

- **Encourage other children to be positive role models:** Children with vision can model acceptable behaviors such as sharing, taking turns, following directions and engaging in back-and-forth communication.
- **Role play:** As a class, practice different scenarios with all the students and talk about how they could respond in certain situations. Then allow the students the opportunity to try out different strategies by role playing.
- **Develop social skills groups:** These small groups can help students work on social skills with their peers. In smaller groups, peers can be more open in sharing personal aspects of appropriate social skills.

These activities can be modified for any age. And the last thing, encourage peers to interact not only in the classroom with students that have a visual impairment, but in the halls, cafeteria and recess. The more interaction, the more children with visual impairments will grow and learn about this very important skill.



Playing an iPad game or looking at a BrainPop video is more fun when you can do it with a classmate.

The Power of Peers!

Aimee Smith, AARC Program Coordinator

Peers can be a very powerful tool in teaching students with exceptional needs, and you end up teaching the peer as well! Here are 3 ideas of how you can use peers to teach skills in the school setting at all grade levels:

Group Work: When you have group work activities, explicitly teach group work skills, assign roles, and have a student help you model what to do. Review the group work each time you have group work until all students are following the model. You may need to have a peer who is strong in those skills and gets along with your student(s) with additional needs to provide more support if they are struggling to manage the group tasks.

Goal Buddies: Work with students on goal setting and develop a “buddy” system. Have them work together to monitor their progress on their goals and work towards self-monitoring. Sometimes it's easier for our students to see others' behavior, but not their own. Make sure to meet with students to model the progress tracking and build a climate that fosters a feeling of safety, progress, and encouragement.

Inclusive Peer Social Leaders: Train a group of peers in how to communicate with peers that may struggle with communication or social skills and how to join in during lunch, recess, and other unstructured times. Meet with this group regularly and ask them about their experiences and struggles. Give them tools on how to approach difficult situations, such as how to guide a peer to talking about other students' interests, how to set boundaries and talk about socially expected and unexpected behavior when it happens, how to approach someone who may seem awkward in their behaviors, and when to seek help from an adult.

The main points in all of these situations are to 1) **explicitly teach**, 2) **model or role play**, and 3) **regularly follow up or review to reinforce instruction**. Visuals are great tools for nonverbal reminders and remember to adjust your teaching to be developmentally appropriate for the students you teach, both in general and special education. What you teach at high school in each of these scenarios, and how you teach it, will vary greatly from middle or elementary school.

Making a Master

by Kelsey Koenigs, SESA DHOH Specialist

“Peers as teachers” is often a recommendation designed to have exemplar peers model language, whether it is spoken language, written language, or signed language to my kiddos. This is structured by having identical copies of an activity and selecting a peer who knows the goals and objectives to model the expectation to the student that is learning. This not only supports the purpose of the lesson but often acts as behavior and socioemotional modeling as well.

With that being said, what I consider to be the most effective use of peer modeling is actually when my students get to be the model, master, and teacher. So often we look to peers to lead while our students follow, but the pinnacle of success in my book is when my student can tap into their own self-knowledge, social skills, and confidence to run the show. When a student is able to teach another student, it solidifies their own comprehension of the topic. In addition to that, the student becomes empowered by sharing about their identity and the other students tend to rally around that. This can help diminish the potential feeling of shame a student might feel in reference to their hearing device, their hearing loss in general, their use of an interpreter, etc. Fostering that acceptance of differences at a young age is critical and most effective when taught by the student, themselves, directly.

Suggested Topics for DHH Students to Demonstrate Mastery as Teachers

1. Teach peers about their hearing loss
 - Show peers how to get their attention/ characteristics of a deaf friendly environment
 - Demonstrate communication repair strategies for peers
2. Teach peers about their assistive listening device/s
 - Show peers how to complete the Listening Check with Ling 6/7
 - Create a morning routine for the Daily Listening Check where peers buddy-up with this student to complete the Ling 6/7 Sound Check.
 - Let students become familiar with FM microphone
3. Weekly ASL Club
 - Lead voice-off language-based games and activities with peers
4. Sign Time: Bring a Friend
 - Model voice-off lesson expectation to a friend (focus more on specifics such as facial expressions, hands shape, location, movement, etc.)



Learning how to communicate is more meaningful if your classmates are learning with you.

Building Skills and Strengthening Classroom Communities with Peer Mediated Intervention and Instruction by Brian Babcock, SESA AI Specialist

As a special education teacher, I had a tendency to relate my instructional practices to personal experiences. Old habits can be difficult to kick.

While learning to fish on my local rivers, I scanned a lot of websites, watched a number of videos, and listened to lectures on the basics. With a foundational understanding of the general concepts, I made my way to the river. **Tangled lines. Snagged tackle. Wet feet. No fish.**



It wasn't until I found a group of seasoned fishermen, with an invested interest in helping me, that I began to really learn.

Peer Mediated Intervention and Instruction (PMII) is an evidenced-based practice that benefits students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their peers. Implemented well, PMII benefits all participants in meaningful ways. Students with ASD learn the skill of initiating interactions and responding to others through real-time, organic opportunities. Peers learn awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of those students who are different from them. With careful planning and oversight, peers can be a highly motivating and effective partner in building new skills and inclusive communities.

What skills should I target?

Like all successful interventions, PMII begins with identifying a meaningful goal and an established baseline. Understanding what skills your students possess and preparing next steps for instruction are critical steps in goal development. A body of evidence exists which supports the use of PMII to teach social, communication, joint attention, school readiness, play and academic skills.

- Is your preschool student engaging in object substitution, a form of symbolic play that typically develops between ages two and three (i.e. the use of a banana as a telephone or a wooden spoon that's a magic wand)?

- Group projects and presentations are not uncommon in high school. Yet, some students miss the opportunity to participate because identifying a role for them can be challenging.
- Could it be more effective for a peer to remind your student with a visual cue to raise his hand if he has a question vs. taking time from instruction to provide a reminder?

Planning and Implementation:

1. Identify times when social interactions are likely to naturally occur.
2. Be considerate of the times in the day when your student has a history of success.
3. Identify, recruit, and train peers:
 - Receive parent/guardian consent for identified peers.
 - Plan on peer involvement to last 3-4 months.
 - Guide peers in recognizing and appreciating differences. Younger children may require close supervision and guidance during the initial stages of implementation.
 - Equip peers with visual aids and/or scripts to accompany prompts and redirections.
 - Role play likely scenarios so that peers are better prepared.
 - Build a schedule for daily interventions (shoot for a minimum of 15 minutes/day).
 - Develop a system for collecting data. Teach peers to use it!



While supporting younger peers with the real-time modeling may be necessary initially, develop a plan to fade the intensity and frequency of your direct interventions. After all, the goal is for peer-lead intervention and instruction. Schedule weekly meetings with student peers to answer questions, problem solve, and fine tune.

Having taught me where to stand in the water and how to cast a line, my peers now regard me as less of a liability on the river. I seldom scare away fish, and my negative impact on the success rate of others has diminished. I haven't fallen in the river in years. . .okay, months. I have become more confident. When I do misstep, the social impact is softened by the relationships that were forged in the teaching and learning process.

Consider Peer Mediated Intervention and Instruction. Utilizing peers as teachers is a natural way to increase skills while creating a strong community in your classroom.

Reference:

[Autism Focused Intervention Resource & Modules](#)

SESA Library Resources:

Peer Play and The Autism Spectrum: The Art Of Guiding Children's Socialization And Imagination: Integrated Play Groups Field Manual by Pamela J. Wolfberg

Call Number: 618.928 Wolfber | **ISBN:** 193128217X

Pub. Info: Shawnee Mission, Kan. : Autism Asperger Pub. Co., c2003.

Peer Buddy Programs for Successful Secondary School Inclusion by Carolyn Hughes

Call Number: 371.4047 Hughes | **ISBN:** 1557669805

Pub. Info: Baltimore, Md. : P.H. Brookes Pub. Co., c2008.

Behavior Specific Praise and Reach Statements as Way to Use Peers as Teachers by Lyon Johnson, SESA ED Specialist

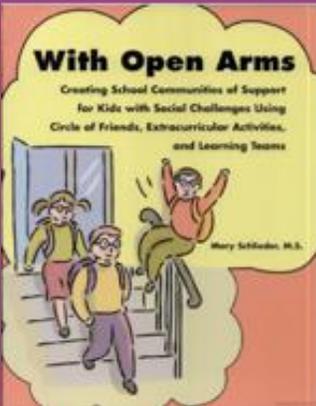
Social, emotional, and behavioral skills can be taught directly (e.g., social skills groups), but can also be woven across the entire curriculum and school day using peers as teachers through positive behaviors they model on a daily basis. Peers demonstrating pro-social behaviors become the teachers when educators combine behavior specific praise (BSP) and reach statements as part of a comprehensive and responsive positive behavior acknowledgement system. BSP is a very basic requirement to effectively change the behavior of a non-responding student. It is a verbal statement that praises and describes an appropriate and desired behavior (Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000). For example, the teacher might say, "I like the way John is working quietly at his desk with his eyes on the speaker." BSP lets students know what they need to do in order to receive praise. It also instructs the student, and those within earshot, how to behave in similar situations, settings, or routines in the future. Reach statements instruct non-responding student(s) on the required behavior within the naturally occurring setting, situation, and routine via peer modeling and then specific instruction. It teaches the rules for how students or groups acquire a teacher's Behavior Specific Praise (BSP) and therefore, teacher attention. The first step for using reach statements is the teacher awards BSP to a narrowing area of students around the non-responding student. BSP is delivered first to the class, then students in a grouping next to the non-responding student, followed by students directly next to the non-responding student. For example, if a non-responding student fails to comply with a behavioral expectation, the teacher directly instructs the noncompliant student. That is, in the rule for the desired behavior and the result of that behavior. For example, the teacher might say, "Johnny, I can't wait to tell you what a great job you are doing as soon as you _____ (e.g., stay in your personal space with hands to yourself; make respectful requests and are supportive to your fellow classmates; take pencil to paper and start your writing assignment, etc.)." This type of statement should be repeated and rephrased until the noncompliant becomes compliant. If noncompliance is thought to be related to an actual social skill deficit, as opposed to a performance deficit, the educator could provide direct instruction to remediate through a social skills group (see SESA Newsletter Article by Nicole Taylor for more information) or through individualized instruction.

References:

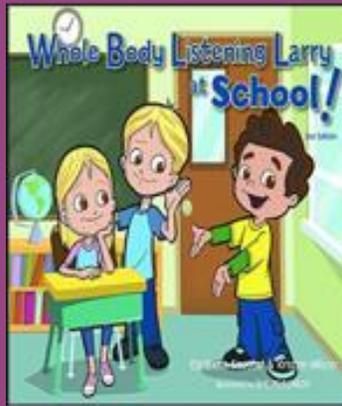
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- Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2007). *Applied behavior analysis*.
- Myers, D. M., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers' use of praise with a response-to-intervention approach. *Education and treatment of children*, 34(1), 35-59
- Sutherland, K. S., Wehby, J. H., & Copeland, S. R. (2000). Effect of varying rates of behavior-specific praise on the on-task behavior of students with EBD. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8(1), 2-8.

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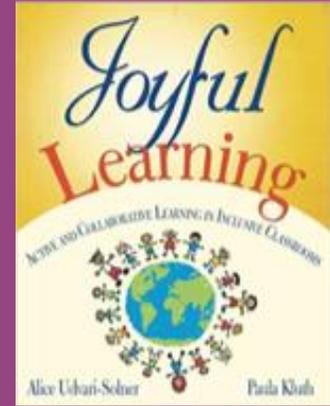
Recommended Resources



With Open Arms: Creating School Communities of Support for Kids with Social Challenges Using Circle of Friends, Extracurricular Activities, and Learning Teams
by Mary Schlieder.
Autism Asperger Pub Co.,
2007.



Whole Body Listening Larry At School!
by Kristen Wilson &
Elizabeth Sautter;
illustrated by Eric
Hutchison.
Think Social Publishing,
c2011



Joyful Learning: Active and Collaborative Learning in Inclusive Classrooms
by Alice Udvari-Solner,
Paula Kluth. Corwin Press,
c2008.

For a complete list of recommended resources: [Click here](#)

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