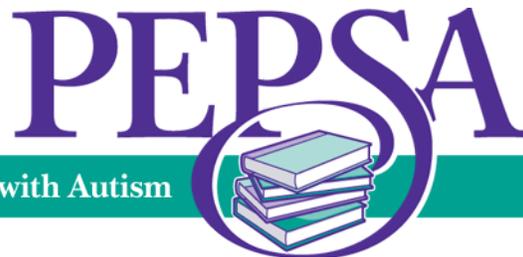




Florida Department of Education



Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism

PEPSA 2009-2010

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Developing and Facilitating Social Interactions in a Young Student with Autism and His Peers with the combined use of Peer Empathy Training and the Support of a Capable Language Model

The purpose of this project was to develop and facilitate social interactions between my student with high functioning autism and his peers during shared time(s) within the school day. The structure of service delivery for students in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program at our school provides for students with disabilities to spend time with their non-disabled peers, daily. This project was designed to make the shared time functional and meaningful for the student with ASD and his peers by creating a safe environment that would give both the focus student and his peers the tools and support to facilitate effective social interactions.

The focus student's daily schedule was reviewed for times that would provide the most natural opportunities for supported social interactions. Special area and recess were identified as two such times. The focus student and his peers were observed during the target times to identify existing interactions, potential opportunities for interactions and the 'language scripts' that would be appropriate for each setting. A Peer Empathy Training was conducted with the non-disabled homeroom peers highlighting the student's abilities and preferences. The training was enhanced by incorporating role playing and pictorial and video representations of the focus student. The video featured him during large group and one-on-one instructional times. My instructional assistant was trained in strategies to facilitate and support social interactions.

The peers and teacher were very receptive to the training and wanted to know more. The presence of an adult really seemed to make the students feel safe in approaching the focus student and trying to interact with him. With the encouragement and support of the instructional assistant, the students increased their attempts to interact with the focus child even though he was not always receptive.

The results of the project emphasize the need for peer training and 'supported' opportunities to practice interactions with students with disabilities as soon as possible. The results also indicate a need for intense, deliberate social skills training and support in the classroom.