#

# Article Critiques

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# TLT 491-14: Early Childhood Education

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**Article Citations**

Robertson, J., Green, K., Apler, S., Schloss, P. & Kohler, F. (2003). Using a peer-mediated interventions to facilitate children’s participation in inclusive childcare activities. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *26(2)*, 182-197.

**Article Description**

Robertson *et al.* (2003) discussed the lack of research supporting the use of peer mediations for effective inclusion and educational scaffolding of students with special needs in the preschool environment. The team provided readers with a moderately well-designed study which upheld the notion of the positive impact of peer intervention for children with developmental delays. The study looked at two preschool children with special needs assisted by peer trainers specifically taught to use positive supports to encourage the target students to stay on task, use interactive play and demonstrate appropriate behaviors during play. Researchers monitored the behaviors using momentary time sampling and checklists to measure changes in the behavioral criterion for peer mediation efficacy. Results showed extreme improvements from baseline after peer interventions on all measured items with increases meeting or approaching 100% desired criteria for interactive play and on-task and appropriate behaviors.

**Strengths/Weaknesses**

Although Roberston’s group demonstrated desirable results, the study design lacked important elements of strong, convincing research. The sample size, a mere two students and only two peer trainers (one per student), was extremely underwhelming. The team should have used more students or taken data on students without the interventions as well to increase the sample size. Furthermore, even the authors suggested that both of the target students may already been capable of achieving 100% desired responses on the measured criteria, but were simply motivated by the peer trainers. Possibly, the students were simply led stay on task and demonstrate the selected actions due to the additional attention. Moreover, the target students were already performing better than chance on the target behaviors during baseline measurements, most behaviors ranging from 60-80% criteria. The improvement to 95-100% on all tasks sounds misleadingly more drastic than the data suggest, especially when intervals including 95% and 100% are noted in the reported baseline data. Although mean data is lower, these behaviors already were exhibited at occasional high rates. In future studies, the team must focus on desirable, low-occurring behaviors rather than these already frequently occurring actions.

Despite clear downfalls, Richardson and colleagues had some highpoints in their study design and implementation as well. First, peer trainers were specifically taught how to mediate appropriate interventions with the target students. This suggests consistency in the interventions and proper control of the experimental procedures. Second, the behaviors monitored occurred during in circle activity time. This perfectly natural and highly educational setting provided the team with accurate inventories of the behaviors in the desired environment under optimal learning conditions. Finally, the researchers operationally defined their variables and used a variety of measurement techniques. This allowed for thorough investigation where different elements of the data were recorded and more data accounted for over time.

Aside from both strengths and weaknesses in design, the study was notably powerful when considered in the context of implementation. The researchers used proper techniques and thorough descriptions of how to implement peer mediations. The team had teachers choose appropriate students as targets for intervention and optimal students to work as the mediators. Moreover, the researchers spent time teaching the peer trainers how to facilitate the target students’ learning. These procedures for implementation were exemplary and the results of the study showed subsequent efficacy. Clearly, this study provided the proper framework for peer intervention implementation in the preschool environment.

**Conclusion**

Richardson *et al.* (2003) used methods that seem rooted in a variety of teaching methods but seemed to focus most on age appropriate learning. Using peer mediators added the element of age appropriate teaching and scaffolding to learning. Peers are the epitome of age appropriateness and provide modeling of proper social skills and appropriate actions without the awkwardness of direct instruction of these behaviors. In young children, peer mediation for social-type learning such as interactive play and on task behavior seems the most age appropriate method. These children would learn through play at home, so by using play or social based methods for learning in school the child can learn in the most natural ways possible for his or her age level.

The take home message from the article was to remember that although peer mediated learning is extremely effective, there are important considerations. Data must be collected to ensure the interventions work. All children involved must be carefully selected and taught how to be either the mediator and use proper techniques or how to respond to the mediation. Children can teach children, but teachers must teach *children* first. Children aren’t actually teachers for good reason and teaching the children how to be mediators is critical and crucial to proper peer-based interventions.

**Article Citation**

Huera, M. & Jackson, M. (2010). Connecting literacy and science to increase achievement for English language learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *38*, 205-211.

**Article Description**

Huera and Jackson (2010) provided an easy framework for encouraging English language learners (ELL) to learn through incorporation of other content areas, specifically. The pair did not collect data in a empirical fashion, but rather discussed how to use science to teach ELL to read, write and speak. They suggested that by finding a subject seemingly unrelated to language learning, ELL are motivated to learn new words to describe their learning. The team used science notebooks, inquiry-based learning, discussion and picture drawing with labels to encourage students to use language. Depending on their levels of English, students combined both their native languages and English to discuss the science lessons Students displayed internal motivation to learn new English vocabulary by looking for words to describe their observation and questions about science. The integration of language learning in science seemed extremely effective and helpful for teaching language to young students and the anecdotal data presented by the authors supported this notion.

**Strengths/Weaknesses**

Although the content in Huera and Jackson’s (2010) paper was immensely helpful and intuitive, the paper's flaws were vast. The paper was presented in the style of a research-based, empirical study; however, no authentic data or methods were used to display true efficacy of the practices. The paper anecdotally accounted the teachers’ experiences with using science to include and facilitate ELL in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Although the stories seemed to support the efficacy of enlacing language learning in other content areas, there was no baseline data or any data using operationally defined variables. By collecting reportable data, the researchers could have easily altered their anecdotal results into a true empirical product.

Conversely, Huera and Jackson gave future teachers easy instructions and ideas for how to bring science and English language learning together. The research practice gap was altered into a mere tiptoe by their clear, detailed instructions for implementation and variety of ideas for execution. The authors showed samples of student work when using their strategy and offered specific ideas for how to instruct different level ELL and what interventions would work best for those students. Specifically, the authors gave examples of students at different speaking, listening, reading and writing levels and showed what parts of science activities the students could complete in either English or their native language for optimal educational development. The group truly made implementation of mixing English language learning with science or any content area simple for any teacher.

**Conclusion**

Huera and Jackson (2010) found a clear method for making ELL want to learn English for internally-motivating reasons which were meaningful to each student. Students were excited about different areas of learning and by incorporating English language into a variety of activities and content areas all students were bound to find an area which motivated them to increase English language knowledge. This approach closely related to the methods of Montessori and Rossi, which focus on child-centered, play-based learning. The strategies allow students to find self-motivating activities and reasons to learn. Similarly, moving English language learning into science or other content areas allows young children to find motivation to learn language and incorporated it as a life tool. Children must want to learn to have the most effective kind of learning, and this article gave an effective strategy to help more students find the motivation and internal drive to learn English while learning other content.