Background

- Individuals with ASD are characterized by deficits in social interaction and communication.

- As students enter middle and high school, social demands increase and as these deficits become more pronounced and can lead to isolation and peer rejection.

- Peer-mediated intervention (PMI) is an effective approach to target a range of skills. PMI is well suited for naturalistic and inclusive settings.

- PMI can alleviate demands on staff and utilization of similar aged peers may have a collateral effect of forming social connections.

- This review expands on two systematic reviews which sought to identify what makes PMI an effective intervention for individuals with ASD (Chan et al., 2009 and Watkins et al., 2015).

- This review examined the specific components of peer training and general descriptive variables: a) social interaction targets, b) components of intervention, c) components of peer training, d) effectiveness of interventions used in educational middle and high school settings, e) primary outcomes, f) participant and peer demographics, g) generalization, and h) social validity.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the methodological quality of the studies reviewed as measured by CEC quality indicators?

2. Does PMI aimed specifically at social communication skills for secondary students with ASD meet the CEC criteria for an evidence-based practice?

3. Are the specific training components implemented for peers? Is treatment fidelity data collected on peer behaviors?

4. What are the characteristics of the PMI studies regarding participant demographics, tiers of intervention agents, intervention components (i.e., direct instruction for focus student and setting), and outcomes, including generalization and social validity.

METHODS

Initial Procedures

- We defined PMI as an intervention in which typically developing peers support or mentor similar-aged students with autism and act as the intervention agent.

- Analysis of outcome measures was conducted.

Search Procedures

- Data were obtained from PMI studies in which the intervention agent was a peer or a child with an age range of 12-17 years old.

- The study was published in English.

Analysis Procedures

- Evaluation of the quality of the research studies using the CEC standards.

- Coding of descriptive variables of the study.

- Peer training components.

- Evaluation of the results to be either a, means no effect, or negative effect.

- Study selection for the figure.

RESULTS

Key Take-Aways

- To reduce adult presence during peer implementation, the authors suggest researchers use feedback prior to PMI observations to help prompt peers to implement the strategies learned in training sessions.

- The review does not recommend complete removal of facilitators. However, the more independent the peer partners are, the better we can gauge the effectiveness of peers as intervention agents.

- Tiers of intervention agents should continue to be explored. The more knowledge gained on the training of teachers to train peers will help to reduce the need for researcher involvement.

- Teachers and school staff should continuously monitor the peer’s implementation of the training.

- According to current CEC standards, PMI is a potentially research-based intervention for social communicative outcomes for adolescents with ASD.