

ERIK W. CARTER, PH.D.: Okay. Welcome to session 5, the last segment of this web-based professional development series focused on promoting inclusion and learning in relationships for students with complex needs. In this final session, I'm going to continue the presentation on peer support arrangements as an evidence-based approach for supporting academic and social participation within inclusive classrooms. Now, we left off last time having addressed the first three steps, planning for meaningful participation in inclusive settings, selecting peers to provide support, and equipping students for their roles within these interventions. Let's now turn to the final two. So, after the orientation sessions, students are ready to begin working with one another in the classroom. Now, this may require moving students so they are sitting in close proximity to one another and you also want to decide as a team the answer to a number of different questions. For example, how will the team communicate about future lessons? Who will adapt materials? Who's going to give feedback to the peer supports and their partners as they work together? Who will model peer support strategies and who will collect data on the students IEP goal project -- progress, which is really a great role for paraprofessionals? And finally, what's the plan for dealing with any inappropriate behavior of either the peer supports or of the students with disabilities? Now, as students work together, they're likely to exchange a wide range of supports. I want you to watch the next few slides with examples of peer supports in action.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

WOMAN: That's a cool one. Cool.

MAN: Uh-hmm.

WOMAN: Good.

WOMAN: Think small.

WOMAN: Yeah. Yeah, she did that. That's what we say.

WOMAN: Is that small?

MAN: Okay.

WOMAN: Now. That definitely. That was awesome.

MAN: Okay.

WOMAN: Uh-hmm. Do you like this or this?

MAN: No, it didn't go away.

WOMAN: It didn't go away?

[INDISTINCT CHATTER]

WOMAN: That is wrong.

WOMAN: It is. Finding it would just be so hard.

WOMAN: What's wrong -- what's wrong with the [inaudible] right there?

WOMAN: Yeah, that have to be crooked. Uh-hmm.

MAN: Okay.

WOMAN: All right. Put it where you want it.

MAN: Oh, that's [inaudible]

WOMAN: Yeah, you can do that.

WOMAN: All right.

MAN: Okay. Okay.

WOMAN: G-R...

MAN: Oh.

WOMAN: O-U...

WOMAN: Yeah. One different thing?

MAN: Maybe like a heart or something?

WOMAN: You can do that. It's all right.

MAN: Like a heart, like this.

MAN: Do you [inaudible]

WOMAN: No.

MAN: Let's see. Do you hangout with family?

WOMAN: No.

MAN: You don't hangout with family?

WOMAN: Only books.

MAN: Only books?

WOMAN: Yeah.

MAN: Yeah?

[INDISTINCT CHATTER]

WOMAN: And song, okay. Yeah.

[INDISTINCT CHATTER]

WOMAN: And now we go to Emily's [inaudible] Emily?

WOMAN: Thanks, Trisha.

[VIDEO ENDS]

ERIK W. CARTER PH.D.: As students work together, paraprofessionals and other school staff, monitor how they're doing. For example, they might observe whether students sustain on task, whether they have needed materials, they're engaging in appropriate interactions or supporting one another in effective ways. So, on your screen, I've included an example of a checklist that a paraprofessional might use to focus those observations. This is a checklist that could be readily adapted to match the specific goals of any particular peer support arrangement that you're working with. The other important role for paraprofessionals really relates to the use of facilitation strategies. So, staff in the classroom should be very proactive about encouraging and reinforcing interaction and collaborative work as students with and without complex needs to work together. In other words, paraprofessionals really should be looking for natural opportunities to make connections among students both socially and academically. And you can do these lots of different ways. For example, paraprofessionals might model ways for peers to initiate, maintain, and extend conversations. They could demonstrate how to ask questions or converse to someone who uses an augmentative or alternative communication device. They might highlight shared interests and strengths and experiences or other things that students have in common. They could explicitly teach or periodically prompt important social interaction skills like greeting a classmate or requesting help or even refusing support. And they could redirect questions and comments that come from them, to peers and the student with disabilities and instead students -- encouraging students to ask questions of one another. Other facilitation strategies might include interpreting the communicative attempt -- intent of particular behaviors as well as suggesting appropriate responses or highlighting student strengths and contributions to small group and other projects. It might include assigning classroom responsibilities that require frequent interaction like small group assignments or cooperative projects or it might involve making sure students are sitting close to one another and in proximity or asking specific peers to provide particular supports that a student might need. And finally, it's absolutely essential that you regularly reflect on the progress students are making as they work with one another and the degree to which students are really benefiting from participation in these arrangements. Although peer support arrangements had been found effective in the research literature, it's essential that you show they're working well with your students in your classrooms in your school. So, what are some of the avenues to which you might collect data on the processes and outcomes associated with these interventions? Well, you know, as Yogi Bear said, you can observe a lot by watching. And so paraprofessionals and other school staff can collect data on any number of outcome such as of a nature of students interactions whether it's appropriate and reciprocal and of high quality, the types of conversational skills used by students such as the frequency of academic and social-related initiations or

responses. Perhaps focusing on the modes of communication used by students such as whether they use their communication device or manual signs. Perhaps you'd collect data on the persons involved in interactions, whether they're happening with peer supports or with other classmates or other adults in the classroom. You might look at the percentage of time during which students are engaged academically or working on activities that are aligned with the general curriculum or perhaps you'd look at the percentage of time students spend in different instructional formats such as small groups or working one-to-one with an adult or a peer. You might turn to other indicators as well. And for example, rating scales could be completed before and after establishing peer support interventions to capture any changes that may be really difficult to document in direct observation. For example, you might use an assessment of social skills or adapt to behavior or assessments of support needs, those are all possibilities. Informal social network assessments can also be used to document whether students are developing new relationships and developing new affiliations among their peers with and without disabilities during and beyond the school day. Academic assessments linked to the core - course content. That can also be drawn upon to determine the extent to which students are learning critical course content or you might look at progress on student's academic-related IEP goals in the classroom. Now, in addition to collecting data on student performance, I strongly encourage you to consider how key stakeholders review the goals and the procedures and the outcomes associated with the intervention. General educators, special educators, paraprofessionals, parents, and students with and without disabilities all have important perspectives on their experiences with these interventions. For example, with students with significant disabilities, you might ask them about the experiences they've had receiving peer support, the extent to which they enjoy working with and getting to know their peer partners. And maybe about their preferences with regard to continuing to receive such support in the future. I put on the screen some examples of questions you might ask in recognizing that you have to be very creative in trying to capture the perspectives of students who have very complex communication challenges. Now, students with disabilities who are part of peer support arrangements and other peer mediate groups like the peer partner project are likely to talk about the new peers they meet and the friendships they develop. Consider the experiences of this student as he reflects on the challenges of getting no schoolmates apart from involvement in a program like this.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

MAN: When you're not in the club, you can't figure out who are these people. We always go the halls and they were, like, wondering who in the world are these people. But when you get to being in a club, you got to understand what to like and what they like, what they don't like.

[VIDEO ENDS]

ERIK W. CARTER, PH.D.: Peer should also be asked about their experiences in this new role, about the lessons that they're learning, about the impact that they've noticed and their advice for making the intervention more effective and enjoyable. You maybe surprised at just how much students have to gain from serving in these roles. And so I've included some examples of questions you might ask of

participating peers. Now, listen to these three peers reflect on their own experiences and the lessons they've learned as a result of being part of natural supports projects in their respective schools.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

WOMAN: I've also found out that with working with students in Ms. Cataldi's class that the students with disabilities are more like the typical Fox Chapel student that I'll have in my classroom. So, it has helped me to learn that I -- other people need to realize that the students with disabilities can do just as much as we can and they can offer certain things that other students cannot. So, I think that it's been really important working with Ms. Cataldi that it's helped me learned that they aren't necessarily -- they might have setbacks but everyone has setbacks.

WOMAN: They used to be so shy in their little groups and now they walk down the hallways and everyone knows their name and everyone gives them a high-five and waves to them and they're all included now, so I'm really happy about that.

WOMAN: Now, that I have been working with Will, he will see me talking to my friends and then that makes him more likely to see them throughout the day and then he'll meet a bunch of other new people while he's talking to them and I feel that now that he's been working with me and he's socially just like grown and met a lot more people other than just peer helpers. He's meeting a bunch of new students and having a lot of good opportunities with them as well.

[VIDEO ENDS]

ERIK W. CARTER, PH.D.: General educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators, they'll all have important insights into the implementation requirements of peer supports within a particular classroom as well as the extent to which they feel well equipped to deliver the strategy with high fidelity, and the degree to which participating students are really engaged in and reaching intended goals. And of course they'll have their own recommendation for strengthening the quality and impact of these supports. For example, the principal of Bangor Area Middle School reflects here on finding the right starting points for peer supports at her particular school.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

WOMAN: Easiest way to start truly is with social activities. So we planned all those social activities so that students got to learn to meet each other, to have fun with each other, but then it was easier to learn with each other in the classroom. We started in the classrooms that we knew teachers were on board and excited and once they could see the spark in students, they started to talk to other teachers about the spark that they see, and that's how the project is continuing to grow.

[VIDEO ENDS]

ERIK W. CARTER, PH.D.: And finally, parents have the unique vantage point from which they can speak to changes in their child's excitement about going to school, about social connections taking place beyond a school day such as phone calls and e-mails and Facebooking with peers or other noticeable differences related to getting to know their schoolmates within these kinds of projects. Listen to this parent describe the impact peer-mediated supports have had on her child with a disability.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

WOMAN: The peer support program has really made a difference in my daughter, Sissy's life. It has changed the focus from disability to abilities. It has -- it just has changed so much in terms of attitudes and student involvement. She is all over the high school now. She -- you might find her in the art room or the lunch room or the TV studio and she talks about it when she gets home and she's really excited to meet new friends and to talk about them. And it's just been a wonderful addition to her school life.

[VIDEO ENDS]

ERIK W. CARTER, PH.D.: But the impact isn't just on students with disabilities. Parents of those peers without disabilities who were involved in providing support also speak about the personal growth in their children.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

WOMAN: I've seen some really big changes in him. He isn't very kind and compassionate person, so I haven't seen too much of a change in that, but it's been more that he's become such an advocate. He'll say to me, I came, you know, he was walking down the hallway and he potentially could see that something was going to, you know, go wrong with boys walking in front of him and it was, you know, the last skills child in front and he was mimicking a show that he'd watched on TV and he said he just -- he felt very protective, wanted to make sure that, you know, no bullying went on and I really feel like he's become, you know, such an advocate for the moral way of, you know, the children in the school, at the last skills children in the school.

[VIDEO ENDS]

ERIK W. CARTER, PH.D.: Let me close this discussion about evaluating outcomes with two quotes from our recent research studies examining the impact of peer support arrangements. One paraprofessional made the following comment. She said, "I always felt responsible, like I had to be there. And now I see I can walk away and that actually promotes interaction. I used to think people would think I wasn't doing my job if I wasn't right there, and I view that very differently now." We found that paraprofessionals may initially feel reluctant to shift into these new roles. So, assuring them that stating direct support is actually a desired aspect of their job can go a long way towards alleviating those concerns. And finally, one of the students with significant disabilities made this comment when asked about having peer supports. The student simply said, "It's fun hanging out with friends that you know. I don't like to sit with grown-ups all

the time." Peer support arrangements really are a promising approach for supporting student with complex needs, academically and socially within inclusive classrooms. I hope this session has helped you catch a glimpse for how peers might be actively engaged in supporting inclusion and learning in social connections in the classroom. And I wish you well as you explore implementing these evidence-based strategies in your own schools.