# Student Development Through Involvement: Benefits of Peer Support Arrangements

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**Abstract:** *Peer support arrangements are strategies implemented by schools to provide structured opportunities for students without disabilities to work alongside peers with disabilities, often intellectual and developmental disabilities. Although the benefits of this practice for students with disabilities is well documented, there is limited literature describing the impact of the experience on the peers without intellectual and developmental disabilities. To address this, a content analysis of reflection papers written by 24 high school students without intellectual and developmental disabilities was conducted to better understand the benefits of the peer support arrangements. Six themes to emerge from the reflections include: Emotional Benefits, Skill Development, Understanding Disability, Personal Reflection, Comfort with People with Disabilities, and Ongoing Commitment. Of particular interest is the theme Emotional Benefits, which featured student descriptions of how the mentorship experience increased attendance and school engagement. These findings are discussed and implications for practice and future research are provided.*

To meet the mandate of educational placements for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), schools seek strategies to provide successful inclusive educational opportunities. This may be particularly challenging when designing inclusive instructional programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), who are generally educated in a more restrictive environment than their peers with high-incidence disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). To support inclusive classroom and culture, schools may implement peer-support arrangements to provide students with opportunities to promote inclusion (Olson et al., 2015). Although the benefits of these arrangements for youth with IDD are well-documented in existing literature (e.g., Brock & Huber, 2017; Carter et al., 2016), limited research regarding the benefits for peers without disabilities has been conducted. As such, this study sought to explore benefits experienced by those students who provided supports to peers with IDD.

## Peer Support Arrangements

Peer support arrangements are a form of peer-mediated intervention, a broad term that describes situations in which students with disabilities (often IDD) are provided with supports that are delivered by peers (students without IDD) to increase skill development and inclusive education opportunities (Brock & Huber, 2017). Peer support arrangements differ from other peer-mediated approaches in that they (a) include an emphasis on providing social supports and engagement in a social experience, (b) allow for a support structure that may be influenced by the strengths and interests of each involved party, (c) generally involve a smaller number of students, (d) are usually focused on supporting students with low-incidence disabilities or students with more significant needs, and (e) focus on delivery in an inclusive environment (Carter et al., 2009).

Although many adult paraprofessionals, or paraeducators, support students with disabilities in the classroom, peer support arrangements deviate from this traditional service delivery model (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). Students providing the support receive training and guidance from school staff members to increase quality and integrity of the arrangements (Rossetti & Goessling, 2010). When using peer support arrangements, the role of the adult staff changes to a more indirect support role by providing guidance to the peers without disabilities (Brock & Carter, 2016). This shift provides alternative classroom support opportunities for students with IDD, who until this peer support experience may have been supported only by an adult paraprofessional to achieve academic and other individualized goals (Milley & Machalicek, 2012). Carter et al. (2009) described the unintended consequences of the overuse of one-on-one paraprofessionals to support students in the classroom. These unintended consequences include: (a) reduced interactions with peers, (b) stigmatization, (c) fewer interactions with certified teachers, and (d) development of unhealthy interdependent relationships between students and paraprofessionals.

## Benefits to Students with Disabilities

The benefits of peer support arrangements for students with disabilities is well-documented in existing literature. Carter et al. (2016) studied the impact of peer support arrangements for high school students with significant disabilities, including social benefits (e.g., increased interactions with a wider variety of peers, more significant progress in working towards social-related goals) and positive influence on classroom inclusion (e.g., increased opportunities to participate in the same classroom activities as nondisabled peers, heightened level of engagement, more time in the physical classroom).

Brock and Huber (2017) reviewed relevant literature on peer support arrangements and identified the practice as "evidence-based" for promoting social interactions. Peer support arrangements may also have social benefits for students who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices (Biggs et al., 2017). Although long-term impacts are unknown, Carter et al. (2016) found that peer support arrangements can expand the social network of a student with a significant disability by providing an opportunity for the development of friendships.

These social interactions may occur outside the designated time frame, both during and outside of school, and may exist for an extended duration (Asmus et al., 2017). Peer support arrangements may also be beneficial to support positive postschool outcomes for secondary students with disabilities (Scheef et al., 2018).

## Benefits to Students Without IDD Engaged in Peer Support Arrangements

Although the benefits to students with disabilities may be at the forefront of efforts to develop peer support arrangements, the benefits of peers without disabilities should also be considered. These kinds of experiences with peers are important for developing positive perceptions and experiences with people with disabilities; they are the future generation of co-workers, employers, and community members. The benefits to peers without IDD engaged in a peer support arrangement has not received nearly as much attention in the literature, with most studies being 15 or more years old (e.g., Copeland et al., 2004; Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Kamps et al., 1998). Carter et al. (2009) summarized this early body of literature by describing peer benefits. These peer benefits include: (a) personal growth, including a deeper self-understanding; (b) enhanced views regarding people with disabilities; (c) increased views of value of diversity; (d) development of advocacy skills; and (e) friendship.

Although exploring benefits for peers was not the primary focus, two more recent studies also described these benefits for peers. In one such study, Carter et al. (2011) interviewed six students who worked alongside a peer with IDD to measure social validity of research featuring peer support arrangements. Each student reported positive experiences and noted that they would recommend the opportunity to other students. In the interview, the six students identified personal benefits from the arrangement, including (a) additional opportunities to develop friendships, (b) better awareness of the contributions of students with disabilities, (c) increased understanding of disability, and (d) enhanced social skills. Through interviewing teachers who have implemented peer support arrangements, Leigers et al. (2017) found similar results. Additionally, they found that peers without disabilities felt a greater connection to their school community and had the opportunity to develop skills relevant to their desired profession.

Schaefer et al. (2016) conducted a review of literature to identify the extent to which peer-mediated interventions (including peer support arrangements) benefit the partner student without disabilities. After reviewing 53 studies, the authors concluded that "these studies suggest that the focus on the outcomes and perspectives of peers has been secondary to the outcomes of students with [IDD], with few studies targeting peers as the primary focus" (p. 352). To address this need, the authors called for additional research focused on peers without disabilities engaged in peer support arrangements. As such, the purpose of this qualitative content analysis study is to better understand how peer support arrangements benefit peers without

IDD. The following research question has been explored using qualitative methods: What are the perceived benefits to high school students who participate in peer support arrangements with students with IDD?

## Methods

To answer the research question, a qualitative study was conducted involving students without IDD who were enrolled in a credit-bearing course that included peer support arrangements.

### Research Design and Procedures

After the peer support experiences, all students enrolled in the course wrote a reflection paper at the end of the semester to fulfill a course requirement. Written data sources are beneficial to researchers in that they accurately represent the actual language of the participants and represent work that the participants have taken the time to thoughtfully create (Creswell, 2014). Students were provided with a list of questions by the special education teacher to guide their reflection paper. These questions included:

- What did you learn in the process?
- Did you find out something about yourself?
- What made you want to be a peer mentor?
- How have your thoughts changed or not changed?
- Did it change anything for the future for you?
- Would you recommend being a peer mentor to a friend? Why? Why not?
- What would you change about the class, if anything?

Completed student reflection papers were collected and anonymized for data analysis.

To collect data that presented the perspectives of the students and did not limit student responses, exploratory qualitative methods were an appropriate choice for this study (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, content analysis was used to answer the research question through understanding and analyzing materials included in the student essays. This method is generally characterized by a systematic analysis of material to better understand occurring themes and patterns (Saldaña, 2011).

### Participants and Setting

This study included 24 high school-aged students without IDD who attended a school with a student body of approximately 760 students in the northwestern United States. As all identifying information was removed from raw data, demographic information of participants (e.g., age, race, experience) was not collected. All of the participants were enrolled in a credit-bearing course in the Fall 2018 semester that provided opportunities to engage in peer support arrangements with a student with IDD. Peer partners worked together each time the class met, four times a week for approximately one hour each session for an entire semester. Partnership assignments were made by the special education teacher, who considered the goals, schedules, strengths, and needs of both students. The

activities primarily occurred in the general education setting, but also included occasional opportunities in community, vocational, or special education settings. Students provided supports to peers with IDD in relevant skill areas (e.g., academic, social, independent living, self-determination) while also engaging in activities that promoted more inclusive classrooms and the greater school community. Unlike some peer support arrangements, students were not recruited from within specific classrooms (i.e., peers were not concurrently enrolled in the course in which the student with IDD was enrolled).

Students who participated in the peer support arrangement course were trained by school staff and faculty to work with individuals with disabilities; the peers were also trained to work with their specific peer partners. After a one-hour general orientation, students were given targeted and ongoing training to provide support for specific students in the relevant context or environment. This allowed the students without IDD to better understand the individualized strengths, needs, and goals of their partner with IDD. In addition to the hands-on experience, students enrolled in the course completed various assignments to better understand disability and the disability community.

### Data Analysis and Credibility

Data analysis was guided by the process of Thematic Analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and featured each of the six steps that constitute this process. These included

1. familiarization with the data
2. identification of initial codes
3. review of coded content for themes
4. evaluation of themes identified in the previous step
5. development of definitions and names for each theme, and
6. production of the written report.

The first author, who has expertise in special education and qualitative research, individually coded the student papers. This was done using a theoretical approach, a process that involved labeling information with a specific research question in mind (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on the recommendation of Saldaña (2011), the content analysis involved seeking content through both manifest meaning (i.e., surface-level, directly stated) and latent meaning (i.e., subtext, suggestive). Through this process, an initial codebook that included the specific descriptive and values codes, related definitions, and usage examples used by the first researcher was developed and refined. Using a codebook in this qualitative research analysis increased the efficiency of the coding process (Guest et al., 2012).

Because researcher triangulation increases the credibility of research findings (Brantlinger et al., 2005), the uncoded student papers and the initial codebook were next given to a second researcher, who also has expertise in qualitative research methods. The second researcher then separately read and coded the participant writing, modifying the codebook as necessary. The two researchers then convened to discuss their separate codes, review the codebook, and develop a common coding system. Per Saldaña (2011), this dialogue on the codes was integral to both the credibility of the research findings and the continued analysis of the data. Then, the two researchers collaboratively reviewed the student writing page by page to come to a consensus regarding the coded data. Once this process was complete, the two researchers reviewed the coded data extracts to identify themes that describe the nature of the content. Content was reviewed to ensure each item's relevance to its assigned theme. Coded data extracts were then reviewed again by both researchers to verify their fit and relevance to the theme.

### Ethical Considerations

Data sources were provided by the classroom teacher and identifying information was removed before being presented to the researchers. As such, participant identity was unknown by the researchers as the stripping of personal information allowed for anonymity.

### Results

The present study sought to answer the research question: What are the perceived benefits to high school students who participate in peer support arrangements with students with IDD? Fifty-eight pages of typed text written by 24 unique high school students without IDD who engaged in a peer support arrangement were analyzed. Through the analysis of the data, six themes emerged. These themes included: Emotional Benefits, Skill Development, Understanding Disability, Personal Reflection, Comfort with People with Disabilities, and Ongoing Commitment. Table 1 includes the codes associated with each theme, the number of students whose essay responses included each code, and an operational definition for the code. To represent magnitude, themes have been presented based on the number of students whose work included each code (highest to lowest).

**Table 1**

*Emergent themes with related codes*

| Theme | Code | Number of Students | Description of the Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional Benefits | Enjoyment | 18 | Enjoyment of the peer mentoring experience |
| | Spirit lift | 14 | Experience has a positive impact on peer mentor's emotions |
| | Pride | 5 | Expression of pride in peer's accomplishments as a result of the experience |
| | Inspiration | 3 | Peer mentor has been inspired to do better |
| | Mutual benefit | 1 | Both students benefitted from the experience |
| Skill Development | Problem solving | 8 | Increased ability to solve problems |
| | Flexibility | 8 | Increased ability to be flexible |
| | Patience | 6 | More patient when working with others |
| | Leadership | 5 | Development of leadership skills |
| | Hands off | 4 | Recognition that people need to do things for themselves to learn |
| | Learning | 4 | Learning new skills (e.g., cooking) |
| | Communication | 3 | Improved communication skills |
| Understanding Disability | Awareness | 14 | Understanding of disability and perceptions of disability |
| | Ability of people with disabilities | 8 | Recognition that people with disabilities have skills and talents |
| | Whole person | 5 | Recognizing a person as being more than their disability |
| Personal Reflection | Personal growth | 15 | General self-improvement resulting from the experience |
| | Personal awareness | 8 | Realization of personal preferences, biases, skills, interests, or abilities |
| | Compassion | 3 | Increased compassion |
| Comfort with People with Disabilities | Friendship | 12 | Friendships developed from the experience |
| | Comfort | 9 | Increased comfort around people with disabilities |
| Future Commitment | Continued commitment | 9 | Expression of eagerness to continue working with people with disabilities |
| | Career | 5 | Increased interest in careers with people with disabilities |
| | Advocacy | 5 | Increased commitment to support the rights of people with disabilities |

*Note*: 24 total students; "Number of Students" represents the number of students whose writing included this particular code.

## Theme: Emotional Benefits

Although student response papers included many benefits, the theme Emotional Benefits mostly included statements related to their personal enjoyment of the experience. In fact, the code "Enjoyment" was identified in more student essays than any other code. One student explained, "I knew that I would love this class. Now that I have gone through a semester, I can only say that this is an understatement. This class is easily my favorite." This sentiment was echoed by other students in their reflective writing; overall, students enjoyed the experience. Another student wrote, "Throughout the day, after second period, I often find myself looking forward to the next day just so that I can go back."

## Theme: Skill Development

In their writing, students described how the peer support arrangements offered opportunities to develop a variety of skills. Although many specific skills were mentioned, the most prominent involved those related to problem solving and flexibility. One student explained, "I learned how to approach harder situations in an appropriate way ... there were a few challenging instances throughout the year where I previously would have had not a single clue on how to handle them." One student also described their sense of responsibility to problem solve by noting, "I have more responsibility put on myself, and more self-reliant to problem-solve and think of ways to help the student." This problem-solving may involve the need for flexibility, which was described by one student who wrote, "I've learned that sometimes things just don't work, and there's nothing wrong with that. While it may be frustrating, it happens, and it happens a lot. This just opens the doors for new ideas." Students also described the development of skills related to patience ["one thing that I have a hard time with is having patience, and I definitely had to be patient in this class"], leadership ["this class has given me skills that I am able to carry over to cheerleading being a captain"], hands-off teaching ["I learned how to take a step back and let the students learn from their own mistakes"], and communication ["it has immensely helped with my people skills"].

## Theme: Understanding Disability

Through the peer support arrangement experience, students gained a better understanding of disability. The most prominent aspect of this theme involved disability awareness and a change in personal perceptions of disability. One student wrote that the experience has "opened my eyes to a new point of view on how to approach people [with disabilities]." Another student discussed the experiences working with a student with IDD and explained, "I have also learnt about the challenges a person like him faces, and that has made me more empathetic."

Recognizing that peers with IDD are young adults just like themselves, one student explained that they learned simply to "treat them like normal people." Students talked about being able to look beyond disability to see their peers for the people they are. One student wrote, "I also learned a lot about [my peer] as a person. I learned that even though she can be stubborn sometimes, she's a really kind person and likes making everyone around her happy."

This increased understanding of disability also included statements that demonstrate a heightened awareness of the ability of people with disabilities. One student wrote, "Most people assume that if you have a disability you lack intelligence and so they are treated differently because of it ... These kids are so intellectual and it is so amazing to watch them prove the standard opinion wrong." Another student was surprised to learn that many of the students with IDD "are super independent, smart, and really rarely need help."

## Theme: Personal Reflection

Student essays included statements that demonstrated how the peer support arrangement provided opportunities for personal growth and a heightened sense of personal awareness. Some broad student statements reflected on this personal awareness: "I have grown so much as a human with this class," "I never thought it would be the class that would completely change my daily outlook," and "[friendship with the peer] has changed my whole view on the world". Another student was especially impacted by the experience and noted, "Without this program of class I would not be who I am today, and I truly believe that." Students also made specific mention of how the experience allowed them to become more self-aware. While one student wrote, "I learned that I really really love being there for people," another student explained that "something that I have found out about myself is I personally do not like working with others." The experience working with students with IDD allows some students to better understand their own learning barriers. One student wrote, "I learned techniques that can help with my ADHD ... This class helped me with myself and how I learn how to help myself with my ADHD."

## Theme: Comfort with People with Disabilities

The peer support arrangements provided students with an opportunity to become more comfortable being around people with disabilities. Although the school offers inclusive classroom experiences for students with IDD, some students enrolled in the peer support arrangement still had limited interactions prior to enrolling in the course. These limited opportunities for engagement resulted in a discomfort, which was reduced by the peer support arrangement. One student explained:

> Before taking this class if a kid with autism was talking to me, I would be nervous about saying something that might make them really upset or doing the wrong thing. But really you don't have to worry about those things; you just treat them how you treat your friends.

This increased comfort was exemplified by many students who wrote about friendships with peers with IDD that blossomed as a result of the experience. One student

wrote, "I have created a friendship that will stay with me for the rest of my life." Several students discussed how the relationship morphed from arranged sessions into genuine friendships. One student explained, "We became close friends throughout the semester. It didn't feel like I was her peer mentor; it felt like I was just one of her friends helping her out and I am so thankful for that." Students wrote about these relationships extending beyond the school. One wrote, "Most of the students with IDD enjoy spending time with their mentors outside of school, and I did that quite a few times, and I hope to continue to keep having the opportunity to do that."

*Theme: Ongoing Commitment*

The benefits described in the aforementioned themes perhaps supported student interest in continuing to work with individuals with disabilities. This interest ranged from wanting to continue with the peer support program to expressing interest in engaging in disability work/advocacy in the future. On the more local level of the peer support program, one student wrote, "I am excited to [be a peer mentor] for another semester" while another lamented that "I am very sad I only have one semester left, but I plan on coming to visit still." The continued commitment was described broadly by some, while others were more specific with their goals and interests. One student wrote that the experience "has given me a passion that I know I will carry with me for my entire life—no matter what I choose to do." Another wrote, "One thing I know is that in the future if I do have an opportunity to work with [people with IDD] I will immediately take advantage of it." Other students described how the experience has impacted their career goals. One wrote that the experience "has opened my eyes to a potential career path that I hadn't considered up to this point." Another wrote, "After taking this class I think that possibly going with some sort of career where I can work with this community would be really awesome." Students also spoke about the continued commitment through advocacy with statements such as "Being a peer mentor has helped me learn to take a stand when needed" and "I would hope to become a major advocate for integration." Another wrote that as a result of the experience, they will "make a bigger effort than I have before to include any and everybody in activities or anywhere I am."

Thematic Analysis of the student essays showed a variety of benefits experienced by those without IDD who engaged in peer support arrangement. Six themes emerged from this systematic analysis. Listed in order of magnitude of presence (most to least), they include: Emotional Benefits, Skill Development, Understanding Disability, Personal Reflection, Comfort with People with Disabilities, and Ongoing Commitment.

## Discussion

Reflection papers written by 24 high school students who support a peer with IDD were analyzed using qualitative methods. Specifically, this study sought to better understand the benefits experienced by these students without IDD as a result of the experience. Six themes describing a variety of benefits emerged through the thematic content analysis. Two of the themes (Understanding Disability and Comfort with People with Disabilities) describe benefits that have been documented in previous literature. Three other themes (Skill Development, Personal Reflection, and Future Commitment) have been broadly described in previous literature; however, findings from this study provide greater understanding on the benefits peers with IDD might experience. One final theme (Emotional Benefits) represents content that has not been revealed in existing studies.

*Emotional Benefits*

The theme Emotional Benefits was represented with the greatest magnitude and described benefits not included in existing literature related to peer support arrangements. Remarks about enjoyment of the activities were quite common in the student papers. Many students went beyond simply describing having fun. For many students, the experience was a highlight of their day, with several noting that meeting with their peer encouraged them to keep coming to school. These benefits may be of particular importance to high school students at risk of dropping out of school. In a widely distributed report, Bridgeland et al. (2006) surveyed individuals who dropped out of high school to identify the reasons for their decision to end high school before obtaining their degree. Nearly half of respondents explained that the primary reason for dropping out was a lack of interest in classes and course content (i.e., boredom). In contrast, this study highlights reasons why students might be encouraged to stay in school. Student participants clearly stated that getting through their day would have been a struggle without the peer support arrangement.

*Additional Themes*

Content related to the themes Understanding Disability and Comfort with People with Disabilities has been represented in previous literature (e.g., Carter et al., 2011). In addition, a large body of literature exists detailing the increased understanding of disability and comfort around people with disabilities resulting from contact and interaction (e.g., Morin et al., 2013; Ouellette-Kuntz et al., 2010). As such, it is perhaps not surprising that these themes emerged from the student writing as benefits. Similar to findings from previous studies (e.g., Leigers et al., 2017), students without IDD in this study identified friendship development as a benefit of the peer support arrangements. Content related to friendship development was included in the theme Comfort with People with Disabilities because we viewed this as an indicator of comfort; one cannot be friends with someone they are not comfortable with. This finding suggests that the peer support arrangements can be effective in not only including students with IDD into an existing network, but also in shaping the perception/confirming that students with IDD can be and are an integral part of valued friendships, at least at an individual peer-to-peer level.

Although Carter et al. (2011) noted a perception of increased social skills for students without disabilities, the student papers in this study described development in many more domains. Perhaps most noteworthy in the Skill Development theme are those related to problem solving and flexibility, the two skill areas most present in student papers. As these are skills highly valued by employers (National Association for Colleges and Employers, 2019), students who serve as peer mentors will likely be increasing their capacity to find and maintain employment in a desirable field. The theme of Personal Reflection was also touched upon in existing literature (e.g., Carter et al., 2009). However, student papers in this study identified substantial gains in personal growth (e.g., general self-improvement) and personal awareness (increased understanding of one's self). The benefits associated with Personal Reflection may lay the foundation for the perceived benefits related to statements categorized under the theme Future Commitment. Similar to the findings presented by Leigers et al. (2017), students in this study described how the peer support arrangement helped guide career interests. More common in this study was a general commitment from students to continue spending time with people with disabilities in some capacity. This represents the extent to which the experience had a profound impact on many students.

## Limitations of the Study

When considering the findings of this study, several limitations must be considered. The student work samples presented in this paper represent perceptions of one program in a single school. As such, the findings only represent the perceptions and beliefs of one program. As there is not a standardization of peer support programs, students who participate in similar programs in other schools might find different benefits. It should also be noted that the writing prompts given to students in their reflection essay encouraged responses that included a description of benefits. As this sample was collected a priori, this was not an intentional design component of the study, but rather the nature of the acquired data. In addition, readers should consider that students were not all assigned the same types of tasks with their peer partners. While some supported students in the general education setting, others worked in other settings (e.g., the community, special education classroom). A student's specific placement may have impacted their perceived benefits.

## Significance of the Study

Findings from this study suggest that opportunities to support students with IDD may be beneficial to at-risk high school students. Perhaps most notably, these kinds of opportunities may increase interest in attending school on a regular basis; participants in this study described the experience as a primary reason they continue to attend school. Students who deliver supports to students with IDD may also experience personal growth, including skill development and perhaps greater focus on a potential career. Students may also recognize strengths or personal attributes of which they were previously unaware.

Schools that seek positive inclusion models and that do not yet have opportunities for students to engage in peer support arrangements should consider developing such programs. Although the benefits for the students with IDD may be apparent, schools should also view these opportunities as development opportunities for peers without disabilities. Indeed, the peer support arrangement appears to be mutually beneficial, potentially defining the purposes and goals of a traditional inclusion model. This may be particularly important for students at the secondary level who are perhaps more focused on exploring personal interests and better understanding career possibilities. In addition, students at this level may have more flexibility and individuation with their course schedule, thus allowing them opportunities for regular and sustained interactions. Practitioners interested in developing peer support programs should consider exploring the recommendations provided by Carter et al. (2015).

When selecting students without IDD to participate in peer support arrangement, school counselors and teachers may consider the appropriateness for selecting at-risk students. Although Carter et al. (2009) explains that selecting peers with regular school attendance is important, there is also value in considering at-risk students in need of positive school experiences. A potential unintended benefit of engagement in peer support arrangements for at-risk students is the regular interaction with adults; an essential feature of peer support arrangements is teacher and paraprofessionals training for students delivering interventions and instruction. In their school dropout report, Bridgeland et al. (2006) recommend that schools ensure that each student develop a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school community. Peer support arrangements, which inherently include both peer and adult interaction, are one such way schools can meet this goal.

## Future Implications of Research

To build on these findings, future research may include a quantitative study of students who engage in peer mentoring experiences. These studies may focus on perception change as a result of the experience. A longitudinal study that explores career choices for peers may help better understand how these experiences impact the professional trajectories. A survey of current special education professionals who engaged in peer mentoring experiences while in high school may lead to an expanded understanding of how the experience impacted their interest in special education or their ability to be successful in their career. As findings from this study indicate that peer arrangements may positively impact a peer without IDD's interest in school and attendance, research that focuses specifically on students at risk for school dropout would be beneficial. It might also be interesting for future researchers to explore some of the codes that were identified less frequently in this study. Probing these specific items (e.g., Communication) may yield interesting findings that were not addressed in this manuscript.

## Conclusion

Peer support arrangements are an effective strategy to support classrooms and school communities that are inclusive of students with IDD. Although gains for students with IDD may be the primary consideration for implementing peer support arrangements, students without disabilities may also reap benefits in multiple areas from these arrangements. The findings from this study support and expand on previous research. Perhaps most notable is the emergence of a theme related to how the experience can have a positive impact on a student's school experience and interest in school attendance. To support student development, schools without peer support arrangements should offer this experience to augment the education experience for all students in the school.

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