Title: Teachers’ Roles in Arranging Participation Frameworks: An Examination of Small Group Interactions Between Autistic Students and Their Typically Developing Peers

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Introduction: Many individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have difficulty initiating and responding to conversations with peers, which could hinder their ability to form social relationships. Researchers have recently developed peer-support interventions to create opportunities for naturalistic social interactions between autistic students and their typically developing (TD) peers (Carter et al., 2017). However, general education classrooms often rely on paraprofessionals or other service providers to guide autistic students through academic instruction and social interactions (Giangreco, 2010). In general, students with disabilities are often at a disadvantage, and less likely to initiate social-related interactions with peers while an adult is in close proximity (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). Given these findings, it is imperative that we seek to understand how classroom personnel, specifically paraprofessionals, manage small group social interactions between autistic students and their TD peers. Therefore, a discourse analytic framework will be used to assist with the exploration of the following research question: In a small group interactional context, how do paraprofessionals position autistic students in contrast to their TD peers?

Method: Teachers from four elementary school classrooms within a single school district participated in the current research project. Each classroom had at least one student with a confirmed ASD diagnosis. For inclusion in the current study, the autistic student had to be receiving special education services through the school and was assigned a 1:1 paraprofessional. The classrooms each participated in three thirty-minute video recorded classroom observation sessions. During the observations, the autistic student and four TD peers were systematically chosen to wear eye-tracking glasses as a way to examine visual attention patterns in the classroom. After data collection was complete, the data was transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004), and discourse analysis was used to capture verbal and non-verbal patterns of behavior that guide small group discussions. In particular, the data was analyzed using the concept of footing, or a change in the focal participant’s alignment, stance, or posture when addressing other conversational participants (Goffman, 1981). These shifts in stance can be displayed on the utterance level, through changes in pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, or tonal quality, and can differ depending on one’s relationship to the stakeholders in the conversation. A collection of excerpts was built from each of the four classrooms that included small group interactions between an autistic student, TD peer, and paraprofessional. Each excerpt was identified by a shift in how the paraprofessional addressed each student differently.

Results: Segments 1 and 2 were selected as example interactions that illustrate a more widely occurring phenomenon within the data. These segments are from a small group discussion between Gabby (an autistic fourth grade student), Lyla (a TD fourth grade classmate), and the paraprofessional who is guiding the interaction. When it is Gabby’s turn at talk to share her experience of losing her first tooth (lines 49-51), the paraprofessional does not acknowledge her response. Instead, the paraprofessional shifts the conversation to the TD peer and states, “she remembers the date...” (lines 52-53), as if Gabby is a bystander and no longer an integral part of the discussion. As the small group interaction progresses, this act of talking about Gabby while she is in close proximity still remains (Segment 2). This shift in alignment of the conversation occurs when Gabby engages in an activity or perseverates on a particular topic that may be considered atypical. The ways in which paraprofessionals in four elementary school classrooms position their autistic students will be further explored for the poster session.

Discussion: The use of paraprofessionals in the classroom can be necessary to aid in the facilitation of activities and inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the classroom setting. However, it is often the case that overreliance on these supports are detrimental to the academic and social participation of the students (Giangreco, 2010). As evidenced by segments 1 and 2, the paraprofessional attempted to include the autistic student and their peer partner into a conversation by placing them in physical proximity with one another. However, in both instances, the teacher created a barrier between the students by excluding Gabby from the conversation and instead discussing her actions with the peer partner. The use of a discourse analytic framework,
particularly analyzing shifts in footing, can aid in a more thorough understanding about the experiences of autistic students as they are placed in small group discussions. As O’Reilly and colleagues (2016) suggested, this analytic method can help to promote practices that better support autistic students in their interactions.

References:


Segment 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gabby</td>
<td>46. Hang on (. ) Before I tell her that (. ) 47. I want to tell you guys something</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paraprofessional               48. What do you want to tell us ↑

Gabby                                49. When I was on the roadtrip on the 50. 24th on:: um:: (.2) January (. ) I lost 51. my second tooth.

Paraprofessional               52. Ohh:: She remembers the 53. date when she lost all of her teeth 54. (. ) That’s very impressive (. ) What 55. do you think (. ) Lyla ↑ Ya

Segment 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>58. Oh she likes to fix the edges of my 59. laminated (.6) Okay fix it quickly cause we 60. have to get to reading (.2) Thank you (.2) 61. All set</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lyla 62. She does this all the time ↑

Paraprofessional 63. She likes to fix it yes (.5)

Lyla 64. I can see that (. ) She cut the pink off

65. too (.2)

Paraprofessional 66. So this bookmark here has all reading strategies that we focus – that we

68. work on (.1)

Lyla 69. Ya (. ) I can kind of see it

Paraprofessional 70. As soon as she cuts that edge shes

71. gunna show us =