

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Hughes, C., Rung, L.L., Wehmeyer, M.L., Agran, M., Copeland, S.R. & Hwang, B. (2000). Self-prompted communication book use to increase social interaction among high school students. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 25, 153-166.

BOTTOM LINE

A self-prompted communication book was used to train 5 high school students with extensive support needs on how to begin conversations of four high school students, and the effectiveness of the training was then examined.

The 5 students were taught by general education peers to prompt themselves to increase their conversational initiations by using communication books. They were also taught to prompt themselves to introduce conversational topics to their general education peers.

The investigation revealed that self-prompted communication book training provided by peers was associated with increases in participants' appropriate initiations to familiar and unfamiliar general education conversational partners and in the corresponding responses of these partners.

TIPS

- Teach students to provide their own prompts for desired performance, such as social interaction.
- Ask for participants' input prior to the intervention in order to reaffirm their social goals during each training session.
- Individualize communication books according to participants needs.

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants increased their conversation across all identified topical areas. The content of their conversation was similar to that of their general education peers.
- Self-prompting teaches a student to direct his or her performance of a desired behavior in situations in which a trainer or other form of discriminative incentive is not present.
- Multiple peers as trainers may have promoted generalization.
- Having peers model appropriate initiations and responses during training may have contributed to the decrease in inappropriate initiations.
- The perception of the participants that potential benefits could result from social skills instruction may have contributed to the effectiveness of the intervention.
- The self-prompting strategy was associated with increases in the number of conversational topics discussed and with decreases in inappropriate initiations by participants.
- Outcome measures assessed were
 - (a) Rate of initiation
 - (b) Percentage of intervals,
 - (c) Percentage of appropriate initiated conversation, and
 - (d) Percentage of inappropriate conversation.
- During baseline, no self-prompting was observed for any participant. After self-prompted communication book training was introduced, percentage of intervals in which participants performed self-prompting steps increased immediately, which maintained a mean of 93% during maintenance.
- Our efforts effectively increased participants' social interaction skills, self-prompted performance, and expression of social goals.

METHOD

- Four young men and one young woman from a large, urban high school participated in the study. They were selected from a pool of 23 students enrolled in classes for students with extensive support needs and who had an IEP goal to increase social interaction with general education peers.
- Students were queried regarding their social interaction goals before the training began.

METHOD

cont.

- Social skills training was provided by peer trainers. 13 general education students served as *peer trainers* to teach self-prompted communication book use to participants. None of the peer trainers served as a conversational partner.
- 58 general education students served as *conversational partners* during generalization sessions. 10 partners were peer buddies who were classmates (“familiar peers”) and 48 were “unfamiliar peers”, recruited from physical education classes or the school lunchroom by asking for volunteers. The total number of conversational partners per participant ranged from 19 to 27 (6-8 familiar peers and 11-20 unfamiliar peers).
- Students were taught to prompt themselves to interact with peers using communication picture books.
- A multiple-baseline-across-participants design with a multiple-probe component was used to evaluate the effects of self-prompted communication book training on participants’ social interactions with conversational partners.
- Three experimental conditions were used during which generalization data were collected daily:
 - ◆ Baseline: The participant and one partner sat facing each other for a 5-min. baseline session. They were instructed to initiate conversation no more than three times per session, to respond with only one statement to a participant’s initiation, and not to prompt conversation.
 - ◆ Self-prompted communication book training occurred daily, averaging 13 minutes and following a training script. Peer trainers were trained during the training condition only, prior to collecting generalization data.
 - ◆ Maintenance was assessed by withdrawing the communication book training on 5 sessions. Two criteria were used for terminating training. The mean total training time across participants was 132 min.
- The effects of training were evaluated by measuring students’ interactions, conversational topics, and social behaviors.
- Conversational partners provided qualitative ratings of the interactions, and the participants were queried after the intervention about whether or not their training goals were met.

RELATED
PUBLICATIONS

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- Hughes, C., Rodi, M.S., Lorden, S.W., Pitkin, S.E., Derer, K. R., Hwang, B. & Cai, X. (1999). Social interactions of high school students with mental retardation and their general education peers. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 104*, 533-544.
- Hunt, P., Alwell, M., Goetz, L., & Sailor, W. (1990). Generalized effects of conversation skill training. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 15*, 250-260.
- Johnson, R.M. (1992). *The picture communication symbols book*. Stillwater, MN: Mayer-Johnson Co.
- Wehmeyer, M.L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities: Basic skills for successful transition*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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