

Preface

Numerous studies have demonstrated the powerful influence of peer support and social relationships on student development and performance. Peer group socialization is a major avenue through which children develop their identities and self-concepts, which, in turn, shape their future interactions (Rodkin & Ryan, 2012; Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009). Furthermore, meta-analyses have shown the positive effects of peer coaching and tutoring on students' motivation, self-concept, academic behavior, attitudes toward learning, and academic achievement. Research has also shown that older peer mentors influence mentees' perceptions, connect them to a social support network, and reconnect them with supportive adult authority figures. Because the social and academic lives of children and adolescents are intertwined in the school context, it is important to develop programs for addressing both in tandem.

As schools continue to face the challenges of optimizing growth for students, teachers, and classrooms, interventions that systematically incorporate peer supports offer a powerful tool for improvement (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006; Meltzer, 2014). For struggling learners and students with special needs, the power of peer-enhanced approaches is clear. Research indicates that incorporating peer support programs or peer-based interventions in the classroom is a win-win situation for students with special needs and their peers. Such supports are often associated with increased motivation, improved school performance, higher attendance, lowered retention rates, reduced special education placement, higher scores on state- and nationally-mandated assessments, and social and emotional gains.

Despite the existing research base, there are very few available resources that provide guidelines for applying these findings to classroom practice and that guide teachers, administrators, and school support personnel in implementing evidence-based programs. Therefore, there is a serious need for a book that incorporates what we know about peer supports and peer-based interventions into teacher preparation, classrooms, and schools. This book meets that need, providing teachers with evidence-based practices for enhancing learning, development, and social relationships for students with learning challenges and other special needs.

Chapter 1, by Meltzer and colleagues, discusses the rationale as well as specific suggestions for blending the teaching of executive function processes with a peer coaching program. Chapter 2, by Regan et al., focuses on peer interactions in the content areas as a means of differentiating instruction. Chapter 3, by Cramer and Mason, focuses on literacy, examining the role of peer support in learning to write. Literacy is discussed further in Chapter 4, in which Scornavacco et al. examine the role of peer discourse in collaborative strategic reading, and in Chapter 5, in which Kearns et al. examine peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) for reading.

Chapter 6, by Powell and Fuchs, addresses PALS for mathematics. Chapter 7, by Wilkerson and Lequia, focuses on the benefits of small-group instruction for learners with varying strengths and challenges. In Chapter 8, Richards-Tutor, Aceves, and Reutebuch address how peer support for English learners can make a difference in the classroom. Finally, in Chapter 9, Strain and Bovey discuss how preschool peers can influence social outcomes for students with special needs.

We hope that this text will be a useful resource for educators, administrators, and other school personnel who work tirelessly to support special-needs learners, and that this will be as good a read for you as it has been for us.

REFERENCES

- Harris, K. R., Graham, S., & Mason, L. (2006). Improving the writing, knowledge, and motivation of struggling young writers: Effects of self-regulated strategy development with and without peer support. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 295–340.
- Meltzer, L. J. (2014). Teaching executive functioning processes: Promoting metacognition, strategy use, and effort. In J. Naglieri & S. Goldstein (Eds.), *Handbook of executive functioning* (pp. 445–474). New York: Springer.
- Rodkin, P. C., & Ryan, A. M. (2012). Child and adolescent peer relations in educational context. In K. R. Harris, S. Graham, & T. Urdan (Eds.), *APA educational psychology handbook: Individual differences and cultural and contextual factors* (Vol. 2, pp. 363–389). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Rubin, K. H., Bukowski, K. H., & Laursen, B. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups*. New York: Guilford Press.