

4-24-2020

EPRICC: Exploring Peer Relationships in an Inclusive College Classroom

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Abstract

This research project measured the perceptions of traditional college students when having visiting students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in their college classroom. In this study, visiting students with IDD were partnered with peer allies who are traditional students participating in ESP-250. Allies and visiting students meet before each class session to build relationships, attend class together, participate in class activities, and collaborate on homework assignments. After class, allies record a journal entry describing their feelings and experiences. Data from these journals are coded to determine what trends are demonstrated in the perceptions of allies when having visiting students in their class. Pre and post surveys are also sent out at the beginning and end of the semester for both participating and nonparticipating ESP-250 students to complete. Current results show that 11 out of the 12 allies frequently agreed they were making connections with the visiting student they were working with. Both visiting students and allies have expressed feelings of appreciation and understanding of differing perspectives. This leads us to believe that inclusion can have a positive impact on the college classroom experience. This research is continuing.

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that postsecondary education benefits students with Intellectual and developmental disabilities including positive employment outcomes, independence and competitiveness in the workplace, and a rise in self-esteem. Research also suggests that perceptions of family and faculty have an impact on the academic experiences; however, there is a lack of research on the impact of peer perceptions. This leads to this study on peer perceptions with students with IDD in the post-secondary classroom.

PROCESS

Students with IDD (intellectual and developmental disabilities), also known as peers, are paired up with an ally from class (students enrolled in the ESP 250 course). Peers and allies meet for half an hour before every class to socialize and give visiting students the college experience.

Academically, visiting students complete homework assignments and projects. During class time they collaborate with their allies to complete in-class assignments. After each class, allies and peers write a journal entry and answer a few questions. These are coded to determine the different perception trends occurring.

- Scaled questions determine how well peers and allies are collaborating and aid in the understanding of the perceptions noticed in journal entries.
- Answers obtained from essay question are coded material and are the bulk of the results for this project

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ANALYSIS / DATA

Analysis of Perceptions:

- For the spring semester, frequency of responses was recorded:
 - Highest frequency: 41% discussed engagement
 - Lowest frequency: 12% discussed personal dispositions

PERCEPTION THEMES:

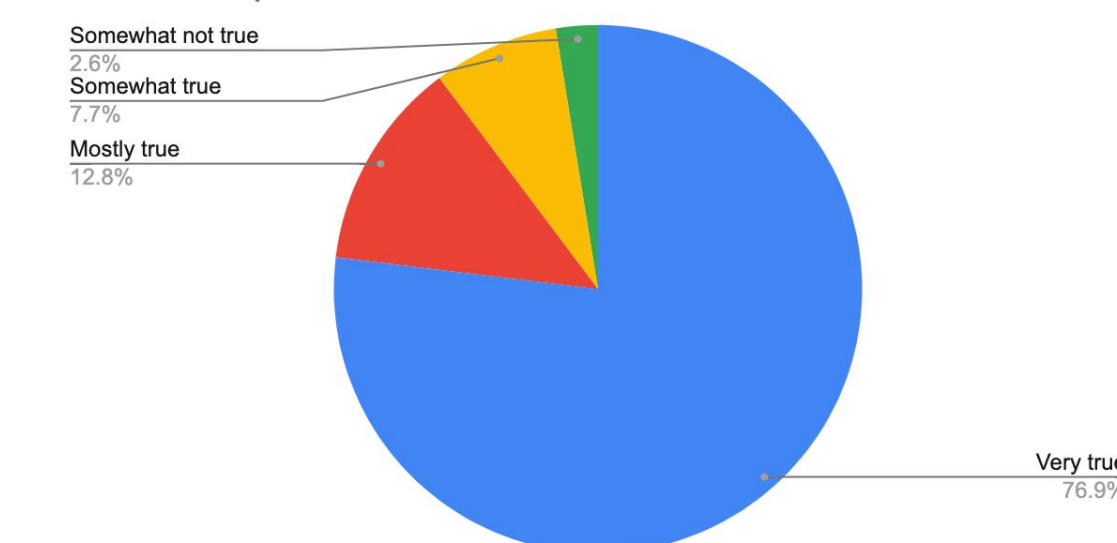
- **Personal Dispositions:** Student recounts of their original perspective on students with IDD
- **Positive Feelings :** Examples of positive feelings include feelings of happiness and appreciation.
- **Engagement:** Noticings of engagement that peers have in class.
- **Personal Experiences:** The recollection of students with IDD opening up about their personal feelings or experiences.
- **Social- emotional support:** Experiences where allies support peers emotionally due to class content.
- **Strategies in PSE environment:** Allies thinking of strategies to support their peers in the college environment.
- **Classroom application:** Students reflecting on how to support students with disabilities in their future classroom.

CONCLUSION

Current results show that the majority of students are not only connecting with peers but also feel as though they can contribute to the classroom in a number of ways and are comfortable including them in classroom discussions and activities. The perception themes we are seeing are generally positive and forward-looking as well as informative to participants leading to the ongoing conclusion that the inclusion of students with IDD has a positive impact on the postsecondary classroom environment. This study is ongoing and we will continue to gather more data. This will lead to a better understanding of the impact peer perceptions can have on the postsecondary classroom environment with the inclusion of students with IDD.

Data Spring Semester 2020

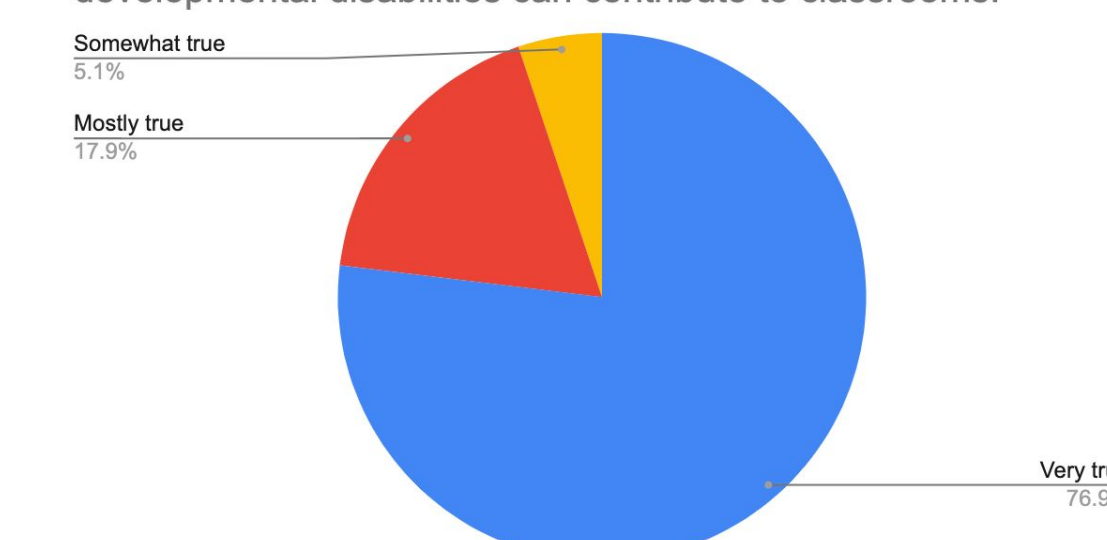
Count of I am comfortable including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in class discussions and activities.



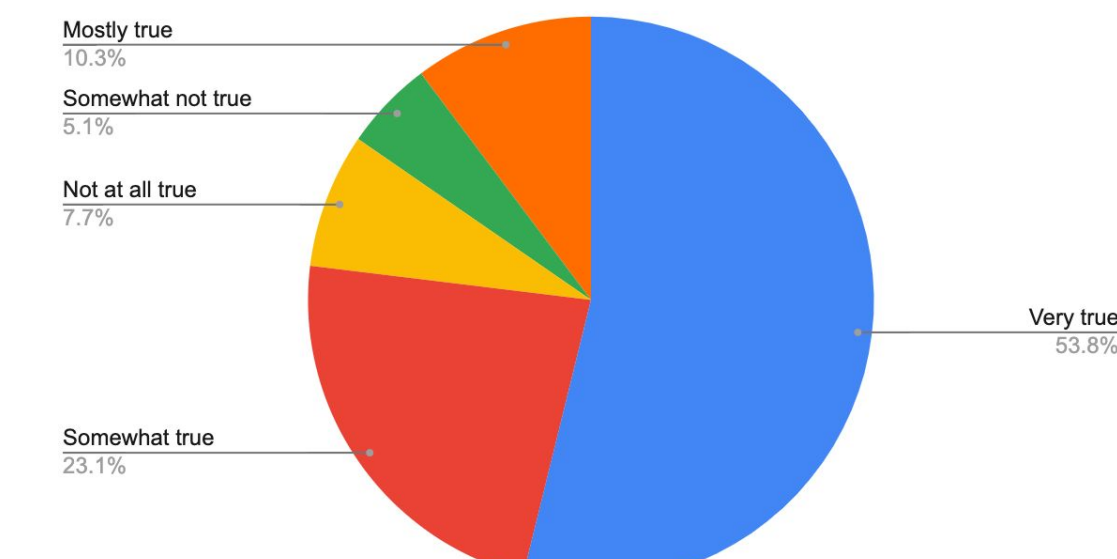
76.9% of participants strongly agreed that they are comfortable including individuals with IDD in class discussions and activities. 2.6% say it is "somewhat not true" that they are comfortable with this.

76.9% say it is "very true" that there are many ways students with IDD can contribute to classrooms. 5.1% say that this statement is somewhat true.

Count of There are many ways individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can contribute to classrooms.



Count of I was able to "connect" to my peer before class.



53.8% of participants state it is "very true" that they were able to connect with their peer before class. 7.7% of participants over this semester state they were not at all able to connect with their peers before class.

Data on Scaled Questions:

Fall 2019

- 75.68%-83.78% of participants strongly agreed to the following statements:
 - They were able to connect with peers before class
 - They were comfortable with including individuals with IDD
 - They believed there were many ways individuals with IDD can contribute to classrooms.

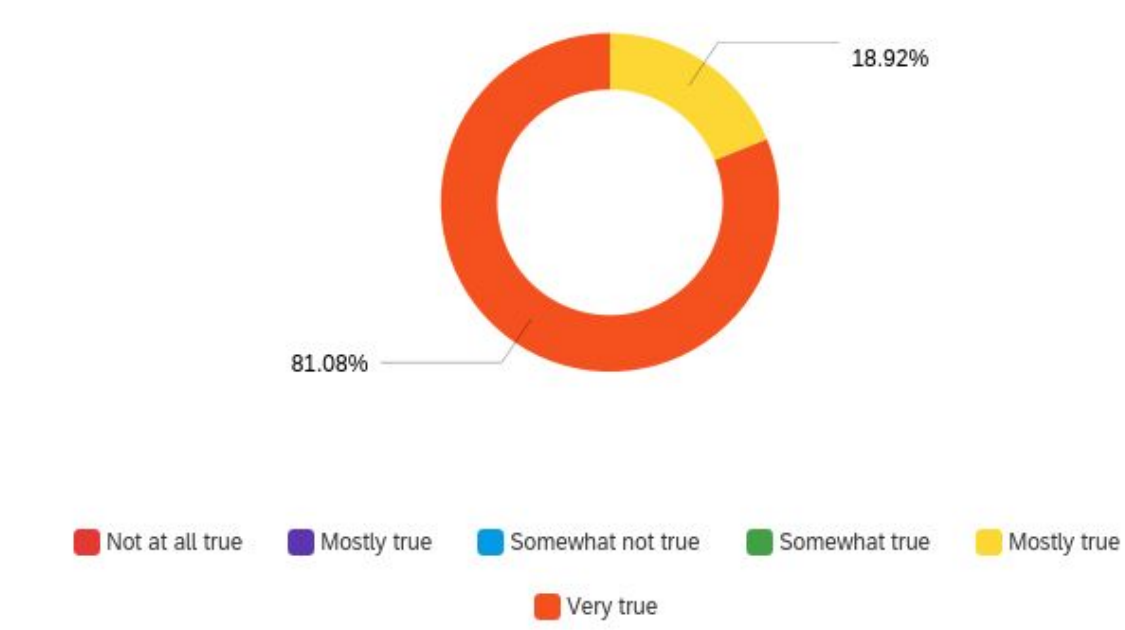
Spring 2020

- 53.8%-76.9% of students strongly agree to the same statements asked in the fall.
- Spring semester; however, is incomplete at this time, therefore, analysis between semesters cannot yet be made.

Data Fall Semester 2019

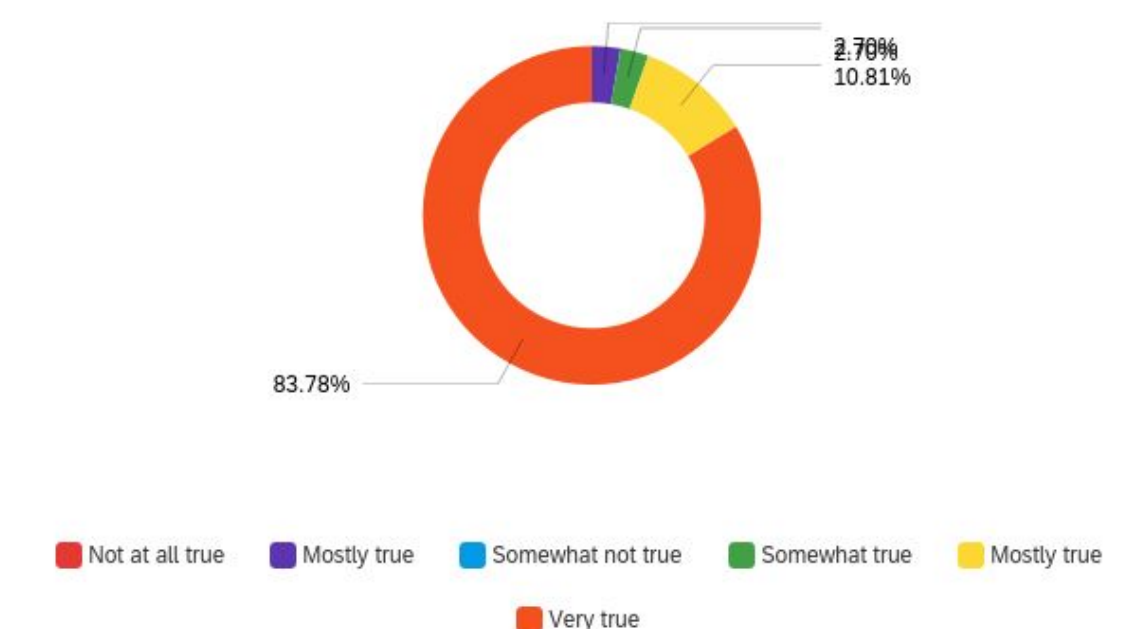
Q4 - I am comfortable including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in class discussions and activities.

81.08% of participants strongly agreed that they are comfortable including individuals with IDD in class discussions and activities. 18.92% say it is "mostly true" that they are comfortable with this.



Q5 - There are many ways individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can contribute to classrooms.

83.78% of participants strongly agreed that there are many ways students with IDD can contribute to classrooms. 2.7% say that this statement is somewhat true.



83.78% say it is "very true" that there are many ways students with IDD can contribute to classrooms. 2.7% say that this statement is somewhat true.

Q3 - I was able to "connect" to my peer before class.

75.68% of participants were able to connect with their peer before class. 5.41% of participants over this semester state they were not at all able to connect with their peers.

