EPRICC: Exploring Peer Relationships in an Inclusive College Classroom

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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 experience.

Before every class to socialize and give visiting students the college environment with the inclusion of students with IDD.

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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
Data Spring Semester 2020
- 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.

Data Fall Semester 2019
- 83.78% of participants strongly agree that there are many ways students with IDD can contribute to classrooms.
- 2.7% say that this statement is somewhat true.

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 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.