

## Implementing Peer Mediated Interventions with Visual Supports for Social Skills Development in a School-Based Work Setting with Secondary Students with Autism

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**Abstract :** More youths and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have been entering the workforce in recent years. Historically, students with ASD struggle after leaving high school and experience lower rates of employment, with social skills continuing to be the most problematic area of concern. Special education teachers may find it challenging to identify effective combinations of evidence-based practices (EBPs) and supports to best guide these students. One EBP, Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII) has been well documented in the literature as being effective for younger students with autism but not researched as much with older students and adults, particularly in work settings. A need to combine PMII with other EBPs has been identified as a way to achieve a greater positive impact rather than any practice alone. A multiple baseline across skills design was used in this research project with two participants in different settings. PMII was combined with Visual Supports, with typical peers being trained in both practices. PMII is an evidence-based practice used to address social concerns by training peers without disabilities as to how they can provide feedback to and support, the student with ASD with social interactions in structured settings. The peers without disabilities were the instructors, while the adults facilitated the social situations and provided support to both the peers and students with ASD when needed. Because many individuals with ASD learn best with visual input, rather than using only the spoken word (verbal directions and feedback), Visual Supports were used in conjunction with PMII. Visual Supports can include written words, pictures, symbols, videos, or objects. In this project, the Visual Supports used were written social scripts, videos, Stop and Think signs, written reminder cards, a school map, and a pictorial task analysis of work tasks. Variables that may affect intervention outcomes in this project included attendance at school and school-based work settings for both the students with ASD and the peers without disabilities and behaviors and responses from others in the settings. Qualitative data was also collected from observations and surveys with peers about the process and their role. Data indicated that the students with ASD responded more positively to redirection and support from their peers than to teachers and staff and showed an increase in positive interactions with others. Those surveyed indicated a positive attitude toward and response to the use of peer interventions with visual supports.

**Keywords :** autism, social skills, vocational training, peer interventions

**Conference Title :** ICSNECD 2025 : International Conference on Special Needs Education and Child Development

**Conference Location :** Amsterdam, Netherlands

**Conference Dates :** May 13-14, 2025