



Jimenez B^{1, 2},

¹Mater Dei School, ²University of Sydney

Building Teacher Capacity of Research-based Practice for Students with ID & ASD: Individualized Teacher-Directed Professional Development

A vital component of improving academic student outcomes is high-quality teacher professional development (PD; McLeskey et al., 2014), involving strong focus on learner (e.g., teacher, paraprofessional) development within the classroom and the learning community (McLeskey, 2011). Due to complex support needs of students with intellectual disability, it can be challenging for teachers to implement EBPs individualized for their learners, yet still implemented with fidelity. The use of a mentoring/coaching continuum is an effective method to support individualized teacher growth and implementation fidelity of evidence-based practices (EBPs); however special attention must be placed on individualized student needs and fading of supports over time (Hill et al., 2013). One key quality of learner-centered PD is identification of teacher needs that are consistent with their beliefs and knowledge (Polly et al., 2011). Sustainability of teacher-directed learning must include building teachers capacity for growth-minded continuous improvement (Shurr et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of learner-centered PD, including the use of coaching and mentoring, to support special educators as they use evidence-based practice to support their classrooms. This study used a mixed method approach in order to integrate qualitative data and quantitative data in a pragmatic approach as described by Morgan (2007) and Creswell (2009). A sequential phased process was developed in order to construct the most appropriate professional development for each teacher participant. Researchers observed teachers in the classroom, conducted individualized interviews, teachers developed their own professional learning goals collaboratively with their mentor/coach. Over one school year, 16 special educators guided their own professional learning using the sequential phased process. Formative quantitative assessment data was collected on teacher implementation fidelity, and data –based decisions were made based upon student data, as a result.

A common thread throughout the formative phase of this study was the desire to better serve students, specifically more explicit and embedded systematic-instruction. Allowing teachers to self-identify their own professional learning goals responded to the need for teachers to “buy-in” to the learning cycle for increased implementation fidelity of the EBPs. All teachers showed significant growth in implementation of fidelity, sustainability, and generalization of their identified professional learning goals. As part of the coaching/mentoring cycle, each teacher demonstrated greater approximation of identification of future goals appropriate for their current teaching capacity. Additionally, teachers demonstrated greater leadership skills to self-monitor (finding evidence-based resources to support learning, self-questioning, and teacher-leadership within their school to support peers).