

# Examining the Experiences of General Education Teachers Including Students with Autism

Kelsey A. Oliver, Ph.D. & Danielle Christy, LEP # 3165, Aubyn Stahmer, Ph.D.



## BACKGROUND

- Number of students with autism included in general education classes is increasing
- Inclusive GE classes result in better outcomes for students with autism and positive effects for typically developing peers than segregated classes
- Teacher knowledge, attitudes, and experiences impact success of inclusion
- Little is known about best practices for supporting GE teachers to educate students with autism
- Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching (CPRT) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are promising strategies for educating students with autism in inclusive settings
- Important to know what strategies teachers use to support students with autism, where teachers need more support, and their perceptions of common educational strategies like CPRT & UDL

## METHODS

- 12 GE Teachers completed focus groups online via Zoom call
- Inclusion criteria: lead teacher in elementary or middle school GE class, taught at least one student with autism
- Participants had an average of **11.8** (*SD* = 8.6) years teaching experience. 100% female sample. Majority taught kindergarten at a public school
- Using interview guide, asked a series of questions about CPRT, UDL, and other strategies teachers would use based on brief vignettes about students with autism
- Teachers were encouraged to share their relevant experiences

**RESULTS:**  
 General Education teachers use **multiple strategies to facilitate communication, self-regulation, social interaction, and academic engagement** for their students with autism and have **generally positive perceptions of CPRT and UDL, with a few exceptions**

UDL Component	Teacher Feedback/Quotes
Multiple Means of Action or Expression +	-Having the student dictate to teacher or computer (voice to text) instead of writing -Video record presentation to give later - Making art project/poster instead of writing
Sustaining Efforts +	- Using preferred interests to encourage engagement in tasks
Multiple Means of Representation +	-Providing visual when speaking or write down what you're saying
Options for Comprehension +	- Giving oral instead of written exams
Recruiting interest +	-Incorporating student interests increases motivation

Strategies Used by Teachers			
Facilitate Communication	Self-Regulation	Social Interaction	Academic Engagement
-Sentence starters -Verbal modeling -Priming -Visual supports	-Priming -First/then contingency -Peer modeling/support -Visual supports -Support staff -"Calming center" -Providing breaks	-Priming -Peer modeling/support -Visual supports -Educating/training peers	-First/then contingency -Visual supports -Breaking down task and scaffolding -Incorporating student interests

CPRT Component	Teacher Feedback/Quotes
Student Attention +	- "Doing this for the whole class makes it better, not just for one student" - "This is just good teaching"
Clear and Appropriate Cues +	- "This is just good teaching"
Easy and Difficult Tasks +	- "We always have a mixture of easy and difficult cues"
Reinforcing Attempts +	- Providing rewards for incremental progress and effort is helpful - Recognizing that they are going to make mistakes & giving credit for effort
Share Control/give choices + / -	- "Powerful for all students, not just those with autism...Aligns well with UDL" - "I am a big control freak so I think that's the part that's hard for me to provide choices" - "Shared control can be tricky" because he might only want to do a certain thing
Direct and Natural Reinforcement + / -	- "Following [student's] lead of what they love...and then using that as their reinforcement" is helpful - Immediate reinforcement can be difficult
Follow Student Lead + / -	- Can be difficult if student only wants to talk about/do one certain thing - Can "go down a rabbit hole" - "Really grabs his attention and gets him to buy into that and be really engaged"