“Who’s on First?”

Using Sports Trivia Peer Tutoring to Increase Conversational Language

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As a growing number of students with disabilities are included within general education environments, it is important to plan ahead for the new and exciting social opportunities they will encounter in these environments. In addition to teaching programs designed to overcome basic communication deficits, it is important to give careful consideration to what students will talk about as they become fully participating members across a variety of new social environments. Students with disabilities often require repeated practice to acquire, generalize, and maintain social communication skills. A structured, reciprocal peer tutoring program can provide students with many opportunities to respond with immediate feedback. When implemented systematically, peer tutoring programs are able to support students as they practice the skills necessary for a conversational exchange. Therefore, this article describes how to create a systematic peer tutoring program with sports trivia content to teach and support social conversational skills for individuals with disabilities.

Many children with disabilities exhibit language deficits, limitations in appropriate social responses, and difficulties with peer interactions (Downing, 1999; Kuder, 2003). A lack of appropriate social communication skills can have a negative impact on students’ access to important and meaningful relationships (Downing, 1999). Simply placing students with disabilities alongside their peers without providing explicit instruction in socially contextual conversational skills does not lead to meaningful conversation (Gresham, 1981). Therefore, it is critical for teachers, parents, and friends to arrange multiple opportunities for students with disabilities to learn and practice socially appropriate communicative interactions.

Teaching students how to communicate is extremely important because the ability to communicate gives students a way to gain access to basic needs (Downing, 1999; Reichle, Beukelman, & Light, 2002). For instance, if a student with limited mobility is too warm or is hungry, he or she can request changes to the current situation by, for instance, asking for a window to be opened or for a snack. Without systematic communication programming, many students with disabilities may not acquire socially appropriate ways to request access to their most basic needs (Wacker, Berg, & Harding, 2002). In addition to teaching
students how to request access to preferred items and activities and how to refuse nonpreferred items and activities, it is important to teach students how to request access to peers and how to successfully engage in social interactions.

Communication requires an exchange between two people. When students with communication and social skills deficits are taught to engage in an appropriate social exchange, they are more likely to experience additional learning opportunities (Downing, 1999; Wacker, Peck, Derby, Berg, & Harding, 1996). For example, teaching a simple, age-appropriate greeting response (such as, “Hey, what’s up?”) to Caitlyn, a student with communication difficulties, substantially increases the likelihood that she will come into contact with a variety of new socially important information. For instance, her peer, Amy, may respond with, “Not much. Hey, there’s a basketball game tonight. Wanna come?” In this example, Caitlyn is able to access new information: There is a basketball game and her peer wants her to attend. Although a greeting response such as “Hey, what’s up?” may be more simple, teaching age-appropriate greeting responses to students with communication and social skills deficits will give them access to a variety of social opportunities with their peers. Although there are many teaching strategies designed to increase the receptive and expressive communication skills of students with disabilities using a variety of response modalities (Freeman & Daké, 1996; Frost & Bondy, 2002; Sundberg & Partington, 1998), the following important question for parents and teachers remains:

**Once Students Are Talking…
What Should They Talk About?**

Teaching students a variety of common-interest, social conversational topics can be beneficial to students with disabilities and their peers (Goldstein & Morgan, 2002; Gresham, 1981) and should increase the probability that students will form friendships (Chadsey & Han, 2005; Downing, 1999). Because friendships require a level of shared interest, mutual understanding, and knowledge of various commonly discussed topics (Chadsey & Han, 2005), programs designed to assist students in the acquisition of these skills are extremely important. In other words, it is wonderful that as a result of teaching Caitlyn a greeting response, she is invited to the basketball game, but consideration needs to be given to what Caitlyn will talk about while at the game. Teaching students how to request and gain access to social situations is critical to their success and independence, but it is equally important to teach students examples of what to say when they are then in those new social situations.

A peer tutoring (PT) program in age-appropriate conversation starters is one way to teach and support students’ acquisition of an acceptable and functional social vocabulary. A structured PT program that deliberately features visual cues from students’ home, school, and community environments should increase the likelihood that the newly acquired communication skills will transfer from the structured PT format to the natural environment. That is, simply inviting Jenna, a student with autism, to participate in a sports trivia peer tutoring program gives her an opportunity to practice social exchanges with her peers. However, purposely selecting and including age-appropriate pictures and common-interest topics as cues for conversation should more directly affect Jenna’s ability to generalize this new set of conversational skills to her home and community environments (Duan & O’Brien, 1998; Stokes & Baer, 1977). This level of planning and intentional programming is often necessary for students to transfer knowledge from the peer tutoring environment to their home, community, and anywhere else social conversation is expected.

Han and Chadsey (2004) found that among 65 middle school students interviewed, the most preferred activity reported was sports. Conversations about sports occur across many age groups and within many environments, including the playground, lunchroom, and game settings. Sports talk can be age appropriate and can provide students with important social conversation starters. The acquisition of a social vocabulary that includes sports content has the potential to bridge what appears to be a rather large social gap between students with disabilities and their peers. This article describes the design and implementation of a sports trivia peer tutoring program to increase conversational language skills for students with communication and social skill deficits.

**Why Peer Tutoring?**

Peer tutoring is an evidence-based, cooperative learning strategy that increases students’ engagement in functional, academic content (Greenwood, 1991). Peer tutoring has been used to support students’ learning of a variety of academic skills, including sight word identification, algebra, problem solving, and reading (Allsopp, 1997; Barbetta, Miller, Peters, Heron, & Cochran, 1991; Houghton & Bain, 1993). Peer tutoring is also an effective peer-mediated strategy for teaching and supporting the use of critical social skills necessary for successful peer interactions (Duan & O’Brien, 1998; Gumpel & Frank, 1999; Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard, & Delquadri, 1994).

The components of successful social interactions, such as initiating and responding to peers, delivering praise, and celebrating success, are explicitly taught and practiced within a PT program (Brady, 1997). Therefore, PT programs provide an appropriate structure and format for repeated practice of these skills. Although there
are many different formats for tutoring, reciprocal, same-age peer tutoring is an ideal format for students with communication and social skills deficits and their peers to practice the give and take of social interactions. In fact, when implemented systematically, PT programs are an excellent method for substantially increasing the number of learning opportunities and positively influencing student engagement during the school day (Greenwood, 1991; Heron, Welsch, & Goddard, 2003; Miller, Barbetta, & Heron, 1994). See Heron, Welsch, and Goddard (2003) and Maheady, Mallette, and Harper (2006) for descriptions of various peer tutoring systems.

The repeated practice embedded within peer tutoring systems benefits students by promoting the acquisition of social skills, such as listening and communicating clearly, and also by providing a carefully planned environment for the practice (Cohen, 1986). In a structured social skills PT program, students have many opportunities to practice newly acquired social skills and to receive immediate feedback on their performance. The level of practice and feedback embedded within a PT program is often necessary for the initial acquisition and maintenance of new skills for students with communication and social skill deficits (Arreaga-Mayer, 1998; Calculator, 1988). Repeated practice of age-appropriate content within a PT format may increase students’ conversation starters and positively influence their social interactions. Sports trivia is not only age-appropriate but also fitting as the content included in PT programs designed to teach and support social conversational skills.

Managing the Team (Role of the Teacher)

Creating and maintaining a sports trivia peer tutoring program is similar to managing a baseball team. In this program, the teacher is the manager and begins by designing the program according to the following steps:

1. Choose the players.
2. Select and write the content.
3. Acquire the equipment.
4. Train the tutors.

Once this is complete, the teacher schedules, organizes, and manages the peer tutoring sessions. It is also important that the manager promote and create additional opportunities for students to practice their new sports talk with their friends and family. The following sections describe how to carry out these steps in a sports trivia peer tutoring program.

Designing the Program

The foundation for an effective PT program is built on the following components: (a) selection of student participants (drafting the team), (b) inclusion of age-appropriate conversational content (preparing the field), (c) creation and organization of tutoring materials (gathering and organizing the equipment), and (d) preparing the tutors (spring training).

Drafting the Team (Selecting Student Participants)

Selecting student participants is the first step to creating a PT program and should be done with care and consideration of students’ individual interests and the interests of their same-age peers. A promising tutor, for example, is a student who talks frequently about sports, recites facts from sports pages, or flips through baseball cards during free time. Selecting students already knowledgeable in sports may substantially reduce the need to include additional management systems within training and tutoring sessions. However, prior sports knowledge is not a prerequisite for becoming an effective tutor. Because peer tutoring is a cooperative learning activity, in which both the tutor and tutee learn by teaching, prior sports knowledge is helpful but not critical to the success of the program.

While drafting the team, identify and select students who need explicit instruction and repeated practice to acquire social skills. Consider students who experience rejection by their peers and students who appear to avoid unstructured social interactions. Students with limited social communication skills would benefit from this program first by learning new conversation starters and second by engaging in multiple practice opportunities requiring the careful balance of a give-and-take exchange between two people.

Although there are some prerequisite skills necessary to participate in a sports trivia peer tutoring program, these skills can be taught within training sessions prior to the start of the program (for additional information, see the Spring Training section of this article). However, it is important to consider selecting students who are able to follow multistep directions, sit, attend, and engage in a 20- to 30-min structured activity. It is also helpful to have tutors who are able to read simple text, such as “Who is this?” or “What team does he play for?” With the addition of simple-to-use, low-tech supports, however, the ability to read is not a prerequisite skill. See the section on Troubleshooting in this article, and refer to Wood, Mackiewicz, Van Norman, and Cooke in this issue for additional information on how to support nonreaders in this program. With proper modeling and feedback, students with a range of abilities can also serve as tutors and play a reciprocal role during PT (Cooke, Heron, Heward, & Test, 1982).

Preparing the Field (Selecting Content)

Once the players are drafted, select the content. Look, ask, and listen to find out students’ interests in specific
teams, sports, movie stars, and TV shows. Plan to expand on that knowledge as you develop questions for tutoring. Ask students sample questions (see Figure 1) to evaluate their background knowledge of various sports, then select content for tutoring to develop their conversational skills around a particular topic.

When unsure about students’ knowledge of sports figures and other age-appropriate topics, place a variety of sports items, such as hats, T-shirts, and sports magazines, in the classroom and ask students to talk about what they know about the items. For example, point to a Philadelphia Eagles jersey and ask, “What team is this?” or “What sport do the Eagles play?” Also inquire about what is popular in sports by getting help from student athletes and other students interested in sports. Ask a group of sports enthusiasts to help draft the questions. Approach students who are baseball fans and ask them to help write the baseball questions; talk to some of the school’s basketball stars to find out who is the most popular professional basketball player. Appropriate questions for sports trivia peer tutoring are based on student preference and family interest and include a wide range of information from students’ home, school, and community environments. When drafting questions, it is important to ask family members and friends about students’ favorite teams and players and to include questions about teams that are currently featured in the media.

To maximize the benefits of this program, make sure the content matches cues in the students’ environment (e.g., pictures in magazines, on T-shirts and hats). For instance, if the World Series is underway, consider including some questions about players and teams that will be featured on the news, in the newspaper, and in magazines. Also, try to avoid selecting trivia material based solely on the sports team preferences of the adults in the classroom. It would be a big mistake to send a player home ready to talk about the New York Yankees (i.e., the teacher’s and paraprofessional’s favorite team) when Mom, Dad, and brothers are huge New York Mets fans!

When writing questions, it is critical to keep in mind that the purpose of this program is to teach students age-appropriate conversational topics in response to a variety of cues so they have more to talk about with their same-age peers and family members. As a result of this program, for example, a student should be more likely to be cued to engage in a conversation about the Yankees and baseball when he sees a peer wearing a Yankees T-shirt, holding baseball cards, or flipping through a sports magazine. For students to meet goals such as this, the PT content must be closely aligned with items frequently found within the home, school, and community environments. Therefore, be selective in choosing the content and in writing the questions so that students will gain knowledge in socially acceptable, age-appropriate, and common-interest conversation starters.

Once the content has been narrowed down, draft a minimum of 24 to 36 questions and answers that will directly target these high-interest content areas, then select a set of six to eight questions to include in the first round of materials. During peer tutoring sessions, each student should have a set of six to eight questions to practice answering. As students answer a question correctly during two consecutive testing sessions, new questions should be added from the original set. Figure 2 displays sample questions, and Figure 3 gives suggestions on how to use the Internet to find topics for questions and pictures to use in tutoring.

### Gathering and Organizing the Equipment (Creating Materials)

There is a variety of equipment necessary to run an efficient and effective sports trivia peer tutoring program: (a) tutoring materials; (b) management materials; and (c) easy, low-cost alternatives and organizational odds and ends.

#### Tutoring Materials. An individualized binder format is ideal for presenting pictures of sports figures and icons and for displaying scripts of sports trivia. It can be

| Teacher shows the student a picture of an athlete and asks, |
| “Who is this?” “What team does he (she) play for?” |
| Teacher points to a sports emblem and asks, |
| “What team is this?” “What sport does this team play?” |
| Teacher holds up a sports magazine and says, |
| “Who is this?” “What game is on Sunday?” |
| Teacher asks the student to |
| “Name as many (baseball, football, or other sport) players as you can think of.” |
| Teacher asks the student, |
| “What is your favorite sport?” “Name a professional (favorite sport) player.” |

**FIGURE 1.** Sample probe questions for the development of peer tutoring content.

| “What sport does this person play?” |
| “What team does he [she] play for?” |
| “Who is the second baseman for the Yankees?” |
| “Name the football teams from New York.” |
| “What is Derek Jeter’s batting average for the 2006 season?” |

**FIGURE 2.** Sample trivia questions.
In addition to using the interests of your students, their peers, and their families to draft trivia questions, you can find topics from the following Internet resources for “What’s Hot In Sports Talk:”

- http://www.funtrivia.com
- http://www.yahooligans.com/content/sports/
- http://www.sikids.com/

Research sports images using www.altavista.com or www.google.com:

1. Using a Web browser (Netscape, Internet Explorer, etc.), open http://www.altavista.com or http://www.google.com
2. Click on the Images link.
3. Enter keywords for the image you want to search for. For example, if you are searching for an image of Derek Jeter, type “Derek Jeter” in the search box.
4. Scroll down through the thumbnails (the small sample pictures on the left side of the screen) until you find a photo you like. Hitting the Next button on the bottom of the page will give you more photo options.
5. When you find the image you like, click on the thumbnail. The thumbnail is a link to the actual photo on the Web.
6. To save the image:
   - Windows users: Right-click on the image and choose Save Image As..., name the file, and choose the directory in which to save the image.
   - Mac users: Click and hold down the button on the image until a menu pops up. Choose Save Image As..., name the file and choose the directory in which to save the image.
7. To print the image without saving it:
   - Windows users: Right-click in the image and select View Image. The image will appear on a Web page by itself. Choose Print from the File menu. Select a printer and print.
   - Mac users: Click and hold the button down on the image until a menu pops up. Select View Image. The image will appear on a Web page by itself. Choose Print from the File menu. Select a printer and print.

If you do not have access to the Internet, find clippings from magazines and the newspaper. Peer tutoring in age-appropriate responses to “hot topic” trivia is limitless. Peer tutoring materials can be created in the same manner as described above to include trivia about current movies, music, TV characters, movie stars, and more.

FIGURE 3. How to use the Internet to find trivia questions and pictures.

adapted to fit budget and time constraints. See Figure 4 for sample peer tutoring materials.

The following materials are needed to create an organized peer tutoring system:

- peer tutoring binder (a 1- to 2-inch binder for each student)
- plastic sheet protectors (one sleeve to hold two back-to-back, scripted pages)
- printed pages with scripted trivia questions
- progress sheets (see Figure 5 for a sample progress sheet)
- testing sheets (see Figure 6 for a sample testing sheet)
- pencils and crayons or markers
- tokens or other rewards for correct tutoring behavior (e.g., a self-inking star stamp and index cards or laminated stickers with Velcro)
- timer to signal the end of the session
- box to store materials

To create a peer tutoring binder, find and print pictures of sports figures from the Internet, sports magazines, or the newspaper. Import the pictures into a Microsoft Word (or similar) document and arrange the page in landscape format. Type the trivia questions related to the picture on a second page of the same document. Save the document for easy access and updating. Print out the trivia questions, answers, and pictures on a color printer in landscape format (i.e., a horizontal page rather than the standard vertical), and insert the picture page and the question page back to back into a plastic sheet protector. Place the pictures and scripts in the binder so the tutee sees only the picture while the tutor is able to read the corresponding script (see Figure 4). For organization and efficiency, each picture should correspond to more than one trivia question. For example, the questions “Who is this?” and “What team does he [she] play for?” are asked about one picture and should be placed on the same page. Repeat this process and add additional pages as needed to include all six to eight questions.

Management Materials. To run an effective and efficient PT program, it is important to have a systematic management plan in place prior to the start of training. The management system should be used to provide students with immediate and specific feedback on their performance during training and throughout the program. A simple, easy-to-assemble star card management system consists of an index card; a self-inking star stamp, marker, or stickers; and coupons or similar tokens exchangeable for lunch with the teacher, an extra trip to the library for more books on sports, or other preferred activities. In addition to the on-the-spot feedback, consider a bulletin board to display exceptional players’ star cards so that students receive social recognition for their efforts during PT sessions.
The star card system is an example of a simple management system that can be used during training and during independent PT sessions. If an effective, ongoing classroom management system is already in place, consider extending its application to training and subsequent tutoring sessions. During training, the management system is used to provide students with immediate, tangible feedback following their demonstration of newly acquired tutoring skills. Once training has ended, the management system is used to clearly communicate and support high expectations for engagement during peer tutoring sessions.

**Easy, Low-Cost Alternatives and Organizational Odds and Ends.** If budget or time constraints do not allow for the purchase of binders, sheet protectors, computer paper, or star stamps, think of lower-cost solutions or those requiring less effort. To save time, consider purchasing several sets of trading cards and using removable labels on the back of each card. Rather than use the Internet to find pictures, ask students to help you cut pictures from
magazines and newspapers and then hand-write the questions and answers. In place of a star stamp, consider using a brightly colored marker or crayon.

To keep the program materials organized, use a storage bin to hold the binders, the timer, and all other related peer tutoring materials. Clearly label the tutoring binders with students’ names, and use the inside flap of the binder to hold multiple copies of progress and testing sheets. Attach Velcro to the binder and related materials or use a pencil pouch to hold students’ pencils, markers, and star cards. Above all, remember to keep it simple and organized. Too much complexity in the construction of the materials can delay the implementation of the program.

**Spring Training (Preparing Tutors)**

Once a set of questions has been written and the materials are gathered, it is time to begin spring training. A typical reciprocal peer tutoring session consists of 20 to 30 min of teaching, 5 to 10 min of testing, and 5 to 10 min of charting and cleanup. Use a model–lead–test teaching procedure, with role playing and feedback components, is an optimal way to teach students how to master these skills. Consider using a group instruction format with modeling and role playing to simultaneously teach a group of students where to obtain and how to hold the tutoring materials. Have students say the answers in unison to rehearse the giving of praise or corrective feedback.

Consider using a direct instruction approach to (a) ask a question to the group, (b) wait for the students to answer in unison, and then (c) provide feedback to the group. For example, say, “When your partner is correct the first time, what do we say and do?” Wait for a response. Students should respond with, “We say something nice and ask the next question.” Say, “Yes, you should praise your partner’s answer and then ask the next question,” or something similar to provide students with immediate feedback on their performance.

The peer testing component of tutoring follows a 20- to 30-min period of peer teaching. During this time, both students ask their partner all the trivia questions and make a decision about the accuracy of their peer’s response to each question. This component of the program gives both students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the content. When students answer a particular question correctly during two to three consecutive tests, the teacher or student removes the mastered question and adds new, unknown content to the student’s materials. During training, give students the opportunity to practice testing by having them ask each question one time, wait for their peer to respond, and make a decision about the accuracy of their partner’s response. Provide students with a lot of practice and feedback as they learn the skills needed for testing and recording corrects and incorrects on a testing sheet (see Figure 6).

It is also important to teach students how to document their peers’ overall progress in the sports trivia peer tutoring program. During training, teach students how to record the number of questions their partner mastered during each session on a cumulative progress chart (see Figure 5 for a sample cumulative progress chart). Use modeling and repeated practice to teach students how to count the number of questions answered correctly during two to three testing sessions, and then how to record that same number on their peers’ cumulative progress chart. For instance, teach students to color in three squares on a cumulative progress chart when their peers answer three trivia questions correctly for two consecutive testing sessions. Continue to practice charting until students demonstrate an appropriate level of accuracy and reliability in recording their partners’ progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct Response</th>
<th>☑ or X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Who is this?”</td>
<td>Derek Jeter</td>
<td>☑ X X ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What team does he play for?”</td>
<td>Yankees</td>
<td>☑ X ☑ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What team is this?”</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What sport do they play?”</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>X X ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Who is this?”</td>
<td>Tiger Woods</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What sport does he play?”</td>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>☑ X X ☑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 6.** Sample testing sheet. Shading (Question 2) indicates that the student has reached mastery on that question and that a new question should be added.
Accurately and reliably mapping student performance over the course of the PT program is critical because it gives a visual display of the program’s effectiveness. Once the PT program is up and running, students’ progress can easily be checked by glancing at the cumulative progress charts. If students are not moving ahead as predicted, observe a session and identify any problems, such as inaccurate tutor feedback or unreliable progress recording. Provide students with additional practice opportunities and intervene to correct any errors.

During training, focus on teaching students how to become effective and efficient peer tutors. For training purposes, consider using known content, such as number, letter, or color questions, and introduce the trivia questions once students have mastered the skills of peer tutoring. To be effective tutors, students should be able to accurately complete the following sequence of skills with minimal to no adult assistance: (a) obtain materials, (b) pair with their partner, (c) begin tutoring (when instructed), (d) read the question(s), (e) wait a minimum of 3 s for their peer to respond, (f) provide a praise statement following an incorrect answer, (g) provide the answer following an incorrect answer the second time, (h) turn the page and read the next question, (i) switch roles when instructed, (j) engage in testing (when instructed or signaled by a timer), (k) chart their partners’ progress, and (l) put away materials.

Throughout training, during subsequent peer tutoring sessions, and following students’ acquisition of new conversational topics, it is important to periodically collect information on the accuracy of students’ tutoring skills and to evaluate their use of sports vocabulary outside of peer tutoring sessions. To assess for generalization and maintenance of students’ conversational skills, evaluate students’ use of age-appropriate conversational topics before beginning the program, during training and peer tutoring, and following PT sessions. To systematically evaluate students’ progress, create a simple skills training checklist and observe students while they are engaged in PT (see Figure 7 for a skills training checklist). While observing students, record a tally mark under the independent column on a data sheet when the tutor correctly performs a skill in the sequence without prompts and a tally mark under the prompted column if the tutor performs a skill following a prompt. If students consistently require prompts to perform particular skills correctly during two to three consecutive sessions, tailor the remaining training sessions to provide additional opportunities to practice those skills.

It is equally important to observe students delivering praise statements and evaluating the accuracy of their peers’ responses during the testing component of a PT program. If students are having difficulty mastering these skills, conduct additional practice sessions and continue to give explicit instructions and feedback to teach each skill. For additional information on targeting training difficulties, refer to the Troubleshooting section of this article.

Through demonstration, role play, practice, and feedback, students will learn appropriate tutoring skills. As students perform each new skill with accuracy, offer immediate and positive feedback on their progress. Before moving from training to peer tutoring sessions, observe students’ demonstration of peer tutoring skills to recheck for mastery. For more information on peer tutor training, refer to Gardner, Nobel, Hessler, Yawn, and Heron (this issue), Cartledge and Lo (2006), and Cooke, Heron, and Heward (1983).

### Game Day
(Playing and Managing the Game)

It’s time to hit the dirt! Students are now ready to begin peer tutoring sessions. Prepare a schedule so all players know when and where tutoring will take place. Unless social conversational goals are included in students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), it is not recommended that tutoring in sports trivia replace time allocated to academic instruction. Sessions may be scheduled during recess, homeroom, or an after-school pro-
gram. To allow time for teaching, testing, and charting, prepare to run tutoring sessions for 30 to 50 min. For an example of a scripted PT session, refer to Figure 8.

Monitor as many peer tutoring sessions as possible to assess the fidelity of program implementation. It is important to schedule three to four brief, 60-s observations to collect information on students’ engagement and evaluate the progress of tutoring sessions. Continue to use a skills-training checklist or similar progress monitoring sheet to record student engagement during independent PT sessions. Think about using the management system to provide consistent and immediate feedback if students are observed in off-task or other disruptive behaviors. Consider delivering star stamps and praise to students who are engaged in peer tutoring, and restate expectations for tutoring behaviors, such as sitting up tall and speaking clearly.

Also consider linking the number of stars earned on the star card to a mystery motivator: After collecting a predetermined number of stars, students can select coupons for extra recess time, stickers, or access to a favorite computer game. Whether selecting a structured management system to support student engagement during PT sessions or not, it is essential to the success of this program that good tutoring behaviors are frequently rewarded and celebrated.

Be sure to keep statistics on the players. For example, once a student demonstrates mastery of a particular trivia question, as indicated by the number of colored squares on his or her cumulative progress sheet, replace the mastered material with new questions. After adding new questions from the set of drafted questions, place the mastered questions in an envelope for a maintenance and generalization check at the end of the week and then again at the end of the month. For the maintenance and generalization check, select a time to check students’ retention of the trivia questions across a variety of different environments.

Consider the following scenario as a way to conduct a structured assessment of the extent to which newly acquired sports talk generalizes across environments. One week after Amelia achieved mastery on Trivia Questions 2 and 3, Ava, a peer who was not Amelia’s partner during peer tutoring, talks to Amelia on the playground. She asks questions about sports that are similar to those asked in PT, but in a different way from how they were presented during PT and also in a different setting from where the trivia was practiced. For example, Ava talks to Amelia on the playground about the sports figures with a magazine present but in the absence of the binder and any other peer tutoring materials. If Mrs. Kay, Amelia’s teacher, observes Amelia inaccurately answering Ava’s questions during two to three consecutive maintenance and generalization checks, Mrs. Kay could return those questions and topics to Amelia’s PT materials for additional practice. However, if Mrs. Kay suspects that Amelia did not

Manager (teacher): “It’s time for tutoring. Please get your materials and begin when I say ‘Start.’ When the timer rings, switch roles. If you have questions, raise your hand. I will be walking around the room to answer questions and deliver star stamps.” Teacher waits for students to gather materials, sets the timer for 10 minutes, and says, “Start tutoring now.” Teacher walks around the room delivering star stamps and praise for good tutoring behaviors as students engage in tutoring.

Coach (tutor): Reads the first question, waits 3 seconds for the player (student) to respond.

Player (student): Answers the question.

Coach (tutor): If the player is correct, the coach says, “Fantastic!” or a similar praise statement and asks the next question. If the player is incorrect, the coach says, “Try again,” and re-reads the question.

Player (student): Answers the question.

Coach (tutor): If the player is correct, the coach says, “Fantastic!” or a similar praise statement and asks the next question. If the player is incorrect, the coach reads the answer (“Baseball”) and waits for the player to repeat the answer.

Player (student): Repeats the answer.

Coach (tutor): Reads the next question, waits 3 seconds for the player (student) to respond.

Students repeat the process until the timer rings. Students switch roles and repeat the process until the timer signals the end of the session.

Teacher: “It’s time for testing. Ask your friend each question one time and mark the testing sheet. Once you have finished testing, count the number of questions with two smiley faces in a row and color in your progress sheet. If you need help, raise your hand.”

Student 1 (tester): Asks each question one time, decides if his student is correct (smiley face) or incorrect (X), and records the answer on the testing sheet.

Student 2 (tester): Asks each question one time, decides if his student is correct (smiley face) or incorrect (X), and records the answer on the testing sheet.

Students count the number of questions with two smiley faces in a row and color in the corresponding squares on their individual progress sheets.

Teacher: “Time’s up. Great work. Put your peer tutoring materials away, get your backpacks, and line up for the bus.”

Approximate time: 20 minutes (7 minutes each as coach and player; a total of 6 minutes for testing)

FIGURE 8. Example of a scripted sports trivia peer tutoring session.
have enough practice opportunities to use her new conversational skills, Mrs. Kay should reconsider the appropriateness of the trivia content.

It is important to remember that the idea behind a sports trivia peer tutoring program is to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to learn and practice age-appropriate conversation starters with their peers with and without disabilities. If students are unable to use their new knowledge about sports at home, at school, or in the community, perhaps different content should be considered. When students, their same-age peers, and families are not interested in sports, try including a different kind of trivia in the PT program. For additional trivia ideas, see the section on Troubleshooting.

Once students reach mastery of the content during peer tutoring, the focus of the program becomes arranging opportunities at school to help support the use of age-appropriate conversation starters outside of peer tutoring. For this program to meet its ultimate goals, it is important to keep the content in the PT materials matched to student interest and linked to age-appropriate social conversations.

### Eyes on the Ball (Encouraging and Supporting Communication)

The purpose of peer tutoring in sports, music, or TV trivia is to give students something to talk about with their peers in the lunchroom, on the playground, on the bus, or anywhere else. It is one thing for students to be great sports talkers during tutoring sessions and another for them to practice using their new knowledge about sports in other locations. Once students acquire some conversation starters during peer tutoring, consider contriving some postgame opportunities in the classroom, lunchroom, gymnasium, and anywhere else you can think of to prompt and reinforce sports talk among peers. Create several situations to promote and support the use of these conversational skills outside the tutoring environment to increase the interaction opportunities between students and their peers.

Initially, it may be necessary to create highly structured social opportunities so students come into frequent contact with multiple practice opportunities. However, if the program was built on students’ common interests with peers and family members, then expect that social attention from peers and adults will quickly support the use of students’ new conversational skills. When opportunities are arranged to support new social interactions across many different environments, the benefits of designing, developing, and running a sports trivia peer tutoring program will outweigh the time and effort spent in training and practice.

The following are four suggestions for increasing students’ postgame engagement in age-appropriate conversations in a variety of settings:

1. Give students access to sports pages and magazines, and provide praise or other identified reinforcers for engaging in contextual conversations.
2. Purchase trading cards of sports figures or other celebrities and put the cards in students’ lunchboxes and backpacks. Allow students access to the cards while they are with their same-age peers in the lunchroom and on the playground. Simply giving trading cards to students following engagement in sports trivia peer tutoring may be a sufficient cue to prompt sports talk in various social situations and encourage peer interaction.
3. Add sports-related items to the classroom to provide students with multiple cues to engage in socially appropriate conversations. For example, work with students to create a sports news bulletin board. Use the bulletin board to display a variety of known sports figures’ pictures from magazines and newspapers. Teach students how to use the bulletin board as a springboard to conversations.
4. If necessary, use the star card management system to support students’ use of appropriate conversation and social interactions.

Adding simple cues in the classroom and throughout the school building will support students as they leave the structure of peer tutoring and use their new skills throughout their day.

Above all, be a fan! Engage in conversations with students as they use their new, socially appropriate conversational topics across a variety of environments. If necessary, continue to use the star card management system to target reluctant students’ social initiations, to support their successful peer interactions, and to reinforce the new and exciting applications of their conversational skills.

### Game Day Troubleshooting (Resolving Program Issues)

Even after students have learned the skills necessary to become fluent tutors, some game-day stresses may surface during PT sessions. Potential problems include students who (a) mispronounce the names of sports figures or exhibit other reading difficulties, (b) lack motivation, or (c) engage in age-appropriate but off-topic conversations during tutoring. The following scenarios provide possible solutions for such problems.

**Scenario 1. You’ve started peer tutoring sessions, either classwide or in a one-to-one format, and notice that Zachary mispronounces the name Derek Jeter. He says “Dirt Peter” as he corrects the tutee, who is desperately trying to answer correctly.**

Misprediction errors are an indication that Zachary needs additional opportunities to practice reading the content out loud. A simple teacher-led practice
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session using the model–lead–test procedure should help Zachary learn the correct pronunciation of difficult words. During a brief practice session, preview the questions with Zachary by providing a model, asking Zachary to imitate the model, and finally asking Zachary to say the word on his own. For example, to teach Zachary the correct pronunciation of Derek Jeter, provide a model by saying, “My turn. This says ‘Derek Jeter.’” Then ask Zachary to imitate the model: “Say it with me. ‘Derek Jeter.’ Excellent!” Finally, ask Zachary to pronounce the name on his own: “Good, now it’s your turn.”

A tape recorder or similar recording device and flashcards could be used to provide additional practice opportunities. Print the names of players on flashcards, and tape-record the voice of a peer reading the correct pronunciation of the difficult words. During free time, give Zachary time to practice finding, matching, and correctly pronouncing the names following the verbal model on the tape recorder. For additional support during PT sessions, consider pairing Zachary with a peer fluent in the pronunciation of the target words. Explicitly teach Zachary’s tutoring partner to provide immediate praise following Zachary’s accurate pronunciation. Giving Zachary additional time to practice pronouncing difficult words increases the likelihood that he will be successful in a reciprocal PT program.

Perhaps correct pronunciation is not the issue, but students are having difficulty reading the trivia text. If this is the case, consider embedding an electronic recording device as described in Van Norman and Wood (in press) and Wood, Moore Mackiewicz, Van Norman, and Cooke (in this issue) or use a Language Master card reading device (e.g., Califone) to provide students with a recorded voice model of the text. Using either of these simple, low-tech devices can help students with speech or reading difficulties become active participants. Monitoring PT sessions at least once per week will indicate the amount of support and extra practice students might need to become more effective tutors.

Scenario 2. Students are tutoring, but they appear to be in slow motion. How can their pace be increased?

Pacing problems during peer tutoring may be due to lack of fluency with the component skills of the program, low motivation, or both. Check students’ progress by frequently observing tutoring sessions. If they are not fluent in the skills needed for peer tutoring, schedule additional practice sessions to model and give feedback on quickly paced tutoring. To increase fluency, give students opportunities to handle the tutoring materials and engage with the peer tutoring binder and its contents. If physical manipulation of the materials is difficult for students, schedule a time to practice handling the materials. During a training session, first demonstrate how to quickly turn the pages and then give students an opportunity to practice doing so. If fluent reading is a concern, consider conducting additional training sessions and have students practice reading the trivia questions first for accuracy and then for accuracy plus speed to build fluency. Training effective tutors will help maximize the number of opportunities each student will have to interact with the content during tutoring sessions.

If, on the other hand, students are observed reading with fluency and manipulating the materials with ease but they appear unmotivated, consider using the management system to reinforce appropriate pacing and engagement during tutoring sessions. Try using the star card system to give students immediate feedback on their performance. Once students collect a predetermined number of stars for their quick pace and engagement, give them access to additional free time or other preferred activities.

For example, when Daniel and Layla are engaged in appropriately paced tutoring, say, “Wow! You guys are really flying! Keep up the great work,” and put a stamp on their star cards. After Daniel and Layla both collect 5 to 10 stars, allow them to exchange their star cards for free time, a special activity, or other preferred items. To help students maintain quick pacing and accurate performance during PT sessions, periodically observe a session to provide immediate feedback. In addition, check students’ progress charts at least one time per week and remove mastered content to keep the materials new, exciting, and up to date.

If student motivation during PT sessions continues to cause concern, review the content and evaluate the fit of the trivia questions with students’ interests and social environments. If students appear unmotivated during PT, consider changing the content, perhaps from sports trivia to movie trivia. Ask students for ideas on how to change the program so that there is a fit between what the students are learning in peer tutoring and the social environments in which they play, work, and live, both now and those planned for the future.

Scenario 3. Students are not showing an interest in sports, but they love American Idol.

For sports fans in class, sports trivia peer tutoring is a place to start; however, adding additional, age-appropriate content is encouraged. The peer tutoring format is ideal for presenting facts about popular TV icons, movie stars, cartoon characters, and just about anything else. If students show interest in Nickelodeon’s Children’s Choice Awards, consider finding the current and most popular musicians and programs on www.nick.com. Use Internet search engines to find out the latest scoop on television’s American Idol hopefuls and Amazing Race contestants. Download video and audio clips from Internet resources illustrating movie stars and singers. Be creative and redesign the program to include the use of a portable, electronic, digital video device in place of magazine and newspaper clippings, and write trivia questions on index cards.
cards. For this program to be successful, both the programs’ content and design must capture students’ interest and ultimately increase their knowledge and use of appropriate conversational starters. Remember to always keep the content age-appropriate, new, and exciting!

Scenario 4. Each time Dylan is paired with Nate, they argue about which sports team is going to win the next big title. They are not even reading the trivia questions!

If Dylan and Nate’s lively discussion is at an appropriate volume and not disrupting others engaged in tutoring, then consider altering the structure of the PT program to give the boys an alternative format to practice age-appropriate social interactions. Perhaps the highly structured PT format is no longer appropriate for Dylan and Nate and arranging an organized debate might be more suitable for them. As observations are conducted, keep in mind that socially advanced students can still participate in the program by providing appropriate models and can make valuable contributions as authors of trivia questions. They can also participate by taking on the role of assistant manager.

If students are improvising rather than reading the scripted questions word for word, try not to give up on the program. Conduct more frequent observations and document exactly what students are doing when they are not reading the trivia questions. If students are skipping over the script but are engaging in elaborate sports conversations, reflect on the contextual fit between students’ current interests and the programs’ content, and then update the content as necessary.

If students are consistently and frequently disengaged during sessions or express disinterest before or after PT, change the trivia questions immediately. If students continue to be disengaged even after the materials are updated to match their individual interests, schedule additional training sessions to model and practice appropriate PT behaviors. For example, step in as a pinch hitter for a tutee during a session and model correct posture, quick answers, and appropriate eye contact. Then have the tutee step back in and practice these skills while you give corrective feedback and praise. By keeping the materials up to date and frequently observing peer tutoring sessions, the issues presented in these four scenarios can be avoided.

Conclusion

Teaching socially appropriate conversation starters in a structured peer tutoring format should substantially increase the number of opportunities students with disabilities have to learn and practice critical social communica-

tion skills. When, as a result of a carefully planned and constructed sports trivia peer tutoring program, students with and without disabilities are overheard engaging in lively debates about the best college football team, celebrate! Students are now socially prepared to interact with their same-age peers and more likely to form lasting, meaningful friendships because they finally have something to talk about.

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Charles L. Wood for his comments and suggestions on the earlier drafts of this manuscript. I am truly grateful for his continued assistance and patience throughout the writing process.

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