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SEPLA-CON 19

Monday 22nd July – Rosehill Racecourse
Tuesday 23rd July – Rydges Parramatta



Building Teacher Capacity of Research-Based Practice for Students with Disability: Individualised Teacher-Directed Professional Development

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Biography:

Dr. Bree Jimenez is a Special Education Pedagogy and Research Consultant with Mater Dei School in Camden, New South Wales and an Honorary Research Associate in Special Education with the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney.

She has worked with Mater Dei school for over 4 years as a special education pedagogy consultant providing professional development and mentoring/coaching for teachers serving students with mild/moderate intellectual disability and autism.

Her research focuses on mainstream curriculum access and assessment for students with intellectual disabilities, including autism. She has published several research manuscripts in peer reviewed journals, multiple book chapters, academic programs, and a book on strategies to support academics for students with disabilities. She works closely with teachers, executives, school systems and state departments of education both nationally and internationally. Dr. Jimenez presents at national and international conferences and at state department of education and school system professional development for teachers, parents, and service providers of students with intellectual disabilities on the topics of assessment and access to the mainstream curriculum.

A vital component of improving academic student outcomes is high-quality teacher professional development (PD; McLeskey et al., 2014; AITSL, 2019), involving strong focus on learner (e.g., teacher, teacher assistant) 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 evidence-based practices (EBPs) individualised for their learners, yet still implemented with fidelity. The use of a mentoring/coaching continuum is an effective method to support individualised teacher growth and implementation fidelity of EBPs; however, special attention must be placed on individualised 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 presentation is to share the innovative process implemented at an independent school for students with disability. The effect of learner-centered PD, including use of coaching and mentoring, to support special educators as they use evidence-based practice to support their classrooms will be shared. A sequential phased process was developed in order to construct the most appropriate professional development per teacher participant. Through design, a pedagogical coach/mentor first observed teachers within their classroom and conducted individualised interviews. Then, teachers developed their own professional learning goals collaboratively with their mentor/coach. Over two school years, 19 special educators guided their own professional learning using the sequential phased process. Formative quantitative assessment data was collected on

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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 process was the desire to better serve students, specifically better alignment to age-appropriate learning goals and more explicit embedded systematic-instruction. Allowing teachers to self-identify 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 generalisation 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).