



Peers may be influencing a child's classroom behavior

Teachers may not be the only people in early childhood classrooms guiding the development of the students.

There is mounting evidence that peers, much like teachers, are key people through whom children learn and develop in out-of-home education settings.

Researchers with the Early Childhood Education Institute found that children were more likely to experience increased behavioral problems themselves when their peers also demonstrated increased behavior problems.

At the same time, children whose peers had better self-regulation skills demonstrated better gains in self-regulation themselves at the end of the year, according to a study measuring peer's vocabulary skills and social-emotional functioning over the course of a preschool year.

Additionally, peers' higher baseline self-regulation skills were found to be associated with children's higher self-regulation, which indicates that children who have higher baseline self-regulation may be better positioned to benefit from peers' higher self-regulation in developing their own self-regulation skills.

The findings point to the potential value of classroom-level interventions that aim to curb behavior problems and support the development of self-regulation. They also indicate that intervention efforts designed to reduce children's challenging behaviors could have benefits beyond those accruing to the target children, to include all children in a classroom.

The findings also suggest that interventions aimed at

Things to Consider

- Interventions to reduce children's challenging behaviors could benefit all children in a classroom.
- Intervention efforts aiming to improve self-regulation skills could help children to better benefit from high-functioning peers in terms of their social-emotional functioning.
- Mixed-income classrooms may benefit young children growing up in poverty more than homogeneous settings.

improving self-regulation may help children to better benefit from high-functioning peers in terms of the social-emotional functioning.

Considering that a high proportion of children from low-income families attend preschool programs designed to serve primarily low-income populations, systematic programming and supports that can compensate for limited opportunities to interact with peers having varying, especially higher, skills appears desirable.

The results further showed that peer effects of self-regulation skills on self-regulation development are particularly evident for children who themselves demonstrated higher baseline self-regulation skills. The findings indicate cumulative effects of protective factors for early development, in that children garnered additional benefits from their peers' high skill levels when they also had high baseline skills.