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Training and Support for Parents of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

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Abstract

Parents and guardians of children with the special education eligibility of emotional disturbance often have difficulties knowing how to appropriately and effectively handle their children's disruptive behaviors at home. Even though their children may be making behavioral improvements in school, often times their behaviors are still very problematic at home. So why is it that children with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) may display more appropriate behaviors in the school setting than they do at home? One possible explanation is that the parents and guardians of these children do not have the same training and knowledge concerning effective behavioral strategies typically implemented in behavioral classrooms. This article explains the dire need for school districts to implement training sessions and support groups for parents and guardians of children with EBD. The article also details possible topics for training sessions and provides ideas concerning compensation for presenters.

Training and Support for Parents of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Tony, a ten year old boy, began receiving services under the special education category of emotional disturbance in October. When he was first placed into the special education behavioral classroom he displayed an array of disruptive behaviors. These behaviors included hitting his teacher and peers whenever he became angry, which occurred at least five times every day. His behaviors also included screaming profanities at the top of his voice whenever he did not get what he wanted. His teacher did not know that so many four letter, profane words actually existed in the English language. He also refused to complete any assignment and often crumbled up worksheets and tests, smiled mischievously at his teacher and proceeded to make slam dunks into the waste paper basket. However, after six months in the special education behavioral classroom something magnificent happened. Mrs. Holder, a veteran special education teacher, had implemented a variety of both academic and behavioral strategies with Tony beginning the first day he arrived in the classroom. After some trial and error and tremendous dedication and patience on Mrs. Holder's behalf, Tony's once aggressive and disruptive behaviors began to improve.

Mrs. Holder was delighted at the progress and she could see that the anger in Tony's eyes had been replaced with tranquility and happiness that at one time had not been there. One Thursday morning, Ms. Tooke, Tony's mother, called Mrs. Holder crying. She asked if she could come to school that afternoon for a parent / teacher conference. When Ms. Tooke arrived at school that afternoon, Mrs. Holder was taken aback. Tony's mother had a black eye and her arm was in a

sling. Mrs. Holder quickly discovered that Tony had inflicted this harm onto his mother. Ms. Tooke began to tell a detailed account about how Tony became enraged the night before when she had asked him to take out the trash. They had argued and when she explained to Tony that he was grounded for a month, he punched her in the face with his fists and pushed her to the kitchen floor.

After a lengthy discussion with Ms. Tooke, Mrs. Holder discovered that this was not the first time Tony had inflicted such physical harm to his mother. Mrs. Holder also found out that Tony yelled and verbally abused his mother on a daily basis. Even though he had demonstrated markedly improved behaviors at school, Mrs. Holder was disheartened and deeply saddened to discover that at home his behaviors had escalated in both severity and frequency. As the summer months quickly approached and Tony would be home more, Ms. Tooke was at a complete loss, desperate for help, and most disconcerting – afraid of her son.

Definition of Emotional Disturbance

What exactly is the definition of emotional disturbance? According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004, emotional disturbance is defined as the following:

Condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance.

- *An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.*
- *An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.*
- *Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.*
- *A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.*
- *A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.*

Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), in the United States alone the prevalence of students identified as having an emotional disturbance is approaching half a million.

Impact on Family Unit Impact on Family Life

Stress in the family unit. Severe emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) have the potential to be extremely traumatic, costly, and disheartening to parents and other family members. According to Fox, Vaughn, Wyatte, and Dunlap (2002), the child's behavior eventually impacts every dimension of the family. In some situations, the family's everyday schedule and routine becomes focused on the child with EBD. For example, waking the child up for school and getting them dressed readily becomes an emotionally exhausting event. Additionally, Guralnick (2000) states that the child's behavioral problems create tremendous stress within the family unit. Harrower, Fox, Dunlap, and Kincaid (2000) conclude that families may decide that it is simply

easier and less stressful to remain within the confinement of their home instead of risk public displays of their children's behavioral difficulties. A family, that at one time enjoyed attending church services or dinner with friends now decline these invitations fearful of experiencing an embarrassing behavioral episode from their child. Furthermore, people are less likely to visit the family at home, since parents and other close family members also become literally emotionally exhausted with the relentless and escalating behavioral difficulties.

Finally, students with EBD can exhaust financial resources at a rate faster than the average child (Duchnowski & Kutash, 1996). For example, it is probable that a family's financial resources become easily consumed by visits to psychiatrists and costly medications. The situation might be more exasperating and hopeless if the family does not have medical insurance or does not qualify for governmental medical assistance such as Medicaid.

Impact of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders During Teenage Years

Limited skills to overcome difficulties. Students who are eligible for special education services under the category of emotional disturbance often experience difficulties in their educational and life journeys. Of course, all children are different, so individuals' experiences vary.

Unfortunately research conducted by Carter and Wehby (2003) shows that these children's teen years are filled with difficulties, which they have limited skills to overcome. These students often succumb to peer pressure at a higher rate than other children because they experience difficulty with decision making due to inherent emotional swings. Research conducted by Carson, Sitlington, and Frank (1995) found that many teenagers with EBD experiment with illegal drugs, sexual encounters, and alcohol either because they crave an escape to everyday life situations or because of poor impulse control. According to Boreson (2003), as a result of multiple sexual encounters at a young age, female students with EBD are six times more likely than female students without EBD to become pregnant more than once during their teenage and young adult years.

Likewise, these children and teenagers experience tremendous difficulties with forming relationships and bonds with peers and adults. Friedman, Kutash, and Duchnowski (1996) express that some children and teenagers with EBD either refuse to form close bonds and relationships with others or they sabotage the relationships once they have been formed.

Academic difficulties. The research depicting the academic achievements of students classified as having an emotional disturbance is disconcerting. According to Kaufmann (2005) and Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham (2004), when compared to students who qualify for other special education eligibilities, students with emotional disturbance have higher incidences of suspensions, expulsions, grade retention, rates of dropping out of school, and failure to graduate from high school. According to Wagner (1992), fifty to sixty percent of all students classified as having an emotional disturbance do not complete high school. Out of the individuals who did receive a high school diploma, few attended any type of postsecondary educational training. Research conducted by Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Kortering (2007) and Wagner (1992) also indicated that a large percentage of individuals with EBD are arrested at least once in the two years after leaving school.

Reasons for dropping out of school. Scanlon and Mellard (2002) explored the reasons that students with and without disabilities drop out of high school. The study consisted of two hundred seventy-seven individuals with and without learning disabilities and emotional behavioral disorders. Data was collected concerning the participants' experiences in school and factors that influence their decisions to drop out of high school and their experiences since leaving school.

The data showed that programs for students classified under the special education eligibility of emotional disturbance are seldom available at the secondary level; instead, these students are provided with special education programs for learning disabilities, therefore not meeting their needs. Data results also indicated that reading difficulties are a prevalent cause for students dropping out of high school. Finally, lack of self-confidence also contributed to drop out rates (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002).

Obtaining and Maintaining Employment as Adults

Research by Carter and Wehby (2003) demonstrated that individuals with EBD have an unemployment range from 42% to 70% during the first five years after high school. Carter and Wehby's (2003) research pinpointed the factors leading to these grim unemployment rates. The participants in the study included forty-seven employed adolescents ranging in ages from fifteen to twenty years old. The participants in the study had to meet certain criteria in order to be involved in the study. First, the participants had to have been employed with a community business for a minimum of one month. Participants also had to be enrolled in a class for students with behavioral or emotional disorders. Finally, these employed students had to consent to participation in the study.

The participants were administered a questionnaire to complete. The questionnaire consisted of four parts that included participant information, employment skills performance, employment skills importance, and job satisfaction. Forty-seven adults responsible for supervising the participants in their daily jobs were also given the questionnaire to complete, excluding the job satisfaction section. The data revealed that the adolescents with behavioral and emotional difficulties rated their job performances much more favorably than did their employers. Findings also indicated that the adolescents and employers had differing views regarding the importance of certain work behaviors.

In order to be successful in adulthood, it is crucial that adolescents with EBD be offered instruction that addresses job skills that are mandatory to maintaining employment. Not only should they be taught appropriate behaviors, but also which behaviors are most important to control in their personal and professional lives.

Interventions for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Exposure to positive behavioral strategies. In order for students with the special education eligibility of emotional disturbance to improve their behaviors in both the school and home setting, parents must be exposed to the positive behavioral interventions and strategies

implemented by highly trained school staff members. I taught students with emotional and behavioral disorders for nine years. In my experience, I have witnessed repeatedly the same phenomenon. My students' behaviors dramatically improved once they began receiving services in a special education behavioral classroom. However, I received phone calls from distraught parents sometimes daily reporting the out of control behaviors their children exhibited at home during after school hours, weekends, holidays, and summer breaks. Most of the parents had experienced limited opportunities to learn behavioral interventions and strategies that had proven so effective in the school setting. I attempted to explain and reiterate to my students' parents the importance of planning a schedule for the children and using positive behavioral reinforcements when behaviors were appropriate. However, these parents still struggled with their children's behaviors at home on almost a constant basis.

Limited support systems. Unfortunately, the parents of my students also had extremely limited support systems in place to assist them in times of crisis. They had no one to call to assist them when situations became out of control and no one to listen to their frustrations and stories of anguish. Most importantly, they had limited individuals in their lives who were experiencing the same situations. Their co-workers would come to work on Monday mornings telling stories of how their families went to the park for a picnic on Saturday afternoon and then spent the remainder of the day watching movies and making cookies. However, the parents of my students had quite different stories to impart to their friends and co-workers after a long, exhausting, and traumatic weekend with their children. Most of the times these parents did not confide in their co-workers or friends because they did not want to be characterized as having poor parenting skills. Instead, these parents kept silent and lived in their own private torment with no one to comfort, support, or assist them.

Training and Support Groups for Parents

I realized that in order for children to make the same behavioral improvements at home as they frequently do in special education behavioral classrooms, the parents of these students must be taught how to implement the same effective, research-based strategies that are implemented in schools. The parents / guardians of these students also must have a support system that they can turn to for assistance, guidance, and if nothing else – just to talk about their feelings and experiences.

Objectives

Imparting knowledge. The first objective for the “Training and Support Groups for Parents of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders” includes providing parents with knowledge of the effective interventions and strategies implemented daily in special education behavioral classrooms. The presenters dealing with this aspect of training will not only impart the knowledge, but also closely work with parents in teaching them how to implement these strategies.

Support groups. The second objective includes providing an atmosphere in which parents can share their stories in a supportive and nonjudgmental setting. In these support groups the parents will finally be able to openly express their concerns with other individuals experiencing the same types of situations. The facilitators of these meetings should stress the importance of building

support systems and to always maintain the perspective that the behaviors of these children can and will improve. The goal of the support group will be to offer encouragement, support, and hope to these parents by encouraging them to never give up on their children. The facilitators of the support group will reiterate that behavioral changes will take time to occur. They will also teach the parents that if one behavioral technique does not seem effective, then the parents must persevere until they find a strategy that does result in positive behavioral changes.

Timelines and Recommendations for Topics During Meetings

Timelines. With careful consideration, I recommend two meetings each month for a period of seven months. This time frame provides the information and will support the parents' needs, without becoming overwhelming.

Recommendations for topics. The following chart depicts recommendations for topics for the fourteen meetings. Of course, these are only recommendations and each school district should present topics and select times appropriate for their individual needs and schedules.

Recommendation of Topics

7:00 – 8:00	“Creating Consistent Schedules and Routines – A Crucial Aspect of Behavioral Management”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Positive Reinforcements – A Key to Improved Behaviors – Part I”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Positive Reinforcements – A Key to Improved Behaviors – Part II”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Issuing Appropriate Consequences to Your Child”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Setting Limits”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Consistency – A Critical Aspect in Behavior Management”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“De-escalation Part I – Managing the Situation Before Behaviors Become Out of Control”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“De-escalation Part II – Managing the Situation Before Behaviors Become Out of Control”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Healing Time – How to Recover and Heal After Your Child has a Significant Behavioral Episode”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Remaining Calm in Times of Crisis”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Medications – Understanding the Side Effects and Knowing What Questions to Ask Your Health Care Professional”

8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Taking Care of <u>YOU</u> – Tips on How to Take Care of Yourself – Physically and Emotionally”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Siblings of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting
7:00 – 8:00	“Looking Towards a Bright, Hopeful Future”
8:00 – 9:00	Support Group Meeting

Detailed Descriptions of Parent Training Sessions

Creating consistent schedules and routines. During the first session, “Creating Consistent Schedules and Routines – Crucial Aspects of Behavior Management,” the facilitator will teach the parents and guardians how to create effective schedules and routines for their children. In special education behavioral classrooms, a key component to the success and effectiveness of class is precise planning. In my experience, students with EBD tend to make poor behavioral choices when they have excessive free time and are uncertain of expectations. According to Gargiulo (2009), “By creating and developing effective schedules, teachers can minimize the likelihood of disruptive behavior” (p. 299).

The planning of a schedule and maintaining a consistent routine in the school and home settings allow the children to understand exactly what they should be doing at a particular time. Students with EBD respond extremely well to structure and organization. The steps involved in creating and implementing schedules and routines is a component that can easily be taught to parents and guardians.

Positive reinforcements. According to Bos and Vaughn (2006), “Reinforcement is the most significant means of increasing desirable behavior” (p. 36). Taylor, Smiley, & Richards (2009), define positive reinforcement as “The contingent presentation of a consequence following a student response to increase that response” (p. 197). Examples of positive reinforcements may include tangible rewards such as healthy treats, renting a favorite movie, having a picnic at the park, or receiving stickers that may later be traded in for a preferred activity. According to research by McGinnis, Friman, and Carlyon (1999), intrinsic motivation is not decreased by the implementation of positive reinforcements that are tangible in nature.

Implementing positive reinforcements in a responsible manner is a key component to improving behaviors in students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The second and third sessions teach parents how to select positive reinforcements and how to appropriately devise behavior plans so that their children understand exactly how and when the positive reinforcements can be earned.

Issuing appropriate consequences. The fourth training session entitled, “Issuing Appropriate Consequences to Your Child” teaches parents / guardians how to make the consequences appropriately fit the behavior. Parents / guardians who attend this training will learn the different types of appropriate, research-based consequences, such as time-out, response cost, loss of privileges, and extinction. They will learn how to appropriately and responsibly implement these

consequences when needed. It is crucial for parents and teachers to issue firm, logical consequences for inappropriate behaviors. For example, if a child has a tantrum at school and destroys school property, a logical consequence would be that the child must clean up the mess he or she has created and then make financial restitutions. If the child has destroyed another child's notebook, then he or she must work completing chores after school in order to replace the damaged property. It is extremely vital that teachers and parents remain calm when issuing consequences and that the consequences are not unrealistic or impossible to implement.

Parents / guardians will also learn what the current research states concerning physical types of consequences, such as corporal punishment or physical restraint. For example, Alberto and Troutman (2006) state that only as an absolute last resort should any type of physical consequences (i.e. physical restraint) be delivered to children. Only situations where the child is participating in self-injurious behaviors or displaying extreme aggression might a physical restraint be appropriate.

Setting limits. During the fifth session entitled, "Setting Limits" the parents and guardians learn the skill of communicating to their children which behaviors are appropriate and which behaviors will not be tolerated. All children test limits. It is imperative that parents respond to the testing of limits in a firm and consistent manner. For example, a parent tells a child that he can watch television for thirty minutes and then he must complete his homework. Chances are the child will ask his parents if he may watch television for forty minutes or an hour. The parents must remain consistent and abide by what they previously stated. If the parents allow the child to watch television for an hour, then the next day the child will test the limit and ask to watch television for an hour and ten minutes. However, more importantly, the child will know that his parent can be convinced to change the rules.

Consistency. During the sixth session, "Consistency – A Critical Aspect in Behavior Management" the parents learn that consistency is one of the most important key factors in behavior management. Without consistency, rules set forth by parents and teachers have little to no merit. A child must know that every time he argues with his parent or has a tantrum a consequence will be issued. If the child only receives a consequence every three out of ten times, he will continue to test limits and more than likely the inappropriate behaviors will escalate.

De-escalation. The topic of de-escalation will be covered during the seventh and eighth sessions. During these sessions, parents and guardians will learn the key components of how to de-escalate a child in crisis. In this session parents will learn effective techniques of how to identify when their children are becoming upset and angry so that they can intervene before behavioral episodes occur. Many times a behavioral episode can be averted by talking to the child in a low, calm voice. Parents and guardians attending this session will also be instructed in certain calming techniques to assist their children if their behaviors have escalated.

Healing time. "Healing Time – How to Recover and Heal After Your Child Has a Significant Behavioral Episode" is the topic for the ninth session. Many times during a significant behavioral tantrum, a child may do or say things that he or she later regrets. The relationship between the parent and child must be mended and repaired so that hurt feelings do not continue. During this time, the parents must reiterate to the child that he or she is still dearly loved; however, inappropriate behaviors will not be tolerated.

Remaining calm. The tenth session, “Remaining Calm in Times of Crisis” teaches parents the skills necessary to remain calm and in control of a situation that has become a crisis. This session focuses on how to remain calm and think clearly so that the best actions can be taken to help resolve the situation.

Medications. “Medications – Understanding the Side Effects and Knowing What Questions to Ask Your Health Care Professional” is the topic of the eleventh session. According to Weisz & Jensen (1999), in the United States the percentage of children who require medications to treat psychological disorders is between nine and thirteen percent. Research conducted by Runnheim, Frankenberger, and Hazelkorn (1996), indicated that stimulant medications were prescribed and used by 40% of students with EBD to assist in controlling their behaviors.

This session is of the utmost importance to parents because it reviews questions that need to be asked in order to fully understand the medications their children are prescribed. This session reviews the side effects of numerous medications, what pertinent questions to ask health professionals, and ways to research and learn more about the medications these children are prescribed.

Taking care of YOU. Many times parents can become so consumed in their children’s behavioral problems that they neglect to take care of themselves and the other relationships with family members. The twelfth session, “Taking Care of YOU – Tips on How to Take care of Yourself – Physically and Emotionally,” offers key ideas on how parents can make time for themselves in order to focus on their own physical and emotional health.

Siblings. Siblings may sometimes feel neglected because so much of their families’ resources, both financially and emotionally are expended on the children with emotional and behavioral disorders. During this session, parents will be presented with ideas of how to make the siblings of children with EBD understand that they are loved, appreciated, and valuable members of the family.

Hopeful future. The final training session is entitled, “Looking Towards a Bright, Hopeful, Future.” During this last session, parents will be taught the importance of remaining hopeful and optimistic when looking to the futures of their children. By this point in the program, the parents will hopefully be implementing everything they have learned regarding behavior and their children will be making behavioral improvements. This last session will also be used as a time to reflect on the sessions and for the parents to make suggestions for how the sessions could be improved in the future.

Participants and Proposed Funds

Participants. It is my recommendation that these sessions be available at no cost to the parents and guardians of children with the special education eligibility of emotional disturbance. This will enable these individuals to benefit from the training and support group sessions without being concerned about financial costs.

Proposed funding. I recommend that the presenters for the training sessions be selected from those individuals who work daily with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Compensation for their participation in presenting in the parent training and support groups can

be accomplished in one of two ways. It is proposed that each presenter receive a monetary amount for each parent training and support group in which they participate. However, an alternative expenditure would be to offer an allotted amount of time off for each employee instead of monetary compensation.

Conclusion

Teachers who work with students with the special education eligibility of emotional disturbance often have the advantageous opportunities of attending numerous trainings provided by the school districts in which they teach. As professional educators they have also benefitted from years of intense education pertaining to an array of both academic and behavioral strategies. However, at the end of the school day, they send their students home. Many of the parents / guardians of these children may be highly educated and have degrees of their own. Unfortunately, they have not benefitted from the same specific behavioral training provided to their children's teachers. Is it really surprising that some of these parents struggle on a daily basis with their children's behaviors? For behavioral improvements to occur in both school and home settings it is of vital importance that parents and teachers both effectively implement similar behavioral strategies. In order for this to occur, the parents or guardians of these children need specific training. The training should consist of information concerning effective behavioral strategies and step-by-step instructions on how to implement these strategies.

Typically, behavioral teachers also benefit from having one or more paraprofessionals in the classroom with them at all times. These paraprofessionals provide a great deal of support to both the students and teachers in the classrooms. However, the parents and guardians of students with EBD may not know of anyone experiencing the same parenting challenges that they are facing. They may not have anyone to turn to in their time of need or anyone who understands what it is like to parent a child with emotional and behavioral disorders. These parents need to have the opportunity to communicate their feelings and experiences with other parents who are currently walking in the same shoes. With the implementation of parent training sessions and support groups, the home environments of these children will hopefully improve and so will the lives of the parents.

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Recess for Students with Visual Impairments

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Abstract

During recess, the participation of a student with visual impairments in terms of movement can often be both challenging and rewarding for the student and general education teacher. This paper will address common characteristics of students with visual impairments and present basic solutions to improve the participation of these students in the recess setting. Initially the definition and prevalence of visual impairments will be presented. This will be followed by a discussion of possible challenges and general solutions for children with visual impairments in the recess setting. Lastly, specific methods of including a student with visual impairments in movement recess activities will be discussed.

Recess for Students with Visual Impairments

During recess, the participation of a student with visual impairments in terms of movement can often be both challenging and rewarding for the student and general education teacher. This paper will address common characteristics of students with visual impairments and present basic solutions to improve the participation of these students in the recess setting. Initially the definition and prevalence of visual impairments will be presented. This will be followed by a discussion of possible challenges and general solutions for children with visual impairments in the recess setting. Lastly, specific methods of including a student with visual impairments in movement recess activities will be discussed.

Definition and Prevalence of Visual impairments

Visual impairments is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness (I.D.E.A., 2004). The incidence of this impairment for school-age children is approximately one out of every thousand (United States Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). This may seem like a low number but since the average elementary school size in the United States is approximately 500 (U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), about one half of elementary schools will have a student with a visual impairment enrolled during most school years and this child could possibly be enrolled at this school for about six years.

Possible Challenges for Children with Visual impairments in the Recess Setting

When discussing the challenges for children with visual impairments in the recess setting, one should note the fact that children with visual impairments often experience a delay in motor skills. This is true especially in locomotion and mobility. It is to be remembered, however, that these children often possess many of the same motor capabilities as their peers and thus every opportunity should be given in order for the child to reach their full physical potential and also develop in a social context (Foundations of Special Education, 2007). It goes without saying that a lack of an opportunity to fully participate in recess can have a variety of negative effects on the child.

General Solutions to Challenges for Children with Visual Impairments in the Recess Setting

One general solution to including children with visual impairments in the recess setting includes the technique entitled Physical Guidance. In this technique, children with visual impairments are guided verbally and physically in the desired motion to increase their understanding of the movement. This is important because children with visual impairments cannot use visual cues and thus need to be guided in an alternative manner. For example, during a recess activity when children are involved in a game of hopscotch, the partner can perform the “hops” while holding the student’s hand and giving a verbal cue of how and when to jump (Foundations of Special Education, 2007).

The second general solution to including the student in the recess setting involves the method entitled Tactile Modeling. In this method the partner does not touch the student but instead allows the student to initiate the touch as the movement is demonstrated and verbal cues are provided. In using the example of a hopscotch game, the partner, while providing verbal cues, performs the hops as the student with the visual impairment places a hand on the student. The student thus acquires a sense of the motion to be performed and subsequently performs the motion individually. It is to be remembered that both methods require one-on-one attention (Foundations of Special Education, 2007).

As noted the two solutions to including a student in the recess are very general in nature. To follow are specific modifications to common recess activities for children with visual impairments.

Methods of Including a Student with Visual impairments in Specific Movement Recess Activities

Activities	Modifications for Students with Visual Impairments
All Activities	Remember safety is the most important element and depending on the activity an adult or partner may need to be assigned to the student
Jump Rope (individual)	▪ Jump over rope that is placed on ground (touch the rope with feet to gain orientation), continue jumping over the rope, back and forth ▪ Provide verbal cues as to when to jump over the rope during the beginning of the activity ▪ Provide physical assistance

	▪ Allow the student to touch the arm of the student or teacher as a looping of the rope is demonstrated so the student with the visual impairment can then loop the rope ▪ Provide physical assistance in looping the rope when needed
Hop Scotch	▪ Have the student jump with two feet – instead of hop - for the number of times that the other students hopped not being concerned with their foot placement ▪ Provide verbal cues as to when to hop/jump during the beginning of the activity ▪ Allow the student to touch the shoulder of the student or teacher as a hop/jump in the proper direction is demonstrated ▪ Provide physical assistance when hopping/jumping when needed
Throwing/Catching	▪ Allow the student to roll the ball to a student providing verbal cues ▪ Have the student sit as a ball is rolled softly to the student so it can be trapped instead of caught ▪ Have a partner catch the ball and hand the ball to the student with the visual impairment so the throw can then be performed ▪ Provide verbal cues to the student when throwing the ball ▪ Provide physical assistance in throwing the ball when needed ▪ Allow the student to touch the arm of the student or teacher as a throw is demonstrated ▪ Provide physical assistance in rolling the ball when needed
Kick Ball	▪ Allow the student to kick a stationary ball that has been located with the hands and/or feet ▪ Allow the student to run with a peer (holding hands) between the bases ▪ Allow the student to play with a partner as the position of catcher and roll the ball back to pitcher as the pitcher gives a verbal cue ▪ When the student with the visual impairment is batting and running the bases with assistance, have the students in the field throw and catch the ball, without dropping it, to five partners, before a throw is made to the base to get the student with the visual impairment out ▪ Provide verbal cues to the student continuously throughout the game ▪ Allow the student to touch the leg of another student as a kick is demonstrated ▪ Provide physical assistance in kicking the ball when needed
Bowling	▪ Allow the student to touch the pins before walking to the position to roll the ball in order to gain orientation ▪ Have a peer stand in front of the head pin and give a verbal cue and then move out of the way after the ball has been rolled ▪ Allow the student to touch the arm of the student or teacher as a roll is demonstrated ▪ Provide physical assistance in rolling the ball when needed
Basketball (Horse)	▪ Have a student roll a ball at a target such as a bowling pin that is placed under the goal as a modification to shooting in a basket – provide verbal cues as to the location of the pin. The student follows all other rules in terms of location of shooting ▪ Allow the student to touch the arm of the student or teacher as a roll is demonstrated

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| | ▪ Provide physical assistance in rolling the ball when needed |
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Conclusion

The participation of a student with visual impairments in recess can often be both challenging and rewarding for the student and general education teacher. This paper addressed common characteristics of students with visual impairments and presented basic solutions to improve the education of these students in the recess setting. It is to be remembered that all children should be included in recess as the benefits of this activity are paramount.

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Positive Behavioral Strategies for Students with EBD and Needed Supports for Teachers and Paraprofessionals

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Abstract

This article reveals the findings of a multiple case study that demonstrates the behavioral strategies implemented by select elementary personnel that work daily with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). The personnel who took part in this study were special education behavioral teachers, special education behavioral paraprofessionals, and general education teachers. Each person utilized varying behavioral strategies to teach students with EBD. This study also reveals the teachers and paraprofessional' perceptions concerning which of these strategies were the most beneficial in producing improvements in students with EBD. Finally, the study discloses the additional supports that teachers and paraprofessionals need in order to more effectively teach their students.

Positive Behavioral Strategies for Students with EBD and Needed Supports for Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Research Based Positive Behavioral Strategies: Importance of positive behavioral strategies.

There have been numerous in-depth studies conducted pertaining to behavioral strategies. These behavioral strategies, if used effectively, assist in improving behaviors of students of various ages. Behavioral strategies prove vital in improving behaviors so that academic learning and growth occur. According to Furlong, Morrison, Chung, Bates, and Morrison (1997), successful behavioral strategies utilize approaches and measures that prevent problem behaviors from transpiring in contrast to implementing punishments to dissuade inappropriate behaviors. It is extremely important to note that students respond differently to behavioral strategies, and a strategy that is successful with one student may not work for another. Jensen (2005) reiterates that it is highly recommended that teachers "be flexible and have a variety of proactive behavioral management methods to implement in the classroom" (p. 28-29).

Research Questions

Focus of study. This qualitative, multiple case study illustrates the behavioral supports implemented by select elementary personnel in a large Texas City. The researcher conducted interviews with these professional in order to answer two research questions:

1. Which positive behavioral strategies did special education behavioral teachers, special education behavioral paraprofessionals, and general education teachers implement with students with EBD and which of these strategies were the most effective in bringing forth improvements?

2. What additional supports did special education behavioral teachers, special education behavioral paraprofessionals, and general education teachers need in order to better serve students with EBD?

Methodology

Interviews. According to Yin, (1994) there are six sources of evidence in case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. The researcher used interviews as the primary data collection source. According to Tellis (1997), “Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information” (p. 8).

Establishing triangulation with a single method. Commonly triangulation is achieved when the researcher uses three varying data collection techniques such as interviews, documents and records, and observations. In order for triangulation to occur, three data sources must indicate similar occurrences. Jick (1979) expresses that triangulation can occur within a single method design. The researcher using interviews or observations as the only data collection method would be an example of a single method design. Jick states that the single method must address internal consistency issues using an underlying changeable approach with multiple indicators. He states that the benefit of using triangulation in a qualitative design is that it allows a clearer understanding of the complexity of the situation under investigation.

Significance of Study

This study uncovered significant information that will be advantageous to several diverse groups of individuals: special education behavioral teachers, behavioral paraprofessionals, general education teachers, administrators, special education supervisors, and parents.

Teachers and Paraprofessionals

This study discovered beneficial information for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with EBD. First, the study discussed a wide range of research-based positive behavioral strategies. Professionals who teach students with EBD have the opportunity to read this study and gain knowledge concerning these strategies. They may possibly learn about new strategies they have never attempted previously with their students. Also, they will gain knowledge of positive behavioral strategies that the participants in this study deemed most beneficial for students with EBD. Furthermore, the readers of this study will learn information pertaining to the strategies that the participants did not highly commend. Finally, educators reading this study will learn the differences and similarities of how special education behavioral staff members and general education teachers educate students with EBD.

School Administrators and Special Education Supervisors

School administrators and special education supervisors will gain information concerning how the district in which this study took place educates their students with EBD from this study. They will be able to make their own decisions concerning the positive and negative attributes of the methods these teacher and paraprofessional implement with their students. They will then have the opportunity to incorporate in their own behavioral programs the aspects they perceived as constructive. School administrators and special education supervisors will also gain great knowledge concerning which strategies work most successfully with students with EBD and

strategies that lack efficiency. Finally, subsequent to reading about the additional supports that the participants in this study needed to more effectively teach their students with EBD, school administrators and special education supervisors will possibly investigate their own teachers' needs so that these students will have whatever necessary to be successful.

Parents of Children with EBD

The parents of children with EBD will benefit from this study for two main reasons. First, the parents will learn information concerning the benefits of the positive behavioral strategies, which possibly might be used to teach their children at school. From reading this study they will gain knowledge of new strategies that perhaps they can subsequently recommend to their children's teachers for possible implementation. Second, many of the positive behavioral strategies written about in this study are appropriate to utilize in home settings as well as school settings. By reading this study, parents have the opportunity to learn about specific strategies of interest and utilize them with their children at home.

Review of Literature

Setting Well Defined Limits and Rules.

According to Lane, Gresham, and O' Shaughnessy (2002), "Classroom expectations are designed to provide students with clear information on the academic and social responses required of them so that instruction and learning takes place" (p. 168 – 169). Students with EBD require defined limits, rules, and task expectations to be successful in the school setting. Schloss and Smith (1998) offer four decisive factors for establishing classroom rules. First, rules are created to prevent certain behaviors, such as physical aggression or tardiness from occurring. They are also set into place to promote appropriate behaviors, such as completion of assignments and respectful manners. Also, rules preside over the relationships that students have with each other and staff members, how they spend their time during the school day, and how they access and care for school property. Furthermore, rules are consistent across circumstances and environments. Finally, teachers should limit their rules from five to eight in number. An excessive quantity of rules can be ineffective for two main reasons, the students will have a difficult time remembering all of them and teachers will have to spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to enforce them.

Establishing Consistent Routines

According to Schloss and Smith (1998), the establishment of consistent routines is a critical behavioral strategy. Consistent routines provide students with specific ways to carry out certain functions in the school setting. According to Chiles (1997) teachers learning how to institute and reinforce routines with their students, as well as exhibiting an overall effective classroom management system, is "the foundation of a successful career in teaching" (p. 114). Everson (1989) recommends that teachers establish routines in three major areas: room use, procedures during group work, and transitions in and out of the classroom. First, routines established for room use include, but are not limited to, the location of materials and resources, the use of the restrooms, and transitioning among learning activities or centers. Second, routines utilized during group work include expectations for the method in which students begin and conclude learning activities. Third, routines exercised for transitions in and out of the classroom constitute techniques for how the students start the school day, exit, return to the classroom, and complete the school day.

Verbal Reinforcement for Appropriate Behaviors

According to Rhode, Jensen, and Reavis (1992), verbal reinforcement or praise is the positive or encouraging comments provided to students when they have performed appropriate behaviors. An extremely beneficial behavioral strategy technique is verbal reinforcement (frequently referred to as praise). According to Mattheson and Shriver (2005), praise is utilized infrequently in both special education and general education classes, despite its pronounced effectiveness. The research of Beaman and Wheldall (2000) indicates that when teachers implement praise, their students behave more appropriately; in contrast, when teachers discontinue the strategy, their students exhibit disruptive behavior. To the same effect, Rhode, Jensen, and Reavis (1992) suggest that each time a reprimand is given to a student; the teacher utilizes a minimum of four to six genuine positive verbal statements. According to Sutherland, Wehby and Copeland (2000), praise may be employed with students of all ages or disabilities, including those with EBD.

Planned Ignoring of Minor Inappropriate Behaviors

According to Stahr, Cushing, Lane, and Fox (2006), planned ignoring is a behavioral strategy in which the adult purposefully and willfully ignores the disruptive behaviors of students intended to gain attention. The U.S. Department of Education (2004), recommends utilizing planned ignoring of minor inappropriate behaviors when students demonstrate inappropriate behaviors to gain the attention of their teachers or fellow classmates. This behavioral strategy demonstrates effectual results when students are attempting to gain attention or refrain from completing non-preferential tasks.

Reminders

According to Scheuermann and Hall (2008), reminders bring to the attention of students how to comply with rules, class expectations, or routines of the classroom or school. Scheuermann and Hall (2008) express that the positive behavioral strategy, reminders, is extremely beneficial to all students, especially those with EBD. Generally, teachers simply post their rules in their classrooms. However, in order to bear weight to behavioral students, reminders need to be more prominent. According to Scheuermann and Hall (2008), reminders should be “actively incorporated into teaching and reviewing activities and possibly changed from time to time to keep them meaningful” (p. 185).

Earned Activities and Privileges

According to Scheuermann and Hall (2008), earned activities and privileges is a behavioral strategy in which students are rewarded with special activities or privileges for demonstrating appropriate, desirable behaviors. The implementation of earned activities and privileges is highly effective with students with EBD. This strategy is easy to put into practice. Teachers simply set criteria indicating the appropriate behaviors they desire their students to accomplish; for example, a teacher may require her students to complete three assignments during the morning hours of the school day. Another example might be that a teacher requires her students to listen attentively during her instruction without blurting out answers or other comments. Once the students accomplish the required behavior, the teacher rewards them with certain prearranged activities or privileges.

Contracts

A contract is a written agreement between a student and teacher, administrator, or parent that demarcates each participant’s obligations. Scheuermann and Hall (2008) state that in general, the

contract “lists the behaviors that the student will perform, how much, by when, and what the teacher or adult will do to support and reinforce those behaviors” (p. 358). They contend that there are three main advantages in implementing contracts as a behavioral strategy. First, students who are active participants in negotiating contracts are more likely to follow through and uphold their obligations. Second, because the agreements are written, it is probable that students will strive to achieve the behavioral expectations. Finally, contracts are time consuming, but are reasonably easy to utilize.

Documented Self-Monitoring of Behaviors

According to Lewis and Doorlag (2006), documented self-monitoring of behaviors occurs when a student records how frequently he or she performs specific, targeted behaviors. Students gain tremendous benefit by exercising the positive behavioral strategy of documented self-monitoring of behaviors. The advantage of using this strategy is so that students can “learn to evaluate and self-reinforce their own performance in class” (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006, p. 129). Jensen (2004) states that when students self-monitor behavior, “the process of concrete collection and tallying of behavioral responses helps to make the students aware of personal behavioral patterns” (p. 33). This strategy is extremely versatile and may be implemented either to increase positive behaviors or reduce inappropriate behaviors.

Point System or Token Economy

According to Walker, Ramsey, and Gresham (2004), token economies allow students to earn tokens or points for demonstrating appropriate behaviors. The students are then permitted to exchange their token for desirable reinforcements, such as tangible items or activities. Token economies are used in numerous settings as a behavioral modification technique, including self contained classrooms. Rosenberg et al. (2004) states that several styles of token economies exist; however, in order to effectively use token economies, three requirements must be met: tokens, reinforcers, and specified regulations.

Turkewitz, O’Leary, and Ironsmith (1975) conclude that two practices greatly improve the effectiveness of token economies. They recommend that after successfully completing a teacher initiated token economy, the students then be allowed and encouraged to monitor their own behaviors and determine how many tokens they should earn. They also recommend that eventually the use of tangible reinforcers be removed from the plan and the teachers should rely more on verbal reinforcers, like praise.

Home School Reward Plan

Algozzine and Ysseldyke (2006) indicate that a home-school reward plan is an effective positive behavioral strategy. This strategy may be utilized in two different ways. First, a plan is instigated that rewards a student at school for demonstrating positive behaviors at home. Alternatively, a home-school reward plan can be designed in which parents, guardians, or other family members positively reinforce a child’s behavior at home for acting appropriately at school.

The behavioral objective should also indicate the type of reinforcement the child will receive for mastering the objective. The child’s parent continues to document the tantrums at home and provides the teacher with this crucial information. Once the child masters the behavioral objective, the teacher provides the student with the pre-arranged tangible reward, earned activity, or privilege at school.

Data Analysis for Participants – Positive Behavioral Strategies
Did the Participants Implement These Specific Strategies?

	Behavioral A	Behavioral B	Behavioral C	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	General A	General B	General C
Set Well Defined Limits, Rules, and Task Expectations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Establish Consistent Routines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Set Easily Attainable Daily Goals	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nonverbal Signals for Appropriate Behavior	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Frequent Verbal Reinforcements for Appropriate Behavior	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Planned Ignoring of Minor Inappropriate Behavior	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Verbal Reminders	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stand Near Student	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Earned Activities and Privileges	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Work Completion Contracts	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Documented Self-monitoring of Behaviors	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Point System	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Home-School Reward System	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Answers to Research Question One – Positive Behavioral Strategies

Research – Based Positive Behavioral Strategies

The nine participants in this study were interviewed to answer the research question, “Which behavioral strategies did special education behavioral teachers, special education behavioral paraprofessionals, and general education teachers implement with students with EBD and which of these interventions were most effective in bringing forth improvements?” Numerous interesting and enlightening trends developed from analysis of this data.

Discussions and Implications

Theme One

Implementation differences among participants. First, it is important to note that none of the behavioral staff members or general education teachers used all thirteen positive behavioral strategies identified by the researcher. However, two participants, Special Education Behavioral Teacher B and Paraprofessional B put into practice twelve of the thirteen strategies. The only strategy these two participants did not implement was standing near the student. Two participants, Behavioral Teacher A and Paraprofessional A utilized eleven positive behavioral strategies, with the exception of documented self-monitoring of behaviors and home school reward plan. Four participants, Special Education Teacher C, Paraprofessional C, General Education Teacher A, and General Education Teacher C all reported that they exercised nine of the thirteen strategies. General Education Teacher B used eight positive behavioral strategies, the fewest number reported by any of the nine participants. The special education behavioral participants employed more positive behavioral strategies than did the general education teacher participants. However, the researcher was not surprised by this theme because the main focus of behavioral staff members was behavior, whereas, the primary focal point of general education teachers was academics.

Theme Two

Most utilized positive behavioral strategies. The second theme involves all three sets of participants, special education behavioral teachers, behavioral paraprofessionals, and general education teachers’ unanimous implementation of six positive behavioral interventions including: (a) setting well defined limits and expectations, (b) establishing consistent routines, (c) setting easily attainable goals, (d) frequent verbal reinforcement for appropriate behaviors, (e) planned ignoring of minor inappropriate behaviors, and (f) verbal reminders. Two behavioral strategies, nonverbal signals for inappropriate behaviors and earned activities and privileges were utilized by eight of the nine participants. General Education Teacher C was the only participant who reported that she did not use nonverbal signals for appropriate behavior with her student with EBD. General Education Teacher B was the only participant who refrained from utilizing earned activities and privileges.

Theme Three

Least utilized positive behavioral strategies. Theme three stems from analysis of data concerning the strategies, which were implemented by the fewest number of participants. One of the thirteen positive behavioral strategies, home-school reward plan was used by only three of the nine participants, Special Education Behavioral Teacher B, Paraprofessional B, and General Education Teacher C. Whereas the strategy self-monitoring of behaviors was used by only two participants, Special Education Behavioral Teacher B and Paraprofessional B. The researcher

expected that more of the participants would have reported utilizing these two strategies. However, both of these strategies pointed to extenuating conditions.

Many of the participants stated that they refrained from using a home-school rewards plan because they were concerned about the parents of their students not following through with the stipulations of the plan. They expressed their reluctance to set up a plan that required the parents' involvement because they did not want the students to be disappointed if the parents could not or would not provide the students with the prearranged rewards.

There was also an underlying reason that the strategy, documented self-monitoring of behaviors, had limited use by the participants in spite of research supporting the effectiveness. According to Lewis and Doorlag (2006), students gain tremendous benefit by exercising the positive behavioral strategy of documented self-monitoring of behaviors. The advantage of using this strategy is so that students can "learn to evaluate and self-reinforce their own performance in class" (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006, p. 129). Jensen (2004) states that when students self-monitor behavior, "the process of concrete collection and tallying of behavioral responses helps to make the students aware of personal behavioral patterns" (p. 33). This strategy is extremely versatile and may be implemented either to increase positive behaviors or reduce inappropriate behaviors. However, several of the participants claimed that the reason they did not implement self-monitoring of behaviors was because they thought that their students would not demonstrate honesty, therefore compromising the integrity of the strategy. On the contrary, according to Lewis and Doorlag (2006) the possibility of the students incorrectly monitoring their own behaviors would have radically decreased with teacher supervision.

Theme Four

Strategies not utilized by general education teacher participants. The fourth phenomenon or theme entails the unanimous decision by all three general education teacher participants to not utilize three strategies, point systems, work completion contracts, and documented self-monitoring of behaviors.

The researcher would like to examine in greater depth the operation of the point system. All of the general education teachers stated that they reported information either verbally or by written form to the special education behavioral staff members concerning their students' behaviors in their classrooms. However, none of the general education teachers actively assigned points to their students; this task was left solely up to the special education behavioral staff members. Also, both General Education Teacher B and General Education Teacher C realized that a point system was being utilized with their students with EBD; however, they had no inkling as to how the system worked. Only General Education Teacher C offered details as to the amount of points her student received daily for exhibiting appropriate behaviors.

Ayllon (1999) recommends that consistency must be used when implementing a token economy with students. In order for a token economy to produce effective results, all staff members involved with the child must take active participation in implementation. The staff members must be trained on the use of token economies so that they reward the same behaviors, dispense appropriate amounts of tokens, and refrain from dispensing tokens when the appropriate, designated behaviors have not been demonstrated by the students. Ayllon (1999) also recommends that staff members have the opportunity to raise questions and concerns about the use of the token economy and need to be evaluated regularly.

In addition, none of the general education teachers used work completion contracts despite the fact that five of the six behavioral staff member participants implemented this strategy with their students with EBD. The researcher offers a possible reason to explain this phenomenon. The general education teacher participants typically had between eighteen to twenty-two students in their classes. They did not have paraprofessionals to assist them in any manner. The general education teacher participants in this study might possibly be so overwhelmed with their day-to-day responsibilities that implementing yet another strategy seemed unachievable. On the other hand, special education behavioral teachers were responsible for considerably fewer students and had two behavioral paraprofessionals to assist them on a full time basis. Therefore, creating and using work completion contracts was a more conceivable and manageable task for them.

Theme Five

Most effective positive behavioral strategies. The final theme deals directly with the selections of the participants concerning the two most effective positive behavioral strategies. The strategy selected by the most participants was earned activities and privileges. Six participants, excluding Special Education Behavioral Teacher C, Paraprofessional C, and General Education Teacher B selected this strategy as either their first or second choice when asked to provide the most effective strategies they carried out with their students. This strategy was given immense praise by the six participants who chose it. The researcher would like to emphasize the fact that both General Education Teacher A and General Education Teacher C did not simply rely on the behavioral staff members to provide their students with earned activities and privileges. However, they both created their own special activities and privileges that their students could earn if appropriate behaviors were exhibited. Therefore, they actively and enthusiastically took part in implementing earned activities and privileges in their classrooms.

Verbal reinforcements for appropriate behaviors was selected by five participants, Special Education Behavioral Teacher A, Paraprofessional A, Paraprofessional C, General Education A, and General Education Teacher B as one of the most successful strategies. The researcher was not surprised by the overwhelming preference of either one of these strategies. Verbal reinforcements for appropriate behaviors was commended highly and used continuously by all of the participants. According to Beaman and Wheldall (2000) verbal reinforcement was highly effective in decreasing problematic behaviors. Landrum, Tankersly, & Callicott (1998) state that verbal praise is also simple to utilize, requires no special preparation, and is always readily accessible.

The researcher found it worthy of note that two participants, Special Education Behavioral Teacher A and Special Education Behavioral Teacher C both expressed that humor was one of the most effective positive behavioral interventions. The researcher had not originally inquired about this strategy, however it was offered by both of these participants when asked to discuss additional strategies they used with their students. Both of these participants stated that the ability to make a student laugh who was in a crisis state de-escalated the situation and made resolution more expedient and less problematic for all those involved.

Answers to Research Question Two – Additional Supports

The researcher interviewed participants in this study to answer the second research question, “What additional supports did special education behavioral teachers, special education

behavioral paraprofessionals, and general education teachers need in order to better serve students with EBD?” Their answers can easily be broken down into three diverse categories: (a) supplementary resources, (b) extended training, and (c) highly trained counselors to offer encouragement and advice. The participants in this study purely requested necessary supports that would greatly benefit the students in which they taught.

Supplementary Resources

Four participants, Special Education Behavioral Teacher A, Special Education Behavioral Teacher B, Paraprofessional B, and Paraprofessional C affirmed that they desperately needed extra resources, finances to purchase either tangible rewards or academic materials for their students. The participants stated that to provide their students with tangible rewards and adequate teaching materials they were spending their own earnings. These behavioral teachers and paraprofessionals had a choice to make, use their own money to buy necessary rewards or discontinue the utilization of their point systems and classroom stores. The choice was easy for these dedicated participants. Refusing to allow their students’ behavioral improvements to dissipate, they simply preferred to use their own hard earned money.

Extended Training

Four participants, Paraprofessional A and all of the general education teacher participants stated that they required additional training to more successfully teach their students with EBD. The range of training was diverse, including specialized training in assisting students during aggressive or tantrum behaviors to learning more about varied positive behavioral strategies. Specialized training is absolutely a necessity in teaching students with EBD. Zarghami and Schnellert (2004) emphasize that students benefited both behaviorally and academically when experienced, qualified teachers are hired and provided with systematic teacher training and professional development.

Assistance From Highly Trained Counselors

The third category of answers to this inquiry offered by Special Education Behavioral Teacher C consisted of having counselors visit the staff members who worked with students with EBD. The counselors’ duties consisted of helping the staff members invoke helpful strategies with the students and offer advice and encouragement. In the researcher’s opinion, the underlying message from Special Education Behavioral Teacher C was the absence of a support system. She expressed that in the past when the counselor visited her regularly, she felt a great comfort. When this counselor’s services were no longer offered, Special Education Behavioral Teacher C felt a great loss.

Practical Applications in the School Setting

The researcher proposes three practical applications to teachers and parents in their endeavors to assist students with EBD.

Application One: Collaboration

Katz and Mirenda (2002) state that students achieve greater successes when teachers share their expertise, ideas, and worked together in a collaborative manner. Unquestionably a vital aspect of teaching students with EBD is collaboration. Behavioral staff members, general education

teachers, school administrators, and parents must all collaboratively work together to achieve academic and behavioral successes for students with EBD. They must present a unified front and always do whatever is in the best interests of the students. Serious repercussions are impending when staff members and parents cannot come together to help these students. Constant and honest communication is essential between the behavioral staff members and general education teachers. Both behavioral teachers and general education teachers must frequently communicate with the parents or guardians of these students so that situations can be resolved quickly and do not deteriorate.

Application Two: Active participation in implementation of strategies.

It is necessary for general education teachers to take an active role in all implemented strategies. Several of the general education teachers in this study made comments suggesting that certain strategies were the responsibilities of the behavioral staff. The researcher understands that time is an issue, and it is certainly not feasible to implement every behavioral strategy. However, several of these strategies are much more effective when used in both behavioral and general education classrooms. It is critical that behavioral staff members and general education teachers know exactly which strategies are being utilized and the details of each one. In order to effectively teach students with EBD the great division between behavioral classrooms and general education classrooms must be eliminated.

Application Three: Acceptance into general education classrooms.

According to Cartledge, Frew, and Zaharias (1985), the attitudes of teachers play a crucial role in the acceptance of students with disabilities into the general education setting. If general education teachers perceive students with disabilities as guests or visitors in their classrooms and not full participants, general education peers will perceive students with disabilities in a similar fashion. However, if general education teachers portray to their students an environment of acceptance through their words and actions, students are more likely to also demonstrate tolerance and acceptance. The words and actions of teachers greatly influence the acceptance level of students with EBD, as well as other disabilities into the general education setting. It is critical that general education teachers welcome these students as full participants in their classes, even if the students only spend minimal time in the general education setting.

Conclusion

Jensen (2005) highly recommends that teachers “be flexible and have a variety of positive behavioral management methods to implement in the classroom” (28-29). No one behavioral strategy, either positive or aversive is capable of correcting all inappropriate behaviors for every child with EBD. These students may require copious positive strategies implemented simultaneously in order for authentic behavioral improvements to transpire. In conclusion, to effectively alter the inappropriate behaviors of students with EBD, collaboration among all staff members is imperative. The staff members must be viewed by the students as a unified force. Similarly, multiple strategies must be implemented with persistence over an adequate period of time. Finally, just as all students do not learn in the same way, all students do not respond to behavioral strategies similarly. It may take several attempts to find the precise combination of strategies before students demonstrate behavioral improvements. Trial and error is sometimes an excruciatingly time consuming and exhausting requirement necessary to improve the behaviors of students with EBD.

The nine participants in this study demonstrated immense dedication to their profession. The researcher thought that their requests for additional supports were both valid and reasonable. It is inconceivable to dedicated behavioral teachers and paraprofessionals for their students not to have what they need so that improvements can be made. Moreover, teaching students with EBD is not only financially expensive, but emotionally draining as well. It is imperative that these professionals receive emotional support so that they will not become disheartened. Finally, specialized training for all staff members who teach these students is critical. Disaster is imminent if professionals teach students with EBD and have not received both appropriate and intensive specialized training. It is absolutely critical that the teachers and paraprofessionals who work with children with EBD have the resources they so desperately need so that behavioral improvements are not only plausible, but become an actuality.

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Planning a Good School Experience for Children with Autism: A Family's Story

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present a parent's perspective on collaborating with the general education of their son with autism. It is a story of how both sides worked for the educational benefit of a child with autism.

Planning a Good School Experience for Children with Autism: A Family Story

Autism occurs more often today than ever. A recent study reported the prevalence to be 1 in 150 children (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). As a result, there has been a surge in the attention given to instructional considerations for children with autism at school. However, the availability of well trained and knowledgeable personnel to organize programs for the preschool and school age children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is highly variable (O'Brien & Daggett, 2006). One of the clear needs in the field of autism is to increase the number of well trained professionals to work with children and their families (National Research Council, 2001). Meanwhile, when parents first learn that their child has autism; most of them do not know anything about it. Some parents quickly begin their learning journey into the world of autism spectrum disorders; many parents become immersed in reading and studying everything they can find about ASD. Later as they meet with professionals at school, they sometimes find they have more to say than the professionals because they have been developing their own kind of expertise about autism (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Yet, it is unrealistic to expect all classroom teachers to be autism experts; a more practical approach is to support parent-professional collaboration on behalf of children with autism.

To date, the value of parental input has gained increasing recognition when it comes to providing services to children with disabilities (Prezant & Marshak, 2006; Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). As a result, more and more professional training programs are preparing professionals to understand the importance of parent involvement and collaboration. Professionals who understand that past experiences influence current attitudes about services and/or service providers can respond to negativity with empathy and support. Moreover, professionals who are willing to help parents learn about and negotiate the world of special education services somehow contribute a great deal to parent involvement, a sense of collaboration and trust in professionals (O'Brien & Daggett, 2006).

Parent Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration is regarded as "a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (Friend &

Cook, 2003, p. 5). It characterizes collaboration as voluntary, sharing mutual goals, responsibility for decision-making, resources shared, and accountability. Somehow, speaking of “collaboration” seems easier than actually implementing it. Parents often see their child in a lifelong context and their future; professionals sometimes see the child who needs services within limited resources provided by school systems. For parents and professionals to come together on behalf of the child, they must be able to share their sources of information and their perspectives (O’Brien & Daggett, 2006). To identify the perspective differences between parents and professional might actually help each other to find a common ground to support children with autism as their utmost goal.

In fact, many training programs at universities and colleges provide a class or two to help pre-service teachers understand the importance of collaboration with families of school age children. There are also many printed materials available to support teachers’ professional development. However, there is a dearth of materials or information regarding families of children with special needs on how to collaborate with professionals on behalf of the child. Most literature studies have addressed how school teachers can support and collaborate with parents of children with ASD but few have pointed out how parents might become an active part of building collaboration with school teachers particularly when they may not get adequate support or training in teaching children with ASD. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to share a family’s story of how Tyler¹’s parents initiated and worked with general education teachers to support Tyler’s education at an elementary school.

Tyler’s Story

Tyler is a very smart, active, and sensitive boy diagnosed with autism when he is three and a half years old. He enjoys activities including Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends, coloring, reading, playing on the computer, and playing trains with his father. At school he enjoys playing with his friends, recess time, and loves math classes. Tyler also has participated in an early intervention applied behavior analysis (ABA) program for three years before he becomes a kindergartener at a faith based private school.

Preparation for the journey. When the time came for Tyler to attend kindergarten, Tyler’s parents, July and Sam, sent a letter of introduction to school administration, the principal, and his future teacher several months before the school term started. They wrote a letter (see appendix A) to introduce Tyler and autism to school personnel. In the first letter to the school, they addressed their intentions for Tyler’s education, what they were looking for, and what they were willing to contribute to the classroom to support teachers in teaching Tyler. The letter aimed to help the school know them not only as parents of a child with autism but also as a partner to share responsibilities for teaching their child. July and Sam also made appointments and met with school administrators and staff to discuss what the roles and expectations of all involved. The first letter to the school was an early, clear commitment to collaboration, which is the key to successful working relationships with school and teachers (Daven, 2004; Stivers, Francis-Cropper, Straus, 2008).

¹ Tyler and all other personal names in this article are pseudonyms.

Although July and Sam initiated the conversation and seemed confident on how to best educate Tyler, they went to school and talked to staff and teachers to learn how to create the best possible education environment. Sharing leadership is another key when teachers, administrative staff, and parents come to build a successful collaborative relationship (Hines, 2008). On one hand, general education teachers have considerably more knowledge and experiences with his/her content area. The parents of children with disabilities have an understanding of their child's learning styles and how to make modifications to support their child's learning needs. By the same token, the administrative staff also makes an effort to understand each member's point of view and encourage teachers to share ideas about lesson plans, classroom management, and assessment with parents before beginning the school year to ensure the success of collaboration (Wolery & Odom, 2000).

July and Sam then went to school and met with the staff and the principal; they talked about what they thought were Tyler's educational needs, expressed their willingness to work with school, and answered questions that the school had. Three weeks later, they received a call from school about welcoming Tyler to his new school in the fall.

It should be a given that each individual engaged in a collaborative activity has resources to contribute that are valuable to reaching the shared goal (Friend & Cook, 2003). After the meeting, July began preparing a binder for Tyler's teacher based on the conversations they had at school. It included information that was necessary for the school to support students with autism in their learning needs. July hoped the binder would provide enough information for teachers on teaching children with autism. This binder would be delivered to the teachers four months before school began.

Autism binder. There were four sections in the binder that included general information about autism, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), learning styles and educational resources that focus on autism. The first part provided information regarding what autism is and the features and characteristics of autism spectrum disorder. July printed few pages from Autism Society of America website and handouts that she had from the conferences, workshops, and meetings that she went to. The second part was about ABA. Tyler had received ABA training since he was about four years old so July thought it might be helpful for teachers to know what training methods had been used with Tyler. The third part of the binder was regarding learning styles. July put some fact sheets or handout of modifications and accommodations to support students with autism in class. July provided a sheet of few techniques on how to calm Tyler down, keep him focused, and so forth. The last part included resources that July used to help prepare teachers to work with children with autism. Among the resources were different aspects such as how to inform classmates and others about autism. Sometimes, she included a few videos that covered Tyler's performances in communication and social interactions with other children at home for the teacher to learn more about Tyler.

A follow up letter with additional information on Tyler would be sent to his new teacher, Ms. Freed, about three months before the school term started in fall. July used this chance to offer parental involvement (e.g., classroom aid) and support as needed. Communication was the main focus of the letter, such as the discussion of how teacher/parents communicate during the year and scheduled meetings between teacher/parents. A communication folder with lined paper would be utilized on a day-to-day basis.

Two weeks before the start of the school term, July called and set up meetings with Ms. Freed and Tyler in her classroom. This allowed Ms. Freed and Tyler to get to know each other and for Tyler to become comfortable in the classroom he would be in. In their first meeting, July asked if Ms. Freed could do an activity with Tyler so that Tyler had an actual experience of interacting with his teacher. After the meeting, July spent time talking with Tyler about his experiences in class and helped him get ready for the school term. This visit also allowed Ms. Freed to establish rapport with Tyler and observed his behaviors and performances in a direct and personal manner. This type of activity would really establish the trust, openness, and reciprocity relationship between parents and school teachers (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988).

Beginning the journey. During the school year, open communication between parents and the school administration, principal, teacher, and therapists was vital. July usually wrote a note to school regarding things that came up during the school year, such as picture day or field trip (see Appendix B for an example). July also offered assistance in the beginning of the school term to transition Tyler into the classroom. She stayed in or outside of classroom to conduct brief observations on Tyler's behaviors and performances and helped both Tyler and his teacher to a successful transition in the classroom.

For example, on the first day of school, July's observation notes to Ms. Freed included:

T's a huge water drinker—may need to think how we could meet his need for water at school. Will monitor and observe further.

T had difficulty drinking out of milk carton at lunch; I will send straw with lunch.

Plan for tomorrow: mom present till first recess, then leaves and returns at lunch recess for rest of the day.

When things did not go well, July would use notes more often with Ms. Freed and other specialists at school. For example:

July: T did not want to go to school today.

Ms. Freed: T having some minor difficulties in the classroom. "weepy" today.

July: T did not sleep well last night. Seems to be doing OK this morning.

Ms. Freed: T don't want to put thumb on an ink pad to make a thumb print today (sensory issue)

July: T verbally acting out over the weekend.

Ms. Freed: T upset over a game during recess today.

July: T is expressing some anxiety. Just to give you a heads up

Ms. Freed: T had a good day.

During the semester, Tyler's speech pathologist (SP) could not hold a regular therapy time with Tyler and a problem arose.

Ms. Freed: T had a meltdown at school today.

July: Let's get together for a parent conference and discuss this.

Ms. Freed: SP at school today but did not get T for therapy.

July: Just to bring you up to speed on my meeting with SP. The plan is to see T between 8 to 9 am on Mondays. Feel free to discuss further with me if needed....I tried to "lock" her in on a time as this will help T to know when to expect speech therapy during the week. If

her Monday schedule gets changed, I have asked her to give us a heads up for your and T's benefit.

Few weeks later....

Ms. Freed: SP is still inconsistency with time of therapy and this is disrupting my classroom and putting T on the negative for going to SP.

July: I contacted SP regarding her scheduling inconsistency. She states 11:00am on Thursdays will work for her.

Ms. Freed: T refusing to go to SP.

July: since picking T up from school, he has been VERY confrontational and weepy. This includes shouting/screaming verbal "tantrums"...this is not like him.....he is probably trying to "gain" some control over his environment...refusing to complete homework tonight.....stemming and patterning a lot.....don't hesitate to call me....I can be there to help keep him focused today...

Ms. Freed: T received a hug from me for reassurance today.

July: we have an emergency IEP meeting with T's team to discuss inconsistency with SP and how to resolve this matter. Until then, do not send T to SP.

Ms. Freed: I am available whenever you need me for the meeting.

July and Ms. Freed used their daily notebooks through the school year; information from parents at home gives an ongoing picture of behaviors and progress. Frequently, family members have developed ways of assisting at home that can be included at school. For example, July and Ms. Freed used it for information sharing, such as what happened in the child's day or night, what activities the child participated, special events, instructional themes in class, and opportunities to do troubleshooting which were also mentioned as benefits by Davern (2004).

Continual journey. In late winter of school team, July wrote an introduction letter to the next teacher in line for Tyler. This letter was to introduce Tyler to the next teacher so the teacher might have an opportunity to observe Tyler at his current classroom and/or talk to his current teacher. A follow up letter would also be sent out in March or April to the next year teacher, including the bag with the binder of information and other resources. Tyler's current teacher kept the information most of the school year; then July retrieved it back during late spring time to make adjustments for the next teacher. Again, July would set up one to two meetings with the next teacher during the summer months to see how she is doing with the preparation work and if she has any questions, concerns, or need assistance. Again, before school begins, July, Tyler, and his new teacher will have a meeting to allow the teacher and Tyler to get to know each other and for Tyler to become comfortable in the classroom that he will be in. During the school year, a folder containing brief information, such as a quick reference guide is given to the teacher for the school year. It is kept by the teacher and retrieved at the end of the school year so July can revise it for the upcoming school year.

Now, Tyler is a happy second grade child and very successful in the classroom. He still has good days and bad days, but he loves school. The school has also taken on three to four more students on the autism spectrum this past year because of good experiences of teaching and working with children with ASD. July and her husband are very pleased and continue to be supportive to these teachers, the school administration, and other families of children with autism.

July's experiences

As a parent of a special needs child, I would like to share not to be afraid of the school systems you are a part of. Don't be afraid to ask straight forward questions and offer what you are willing to do to help them and your child to succeed in learning. Be an advocate for your child and don't give up. This would include any classroom modifications that may be needed. My husband and I are willing to offer financial assistance to the teachers to attend workshops and seminars that focus on teaching strategies for the autism spectrum. This includes a paid teacher sub, seminar/workshop fees, gas, meals and lodging. We also offer to pay for a classroom aide for our child, even though at this time he does not require one.

July's experience in working with families and teachers is that not everyone has all the information on how to help the child to learn. They need to listen to each other and have open communications with each other is the key to success. For example, a teacher may want to try a teaching technique that parents may not be familiar with in working with their child. On the other hand, teachers need to listen to the concerns of parents who know their child very well. It's the mixture between the two that helps build open and working relationships for the benefit of the child.

July: We have been blessed to have teachers willing to listen and work with us as team members. I also have seen techniques that worked with my son that I was not familiar with.

Conclusions

A word for families. School professionals may not have extensive experiences providing accommodations for children with autism. Yet, they might feel it is their responsibility to know how to meet students' learning needs. Indeed, many do. However, teaching students with autism is very challenging because each student's learning patterns are different and finding an effective teaching strategy for individual students takes time. Won't it be easier to get a positive response from school if a parent says "my child has different learning patterns from most of other children so how are we going to address this" than another parent demanding specialized instructional services for his/her child with disabilities because they are required by law? Open communication is the beginning to build a positive relationship between parents and school teachers. Till then, parents can share all of their research and information with school educational teams and why it is beneficial for their child. As July often said, it is a matter of putting all ideas together and seeing what makes the most sense for school teachers.

When July was asked about how to help students with autism at school, she said,

"When it comes to working with children on the spectrum, many of these kids are motivated to learn when given short goals to achieve and are rewarded for reaching those goals or responses. Rewards are usually more in the beginning until a trusting relationship has formed and then these rewards are slowly backed off over time. Rewards should be something the child enjoys and is willing to work for."

A word for school teachers. Parents are seen as collaborators and equal partners with school teachers these days. Studies also indicated that the characteristics of effective collaboration identified by parents as being open mindedness, free thinking, and a willingness to take on board new perspectives (Hodges & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Since more and more general education

teachers who include children with special needs in their classrooms now need to work closely with parents of all children with and without disabilities, teachers now must work with parents together to help children with autism to develop the skills that they need.

Parents may know what works for their child but may not know where to start a conversation with school teachers. The building of positive school/home partnerships requires that the family be viewed as a key partner in the education of a child with a disability. Successful school experiences require the involvement of parents. Turnbull and Turnbull (1997) speculated that some parents may not have the motivation to assume a more active role or may lack of the requisite knowledge and skills to become active participants in their children's education. As a result, parent empowerment and family centered services should be emphasized while building collaborative parent professional relationships. Collaboration involves sharing of information and resources as well as expertise and a commitment to jointly reaching decisions (Friend & Cook, 2003). Collaboration means that professionals no longer have power over families but rather achieve power with families. In view of practical limitations of programs that provide specialized training for teachers that work with families of children with disabilities, it is the hope of this article to demonstrate that parental efforts at collaboration can support the educational needs of children with autism.

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A Preliminary Study on Sight Word Flash Card Drill: Does it Impact Reading Fluency?

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of a tutoring intervention for sight word acquisition and to examine whether progress was matched by improvement in oral reading fluency. Three primary students were selected based upon teachers' referral for poor reading fluency. Flashcards were used to assess accuracy of recognition of vocabulary words listed in each student's current and previous reading books. Number of words correctly identified was recorded for each child. In addition, reading rate in the form of correct words and errors per minute was also assessed. Reading passages for evaluating rate were chosen randomly from each student's current reading book. A single-case A-B design was used. Both sight word recognition and reading fluency were assessed one to two times weekly for each student throughout the study. Analysis indicated all three students improved slightly in rate of sight-word acquisition during treatment; interestingly, oral reading fluency did improve markedly for all students.

A Preliminary Study on Sight Word Flash Card Drill: Does it Impact Reading Fluency?

Reading is probably the single most studied basic skill in the curriculum. An exceedingly complex task, it involves a host of motor and neurological skills, all simultaneously executed (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2003), about one-third of fourth-graders read below the basic level. It is not surprising, then, that most referrals for special education services are for concerns about reading skills (Joseph, 2002).

Recently, the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) examined the individual components of reading and reported that reading fluency, in particular, is a crucial component of reading proficiency. Without fluency, the student cannot comprehend the material: too much attention must be devoted to decoding individual words, leaving little room for processing and understanding the content of the passage (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, Tarver, & Jungjohann, 2006).

A key component of fluency is *automaticity*, or the ability to readily recognize words in isolation (Carnine et al., 2006). Automaticity allows the reader to group words into "chunks" or phrases, thus speeding up the process and facilitating comprehension.

Many reading interventions for fluency include a flashcard drill to develop automaticity. The underlying assumption for this decision is that a flashcard drill using targeted words will not only increase automaticity, but will also indirectly affect oral reading fluency in a positive direction.

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a tutoring flashcard intervention for word-recognition and oral reading fluency. Specifically, we measured progress in recognition of vocabulary words throughout the intervention period, and whether this progress was matched by an improvement in reading fluency.

Method

Participants

The students targeted were three second-graders. Two had been identified as having a learning disability in reading, and one had been identified as cognitively delayed. Participation was voluntary; consent was obtained from both the student and the parent.

Materials

Ten oral reading samples were randomly selected from the textbook used in instruction. Each sample contained from 60 to 90 words, and selection was evenly distributed throughout the textbook.

A recording form in which the tutor logged the number of words mastered during each session also was kept inside the tutee's folder. A reinforcement chart with 12 spaces was provided. A selection of reward items was provided, based upon a poll of student preferences.

A work mat (a paper mat with spaces marked for organizing the different sets of flashcards) also was provided for the use of the tutor. This folder had pockets for storing the different groups of cards.

Flashcards were prepared of all the vocabulary words in the reading texts, up to and including the text, which would be used in the classroom (a total of 257 words). Each child had two sets of flashcards, one for probe purposes, the second for tutoring.

Dependent Measures

There were three dependent measures, (a) correct reading rate, measured as correct words per minute on oral reading probes, (b) incorrect reading rate, measured as errors per minute on oral reading probes, and (c) number of words in isolation (flashcards) correctly identified.

Procedures

Tutoring structure. The tutoring procedure was a type of “folding-in” technique (Shapiro, 2004), adapted from that developed for sight words by Murphy and Fasko (1990) and Fasko (1994). In a folding-in drill, the tutor works with the student using a deck of 10 cards that include both known and unknown sight words. The majority of the words are already known to the student, usually about 70%, so that the student 1) can experience frequent successes during the tutoring sessions, and 2) increase automatic recognition on those words (Daly, Chafouleas, & Skinner, 2005).

Probes. An initial probe of vocabulary words was administered to assess which vocabulary words had already been learned. Each word was presented and the student was allowed three seconds in which to say the word. No feedback was given during this or subsequent word probes. Incorrect words were placed in one pile, correct ones in another. After all the words had been presented, those that had been correctly identified were re-presented in an attempt to control for guessing. If the child identified the word correctly both times, it was assumed that the word had been learned. The number of words was recorded. During subsequent probes, words already learned were not re-presented; additional words learned were simply added to a running total.

Oral reading fluency probes were also administered. The child was given a randomly selected passage from the reading probes and asked to read. At the end of 1 minute, correct reading rate as well as error rate were computed and recorded. Both word probes and fluency probes were administered one to two times per week throughout the study.

Preparation of flashcards. The cards used in tutoring were prepared using information obtained in the initial word probe. Those which were recognized in the initial probe were marked on the back with a green dot; those which were not recognized were marked with a red dot. The first ten cards to be drilled were prepared for each tutee, using a proportionate mixture of 30% unlearned to 70% learned. These ten cards were called the drill set.

Tutor training. The experimenter trained all tutors during a 1-hr. session using modeling and role-playing. Tutors were assessed individually by the experimenter for readiness at the end of the session, and were considered ready to begin tutoring when, during practice with other tutors, they correctly performed 100% of the tasks on a procedural reliability checklist. In addition, the experimenter closely supervised the first tutoring session, giving prompts and coaching to the tutors when necessary.

Design. A single-case A-B design was used to assess the effects of the intervention upon word recognition and reading fluency. Data were recorded across sessions, that is, days of school. It became necessary to record in this way because of an unprecedented number of snow days (16) which randomly interrupted normal school attendance.

Baseline. During this phase, no tutoring occurred. On the first day of the study, the teacher introduced the new reading book and the first story. Word probes and oral reading fluency probes were administered one or two times weekly throughout this phase, which lasted 27 days.

Tutoring. Throughout the tutoring phase, word probes and oral reading fluency probes continued to be given one or two times weekly. Each tutoring session lasted about 15 minutes each day and occurred in the reading teacher's classroom.

Tutors began by opening out the work mat and the flash cards. The previously learned cards had a green dot; the unlearned cards had a red dot. These decks were called the red and green decks, and they were stored in the corresponding pockets on the work mat. The tutor took the previously prepared drill set of ten cards. The drill cards were shown one by one to the tutee, who had three seconds to respond correctly by reading the word.

If the response given was correct, the tutor confirmed this by saying "That's right!" or "Good!" placed the card in the area marked "Correct," and went on to the next card. If an

incorrect or no response was given, the tutor said "No," in a firm voice, stated the correct word, and had the tutee repeat it. The tutee confirmed it if correct. The card was then marked on the back with an X and placed behind the next card in the drill deck, and the tutor then went on to the next card.

After all 10 cards were shown (and any repeats), the tutor marked an O on the back of those cards that were identified correctly within the time limit. The cards were shuffled and the procedure was repeated with the same ten cards. At the end of the session, a line was drawn under the X's and O's to separate each day's marks. When a card had at least five O's in a row on the back *and* going across two days, it was considered mastered. The card was then placed on the spot marked "mastered" and replaced with a new card from either the red or the green deck, depending on the type of card mastered, thus retaining the ratio of previously-learned to unlearned words.

At the end of each session, the number of mastered cards was counted and recorded by the tutor on the recording form, and the tutee recorded the corresponding number of marks on the reinforcement chart. When the 12 spaces of the reinforcement chart were completed, the tutee was allowed to select a reward from the reward box, and a new reinforcement chart was started. At the end of each session, each group of cards (the new deck, the drill deck, and the mastered deck) were put away in the appropriate pocket in the tutee's folder.

Results and Discussion

Data from probes were collected by the experimenter and recorded on graphs. Procedural reliability was assessed by the experimenter at 20% of the sessions for each dyad through direct observation, using a checklist designed for this purpose. Percent of agreement for the observations averaged 98%, ranging from 91% (when tutors did not mark the cards properly) to 100%.

To assess interscorer agreement, a special education teacher familiar with the procedures tallied agreements and disagreements with the experimenter during 20% of the probe sessions. The calculation required dividing the number of agreements per word by the number of agreements plus disagreements and multiplying by 100. Agreement for word recognition ranged from 98 to 100%, with a mean agreement score of 99%; that for fluency ranged from 98 to 100%, with a mean of 99%. Disagreements primarily occurred regarding one student, who had a speech impediment that made her difficult to understand at times.

Cumulative words acquired indicated slight improvement in rate of acquisition of sight-words after initiation of the intervention for the three students. All three showed improvement in fluency.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Student 1's rate of acquisition of sight-words improved only slightly after the intervention was initiated. She acquired an average of 1.43 words per day during baseline; during tutoring, she averaged 3.18 per day. However, the intervention had a more distinct impact on her reading fluency; her correct reading rate rose from an average of 15.5 words per minute during baseline to 47.5 during intervention, and her error rate dropped from 5 errors per minute to 3.

Similar results were obtained for Student 2 (Figure 2). On sight-word acquisition, Student 2 improved from 1.32 per day to 3.26 per day, while her reading fluency improved from 14 words per minute to 30, and errors decreased from 7 to 4.

For Student 3 (Figure 3), acquisition improved from an average of .6 per day during baseline to 2.95 per day during tutoring. Fluency improved from an average of 15.8 words per minute during baseline to 42 correct during tutoring, and errors dropped from 9 to 4.25.

All students showed fluctuation in their correct reading rates after onset of the intervention. Perhaps, as time went on, there was increasingly greater likelihood that the oral reading probe randomly selected each time was from a story they had already read in class. Hence, they had already “practiced” it. Of the five points collected during the intervention phase, only that on day 48 was from a story not previously read in class. In addition, since the sight-words were taught in a random order, they may or may not have been taught the particular words in any one reading passage.

In summary, the results of this study offer some promising preliminary information about the effectiveness of flashcard drill for increasing speed and accuracy in word recognition. The data provide some empirical evidence that improving word automaticity leads to increased oral reading fluency. Stronger evidence may be obtained in future studies by using standardized, grade-appropriate reading probes for monitoring fluency progress, rather than stories in the textbook. Also, the addition of a maintenance phase would strengthen confidence in the results.

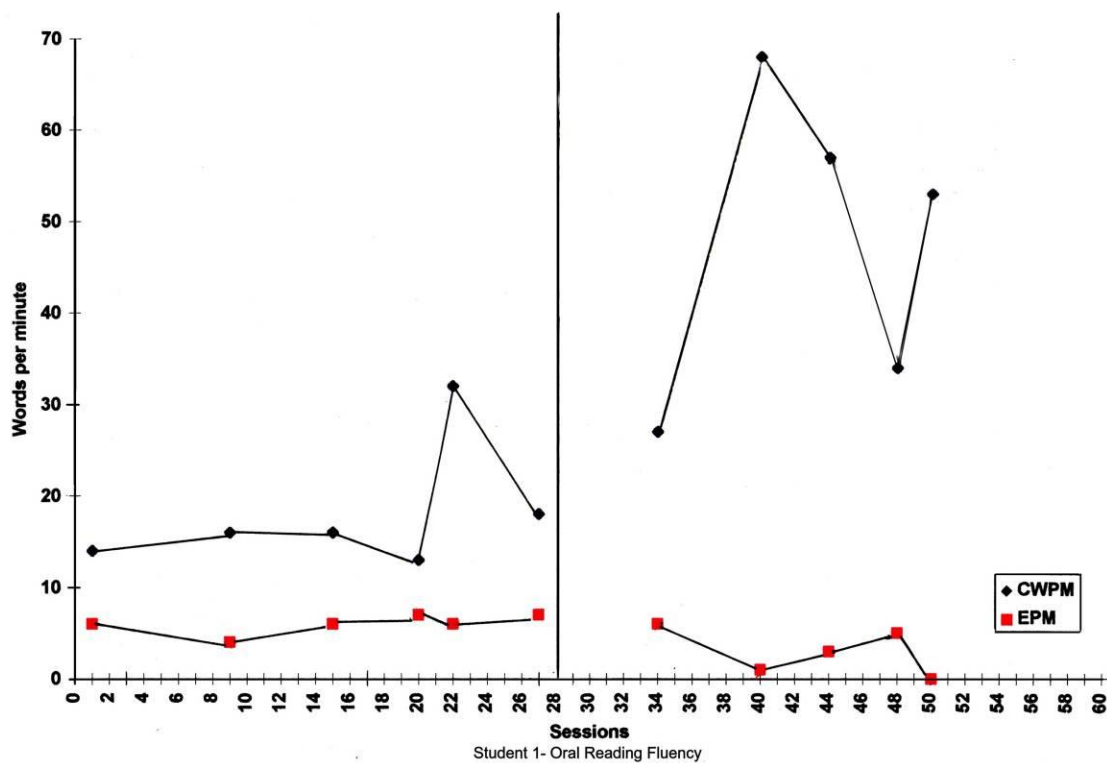
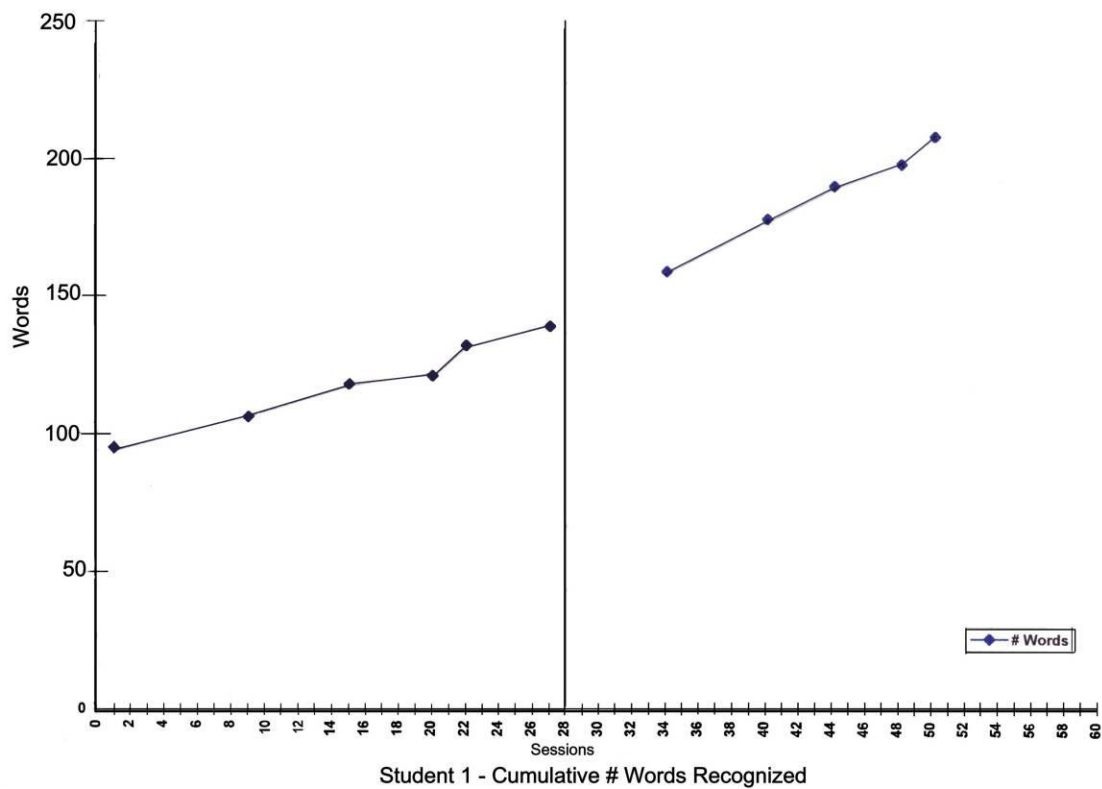


Figure 1. Student 1. CWPM = Correct Words per Minute; EPM = Errors per minute.

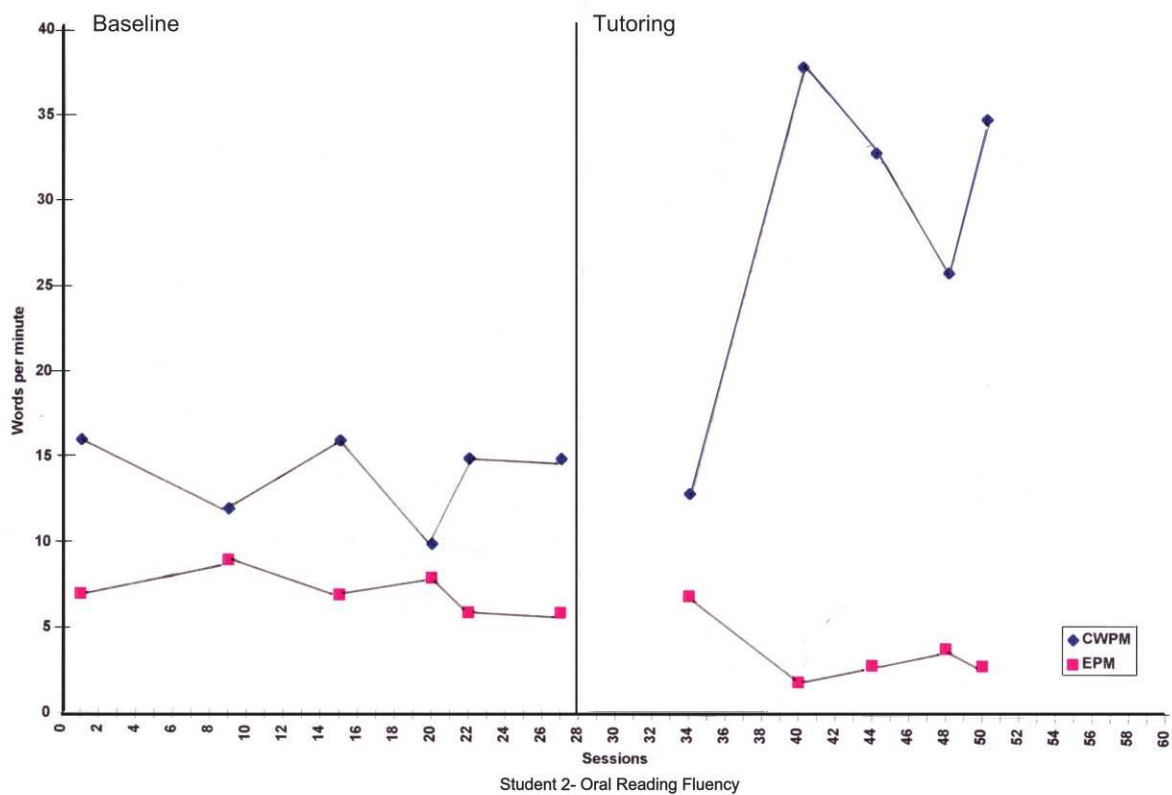
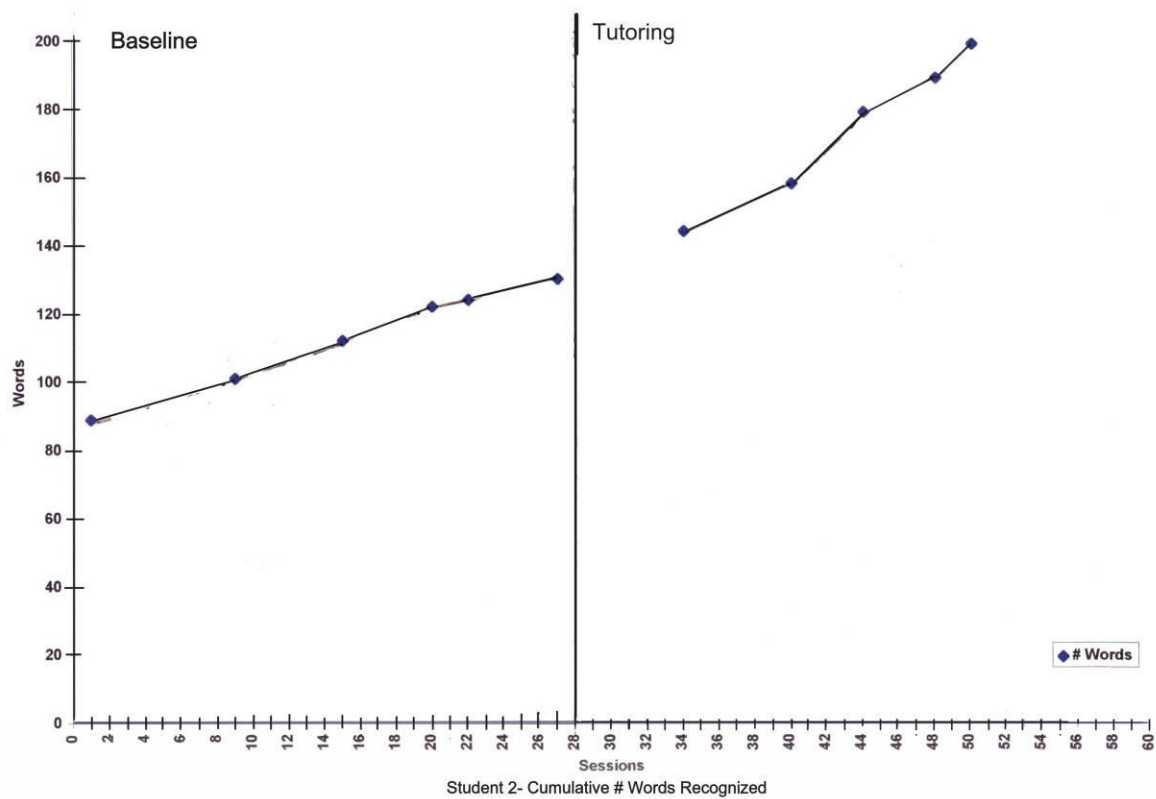
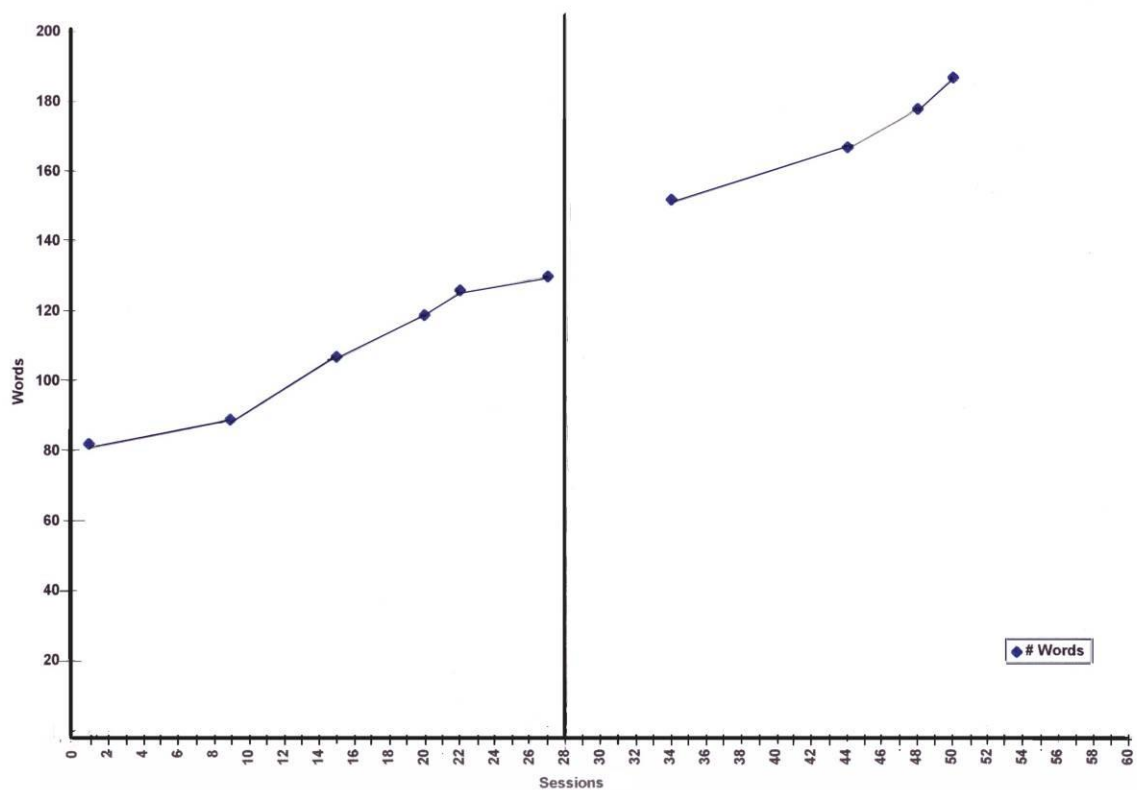
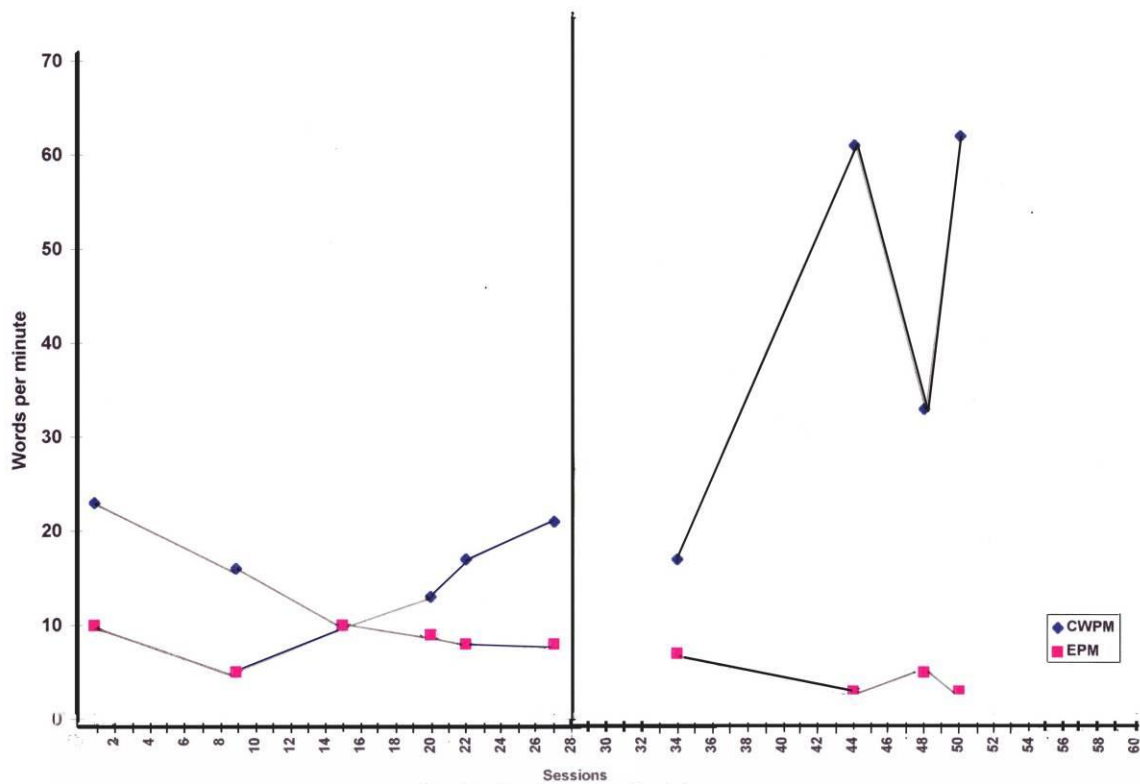


Figure 2. Student 2. CWPM = Correct Words per Minute; EPM = Errors per minute.



Student 2 - Cumulative # Words recognized



Student 3 - Oral Reading Fluency

Figure 3. Student 3. CWPM = Correct Words per Minute; EPM = Errors per minute.

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An Introduction to Literary Quranic Stylistics

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Abstract

A stylistic analysis is one approach of analyzing a literary text using literary descriptions. The use of literary texts in the literature classroom has been limited to mostly Western sources. This paper is an attempt to create an awareness of the linguistic features present in the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran. The Surah (chapters of the Quran) in the English translated versions of the Quran prove to contain a rich variety of linguistic features. Using the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts for the teaching of literature in the English language, especially at Islamic institutions, and using the stylistics approach to analyze these texts in the Literature classroom is a new and creative contribution towards the pedagogy of English language teaching. This paper also seeks to discuss the aims of stylistics in relation to the study and the teaching of literature. Besides reading literature, one can gain considerable pleasure from analyzing literature. One enjoys reading literature because it is interesting, enjoyable and/or emotionally touching. This enjoyment can be brought about by reading. Although reading is an important step in the study of the literary texts, there is another more important step - to analyze the literary texts, which is, to struggle to explain how one comes to understand literary works.

An Introduction to Literary Quranic Stylistics

Stylistics is an area of study where the linguist combines with the critic so as to achieve a better or fuller understanding and appreciation of literature. Stylistics also exploits one's knowledge of the variety of linguistic features present in the literature to deepen one's awareness of the literature. According to Mick Short, stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of literary texts (Short, 1996:334). In other words, stylistics is a tool that analyses literary texts using linguistic descriptions. In his book, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (1996), Mick Short suggests the following language features to be examined for a stylistic analysis:

- i) foregrounded features, including figures of speech
- ii) whether any patterns of style variation can be discerned
- iii) discursial patterning of various kinds, like turn-taking or patterns of inferencing
- iv) patterns of viewpoint manipulation, including speech and thought presentation
- v) patterns of lexis (vocabulary)
- vi) patterns of grammatical organization
- vii) patterns of textual organization (how the units of textual organization, from sentences to paragraphs and beyond are arranged).

Stylistics, predominantly, has been geared towards literary text description. It uses linguistic descriptions to analyze a literary text. When one reads, one wants to understand and respond to

the literary text through the language of the literary text. A stylistic analysis helps one to examine the language of the literary text. In the academic setting, as linguists work with literary texts by applying the principles of linguistic theory, more and more about literary language can be learnt.

Stylistics and the Study and the Teaching of Literature

Many students enjoy literature. To make any learning process reach an optimal level, enjoyment is a must. Thus, literary texts, if well-selected, can be a potentially useful aid to the language teacher.

Since stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of literary texts, it actually combines language and literature. If a student is taught literature, literary texts or extracts from them can be used to break up language classes. Class discussions can be held to identify difficulties the students have in general and in reading the literary text.

In the academic setting, a reading class would have several aspects to consider. The first would be to select the text, then to develop interesting strategies for the reading process, after which the teacher has the task of dealing with the difficulties experienced by the students. As a whole, these steps are concerned with making a point of using literary texts for a discussion whenever possible during the reading process. There is a definite link between stylistics and the reading process when the language of the literary text is examined in detail.

Reading is an important skill to the study of literature. When the student enters a tertiary institution, there is an emphasis on learning the four language skills--reading, writing, listening and speaking--through instruction in language studies and students are encouraged to participate in activities designed to improve these skills.

Stylistics links language and literature studies. Literary texts often contain a number of different varieties of English. They can be extremely useful in sensitizing more advanced learners of English to linguistic variation. The study of stylistics would be of particular interest to undergraduate students interested in stylistic analysis and also be relevant to advanced students and researchers such as this writer.

Stylistics has its place in the study and the teaching of literature. This paper also deals with the stylistics approach to the study of literature and its relevance to the teaching of literature. Mick Short states "the practice of stylistics comes about at any point of intersection of the language of a text with the elements which constitute the literalness of the text" (Short, 1988, p. 162).

From a teaching or classroom viewpoint, there is much that can be done. The teacher can use the literary text to introduce and form the basis of teaching some structural features of the English language. The teacher can teach grammar in action and through a stylistics approach of analysis, its communicative features can be illustrated. This can be very beneficial when teaching both native and non-native learners of English.

Where lexis is concerned, stylistics is a way of exploring the literary meanings from a text. Through stylistics and the teaching of literature, the rules of language are exploited. After observation, linguistic patterns and changes to those patterns are recognized.

From a linguistic point of view in the classroom, the teacher can introduce through a stylistic analysis, the appreciation of different levels of language organization in the literary text. Teachers can also point out how words work and the nature of figurative language.

Stylistic interpretation involves a process of making equations or inferences about the linguistic forms and meanings in a literary context. Literary texts can also be compared on the basis of related or contrasting themes. Features of a text can also be compared through stylistics.

Mick Short states “that a stylistic examination of a text can provide a systematic and principled basis for grading texts for comparison or for further analysis. These texts can be progressively introduced to students on the basis of their linguistic accessibility” (Short, 1988, p. 172).

Widdowson writes that if stylistics is to make any valuable contribution to criticism, literature must be studied as a mode of communication, and in such a study, means and ends must be given equal attention and shown to be independent (Widdowson, 1975, p. 235). In teaching literature in the area of stylistics, the invitation for the recognition of how a text works as a whole is explored and probed into.

Stylistics and Translations

The use of translated materials can be introduced purposefully and imaginatively, into the language and literature classroom. In the classroom, using translated materials can help the teacher achieve optimal results if these materials are applied to relevant and suitable approaches, activities and exercises.

Our mother tongue shapes our way of thinking and to some extent our use of the other language (whether second or foreign language). The pronunciation, choice of words, tone, word order, etc. is influenced by one language on the other. When this influence is understood, the teacher can correct errors of habit or common errors that usually creep in unconsciously.

An appropriate material of translation is authentic and wide-ranging in scope. The learner can be brought in touch with the whole language of the target language to maximize the learner's power and range of expressions. This will in turn add to the learner's vocabulary.

Using translated material can invite speculation and discussion. Because there is rarely a “right answer”, the atmosphere of the classroom can be more relaxed. The text given by the teacher can be very short and yet this text can be exploited to serve both reading and discussion to cover the whole class period.

According to Alan Duff, using translated materials develops three qualities in learners (Duff, 1989, p. 7):

- i) *Flexibility- It trains the learner to search for, explore and choose words.*
- ii) *Accuracy- In the search for the most appropriate words, the learner strives with the best choice of words.*

iii) *Clarity- In his choice for words, the learner tries to convey what is meant.*

The teacher can select materials to illustrate particular areas or aspects and structure of the English language with which the learners have difficulty. Thus, the materials could be used to cater for the learner's needs and to cover the required syllabus. The materials could have illustrations of prepositions, articles, if-clauses, etc. These difficulties could be worked out while the learners come to see the link between language and usage in the target language through practice.

Practice in language learning must not mean giving assignments, marking all the errors in red and returning the marked assignments back to the learners. This way, the teacher will eventually demotivate the learners. Practice in language learning should mean giving the learners regular opportunities to compare and discuss their work with others and to respond to suggestions and tasks with an eagerness to learn and not fear of making flaws.

The teacher must be competent enough in the target language to deal with and handle the different classroom situations. Simple but interesting tasks can be given to the learners before actually working on the texts. This is designed to set the students thinking along specific lines and issues. For example, as a warm-up exercise, after a general reading of the text, the learners could be asked to suggest suitable titles for the text.

Activities involving the use of translated materials constantly mean making choices. The longer the learner stays neutral or undecided and without making a choice, the harder the learner finds it to make up his mind. The teacher realizes that the best responses, answers or solutions occur in the classroom after thinking is done and choices are made. Then, the discussions will function well in order to give the learners time for deeper and further reflection and a chance to change their minds to make even better choices.

Teachers are encouraged to look at the following items when evaluating and analyzing a piece of translated text through stylistics. The uppermost question in this writer's mind is: If I were a language teacher with learners whose mother tongue was not English, meaning teaching learners with English as their second language (ESL) or as their foreign language (EFL), which type of translated material would I choose? This writer would want to have the following in mind when making her selection.

- i) The materials must reliably reflect aspects of the English language (e.g., prepositions, conjunctions, etc.).
- ii) The materials which put across the meaning of the original text clearly and if not, that the teacher would be able to tell where the uncertainty lies and devise tasks and exercises to test whether the learners can detect it as well.
- iii) Whether any words used have underlying implications and that they are loaded with more meaning. These words can appear in the form of figures of speech.
- iv) Whether the dictionary meaning of a particular word would serve a suitable explanation as to whether the word is appropriately used.
- v) Whether the words used sound natural and smooth flowing. One of the most frequent criticisms of translated material is that it doesn't sound natural. This is because the translator's thoughts and choice of words are too strongly molded by the original text. This is termed as source language influence (Duff, 1989, p. 11). A good way of shaking off the

source language influence is to set aside the original text and exploit or work with the translated material on its own with the learners.

- vi) Whether in terms of form, the ordering of words and ideas match as closely to the original text as possible. Here, differences in the language structure often go through changes in the form and order of words. When there is doubt in the understanding of the text, words and phrases should be taken out and looked at closely with an expert to clear the doubts.
- vii) Whether the context of the text is clearly discernible. What is meant by context is the what, where and to whom. What one is writing and speaking about, where the situation occurs and to whom it is addressed.
- viii) Whether the register is discernible. What is meant by register is how. Whether tones can be detected or distinguished to be having formal or informal expressions, cold or warm, personal or impersonal. The intention of the speaker must be clearly understood through the register in terms of the tone of the speaker. Whether it is the intention of the speaker to persuade or dissuade, apologize or criticize.
- ix) The style and clarity of the translated material should not attempt to change the style of the original text. It must, however, attempt to put across the meaning as clearly as possible with the choice of words.
- x) Figures of speech and idiomatic expressions include similes, metaphors, symbols, proverbs and saying, jargon, slang and colloquialisms. The explanation of these expressions carries these questions: Is the original word retained in inverted commas? Can the original expression be explained better by a close equivalent? Is it clearer to use non-idiomatic language or plain prose in terms of understanding?

The Use of English Language Translations of the Meaning of the Quran

This writer is convinced that the English language translation of the meaning of the Quran is a good alternative to be used in the English language and literature classroom.

According to Islam, it is an important duty for every man, woman and child to read and understand the Quran according to his or her own capacity. Muslims regard the Quran as a living miracle, an open book challenging all humanity to see and prove for them. They see in the Quran an invitation from God to all human beings to use their intellect to reason out this truth, having been created and endowed with adequate intellectual faculties to do this.

The Quran contains messages that are directly stated and accessible to the reader's thought processes as well as messages which are conveyed by means of images which can appeal to the readers senses and stimulate his/her imagination of certain sensory experiences. Humanity is invited to "think" and "experience" as they try to understand the messages in the Quran. Muslim students, in particular, should be exposed to the study of Quranic concepts as early in their academic life as possible due to the abundance of concepts presented in the Quran. In this way, they will have a reasonable framework within which to grasp and understand at the time or at a later date, the varied concepts in the Quran with ease, which can help to elucidate the messages in the Quran.

Muslim educationists feel it is reasonable for Muslim students to try to make the Quran as much a part of their lives as possible. Thus, they would no doubt consider it a great achievement if the

Quran could be fitted to a large extent into any curriculum at Islamic educational institutions in any medium of study- including the curriculum of English language and Literature classes especially at Islamic educational institutions.

The basic justifications for using the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran in English language and Literature classes are the following. Firstly, the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran can be used most productively when teaching its content while exploiting its language. Secondly, the English language translations of the meanings of the Quran can be a source of encouragement for students especially at Islamic educational institutions because Muslims students are aware of the sacredness of the Quran. Because of their religious background, the students are motivated to relate to or imagine what is mentioned in the Quran. As Muslims, it is indeed beneficial for them to have an opportunity to study Quranic concepts for them to grow and develop spiritually. Also, Quran-based instruction would be a sure way of inculcating Islamic moral values in the learners and they can use these values as a yardstick for critiquing other texts. The third reason would be that of the possibility of introducing the literary aspects of the Quran to Muslim as well as non-Muslim students who may be attending Islamic institutions. A fourth reason would be that this is an effective way of making students more familiar with the Quran, which will enable them to use Quranic quotations effectively. This ability will be a great asset for anyone academically to prove and highlight his/her points in other coursework and socially especially in Islamic gatherings where topics of discussions, which are related to the Quran, are brought forth. Quranic quotations can make an impressive addition to one's rhetorical style.

It is suitable to teach Quranic concepts to students at the undergraduate level and beyond in particular because their maturity will allow for easier understanding and grasping of Quranic concepts and this would play an important role in enabling them to relate Quranic concepts to practical situations in their lives. They can also use these concepts in other relevant coursework. This is important because they are expected to express their viewpoints constructively in the near future in the real world and this may be their last chance to study Quranic concepts in an academic setting.

Conclusion

From the discussion in this paper, one can see that literary texts can be exploited in terms of language and content through stylistics. Stylistics can provide a way of mediating between two subjects, English language and Literature. This writer has also introduced the idea of using the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts in the English language and Literature classroom. Stylistics is a way of analyzing literary texts using literary descriptions. The writer has indeed paved the way for the sensible possibility of analyzing the English language translated versions of the Quran using the stylistics approach in the Literature classroom.

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Learning to Critique Disability Children's Literature Available to Teacher Candidates in Their Local Communities

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Abstract

This work reports on teacher candidates' critique of disability children's literature available to them in their local communities. Blaska's (2003) Images and Encounters Profile: Checklist to Review Books for Inclusion and Depiction of Persons with Disabilities was used in order to maintain consistency among teacher critiques. The findings suggest that the teacher candidates experienced difficulties in locating disability children's literature in their communities. The majority of the disability children's books that they were able to review, however, met Blaska's (2003) Images and Encounters Profile criteria. The teacher candidates' perspectives related to the critique experience are also discussed, and a table of the reviewed disability children's books is included.

Learning to Critique Disability Children's Literature Available to Teacher Candidates in Their Local Communities

The Need for Children's Literature in Special Education

High quality schools require a pool of highly qualified teachers who have knowledge related to inclusive pedagogy and who know how to translate this knowledge into successful instruction for the widest range of learners, including students with varying disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). Providing teacher candidates with access to a diverse disability children's literacy environment in teacher preparation programs might be a first step to achieve these goals. Stelle (1999) agrees, "Children's literature can be used to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities and to encourage positive peer relationships among children of differing abilities" (p. 123). Such literature also allows discussing challenging matters in ways that are not directly accessible via the more formal and clinical third person language found in a typical professional text (Wear, 1989).

The use of disability children's literature is not a new concept in the college classroom. For example, Zambo (2005) promoted the use of picture books about characters with disabilities in her education psychology course to prepare future teachers to work more effectively with the population of secondary students. Using picture books also afforded opportunities to "make theory come alive" (p. 502).

Leftwich (2002) used diverse children's literature with her teacher candidates in order to increase their understanding of disability as well as to augment their sensitivity to cultural diversity. Since most of her teacher candidates came from white and middle class backgrounds, they found the experience of reading and responding vicariously to culturally diverse children's literature powerful for their future classrooms. However, in order to feel comfortable using such literature in their future classrooms, they all had to be taught how to use it.

Marlowe and Maycock (1989) conducted a study on the effects of a literary text based course in special education on teacher candidates' attitudes towards children with disabilities. They found that teacher candidates exposed to such literature held more positive attitudes toward children with disabilities than a control group instructed with a traditional college text based course. In their explanation they wrote:

The use of contemporary literature may be one imaginative way to provoke reflection in teacher education students, which in turn, might improve expectations and responses toward children with disabilities. Literature provides an intimacy where we can learn how a child with a disability views himself or herself and what he or she has in common with all of us becomes clear. (pp. 3-4)

Blaska (2003) urged teachers to incorporate disability children's literature as a part of their curricula regardless if they currently have a child with disability integrated in their program or not. Blaska argued:

With exposure through literature, children will have the opportunity to ask questions and gain information prior to meeting a person with a disability or illness whether it occurs in school or in the community. (p. 9)

As a strong advocate of disability diverse children's literature in instruction, I too, engaged my teacher candidates in critiquing literature available to them in their local communities. Their learning about and critiquing such literature became an object of the study reported in this work. The questions that guided this inquiry included:

- How accessible was the most contemporary disability children's literature to teacher candidates in their local communities?
- What type of diverse disability children's literature was available to the teacher candidates in their local communities?
- How many of the children's books under review did meet Blaska's (2003) *Images and Encounters Profile* criteria for *Inclusion and Depiction of Persons with Disabilities*, and for what major reasons?
- What were the teacher candidates' perspectives on the critique experience?

For the purpose of this study, the most contemporary literature was defined as literature published within the past five years at the time of the study. This definition is consistent with the subject literature suggesting that "Teachers should look for current and appropriate characterizations" before reading and recommending disability children's literature to their own students (Prater et. al, 2006, p. 22). Teacher candidates' local communities included their school libraries and classrooms, public libraries, bookstores, or even their own and friends' private collections.

Method

Participants

Eight teacher candidates enrolled in a summer course on inclusion were asked to critique disability children's books for their depictions of disabilities and or illness. The course had a cross-categorical approach in which characteristics of students with particular disabilities and special needs were identified and appropriate teaching strategies were applied to accommodate students with special needs.

The teacher candidates were six females and two males (See Table 1 for demographic information about these teacher candidates), aged from twenty-two to forty-one years old. At the time the course began, they all held bachelor's degrees in such various areas of expertise as English, math, chemistry and physics, accounting, and public relations/journalism. They also differed in terms of their teaching experience, ranging from full time teaching (n=2), part time teaching (n=1), substitute teaching (n=1), working as a teacher aide (n=1) to not having any teaching experience (n=3).

Data Collection

The teacher candidates used Blaska's (2003) *Images and Encounters Profile*, a structured checklist consisting of ten criteria to critique the most contemporary children's books with characters with disabilities and illnesses found in their local communities. More specifically, using *Images and Encounters Profile* entries for each reviewed book, the teacher candidates examined "the storyline, language, or illustrations" (Blaska, 2003, p. 199) and indicated if the criteria listed below were present in the books under review.

The ten criteria included:

1. Promotes empathy not pity
2. Depicts acceptance not ridicule
3. Emphasizes success rather than, or in addition, to failure
4. Promotes positive images of persons with disabilities or illness
5. Assists children in gaining accurate understanding of the disability or illness
6. Demonstrates respect for persons with disabilities or illness
7. Promotes attitude of "one of us" not "one of them"
8. Uses language which stresses person first, disability second philosophy
9. Describes the disability or person with disabilities or illness as realistic (i.e., not subhuman or superhuman)
10. Illustrates characters in a realistic manner (p. 199).

According to Blaska's protocol (2003), teachers should check "Yes," if the criterion was addressed positively, "No," if the criterion was addressed negatively, and "Not Present," if the criterion was not evident. In addition, the teacher candidates were asked to make open-ended comments in response to each profile criterion, which indicated what prompted their choices. Some offered commentary that was elaborate and supported with direct quotes from the reviewed children's books, while others briefly explained their selections.

I provided the teacher candidates with a Cover Page for Each Reviewed Children's Book so that they could record basic characteristics of the reviewed children's books (e.g., author, title, year of publication, genre, target disability, and so on).

At the end of the review process, the teacher candidates filled out a basic demographic information survey and prepared a paper in which they discussed the process of identifying and

reviewing the children's books with disabilities and or illness. They also shared their perspectives related to the critique experience as a whole.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included reading and rereading the teacher candidates' written reports on their process of locating the required books and obtaining general information about the range of literature available to them in their local communities. As a result of this analysis, the theme of challenges related to the process of finding disability children's literature emerged.

Next, a table summarizing the general characteristics of the critiqued children's books was prepared. Data analysis also consisted of the review of the teacher candidates' completed *Images and Encounters Profile* entries for each of the books. Frequency counts were used to tabulate the number of books that met positively each of the *Images and Encounters Profile* criteria.

The teacher candidates' open-ended comments about each of the critiqued books were further read and reread in order to identify and categorize the major reasons they offered in support of their ratings.

Finally, the teacher candidates' written reports were again read in order to examine their perceptions on the critique experience as a whole. Major patterns in their plans for inclusion of disability children's literature in their future classrooms emerged from this analysis.

Findings

The Most Contemporary Disability Children's Literature in the Teacher Candidates' Local Communities

In answer to the first research question: How accessible was the most contemporary disability children's literature to teacher candidates in their local communities, teacher candidates reported major challenges. One teacher candidate summarized this sentiment in this way, "Compared to the number of stories about sports, dinosaurs, and mischief, there is not a wide variety of children's books dealing with a disability to choose from." As reported by the following two teacher candidates, a major challenge was meeting the requirement that the books for the critique be contemporary (published within the past five years at the time of the study):

I went to my local elementary school library and found two really good chapter books on children with disabilities...but surprisingly there were not many that were published within our criteria, the last five years...I decided to try Barnes & Noble's Bookstore; here again I was surprised that there were not many recent publications available, even though they have a small section just on children with special needs.

Children's books including a disability or illness are hard to come by. Many of the books that I found were preparation books for parents or teachers expecting or dealing with a child suffering from a particular disability or illness.

Another challenge reported by the teacher candidates was a limited diversity of disability represented in the very few books that they managed to find. A teacher candidate protested, "I found many books centered on the same disabilities. There was little variety to choose from, and the illness aspect of the assignment was almost non-existent."

Several teacher candidates noticed that the librarians themselves had no recollection of even having such books in their own libraries as they were often surprised at a very request of helping the teacher candidates to find such books. This teacher candidate wrote to this affect, "While I was at the libraries in the children section searching for these books I noticed that when I asked the librarians for help, they looked at me kind of funny."

The limited diversity of the most contemporary books with characters with disabilities in the teacher candidates' local libraries meant fewer opportunities for their users for independent reading about disabilities and illness. It also led to fewer chances for teachers and parents to look for such books in the first place. This teacher candidate made this point most clear when she wrote,

...there are not many children's books on disabilities that are easily accessible to parents. Unless a parent wanted to find a book with a disability to help their child with a better understanding, I don't think the chances of a child going in to a library and picking up one of these books to read because it's interesting is very likely.

Like other teacher candidates in this study, this teacher candidate was determined to change this situation, as reflected in this call to fellow teachers: "It is especially important for us as teachers to make sure that children are exposed to this kind of literature."

General Characteristics of the Identified Disability Children's Literature

In the following section, I address the second research question: What type of diverse disability children's literature was available to the teacher candidates in their local communities?

A total of eighty children's books were originally located in the teacher candidates' communities. However, twenty eight of these children's books were excluded. They either did not meet the requirement of being published within the past five years or they were the same books reviewed by more than one teacher candidate. This left fifty two (n =52) different children's books identified by the teacher candidates in their local communities to be included in this analysis (See Appendix for Table 2 Summary of the General Characteristics of the Reviewed Disability Children's Books). The books found were published between 1999 (n=12), 2000 (n=9), 2001 (n=12), 2002 (n=10), 2003 (n=7), and 2004 (n=2).

The books represented seven genres as identified by the teacher candidates. These were: fiction books (n=27), picture books (n=15), non-fiction books (n=5), easy-reading books (n=2), chapter book (n = 1), biography (1) and a pamphlet (n=1). Furthermore, the identified books represented varied reading levels, from baby-preschool (n=6), elementary and middle school ages 4-8 (n=24), high school ages 9-12 (n=20) to young adulthood ages 12-up (n=2). Most frequently they were published by the Woodbine House (n=6), Albert Whitman (n=4), Viking (n=3), and Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers (n=3).

All together, the identified books depicted characters with eleven different categories of exceptionality, based on the federal definitions of disability (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007), and two types of chronic illnesses. The categories included: mental retardation (3), Down syndrome (5), Tourette syndrome (2), visual impairments (9), hearing impairments (5), learning disabilities (5), speech and language impairments (2), orthopedic impairments (9), other health impairments including ADD and/ ADHD (4), multiple disabilities (5), and developmental disabilities (1). Two types of chronic illnesses were leukemia (1), which is one of the most

common forms of cancer in young children, and schizophrenia (1), which is one of the most common forms of mental diseases characterized by severe brain dysfunction. Chronic illnesses are often referred to as other health disabilities or impairments (Blaska, 2003). In this study, however, chronic illnesses are reported as a separate category.

The teacher candidates noticed, however, that the authors of the identified children's books used alternative terms for the federal categories of disability and illnesses. Some terms differed only slightly from the federal disability terms, whereas others differed more significantly. For instance, a federal disability category such as hearing impairment was referred to as deafness and deaf by several authors. Similarly, a federal disability category such as an orthopedic impairment was used to describe disability categories such as cerebral palsy, physically impaired, physical disabilities, missing limbs, wheelchair users and orthopedic impairments. These differences might reflect the authors' unfamiliarity with the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates for the use of "people first language for referring to people with disabilities" (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007, p. 5). Alternatively, the authors might have chosen to use a more simple language to accommodate their audience: children.

The teacher candidates observed a striking asymmetry in gender differences in characters with disabilities in the books they critiqued. They found more books depicting male characters (n=32) than female ones (n=11). Eight books (n=8) portrayed characters with disabilities representing both males and females. In one book a character with a disability was portrayed as an object—a young car (n = 1). Interestingly, when characters were portrayed as animals, a disproportional ratio of male animal characters (n=3) to female animal characters (n=1) was maintained.

The teacher candidates reported a similar asymmetry in the ethnic background of characters with disabilities depicted in the books they reviewed. The majority of characters with disabilities were portrayed as Caucasian White (n=32). Six characters with disabilities (n=6) were of African-American origin. Six books (n=6) displayed images of disabilities in characters from diverse ethnic (mixed) backgrounds. Only one book presented images of a character with a disability with Asian background.

The limited access to diverse disability children's literature in the local communities in this study is consistent with the findings reported in previous studies. For instance, Blaska (2004), who analyzed childhood programs in the Minnesota professional communities, including Head Start, nursery schools, early childhood special education and center-based childcare, found that while most of these programs had many books depicting a diversity of cultures (73% had 1-10 books with multicultural components in them), few had books depicting characters with disabilities in them. Similarly, Worotyneć (2004, Winter), who examined the New York Public Library's (NYPL) children's book collections for both teachers and parents, found that although children's books from the "100 Picture Books Everyone Should Know" identified the themes related to multiculturalism, they did not provide a balanced discussion of ability/disability issues. Inadequate access to diverse disability children's literature in both this study and previous research may have well contributed to parents' and other professionals' somewhat limited awareness of disability/ability issues through such literature.

The Images and Encounters Profile and the Specific Disability Children's Literature

In the following section, I discuss answers to the research question: How many of the books under review did meet Blaska's (2003) *Images and Encounters Profile* criteria for *Inclusion and Depiction of Persons with Disabilities*, and for what reasons?

Promotes empathy not pity

The teacher candidates reported that thirty nine (n=39) books (See Appendix for Table 3 Summary of the Images & Encounters Profile) promoted the themes of empathy towards individuals with disabilities or illness for a variety of reasons. For instance, some books were recommended as reinforcing the themes of empathy because they depicted characters with disabilities as those sharing a series of familiar and age appropriate activities with their peers. One such example is the book *Susan Laughs*, by Jeanne Willis (2000), in which the main character, a young redheaded girl in a wheelchair is shown as a cheerful and energetic child involved in a variety of activities such as: horseback riding, math, and swimming with her friends.

Other books were considered as aiming at empathic awareness because they created characters with disabilities who were not afraid to talk about their emotions and feelings related to having a disability, and thus to project this newly found awareness to others. In the book, *My Name is not Slow*, by Autumn Libal (2004), the young readers were coached on how to increase their understanding of a child with Down syndrome's situation, feelings, and motives so that they were able to discern and interpret their own emotional states, and thus easily identify with the character.

Additional reasons included attention to a variety of assistive technology devices used by characters with disabilities to compensate for the challenges they experienced related to specific disability conditions, and alternative ways of learning and doing things. This teacher candidate illustrates this latter observation in the context of *All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!*, written by Ellen B. Senisi (2002). He wrote,

This story actually has real photographs of the student with the disability. Therefore, when you see a picture of the student doing different activities, you realize that he is a child just like any other child. He just has to find different ways to complete the same tasks.

Depicts acceptance not ridicule

Forty one (n=41) books were categorized as depicting acceptance towards individuals with disabilities. Again, a variety of reasons were offered by the teacher candidates for considering books as the ones "promoting the themes of acceptance." Most were defined as such because they shared stories about typical school and friendship relationships between children with and without disabilities. Within this context, one teacher candidate wrote this about the main character with Down syndrome in *Russ and the Almost Perfect Day (A Day With Russ)*, by Janet Elizabeth Rickert and Pete McGahan (2001).

His friends play with him; his friends invite him to birthday parties; he and his friends ride a scooter and play hula hoop during gym; and together with his friends they visit snakes during their science class.

Interestingly, the teacher candidates also highly rated books which equated acceptance with friendship not only among human beings but also between human beings and non-human beings also affected by disability. *All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!*, written by Ellen B. Senisi (2002), is an example of such a book. The book gives a glimpse into the life of a young boy, Moses, who uses wheelchair and becomes a friend with Zaki, an iguana with missing toes. According to the teacher candidates, the young readers could easily learn from this book that disability is an issue that affects both human and non-human beings, and that pets with disabilities can become children's cherished friends.

Emphasizes success rather than, or in addition, to failure

Forty eight (n=48) of the books were praised for creating opportunities for characters with disabilities to succeed. Yet, the concept of success meant a lot of different things in the context of different books. Some books were categorized as promoting opportunities for success because they showed school environments with youngsters with disabilities having full access to the general curriculum, and their achievements were reported in various age appropriate activities. For instance, one teacher candidate argued that Dustin, a young boy with Down syndrome in the book, *Dustin's Big School Day*, by Alden R. Carter (1999), is shown "doing many academic activities such as: math, spelling, and geography. He is succeeding in each activity."

Also, the books that emphasized their characters' with disabilities efforts of independence were highly rated on the success dimension. For instance, *The Alphabet War: A Story about Dyslexia*, by Diane Burton Robb (2004), illustrates such a successful journey for independence of a youngster named Adam. As almost all peers in his class mastered the skill of how to read, Adam struggles to make sense of letters due to his dyslexia. With help of his family and a tutor, Adam begins to believe in himself and his ability to learn to read. "Adam reads a book independently. He is also very good at science projects and building things," reported a teacher candidate.

Similarly, the teacher candidates observed that the books which created characters with disabilities driven by curiosity, vitality, and spontaneity combined with a general sense of happiness illustrated that success in the lives of children with disabilities. One such book is *Let's Talk About Being in a Wheelchair*, by Melanie Ann Apel (2002). "The author tells about a variety of successful people who use wheelchairs, including Christopher Reeve, Robby, and Maisey," commented one teacher candidate. "The book stresses the fact that we should not categorize people with disabilities as "special" or different, because all people are with most of the same goals and desires for success," wrote another teacher candidate.

Promotes positive images of persons with disabilities or illness

Forty nine (n=49) reviewed books were classified as meeting this criterion, sometimes because they depicted characters with disabilities with positive personality traits such as being happy, joyful or playful individuals. "The book shows many pictures of disabled children, happy and participating in class and in sports like everyone else," commented the teacher candidate who reviewed *Don't Call Me Special*, by Pat Thomas (2002). Similarly, in response to *Chang and*

the Bamboo Flute (Hill, 2002), another teacher candidate argued, “Illustrations show happiness and portray ‘normal’ interactions, moving beyond the characters’ disabilities.”

At other times, teacher candidates considered books as promoting positive images of individuals with disabilities when they shared stories of friendship relationships between children with and without disabilities. A teacher candidate who reviewed *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, by Sharon Creech (2003), shared this sentiment too when he reported that his book “tells about friendships and accomplishments of Bailey, the main character.”

Still other books were considered as promoting positive images of individuals with disabilities because they portrayed characters that had a sense of humor. “The main character has a good sense of humor, and good values, and loves his grandparents,” wrote a teacher candidate about *95 Pounds of Hope*, by Anna Gavalda (2003). Similarly, the main character with a disability in *Russ and the Firehouse*, by Janet Elizabeth Rickert (2000), “is enjoying helping out with the chores; he is always smiling, and the firemen tell him he is a big help,” argued another teacher candidate.

Assists children in gaining accurate understanding of the disability or illness

According to the teacher candidates in this study, forty books (n=40) met this criterion when their authors provided balanced descriptions of individuals with disabilities, including both their strengths and limitations. “Kate’s mom gives a very good description of Timmy’s strengths and weaknesses, and Timmy talks about some of the emotions he experiences because of his disability,” argued the teacher candidate who reviewed *What’s Wrong With Timmy?*, by Maria Shriver (2001).

Also, books with detailed information on how to modify activities for individuals with disabilities both at home and at school were rated highly on the accuracy factor. “This book explains Taylor’s therapy sessions and the stretches he does at home. It also tells what the disability is and shows how Taylor is affected by it,” reported a teacher candidate who critiqued *Rolling Along: The Story of Taylor and His Wheelchair*, by Jamee Riggio Heelan (2000). Similarly, the book, *Moses Goes to School*, by Isaac Millman (2000), “discusses some of the adaptations that Moses uses to learn, such as vibrations, computers, and sign language,” commented another teacher candidate.

Several books were considered as accurate representations of those with disabilities because they were told by individuals with disabilities themselves, representing thus “the insiders’ point of view.” Teacher candidates agreed that this was true for these two books, *Animal Helpers for the Disabled*, by Deborah Kent (2003) and *A Corner of the Universe*, by Ann M. Martin (2002).

Demonstrates respect for persons with disabilities or illness

The teacher candidates reported that forty seven (n=47) books demonstrated the themes of respect towards individuals with disabilities. This was evident in books that portrayed children with disabilities with the same tasks and activities as their age non-disabled peers, as in *Moses Goes to School*, by Isaac Millman (2000). In this book, “Children respect Moses because he does all of the same things that they like to do: use the computer, listen to music, and write letters, thus depicting the disabled characters as having friends,” commented one teacher candidate.

Another reason for considering books as the ones that promote respect for individuals with disabilities that teacher candidates mentioned were emphasizing a whole range of personality traits. For instance, a teacher candidate noted courage in *Animal Helpers for the Disabled* (Kent, 2003), when he wrote, this book “shows their struggles and triumphs. You have respect for their courage.” Another teacher candidate observed leadership in *Loud Emily*, by Alexis O’Neill (1999).

Promotes attitude of "one of us" not "one of them"

Forty books (n=40) received a positive rating with regard to this criterion. According to the teacher candidates, the books which promoted the themes of "one of us" not "one of them" depicted individuals with disabilities as actively involved in developmentally and age appropriate activities. “Dustin participates in almost all of the same activities as the rest of the children, and even when he returns from his pull out sessions, he joins in whatever they are doing,” wrote the teacher candidate who reviewed *Dustin’s Big School Day*, by Alden R. Carter (1999). “Kate realizes that she and Timmy have similar interests and Kate invites Timmy to play basketball with her and her friends,” commented the reviewer of *What’s Wrong With Timmy?*, by Maria Shriver (2001). Yet another teacher candidate noted that in *Chang and the Bamboo Flute*, by Elizabeth Star Hill (2002), the main character, “Chang, is included in his family and community.”

The attitude of “one of us” not "one of them" was also present when individuals with disabilities were perceived by their peers as whole persons, human beings with gifts and talents as well as with areas needing improvement. A teacher candidate saw this in *Dyslexia* (Wiltshire, 2003), “The book points out that we all have strengths and weaknesses, therefore we need to help each other to do well in areas that we are lacking.”

Uses language which stresses person first, disability second philosophy

Thirty three (n=33) of the reviewed books were categorized as those in which “people first” language was applied. In these books, individuals with disabilities and illness were depicted as having strengths, abilities, dreams, and desires. Only after such introductions did the reader learn about the limitations and challenges related to specific disabilities that their characters encountered in their lives. For instance, in the book, *Susan Laughs*, by Jeanne Willis (1999), “Susan is introduced, and her activities are listed. It is not until the end of the book that the reader is aware of her disability,” explained one teacher candidate.

Furthermore, in these books the authors empowered characters with disabilities to choose the way they wanted to be addressed and the way they wanted to be described. For example, “Eddie tells his story and describes himself first” in *Eddie Enough*, by Debbie Zimmet (2001), and “Bobby refers to himself as Bobby the Missing Person and Bobby the Human Hidden Camera” in *Things Not Seen*, by Andrew Clements (2002).

Still other books were characterized as using politically correct language in reference to individuals with disabilities when the authors focused on the positives, as in *Otto Learns about his Medicine*, by Matthew Galvin (2001). The teacher candidate who reviewed this book reflected about this attitude in this way, “This book only talks about the attributes. It always uses name not disability.” A teacher candidate who reviewed *Looking Out for Sarah*, by Glenna Lang

(2001), observed too that her author avoided in the whole book the direct use of the disability label such as “Never says “blind” just implied.”

Describes the disability or person with disabilities or illness as realistic (i.e., not subhuman or superhuman)

Forty seven (n=47) of the reviewed books were reported to include realistic images of individuals with disabilities and illness. For instance, in the context of the book, *Sarah’s Sleepover*, by Bobbie Rodriguez (2000), one teacher candidate wrote, “The book mentions some things that Sarah is good at such as finding her way in the dark and some things she has trouble with, such as going up steps.”

Several books were given credit for realistic images of individuals with disabilities and illness when they focused on affective and emotional aspects of living rather than on disability related experiences and feelings. One teacher candidate found this to be true for *Me and Rupert Goody*, by Barbara O’Connor (1999), “The story describes real fears any person may have. That is Rupert was very afraid of thunderstorms, which had nothing to do with his disability.”

Other teacher candidates considered the books as providing realistic images of those with disabilities when they discussed directly and honestly some of the limitations imposed by the disability. This teacher candidate illustrates this criterion in response to *Of Sound Mind*, by Jean Ferris (2001), “Theo watched them, knowing they were doing something he could never do with his sibling; he’d never be able to banter with Jeremy while they were both doing something that involved the use of their hands. There was a degree of spontaneity that he and Jeremy would never have if they had to wait until their hands were free to say what had popped into their minds.”

Illustrates characters in a realistic manner

From the teacher candidates’ point of view, forty five (n=45) of the reviewed books depicted characters with disabilities in a realistic manner. In these books, a teacher candidate remarked, “Photos portray a very realistic view of disability,” as in *Someone Special Just Like You*, by Tricia Brown (1999). Similarly, “Pictures in the book show kids in typical school settings and at home practicing with parents,” reported the reviewer of *Dyslexia*, by A. Silverstein V. Silverstein, and L. S. Nunn (2001).

Still, other books were described as depicting characters with disabilities in a realistic manner when they discussed “thoughts and feelings very well in a realistic setting and under realistic circumstances,” as one teacher noted of *95 Pounds of Hope*, by Anna Gavalda (2003).

The Teacher Candidates’ Insights on the Critique Experience

I address teacher candidates’ responses to the fourth research question in this section: What were the teacher candidates’ perspectives on the critique experience? In general, the teacher candidates found the critique of the most contemporary disability children’s literature a positive learning experience. One teacher candidate explained, “I thought that this was a really interesting assignment. It was challenging yet interesting and extremely educational. After this project, I

now feel confident to incorporate children's books with disabilities into my classroom." "This research taught me the importance of having things represented in literature that are important issues not only to parents but also to children that have to live with them everyday," commented another teacher candidate. Still another teacher candidate discussed the following benefits of conducting the review of children's literature: This project "showed me a great way to analyze future inclusive materials; and it also gave me some new insight in how to apply data collected into classroom teaching theory."

Interestingly, even a secondary content specific teacher candidate, whose initial comments about the assignment echoed reluctance, eventually came along. The following excerpts from before and after the assignment reflections illustrate this transformation:

[At the beginning of the assignment]

Trade Books? 'Yuck!' I don't think that I can learn about children with disabilities from a book, especially from a children's book. I'm mathematics major and I have no plans to teach literature for increased awareness in anything other than the history of mathematics.

[At the end of the assignment]

This assignment has prepared me by wanting to learn more. I have begun to collect more books about other disabilities. I am collecting resources from online sites, journals, or books that I can store for later referencing. I know I can learn about the various strategies not only to assist the target child [a child with a disability] but also to use it to help all of my students.

Furthermore, many teacher candidates involved in this study believed that they learned the tools and skills for selecting high quality children's literature for inclusive classrooms and communities. These teacher candidates' reflections reflect this belief:

I believe that communication through children's literature will be one of the biggest goals of my teaching in an inclusive classroom setting. *The Images and Encounters Profile* works as a great tool also for finding good inclusive communication books, and if the books fit most all the criteria and have humor incidences, you know they will be a good communication tool in your inclusive classroom.

In my future classroom I plan to use children's literature representing children with disabilities as part of a unit on diversity. It is important to educate students about the many different types of people in the world and different ways in which they live. It would also prove beneficial to share these works with students who have disabilities, by helping them see that they are not the only ones who are disabled, that in fact there are many people in the world who are. Reading this type of literature may help them to effectively communicate themselves with others and feel more at ease with their situation.

The teacher candidates participating in this study also began to act as agents of change when they made calls such as these to the key stakeholders at their local schools and communities:

With an increasing number of school districts heading toward inclusion, there will be a greater percentage of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In order to make the integration smoother, everyone in the building should be educated with the help of children's books about the disabilities that they may encounter, not just the teachers.

Teachers really need good tools like these types of books to open up the lines of communication among students with disabilities, regular students and other teachers.

Discussion

As evident from the above comments, the teacher candidates in this study started to acknowledge the important role that children's literature with positive images and depictions of individuals with disabilities can play in increasing awareness about disabilities in their future classrooms. They were also not discouraged with the challenges they faced while locating such literature in their own communities.

However, although eager to incorporate disability children's literature in their classrooms, the teacher candidates in this study seemed to lack what Rosenblatt (1978) refers to as aesthetic stance, an affective experience of reading and rereading the text for making more intimate and personal connections during the reading act. More specifically, none of teacher candidates talked about how the books they read made them feel personally. Neither did they reveal in their written reports any personal connections that they made with the characters with disabilities depicted in the books they critiqued. This was despite the fact that they all agreed that many of the books were written by the authors based on their personal experiences with a disability. The following teacher candidate's reflection illustrates such an understanding,

Most of the authors that write about children with a disability have been inspired either by a family member or close friend with that disability, or they may have overcome a disability themselves as in the case of McNamee, author of Sparks... These books are written out of personal interest to increase awareness and openness to the disability.

Even the teacher candidates who expressed an interest in reading more of the disability children's literature in the future tended to stay away from taking on an aesthetic stance in response to this literature. That is, they did not compare their personal reactions and feelings about disability in general with the emotions shared by the characters from the children's literature they critiqued. This was evident in the following reflective comments made by a teacher candidate who reviewed *Niagara Falls, or Does It*. This teacher candidate explained her reasons for the use of a particular book. She also speculated about her students' likely response to the book. She did not offer however her personal reaction to disabilities encountered in these texts:

I would highly recommend it for inclusive classrooms, because it is so positive and does a good job of describing the problems in writing and expressing oneself that a person with dyslexia could have. It also shows how talented and creative people with dyslexia can be in other areas such as building or technical designs. Many children and teachers do not realize the struggle and extra effort some of their classmates have to go through to overcome a learning disability. This book does a good job of portraying the ability differences among several kids in the classroom.

This apparent lack of an aesthetic response in this study is consistent with Leftwich's (2002) findings about her teacher candidates' responses to culturally diverse children's literature they read in her literature course. Leftwich (2000) wrote in this context:

Although I thought that the books would evoke strong personal responses, the students often responded cautiously and impersonally. Specifically, they revealed very little about their own attitudes and values surrounding social differences stemming from ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.... These preservice teachers' responses, like those of many school children, lacked personal connections to out-of-school lives or experiences (p. 5)

Alternatively, in a later study, Leftwich's (2002) findings suggested that her preservice teachers tended to avoid the use of children's literature that might be "emotionally or socially provocative" (p. 4) in their future classrooms. This is because, as Leftwich's (2002) explained, they felt that "they needed to protect children from the harsh realities of everyday living" (p. 6).

The teacher candidates in this study, on the contrary, saw a lot of benefits coming from exposing their students without disabilities to the challenging aspects related to living with a disability. This attitude was evident in the following teacher candidate's call for having conversations with children about difficult topics such as disability. She observed, "If parents and teachers avoid the topic, they will not stir up any difficult questions or mixed feelings, but it is important for children because they will all meet someone with a disability at some point in their lives."

In this study, the teacher candidates' anti-protective attitudes towards "emotionally or socially provocative" disability children's literature were evident in their critiques of the books that did not provide young readers with realistic and accurate representations of individuals with disabilities. The following teacher candidate explained this stance most clearly in this excerpt:

Although young children may really need to understand that there aren't that many differences between children with and without disabilities, I think that some books aren't giving children a good perception of the differences. A few of the children's books seemed to neglect to point out that there are some differences that a child or adult with a disability might have to deal with or the book described the disability with very little detail. In *Rainbow Joe and Me*, Joe is blind, his disability isn't shown affecting him in any way. In the Helen Keller book, all they say about her life with her disability was "The next few years were very hard for Helen and her family. Helen could not tell people what she needed" (p. 8.) This seems to be quite the understatement. In *Moses Goes to a Concert*, the only thing that is pointed out to be different is that they held balloons during the concert to feel the vibrations.

What was further evident in the teacher candidates' comments is a shared awareness of the importance of using disability children's literature in a structured and thoughtful manner. "It is important that each of these books is followed by extra discussion to prevent students from making their own assumptions which could be incorrect," argued one teacher candidate. This belief is consistent with best practices that currently recommend guided reading as an effective approach to positive attitude change towards disabilities through exposing children to disability children's literature. Schrank and Engles (1981 cited in Blaska, 2003), who reviewed the professional literature on guided reading, noted, however, that caution should be practiced in selecting high quality disability children's literature. Exposures should be paired with activities that provide students with opportunities for clarification of any misconceptions about the disabilities recounted in the stories.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice

Educators are encouraged to use the books which satisfied in this study the *Images and Encounters Profile* criteria in their own classrooms and communities for establishing inclusive practices across the curriculum. As one teacher candidate put it, “the more of these criteria that are addressed positively, the more you would want to use the book in an inclusive classroom setting.” The books that were critiqued in this study are cross-referenced in this report with the *Images and Encounters Profile* criteria. It is hoped that, as such, they may be easily translated into the curriculum specific themes around disability awareness such as empathy, acceptance, or promotion of positive images and respect for individuals with disabilities.

The teacher candidates in this study found the critique of children’s books for inclusion of characters depicting disabilities and illness a positive learning experience. They also believed that it will assist them in promoting inclusive pedagogy in their own classrooms and communities. It is important, however, that teacher educators encourage teacher candidates to take on Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance toward reading such literature (1986). This will allow them to become personally involved with the characters depicted in the stories they will be reading. Becoming a personally engaged and affective teacher candidate-reader is a critical aspect of becoming a successful teacher. Research suggests that the most successful teachers use affective strategies when reading and incorporate those strategies in their instructional planning (Gebhard, 2006). As educators, we must strive to prepare our teachers to be personally engaged and affective readers of the diverse disability children’s literature. Multiple exposures to disability children literature, accompanied by a variety of simulation activities designed to elicit personal feelings and associations related to experiencing varying disabilities, will help teacher candidates to become personally engaged with such literature. These experiences will also prepare teacher candidates to model such responses to their own students.

Like teacher candidates in this study, other teacher candidates’ local communities may not always be literacy rich environments. Creating a national online center with diverse disability children’s literature across the nation may be one way of helping these teacher candidates become engaged and affective readers of disability children’s literature in the near future.

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Table 1 Demographic Information about the Participants

Sex	Age	Years of Teaching Experience	Highest Degree Held	Grade level and/or subject taught
Female	23	1 year	Bachelors	7th/8th grade math
Female	41	0	Bachelors	Secondary Education
Male	26	5 years of substituting	Bachelors	English
Female	34	1 year as a part-time	Bachelors Mechanical Engineering Technology	7th-10th grade (substituted)
Female	24	2 years	Bachelors	Regents Chemistry and Physics and 7 th grade science
Female	23	0	Bachelors Public Relations/Journalism	None
Male	22	1year as teacher aid	Bachelors	Work with an Autistic Student
Female	24	0	Bachelors Science/Accounting	None

Table 2 Summary of the General Characteristics of the Reviewed Disability Children's Books

	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5	Book 6	Book 7	Book 8	Book 9	Book 10
<i>Title</i>	What's Wrong With Timmy?	Sarah's Sleepover	Moses Goes to School	The Silent Boy	The Alphabet War: A Story About Dyslexia	Dustin's Big School Day	Susan Laughs	Russ and the Firehouse	Rolling Along: The Story of Taylor and His Wheelchair	Sparks
<i>Author(s)</i>	Maria Shriver	Bobbie Rodriguez	Isaac Millman	Lois Lowry	Diane Burton Robb	Alden R. Carter	Jeanne Willis	Janet Elizabeth Rickert	Jamee Riggio Heelan	Graham McNamee
<i>Publisher</i>	Warner Books	Viking	Frances Foster Books	Houghton Mifflin Books	Albert Whitman & Co.	Albert Whitman & Co.	Henry Holt and Company	Woodbine Books	Peachtree Publishers	Wendy Lamb Books
<i>Year Published</i>	2001	2000	2000	2003	2004	1999	1999	2000	2000	2002
<i>Genre</i>	Fiction	Picture Book	Picture Book	Fiction	Picture Book	Picture Book	Picture Book	Picture Book	Picture Book	Fiction
<i>Reading Ages /Grade Level</i>	4-8 K-3	4-8 PreK-2	Baby-Preschool PreK	9-12 5-8	4-8 PreK-3	4-8 PreK-3	4-8 PreK-1	4-8 K-3	4-8 K-3	9-12 4-6
<i>Found at</i>	Library	Library	Library	Library	Library	Library	Library	Library	Library	Library
<i>Target Disability/Illness</i>	Mental Retardation	Blindness	Deafness	Mental Retardation	Dyslexia	Down syndrome	Physically Impaired	Down syndrome	Cerebral Palsy	Learning Disabled
<i>Character Gender</i>	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male
<i>Character Ethnicity</i>	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	Black	White
	Book 11	Book 12	Book 13	Book 14	Book 15	Book 16	Book 17	Book 18	Book 19	Book 20
<i>Title</i>	Hooway for Wodney Wat	The Hickory Chair	Marguerite Makes a Book	Looking Out for Sarah	All Kinds of Friends, Even Green	Moses Goes to the Circus	Rolling Along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears	95 Pounds of Hope	Niagara Falls, or Does It?	My Name is not Slow
<i>Author(s)</i>	Helen Lester	Lisa Fraustino	Bruce Roberts on	Glenna Lang	Ellen B. Senisi	Isaac Millman	Cindy Meyers	Anna Gavalda	Henry Winkler, Lin Oliver	Autumn Libal
<i>Publisher</i>	Houghton Mifflin Company	Arthur A Levine Books	J. Paul Getty Museum	Talewinds	Woodbine House Inc.	Frances Foster Books	Woodbine House Inc.	Viking	Grossett & Dunlap	Mason Crest
<i>Year Published</i>	1999	2001	1999	2001	2002	2003	1999	2003	2003	2004
<i>Genre</i>	Fiction Book	Fiction Book	Fiction Book	Fiction Book	Easy Reading	Fiction Book	Fiction Book	Fiction	Fiction	Fiction
<i>Reading Ages /Grade Level</i>	4-8 PreK-2	4-8 K-3	9-12 2-5	Baby-Preschool K-3	4-8 K-4	Baby-Preschool PreK-1	Baby-Preschool PreK-1	9-12 5-8	9-12 3-5	9-12 5-8
<i>Found at</i>	Jervis Public Library	Jervis Public Library	Utica Public Library	Jervis Public Library	Dunham Public Library	New Hartford Public Library	New Hartford Public Library	School library	Public Library	Public Library

<i>Target Disability /Illness Character Gender Character Ethnicity</i>	Speech Impairments	Blind	Blind	Blind	Orthopedic Impairments	Deaf	Orthopedic Impairments	ADD	Dyslexia	Down syndrome
	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male/Female	Male	Male	Female
	Rat Animal	Black	White	White	Black	White	Bears/Animal	White	White	White
	Book 21	Book 22	Book 23	Book 24	Book 25	Book 26	Book 27	Book 28	Book 29	Book 30
<i>Title</i>	Me and Rupert Goody	Let's Talk About Being in a Wheelchair	Brian's Bird	Don't Call Me Special	Russ and the Perfect Day	Dyslexia	Animal Helpers for the Disabled	Otto is Different	Loud Emily	Otto Learns about his Medicine
<i>Author(s)</i>	Barbara O'Connor	Melanie Ann Apel	Patricia A. Davis	Pat Thomas	Janet E. Rickert	A.Silverstein V.Silverstein L.S. Nunn Franklin Watts	Deborah Kent	Franz Brandenburg	Alexis O'Neill	Matthew Galvin
<i>Publisher</i>	Douglas & McIntyre	The Rosen Publishing Group	Albert Whitman & Co.	Barron's Educational Services	Woodbine House		Franklin Watts	Greenwillow Books	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	American Psychological Association
<i>Year Published</i>	1999	2002	2000	2002	2000	2001	2003	2000	1999	2001
<i>Genre</i>	Fiction	Non-fiction	Fiction	Non-fiction	Fiction	Non-fiction	Nonfiction	Picture Book	Picture Book	Picture Book
<i>Reading Ages /Grade Level</i>	9-12 4-7	4-8 K-3	9-12 2-6	4-8 K-3	4-8 K-3	9-12 2-4	9-12 4-7	4-8 PreK-3	Baby-Preschool PreK-2	4-8 PreK-3
<i>Found at Target Disability /Illness</i>	School Library Mental Retardation	Public Library Physical disabilities- unable to walk	Public Library Blindness	Public Library All disabilities in general	Book store Down syndrome	Book Store Dyslexia	Local library Hearing/Visually Impaired	Local library People missing limbs.	Local library Turrets	Internet Site ADD/ADHD
<i>Character Gender Character Ethnicity</i>	Male	Male	Male	Male/Female	Male	Male/Female	Male/Female	Male	Female	It/Object
	Black	White	Black	Mixed	White	Mixed	Dogs/Animal	Octopus/Animal	White	Young car

	Book 31	Book 32	Book 33	Book 34	Book 35	Book 36	Book 37	Book 38	Book 39	Book 40
<i>Title</i>	Chang and the Bamboo Flute	Someone Special Just Like You	Granny Torrelli Makes Soup	Eddie Enough	A Corner of the Universe	Ben, King of the River	Joey Pigza Loses Control	Goose's Story	Things not seen	Dyslexia
<i>Author(s)</i>	Elizabeth Star Hill	Tricia Brown	Sharon Creech	Debbie Zimet	Ann M. Martin	David Gifaldi	Jack Gantos	Cari Best	Andrew Clements	Paula Wiltshire
<i>Publisher</i>	Douglas & McIntyre Ltd.	Library of Congress	Harper Collins	Woodbine House	Scholastic Inc	Albert Whitman & Company	Scholastic Inc.	Melanie Kroupa Books	Philomel Books	Raintree Steck-Vaughn

<i>Year Published</i>	2002	1999	2003	2001	2002	2001	2000	2002	2002	Publishers 2003
<i>Genre</i>	Fiction	Non-Fiction	Fiction	Fiction	Fiction	Fiction	Fiction	Easy reading	Fiction book	Chapter book
<i>Reading Ages /Grade Level</i>	4-8 K-2	4-8 K-3	9-12 5-8	4-8 K-4	9-12 5-8	4-8 1-3	9-12 4-8	4-8 PreK-3	9-12 6-12	9-12 5-8
<i>Found at</i>	Local Library	Local library	Local library	Internet Site	Local library	Local Library	Local Library	Local Library (Whitesboro)	Local Library (Whitesboro)	Local Library – Rome, NY
<i>Target Disability/ Illness</i>	Mute	Mixed.	Visual Impairment	ADHD	Schizophrenia	Developmental Disability	ADHD	Physical disability	Blindness & Physical	dyslexia
<i>Character Gender</i>	Male	Male/Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male/Female
<i>Character Ethnicity</i>	Asian	Mixed	White	White	White	White	White	Goose/Animal	White	Mixed
	Book 41	Book 42	Book 43	Book 44	Book 45	Book 46	Book 47	Book 48	Book 49	Book 50
<i>Title</i>	Lumber Camp Library	Do you remember the color blue?	Simon's Special Sneeze Test	Russ and the Apple Tree Surprise	Rainbow Joe and Me	Of Sound Mind	Bluish	Helen Keller	Spider's Voice	Some Kids Use Wheelchairs
<i>Author(s)</i>	Natalie Kinsey-Warnock	Sally Hobart Alexander	Candida Korman	Janet Elizabeth Rickert	Maria Diaz Strom	Jean Ferris	Virginia Hamilton	Cynthia Klingel	Gloria Skurzynski	Lola Schaefer
<i>Publisher</i>	HarperCollins Publishers	Viking Published by the Penguin Group	TSA Publication	Woodbine House	Lee & Low Books	Farrar Straus Giroux	The Blue Sky Press	The Child's World Inc.	Simon & Schuster	Capstone Press
<i>Year Published</i>	2002	2000	2002	1999	1999	2001	1999	2002	1999	2001
<i>Genre</i>	Fiction book	Biography about Sally	Pamphlet	Picture	Picture	Fiction	Fiction	Picture book	Fiction	Picture
<i>Reading Ages /Grade Level</i>	9-12 2-5	9-12 4-8	4-8 K-4	4-8 K-3	Baby-Preschool Pre-K	Young Adult 12-up	9-12 5-8	4-8 PreK-2	Young Adult 12-up	4-8 PreK-2
<i>Found at</i>	Local Library – Rome, NY	Local Library – Rome, NY	Hughes Elem. Library	Hughes Elem. Library	School Library	School Library	School Library	School Library	School Library	School Library
<i>Target Disability/ Illness</i>	Blind	Blind	Tourette Syndrome	Down Syndrome	Blindness	Deafness	Leukemia	Deaf and Mute	Mute	Physical Disabilities
<i>Character Gender</i>	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male/Female
<i>Character Ethnicity</i>	White	White	White	White	Black	White	White	White	Spider/Animal	Mixed

	Book 51	Book 52
<i>Title</i>	The Gypsies Never Came	Some Kids are Deaf
<i>Author (s)</i>	Stephen Ross	Lola Schaefer
<i>Publisher</i>	Simon & Schuster	Capstone Press
<i>Year Published</i>	2001	2001
<i>Genre</i>	Fiction	Picture
<i>Reading Ages</i>	9-12	9-12
<i>/Grade Level</i>	5-9	5-9
<i>Found at</i>	School Library	School Library
<i>Target Disability /Illness</i>	Physical Disability	Deaf
<i>Character Gender</i>	Male	Male/Female
<i>Character Ethnicity</i>	White	Mixed

Table 3 Summary of the Images & Encounters Profile

<i>Images & Encounters Profile Criterion</i>	<i>Books with Positive Responses to the Profile Criterion</i>
1. Promotes empathy not pity	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 51 (N=39)
2. Depicts acceptance not ridicule	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50 (N=41)
3. Emphasizes success rather than, or in addition, to failure	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52 (N=48)
4. Promotes positive images of persons with disabilities or illness	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52 (N=49)
5. Assists children in gaining accurate understanding of the disability or illness	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52 (N=40)
6. Demonstrates respect for persons with disabilities or illness	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 52 (N=47)
7. Promotes attitude of "one of us" not "one of them"	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50 (N=40)
8. Uses language which stresses person first, disability second philosophy, i.e. Jody who is blind	1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 43, 47, 48, 50, 52 (N=33)
9. Describes the disability or person with disabilities or illness as realistic (i.e., not subhuman or superhuman)	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52 (N=47)
10. Illustrates characters in a realistic manner	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52 (N=45)

Note: The multiple types of responses to several of the **Images and Encounters Profile** criteria in context of the same book seemed not to be mutually exclusive. That is according to the teacher candidates, many books adhered to more than one criterion from **Images and Encounters Profile**. These multiple types of responses might be a result of the fact that the review of the children's literacy, similarly to the act of reading a literary work, is an interactive event in which the reviewers, as the readers, are involved an interaction or transaction (Rosenblatt, 1986) between the text and the reader. Consequently, differing interpretations are possible as the meaning is negotiated by communication between text and reader.

Assessing and Teaching Reading to Pupils with Reading Disabilities in Nyeri and Nairobi Districts-Kenya: The Teachers' Opinion

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Abstract

The study aimed at finding out whether teachers can identify the courses of reading disabilities in learners. It intended to establish whether teachers have adequate knowledge of identifying learners with reading disabilities, determine the proportion of non-readers in grade five. It also investigated the existing methods and materials teachers use in teaching and remediating reading including the difficulties teachers encounter when teaching. Finally, the study aimed at finding out whether there are any gender differences in learners with reading disabilities. This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approaches where mixed method designs were used for collecting and analyzing data for both teachers and learners. The study embarked on interviews for learners by use of structured questionnaires. Learners were also assessed to determine the level of reading ability. The study also used semi-structured questionnaires for teachers. A focus group interview was also held with teachers in the study. The study was conducted in Central and Nairobi provinces where Nyeri and Nairobi districts respectively were used. Purposive sampling was used to select the provinces, districts, divisions, primary schools, populations and the target groups, in this case of the teachers and learners. This was based on KCPE results analysis for 2006, the division that performed best overall in Nairobi and the poorest performing division in Nairobi from KCPE results, 2006. Nyeri District was representative of rural primary schools and therefore, the municipality and one rural division was selected. In this case, Nyeri municipality division and Othaya division. There were four schools selected from each of the four divisions, giving a total of 16 schools from both Nairobi and Nyeri. In each school, 15 pupils were purposively selected from the list of those learners scoring 250 marks and below from their end of standard 5 examinations. If the learners were more than 15 scoring 250 marks and below, the researcher used random sampling. A total of 240 learners were the sample for the study, streams were not considered in the study. All teachers who taught English to the learners in the study, in class in 2007, were in the study. All the class teachers of grade five in 2007 of not the English teacher were also included in the study. A total of 34 teachers participated in the study. There were five types of instruments namely: questionnaires for teachers, questionnaires for learners, assessment tools for reading – wood list A to E, passage 1 to 4; checklist on reading errors and learners' reading attitude survey. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data from the assessment tools, questionnaires for learners, and reading attitude survey. All the hypotheses were tested at $P=0.05$ Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the different variables. Multiple regression analysis and chi-square test were also used. Teachers' questionnaire was analyzed through descriptive research. The following results were obtained based on the objectives, questions and hypotheses of the study: The teachers assessed their learners reading ability but they did not use proper methods of assessment;

teachers were able to identify children who could not read at class level as non-performers but not able to identify the specific reading difficulties. Non-readers ranged from 0 to 27.1% for Nairobi and 0 to 53.6% in Nyeri; almost half of the teachers in the study did not either teach reading or they did not know the methods to use in teaching reading. The study indicated that there were more boys (103) than girls (78) who could not read. The study concluded that: teacher training syllabus on reading whether in mother tongue, Kiswahili or English be adequately developed to cater for individual learners and equip the teachers with methods for teaching reading adequately. More time be given to teaching reading, assessing reading and remediating reading disabilities both at the primary teacher education colleges and at primary schools; reading in an ongoing process and therefore it is recommended that reading be taught all through primary levels. (standard 1 to 8) and be within the developmental states of reading; reading readiness curriculum be developed for early childhood and at primary levels. Such policy should ensure smooth transition of learners' movement from home, preschool and primary schools. Finally the study recommended adequate development of teacher training syllabus on reading in mother tongue English or Kiswahili more time, reading be taught continuously from standard 1 to 8 and smooth transition for learners' movement from home, pre-school and primary schools.

Assessing and Teaching Reading to Pupils with Reading Disabilities in Nyeri and Nairobi Districts-Kenya: The Teachers' Opinion

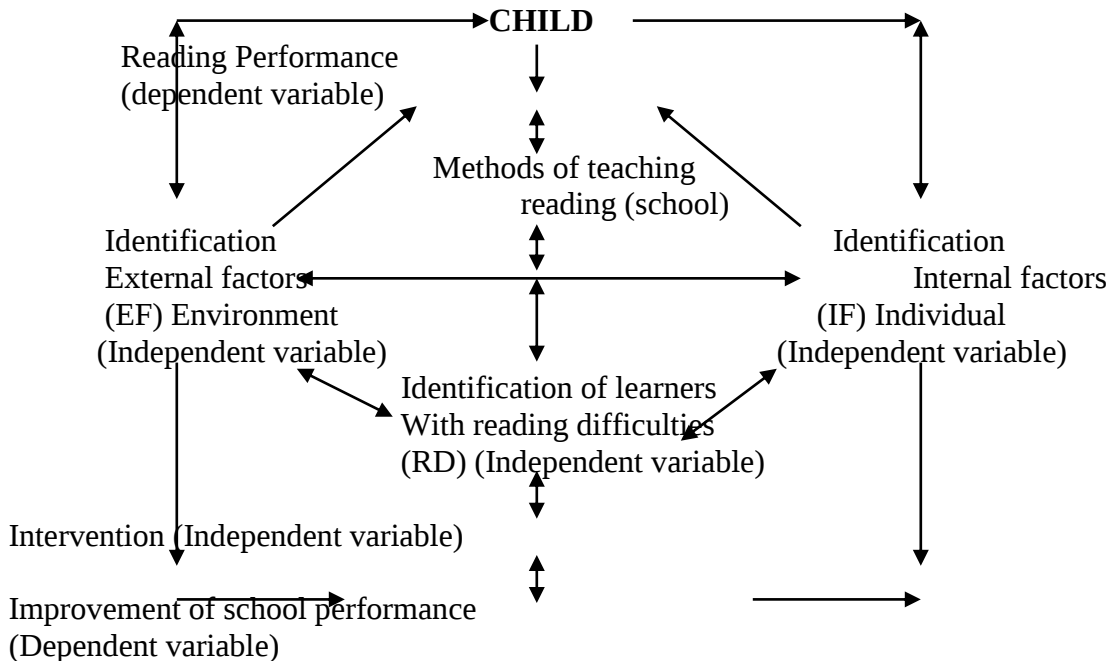
Reading disabilities is an area of concern to many educators both locally and globally. It is one of the basic skills taught to children during the early years of primary school especially in the first three years, grades one to three, yet for unexplained reasons, they are unable to use reading as a tool for learning new information, ideas, attitudes and values from grade four onwards (Lerner 2006). Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2003), add that becoming a skilled reader is very important in the society and one who is not skilled in reading is at a greatly disadvantaged both in school and the workplace. According to Mercer (1997), between 10% - 15% and Lerner 17.5% of general school going children have reading difficulties even long after passing through the initial learning stages. Such children do not use their reading skills as a tool to gather information and to improve their academic skills.

According to Carmine, Silbert & Kameeni (1997), reading difficulties are the principal cause of failure in school. It is also important to note that children's entire development stages such as cognitive, personality, emotional and social are positively influenced by having better reading ability levels, which in turn gives them a good understanding of various domains of knowledge in life. Reading experiences strongly influence a learner's self image and feeling of competency, furthermore, reading failure can lead to misbehavior, anxiety and lack of motivation (Mercer and Mercer 2001). Teachers should therefore be in a position to assess pupil's problems including those of reading from a holistic point of view in order to help such children manage academically in school (Dreikurs & Grunwald & Pepper 1998).

In Kenya, where so much emphasis is placed on passing examinations quite a number of children may be disadvantaged especially if they are poor readers. Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 has shown a concern of a cumulative dropout rate in primary education as high as 37% and repetition rate of 14%. The study was set to find out whether lack of proper assessment and poor teaching of reading has any contribution to this high level of dropouts.

With free primary education in place now in Kenya since January 2003, over 7.6 million (Kenya Times, November 6, 2006) children are now attending primary school and of course an increase in the number of children per class to be taught by one teacher. Taking the estimates of Mercer (1997) of 10% to 15% and Lerner (2006) of 17.5%, Kenya could be having staggering figures of children with reading disabilities ranging between **760,000** to **1,140,000** or **1,330,000** on the higher estimates. The study assumed that these children had reading disabilities due to various causes and that teachers' failure to assess such learners with reading disabilities and failure to give adequate intervention measures in the classroom situation has made the above numbers to keep escalating.

Conceptual Framework and Review of Related Literature on Reading Disabilities



Source: Researcher

Reading Disabilities (RD) can result from Internal Factors (IF) such as Perceptual Deficits (PD), Language and Culture (LC), Cognitive (C) and Intrinsic Motivation (IM). The External Factors (EF) include: Educational (E), Socio-Economic (SE) and Extrinsic Motivation (EM).

This conceptual framework is based on the social systems perspective developed by Bronfenbrenner who believed that the ecological contexts or settings in which an individual develops are nested, one inside the other. A learner's ability to read and perform well in school may be related to the nature of the relationship between the learners, home in this case, conditions in the home environment and the school and the methods used in teaching such a learner. The individual must have the ability to reciprocate with environment and vice versa. Bronfenbrenner uses terms such as ontogenic systems to mean the individual's cognitive, language, social and learning aspects.

In this study, internal factors were based on ontogenic systems, then microsystem is the reaction from the relationship of the learner and the teacher (external factors) and the relationship of the learner and the parent-home and teacher-school, while the exosystem talks of achievement related to socio-economic status and other factors that may affect reading ability of the learners. The

conceptual framework is also strengthened by cognitive and reading developmental theories by Piaget (cited in Myers 1989) and Chall (1983) respectively. The study selected these theories because all teachers teaching reading must have full knowledge of each developmental stage in order not to “push” the learner but to give the content materials that are commensurate to the learner’s ability.

Piaget’s stages of cognitive development from concrete operational thought to formal operational thought was useful in this study because the learners are already in grade 5. The learners in grade 5 which is the main focus of this study are between 11 and 12 years and according to Piaget, learners at this stage are assumed to have logical operations that are interrelated and reversible. The learners acquire basic logical ways of reasoning at concrete level where the child can now read, understand and interpret what he/she is reading. According to Piaget’s theory, mental development progresses as a result of learners’ interactions with their surroundings. The role of the educator is to provide material and appropriate opportunities in which learners can interact.

The theoretical framework in this study was based on the stages of reading development given by Chall (1983). According to Chall, there are six stages of reading development (0-5). Stage three, which is the main focus of this study is from classes four to eight (nine to fourteen year olds). This stage is unique in that the learner reads for learning, in other words the learner uses reading as a tool, while stages 0 – 2, the child learns to read. At this stage, the child learns new information, ideas, attitudes and values. He/she grows in background knowledge, word meaning and cognitive abilities. Reading at this stage is essentially for facts and the reader typically comprehends from a singular viewpoint.

Research Design

This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This mixed methods design, presents procedures for collecting, analyzing and linking both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell, 2005). The combination of both forms of data provides a better understanding of the variables under study concerned with finding out:

1. Teachers’ knowledge of identifying learners with reading disabilities.
2. The existing methods/approaches used in teaching reading.
3. Whether teachers carry out any interventions strategies with learners who have reading disabilities.

Location of the Study

The study was conducted in two districts, namely, Nairobi and Nyeri. Nairobi being a cosmopolitan province has different peoples, who have immigrated from all over searching for jobs and better lives. All racial and ethnic groups and levels are found in Nairobi as a city and capital of Kenya. The characteristics of learners might be different from those of rural due to the nature of the city’s multi-ethnic languages. Also, the language of instruction in Nairobi is Kiswahili as opposed to rural areas. Dagoretti Division was selected to represent low performing divisions as per 2006 KCPE grades and Westlands Division to represent higher performing grades was reflected in 2006 KCPE results.

Nyeri, on the other hand, has representation of rural schools in the nation because the medium of instruction is mother tongue. In Nyeri, the two divisions that were selected included Nyeri

Municipality and Othaya. The rural districts use mother-tongue as a medium of instruction and yet they sit the same national examination like other learners in Nairobi.

Target Population

The target population of this study comprised 2,413 teachers, 103,569 learners from 232 schools in Nyeri, while those from Nairobi were 4,231 teachers, 196,059 learners from 193 schools. All the grade five learners from Nyeri were 17,383 in 2006 in Nyeri while those in Nairobi were 26,025 learners.

Sampling Techniques

In this study, several sampling techniques were used to arrive at the study sample. The techniques used included; purposive, convenient and stratified random sampling.

(i) Divisions and schools in the study

Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used respectively to arrive at the four divisions and the sixteen schools for the study. Purposive sampling was used by the researcher to select the divisions involved, selecting the samples using set criteria. In this case, the KCPE results analysis of 2006 were used to select the division that performed best (Westlands) all over and the poorest (Dagoretti) performing division in Nairobi. Two divisions, out of eight, were selected in Nairobi schools namely, Highridge, Hospital Hill, Kilimani and Milimani. Nyeri divisions were purposively selected as municipality representing urban-rural and Othaya representing rural.

Schools in the four divisions were conveniently selected due to the time and financial constraints. In this study, the sixteen schools sampled were somehow accessible due to their distances from each other with only a few that required many hours of traveling to reach them.

(ii) Teachers in the study

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the teachers who taught English to the learners in the study in 2006. The grade 5 class teachers were also selected for the study if they were not the same as the English teachers. These two groups were better placed to know their learners' reading difficulties because of more contact hours with learners and or dealing with learners' progress records.

The teachers were briefed on reading difficulties and non-performing learners. They were also asked to provide the progress records of grade 5 of year 2006, to be used as a tool for selecting learners in the study. Teachers were informed that only those learners had an overall score of 250 and below out of a score of 500 were required for the study. They were also requested to fill in questionnaires.

(iii) Learners

Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling were used to arrive at the sample for learners in the study. Stratified random sampling involves dividing the study population into homogeneous sub-groups and then taking simple random sample in each sub-group.

In this study, grade five learners who had scored 250 marks and below out of the total 500 over marks in primary school subjects were stratified as a sub-group with certain homogeneity due to their poor performance. This is a group which probably is condemned by teachers and the

prediction of their school performance including KCPE is more less negative than positive. Simple random sampling was used to select learners in this lowly scoring group.

Sample Size

The sample for the study comprised two hundred and forty (240) standard five learners and thirty-four (34) teachers in sixteen schools, eight from Nairobi and eight from Nyeri districts. This is shown in figure 3.1 below

Table 1: Sample size

District	Division	Primary School	English teacher or Class teacher	No. of Children scoring 250 marks and below in a school
Nairobi	Westlands	Hospital Hill	1	15
		Highridge	2	15
		Kilimani	2	15
		Milimani	1	15
	Dagoretti	Toi	1	15
		Joseph	1	15
		Kang'ethe	3	15
		Jamhuri	3	15
		Ndurarua	4	15
Nyeri	Municipality	DEB-Muslim	2	15
		Temple Road	2	15
		Nyamachaki	5	15
		Kamuyu	1	15
	Othaya	Munainani	2	15
		Thunguri	2	15
		Gitundu	1	15
		Ruruguti	2	15
Total: 2	4	16	34	240

Nairobi was chosen because of its urban setup where it was felt it is a representative of an area where most of the factors like language spoken at home and school would be similar. It was felt that it would give a proper sample of the reading situation in Kenyan urban areas. Nyeri, on the other hand, represented a rural setup where most of the factors like mother-tongue would play a significant role on learning of reading skills. The schools chosen were representative of poor and good KCPE performing schools as per KCPE 2006 analysis.

Research Instruments

The instruments consisted of five items namely: Teacher questionnaires and checklist on reading errors.

Data Analysis

The data collected were coded using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS allowed for use of both descriptive and inferential analyses to give a general picture about the central tendencies of each variable and also make comparisons among the variables. Most of the data about teachers were analyzed using descriptive statistics alone.

Results and Discussion

Sample description was analyzed and presented using frequency and percentage tables, coupled with figures along such demographic variables as age, gender, and teachers' professional levels, among others.

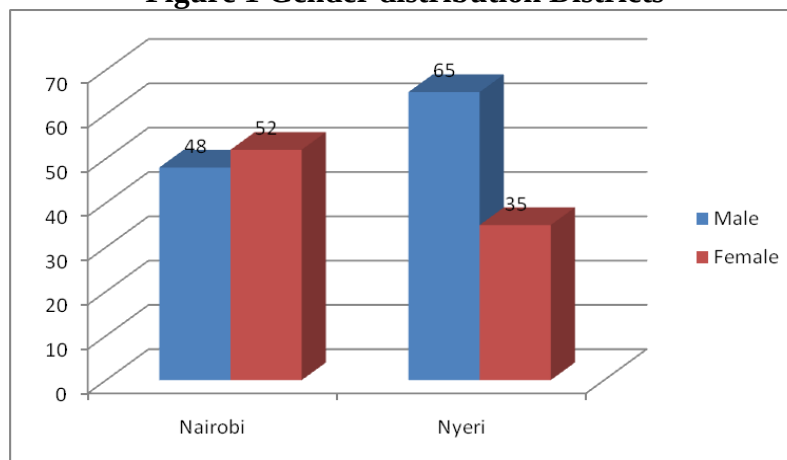
Demographic Characteristics of Learners

The demographic characteristics of learners were analyzed along gender, age, number of siblings and position in the family.

Gender of Learners

Nyeri district had the highest number of boys and in the whole study there were more boys than girls. Figure 4.1 summarizes the gender distribution of learners in the two districts.

Figure 1 Gender distribution Districts



Age of learners

The mean age of the learners in the study was 12 years with the youngest at 10 years and the oldest at 17 years. Table 2 analyzes the age distribution of learners who participated in the study.

Table 2 Age distribution of learners by years and Districts

Scores	Districts	
	Nairobi	Nyeri
	Years	
Mean	12.43	12.63
Median	12.00	12.50

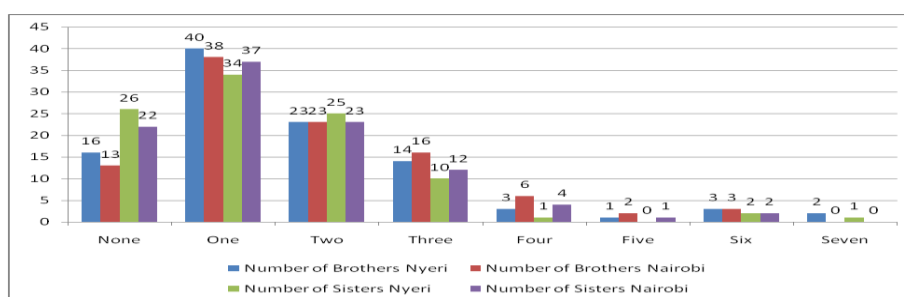
Mode	12	12
Std. Deviation	1.128	1.101
Skewness	1.173	1.523
Minimum	10	11
Maximum	17	18

The mean score for age in Nairobi is 12.43 years, with the youngest learners being 10 years and the oldest 17 years. It may be assumed that several learners had repeated grades especially those above 13 years in that KCPE candidates should be within a mean score of 13 years. On the other hand, the age range for Nyeri learners is between 11 and 18 years. The mean score for age for Nyeri is 12.63 which is higher than that of Nairobi. Majority of the learners were within 12 and 13 years of age. Learners between 14 and 18 years could have repeated grades.

Number of Siblings

Majority of learners in both Nyeri (74%) and Nairobi (75%) had only one sibling meaning the families were small. Figure 2 presents an analysis of number of siblings.

Figure 2 Number of siblings by districts and gender



From the figure, it can be observed that families may mean more and higher expectations and therefore, the children do not perform. Both Nyeri and Nairobi had majority of learners performing at 250 marks and below as first borns, Nyeri having the highest percentage(43%). The high percentages of poor readers given in figures 3 had one or two siblings and being first or second ordinal birth positioning may lead one to reason out that these learners were not getting adequate opportunities to socialize and also that there was too much pressure to perform better from parents.

Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

The study had 34 teachers purposefully sampled from the 16 schools used for the study, 8 schools from Nyeri and 8 from Nairobi. Only those teachers who taught English or were class teachers grade five in 2006 were involved in the study. The 34 teachers used in the study were asked to give the qualifications they attained at their colleges. This was crucial in that it gave the indication of the level of preparedness and professionalism in their career. The qualifications of the teachers in the study were as indicated in figure 4 below.

Qualification

The professional qualifications ranged from BA-Special Education (biases on Learning Disabilities and Mental Retardation), MA-Special Education (biases on Learning Disabilities and Mental Retardation) and candidate for PhD in Reading Disabilities.

The professional qualifications ranged from P3 to B.Ed. One of the teachers was not even trained. Majority of the teachers are trained in various methods of teaching learners and therefore, it is also expected that they were also trained to teach reading.

Methods of Reading Assessment

Several questions were given to the teachers in the area of assessment in reading. The questions were categorized as general and specific. The general questions whether teachers assess learners at all, how often they assess the learners in reading using the continuous assessment tests (CATs), description of methods they use in assessing reading ability in pupils and the characteristics of good and poor readers, the proportion of learners with reading disabilities and the impact of reading disabilities on other subjects. The specific questions asked were testing; ability to identify specific reading errors in individual learners and prediction of performance of individual learners in reading. Qualitative and quantitative statistical data were obtained from the teachers' questionnaires and checklist on reading errors respectively, to indicate whether teachers had full knowledge of identifying learners with reading disabilities in specific skill areas. The results of teachers' responses and learners' data are analyzed below.

From the teachers' responses, 88% assessed learners' reading ability, while 6% did not. Another 6% left the space blank. This is a good indication that the teachers voluntarily assess learners' reading abilities. Over half (55%) of the teachers in the study tested their learners weekly, 18% monthly, 12% termly, 3% yearly while 12% left the space blank indicating they were not sure or they do not assess at all. These data support the data above in figure 5 (a) where 88% of teachers assess learners' reading ability, but there is a problem with frequency of testing which is too low as indicated in figure 5 (b) If at all 73% (55% plus 18%) of the teachers, assess learners' reading ability at least monthly, the learners in the study since teachers would have identified such learners for interventions.

According to Heilman *et al.*, (1985) effective reading teachers employ ongoing diagnosis of a learners' reading development and also provides opportunities for the pupils to practice and apply skills in meaningful context. For teachers to be effective, they should assess the learners often and within the lessons they teach, give feedback and maintain a high level of pupil involvement in learning.

Proportion of Non-readers in Grade Five According to Teachers

In Nairobi District, there were 39 boys who could not read at grade five level while in Nyeri District 64 could not read at grade five level at the time of the study. The girls were more than boys according to the information given by teachers. Nyeri District however, had the highest number of learners who could not read passages and sentences with a frequency of 108 and 85 respectively. From the figure above, learners from Nyeri District had more reading problems when compared to those from Nairobi District. This is confirmed by a study conducted by Callaway, Jerrolds, and Gwaltney (1974) which claimed that learners who came from homes with extensive accounts of reading materials rated highest in reading and language achievements. Maybe learners from Nairobi had less reading problems because they are constantly encouraged to read and also because of availability of more reading materials in Nairobi District. Furthermore, Nairobi District being an urban district, have a variety of reading materials than Nyeri District which is rural.

Methods Teachers Use to Assess Learners' Reading Abilities

From the findings, only 3 (9%) assessed their children through observation but the observation technique was not explained. Seven (21%) assessed by giving oral questions. Five (15%) had the

learners read and as they listened. None of those methods or strategies given by the teachers were explained, an indication that the answers may have been guessed. Eight (23%) did not respond to the question meaning perhaps they did not have any methods they used.

On methods and materials used in teaching, the following responses were recorded: 11.2% used flash cards, sound, modeling word, individual/silent groups while 11% did not respond. Twenty six (76%) teachers taught reading, 3 (9%) did not and 5 (15%) did not respond. Results on level of confidence in teaching indicated that 9(25%) were very confident, 20 (58.8%) were confident, 1 (2.9%) not confident, 1 (2.9%) unsure and 3(8.8%) did not respond.

Teachers taught in their colleges enumerated several methods. Out of the many methods cited by the teachers, only 5 (61%) are actual methods of teaching reading, while the remaining 39% are non-existing methods as follows: phonics/phonetic had the highest rating of 18(24%), followed by whole word 11(14%), look and say 8(11%), alphabetic method 6(8%) and finally language experience 3 (4%). The rest of the “methods” were teacher creation such as sounds rated at 5(7%), flash cards 3 (4%) individual 2 (3%) among others.

Looking at the responses by teachers on methods taught at their colleges, one would wonder whether some were really taught, or whether they have forgotten what they learnt in colleges. The data actually show that the teachers have scanty information on the actual methods of teaching reading.

Intervention Strategies Used Against Reading Disabilities

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they carried out any intervention with learners who have reading disabilities. Thirty teachers gave the answer as yes while 4 left the space blank. They were also asked to give the strategies they use to remediate reading disabilities in learners. Among the strategies cited are; use of ability grouping (about 18%), giving story books / magazines to learners, identification of weak learners (over 12%) and use of peer teaching (about 5%). Others were varying methods of teaching, creating interest and advising parents to help. These responses, are good but are generally weak for a serious remedial program. This may mean that teachers are not trained in intervention methods.

Interventional Strategies Used by Teachers and Those that Worked

From the responses given by the teachers, the strategies they gave could work if they had full knowledge of proper remedial teaching and if they were given support. Such strategies that the teachers used are; use of supplementary materials (about 30%), encouraging parents to assist (over 20%) and allocation of more time about (15%). From the table below, there are some strategies that the teachers used but did not work; such were allocation of more time, creating interest in the learners and encouraging parents to assist.

Consultation of Resource Persons

From the responses given by the teachers, 17 (50%) said they consulted other professionals, 12 (35.3%) said they do not consult at all, while 5 (14.7%) did not respond. From the teacher’s responses, it may appear like there is little collaboration or consultation among them on methods. Only 4 (11.8%) teachers get adequate help, while 24 (70.5%) get little or no help at all. Further, the teachers said that they need assistance in the methods of teaching; the number of learners be reduced; they needed more materials; they needed more time for teaching reading and that they needed specialist to work with poor readers.

Conclusion

The study concluded that: teacher training syllabus on reading whether in mother tongue, Kiswahili or English be adequately developed to cater for individual learners and equip the teachers with methods for teaching reading adequately. More time be given to teaching reading, assessing reading and remediating reading disabilities both at the primary teacher education colleges and at primary schools.

Recommendation

The study recommends that reading be taught all through primary levels (standard 1 to 8) and be within the developmental states of reading; reading readiness curriculum be developed for early childhood and at primary levels. Such a policy should ensure smooth transition of learners' movement from home, preschool and primary schools. Finally, the study recommends adequate development of teacher training syllabus on reading in mother tongue, English or Kiswahili.

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Response to Intervention and Identifying Reading Disability

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Abstract

The educational community is discussing response-to-intervention (RTI) as an alternative assessment method. This study investigates assessment elements (beginning text level, ending text level, and number of weeks' participation) of the Reading Recovery (RR) program as part of a future RTI model. By means of a discriminant function analysis, third to fifth grade students (N =155) who participated in RR during first grade formed the basis of the data for the analysis. The results indicated that RR assessment elements are significant predictors of first-grade students who are later identified as having a reading disability. Ending text level was consistently the largest predictor of students later classified as having a reading disability or not.

Background

In considering whether Reading Recovery (RR) would be a valuable component of response-to-intervention (RTI), it is important to understand its characteristics and the perspectives of the educational community.

The Reasons for RTI

A fundamental debate currently exists about the method of diagnosis for learning disabilities (LD). The focus of the discussion has centered on two issues. First, there are conceptual problems with the use of intelligence tests in the assessment process (discrepancy between IQ and academic achievement) for special education services eligibility. Research found no difference between the reading, spelling, phonological skills, and reading comprehension of individuals with reading disabilities with high IQ scores versus low IQ scores (Tal & Siegel, 1996). IQ tests do not help predict those students who would benefit from remediation (Kershner, 1990). Other research indicates that difficulties with reading may impede the development of language, knowledge, and vocabulary skills (Stanovich, 1988). This further complicates the relationship between reading and IQ and, therefore, the justification for using IQ in the identification of LD. Second, the practice of waiting until third grade to assess if a student has succeeded in grasping the academic content (the "wait-to-fail" model) is considered to be contributing to the increased severity of academic difficulties for students in older grades (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Jorgensen, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001).

The alternative being proposed is response-to-intervention (RTI) (Gresham, 2002). A student considered to be struggling with literacy skills can be considered for identification as having an LD by being dually discrepant: low achievement and little or no progress in a three-tiered intervention program. In the first tier, students participate in presumably research-based reading instruction activities in the regular education classroom which represent those used with students generally across the nation. Each student's rate of reading growth is evaluated. A student who is dually discrepant is designated as at risk for poor reading outcomes, and possibly having a reading disability (RD). This student moves to the second tier in the RTI process. Progress monitoring is

conducted again this time in a small-group or individually instructional format referred to as tier two. A student in this level of RTI would receive intensive instruction, hopefully with improvement in reading development. If progress does occur, the student returns to the regular classroom program and is no longer viewed as dually discrepant. If the student does not make good progress in the second tier, an intrinsic deficit is probable, and a need for the third and final RTI tier is evident; a condensed special education evaluation would determine a possible disability classification and placement (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

Reading Recovery as a RTI Method

This study investigates Reading Recovery (RR) (Clay, 2002b) as a standard protocol RTI format for LD in reading identification. Eighty percent of students identified as LD have the disability in the area of reading (Roush, 1995). The standard protocol approach of RTI uses a standard set of procedures for students with similar characteristics of academic difficulty (Fuchs et al., 2003). For example, one teacher and one student work together on a set of activities for a portion of the school day over a set time period (i.e., 20 weeks) with the aim of improving the student's academic performance. The RR program closely parallels this format of RTI (Clay, 2002a). With its consistent implementation and instructional methods for students, the RR program offers the educational community a practical, already in-use component for RTI. RR, a first-grade remedial literacy program, is implemented annually in over 10,000 US schools as well as in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Reading Recovery, 2006). RR's daily programming includes students reading texts which require a working knowledge of phonemic awareness, oral fluency, and comprehension. Students who achieve 90% mastery of a text by orally decoding the words would advance to the next book level in the series (A, B, 1-30). When students do not make progress through the daily 30-minutes literacy lessons tailored for each student per day during this twenty-week RR program, impaired reading skills and a need for further special education services is indicated.

The RR program is designed to address the needs of students experiencing difficulties with literacy (some of whom may later be classified as having RD). The characteristics of RD include difficulties with phonemic awareness (the ability to segment and manipulate the sounds of spoken words), speech perception (the ability to hear subtle differences between words—such as “mat” and “sat”), vocabulary skills, phonetic working memory (successfully repeating a sentence as heard), and syntax (i.e., use of a capital letter to start a sentence, combining sentences to make a paragraph) and semantics (i.e., social context of language, idioms) (Mann, 2003). Students experiencing difficulty with one or a combination of these characteristics could have a RD. Relative to these skills, the RR program includes the following activities: oral reading and writing of various genres of text, working with words using plastic letters, solving unknown words by breaking words into parts as well as relating the context of the text to the sentence and unknown word, developing reading fluency, and completing a daily Running Record oral reading assessment. This assessment involves an analysis of students' oral reading miscues and the required cut-off of 90% accuracy which determines if a student is ready to progress to the next book level in the RR program (Clay, 2002b).

RR meets the criteria of RTI with the pass/fail component of students' progressing to book level 15 during the 20 weeks of 30-minute, daily reading strategy intervention sessions. The number of sessions can be extended for students who need additional remediation. Owing to conceptual problems with the current method of diagnosis for LD used in the wait-to-fail model, assessment elements of the RR program could serve to predict students who need special education services and to provide them as soon as first grade. Cavanaugh, Kim, Wanzek, and Vaughn (2004) completed a

synthesis of twenty-seven intervention studies which indicated that early intervention for reading difficulties can be effective for students as young as kindergarten.

RR's effectiveness has been challenged in three areas. First, RR is not economical: one teacher per student for 30 minutes per day over 20 weeks (or more). However, since the aim of the RTI model is to provide intensive direct instruction to address a student's unique needs, an individual academic intervention has real merit because the teacher providing the intervention can tailor the level and progression of activities relative to the student's individual readiness level. Also, while classroom-based, problem-solving RTI models do exist, they are not the only acceptable research-based RTI models; standard protocol approaches have also been found to be effective (Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, & Chen, 1996). Furthermore, RR has a high degree of fidelity of treatment given its extensive training, practice, and ongoing feedback for teachers. This helps ensure that the student receives the intensive intervention (Clay, 2002b). A second criticism is that RR's learning levels may not be sustained in subsequent grades; and third, 10 to 30% of children receiving the program in first grade (ages six to seven) may not successfully complete it (Grossen, Coulter, & Ruggles, 2004; Hiebert, 1994). However, these two criticisms have been contradicted by research which affirms that RR is an effective intervention for students with low literacy skills (Agostino & Murphy, 2004; Brown, Denton, Kelly, Outhred, & McNaught, 1999; Pinnell, 1989; Schwartz, 2005). For example, Agostino and Murphy (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of thirty-six RR studies and found that the program offered positive outcomes for discontinued and non-discontinued students on assessments tailored for the program as well as standardized achievement measures. The meta-analysis indicated a lasting program effect by the end of second grade and beyond.

RR's beginning/ending text levels and number of weeks could offer educators a means to determine which students would be later identified as RD. Beginning reading skills are an indicator of future reading ability. Bishop (2003) and Catts, Fey, Zhang, and Tomblin (2001) indicate that assessing a student's reading skills as early as kindergarten is a good predictor of students who need assistance with reading skills. Beginning text level relates to RTI's dual discrepancy component in two ways: 1) it helps determine the degree of the student's low performance with reading skills, and 2) it provides a baseline to measure reading growth over time. In the RR program, book level 15 represents the end of first-grade reading ability. If a student does not reach this ending text level of ability, the student could be defined as having a RD by the end of first grade. Number of weeks' participation in the program relates to a student's ability to make adequate progress with literacy skills during the intervention period. The longer a student "continues" in the program (especially after 20 weeks), the higher the likelihood of an underlying language processing problem (i.e. RD) for the student (Rhodes-Kline, 1996).

Socioeconomic Status and RD

Social class has been identified as a determinant of a student's behavior and performance in school (Grundmann, 1997; O'Connor & Spreen, 1988). Students from lower income families often experience fewer literacy activities within the home and little opportunity for out-of-school educational experiences. This results in students' having less background knowledge and skills which schools demand as a precursor for academic learning. In this study, socioeconomic status is based on students' eligibility for the free/reduced lunch program in first grade.

Research Questions

This study is designed to address the following questions:

1. Which, if any, of the elements (beginning text level, ending text level, and number of weeks of participation in the RR program) are good predictors of students who are later identified as having a RD by third through fifth grade?
2. Do alternative definitions of reading disability (IQ/achievement discrepancy, reading composite scores <30, 23, and 15) indicate RR assessment elements which would be useful in determining RD status under an RTI format?
3. As a covariate to RR assessment components, how does socioeconomic status compare in terms of RD/non-RD status?

Contribution of this Study to RTI Research

This study expands previous research in four ways. First, it adds to the body of RTI research in that no other retrospective studies are known to have been completed. Other researchers (i.e., Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, & Francis, 2005) have investigated experimental RTI methods or programs using the principles of RTI that only in certain cases aim to actually identify students. Second, this is the first retrospective study of students who received a reading skills intervention in first grade some of whom were later identified as having a RD. Third, this is the first known analysis of RR in a RTI context. Fourth, the results of this study provide a means to see how characteristics of RR's book levels and students' number of weeks' participation in the program are related to students later being identified as having an LD in reading.

Method

Description of the Sample

Third to fifth grade students (N =155) who participated in RR during first grade formed the basis of the data for the analysis (see Table 1). The sample consisted mostly of Caucasian (61%) and African-American students (30%). Thirty-seven percent of the students represented in the sample were female. Twenty-three percent (35 students) were officially identified as having a LD as defined by school districts.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics (N=155)

Gender	
Gender Ratio ¹	M=97/F=58
Age	
Age M(SD)	9.97 (.764)
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian	
African-American	0.6%
Hispanic	30.3%
Multiracial	0.6%
Caucasian	2.6%

Other	4.5%
Grade during 2005-2006 school year	
Grade 3	13%
Grade 4	43%
Grade 5	45%
Receiving special education services during 2005-2006 school year	
No	77%
Yes	29%
Retained in a grade ²	
Yes (1 year)	23%
No	65%
Number of weeks in Reading Recovery during first grade	
Mean	16.54
Median	17.00
Mode	20.00
Range	4 to 26
Free/Reduced lunch status in first grade	
Free/Reduced	85 (55%)
No Subsidy	70 (45%)

¹M=63% F=37%

²One school district did not provide data for 25 students' retained-in-grade status.

Procedure

Special education personnel (Special Education Directors, Title I Directors, and RR Teacher Leaders) of school districts (A, B, and C) in a western state agreed to participate and provide the required data for the sample (N=155) in this study. Of the 35 students having a LD in the sample, School district A had 4 students, school district B had 20, and school district C had 11 students. The three school districts identified students as having an LD based on the "wait-to-fail" model of an IQ/achievement discrepancy of twenty-two points. For other students in the sample who were not identified by their districts and had not completed the Weschler Intelligence Scales for Children III (WISC III) (1991), results from the InView (CTB/McGraw Hill, 2001) cognitive abilities test were used to factor out students with possible characteristics of other disabilities (i.e., mental retardation). As a retrospective study, reading composite achievement data on students defined as RD or non-RD in third to fifth grade was analyzed relative to their first-grade RR scores and free/reduced lunch status. School districts A and B provided Terra Nova (TN) reading achievement data (CTB/McGraw Hill, 2001); school district C included reading achievement results from the Woodcock-Johnson (WJ) III-Tests of Achievement (Woodcock & Johnson, 2001).

Rationale for Analyses

Analysis 1 used the school districts' definition of LD for defining group membership. Analysis 2 defined RD/non-RD status by using TN (2001) reading composite scores lower than the thirtieth percentile. In a similar study, Vellutino et al. (1996) provided an intensive intervention to first and second grade students', those who remained below the thirtieth percentile on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (WRMT-R) following the intervention were defined as "difficult to remediate." Analysis 3 used TN scores of less than twenty-three (twenty-three to forty represent the slightly below average range). Analysis 4 even further refined the definition of RD by using a cut-off reading composite score of fifteen (scores of eleven to twenty-two represent the well below average range of the TN Test).

Variables Used in this Study

RD/non-RD status. The grouping variable (GV) of the four analyses of the sample (N=155) was students' identification as RD or non-RD. Standard procedure for discriminant function analysis requires that the comparison-group size (RD group) be five times the number of variables in the equation (4 variables [beginning text level, ending text level, number of weeks, and free/reduced lunch status] $\times 5 = 20$) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). For this purpose, the RD group size was at least twenty students for each analysis.

Beginning/ending text levels. These predicting variables (PVs) were continuous variables; book levels were coded A, B (pre-kindergarten) and 1-30. Book levels "A" and "B" contain one word per page indicating an object that changes color as the pages progress. Book level 5 is considered as representative of the beginning of first grade. Book level 15 (end of first grade) represents a more varied and challenging form of text. For example, the place of text varies throughout the story (top, middle, bottom of page), some pages have one sentence, other pages have three, and there are changes in verb tenses as well as types of sentences (interrogative, imperative). Book level 30 would be similar to an early third-grade chapter book series (Clay, 2002b).

Number of weeks. Number of weeks in the RR program can vary from one jurisdiction to another. For the school districts who participated in this study, 20 weeks were considered standard. Students who attained book level 15 before or at week 20th were considered as "discontinued" (successful). Students who did not reach book level 15 were considered "continued" (unsuccessful). These students may have been provided with additional sessions to improve reading skills. This PV was a continuous variable (1-20 or more).

Free/reduced lunch status. Free/reduced lunch status was used as a means to categorize the socioeconomic status of students in the sample. This categorical PV was coded as either "0" (not eligible for any subsidy) or "1" (reduced or free lunch). The free/reduced lunch data was based on family income of the student during their participation in the RR program in first grade. Children participate in the free lunch program in two ways. First, the household is a participant in Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. Second, the student's household income must fall below 130% of the federal poverty level. For reduced-priced meals, household income must be between 130 and 185% of the federal poverty level (National School Lunch Program, 2005).

Methods of Analysis

The aim of this study was to examine whether a relationship exists between RR assessment scores and a student's subsequent identification as RD. A discriminant function analysis was completed using SPSS (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975). Beginning text level, ending text level, number of weeks in the RR program, and free/reduced lunch status (as a covariate) represented the predictive variables (PVs) of the function. Group membership (RD or non-RD) was the grouping variable (GV). Student cases that contained missing data for the GV and PVs were deleted from the sample. In the resulting analyses, coefficients above $\pm .500$ were interpreted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to evaluate if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups in each analysis of this study (RD and non-RD) based on beginning text level, ending text level, number of weeks, reading composite, and IQ variables.

Results

Results of Discriminant Functions

Tables 2-4 indicate the results of the analyses. The correlational matrix indicated that no correlations resulted in a value beyond ± 0.900 . This indicates that multicollinearity was not an issue in the discriminant function. The correlation between IQ and reading composite was moderate ($r = .494$, $p < .01$). Number of weeks was negatively correlated with beginning text level ($r = -.428$, $p < .05$). The Wilks' Lambda for each of the four analyses were significant (Analysis 1: $\Lambda = .828$, $X^2[4, N = 155] = 28.58$, $p < .001$; Analysis 2: $\Lambda = .854$, $X^2[4, N = 155] = 23.82$, $p < .001$; Analysis 3: $\Lambda = .907$, $X^2(4, N = 155) = 14.69$, $p < .005$; Analysis 4: $\Lambda = .930$, $X^2[4, N = 155] = 10.88$, $p < .028$) indicating that the predictors differentiated among the two student groups (RD/non-RD).

Table 2

Intercorrelational Matrix (N = 155)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	—	-.215**	-.019	.000	-.301*	-.073	.020	.191*
2. IQ ¹		—	.494**	-.022	.075	.247*	-.135	.007
3. Reading Composite ²			—	-.035	.007	.241*	.050	.256**
4. RR Number of Weeks				—	-.428*	-.214*	.076	.149
5. Beginning Text Level ³					—	.150	-.043	-.061
6. Ending Text Level ⁴						—	-.250*	-.342**
7. Free/Reduced Lunch ⁵							—	.274**
8. RD Status ⁶								—

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

¹InView/WISC III IQ Test scores.

²Terra Nova Academic Achievement Test/Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement scores.

³Reading Recovery instruction and assessment book series.

⁴Reading Recovery instruction and assessment book series.

⁵Students free/reduced lunch status during first grade.

⁶Student's RD or non-RD status as of the 2005-2006 school year.

The standardized discriminant function coefficients and structure coefficients are presented in Table 3. Ending text level was consistently the largest PV in the four functions and was the most representative of the functions as defined by the structure matrix; free/reduced lunch status was well represented in the function of Analysis 1. Number of weeks became a significant PV only in Analysis 4 (reading composite <15). Each successive Analysis (1-4) resulted in explaining less and less of the variance in the function of the four variables.

Table 3

Discriminant Function Results

	Wilks's Lambda	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients ¹	Structure Coefficients ¹
Analysis 1 – School District Definition of LD RD (N=35) and Non-RD group (N=120)	.828 ($p < .001$)	ETL ² .783 ⁶ F/RL ³ -.404	ETL .890 F/RL -.547

		Weeks ⁴	-.239	Weeks	-.394
		BTL ⁵	-.079	BTL	.146
Analysis 2 – Reading Composite < 30	.854	ETL	1.017	ETL	.921
RD (N=50) and Non-RD group (N=105)	(p<.001)	F/RL	.380	Weeks	-.262
		BTL	-.152	BTL	.049
		Weeks	-.130	F/RL	.095
Analysis 3 – Reading Composite < 23	.907	ETL	1.054	ETL	.967
RD (N=35) and Non-RD group (N=120)	(p<.005)	F/RL	.163	Weeks	-.102
		BTL	-.144	F/RL	-.078
		Weeks	.092	BTL	-.024
Analysis 4 – Reading Composite < 15	.930	ETL	.957	ETL	.855
RD (N=50) and Non-RD group (N=105)	(p<.028)	Weeks	.531	F/RL	-.346
		F/RL	.186	Weeks	.255
		BTL	.033	BTL	-.053

¹Values for each analysis are listed in descending order

²Ending Text Level in the Reading Recovery program

³Free/Reduced Lunch Status during First Grade

⁴Number of Weeks in the Reading Recovery Program

⁵Beginning Text Level in the Reading Recovery program

⁶The higher the ending text level, the less likely to be identified as having a RD

Table 4 indicates that in Analysis 1 (school districts' definition), reading composite was higher for the RD group relative to the non-RD group. In Analyses 2-4, students categorized as RD demonstrated lower levels of functioning as indicated by their reading composite and ending text level scores. Beginning text level followed this pattern except in Analyses 3 and 4 where the RD group had a marginally higher value. With the exception of Analysis 2, the RD group had comparatively larger number of students who participated in free/reduced lunch programs. The number of weeks was relatively constant across RD/non-RD groups in all four analyses.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Reading Composite, Number of Weeks in RR, Beginning Text Level, Ending Text Level, and Free/Reduced Lunch Status in First Grade

	Analysis 1		Analysis 2		Analysis 3		Analysis 4	
	School Districts' Definition		Reading Composite<30		Reading Composite<23		Reading Composite<15	
	RD (N=35)	Non-RD (N=120)	RD (N=50)	Non-RD (N=105)	RD (N=35)	Non-RD (N=120)	RD (N=21)	Non-RD (N=134)
Reading Composite Mean ¹ (SD)	54.40 (28.891)	42.71 (22.767)	16.36 (8.086)	59.15 (16.566)	12.23 (5.806)	55.01 (19.016)	8.62 (4.341)	51.10 (21.349)
Number of Weeks in RR Mean ² (SD)	17.97 (3.97)	16.12 (4.44)	17.22 (4.097)	16.21 (4.510)	16.80 (4.276)	16.46 (4.442)	15.86 (4.127)	16.64 (4.439)
Beginning Text Level Mean (SD)	0.89 (1.83)	1.28 (2.67)	1.12 (2.076)	1.23 (2.694)	1.23 (2.211)	1.18 (2.593)	1.29 (2.194)	1.18 (2.557)
Ending Text Level Mean ¹ (SD)	8.40 (4.97)	14.57 (6.74)	9.64 (6.009)	14.86 (6.640)	9.43 (5.700)	14.27 (6.822)	9.24 (6.625)	13.79 (6.729)
Free/Reduced Lunch Frequency (%)	27 (77%) ³	58 (48%)	26 (52%)	59 (56%)	20 (57%)	65 (54%)	14 (67%)	71 (53%)

¹Independent Samples t Tests indicated significant differences for RD and non-Rd groups in all four Analyses²Independent Samples t Tests indicated significant differences for RD and non-Rd groups in Analyses 1 and 2³For example, in Analysis 1, 27 of 35 students classified as RD were on Free/Reduced Lunch programs in first grade (77% of the RD group)

Discussion

By means of a discriminant function analysis, this study examined whether beginning text level, ending text level, number of weeks in the RR program, and free/reduced lunch status (as a covariate) would be good predictors of students identified as having a RD by third through fifth grade. The results indicated that higher ending text level was the largest PV of each of the four analyses. There was also a small but significant negative correlation with ending text level—the higher the ending text level, the less likely to be identified as having a RD.

Number of weeks was a good PV in Analysis 4 (reading composite <15). The negative correlation with beginning text level would be expected; the lower the initial text level, the more likely a student would need to complete a relatively higher number of weeks in the RR program. Analyses 3 and 4's slightly higher beginning text level mean value would still round to book level one. The mean number of weeks did not vary much between groups across the four analyses. This can be attributed to some students' parents possibly requesting a withdrawal from the program, students may have been absent from school, or they may have relocated to another school district. With 55% of the students in this study on free/reduced lunches, a large portion of the sample would be from low-income families who may be transient or truant (Stronge, 1992).

Research (Grundman, 1997; O'Connor & Spreen, 1988) discusses a link between socioeconomic status and LD. In terms of descriptive statistics, the sample in this study associates a RD/low socioeconomic relationship given that 55% of the sample was on free/reduced lunch programs. Although free/reduced lunch status was well represented in the discriminant function of Analysis 1 (traditional IQ/achievement discrepancy method), it was not a significant predictor in any of the four analyses. With an assessment of intelligence not being part of the assessment models of Analyses 2-4, socioeconomic as well as racial and cultural biases inherent in IQ testing would be avoided (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002).

Many researchers argue against the continued use of IQ in the identification of RD (Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Warner, Dede, Garvan, & Conway, 2002). The results of this study supported this argument in that IQ and RD were not highly correlated. Although the IQ/achievement identification model in Analysis 1 accounted for relatively more variance than the more refined definitions of RD based on reading achievement scores, the difference between them was negligible. This could be attributed to the successively smaller RD group sizes in Analyses 2-4; as the size of the comparison group declines, the power of the analysis is impacted. Furthermore, IQ's moderate correlation with reading composite helps support the use of reading composite as a replacement for IQ in classifying students as RD/non-RD in the analyses. Also, the school districts' definition resulted in a higher mean reading composite score for the RD group relative to the non-RD group; Analysis 2-4 resulted in the more rational result.

Findings relative to other RTI research

The RR program meets the criteria used in RTI research (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998) with its dually discrepant method of assessment (progress through leveled texts during the 20 weeks of remediation) as well as the pass/fail component of reaching book 15 (representative of first- grade level of reading ability) after 20 weeks of participation in the intervention. This model reflects the objectives of RTI's Level 2: 1) to prevent reading difficulty by delivering an intensive and presumably effective intervention that improves reading development, and 2) to assess the level of responsiveness to an instructional intensity from which most students should improve.

The results of this study indicate that ending text level is a significant indicator of students who would later be identified as having a LD—80% of which have a RD (Roush, 1995). School districts which use RR should incorporate ending text level into their identification practices when considering RD status. It would not explain the entire concept of having a RD, but it would be an indicator of the need for further assessment. In addition, the students with low reading skills could be referred by the end of first grade as opposed to the traditional format of waiting until third or fourth grade.

Although the increasingly refined definitions of RD in this study rendered significant functions and consistently rated ending text level as the largest discriminating variable, the declining amount of variance explained would suggest the presence of other factors in determining LD status. RR's ending text level alone would not be sufficient as a RTI model. Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert (2006) also comment that a RTI model cannot stand alone as the primary means of identifying for LD. The results of this study would support this given that ending text level only explains 7 to 17% of the variance in the construct of LD identification. Other aspects related to assessment for LD need to be considered.

More explicit assessments of the characteristics of RD (phonemic awareness, speech perception, vocabulary skills, phonetic working memory, and syntax, and semantics) during an intervention program such as RR could better predict students to be considered for RD classification. Other research (Lovett, Steinbach, & Fritjers, 2000) has found explicit assessments of rapid automatic naming (RAN) and phonemic awareness to be good predictors of students having difficulty with reading skills. Periodic evaluations of these aspects of reading skills in addition to daily RR programming could help provide a more comprehensive picture of students' progress based on the dual discrepant model.

Limitations

There was no measure of the type and quality of general education classroom instruction that these students received before, during, and after their participation in the RR program. Students may or may not progress with RR activities due to the type or depth of literacy instruction that occurs within the classroom.

Although research (Roush, 1995) has found that about 80% of students with a LD have low skills in the area of reading, access to individual students' files was not included for the data set used in this study. However, students' participation in the RR program due to difficulty with literacy tasks would suggest that at least 80% had difficulties in the area of reading.

Generalization to the larger national student population is hindered due to regional and demographic factors. The sample for this study was composed of students from three school districts in a western state. The proportion of racial groups in the sample is not representative of students across the nation. This study was composed of 30% African-American students whereas they represent 14.8% of the national student population. One percent of this sample was Hispanic as opposed to 14.2% of the American school population (Lawson, Humphrey, Wood-Garnett, Fearn, Welch, Greene-Bryant, & Avoke, 2002).

Furthermore, RR has been funded through government programs and legislation (i.e., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) which aim to address the needs of students of low socioeconomic status. These students represented 55% of the sample in this study whereas about 18% of US children were living in poverty as of 2004 (Douglas-Hall & Koball, 2006).

Future Research

As a conceptual model of identification for students with LD generally, RTI needs to define not only the cut-off score to be used but also other elements of the assessment-for-identification process. For RD, this study highlighted the aspect of ending text level being a significant predictor in all four analyses; however, only 7 to 17% of the variance in RD/non-RD group membership was explained by ending text level, beginning text level, number of weeks in RR, and free/reduced lunch status. This indicates that there are other components to be considered in the identification of RD. Future research could investigate whether combining RR with the model of Flanagan, Ortiz, Alfonso, and Mascolo (2002) would provide a more comprehensive RTI assessment process. Flanagan et al.'s model is a comprehensive assessment which includes quantitative knowledge (math calculation and reasoning), reading and writing (oral reading, comprehension, written expression), and crystallized intelligence (general information, oral expression, lexical knowledge, and listening comprehension). Combining these two models (splitting level two of the RTI format into two steps) could help define the factors which could account for the remaining variance not explained in the discriminant functions of this study and help schools' multidisciplinary teams decide possible classification for long-term special education services: level three of RTI.

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The Importance of Identifying and Studying the Reasons Why Special Education Students Drop Out of High School

Richard Wieringo

The impact of the recession on the American economy is felt by the majority as the rate of unemployment increases and the difficulty of getting a job doubles. The need for higher education has then been highlighted as many companies look for, if not college graduates, then at least a high school diploma in their applicants. “The importance of a high school education as a minimum standard for employment has dramatically increased over the past fifty years” (Brown and Chairez, 1999). This is made even more evident nowadays. Americans’ professional and monetary successes have always been mostly dependent on their educational achievements; and the same is still true today, especially in the face of a nationwide financial crisis (Shore, 2003). The increasing rate of high school students dropping out is a cause for great concern as it is inevitable for most of these students to have educational deficiencies that unconstructively affect their career opportunities and social interests throughout their adult lives (Rumberger, 2003). This then augments “a pattern of increased economic marginalization for those Americans with the least education” (Shore, 2003). Dropping out of high school—aside from the fact that it nullifies the students’ chances of going to college—reduces one’s career choices and advantages in a complex economic and social climate characterized by dynamic sophistication and finesse (Strother, 2006). Employment opportunities in today’s high skill-high wage economy require advanced skills that dropouts generally do not possess.

The Negative Impacts of Noncompletion and Students with Disabilities

An unfinished high school education produces serious consequences for the individual and society in term of economic impact and future productivity (Strother, 2006). These negative impacts include “unemployment, underemployment and higher rates of incarceration” (National High School Center, 2007). The harmful effects of noncompletion are enhanced when it comes to special education students because their disabilities already act as barriers that they need to overcome when it comes to their need and desire for employment and professional success. Their disabilities may act as deterrents to acceptance. They may have developed insecurities because of this and this then affects their relationship with their peers, making them loners, outcasts and generally making them feel left out. The study created by Christle, Jolivet and Michael (2007) shows that the feeling of being an outsider negatively contributes to a student’s motivation to stay in school. This is especially true for at-risk students like those with disabilities (Christle, Jolivet and Michael, 2007).

Most probably because of these facts, the dropout rates of students with disabilities have been found to be significantly greater than regular high school students (Blackorby and Wagner, 2006; deBettencourt, Zigmond and Thornton, 2005; Lehr, et al., 2004). Lehr, et al. (2004) also state that students with disabilities are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school. The fact that special education students “have been identified as being among the lowest performing students on current high-stakes tests” shows the urgency of the need for programs that can help them stay in school and graduate (Lehr, et al., 2004, p. 13). This is the cornerstone of many dropout prevention programs. However, these programs mostly target general student populations and students with disabilities are left behind.

Dropout Prevention for Students with Disabilities

Education is at least equally, if not more important, for special education students as they face more difficulties as they confront their adult lives. They must be made equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be able to function normally in society and achieve success both personally and professionally. This is the main reason why it must be guaranteed that more and more special education students graduate high school and given more opportunities to move on to higher education. In order to address this issue properly, it is highly important for the causes and reasons for special education students dropping out of high school to be examined. It must be considered that this task involves, not only looking at the reasons why these high school students drop out, but also the identification of factors and variables that may positively or negatively correlate to the reasons why they drop out. Examples of these variables include race/ethnicity, type of disability, gender, and financial stability. Factors, on the other hand, include school attendance, school achievement, student engagement and relationship with peers, teachers and family (Reschly and Christenson, 2006; Christle, Jolivet and Michael, 2007; Bear, Kortering and Braziel, 2006).

In order to present a comprehensive study that takes into consideration all the factors needed to be able to arrive at accurate results and develop a methodology that can both be replicated and applied to other demographics, the question “Who is dropping out of high school?” needs to be answered (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006). In this case, students with disabilities need to be characterized in order to ascertain these characteristics’ correlation to their decision to drop out of high school. That is why this study’s goal is to be able to get in touch with students with disabilities that have dropped out of high school in the recent school years. In this way, data will be gathered that is most pertinent to the study. It is important to examine these characteristics and personality traits in order to be able to ascertain why they have dropped out. For instance, a certain school may have a high percentage of students with disabilities who have dropped out who have a low GPA. This may say that they dropped out because they could not handle academics well and were generally failing. A dropout prevention strategy for this school may be monitoring and mentoring, wherein a student with low grades are monitored and tutored for improvement. In this way, dropout prevention programs will be more personalized and effective.

Disabilities should also be considered per category, as well as per state and locality in order to be able to maximize the effectiveness of programs that aim to reduce high school drop outs. It should be ensured that everything is being done to be able to provide more and better opportunities for these students who are already at a disadvantage when it comes to being able to become functional members of society. Although the concept of inclusion popularized by IDEA 2004 promotes students with disabilities being integrated in regular classrooms in order for them to feel included and so that they may be able to interact with regular student—building relationships and maximizing learning at the same time—it must not be forgotten that these students also have special needs and these needs to be addressed. Some ways of doing this are monitoring, developing resiliency skills among students with disabilities, and increasing motivation and school engagement (Lehr, et al., 2004; Pike and Kuh, 2005; Reschly and Christenson, 2006; Harris, 2008). Other times, it is as simple as providing appropriate physical facilities for special education students.

A Call to Action

It is sad to say, though, that it is only recently that awareness for the dropout rates of special education students have arisen. This is because “students with disabilities are included in the “all students” agenda of federal, state, and district standards-based reforms” through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Thurlow, Sinclair and Johnson, 2002). Furthermore, studies that have been conducted that present usable data related to students with disabilities that can be adapted to the present times are very few compared to studies of dropout rates of regular students (Lehr, et al., 2004, p. 13). In fact, as Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) state. “The public has been almost entirely unaware of the severity of the dropout problem due to inaccurate data.” This makes the task all the more pressing and difficult. This also augments the functionality and usefulness of the results of a study that aims to calculate the top reasons why students with disabilities drop out as it will present updated data that can be used by future researchers, dropout prevention programs and schools. Furthermore, the study can be replicated and applied to other states, school districts and individual schools. This doubles the purpose of the study. Aside from presenting usable data, it can provide an effective avenue of studying the reasons why they drop out in order to create more personalized and effective strategies that will increase high school completion rates of students with varying disabilities.

Both the government and schools should work together in order to create programs that will effectively address this problem. Identifying the top reasons why students with disabilities drop out of high school involves the inclusion of a lot of factors and variables that may correlate to a the act of dropping out. Although this task is difficult, it must be undertaken as the findings can be translated to tangible positive results in dropout prevention. With the current educational policies and dropout prevention programs and strategies, educators should gain more ground in making special education students stay in school and graduate. For regular students, high school completion is equated to an avenue to enter university to be able embark professional careers, earn good money and live the good life. However, for students with disabilities, it is so much more. High school graduation is the day that they are given more opportunities to live a normal and independent life.

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