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Special Education Legal Alert

Perry A. Zirkel

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This monthly legal alert summarizes two recent cases that are officially published federal appeals court decisions, one that illustrates various basic issues under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the other that identifies a potentially significant additional obligation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For automatic e-mailing of future legal alerts, sign up at **perryzirkel.com**; this website also provides free downloads of various related articles.

In *Mr. P. v. West Hartford Board of Education* (2018), the Second Circuit Court of Appeals addressed a wide variety of IDEA issues, starting with child find, for a student who received (a) a 504 plan in his sophomore year and (b) IEPs for emotional disturbance (ED) in his junior and senior years as the result of social, psychological, and psychiatric problems, including hospitalizations for suicidal and homicidal ideations. The IEPs successively included homebound tutoring, placement in a district alternative school program, and a vocational transition-services program.

The Second Circuit upheld rejection of the parents' child find claim, concluding that in the six-month period from the student's hospitalization until his first IEP the district met the "reasonable suspicion" and "reasonable period" standards under the circumstances, including the immediate provision of accommodations (via a 504 plan).	Although supporting the individualized, multi-factor nature of the ongoing child find obligation rather than the automatic "red flag" approach, the circumstances in this case that warn against over-generalization include (a) the effect of the IDEA's statute of limitations, (b) the "long period of time" element of the definition of ED, and (c) the parents' interacting actions, including their request for a special education evaluation. For further information, see the "Child Find" subheading of the Publications part of my website.
The court similarly upheld the rejection of at least seven other alleged procedural violations, including challenges to the sufficiency of the evaluation, homebound tutoring, and the IEP.	The court concluded that some of the procedural claims did not constitute violations and that others were violations that did result in result in the requisite loss to the student's education or parents' participation. See the "FAPE" subheading of the Publications part of my website for additional information.

Finally, the court upheld rejection of the parents' substantive FAPE challenge to the IEPs under *Endrew F*., even though the hearing officer and lower court had used the Second Circuit's previous, "meaningful benefit" interpretation of the *Rowley* standard.	In upholding the substantive appropriateness of the district's successive IEPs, the Second Circuit concluded that its prior "likely to produce progress" approach is "consistent with the Supreme Court's standard in *Endrew F*." See the "Game Changer?" article in "FAPE" section of the Publications section of the website.

In *Pollack v. Regional School Unit* (2018) the First Circuit Court of Appeals addressed the issue of whether a student with multiple disabilities, including autism, who was unable to communicate with his parents about his experiences at school was entitled to carry an audio recording device during his time at school. When the school administration refused their request, the parents resorted to adjudication, basing their claim initially on the IDEA and Section 504/ADA and ultimately on an ADA regulation.	
For the IDEA claim, the parents proceeded to a due process hearing focused on FAPE. The hearing officer ruled in favor of the district, finding that the student had made significant progress without the requested device and that it provided him with no demonstrable benefit. The parents did not appeal this ruling, instead proceeding in court based on an ADA regulation that potentially extends the individual entitlement beyond the substantive scope of FAPE under the IDEA.	The IDEA, even under the revised FAPE standard of the Supreme Court's recent *Endrew F*. decision, poses an uphill slope for obtaining, via adjudication, such uncustomary means of access (with another example being service dogs). Nevertheless, the ultimate determination is a matter of the individual circumstances. In this case the evidence was preponderant that (a) the student had made continuous and significant progress without the requested accommodation for several years and (b) it was not a safety issue for the student. A change in either of both of these crucial findings might mean a different ruling.

To top

A Parent-digm Dilemma: Communicating with Parents for better Outcomes of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder. By Helane Folske-Starlin, Ph.D

Abstract

Educators and Parent act like natural enemies (Waller, 1932) (Miretzkey, 2004). I propose that this can be addressed with effective communication from all stakeholders. One problem that presents itself is how do we teach educators to communicate with families (Hradecky, 1994, September/October)? A second problem is families don't always know what to ask educators and administrators when they are concerned for their child.

Keywords: Communication, Education, Teachers, Parent involvement, Special Education, Parent-Teacher relationships, School- Partnerships, Emotional Impairments

The area of verbal communication has been found to be key to assisting parents, educators, and students to have successful educational attainment and opportunities. Research has found, that as educators, school personnel are not doing well in verbal communication with stakeholders (Folske-Starlin, 2017)

Utilizing strong verbal communication skills to empower families and educators can facilitate better outcomes for students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD).

Research Findings

Literature indicates that the outcomes for student with EBD are poor at best (National Council on Disabilities, 2004). Change can affect the outcome by supporting parents and educators to be more active in continuous effective communication and involvement in our students' school communities (Oglan G. R., 1997).

Communication and parent involvement (Epstein, 1995) (Schussler, 2003) (Giannetti, 1998) leads to greater academic success for students (Boyer, 1991) (Henderson & Berla, 1994), (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1993) (Harris, L & Associates, Inc., 1987) (Oglan G. &., 2001) (Peterson, 1992) furthermore, studies into parent involvement and success of children at school found that the highest predictor of student success is parent involvement (Ou & Reynolds, 2008). Parents and educators continued to highlight that verbal communication, perceptions and activities are a struggle and that successful engagement in this area is minimal at best (Folske-Starlin, 2017). Effective communication "develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Educators need to trust themselves and parents to facilitate more effective verbal communication.

Parents expressed a desire for effective communication from teachers and school administrators. Parent commentary on how they perceived communication with schools and teachers was mixed. Some parents felt there were teachers they could talk to but when placed in the general pool of educators and administrators the quality and quantity of communication decreased (Folske-Starlin, 2017). This decreased communication and frustration was expressed by parents (Folske-Starlin, 2017)

- "When I feel like sometimes my voice isn't being heard"
- "I feel like they like to test out their own theories first. Then they might try what I say."

- "She won't talk to me and it makes me feel like I'm responsible. I felt really bad for her and they didn't want me to have any contact with her. Still to this day she wasn't at the IEP."

A focal point of communication with parents should be viewed as positive and engaging. The communication needs to be responded to in a format that is not adversarial but constructive an open to reciprocal responses.

In a review of teacher education programs verbal and written communication is highlighted but the facilitation of open communication, that involves active listening, verbal, written, non-nonverbal interaction with parents is not implicitly taught (Folske-Starlin, 2017). Our skills at alleviating the stress that can occur with "teacher meetings" can be augmented by "building rapport, conveying interest and empathy" (Graham-Clay, 2005) with our stakeholders (Oglan G. R., Parents, learning and whole language classrooms, 1997).

Are we communicating with the same language?

We perceive language based on individual perception and societal exposure. Researchers have found that educators and the community have different perceptions of language (Lawson, 2003) (William & Sanchez.B., 2012) (Baker & Soden, 1997) (Baker, 1997).

Educators have a communication style that is "school-centric" (Lawson, 2003). This "school-centric" perception of communication leads educators to ask: "How can parents support schools and teachers" (Lawson, 2003)?

Parents' communication style is "community-centric" (Lawson, 2003) (William & Sanchez.B., 2012) (Baker & Soden, 1997) (Baker, 1997). Parents ask: How can I help my child or what can the school do to help us"(Lawson, 2003)?

Those two questions are not the same. We perceive information based on our prior experiences and where our interest lies. This is emphasized in the literature by the quote "we teach what we are". (Swinton, M. & Bassett, R., 1981)

Are we listening?

Several times during parent interviews (Folske-Starlin, 2017) teachers' expressed frustration with communications. This is supported by comments such as:

- "I like my voice to be heard even though sometimes I don't think it is being heard. I would like to be able to communicate with them better."
- "I think it would have been better if we had gotten a little bit more on the same page" (Parent Interview)
- "I am made to feel like they don't care, this is not my problem this is your problem." (Parent Interview)
- "Sometimes it's hard for me to understand and I have had conversations with my assistant principal." (Teacher Interview)

These statements serve as indicators that parents and educators are not feeling as though they were heard on subjects and their student. This miscommunication impacts relationships between school and home.

What is Effective Communication?

Communication is the process of sharing information, thoughts, and feelings between people (Hradecky, 1994, September/October) (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). That means to participate in active listening. This includes hearing what is being said along with how it is being said.

How can we facilitate effective communication?

As a community of educators, how do we support each other and parents to feel like their voices are being heard?

Results in the data (Folske-Starlin, 2017) suggest we need active listening skills and effective spoken and written language. These skills need to be acquired to facilitate effective communication. For example, the following data suggests we are not using these skills yet:

- "I just want to sit down and talk to the family: (Teacher Interview)
- "They don't listen! They just test out their things before they even try mine" (Parent Interview)
- "She was just easy going, easy to talk with, she didn't blame him you know what I mean?" (Parent Interview)

We need to improve communication skills in all levels of interaction with parents, the community, and other educators. The use of stronger listening techniques and becoming adept at using effective communication skills will benefit our school communities and our students' potential success

What Does Effective Communication Involve?

Use of good listening skills and listening to the essence of the conversation is vital.

There is a need to address the natural enemies that can occur in education. This phenomenon is still current in our conversations. "Both, supposedly wish things to occur for the best interests of the child; but…the fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies" (Waller, 1932/2014) (Miretzkey, 2004).

Effective conversations and listening skills mean that individuals focus on the issue, not the person and be genuine rather than manipulative when interacting with others. This saves time and promotes open constructive communication.

Other barriers to effective communication with parents indicate they want specific answers, but they do not always know what questions to ask. Literature suggests that a parent's own negative experiences in school may impact relationships and interactions with school teachers and administrators (Graham-Clay, 2005). These negative impacts also hamper the production of questions and responses from parents when trying to communicate their needs to the education community for their child.

Educators and administrators need to be flexible towards community and school stake holders. Stake holders communicate with their knowledge base. That knowledge base is individual and based on exposure (Koen & Ebrahim, 2013). Asking questions that will facilitate parent communication and lead to the process of allowing parents to start formulating and presenting questions on behalf of their student are key. Sharing time interacting promotes equal communication opportunities and lowers the chance of monopolizing the conversation which erodes the opportunity to build trust.

Employ empathy with parents and stakeholders. Employing active listening and trying to understand what they are communicating is essential. Listening indicates where their personal importance lies and assists in lessening miscommunication and impacts trust.

Striving for communication with parents, educators or administrators the following could serve as a guide:

- Want information from all stakeholders.
- Ensure that the information we share is clear.
- Want to encourage parents, educators, and administrators to communicate.
- Need to connect emotionally

Respond to Parents and stakeholders in ways that acknowledge their experiences and value their opinion and concerns. An atmosphere of openness and trust establishes a strong relationship with parents, educators, and administrators. This will only benefit students' academic and social success in school.

Problems Parents and Educators Expressed

When interviewing parents and educators, several commonalities in communication gaffs and desires appeared. The following samples are identified as communication problems (Folske-Starlin, 2017):

- I don't know if it was just a lack of openness or lack of communication between him and me." (Teacher Interview)
- "It's just contact, contact, contact, but I know that I am not going to get any responses so why bother?" (Teacher Interview)
- "I felt like they created a lot of these problems because they didn't have the skills or information on how to handle it." (Parent Interview)
- "I brought in a therapist to help and I felt like they just brushed her off." (Parent Interview

The struggles portrayed, by the above quotes, could have been positively impacted with stronger, effective and open communication skills by all participants (Hargie, 2006) (Blizard, 2012) (Hargie, 2017).

We create barriers to effective communication

Many times, education professionals are their own worst enemy when it comes to having conversations with parents. People involved in the communication tend to focus on a personal agenda when talking and not focusing on the exchange of ideas and the meaning of the communication. Often those involved lack skills that promote effective communication.

One skill to consider is chunking of communication with parents, educators, and students. Too much information can lead to experiencing information overload and then a shutdown of taking in needed information.

The focus needs to be on stakeholders. By focusing on what they are saying - the message - rather than the messenger, individuals can dampen misunderstandings. Many times, anxiety comes out as emotional noise and we need to be prepared for how we will handle it and defuse a stressful situation.

The need to set up comfortable spaces for communication as not to have the distraction of external "noise" is important. Nothing worse than trying to have a meaningful conversation with 300 or more individuals moving through one area. (Halls in a school during a transition! Yikes!)

Avoidance of talking in abstract, overly-formal language, colloquialisms, and jargon facilitates understanding across "school-centric and community-centric" language (Lawson, 2003). Instruction in "educational jargon" and acronyms are specifically taught to educators and administrators and there is a time and place for this. When trying to bridge community communication gaps, it is not the time to utilize educational jargon. Don't use jargon, stereotypes, and generalizations with students, why use it with ourselves or the parents we work with?

When communication begins to breakdown keep the emotional window open and not jump to conclusions. Allow time and empathy for the speaker and listener to express what is occurring so the miscommunications and stressors may decrease or are relieved.

Ignoring or not responding to a comment or question and interrupting others hampers real communication. Not addressing the difficulties in a situation will only make communication harder in the next attempt, if there is another attempt. Parents have stated that they just stopped trying to talk to teachers or administrators when communication broke down. Confidence and openness are key when communicating. Hedging around a subject is a major barrier to effective communication.

Parents and Educators want relevant information. Stake holders have expressed frustration in not having enough pertinent information to actively participate in the communication. Parents and educators have also expressed this frustration as the following responses indicate (Folske-Starlin, 2017):

- "I know it's hard in education, but I think if you notice those signs, that the kids are lacking, you know to say to the parent that you know this is what I see, I am concerned you know." (Parent Interview)

- "Umm, I feel sometimes that she avoids my phone calls, at times. I, I get if you're busy, just say so." (Parent Interview)

People perceive communication differently based on their prior experiences. Not everyone has had good experiences with school, parents or administrators.

Being careful of stereotyping and generalizing individuals and not hold on to preconceptions about people or things. The tendency is to see what we want to see in the situation and in communication. Not investing time, making assumptions and ignoring details or circumstances can lead to misconceptions and communication breakdown. Not everything is bad. Don't focus only on the negative aspects of a conversation or a situation. Remember not everyone will draw the same conclusions from a given situation or set of information. Everybody interprets incoming information differently.

We can change the barriers to communication

Promotion of strong written, verbal and listening skills can impact communication barriers. These skills need to be taught to pre-service educators and need to be practiced at all levels of educational systems. Barriers to communication can be changed by:

- Having honest and open communication with our stakeholders.

- Taking in all perspectives and look for that common ground to begin building a relationship.

- Trying to be consistent with your verbal and body language.

As educators and administrators bridge the communication complications, stake holders will become more involved. This impacts our success rates for our students and promotes better outcomes for our students and communities (Epstein, 1995). Perhaps we can begin to shift the "Parent-digm Dilemma to be a more "Inclusive Conversation."

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To top

Administering Special Education: In Pursuit of Dignity and Autonomy (Book Review)

By Rossana Hahn

"Education gives children with disabilities a chance to acquire independence and autonomy (2)" School administrators face many challenges when implementing special education programs that ensure quality education for students with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities have the right to receive free and appropriate education in the United States, and this requires a high level of leadership and expertise from school administrators. This book addresses many challenges faced by public school administrators when implementing programs for children with disabilities. The chapters in this book cover critical issues related to identification of disabilities, rights of students with disabilities, and educational approaches to respond to student's individual needs.

The special education system in The United States has experienced advances in educational administration. However, administrators still find issues and barriers when attempting to provide high quality education to students with disabilities. Chapter one of this book details some budgetary issue that affect special education. "Provision of a free appropriate public education, therefore, ultimately, depends on the extent to which the taxpayer will pay for the cost of providing the appropriate special education at public expense" (p.5). The limitations of fiscal resources in poor school districts impacts the school administrators' capability to provide quality education and services to individuals with disabilities. Disproportionality is another issue that affects special education mentioned in this book. "The most recent report of the U.S. Department of Education (2001) found that African Americans exceeded representation in all of the 13 special education disability classifications" (p.48). Additionally, it is noted that disproportionality also affects Latino/as and American Indians. Chapter 4 provides details about transition and how it can be extremely challenging to implement it effectively. "Research has found that a large number of students with disabilities are exiting public education and entering segregated, dependent, and nonproductive lives" (p.80). The author recommended that school's administrators examine their transition programs, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Chapter 7 addresses inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms. It is mentioned that inclusion and mainstreaming are very complex issues confronting school administrators. "Various researchers stress the importance of the building principal's role in assisting school's efforts in the implementation of inclusive programs. The principal can model and emphasize the importance of an inclusive philosophy and provide emotional, personnel, and materials resources for teachers that are attempting to implement inclusion" (152). Later in the book the issue of a shortage of qualified and certified special education teachers is detailed. This chapter provides a review of literature related to recruitment, training, retention, and identification of high qualified special education teachers. "The issues of selection, training, retention, and support for inclusive educators are highly complex" (p.246).

I think the authors of this book did a great job pinpointing relevant issues that challenge school's administrators and these critical issues are clearly explained through this book. Also, this book provides an excellent legal framework. The authors linked the different special education issues to legal contexts.

Additionally, some possible solutions to these issues were presented. Though this book was interesting and informative, the connection between the topics and educational administration was inconsistent. Some of the chapters mentioned possible strategies for the administrators. However, some of the issues were just stated without any clear connection to the administrators.

A difference of this book, other publications such as Leading in a Culture of Change by Michael Fullan focuses more on a leadership aspect. Fullan sustains that leadership is imperative in a culture of change and advises schools' administrators to develop attitudes of a good leader to create successful reform. Also, the language used in Fullan's book is more directed to an audience that is somehow related to education, business, and/or leadership. Fullan does a better job providing a connection between the administrators and tangible examples of how to improve and implement initiatives.

Finally, I think the book Administering Special Education: in pursuit of Dignity and Autonomy is worth reading because it provides a clear idea of critical issues in special education. Also, the readability of this book allows understanding from different types of audiences. Reading this book would be beneficial not only for school administrators but also for special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities.

To top

Computer Software and Improving Word Problem Skills in Mathematics for Middle School Students: A Review of the Literature

By Marta M. Gonzalez

Abstract

Students who struggle in mathematics may find that word problems are a mixture of nonsensical words and numbers (Zorfass & Gray, 2014). It may be difficult for students to perform the appropriate computations when the question is not understood. In some cases, students can complete computations accurately, but due to the word problem-solving format, they may not be able to understand what the problem is asking and, therefore, perform the incorrect computation. By providing students with problem-solving strategies, students may be able to increase their understanding of word problems and improve their ability to apply the knowledge to real-world situations.

Improvements in technology have transformed the way students can acquire information in today's classroom (Florida Department of Education, 2017). Computer software programs and online resources are helping bridge the gap between a student's current level of understanding and grade level content. By using different computer programs, educators are exposing students to different learning modalities, in the hopes that one may help improve their understanding of the content material. By combining problem-solving strategies and computer software, educators are providing students with an alternative method to develop an understanding of word problem-solving skills.

Technology and Mathematics

Wiske, Franz, and Breit (2005) claim that the use of instructional technology in today's classroom may provide students with the chance to learn more efficiently. A study by Eyyam and Yaratan (2014) was conducted to determine whether technology impacts a student's attitude towards education and how it may affect their performance. The results of Eyyam and Yaratan's (2014) study indicate that through the use of instructional technology, students demonstrated a positive effect on learning gains which were evident through student progress results. The study consisted of a quasi-experimental design, in which 81 students were broken up into three experimental groups (n=41) and two control groups (n=41). The experimental groups were exposed to technology in every math class, while the control group attended a traditional classroom setting that did not include technology. Both sets of students completed a pre- and posttest. As a result of the progress test scores completed throughout the study, Eyyam and Yaratan (2014) concluded that the use of technology in the classroom resulted in students within the experimental group to receive higher scores than those in the control group (Eyyam & Yaratan, 2014). In order to address the social validity of technology in the classroom, researchers created a questionnaire to uncover the students' views on technology in the classroom. Based on their findings, 16.5% of students did not prefer the use of technology in the classroom, about one third were indecisive, and nearly half of the students preferred the use of technology (Eyyam & Yaratan, 2014).

In a different study conducted by Kanive, Nelson, Burns, and Ysseldyke (2014), the effects of a computer-based intervention on word problem solving and computational fluency were examined. This study consisted of 90 fourth and fifth-grade students from the same school. All the students in this study were identified in the lower 25th percentile according to the Measures of Academic Progress Mathematics subtest. Students were divided

into three different groups through random assignment, one being the control group. The two experimental groups received 30 minutes of additional mathematics instruction, via computer-based intervention. Based on the results of the posttest, students in the experimental group exhibited a higher retention measure (M=7.04) in comparison to those in the control group (M=1.36) (Kanive, Nelson, Burns, & Ysseldyke, 2014). The findings of this study suggest that computer-based intervention is an effective method for improving the ability to solve word problems and increasing the retention of computational skills.

A study conducted by Shin and Bryant (2017) evaluated the effectiveness of an interactive computer application program for students with a mathematics learning disability. Shin and Bryant (2017) conducted the study to determine the effectiveness of *Fun Fraction*, an instructional computer-based program. The study performed was an experimental design with three students. Students utilized the *Fun Fraction* program twice per week for 20 minutes each session. The intervention lasted a total of 13 weeks. Upon completion of the intervention, two of the three students did not make statistical gains (Shin & Bryant, 2017). The results for their intervention were statistically non-significant, according to the researchers. Only one student provided statistically significant results by showing gains of 69% (Shin & Bryant, 2017). Due to the limited participants within this study, one may not be able to determine the effectiveness of the computer-based intervention program. Although different studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness computer-based programs may have in mathematics, there is still not enough evidence to provide full support to the claim that technology may improve students' ability to apply the necessary skills when solving word problems. Even though studies examined different aspects of technology in the classroom such as technology in a whole group setting, technology with an individualized computer-based program, or a computer-based intervention for students with a mathematics learning disability, it is possible for one to conclude that technology does play an important role in today's classroom. Eyyam and Yaratan (2014) determined that whole group instruction with the use of technology may be more effective than whole group instruction in a traditional classroom setting (Eyyam & Yaratan, 2014). Kanive et al. (2014) concluded that the use of technology for a computer-based intervention does increase the likelihood of the students' ability to retain the information (Kanive, Nelson, Burns, & Ysseldyke, 2014). However, according to Shin and Bryant (2017), the use of technology in the classroom for students with a mathematics learning disability may not provide the necessary support needed for the students to make adequate gains (Shin & Bryant, 2017).

Reading Comprehension and Math Word Problems

"Word-problem (WP) solving differs from other forms of mathematics competence because it requires students to decipher text describing a problem situation and derive the number sentence representing the situation" (Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Hamlett, & Wang, 2015, p. 204). When determining a students' understanding of a computational concept, the use of word problems may not be the best approach. The reason for this is because the word-problem solving format presents the students with the additional task of interpreting the word problem into a numerical equation before attempting to evaluate for the solution. Depending on what information the educator is trying to gather, an equation may provide the most accurate results, in regards, to a student's understanding of a math concept.

Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Hamlett, and Wang (2015) conducted a study to determine whether word-problem solving is a form of text comprehension. In this study, students were evaluated based on their general language comprehension and specific language comprehension (Fuchs et al., 2015). General language is everyday

vocabulary. Depending on a student's level of general language comprehension, one may face additional challenges when presented with content specific language. The reason for this is because content specific language is nearly exclusive to a certain field or study (Fuchs et al., 2015). Due to the lack of exposure to content specific language, students may struggle with the ability grasp the concept being taught. The reason for this may be because students are being asked to put into practice words and phrases with limited exposure to the vernacular. For this study, 206 students were selected from 54 second-grade classrooms out of 14 schools. The students were provided with a battery of assessments to determine the following areas: processing speed, working memory, nonlinguistic reasoning, general language comprehension, specific language comprehension, and arithmetic (Fuchs et al., 2015). All tests were administered individually, except arithmetic. The arithmetic portion was completed in the classrooms or small groups. Upon reviewing student results, researchers arrived at two different conclusions. It was determined that word problems were affected by arithmetic, reasoning, and general language comprehension. The study also revealed that working memory, recall, reasoning, and general language comprehension had significant effects on word problems (Fuchs et al., 2015). According to Fuchs et al. (2015), the results suggest that there is a correlation between text comprehension and word problems.

A study conducted by Duru and Koklu (2011) examined the ability of middle school students when translating mathematical texts into algebraic expressions and vice versa. This study took place in Adiyaman, Turkey. A total of 185 seventh-graders from three different schools were selected. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the gathering of data. The first part of the study gathered data through questionnaires. Students were provided with multiple choice and open-ended questions that required the ability to decipher word problems into an equation with symbols and vice versa. The second part of the study consisted of clinical interviews, in which both authors were present, acting as interrogator and note-taker. The interrogator would ask questions based on student responses provided in the questionnaire. The purpose of the interviews was to determine what strategies the students employed when translating the text into an equation or vice versa (Duru & Koklu, 2011). Only five students, of the 185 participants, were interviewed. The results of this study determined that there is a substantial number of students who are unable to translate mathematical text into an equation with symbols (Duru & Koklu, 2011). An additional observation was that even more students struggled when having to translate an equation with symbols into mathematical text (Duru & Koklu, 2011). Duru and Koklu (2011) claim there are three reasons why students are having difficulties when translating the mathematical text. The first reason is a lack of reading comprehension skills. A lack of reading comprehension skills entails that students are missing the necessary skills to translate the text. Students are also exhibiting difficulties in the translation of the text into equations due to their lack of knowledge about the meaning of symbols and mathematical jargon. Finally, students' struggles also arise from their lack of ability to tap into their schema when solving word problems (Duru & Koklu, 2011). As a result of this study, it was determined that reading comprehension plays a crucial role in successful problem-solving (Duru & Koklu, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to take the necessary steps to ensure students are gaining comprehension skills and applying useful strategies when reading word problems.

In a similar study conducted by Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola, and Nurmi (2008), researchers evaluated whether there is a correlation between math word problems and reading comprehension. The study also examined whether gender plays a role in the ability to solve mathematical word problems with more accuracy. The study consisted of 225 students in the fourth grade. Of the 225 students (107 girls, 118 boys), 24.4% received special

education services. The methodology used to determine student level of understanding was accomplished through the use of two standardized assessments presented at the end of the school year (Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2008). One was a reading comprehension test that was divided into two different types of texts, expository and narrative. The second assessment was a mathematical word problems tests. Results of this study indicate that students who performed poorly on reading comprehension also performed poorly on the mathematics word problems assessment (Vilenius-Tuohimaa et al., 2008). The study also determined that there is no link between gender and performance. By demonstrating the connection between reading comprehension and mathematical word problem-solving, Vilenius-Tuohimaa et al. (2008) concur with the findings of Duru and Koklu (2011) in stating that reading comprehension does play a role in the ability to solve word problems.

Bjorn, Aunola, and Nurmi (2016) conducted a study to determine how primary school text comprehension predicts mathematical word problem-solving skills in secondary school. This longitudinal study lasted six years. Students were assessed at the end of fourth grade on their text-reading fluency, text comprehension, and basic calculation ability. Students were assessed again at the end of seventh grade and ninth grade on their mathematical word problem-solving skills (Bjorn, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2016). A total of 224 students, all from the same school, were selected for this study. The results of this study suggest that "text comprehension at grade four positively and statistically significantly predicted performance in math word problems at grade seven…" (Bjorn, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2016, p. 369). Results also suggest that text comprehension at grade four did not play a role in one's word problem-solving skills in grade nine (Bjorn, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2016). Similar to the results of the previous two studies, this study also suggests there is a direct link between reading comprehension and word problem-solving skills.

Upon analyzing several different studies, regarding reading comprehension and problem-solving skills, one may be able to conclude there is a correlation among the two. The adeptness to fully comprehend the text and understand what is asked plays a major role in one's ability to correctly evaluate the mathematical word problem. Regardless of one's ability to perform the calculations correctly, if they are unable to understand the text to create the correct equation, then the calculations performed will not lead to the correct response.

Deciphering Word Problems

Reading comprehension is defined as one's ability to read the text, process it, and understand its meaning. This ability is influenced by one's traits and skills ("What is Reading Comprehension," n.d.). Word problems add a degree of difficulty by requiring the reader to translate the text into an equation with mathematical symbols. Without the fundamentals of reading comprehension, the ability to decipher word problems into equations may be a daunting task.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Wong and Ho (2016), researchers looked at the ability one has to decipher text into a numerical equation. According to researchers, "the additional process of constructing number sentences seems to cause difficulty to problem solvers" (Lewis & Mayer, 1987; Wong & Ho, 2016, p. 520). Two areas were the main focus of this study: number-sentence construction and computation. For this study, 210 kindergarteners from 17 different schools throughout Hong Kong were selected. Students participated in this study for three years. At the end of their second-grade school year, students were assessed on number-sentence construction and computation. Participants were evaluated four times throughout the study. The results of the

study show students obtained a mean score of 69.9% on arithmetic word-problem task. Based on these results, researchers believed that reasonable mastery of content occurred. The results also state that 22.6% of errors were because of number sentence construction and only 7.5% of errors were due to computation errors. The evidence supports the claim that students struggle more with number sentence construction, as opposed to, computation (Wong & Ho, 2017). As a result of this study, it is evident that text comprehension is not the only area plays a role when solving word problems. The ability to translate the text into a numerical equation plays a crucial role in determining whether a student is capable of solving the problem correctly.

A study conducted by Davis (2013) evaluated students understanding of the literacy to be able to decipher the text into numeracy. Numeracy word problems are defined as "simplistic, contrived situations to represent context, involving relationships between concrete objects or illustrations that require resolution using quantitative methods" (Davis, 2013, p. 20). This study consisted of 1000 high school students. Students were provided with the strategy, RULES & T. This is an acronym that represents the following: read, underline, list, estimate, steps, and test (Davis, 2013). Students were expected to use the strategy to improve their ability to translate the text into a numerical equation. By implementing this strategy, the word problem was broken down into different components that made the translation into a numerical equation more manageable. By collecting student work samples, Davis was able to determine that students were focusing on the solution to the problem rather than analyzing the text to comprehend the word problem. The results of this study indicate that by providing students with a step by step process, one may be more successful in the ability to decipher the text into numeracy (Davis, 2013).

In another study conducted by Fuchs et al. (2016), the efficacy of an intervention for additive word problems and multiplicative word problems was examined to determine its value. This intervention focuses on deciphering word problems into a numerical equation. For this study, 213 fourth graders were randomly assigned to three groups: one control group and two experimental groups. The experimental groups consisted of additive word problem interventions and multiplicative word problem interventions. Students were provided with a pre- and posttest to determine their initial placement. Interventions took place over a 12-week period. There was a total of 36 sessions; each session lasted 35 minutes. The data gathered from this study indicates that the additive word problem group showed the most gains from pretest (M=3.89) to posttest (M=15.08). The multiplicative word problem group showed gains of 8.94 from pre- to posttest, and the control group showed the least gains of 3.95 (Fuchs et al., 2016). Based on these results, it is possible for one to conclude that by providing interventions that are specific to a mathematical function, as opposed to focusing on all the mathematical functions concurrently, one may be more likely to understand the text surrounding a specific function.

Upon reviewing various studies all relating to solving math word problems, one may state that there is a correlation between reading comprehension and word problem-solving skills. If students have exhibited struggles with reading comprehension, their ability to solve word problems correctly may be an area of weakness. Students are also receptive to working with technology inside the classroom (Yaratan, 2014). Computer software programs and online resources provide the students with an alternative method to a traditional classroom. Computation skills seem to play no major role in the understanding and deciphering of a word problem into an equation, however that does not diminish the importance of computational skills when problem solving. By presenting the students with a word problem, students must first be able to translate the text into a numerical equation with symbols. If a student is unable to translate the text into the correct

numerical equation, then their ability to perform computations accurately will not play a role in the solving of the equation (Yaratan, 2014). An educator's role is to provide various strategies and techniques that students may employ to read the text, decipher the problem, develop an equation, and perform the computations to arrive at the correct answer.

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Marta Michelle Gonzalez is a graduate student at Florida International University. She graduated from FIU with a degree in Exceptional Student Education, in 2010. She is currently a graduate student at FIU as a member of the Project TEACH Lab Cohort with a concentration in academic and behavioral interventions. Gonzalez is currently in her sixth year at the Academy for International Education Charter School. Her passion is teaching mathematics to middle school students. Recently Gonzalez has started a computer applications course at her school including computer programming and Microsoft Office classes bringing her school into the 21st century. Gonzalez is a proud mother to two young boys, Carlos and Lucas. She is also happily married to her husband of seven years, Carlos.

To top

Hacking Leadership (A Book Review)

By Linda Pearson

Hacking Leadership delivers a purposeful perspective on how to inspire learning within the school community. The author's Joe Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis are at the forefront of education, as a district superintendent and a school principal, they have proven the theories by implementing what they preach.

This book is an excellent resource for administrators who don't want to become a victim of the bureaucracy in the school system and anyone wanting to improve their leadership skills. In reviewing this book, the principal criteria encompassed clear-cut problems and solutions to these issues referred to as "hacks." The author delivers a firm outlook of the education world with the intentions of equipping leaders with the tools necessary to create change within the school. The author's focus on what leaders can do differently instead of embodying change in others. Furthermore, he illustrates his approach to practical common-sense strategies in a logical order by undertaking difficult issues within the school.

Hacking Leadership is a book written for administrators in the education field by leaders with a lot of wisdom. The author inspires administrators with ten specific ways a leader can operate and calls them "hacks". The strongest points in the book are when the author's give step by step blueprints of how to overcome these obstacles. The reader is taken on a journey that presents every problem as an opportunity to create change. The tone of the book is very inspirational as he gives his first-hand story of how he has implemented a positive culture by focusing first and foremost on relationships and centering it around benefitting the students. The flow of Hacking Leadership empathizes with the audience by presenting the reality and offering ten solutions on how to tackle these problems. This quote best illustrates the nature of the book: "Because a school's culture extends to all of its stakeholders, effective interactions are the single most important non-negotiable entity in creating flourishing schools." "And these schools and their leaders aren't born; they have to be hacked. Each chapter in Hacking Leadership presents a problem, a hack or solution, a blueprint for implementing and improving strategies and practical tips when faced with setbacks. Some examples that define what a lead learner can do is model learning, offer an open ear when someone is struggling, take over the class for a teacher for a short time, and actively remove obstacles so staff can maximize their teaching by allowing them to be in charge of their goals. The ten different hacks are centered around looking at issues from a different perspective or lens, viewing the cup as "half full instead of half empty." The author's enthusiasm throughout the book is evident and concentrates on the importance of actively applying self-reflecting skills as a leader. This quote illustrates this growth mindset eloquently, "we learn by doing, but we learn more by reflecting on what we have done."

In contrast, Fullan's book, Leading in a Culture of Change organizes the book as a theoretical framework while also presenting problems from different leaders perspectives. In other words, if you do this, then you will develop leaders. Fullan's leadership book is presented as having a particular mindset that will lead to success but leaves out specific direction on how to get there or steps to take in order to reach the desired goal. The reader is left with having to rely on their own interpretation of problem-solving or having to apply it to any situation. As previously stated, Hacking Leadership outlines a specific plan and how to address issues when confronted with obstacles. In comparison, both authors provide in-depth analysis of the significance of building relationships so ideas flow more freely where all stakeholders are willing to cohesively collaborate in an ever-changing society. "If educators feel passionate about an idea and see value in it, the chances of their using it as a focal point for future learning both individually and collectively increase exponentially. In both frameworks presented, the author's focus is on building strong relationships, shifting mindsets, and creating dynamic cultures with opportunities for all involved.

One of the shortcomings of Hacking Leadership, which doesn't really have a solution is that not all situations or problems can be so easily fixed. These solutions are very practical and seem very feasible but they focus on the leaders setting the tone. Unfortunately, the top permeates to the bottom, so if you have a boss who is pessimistic and unmotivated the effects are detrimental to the entire culture of the school regardless of what you do as a leader in a non-administrative position.

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About the Author

My name is Linda Pearson, born in Miami, Florida in 1974, and I am currently enrolled in Florida International University's Master's program for Special Education with a concentration in academics and behavior intervention. I received my undergraduate in Varying Exceptionalities in 2002 from Barry University. I have been teaching grades Kindergarten through fifth grade for sixteen years now. My passion is in teaching students with special needs and helping them realize their potential. It is always exciting to find new strategies to help my ESE students bridge the gap. As an educator, it is important to keep up with current research and to read books and articles that inspire.

To top

Underachievement Among Elementary Gifted Students

By Abdulmajeed Alzahrani

Contemporary issues in the scope of gifted education concentrate on learners whose performance does not correspond with their ability level. Underachievement among gifted learners constitutes one of the greatest disappointments for a school culture that contributes to frustration for parents, instructors, education shareholders, and the society in general due to the considerable disparity between the learners' potential and their overall academic achievement. In this review, I concentrate on the issue of underachievement of gifted students in elementary school. This paper presents major challenges in the area of giftedness through a critical review of previous academic literature and their connection with underperformance of learners, under-exploitation of students' potential, as well as teacher education. The review further examines the causes of underperformance such as school, environment, personal and family factors, as well as different strategies to address this problem in elementary schools.
Keywords: underachievement gifted students, elementary school, teacher education, nurturing environment, descriptive praise

Underachievement Among Elementary Gifted Students

Underachievement among gifted learners constitutes a paradoxical phenomenon that causes frustration in parents, instructors, education shareholders, and the society in general due to the considerable disparity between the learners' potential and their overall academic performance (Cavilla, 2017). As defined by Chinnis (2016), underachievement, in this case, forms the discrepancy between learner's potential and their actual performance. This implies that a student's performance is not according to their anticipated ability. This perplexing issue has been the cause of major disappointment for educational institutions' culture, from kindergarten to college; it contributes to social anxiety and behavioral problems in gifted and talented children. Moore, Ford, and Milner's (2017) study claim that 15% estimated gifted students are usually underperformers. Consequently, parents, education stakeholders, institutions, as well as instructors need to be concerned about this population. These students represent a section of society that underperforms continuously, thus rendering the reversal of the issue impossible.

Gifted children exhibit unique abilities and talents such as high adaptability levels, exceptional inquisitiveness, and extensive vocabularies that distinguishes them from other children of their age (Cavila, 2017). Consequently, these children are expected to set outstanding records in academics. Aspects such as a learner's socio-economic status, environment, culture, and motivation complicate the individualized nature of underperformance, since they are recognized as the central causes of this issue (Charissa, 2012). Although the reversal of the underachievement behavior through the utilization of a single strategy may not be possible, studies have revealed that placing gifted students in an academically stimulating nurturing environment gradually improves their performance (Siegle, 2013). Further, providing gifted learners tasks that correspond to their ability level reverses the issue of underachievement through the enhancement of their unparalleled thinking, unique insights, and diverse perspectives. Therefore, elementary school educators need to allocate individual programs that incorporate modified curriculum, motivation, counseling, and confidence to enhance the training of gifted learners.

Significance of the Issue of Underachievement among Elementary Gifted Students

There exists a myth in education that since gifted children possess an innate ability to learn, they possess the skills and strategies required to succeed in their academic life with any curriculum offered (Dial, 2011). These students are forced to face intellectual struggle and obtain poor grades due to failure in this aspect or because they may be intellectually weak. Consequently, some of the underperforming gifted students live in distress that causes self-doubt and low self-esteem. As outlined by Dial (2011), some gifted learners fail since they lack the strategies and skills required to succeed in educational institutions. Therefore, this review is significant for teachers to understand some of the reasons that hinder gifted students from utilizing their maximum potential in school, resulting in underachievement. Some educators may not realize the struggle that gifted students undergo in school. They mistakenly assume that these learners receive the required instructions to support and enhance their parallel thinking and unique abilities. They believe that poor grades constitute a motivational issue or impertinence of these apparently lackadaisical learners. However, research illustrates that parents and institutions can suppress the bright talent of gifted students by effecting a forceful separation of the students with that special skill set (Obergresser & Stoeger, 2015).

This paper aims to explore some of the factors that prevent gifted learners from utilizing their full potential and unique abilities in their academic life. Further, the paper could assist teachers, education shareholders, and families to understand some of the interventions or approaches that can be employed to assist these students to apply their innate abilities.

Literature Review

A considerable amount of existing academic research has examined the issue of underperformance among elementary gifted students (Bennet-Rappell & Northcote, 2016). This review critically assesses the subject and documents the inquiry of the requirements of gifted students in elementary school as well as the factors that demotivate them, leading to underachievement in academic life. The review attempts to uncover these factors by understanding the gifted learners through an assessment of their educational requirements. In spite of the fact that the gifted children possess unique abilities and talents such as high adaptability levels, exceptional inquisitiveness, desire to learn, leadership qualities, and extensive vocabularies, they still face difficulty in the academic sphere when they are subjected to the current or normal curriculum. The reason for this is that these children possess various 'special needs' that must be addressed for the realization of their special talents and capabilities.

Gifted learners are perceived as bright individuals who are expected to employ their sharp intellect to conquer all obstacles in their personal, social, and academic lives. Obergresser (2015) establishes that even when gifted children are placed in seemingly suitable classrooms, they fail due to lack of engagement. This perplexes administrators, parents, and teachers who may not comprehend the fact that learning requires more than proper classroom placement. Aspects such as socio-economic status, environment, culture, and motivation of a gifted learner may impact their education potential. Moreover, Siegle, Reis, & McCoach (2012) elucidate that the underperformance of gifted children in elementary school constitutes an extended fact. Thus, it is essential to discover the exact elements and interventions that can be employed to motivate gifted learners to work diligently in their personal and academic lives. The requirements of these students coherently depict the necessity of motivation, constant engagement, provision of appropriate tasks, those considered challenging for

the students' peers by the instructor, and regular assistance from families and educators. Further, research has also demonstrated that the discrepancy in gifted student's abilities and performance is caused by a variety of factors that range from personal, such as low self-esteem, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self-motivation, to environmental factors, such as socio-economic status and culture (Siegle et al., 2012). Individuals such as parents, siblings, and teachers, who are usually responsible for the gifted students' academic lives can also contribute to their poor performance (Merrotsy, 2013).

Concept of Giftedness and Who are Underperforming

The notion of giftedness can be traced back to the research conducted by the New Jersey Department of Education that defined it as the possession of a high level of ability in more than one area (Siegle et al., (2012). The New Jersey Department of Education research investigated a potential explanation for gifted students. People have come to believe that gifted learners possess a high ability level as compared to their peers who require consistent modifications in educational programs to achieve academic standards in accordance with their cognitive abilities. The definition aligns with the research of Francis Galton, Lewis Terman, Alfred Binet, and Leta Hollingworth who are considered the fathers of modern gifted education. Their work included the application of IQ scores, since they believed that gifted people possessed unique mental abilities that distinguished them from their peers. Although there has been a lack of consensus on the key features that can qualify an individual as gifted, the four researchers, Galton, Terman, Binet, and Hollingtworth, believed that giftedness is exhibited through reasoning and mental abilities (Mingle, 2016).

During the 1950s, individuals associated the concept of giftedness with race and ethnicity; in this regard, they thought that white children possessed higher IQs than 'colored people such as Hispanics, Latinos, and Blacks' (Mingle, 2016). Such an inextricable association facilitated the desegregation of schools and maintenance of separate educational systems that resulted in racial segregation. Over time, the four fathers of modern gifted education realized that different individuals, irrespective of their ethnicity or race, recorded different levels of IQ. Therefore, this refuted the interconnection of giftedness and race, and this concept became observable. Teachers were provided the mandate to nominate learners whom they perceived as gifted, so that they could undergo the identification screening process. Consequently, Galton, Terman, Binet, and Hollingtworth emphasized the necessity for effective teacher preparation to identify and deal with gifted and talented learners. According to these researchers, the concept of giftedness refers to a high reasoning capacity and development that outpaces other children in the same age group. From this definition, it is evident that individuals with the high cognitive ability and reasoning capacity; commonly referred to as gifted learners are the ones who underperform, since they record performance that does not correspond with their potential. Therefore, underperforming gifted students comprise learners who are not motivated to learn due to a lack of engagement in classes.

Requirements for Elementary School Gifted Learners and How to Prepare Teachers to Fulfill Them

The definition of giftedness recognizes the affective needs of these individuals that require addressing the issue of underperformance. It is apparent that gifted students require social-emotional stability for the realization of their innate abilities. Educators and parents require finding supportive ways to satisfy the effective requirements of these highly intelligent students (Luzzo & Gobet, 2011). These strategies are required to facilitate the development of positive emotional and social skills in talented students, since these factors

influence their cognitive abilities. Teachers may need to allow gifted students to assume a high level of responsibility towards their learning. This includes the selection of some of the teaching approaches and tasks to be administered in their leisure time. This will facilitate the provision of nurturing environments as well as educational tasks that are compatible with these learners' potential. Gifted students require nurturing environments, which are academically stimulating about the achievement of their educational goals (Obergresser, 2015). The environmental stimulation of an academic nature can be challenging at times, but it enhances gifted learners' unparalleled thinking, unique insights, and diverse perspectives.

During teacher training programs, instructors could be made aware of the need to modify the standard school experience and social-emotional ramifications to accommodate the gifted and talented individuals' extraordinary levels of achievement and ability (Siegle et al., 2012). This can be accomplished by outlining the characteristics and requirements of gifted students in the academic sphere. As argued by Cavilla (2017), being a teacher can be an overwhelming and exciting experience due to the many established standards, curriculums covered, as well as numerous things that require to be learned. Teachers require to be taught the art of managing students' behaviors to understand who require to be taken out of the normal curriculum and learning activities. As recorded in Sullivan's article, some teachers are unaware of the needs of gifted learners; therefore, they tend to characterize their hyperactive nature as a behavioral problem (Sullivan, 2016). Thus, teachers' training institutions may require familiarizing instructors with these needs and characteristics.

Causes of Underachievement

Underachievement among gifted students originates from various factors that range from personal to environmental. As per Siegle et al. (2012), the following are the causes of underachievement among the gifted students.

Engagement and self-regulation. A Research by Chinnis (2016) proves that a positive attitude about environmental perception, self-efficacy, and task meaningfulness helps a person to set realistic goals and evaluate themselves to achieve the intended task. Therefore, gifted students possess a high level of high self-esteem, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self-motivation to enhance their academic achievements. Siegle et al. (2012) argue that gifted students may utilize their time in the creation of challenging and motivating environments, especially in schools to promote their unique innate abilities.

Emotional issues. Emotional issues such as depression and social psychological disorders influence the gifted students' ability to assimilate knowledge. These issues affect a learner's concentration level by causing social and behavioral problems such as being non-conformist about school rules (Charissa, 2012). Therefore, emotional issues cause problems with teachers and sometimes result in school dropout.

School Factor. The school environment influences a gifted learner's performance. The reason for this is that is the school constitutes the only place where a student's academic performance can be assessed and modified. Therefore, the lack of ability grouping, mentoring, motivation, diverse teaching approaches, and disregard for personal preferences negatively impacts one's ability to learn (Siegle, Rubenstein, & Mitchell, 2014). Teacher's personality and the offered curriculum lead to a rise or declines in learners' performance in classroom activities.

Family issues. The relationship between a student and their family is vital to their academic performance. Children who obtain inadequate nurturing and those brought up in dysfunctional families exhibit underperforming behavior (Reis & McCoach, 2008). Further, elements such as affiliation conflicts, lack of parental support, poor economic status, and high academic expectations result in underperformance behavior.

Addressing Underachieving Students in the Classroom

To address underachievement in gifted students, teachers are required to motivate their students to pursue interests they perceive as good, related to their areas of interest and the academic curriculum. For schools, this translates as the fact that the schools' educational content should be useful to cover the underachieving students' interests (Chinnis, 2016). Further, the teachers need to assist students to set realistic goals and objectives without comparing the abilities of those who achieve to those who do not (Nancy, 2017).

Recommendations for Underperformance

Teachers and other educators may need to employ strategies to motivate and encourage their students positively. Teachers are required to adopt certain strategies to provide their students opportunities, especially to gifted underachievers. The high achieving students enjoy being in class and engaging in various challenging assignments due to their high intellectual capabilities (Dial, 2011). The task, as teachers and education stakeholders should be aware, represents difficult tasks that could be enjoyable to the underachieving gifted students (Dial, 2011). The following are recommendations that teachers can put into practice to assist the underachieving students.

One-on-one Teaching

This method of teaching is beneficial for both achieving and underachieving students. This method was studied, and it was proved that both kinds of students benefited from the individualization and accountability offered by one-on-one teaching. This method was successful as educators concentrate on students to ensure that all of them understand the concept and details of what they are learning. This could greatly reduce the risk of dropout of underachieving students (Dial, 2011). Sometimes, the one-on-one teaching method is not possible to practice due to different and timed teaching sessions (Snyder, 2013). This becomes a challenge; however, there are other ways that teachers can implement such as adopting a small teacher-student ratio in to pay increased attention to the voices of the underachieving students.

Encourage Positive Relationships between Students and Teachers

Students can be encouraged to establish good academic relationships with their teachers. This will facilitate potential achievement of underperforming students tremendously. Teachers affect the performance of their gifted students to a great extent (Siegle, 2013). This constitutes an influential way in the context of creative writing. Teachers training on the way to change negative attitudes toward non-performers, and consequently, to identify the gifted underachievers and engage with them form ways to improve underachievement (Bennett & Northcote, 2016).

Differentiating Gifted from the Achieving Students

Separation constitutes an excellent teaching strategy that is effective with students of different learning levels. It is also effective in the context of creative writing (Siegle, 2013). This creative writing strategy forms a flexible

program that adapts to the requirements of various underachieving students (Nancy, 2017). It examines the level of their need, learning capabilities, and student interests. Additionally, the introduction of a differentiated study environment and individual learning constitute successful strategies for underachieving students. The teaching system requires teachers' training about dealing with a classroom of both achievers and underachievers. Learning curriculum content and students' interests are the aspects that teachers can exploit to differentiate gifted underachievers from achievers (Montgomery, 2009). This, therefore, illustrates that tailoring curriculum is essential to accommodate students' unique necessities.

Development of Various Strategies

The application of multiple approaches employment is ideal for dealing with underachievement in gifted students. Underachievement manifests itself in a range of ways; therefore, a variety of ways to deal with it are required (Krishna, 2009). These various ways of intervention satisfy the need of every gifted underachiever. The application of these ways aims to remediate underachievement successfully. For example, teachers can strive at keeping the underperforming students on their toes. This is achieved by ensuring that the students remain occupied with extra assignments. Teachers also allow students to select, examine, and analyze all stimulating and new topics that are either in the curriculum or that are trending outside the curriculum. This satisfies the requirement for underachievers to be interested in the content and to start asking questions when they do not understand something. Chinnis (2016) stated that there increased performance is witnessed when teachers, parents, and education stakeholders provide underachieving students an opportunity to pursue their area of interest independently.

Calling on Underachievers

This involves all students' participation in question-and-answer sessions. Normally, during such sessions in class, teachers tend to call on the achieving students to answer the questions. Receiving answers makes them feel better about their teaching in the classroom; however, they do not consider the negative attitudes the non-performers may develop if they do not get opportunities to demonstrate that they know the answers as well. The irony in these types of teaching methods is that the underachievers might feel excluded. Teachers can engage all students in these types of discussions to ensure that all their students have positive experiences.

Descriptive Praise

Awareness of teachers that the main objective of allowing students to participate in class discussions is to gain confidence and feel important in that particular learning environment is important. The teacher can offer descriptive praise to their students to provide positivity in the student's learning process, so that in turn, the student will perceive themselves positively (Montgomery, 2009).

Conclusion

Underachieving gifted students face challenges in rising to their potential due to factors such as social economic status and environment. Teachers, parents, and education stakeholders are obliged to ensure that underachievers realize their potential. These recommendations are important for students' performance enhancement in academics. This responsibility greatly lies with teachers, because they constitute academic developers. They should ensure that their students are in a suitable learning environment that stimulates and

integrate cognitive abilities. Differentiation is essential for the observation of the content and learning methods applied to students. Teachers should also consider involving underachievers in decision-making processes regarding their educational content, as this would enable students to learn to assume the responsibility for their educational learning.

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The Least Restrictive Environment and the Development and Implementation of its Concepts

By Nassim Aljohany

Abstract

When in 1990 EHA was replaced by the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) became one of the six principles the IDEA has since been based upon. LRE consists of a number of concepts and mandates that schools in the United States provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all disabled students according to their individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses. However, the problems with determining the appropriate settings for disabled children still exist and cause American special education a lot of trouble. The purpose of this project is to show how the concepts of the LRE were developed, what challenges the American education system faced in implementing them and how well they are applied in teaching children with disabilities now.

Introduction

When in 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was enacted, it had a provision that students with disabilities should be taught in the least restrictive environment. Given that most of disabled kids had no access to education when a lot of them could easily cope with the program of regular schools at the time, passing the Act undoubtedly was a very noble move on the part of Congress (MacBeath J, Galton, Steward, MacBeath A, and Page C, 34). The problem was, however, that the law did not provide a clear definition of what "the least restrictive environment" actually meant and how such a provision should in reality be implemented. It was clear that the law required schools to make fair and appropriate decisions about their education services when it came to teaching students with physical and mental problems. What basically remained unknown was what criteria teachers had to use in order to determine the most appropriate setting for their students.

Most children with disabilities required individual approaches and supplementary services. Such needs often were misunderstood and a large number of children were unfairly refused access to mainstream education. In other words, regular schools were totally unprepared to educate disabled students. It came as no surprise that teachers who were never trained to work with people with disabilities found it unusually difficult to provide effective services for physically and mentally ill children. According to Rothstein., & Johnson (2014), In 1989, in Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education case, the Court made it clear that schools should use all the resources available in order to keep disabled students in mainstream classes to the greatest extend possible. If a child finds it difficult to handle the program of mainstream schools, additional services must be provided to improve their achievements. When this is not likely to be effective, it might be removed from mainstream education but, if it is possible, should be allowed to interact with children without disabilities during lunch and/or recess.

When in 1990 EHA was replaced by the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) became one of the six principles the IDEA has since been based upon. LRE consists of a

number of concepts and mandates that schools in the United States provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all disabled students according to their individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007). However, the problems with determining the appropriate settings for disabled children still exist and cause American special education a lot of trouble. The purpose of this project is to show how the concepts of the LRE were developed, what challenges the American education system faced in implementing them and how well they are applied in teaching children with disabilities now.

Review of Literature

As a principle of the IDEA, LRE was literally shaped in the United States by six court hearings which took place in different parts of the country between 1989 and 1994. The outcomes of those cases not only helped the parents of children with disabilities to understand the actual meaning of the LRE, but they also became case law which still is highly influential when it comes to resolving similar disputes. The first case as Rothstein., & Johnson (2014) pointed out that was started by the parents of a six-year-old boy with Down's syndrome, who lived in Texas. It took place in 1989 and became known as Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education . The parents disagreed with the decision of their school district to withdraw their son from his pre-kindergarten program due to the high degree of his mental retardation and speech impairment. He needed a lot of special attention, which could not be given to him without affecting the quality of education services that had to be provided to the rest of the class. As it was later stated by the court, an attempt to modify the curriculum to fit Daniel's ability to learn would change it beyond recognition, and doing that was not what the IDEA was designed for.

In order to make the decision, the court used a two-question test. Its first question was whether the program of the regular schools with additional educational aids and services was or could be effective given the severity of his disability. The court was satisfied that if there was no chance of Daniel being able to handle the mainstream school program, then he had to receive special education and /or should be removed from the classes of a regular school. The second question of the test was whether or not Daniel was mainstreamed to the greatest extent possibly appropriate. Those two questions became irreplaceable parts of the tests, created by the judges in other court hearing, similar to Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education, in order to determine the correct LRE placement (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995)..

Another major case in which LRE was to be established took place in 1991 and was started by the Georgia school district. According to Rothstein., & Johnson (2014), this case invaded history as (Christy) Greer v. Rome City School District. This time, the school district requested hearing against parents of a ten-year-old Christy who also suffered from Down's syndrome. When she was five, her parents wanted to send her to the kindergarten at a local school. However, the school district requested that the parents allowed assessing their child first in order to determine whether it was appropriate to enrol it in the program of mainstream kindergarten. Fearing that their daughter might be placed in the class of special education, Christy's parents took her home in order to work on her education. After two year's time, they brought the girl to the same kindergarten again. This time, the school district still continued to insist on the girl's evaluation, but allowed her to attend the classes as she had already reached the compulsory school age. When Christy's parents refused the request, the school district applied for a hearing to take place and was eventually permitted to assess the girl. After the assessment, it was suggested that she should be placed in a special education class. Parents did

not accept the decision and took the case to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeal. For the time the case was being considered, Christy remained in the above-mentioned kindergarten (Laura &Louis , 2014).

The court decision was that she should not be placed in a special education class and keeping her in the kindergarten in which she was being educated at the time was found appropriate. Although the court made a remark that remaining in the class of regular education might not really be good for Christy in the future, it however, concluded that she made considerable progress during the last two yeas there, her behaviour was not unusually disruptive, and she did not need such an amount of extra attention that would appear to be disproportionate compared with other students. On top of that, it was discovered that the school district did not do enough to provide Christy with supplementary educational aids and services and did not modify curriculum for her as it was required in such circumstances by the IDEA (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995).

This time, the court used the test which was constructed in Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education case to create its own and just a few more questions were added to the test in this case. In order to determine the LRE for the girl, the judges was considering whether or not the school district compared the benefits that the disabled child would receive in a mainstream classroom with the benefits she would receive in a special education setting. Also, the court considered whether or not the presence of the child with disability had a negative effect on other students in the classroom. Finally, the court asked the question about how much it actually cost to provide additional educational aids and services to the handicapped child. This new test was widely used in determining the LRE in other cases and its questions were used to create even better and much more effective tests (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995 ? Rothstein & Johnson, 2014)..

In 1993, there was another major court case which became known as (Rafael) Oberti v. the Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District. This case also played a big role in developing the concepts of the LRE principle. As mentioned Rothstein., & Johnson (2014), The dispute occurred over an eight-year-old boy with Down's syndrome in New Jersey. As in (Christy) Greer v. Rome City School District case, the parents of Rafael were requested to give permission to assess their child before accepting it to their local kindergarten. After evaluating him, it was recommended that he be placed in a special education class. When his parents refused, the boy was allowed to attend the kindergarten regular classes for the morning but was also sent to join a special education school in another district which he had to attend in the afternoon. Despite the fact that Rafael made some social and academic progress in this kindergarten, his behaviour was the major stumbling block to remaining there. The school district recommended that he be placed in a special education class. Although his parents opposed the decision, the school district eventually convinced them to place their son in a segregated class but promised to take him back to the local regular school when mainstreaming possibilities are explored (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995).

However, when Rafael's behaviour improved there, his local school district made no attempt to mainstream him. Because of that, his parents requested a court hearing. It was found that the school district failed to implement appropriate special education techniques to improve his progress and his behavioural problems occurred due to the lack of additional aids and services that were necessary for him. Because of that, in order to determine the least restrictive environment for the boy, the court created a new test. This time, a new question was added to the test, and future courts would also use it to determine the LRE for children with physical and mental disabilities. It was reasoned that the school district should consider all possible additional aids and

services in determining LRE for the child with a disability, and if necessary, give it itinerant instructions and assign it to a resource room (Laura &Louis , 2014).

Just a year after the (Rafael) Oberti v. the Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District case was over, there took place another major LRE court hearing in the United States. This case was started by parents from California who insisted that their eleven-year-old daughter Rachel should be placed full-time in a mainstream setting. The girl was previously enrolled in various special education programs in her local school district, and according to the test she took there, she had an IQ of 44. The school district refused the request of Rachel's parents. Instead, it suggested that the girl be placed in a class of regular education only for non-academic subjects and continue to attend special programs, according to her ability to learn. Her parents disagreed with the decision and took the matter to the court. For the time their case was being considered, they enrolled their daughter in a private school's kindergarten program (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995 ? Rothstein, & Johnson, 2014? Laura &Louis , 2014).

Sometime later, the court found that Rachel made considerable progress in this kindergarten and her behaviour was not unusually disruptive there. It also appeared that the school district exaggerated the true cost of supplementary services that the girl actually needed. The court ordered that the school district place the girl full-time in a mainstream second grade classroom and provide her with necessary additional aids and services. Apart from using the tests that were created in the above-mentioned cases, the court asked the school district to consider a few more factors in determining the LRE for disabled children. It asked the district to take into account what effect the presence of Rachel had not only on other students but also on her teachers. It was highlighted that the actual cost of mainstreaming her should also be taken seriously. Later, this case became known as the Holland Case or Sacramento City Unified School District, Board of Education v. Rachel Holland (Laura,Louis .2014).

The next LRE case was heard by the same circuit court which decided the Holland case and entered the history as Clyde K. v. Puyallup Case (Rothstein., & Johnson, 2014). This time, the dispute was over a fifteen-year-old Ryan who suffered from Tourette's syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Ryan attended a mainstream education class and received special education aids and services in the Puyallup School District (Washington). In 1992, in the middle of the school year, the student's behaviour started to deteriorate and become unusually disruptive. He started to assault teachers and students, his remarks toward females in the school consisted of the elements of sexual harassment, and seeing him kicking furniture and other objects become no longer unusual in the class. When the school district insisted that Ryan should be placed in a special education setting, his parents initially agreed to that but changed their mind a bit later. The matter was taken to the court which eventually upheld the decision of the school district. This time, the court used the test which it created in the Holland case. However, this case was unique as unlike other cases, the judges had to determine the LRE for an older youth with no signs of retardation. The judges took into account that his presence had a very negative effect on other students in the school, his behaviour precluded him from learning, and he no longer received any non-academic benefit in the school. That was the fifth court case which configured the LRE concepts (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995 ? Rothstein, & Johnson, 2014? Laura &Louis , 2014).

The sixth LRE case was heard by U.S. District Court of Denver, the state of Colorado. In this case, the parents of a nineteen-year-old retarded students Gregory insisted upon placing him in their neighbouring high school in order to integrate him into his local community. They argued that attending special education in other city

cannot provide their son with the LRE. However, the court dismissed this claim and said that LRE concepts do not cover such requirements (Gruenhagen &Ross, 1995).

Those courts became the historic background for today's LRE concepts which are included in the Individuals with Disability Education Act. The LRE means that disabled children should have the opportunity to be educated with their peers who have no disabilities to the greatest extent appropriate (American Physiological Association, 2013)

The decision on whether a disabled child will get more benefits in a regular or special education setting must be made by the individual education program team which should approach each case on an individual basis. The schools which accept children with disabilities must be able to provide alternate placements in order to guarantee each of them educational services that meet their individual needs. Every child who is entitled to receiving FAPE must be placed in the least restrictive environment. Public schools which run preschool programs for children with no disabilities should comply with LRE requirements. The schools that do not have such a program in place do not have to initiate it solely to meet placement requirements (Yell, 2012). .

Nevertheless, every school must make sure that the unique needs of each student with mental or physical problems are met properly by placing them in an appropriate setting according to their IEP (Raike, Ed, 2013). At the same time, if a student's behaviour is disruptive and prevents other children in a mainstream class from learning, then regular placement should be deemed as inappropriate for them (Berg, 2004). When an alternate setting is being considered for any disabled person, it is important that they are placed as close to their home as possible. By LRE, school must provide disabled students with non-academic services in as integrated environment as possible. However, for some students, a general education classroom can sometimes be the most restrictive environment, so full inclusion can not be and is not a legal requirement or mandate in education (Keuhne, 1998). When placing a student, it is essential to remember that social benefits often are more important than academic ones (Cpenhaver, 2001).

It is worth noting that the LRE as a complex of specific concepts presents a number of advantages and disadvantages in the education system of America. On one hand, it gives disabled children the opportunity to receive their education in a more natural and simulating environment in which they have high chances of starting friendships with their peers without disabilities (Yell, 2012). This may help them to integrate into their community and feel more confident in their lives when they leave they schools one day. Non-disabled students have the opportunity to learn about differences between various people, and are taught how to tolerate and assist those who are born less fortunate in this world. By having to use different methods and approaches in special education, teachers become more skilled and professional. On the other hand, however, there always are some problems when it comes to implementing the LRE concepts. The teachers of regular schools often are unable to provide special educational services to children with severe behavioural or language disorders (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007).

It has already become clear that to expect from teachers of mainstream education that they will be able to always deal with disabled students in a professional manner is totally unrealistic. It is impossible for them to constantly be ahead of the latest researches or have appropriate knowledge in order to deal with broad range of mental or/and physical disorders. Even if a regular school is assisted by professional specialists, its setting may still be a serious problem for a lot of mentally or physically ill students (Harchik, 2005).

It is obvious that teachers must constantly improve their qualification in order to be able to use specific techniques and strategies in special education. It is crucial to understand that the expectations which teachers set according to disabled students must always be realistic. Without that, no placement can be helpful in improving their academic achievements. When working with mentally impaired students, teachers need to break their assignments into pieces and, if it is possible, try to explain each of them separately. Also, they need to make longer breaks between them, as this usually helps disabled children to get more focused on their works. What is more, it is very important to reward students for their good behaviour, finishing their work in a timely manner, and for being active.

It is crucial to remember that there is no strategy that is good for everyone in special education. Because of that, whatever method is invented, it should be flexible. However, as in special education setting there are usually students with different needs and problems, to create the lesson plan that would fit everyone in the class might be rather difficult. For that reason, teachers should be creative and develop a complex of resources which work and are effective.

Although efficient strategies are most often chosen through the method of trial and error, there, however, are some instructions which are very important to follow in teaching children with disabilities. First of all, lesson plans must always be developed considering the impairments that students who attend the class have. When developing lesson plans, it is essential to ask peers to assess them in order to make sure they will definitely work (Effective teaching strategies for special education, 2013).

When giving a lesson, every response from disabled students must be carefully monitored and verified. The strengths and weaknesses of each impaired person should be taken into account in order to develop an individual plan for teaching them effectively in the future.

One of the effective instructional strategies is Class Wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT). This strategy lies in encouraging students to work in pair, instructing teachers to systematically cover material and correcting errors immediately after their occurrence, conducting tests, and arranging various competitions which are based on points earning.

Another instructional approach which has already proved to be effective is called direct instruction (DI). By this approach, teachers are the only ones who are responsible for students' academic achievements. Timing and wording play a big role in this method of teaching, and sequencing of presenting information in order to explore a general idea of the material is what makes DI effective the most when is used in special education.

Self-monitoring is another strategy designed to be used in special education which helps disabled students to better control their own behaviour and stay more focused on their tasks. The strategy is exceptionally good because it helps children with not only academic problems but also behavioural ones to get ready to be placed in mainstream education classes (Martel, 2009).

Implication of Literature

Reviewing various literatures, one can see that special and regular education teachers are encouraged to use different methods and techniques today, and a lack of resources is not going to be a problem for them in the nearest future. However, the availability of various techniques or/and methods does not necessarily mean that

mainstream education teachers are or will be happy and willing to use them. The inclusion approach in American education makes teaching profession more and more difficult and repels a lot of people from becoming a teacher. There is a shortage of this kind of specialists in the country, and this precludes this profession from becoming popular and competitive. It is a big challenge for American education system indeed, as a lack of competitiveness in it discourages today's teachers from implementing the methods that require hard work even if they are very likely to be effective. On top of that, not every teacher finds the techniques that are allegedly effective really workable (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007). It is a well-known fact that there is no method that is equally good for everyone. The need for finding an individual approach to each student often makes teaching job unbearably hard and confusing. Because of that, determining the LRE for many disabled children in schools still appears to be a real problem nowadays. At the same time however, it is worth noting that this problem has now been addressed much better than it was, for example, several decades ago. It would be wrong to say that there is no progress in improving the opportunity for disabled children to learn in American schools. Today, for example, there is created the Least Restrictive Environment Hierarchy (LREH) in special education, which consists of various hybrid placement programs for disabled children. When determining the least restrictive environment for a child, any of them may be viewed as a possibility. This allows placing a student into a setting, in which their proficiency will be the highest.

Depending on the child's disability, it could be placed in a general education class, which is considered an example of the least restrictive environment, or enrolled in a special residential program, which environment is seen as the most restrictive one. This is a great benefit that today's special education actually provides to mentally and physically ill children.

Conclusion

It has already become clear that the government should do more to implement the principle of the IDEA and improve educational opportunities for disabled children. There are many ways to do that. For example, much more needs to be done to encourage people to become a teacher and make this profession more prestigious. This can be done by increasing wages of such specialists and/or investing more money in their education. Without such steps, it is unlikely that the situation will improve at any time soon, and more and more children with mental and physical disabilities will be missing the opportunity to get educated in the right setting. The sooner the government understands that, the better.

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As a companion piece to the above, this 2-pager is designed for Parent Centers to share with Native youth.

ED's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

To ensure the Department's "significant disproportionality" regulations effectively address this serious issue, the Department of Education is proposing to postpone the compliance date by two years, from July 1, 2018, to July 1, 2020. The Department also proposes to postpone the date for including children ages 3 through 5 in the analysis of significant disproportionality with respect to the identification of children as "children with disabilities" and as "children with a particular impairment" from July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2022. Read the proposed new rule and see where to submit your public comments. Deadline for submitting comments: May 14, 2018

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Latest Employment Opportunities Posted on NASET

* **Family Assistant** - Working single parent with 5 children, aged 8 through 16, seeks an experienced Family Assistant in Lake Forest to join the household team. The ideal candidate has an active, fun, easy-going personality and will enjoy a bustling household with a pool, tennis court, game room, etc. Education degree or certification in special education required. To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher** - Wayfinder Family Services (Wayfinder), formally known as Junior Blind of America, is looking for a Special Education Teacher. Wayfinder's Special Education School provides the best possible services to its students. Our non-public special education school is an individualized, non-academic school for students, ages three through 21, who are multi-disabled and blind or visually impaired. To learn more - Click here

* **Teacher of the Visually Impaired** - The Teacher for the Visually Impaired is responsible for providing itinerant services to students who are served under contract with schools in the Greater New Orleans area. In addition, TVI duties include collaboration with VRS team members to provide extracurricular activities for skill development through transition, recreation, and summer camp programs. To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher** - This position reports to and is evaluated by the site principal. Special Education teachers plan and provide learning experiences for students with disabilities, including cognitive, emotional, or physical disabilities, in a variety of educational settings. Special Education Teachers create a flexible program and learning environment that provide specialized instruction; establish effective rapport with students; may modify general education curriculum to meet students' needs with supplemental aides, accommodations, and other needed supports; and establish good relationships with parents and with other staff members. To learn more - Click here

* **Assistant Principal / BCBA** - We are currently seeking a qualified and enthusiastic Assistant Principal / BCBA for our school in Sherman Oaks. This is an exciting hybrid role that will work directly with our current Assistant Principal, as well as serve as the BCBA. To learn more - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher** - ***Jewish Child & Family Services*** (JCFS) provides vital, individualized, results-driven, therapeutic and supportive services for thousands of children, adults and families of all backgrounds each year. JCFS is currently seeking a Special Education Teacher to work with individuals and small groups of children (K - 12) with emotional and behavior disorders in a therapeutic special education classroom. The Therapeutic Day School is located in West Rogers Park, Chicago, IL. To Learn More - Click here

* **Special Education Teacher - Various** - $50,000/school year (185 days), summers off with year round pay and year round appreciation. Special Education Teachers needed in Arizona (Phoenix and surrounding cities). Needs are in the self-contained and resource settings serving students with emotional disabilities (ED), Autism (A), Severe/Profound (S/P), and Intellectual Disabilities (ID). STARS is the largest school contract agency in AZ. STARS is owned and operated by Occupational Therapists. You will be an employee and receive full benefits. To learn more - Click here

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Acknowledgements

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- National Institute of Health
- National Organization on Disability
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Education-The Achiever
- U.S. Department of Education-The Education Innovator
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- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. Office of Special Education

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