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Special Education Legal Alert

By Perry A. Zirkel

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This month's update concerns issues that were subject to recent published federal court decisions and are of general significance: (a) exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities on the basis of school safety, and (b) attorneys' fees for prevailing parents. Both of these cases relate to other items available on my website perryzirkel.com.

In *William V. v. Copperas Cove Independent School District* (2019), the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reviewed a lower court decision, which is summarized in my April 2019 Legal Alert and which ruled that the school district violated the IDEA by determining that the student did not qualify as specific learning disability (SLD) after diagnosing him with dyslexia. The lower court relied on dyslexia being one of the psychological processing disorders in the IDEA definition of SLD. The specific context of the case, including not only a diagnosis per Texas' strong dyslexia law but also the student's ongoing IEP for speech/language impairment, complicated matters, but the overall generalizable significance of the two-part eligibility test is the key.

The Fifth Circuit vacated and remanded the decision of the lower court for failing to apply the second essential element of eligibility for SLD (and any other IDEA classification—the need for special education.

The appeals court pointed out that IDEA eligibility requires two parts—not only whether the child meets the criteria of any of its listed classifications, such as SLD, but also—based on its impact—the resulting need for special education.

The appellate court did not determine whether this particular student needed special education, instead sending the case back for the district court to make this determination based on missing factual findings within this overall guidance: “While the line between ‘special education’ and ‘related services’ may be murky, case law suggests that where a child is being educated in the regular classrooms of a public school with only minor accommodations and is making educational progress, the child does not ‘need’ special education within the meaning of the IDEA.”

More specifically, the appeals court identified two fatal omissions in the lower court's consideration: (1) whether the accommodations that the district provided to this elementary school student constituted special education rather than related services, and (2) whether the student was making progress with these accommodations. Although emphasizing the essentiality for the second, “need” part of IDEA eligibility, the court also reinforced the blurriness by contrasting special education with “related services” rather than general education and by

	using the term “accommodations” rather than interventions.
The bottom line is simple to state but increasingly difficult—due to state dyslexia laws, RTI/MTSS, Section 504, and other variations in general education—to do: defensibly determine eligibility based on not only the classification but also the need for special education.	
In <i>Albuquerque Public Schools v. Sledge</i> (2019), the federal district court in New Mexico addressed FAPE for a young child who, as a result of Dravet Syndrome, has had life-threatening seizures since infancy that were unchecked by traditional pharmaceuticals but significantly reduced by daily administration of cannabis. The New Mexico Department of Health had determined that she qualified under the state’s law for medical marijuana, which did not extend its immunity to the school grounds and did not conflict with federal criminal law. For the two years of preschool, the IEP team decided upon placement at the neighborhood school for a shortened session rather than instruction in the home, whereupon the child’s mother accompanied her to the classroom and took her off school grounds for the authorized administration upon the start of a seizure. However, at the IEP meeting for full-day kindergarten, when the school district denied the parents’ request for instruction in the home, they filed for due process. The hearing officer found denial of FAPE and ordered the district to provide instruction in the home and an abbreviated option interaction with nondisabled peers at school. The district appealed the decision to federal court, and the parents cross-appealed the adequacy of the remedy for failing to provide fuller relief, including a retroactive remedy and an order for the state education agency (SEA) to seek an amendment of the state’s cannabis law cover such school situations.	
First, the court ruled that the district denied FAPE for kindergarten, not preschool, concluding that the proposed full-day IEP did not meet the <i>Endrew F.</i> reasonable- calculation standard because it put the student’s life or health at unreasonable risk. The court affirmed the hearing officer’s remedy of instruction in the home placement with optional socialization opportunities as FAPE in the LRE.	In reaching its overall outcome, the court concluded that (a) FAPE under the IDEA does not require administration of, or accommodation to administer, cannabis; (b) the IDEA does not allow a district to compel parents to either obtain prescription medication or to accompany the child as a condition for attendance at school; and (c) the district personnel’s implementation of the hearing officer’s homebound order did not pose the asserted risks of losing federal funding or facing criminal prosecution.

Second, the court granted the district’s motion for dismissal of the parents’ cross-appeal, concluding that they were not entitled to: (a) IDEA relief for preschool, because the parent had chosen to accompany the child to effectuate the IEP or (b) Sec. 504 relief for either the preschool or kindergarten year because its refusal to store or administer cannabis complied with state and federal law.	The difference between voluntary choice and district compulsion is not a bright line, with other cases potentially reaching the opposite IDEA outcome depending on the specific factual findings. However, the Sec. 504 conclusion appears more generalizable in light of the existing federal law and its ultimately decisive effect on the IDEA. Nevertheless, the emerging relationship between federal and state statutes regarding the use of cannabis bears careful attention based on continuing state-based policy changes.
Third, the court granted the SEA’s motion for dismissal, concluding that (a) the IDEA cannot be reasonably interpreted to obligate an SEA to pursue amendments of state law in general and particularly those that would permit a federal crime, and (b) the SEA’s failure to seek such an amendment also did not violate Sec. 504, because it was based on the illegal status of cannabis, not the reason of disability.	The parents’ requested SEA remedy was obviously a long shot, probably grounded in symbolic and aspirational reasons. For the alternative Sec. 504 basis, the court expressly stopped short of going in the opposite direction, declining to hold that the student, “as a young child whose parent gives her cannabis to treat a life-threatening seizure disorder, is excluded from the protections of Section 504 or subject to school discipline because she is ‘currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs.’”
The bottom line is to stay attuned to this fluid issue at confluence of the cross currents of federal and state law.	

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Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following links:

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-sept2019-issue1/>

IEP Resources for Families

The Short and Sweet Overview of the IEP | (*Also available in Spanish.*)

Share this crash course on the IEP with families new to special education. It's not long, it's easy to read, and it answers questions such as: What's an IEP? Who develops it, and what does it contain? May parents participate in writing it? May students?

Parental Right to Participate in Meetings | (*Derecho de los Padres de Participar en Reuniones*)

Such an important parental right! This short article answers questions such as: When must the school notify parents of an upcoming meeting? What info must the notice include? What happens if neither parent can attend? May the school hold the meeting without parents in attendance? What is not considered a meeting?

Special Factors in IEP Development

Don't forget about the 5 special factors the IEP team needs to consider for the student. Is behavior an issue? How about limited English proficiency? Blindness or visual impairment? Communication needs or deafness? Does the student need assistive technology? If any of these factors apply to the student, the IEP team must address that factor in the IEP.

For Parent Centers: Staff Favorites

Questions Often Asked by Parents about Special Education Services | (*Preguntas Comunes de los Padres sobre la Educación Especial*)

Great for new staff orientation and as a memory refresher, this publication answers many of the basic questions that parents have about special education in the beginning. Share it with families, of course! It's not a quick read because there are a lot of basics, but the answers are short and straight to the point.

Contents of the IEP | (*Sobre Cada Componente del IEP*)

Here's a useful, quick refresher that branches into deeper explanations of the individual parts of the IEP, from present levels to annual goals to... well, all the way through to transition planning and age of majority!

Training Modules on the IEP Team, IEP Contents, and the IEP Meeting

(All 3 modules are available in *Spanish* also, at the link above.)

In 2016, CPIR updated the 3 central IEP modules in the Building the Legacy training curriculum on IDEA and hosted a webinar to let centers know about their availability and contents. These materials were all vetted by OSEP and designed expressly for Parent Centers and other trainers to use for their own learning and in workshops with families and professionals. Connect with each module, its

slideshow, trainer's guide, and handouts for participants. Listen to the webinar to get a thumbnail sketch of each module's contents.

Want a quick way to find other CPIR training modules on IDEA?

See our quick 2-pager guide in Word, just updated for 2019.

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My Reflection on Teaching a Student with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

By Rocco Adrian
University of South Carolina
Abstract

Teachers face many challenges in their classrooms today. Some of those challenges are how to best support students with special needs. In this article I will define what Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is and give the characteristics of the disorder. I will talk of my experience in the classroom with a student diagnosed with ODD, the challenges I faced and what I did wrong. My aim is to give information to first year teachers on what ODD is, what ODD looks like in the classroom and then offer some strategies and places to get resources so teachers with ODD students are better prepared to meet the needs of those students, giving the teacher and the student a much better chance for success in the classroom.

I taught elementary Physical Education for nine years in a private school right out of college then coached college football for the next seven years. Now I was going to be teaching Health at the high school level in one of our state's biggest schools. In my teacher training, I remember learning about accommodations and having to write lesson plans for students with special needs. On average this first year, each class I taught had between 5 to 7 students with either 504 plans or IEP's. Most of these contained the usual recommendations for students such as preferential seating and guided notes. There was one 504 though that had a diagnosis that I have never heard of before and was certainly not prepared for. That diagnosis was ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) and through my experience I hope that this article will enlighten and equip first year teachers to succeed with ODD students.

What is ODD? According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information DSM-IV, ODD is a pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior that last at least six months, during which four or more of the following are present: 1. Often loses temper, 2. Often argues with adults, 3. Often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules, 4. Often deliberately annoys people, 5. Often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior, 6. Is often touchy or easily annoyed by others, 7. Is often angry and resentful, 8. Is often vindictive. The cause of ODD is not known. The belief is that the cause is a combination of genetic, biological, and environmental factors.

^[1] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. DSM-5 Changes: Implications for Child Serious Emotional Disturbance [Internet]. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2016 Jun. Table 18, DSM-IV to DSM-5 Oppositional Defiant Disorder Comparison. Available from: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519712/table/ch3.t14/

^[1] <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/oppositional-defiant-disorder#1>

I was looking forward to the start my second semester of teaching nine grade health. I was feeling much more prepared for this group of students. I had my lessons made, long range plans set, and having been through each unit once, felt confident the second time would be much smoother. I started off the semester going over procedures, rules, and expectations. I had made social contracts with each class, gone over the syllabus, and started into the first unit. Class was running smooth until one day a student was not meeting the expectations or following the classroom rules. I corrected the student once, twice, and then on the third time I challenged the student with a referral, the next step of discipline in our school policy. The student became more argumentative and defiant which forced me to have him removed. That day began a power struggle between us. The mistake I made was getting into a power struggle at all. Normally, when I challenge any student with a referral, that student would refocus and class would move on. On that particular day, challenging this particular student, diagnosed with ODD, was the worst strategy I could have chosen. I did not understand what ODD was nor did I know how to work with a student who had it. I also did not know how my ignorance about the condition would ultimately affect myself, the student, and the class all together. For the rest of the semester the student would continue to routinely challenge and defy me. What did those daily challenges and deviances look like? They ranged from class outburst, banging on the table, inappropriate comments said aloud in class as well as on our classroom digital networks, getting out of the seat and roaming around the room, and went as far as destruction of classroom resources.

As I searched for ways to try and connect with the student and how to handle the defiance, many questions began to cross my mind, “Why was I not given any information on how to handle such a behavior? Could there have been some literature given along with the student’s 504 to help prepare a teacher on the best practices for working with an ODD student so that there is the best chance for success for the teacher and student? What would my class have looked like if I had known from the start what ODD was, what it looked like in the classroom, and how to best handle the situations when they arose? Would the student, the class, and myself have had a more positive experience throughout the semester?” These questions drove me to reflect back on the experience and seek some solutions to be better prepared to serve students with ODD.

As I reflected back on the day, when the student and I had our encounter, after reading some information about ODD, I realized that my reaction to the incident fueled the student’s behaviors. I realized that I had gotten angry, that I confronted the student in front of their peers, and that I remained in the interaction too long. All of these examples of what not to do caused the student to become more defiant and confrontational.

Through my research and experience, here are some helpful strategies I wish someone had shared with me so I could have been better prepared to accommodate a student with ODD.

First, we as teachers need to keep our emotions in check.

- Stay cool and calm, remember the student with ODD is trying to get a rise out of you.

Second, give the student clear instructions, then move on, giving the student time to process the information.

Third, ignore small negative behaviors when possible, the student may use this strategy to gain attention.

Fourth, be firm and consistent with your classroom rules and expectations.

- Do not give any wiggle room where the student might take advantage if the behaviors are too large to ignore. Be clear with the consequences for not meeting those expectations, and then always follow through. This will help with not allowing a power struggle to generate.

Fifth, give the student choices so that he or she has the feeling of control without diminishing your control of the classroom.

Sixth, give the student an area where they can go and refocus if they are not meeting expectations and disrupting the class or feel as if they are about to.

- This will help to teach the student how to recognize that behavior and learn how to control those impulses.

Seventh, whenever possible, try to use positive reinforcement.

- Quietly giving praise for meeting expectations in class while at the same time not drawing attention to the student.
- Putting together an incentive plan that will allow the student to work towards a goal of getting time to do something they have an interest in during class time.

Finally, reach out to the parents or guardians of the student.

- They may have strategies that work for them that you can use and help keep that consistency for the student.

In conclusion, when I reflect back on my experience of teaching a student with ODD, I look at it as a learning experience. It has inspired me to learn more about the disorder and how to better handle it. The experience has also made me believe that if first year teachers are given information or guidance to this disorder to better prepare for a student with ODD, then they will have a much better chance for success than I did. I believe that giving this information along with 504 plans and IEPs for this disorder or any other disorder would be greatly beneficial to not only first year teachers but to all teachers. In the future, I will be sure to ask for that guidance and information when I receive 504s and IEPs. My hope is that this reflection will provide a little guidance to teachers with students diagnosed with ODD and show that they are not alone in their frustrations. There are resources out there to help provide strategies to turn those frustrations into a positive experience for both the teacher and the student. Teachers can do like I did, they can ask the guidance counselors for information, email the school psychiatrist for any information on the disorder, or reach out to the district compliance coordinator in the department of exceptional children for any resources they can share on how best to fill the needs of our students.

[1] How To Treat Oppositional Defiant Disorder by Janice Rodden

[1] Strategies to Work with Students with Oppositional Defiant Disorder- Woolsey-Terrazas and Chavez

[1] <https://www.weareteachers.com/students-with-odd/>

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Book Review: Hacking Leadership: 10 Ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students, and Parents Love

By Katherine Ramirez

Sanfelippo, Joe; Sinanis, Tony. *Hacking Leadership: 10 ways great leaders inspire learning that teachers, students, and parents love*. Times 10 Publications. 2016. 158 pp. \$18.34.

“The label ‘hacker’ originated in the field of technology, referring to those who circumvented or subverted systems to make innovations” (10). When the term “hacker” is used, successful school leaders are not the typical individuals associated with the term. The book “Hacking Leadership” discusses ten hacks used by effective leaders to help inspire those they lead.

“Hacking Leadership” was written by two individuals, Joe Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis. Joe is a school superintendent and Tony is a building principal. Using their knowledge and experience, they collaborated to create a collection of hacks that are used by effective leaders to help inspire others and discuss ways to implement these hacks into schools. Their beliefs center around communication and relationships.

Sanfelippo and Sinanis wrote this book in order to share effective hacks that are used by leaders and the strategies used to implement the hacks. They believe that effective interactions are the single most important factor and the foundation for a successful school and effective leaders.

The book is centered around ten leadership hacks, or strategies, that are used by great educational leaders. These leaders see problems in a different light and use the hacks to tackle typical problems in the school setting. The ten strategies include: be present and engaged, create culture, build relationships, flatten the walls of your school, broadcast student voices, center school around the children, hire superstars, passion projects for adults, collaborate and learn, and change the mindset. Each hack is based around the concept that positive interactions are the foundation for success.

The authors used the ten hacks to support their thesis that positive interactions are the foundation for effective schools. Some of the most important hacks used are being present and engaged, creating culture, building relationships, and collaborate and learn. Sanfelippo and Sinanis begin by discussing the importance of being present and engaged in the workplace. A school leader will not be able to effectively lead the school if they view the position as a manager (17). School leaders need to have positive interactions with individuals to develop meaningful relationships and the best way to initiate these interactions is by smiling, being transparent, listening, and leading with joy (18). Listening, even for fifteen minutes twice a day, can make huge differences in the lives of individuals. Truly hearing what others have to say and asking meaningful questions is the main part of being present and making others feel important. When practicing this strategy, the authors state that a list should be kept of everyone who was already spoken to, to ensure everyone has a change to be heard (20). To further support their thesis that personal relationships increase leadership skills, Sandelippo and Sinanis included a six-step process to help become fully present and engaged in the school culture. These steps include starting every day with personal interactions with the students and staff, using

morning announcements to enhance the community, cover classes for teachers to catch up on planning, start clubs during recess tailored to student interests, start a blog to share educational beliefs with the community, and create a dream team of individuals to help make decisions regarding the school (24). For principals, popping into the classrooms to build relationships with the teachers and students is another strategy to build relationships. Taking time each day to interact with the classes shows dedication and interest in their learning. Being engaged in the school needs to happen in the school, not in the office (26). Being present and engaged in the workplace is just one way to build relationships through positive interactions in the educational setting.

Positive interactions lead to positive relationships which nurture a positive school culture. Creating a positive culture within the school takes time, effort, and patience. The authors claim that culture is tied to relationships and if the culture is created correctly, then things will fall into place.

Unfortunately, many leaders believe that they cannot make a difference in the school culture single handedly and give up trying to change. Negative feelings can lead to a negative culture which leads to negative relationships. Sometimes, the culture evolves from stagnant beliefs and becomes another way to say, “this is the way we have always done things” and they never change (33). Creating a positive culture can begin with the acronym CULTURE: Communication Uncovers Learning, Transparency Ultimately Reveals Everything. The authors state that clear communication is the foundation for a positive culture because it eliminates the chances for miscommunication and allows for individuals to be transparent. Teacher want to be included in the school’s decisions and changes. When the leaders of the school keep everything a secret and do not involve the teachers, the teachers are left in the dark where their opinions and involvement do not seem to matter. Openly communicating and being transparent allow for individuals to build relationships which lead to creating a positive school culture (34). The authors outline five steps to help develop the school culture. The steps include communicating updates with individuals involved, educating the family and staff on any technological platforms that will be used in the school, ask for feedback from individuals involved, allow for others to share experiences once the culture has been established, and always continue to focus on the goal and build onto the culture (37-39). The authors state that “the school leader embodies a school’s culture [and their] words and actions represent a school’s priorities and concerns” (45). Through the use of these five strategies, leaders can develop a positive school culture.

The authors state that building relationships begin with positive interactions. Building relationships does not explicitly mean between leaders and teachers. Great leaders make time for relationship building between leaders, teachers, students, and parents (47). The authors discussed simple techniques that can be quickly implemented to help build relationships between individuals involved in the school. The techniques include setting up a google calendar to share successful strategies and events, writing positive notes to staff, reviewing the school social media sites to see the latest events, follow through on commitments, make positive phone calls to parents, address issues in a timely manner, and send thank you cards to teachers, staff, parents, and family members for being an important part of the support system. These techniques are quick ways to build and strengthen relationships around the school (50-52). The authors also discussed techniques which require more time to plan and implement. One major strategy to remember is to build up momentum with the

staff before the school year begins by calling the teachers and providing school shirts for everyone. Calling teachers shows that they are an important part of the team and makes them feel appreciated. Providing matching shirts in the beginning of the year also shows everyone that they are a part of the team and they are there to face challenges together (53). Keeping the first staff meeting short is another strategy to build relationships with staff. The teachers want to work in their classroom and prepare for their students. They do not want to waste time listening to long speeches and information. Keeping the first meeting short and sending out electronic handouts shows the teachers that their time is valuable (54). The third strategy is to show off work the students and staff have completed through bulletin boards or the school newspaper (55). When it comes to after school events, incorporating the opinions of the staff is another strategy that can be used. Everyone has their own comfort zones and by using the suggestions from staff will encourage a larger turnout for after school events like team building exercises (56). The leaders should also participate in large events to build relationships. Showing up to the 100th day of school celebration, fall festivals, and aware ceremonies shows parents, students, and staff that you are involved in the school events and care about celebrations and the success of those involved (57). Even though large events are important to show up to, it's the small events that also make a difference. Taking time to cover a class to help out a teacher, keeping kids occupied occasionally to allow time for teachers to plan, or planning little meaningful and helpful surprises are all ways to show the staff that you care and they matter (58). The last strategy is to be transparent about personal growth to the staff. Show them how you have improved and ask for feedback from the staff. The authors state that "making this process transparent helps develop trust" (58). Trust is a major component to building relationships. By incorporating these strategies and quick tips into the school, relationships can be developed and strengthened through positive interactions.

The fourth hack to becoming an effective leader is to flatten the walls of the school to create a partnership with the community. Sandelippo and Sinanis explain that by becoming transparent with the happenings inside and outside of the school, the community will be able to see the learning that is happening inside of the walls. Traditionally, schools and social media do not mix. The authors believe that by thinking outside of the box and combining the two, a positive culture can be developed. By breaking down the familiar barriers and thinking outside of the box, leaders can share the school's accomplishments with the surrounding community. Some quick ways to share content with the community is by determining the most popular social media sites used by the local community, creating a calendar everyone has access to with important events, and use social media trends and hash tags to unite the students, staff, and parents. In terms of long-term commitment, the following are some strategies to run school social media sites. The leaders can connect multiple social media account to one account to allow one post to be posted to every platform at once. Another strategy is to set goals on what and how much should be posted on school accounts. This is to keep the page active without becoming overwhelming. Informing users of the social media pages is an important strategy because the only way they will know how to access the page is by being introduced to the new forms of communication (67). It is important to remember to keep the page active and relevant. Some tips to keep the page active, relevant, and interesting are to have a student take over for the day to share information, streaming the platform from the school website, and offering contests for individuals watching the page. By creating social media platforms to keep in

touch with the community, they are able to see and is going on in the school and feel a part of the school community (70). By becoming a transparent school, the culture of the school enhances which helps strengthen relationships between leaders, parents, students, and teachers.

The fifth hack is to collaborate and learn with other individuals. A one-size-fits-all approach for professional development is not the best option when trying to meet the needs of as many individuals as possible. Sitting through lectures are not engaging and the teachers are often left without any new knowledge because of their lack of interest and concentration. Providing collaborative breakout sessions where everyone can share their own experiences, get advice on their difficulties, and learn from the experiences of others allows the greatest learning opportunities (121). Some quick ways to incorporate cooperative learning into the school environment is by creating sign up on google calendar to discuss needs and goals to help guide professional development opportunities, share information constantly to build on constant collaboration, schedule common free time between teams to help guide them to collaboration time, and track professional development through a collective google calendar. Leaders can implement this hack into their school through more long-term strategies such as determining the readiness for change from the staff. Everyone approaches change differently and while some teachers may be eagerly waiting for hands on and collaborative meetings, some others are fine with sit down lecture meetings. Gradually introducing a change and offering multiple options are important to reaching as many individuals as possible (123). Another strategy to use is to change staff meetings to professional development meetings. Most of the information shared at staff meetings can be easily communicated through an email. Take the meeting time to collaborate with other teachers on what has been working for them and brainstorm on ways they can improve. Creating a collective learning committee is another way to grown in the area of collaboration. Create a team made up of one member per grade level to stand as a representative of the needs they must help guide future professional development (125). In order for teachers to learn, the instruction needs to be personalized, relevant, and easy to apply in their classroom. Personalized professional development groups lead to positive interactions between teachers and allow for the school to grow (132).

Overall, the authors support their thesis that positive relationships are the foundation to a successful school by discussing and providing examples of useful hacks for school leaders. Being present and engaged is a main component to positive relationships because people can tell when someone is not really listening to what they have to say. The authors state that “leaders don’t change the world by sending emails or scheduling meetings” (22). Getting out into the school and truly interacting with the individuals who make up the school is crucial to be a successful leader. Teachers do not want to seek advice or assistance from someone who does not have the time to listen to their concerns. By bring present and engaged, teachers see the leaders getting out of their offices and working hands-on with the students. This shows the teachers that the leaders care about the individuals who make up the school, not just test scores.

Another point made by the authors is the importance of building a positive culture and communication. School culture effects the way people look and feel about a school. If the teachers are unhappy, the culture will be negative. The school culture is connected to positive interactions because positive relationships lead to a positive culture, which facilitates positive relationships and

interactions. Communication is also an integral part of a positive school culture. The authors state that “communication is the beating heart of school culture” (34). Open communication eliminates the chances of miscommunications and enables learning from each other. The school culture is dependent on positive interactions and effective communication guiding the overall feel of the school.

Fullan (2001) also discusses the importance of positive relationships in schools. He stated that “relationships are not ends in themselves. Relationships are powerful, which means they can be powerfully wrong” (65). This is along the same concepts that Sandelippo and Sinanis make that positive interactions (relationships) are the foundation to success. Positive interactions effect the way people look at others and lead to positive relationships. Understanding this concept will help guide future interactions with others.

One element the author could work on is the importance placed on the use of electronic sources. The authors state that Google forms can be used to ask questions to staff (20, 56, 58), Google docs can be used to share communication plans with families (37), and Google calendar to share future events (39, 50, 122). While communal documents such as Google docs or calendar can be a useful tool when it comes to sharing information or collaborating, some issues arise. Many individuals do not like to use electronic forms of communication, may not have access to internet, or are confused as to what it is in the first place. Sharing information with everyone can be difficult and by using electronic sources, it allows everyone to access the information when they need it, however, it might not be the most realistic strategy. If schools are using electronic means for communication, they should hold informational sessions for individuals who may not understand or feel comfortable accessing the information on the own. They can be taught how to use the sources properly so they do not miss out on the information. One way is never going to suit everyone, however, by helping everyone reach a common goal will help a majority of individuals access the resources.

Schools are like an intricate machine with many moving parts and if one part breaks, the machine does not work properly. Effective leaders need to use these hacks together in order to create positive relationships and open communication between teachers, staff, parents, and students. This book is important for all individuals in the education settings because everyone is a leader in one way or another. This book can be used to develop leadership skills and grow as an individual and a school.

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Book Review: School Leadership that Works

By Alicyn Fifield

Abstract

This is a book review of the book *School Leadership that Works from Research to Results* by Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty. This book explores the 21 responsibilities of an educational leader and proposes a plan in which to incorporate them in today's schools. The following is a review of the main topics and their potential utility for the educational leader. Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B.A. *School Leadership that Works From Research to Results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD & McREL, 2005. 194 pp. \$27.95.

“According to the U.S. Census Bureau (March 2002), the earning potential (that is, the median income) of a student who graduates from high school is 19,900, compared with \$11,864 for a student who does not” (3). With this fact the authors of *School Leadership that Works* explain the importance of confirming the factors that lead to student achievement and how school leadership affects it.

Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty collaborated to produce this book which uses current research to determine the effects of school leadership on student achievement and to determine which qualities of leadership are most effective in fostering overall successful results for the school. Robert Marzano is a Senior Scholar at Mid-Continent Research for Education, an Associate Professor at Cardinal Stritch University, Vice-President of Pathfinder Education and President of Marzano & Associates consulting firm. He has developed programs for K-12 classroom that affected current research and theory in cognition. He has authored over 20 books and 150 articles. Timothy Waters has been CEO for Mid-continent Research since 1995. He has served in on the board of directors of the National Education Knowledge Industry Association and was a commissioner of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Brian McNulty Is Vice-President of Field Services at McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning). He has served as the Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services in Adams County School District in Colorado. He has more than 30 years of experience in education. He has a PhD in Special Education Administration.

The purpose of this book is to define and identify the main characteristics and responsibilities of an effective principal. The authors base their main thesis on the supposition that a principal who demonstrates effective research-based practices in the school setting can be an agent of change that leads his/her school and the students within it to ultimate success.

The authors of *School Leadership that Works* provide the reader with a solid research base demonstrating the correlation between the effectiveness of the principal and student progress using meta-analysis. “In broad terms our meta-analysis indicates that principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools” (38). After demonstrating the vital importance of

effective school leadership of the principal, they then shift their focus to identifying the qualities that lead to effective leadership at the school level as defined by current research. They begin their review by outlining and explaining in detail what they see as the 21 responsibilities of the school leader (42-43). These are behaviors that are essential to establishing and progressing within an effective atmosphere within the school environment.

The authors then explain about the two types of change encountered: First-order change is described as the type of change that is expected as the next step in an ongoing process. This type of change is usually easily accepted by staff members. The principal will have certain responsibilities from the list of 21 that will continue the natural momentum with this type of change (69). The Second-order change is the more difficult type of change encountered. This type of change meets with the most resistance since it is perceived as a dramatic shift from the current norms. The responsibilities and the order in which the principal uses the 21 responsibilities will be different when instituting a Second-order change than those when addressing a First-order change (70). The next aspect addressed is selecting the right work. The authors explain that there are two models used when selecting the right work. The CSR (Comprehensive School Reform) Model is implementing a research based proven model school-wide (77-81). The second approach to selecting the right work is designing a Site-specific approach. This is a more comprehensive approach in which the leadership team identifies specific interventions that address the needs of the school (81-82).

In the final chapter the authors discuss the development of a comprehensive plan for instructional leadership within the school environment. They take the vast amount of research-based initiatives that they previously discussed and demonstrate how to incorporate it into a comprehensive system of support that principals can utilize in their practice. Their proposal involves five steps: “1. Develop a strong leadership team. 2. Distribute some responsibilities throughout the leadership team. 3. Select the right work. 4. Identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work. 5. Match the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative” (98).

School Leadership that Works has been written on a strong foundation of research. The authors do a thorough job of basing their conclusions on previous research and works from prominent researchers and citing reproducible results garnered from an impressive list of evidenced-based research studies. Their structure for leadership is well thought out and is accurately inferred from this research base. The main weakness of this book is also its greatest strength. The information from the studies, at times, becomes overwhelming and difficult to follow for the average reader. The authors do ameliorate this difficulty to some extent by including an extensive collection of graphs and charts to aid in deciphering the plethora of information and data.

There are some noticeable parallels in *School Leadership that Works* to Michael Fullan’s book *Leading in a Culture of Change*. Both books recognize the importance of leadership when attempting to orchestrate a change in schools. They also agree that moral purpose needs to be the cornerstone for any proposed changes. The purpose of making changes that affect lives must be for the greater good and not just to make a change. Fullan explains that, “it is essential for leaders to understand the change process” (5). The authors of *Leadership that Works* break change down into

2 parts and explain that a principal will need to use different responsibilities in order to address these different types of changes (69-70). Both books stress the importance of relationships. *Leading in a Culture of Change* is more direct in emphasizing the importance of relationships, whereas the authors of *Leadership that Works* breaks relationship conducive activities over several of the 21 responsibilities that they identify. They do, however, specifically state in responsibility number 12, “Attending to and fostering personal relationships with the staff” (71). In *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*, Richard Elmore emphasizes the importance of understanding effective practices in curriculum. This is picked up in number 4 of the 21 responsibilities in *School Leadership that Works*. Specifically, stated as, “Seeking out and keeping abreast of research and theory on effective practices in curriculum (71). The authors take a more collaborative approach to leadership distribution than do James Spillane and his colleagues do in *Distributed leadership: Towards a theory of school leadership practice*.

Overall, this was a very useful book on the subject of school leadership. The authors used meta-analysis to draw conclusions from well documented established research in order to identify the responsibilities that lead to effective educational leadership. They were then able to demonstrate how to break down these responsibilities into a workable plan that could be implemented to bring about the type of changes that might be needed in order bring about increased student achievement and overall school improvement.

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Differentiated Instruction and Students with Disabilities in a Co-Teach Inclusion Setting: A Review of the Literature

By Maria Frontela

Students with disabilities (SWD) placed in general education classrooms are at risk of increasing their knowledge gap. SWD in the least restrictive environment often need extra support to better understand objectives and content material. However, focusing on setting alone, the inclusion model can better support SWD. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) focused on teaching strategies that increased typical students and SWD participation in the classroom as well as using the actions of the teachers to be presented in a format that can be useful for other teachers. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) analyzed the teachers' practices that were directly linked to the inclusion pedagogy. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) set observations and conducted interviews to discuss with the participating teachers. To conduct their study, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) brought together elements over their research together. As mentioned in the study, the researchers adapted and extended a framework from Black-Hawkins (2007) and Rouse's (2008) insight.

In the research, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) reported on the strategies used in the inclusion setting. One major thought or practice that was mentioned consistently was the mindset of focusing on what is being taught and how instead of who is being taught. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) declared that the teacher-participants focused on formative assessments to support learning and believing all students can make progress. Lastly, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) determined that the participant teachers view the difficulties as professional challenges and consistently attend professional developments to better support their practice.

To measure the teacher's inclusion practices, the research team created an instrument. The instrument called for the presence or absence of their practice, decision-making, and actions. The researchers concluded three findings from their study. The first finding was that there will inevitable challenges in the inclusion model. Secondly, the researchers determined that the inclusion model can vary tremendously between classrooms. It was also supported through a different study and the researchers commented on the inability to make the playing field leveled as there are many different school models throughout. The final finding focused on the teacher's craft knowledge of the inclusion pedagogy with the use of strategies. It was clear that teachers who used the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) focused highly on the content and how it was delivered, and not so much on the students themselves. Once it was clear that the student was not understanding the material, teachers had to determine the plan of action for this particular student, which leads to data-based decision-making to determine and meet the needs of the students.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) conducted the study in two elementary schools in Scotland over a period of six months. They explained that the two schools were selected due to their inclusive

practices. In one of the schools, the researchers visited 5 classrooms, and 6 in the other school. During the observations, the researchers had ensured they had visited classrooms that ranged from 3-12 years old. For most of the study's goals, the interview was focused on 11 classroom teachers. The interviews were done in person and recorded to ensure the most accurate interpretation.

Overall, the study provided the reader with an effective inclusion model. The study provided the reader with the mindset that inclusion teachers require to effectively teach SWD alongside the typically developing students. The research also discussed the strategies used in the inclusion setting. The research determined that the teacher must use the universal design for learning to reach all students. The study also made it clear that teachers in the inclusion setting are ready for challenges and are willing to make it work. This study lends to the current research to determine the appropriate methods to use in class and the appropriate mindset.

A study Strogilos et al. (2017) shows D.I. to be effective for a variety of challenges that are presented in the classroom. However, Strogilos et al. (2017) discussed why and how teachers are misusing D.I. in the classroom and how it presents more challenges to the teacher's plate. Strogilos et al. (2017) examined and defined what D.I. meant as its first goal to establish a clear picture. Additionally, its second goal is to identify factors that influence the development of D.I. in the co-teach inclusion setting.

To find answers, Strogilos et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative research within 34 schools, specifically in a co-teach inclusion model setting. The data collection lasted over a period of six months. The data collection instruments included interviews and observations. Interviews were used with the teacher to answer the first study question of their understanding of the D.I. concept. The interviews were conducted afterschool and the teacher-partners were separated. The interview was guided towards the teacher's understanding of D.I. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes and were video recorded. Observations of the instructional practice of D.I. was also conducted throughout the study. Every teacher pair was at least observed once. The observation lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Observations were described as naturalistic and unstructured.

The study was very detail oriented with the data collection. The analysis of the data collection in this study was very thorough. Strogilos et al. (2017) transcribed the interviews and observations to better understand the context of the teacher's instruction and pedagogy of D.I. The researchers determined that the teachers do not have a consistent view on D.I., which in turn does not provide accurate information on how well students can accomplish when D.I. is presented appropriately. However, the study continues to describe the misconceptions used amongst the teachers in the study when discussing D.I. The study failed to provide the teachers with the appropriate training and tools needed to truly provide the students with better instruction. Yet, Strogilos et al. (2017) could have been more precise and detailed oriented with the teachers. In the end, the study answered it's second question about factors of D.I. being challenging. They agreed some factors were: limited knowledge of the strategy, limited collaboration with co-teachers, large class population, and space as challenges for teachers.

Differentiated Instruction and Teacher Practices

Smets (2017) questioned the complexity of Differentiated Instruction (D.I.) and bridge the gap between the research on teacher effectivity with the practice-based research. Smet's goals in the study was to create an instrument that scaffolds the teachers' decision making when presented in a situation regarding D.I.

Smets (2017) began her study with research from previous studies and starts her research by explaining a bit more about the differences between two researchers' definitions of D.I. Smets uses Tomlinson and Coubergs and Struyven research to compare. When comparing the two, the author created a table in which she can write the operational definition to create a common factor between the two studies. The operational definitions and characteristics of D.I. from the previous studies provided Smets with a foundation of an instrument that would implement throughout the study. The checklist created involved different areas of teaching styles. The checklist included teacher/student interpersonal skills, learning goals, and lesson designs. In under these categories, the researcher created tasks that are found in common D.I. models in previous research. Smet (2017) states that teaching is a complex career that requires many tasks. Therefore, it could be tough to indicate whether the checklist would be an effective measure. To the contrary, the author stated in the discussion that the checklist would be a great guide, but not a to-do list that needs to happen for D.I. to occur in the classroom. However, this study was purely a study of previous research to assist Smets with the development of a tool will aide teachers in differentiating instruction amongst students with disabilities and their typically developing peers.

Data-based decision making (DBDM) is a teacher practice that fuels differentiated instruction. Without this strategy, teachers often do not practice the best methods for true differentiated instruction. According to research, there is a relationship between data-based decision making and D.I. (Faber, Glas, & Visscher, 2018). In this study, the authors aim to find out how effectively DBDM is in relation to student achievement. In this study, all the teachers were trained in how to use DBDM appropriately. The study used Keuning and Van Geel's (2012) model that provides four steps to DBDM.

Faber, Glas, & Visscher (2018) studied the teacher's abilities to crate groups to provide D.I. in the classroom to support the needs of all students in an inclusion classroom setting. The researchers three main hypothesizes were: students will achieve higher student outcomes with more D.I., student outcomes are higher in classrooms that provide pre-planned D.I., and students from different-ability groups do not benefit to the same degree as students with teachers who differentiate instruction. The participants included elementary aged school children in elementary schools throughout Dutch schools. The schools were selected through a survey that indicated levels of strong data-based decision-making skills. From these schools, second and fifth grade classrooms were selected to ensure a variety of elementary levels. Faber, Glas, & Visscher (2018) selected a total of 26 schools that included 51 teachers and 953 students to collect and analyze data. The study results came back with high differences between classrooms. Although the percentages were high, around 37%, the researchers determined that the variance was due to teacher differences. Additionally, the researchers stated that 19.33% of those differences were due to teaching moments.

The authors truly understood and accepted that the study does not accurately measure the relationship between D.I. and student achievement. In fact, the authors provided a better model to address that question. The authors believed that focusing on a small group of students and pre-determining their needs to then provide D.I. would paint a more detailed and specific answer. The authors also state that most of the researched conducted for this study was focused on data-based decision-making and not D.I. They believe if there was more D.I. research conducted, the teachers would have provided more D.I. strategies that could have altered the results of the study.

The results of the study indicate that students in low-ability groups do no benefit from ability grouping, whereas those students found in average-ability groups do benefit and those in high-ability groups have no change (Faber, Glas, & Visscher, 2018). Additionally, the students in mixed-ability groups do not benefit from D.I. as others may have.

From a different perspective, Hani Morgan (2014) provides strategies and educational concepts that could help teachers provide D.I. in a study. Morgan describes theories such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. In this theory, the student can master objectives if seated in the zone of proximity to the teacher. This theory does not limit to seat placement in the classroom. It could be extended to close presence throughout non-instructional activities. She also writes about other strategies like Carol Ann Tomlinson's research on personalized instruction (2010). The author describes Tomlinson's approach for students who do not fit the mold. Morgan continues to describe three strategies used in Tomlinson's approach as emphasizing student interest, using the right starting point, and allowing students to work at their own pace (2014). The combination of all three are what Tomlinson describes as personalized instruction. Morgan describes various techniques that can be used to D.I. in the classroom setting.

Morgan concludes that differentiated and personalized instruction is required more now than ever. Morgan believes that the learners coming in now are the most diverse and composed of different needs. Morgan encourages multiple intelligences, technology, and digital resources to meet the needs of the students (2014).

More research has been conducted on D.I that zone in on teacher practices. In the 2011 study, the authors presented D.I. has some special tool special education teachers are using (Ernest, J. M., Heckman, K. A., Thompson, S. E., Hull, K. M., & Carter, S. W.). The study begins with the definition and models of D.I. and then to a case study of a special education teacher and her use of D.I. in the classroom. The study uses a structure that involves three interrelated areas (data collection, data-based planning, and D.I. as a systematic approach to individualization).

During five-week study, the teacher had to collect data of the students using pre-tests and complete a self-assessment on teacher practices. During the second stage, the teacher analyzed data collection results from the students to determine their strengths and weaknesses. The teacher would determine two D.I. strategies. Next, the teacher needed to implement the individual interventions for the students for at least a week. Finally, a data-based reflection followed to note if the interventions selected were useful or not. If not, the teacher would re-assess the student based on data presented to determine new D.I.al strategies.

Overall, this study made clear that many challenges can arise while providing D.I. to students. The study mentions how goal-setting is a detailed process that could take some time. The study also mentioned during the data collection phase how important assessment checks are. A variety of assessments need to be provided to get a better picture of the students thought process. Additionally, the assessments will provide the teacher with a better understanding of where the student stands. However, the study states assessments will drive the individualization of the D.I.

In most of the study previously mentioned, authors seem to agree on one common thing: D.I. is a challenge in the classroom. In a study by Barbara Kline Taylor, Taylor models effective differentiated instruction through content, process, and product (2015). Taylor states the first thing necessary is to get to know your students. Learning the population of the students through informal surveys allowed Taylor to learn the student's learning styles. Taylor (2015) continues how to describe how she differentiates content, process, and the product of student work. Based on her study, differentiating content would be the complexity, the process would be the learning style and delivery of instruction, and product would be providing the students with an open platform to demonstrate their knowledge. The study goes deeper and tells about the curriculum program that is implemented, called *Understanding by Design* (UbD). The program can be used throughout all stages of differentiating instruction. The program provides the teacher with a guided-hand.

Taylor (2015) will examine the implementation of a program that aims to increase academic achievement throughout the differentiated instruction process. However, Taylor (2015) homed in on the steps of using content, process, and product. The study failed to mention the efficacy of the program and does not provide qualitative that could be beneficial for the research at hand. Strategies to assist in the implementation of D.I. will help teachers effectively provide effective D.I. in the classroom. According to a study by Ismajli and Imami-Morina (2018) research was conducted in public and non-public schools to analyze interactive strategies, describe the level of understanding of D.I. by teachers in public and non-public schools, and the parents' point of view regarding D.I. The study uses students, teachers, and parents of the students to participate in the study.

For this research, students and teachers were presented with a questionnaire. The teachers' questionnaire had two sections and its duration was roughly twenty minutes. The two sections focused on: understanding D.I. and implementation of D.I. On the other hand, students were given an 8-question questionnaire with answer alternatives. Parents in this study underwent an interview with the researchers. Parents were interviewed on school premises and oral responses were recorded and consisted of 5 open-ended questions.

Based on the results found in this research, it can be concluded that students prefer to learn in new and innovative ways. According to the research, teachers from this study do not have enough knowledge of D.I. to be implementing it appropriately for students. Additionally, the parents concluded that there is not enough D.I. being implemented in the classroom.

As a take-away, teachers should take a step back and become the student regarding D.I.. Educators need to research and understand the model and its' primary goals to then implement it in the

classroom. Students, according to this study, show that they are eager to learn using innovative strategies. Parents as well seem to be on board for this model, but educators need to understand it and how it should be implemented in the classroom to meet the needs of the students.

Implementing D.I. in the classroom does not always have to be boring. According to a study by Trinter, Brighton, and Moon (2015), D.I. can be delivered through games. The study discusses how differentiated instruction can be used in teacher-created games. The study also describes the process of creating mathematics classroom games that help the teacher provide D.I. The game design is based from Tomlinson's framework.

The study describes the four steps in transforming a traditional game into an educational differentiated game. Trinter, Brighton, and Moon (2015) believe the first step is to determine the learning goal. Once the whole learning goal is determined, the teacher must create mini goals for three areas: knowledge, understanding, and skills. The know is the information they should know, the understanding is big ideas about the topic that the students should understand, and the skills are the skills they should learn how to perform with the topic (Trinter, Brighton, & Moon, 2015). The second step is determining that game format. Examples of the format include board games, card games, computer games, and so on. The study explains the third step as modifying the game aspects of context, rules, and intended outcomes. The final step is to design relevant graphic designs. The study suggests laminating and using card stock to help the durability of the game.

The study does a good job at explaining how to effective great games that can differentiated instruction. However, the study does not provide guiding questions for a teacher to think of before creating the game, or during the creation. The study could have been more explicit in designing games that truly assist the teacher in creating such activities for the students. The practice however, does seem interesting and could in fact improve student participation and peak student interest.

In a final study, Roy, Guay, and Valois (2013) aimed for three goals: create a D.I scale (DIS), verify the scale through factor analysis, and to report the instructional strategies the teachers used in combination to the scale. The study began with the creation of the DIS that took elements from previous instruments and instructional adaptations. Once the instrument was created, the team decided to test the instrument in a study. The participants rated 15 items on a six-point Likert scale where 1 represented totally disagree and 6 would represent totally agree

During the analysis stage of the instrument, the authors indicated there was trouble with the scale that caused variance in the results. The original scale given to the teachers consisted of 25 questions. From those questions, upon analyzing the data, the researchers concluded that four questions caused a variance. To collect the truest results, the questions that conveyed unclear questions were discarded and information

The authors also reported the instructional strategies used by the teachers throughout the study. The most common strategies reported were adjusting amount of work and providing additional support. Whereas the least reported were varying the complexity of the students' work and adapting the lesson format.

In the discussions, the authors agree that instructional adaptations and academic progress monitoring are two factors that complement dimensions of D.I. However, the study had its limits. The teachers had to self-report, which could have been done in a favorable way. Additionally, the study was only conducted in one session. There have not been any further studies to determine the reliability. Finally, the study did not present any academic achievement testing that could have made an impact on the student. Instead, the study focused on the instrument created and authors agree that further testing on the scale needs to be conducted before making a final decision on the success of the scale.

The literature review supports the significant need to further conduct research on differentiated instruction and its' relation to student academic achievement or success. The literature review supports differentiated instruction may have an impact on student with disabilities on their academic success in a co-teaching inclusion setting. Throughout the literature review, implementing best practices was mentioned frequently amongst most of the literature.

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Autism Spectrum Disorder: The Correlation and Contribution to Parental Stress

By Kathrina Bridges

Abstract

As a parent, it is the norm to experience stress. However, for parents who are raising children with autism, everyday stressors are drastically increased. The review of the literature will examine five studies that were conducted to report that parents of children with autism experience more stress than parents of neurotypical children. An abundance of stress is detrimental to parents' health who are highly stressed which can cause mental health problems, including depression and anxiety. The importance of examining this topic will provide caregivers, professionals, parents, doctors, and teachers the ability to understand how research supports that parents with children on the autism spectrum experience more stressors and provide strategies on how to best support those who are directly involved.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder, stress, mental health

Parenting Stress and Autism: Age, Severity, Quality of Life, and Behaviors

Several studies have been conducted and have been well documented that caring for a child with autism spectrum disorder has a negative impact on their well being including parental stress, health, and mental health including anxiety and depression. However, stress related to caring for a child with a developmental disorder, such as ASD, may be qualitatively different from the stress experienced by parents of typically developing (TD) children (Deater-Deckard and Scarr, 1996). Research to date has not focused directly on children with autism spectrum disorder across a broad age range. Parenting stress with a child on the autism spectrum disorder does not contribute to the child's age, the severity of ASD, the child's quality of life from the parent's perspective or problem behaviors. While child age and ASD symptomatology are suggested to impact general experiences of stress in parents of children with an ASD, other child-related variables may also influence experiences of parenting stress (Mcstay, Dissanayake, Scheeren, Koot, & Begeer, 2013). Through research, including several measures such as the parenting stress index, SRS, Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory, and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Rating Scale it was determined that the association between parenting stress and children on the autism spectrum disorder with comorbidity of hyperactive behaviors played a role on impacting levels of parenting stress. Furthermore, the clinical evidence supports that parents need to be provided with training on how to best manage their child's behavior.

Parental Stress and ASD: Severity and IQ

Studies indicate parents raising children with ASD have elevated stress levels. When an individual experiences stress, their bodies are able to engage in coping mechanisms to alleviate stress. However,

parents with children on the autism spectrum disorder experience high levels of stress have a difficult time regulating their bodies to reduce their stress levels. High level of stress occurs throughout different race, ethnicities, and countries. Those parents who show high levels of parental stress usually perceive their children as difficult and show patterns of ineffective disciplining and dysfunctional parenting, frequently leading to greater difficulties in the child (Abidin, 1992; O'stberg & Hagekull, 2000). When a child displays problematic behaviors, it leads to higher levels of stress for parents. When parents experience a higher level of stress it affects the parenting behaviors which then increases the child's problematic behaviors once more. Another factor that plays a role in increased levels of stress in parents with children on the autism spectrum disorder is the child's level of intellectual ability. The capacity at which a child has the potential to learn, the ability to learn as well as the manifestation of problematic behaviors affects parental stress levels. Based on research, not all parents raising a child with ASD experience high-stress levels. An event is experienced as stressful based on the meaning one attributes to the event and the perceived coping resources (Pastor-Cerezuela, Fernández-Andrés, Tárraga-Mínguez, & Navarro-Peña, 2016). Parents who are equipped with resilience manage to function well and come out stronger. Despite having a child diagnosed with ASD, parents build resilience and have a more positive outlook. A recent review of the resilience literature on parents of children with ASD (Bekhet, Johnson, & Zauszniewski, 2012) concluded that those who possess indicators of resilience are better able to handle the challenge of raising a child with ASD. Comorbidity with ASD, distractibility, and hyperactivity once again was founded to play a role on increased levels of parental stress. A child's verbal IQ is a predictor of parental stress. The worse the child's linguistic skill, the more the parental stress was related to the child's characteristics. In the case of children with ASD, poor linguistic skills probably imply worse communication skills, which could be related to greater parental stress (Bebko, Konstantareas, & Springer, 1987). Results also showed that the lower the child's performance IQ yielded, the greater increase in parental stress. In particular, the child's lower intellectual ability was associated with higher parental stress related to the child's capacity to adapt to changes and transitions and the degree to which the child meets the parents' expectations and is accepted by them, although not consciously (Pastor-Cerezuela et al., 2016).

Parental Stress, Discipline Strategies and Behaviors

Evidence supports that parents of a child with ASD are more stressed when compared to caregivers with neurotypical developing children and children with other medical and developmental delays. For example, Seltzer, Greenberg, Hong, Smith, Almeida, Coe, & Stawski (2010) found that mothers of children with ASD and a history of clinic-level behavior problems showed reduced cortisol activity. This reduced cortisol activity was similar to the reduced cortisol activity found in those experiencing chronic stressors (e.g., combat veterans and families of children with chronic illnesses). Problematic behaviors often stem from a response to parent demand and then are followed by a discipline strategy. Parental discipline strategies can vary from a lax response, harsh or overreactive response or a strategy such as restating the instruction. Children with ASD that display problematic behaviors adversely affect a parent's stress levels and in return the parents' lack of ability to use appropriate discipline strategies increase problematic behaviors in their children. These data clearly document clinically significant levels of parent stress and comorbid child disruptive behavior problems for a large percentage of families (Shawler & Sullivan, 2015). Children with ASD

combined with ADHD (distractibility and hyperactivity) were found to have the most problematic behaviors and increased parent stress levels. Current parent training programs for children with ASD focus on child behavior and do not place any emphasis on parent-child interactions.

Maternal Stress and Family/School Relationships

Compared to mothers of children without disabilities, mothers with children with disabilities have higher levels of stress. Research has not been conducted to determine other factors that contribute to maternal stress other than those of the characteristics of their children with disabilities. Parents that experience a positive school relationship are shown to have less parent stress and a better quality of life. Conversely, poor family-school partnerships may elicit increased stress. In the extreme form of poor parent-school relationships— when parents file for due process or mediation— they encounter a frustrating process of excessive paperwork, technical detail and jargon, and the high financial costs of retaining an attorney (Schrag & Schrag, 2004). Increased participation in parental advocacy activities and educational placement are also factors of maternal stress. Given that mothers of children with disabilities also constitute a highly stressed group, it may be important to have strong partnerships between these mothers and the child’s teachers and other school personnel (Burke & Hodapp, 2014). School personnel including special education teachers need to pay greater attention to the impact of their relationships with families. As maternal stress correlates with school relationships, when parents are supported then they are able to better provide their children to achieve academic and social success.

Parental Stress: ASD combined with ADHD

When a child is diagnosed with both ASD combined with ADHD it increases the severity of the typical characteristic of the disorders. Raising a child with a neurodevelopmental disorder puts a greater strain on parenting skills than that of raising typically developing children (Miranda, Tárraga, Fernández, Colomer, & Pastor, 2015). Due to the increased stress levels, parents face when raising children with comorbidity of both disorders it places a greater tension in the parent-child relationship. Parents of the children reported that their freedom is restricted, frustrated about maintaining their identities and feel controlled by the children’s demands and needs. Research shows that parents with children with ADHD showed higher stress levels than those of parents with children who are on the spectrum or have a combined diagnosis of ASD and ADHD. Parents believe that the behavior of a child with ADHD is more controllable and that children with ASD are more than likely not able to control their behaviors as they are characteristics of ASD. Furthermore, the study concludes that parent support should be implemented to those parents that are at a higher-risk for parental stress with children who have ADHD.

Conclusion

Raising a child that is neurotypical can present stress on parents throughout their daily lives. However, when parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder combined with ADHD increases parental stress to very high levels. Parents are not equipped to handle the levels of stress that come with raising a child with a disability. When problematic behaviors surface, parental stress increases which cause parents to lack effective parenting skills to deescalate their children. Therefore, the

vicious cycle of behaviors and lack of parenting skills continues. Based on research, evidence, and data presented in the articles it is a known fact that parents with children on the spectrum with or without comorbidity have increased levels of stress. It is to be suggested that resources need to be provided to parents that are experiencing high levels of stress to not only work on their child's behaviors but to also facilitate a healthy parent-child relationship. Parents need to be given the tools to be able to work with their child to increase their bond together that will in return decrease their stress levels. Furthermore, individuals involved with the families including schools, administrators, and teachers need to perfect their system in their schools and communities in order to be able to support the families of children with autism spectrum disorder and ADHD better. In conclusion, parents need to be given the appropriate mental health services which may include an attending psychiatrist, therapist, and a possible combination of medication. Research shows that the greatest impact of having a child with a disability affects parental mental health status which leads to anxiety and depression. With increased stress levels and poor mental health, parents will continue to struggle to take care of their children with special needs in an effective manner.

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Problems in Education of Children with Special Needs in Rural Areas in India

By Ajay Saha and Preeti Pachauri

Abstract

This review focuses on the status of special education in rural India. There are fewer committed teachers, a lack of proper textbooks and technology in classrooms. The study is done to highlight important challenges faced by educators of special children in rural India. It exposes the mindset of private schools and how they have marginalized special needs students by denying admission to them. It shows how some NGO's struggle to reach out to the rural areas to alleviate the unmet needs of special education students. Most special needs students living in rural and tribal areas still have many barriers preventing them from receiving basic education. This review also underlines the current conditions regarding how teachers working in rural areas are not trained in special education. They also lack technological support systems that are available in urban areas. In many rural areas, special needs students are provided training in traditional job skills, but these trainings are not part of their regular school curriculum.

Key Words: Education in rural area, Challenges faced by special needs students, Special Education, Lack of teachers' training/study materials, need of classroom technology and lack of funding

Introduction

This comparative study covers the problem in education of special needs children in rural areas. This study also describes the analysis of development of Special Education in rural areas of India and how poorly the government of India has responded to the needs of special education students. According to Deb (2016), "The interdependent relationship between disability and poverty continues to remain a neglected area of research, despite the fact that the poorest and most marginalized groups in the country is often represented by disabled persons" (p 1).

Status of Special Education in Rural India

Education is a fundamental right of all children, including children with special needs. There have been made many efforts toward achieving this right by the NGOs as well as government of India in the rural areas, but they have not been successful in fulfilling this education need. We find that many students with special needs are marginalized and denied admission to schools in the rural areas of India. In India, disability remains a huge risk for falling under poverty among the working-age population. We observe a direct relationship between the poverty rate and disability prevalence, especially in the rural areas. The persons with disability also experience lower educational attainments and work opportunities in India (Deb, 2016). Special education in rural and remote areas has varied models and practices and is a huge challenge. Although there are schools in such areas, not all are equipped to address the needs of children with special needs.

Children living in rural and tribal areas or in remote parts of the country have many barriers preventing them from receiving education. The core purpose of special education is to build the

capacity to reach out to all children, promoting equity, irrespective of their disabilities, but it is yet to be seen in the remote village of India. In some rural and tribal communities, the teachers are naturally at ease with children with diverse needs, as the schools tend to have heterogeneous classes, with one teacher having to teach combined groups of different grade levels. There is evidence that rural teachers show less resistance to include children with special needs compared to urban teachers. The children have to travel long distances for their education in rural areas because of the lack of infrastructure and transportation facilities, a hardship that is compounded further when there is a disability.

There remains a gap on the poverty analysis for the disabled class of population in India. Since a disabled person is less likely to have access to earning, employment opportunities, education, training and rehabilitation, it results in intensifying poverty on the individual and his family. On the other hand, poverty can also cause disability through lack of access to health care and preventive services that further exacerbating the situation. It therefore seems apparent that disability and poverty cause a vicious cycle—each becoming the cause and effect.

According to Das & Shah (2014), “The early origins of special education in India started with Christian missionaries and nongovernmental agencies which stressed a charity model of serving populations such as the visually, hearing, and cognitively impaired” (p 561). Children with disabilities are still being excluded from the mainstream public education system of India. India is one of the few countries of the world where the education of children with special needs does not fall within the purview of human resource development ministry. It is generally the liability of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE). The prime focus of which is rehabilitation, not education (Kumar & Kumar, 2007). In fact, till today, it does not have education, as part of its agenda and the issue of education of approx. 36 million disabled children with disabilities remain imperceptible, hidden from the public domain, a private problem for families and NGOs to deal with. Approximately 80% of Indian population lives in rural areas without provision for special schools. Therefore, inclusive schools have to address the needs of all children in every community and the central and state governments have to train their teachers to manage inclusive classrooms. For a long time, the children with disabilities have been segregated and been deprived of their rights. In the present era, where education is an essential component of life, these children should get equal opportunities and inclusive education is one of those first steps towards lifting the barriers of segregation of the children with disabilities from the mainstream education system.

Education for children with disabilities is the specialized instructions for mentally or physically impaired students whose learning requirements cannot be met by a typical school curriculum. Students are provided specialized instruction in a small group with various accommodations and necessary assistive technologies with related services on a regular basis. This allows students to accomplish their short-term and long-term goals by receiving the specialized instructions to meet their individual needs. The real challenge/problem in India is to locate the total number of special needs students. Insufficient data, does not allow the special education laws/policies to be implemented all around the community without getting a single student deprived of services.

Statistics on disability
in:

1. Mental Disabilities

2. Locomotor Disabilities
3. Visual Impairment
4. Speech Impairment
5. Hearing Impairment

If we consider the estimated census report in two broad categories, there are approximately 27 million physically disabled students and approximately 9 million students intellectually challenged students. In addition to these numbers, another 4 million students are not enrolled in school. These days the enrollment for the special needs students are gradually increasing both in Schools for Special needs and in inclusive system. One thing that needs to be done is that all Special schools become a part from general school system. Earlier Special schools were like a voluntary program. That is why the growth of Special Education in India is not up to the mark. Lately the government of India started funding grants to NGO's for the initiative towards opening more Special schools all over the country. Statistics says in 1960's there were 39 Special schools opened by NGO's but by 1990's the number had grown to 1,100 Special schools all over the India. This growth was mainly because of the law of equal opportunities, protection of right and full participation policies to educate Special needs students. Moreover, there were many other special education schools in various parts of India but not registered as Societies or trust so there is no recognition of such Special Schools due to no appropriate documentation. Until 1970's the government of India's policy promoted segregation. It was the misconception among all educators that children with Intellectual and physical disabilities could not participate in all activities of General education classroom with their normal peers because of their disabilities. As the time passed the government of India's segregation policy was left behind. They begin to think that child with disabilities can equally participate in all activities with their normal peers in general classroom and hence the concept of Inclusive education was introduced in India.

In 1974, the Government of India introduced the first program, "Integrated Education for Disabled Children" (IEDC). The government as well as NGO's participated to implement this Integrated Special Education program in all special schools. This implementation of IEDC program provided the training to all teachers to practice Inclusion, to include the children with disabilities with their normal peers. Thus, the Indian government not only created an inclusive mindset in the community but also the fostered inclusive culture for the disabled children in the society.

I want to make a point by stating that world's second largest populated country like India still a large numbers of special needs/disable students are out of school till date. So the government of India could not even provide the fundamental rights of providing the basic education to all disabled children of India. This leads me to conclude that there is a relationship between poverty and disability in India, particularly in the remote village of India. Most of these poor disabled students are discouraged and deprived of education and hence marginalized from the mainstream society to land up on the street to beg for money.

My heart goes out for these special needs/disabled children who could become highly productive and contributing citizens of India if they receive quality education. Instead, they are seen on the street for begging at such a very young age only because of lack of government not following its own policy to educate these special needs students. Although NGOs tried their level best to come up to the

expectations of government's policy of education for all, but they are not yet successful to accomplish it. It shows the total failure of Government of India. In urban areas, private schools are making huge money only for the sake of admitting special needs students and not with their intent to make them equally educable/able as per their normal peers. This does not only create a demographic inequality throughout the country but also promoting more and more private schools to make profit as in business by not funding the public schools throughout the country with the provision to educate special needs students.

These large numbers of children with special needs in India are no less deserving of education than any other part of the world. With the right resources, institutes and teachers, no doubt a child with special needs can also learn well. We can overcome these obstacles by creating more awareness on special education, by schools having the resources and the ability to re-structure their curriculum to cater to all types of students, by recruiting teachers who have the skills and proficiency to meet varying demands within the classroom and by having the support of family. If these changes are implemented with fidelity, it will increase the confidence of a number of special children to aspire for a valuable education like their normal peers.

I feel there is an educational crisis for the disabled children in India. They do not have equal opportunities and easy access for the free and appropriate basic education as per their fundamental right in the communities. The government must follow national policy strictly not only to improve the quality of life of the disabled children but also by providing them a free and appropriate education. This can only be achieved if the government of India has a separate provision of funding in the annual budget to implement the special education programs in all the public schools of India. In addition, the Government of India must work diligently to eradicate corruptions as only 15% of government grants/funds reach for the policy plan/program/project implementation; rest 85% goes to the corrupt leaders as a black money. Policy makers need to address these challenges appropriately to make special education a reality for millions of children with disabilities in India. Making policies are not worth anything if they are not followed honestly.

The absence of accountability mechanisms, which results in poor policy implementation, suggests that in order to ensure implementation of 1995's Persons with Disabilities Act, some kind of legal enforcement mechanism needs to be created (Alur, 2002), perhaps related to resources allocation or government employee contract renewal. The absence of reliable assessment and strong enforcement mechanisms is perhaps one of the reasons why so many government programs whether away, targets unfulfilled, and government departments remain unchanged despite repeated failure.

According to Deb (2016), "While the occurrence of a positive relationship between disability prevalence and poverty incidence is academically interesting, it also bears crucial policy significance formulations in the Indian context. If the country's development objective is to reduce poverty and income inequality, then one has to recognize the needs of disabled persons and support the additional costs of educating them. Thus, enabling the disabled persons with health and rehabilitation services, education, training and employment can provide them the livelihood and break the nexus between disability and poverty".

Conclusion

In brief, Education of children with special needs in rural schools should not be taken casually. By rectifying the challenges faced, the quality of special education in rural schools can be enhanced. In other words, if these children are given equal rights to a quality education that will allow them to maximize their potential and contribute productively to the society

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