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Special Education Legal Alert

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This month's alert summarizes an unpublished federal district court decision that illustrates various current issues, including the possible child find-RTI connection and a published federal appeals court decision that illustrated the generally nondramatic impact of Endrew F. These various issues are further explained and updated in various articles listed in the "Publications" section of perryzirkel.com.

In *Avaras v. Clarkstown Central School District* (2018), a federal district court in New York addressed a child find claim in the context of response to intervention (RTI) plus subsequent IEP FAPE and tuition reimbursement claims. The basic factual sequence was: kgn – RTI Tier 2 in reading; gr. 1 – RTI Tier 3 in reading and math plus IEE diagnosis of dyslexia, with parental request in May and district evaluation in June, resulting in eligibility and IEP for SLD for last few days of the school year; gr. 2 – unilateral placement in private school and no IEP review and proposal; and gr. 3 – district revised and proposed IEP, which included a self-contained class for language arts, resource room for 30 minutes per day, and consultant teacher services for 30 minutes per week.	
For the child find claim, the court ruled that "the duty to evaluate, at the very least, was triggered 8 weeks after [the child] started Tier 3 services in first grade." Since the district did not initiate the evaluation within a reasonable time thereafter and the evaluation revealed his eligibility, the court found that this procedural violation impeded the child's right to FAPE.	The court apparently based its specific calculation on the fact that the district's RTI program had 8-week cycles. However, reasonable adjudicators can and do reach different conclusions based on these factual features. For example, both the hearing officer and the review officer had rejected the parents child find claim in this case. The general trend is infrequent case and largely pro-district rulings.
For the next year, which was gr. 2, the court ruled that the district denied FAPE because it did not have an IEP in place at the start of the year, concluding that the parents' unilateral placement did not excuse the district's continuing obligation to "provide FAPE"—i.e., propose annual IEPs.	The court deftly ducked the nuances of (a) the parent's consent for initial services, which in this case was an agreement for special education but not for the district's initially IEP proposals, and (b) the district's belated IEP for grade 2, which without review merely amended the previous IEP to show the unilateral placement.
For gr. 3, the court concluded that the proposed IEP provided FAPE in the LRE, finding the interaction with nondisabled students at an appropriately integrated level.	The court attributed the separable IEP problem of lack of updated information from the private school to the parents' failure to provide the requisite consent for this information.

For the remedy, the court awarded tuition reimbursement for the gr. 2 school year, finding that the private placement met the applicable substantive standard and that the equities supported this period.	Oddly, the court did not award compensatory education for the child find violation in grade 1. Perhaps the parents did not sufficiently raise this remedy as an issue separable from tuition reimbursement.
The court rejected the parents' claims (a) for money damages (as unavailable under the IDEA), (b) against the state education department (for lack of systematic violations); and (c) under Sec. 504/ADA (for lack of gross misjudgment or deliberate indifference).	These various additional rulings illustrate the increasing "spaghetti strategy" (throwing multiple claims against the way in hopes that something sticks) of special education litigants and the prevailing judicial standards for each of these claims.

In *Johnson v. Boston Public Schools* (2018), the First Circuit Court of Appeals addressed various parental claims arising from the successive IEPs for an elementary school student who had a substantial hearing impairment despite a cochlear implant. The student's initial IEPs included instruction in both sign-supported spoken English and American sign language (ASL) per the recommendations of his evaluations. Despite the child's reported progress, the district agreed to change his next IEP to exclude ASL based on his mother's insistence. His subsequent progress was negatively affected by his mother's intransigent opposition first to the use of ASL and, later, sign supported English; her lack of cooperation with district and clinical personnel; and the student's inconsistent use of the cochlear processor. After additional evaluations, the district proposed to increase the services, but the parent remained dissatisfied and filed for a due process hearing. As part of settlement negotiations, the district agreed to place the student in a private school for students with hearing impairments. However, the settlement fell apart during the prehearing conference, and the impartial hearing officer (IHO) subsequently issued a decision in the district's favor. After the federal district court affirmed the IHO's decision, the parent appealed to the First Circuit Court of Appeals, which encompasses Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.	
First, the parent claimed that the district court had erred by ruling that she had waived her "mainstreaming" claim. The appellate court readily rejected the parent's claim, pointing out at the due process hearing she sought placement in a private school for hearing impaired students.	Perhaps attributable to the parent proceeding pro se (i.e., without any attorney) at the due process hearing, she failed to clearly preserve a mainstreaming claim via her complaint statement, the prehearing conference, and opening arguments, which amounted to waiver..
Second, she raised various challenges to the conduct of the impartial hearing officer (IHO). The appellate court ruled that (1) the IHO's reliance on the mother's statements during the prehearing conference did not violate the IDEA; and (2) the IHO's consideration of these statements, the IHO's warning that proceeding with the hearing was a gamble, and the IHO's adverse assessment of parent's credibility did not violate the impartiality requirement of the IDEA.	(1) The Rules of Evidence do not apply to due process hearings unless state law specifies otherwise, and settlement discussions during the prehearing conference do not transform the IHO to a mediator unless the parties agree otherwise. (2) These various instances of conduct, although arguable as a matter of best practice, did not fail the IDEA test for IHO impartiality, which is actual—not the appearance of—bias.

Finally and most significantly, the parent claimed that the Supreme Court's decision in *Endrew F.* significantly raised the bar for substantive FAPE. She argued that the adequacy of the district's challenged IEPs should be remanded to the IHO level for reconsideration, since the IHO's and district court's FAPE rulings were based on the pre-*Endrew F.* standard. The First Circuit affirmed rather than remanded the previous substantive FAPE rulings, concluding that the jurisdiction's prior standard of meaningful benefit comported with *Endrew's F.*'s formulation of being "reasonably calculated to enable [the] child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." The court pointed to the similarity of the educational methodologies between the district's original placement and the subsequent temporary private placement, which both yielded sufficient progress under the circumstances.	Notably, in response to the parent's reliance on the undisputed findings that the child's progress was "slow" and that his linguistic skills were "significantly delayed," the court emphasized the importance of the individual circumstances. In this case, the court identified as examples of relevant circumstances for this child "his starting point and [the parent's] own resistance to educating him. in ASL and spoken English." Thus, neither slow progress nor more rapid progress is generalizable as the *sine qua non* of *Endrew F.* in light of its individualized, ad hoc consideration of the substantive appropriateness of IEPs. Of course, this standard is the legal minimum, and there is good reason for IEP teams to aspire to the higher bar of best practice norms as a matter of partnership with parents and adherence to professional ethics.

Group Work Matters: Reducing Stigma in Special Education Students

By Clara West, DSW

Abstract

Generalizations about special education students are based upon societal constructs. These stigma-induced concepts define these students in terms of their disabilities, as opposed to the strengths, which make them unique. Their social-emotional issues are similar to their non-disabled counterparts with few distinctions. This case study discusses how group intervention with adolescent special education girls reduces stigma and promotes emotional stability in the school. When viewed through the lens of shared narratives, group intervention becomes an enriching experience for students and those working with them.

Meeting her for the first time was disconcerting. Certainly, her physical appearance would not have convinced me of the offenses ascribed to her. When our paths crossed that day, I had generalized what I expected her to be, which was in contrast to what I discovered about her. Jenene, a sixth grade student, was small in stature and dressed in the uniform required of all students in the low-income school district where I work as a school social worker. Her uniform was pristine in appearance. Her blouse was without wrinkles and her slacks had creases, which indicated that time and effort had been taken in preparing her clothes for school. Jenene had black piercing eyes and long, dark, wavy hair that was pulled back from her oval-shaped face. Could this unassured-looking girl standing before me in the Vice Principal's office be known as having a reputation for being volatile and aggressive?

Just minutes before the first bell of the day rang, I could hear sounds down the hall from my office, sounds which were atypical of students gathering for school. These were not the usual sounds of voices, laughter, and doors opening and closing that were generally heard at the beginning of a new day. No. These were noises–the amplified expressions--of boys and girls cheering as if at a sporting event. The uproar was coming from the cafeteria. Security had been alerted and additional staff had converged on the scene. A fight had broken out in the cafeteria and Jenene was in the center of the commotion. She had become very angry when another student had insulted her brother, Mark, and she had become physically aggressive in an effort to defend him. The accusation against Mark could have been overlooked. After all, he was a bright student, and a quiet boy. But the incident had provoked an intense emotional response from Jenene and indicated her inability to cope with the normal incitement that sometimes comes with disagreements among students in school. She had taken this offense against Mark personally:

GEORGE: Are you slow or something? The line starts here!

MARK: (*Appearing befuddled, he looked around to see from whom this accusation was coming*.) I am standing right here and you can't make me move!

GEORGE: You have to move or we won't get breakfast before the bell rings!

JENENE: (*Jenene had been chatting with friends, but looked up just as she heard George's voice start to grow louder. He was yelling at Mark*! *She immediately left her friends, pushed through the crowd of other students and found George standing face to face with Mark*.) Leave him alone!

GEORGE: I think he's slow, just like you! He doesn't know what to do next (*Laughing*).

JENENE: He is not slow! Neither am I! (*Jenene grabs George by the collar...but   before the first punch, the administrator appears on the scene.*)

As a special education student, Jenene was not only defending Mark, she was also defending herself. George's embarrassing remarks had been as much of an attack upon her as they had been upon Mark.

In discussions about stigma, Heflinger and Hinshaw (2010) state that "stigmatization often produces a strong sense of shame" (p.61). The author posits that it rarely lends itself favorably to opportunities that would benefit the person. More succinctly, I believe that stigma is a negative stance taken by people or groups of people against others, and unfair beliefs are maintained by society. Jenene's angry outbursts in the cafeteria resulted in stigmatized attitudes by students and staff. The stigma associated with being a special education student, being called "slow," her angry outburst, and the consequent escort by security to the Vice Principal's office, were all causes for shame and further humiliation. In other words, Jenene was in trouble.

I was summoned to attend an impromptu meeting on her behalf that morning and it was then that I learned Jenene had had similar outbursts in the past. These outbursts had resulted in defacing property, and included other incidents of verbal and physical aggression. After these incidences, Jenene typically refused to cooperate when approached by others to calm her. Other behaviors included her unwillingness to complete class assignments, and on occasion, she had to be removed from the classroom.

When we met in the Vice Principal's office, Jenene still appeared angry, exposed and defenseless. Tears were streaming down her cheeks--tears which might have served to wash away the humiliation and frustration, but did little to free her from her own web of confusion and fear. Adults surrounded her. She sat wringing her hands, and swinging her legs back and forth as she waited to hear the outcome of her behavior. Her eyes shifted from face to face and from object to object in the room as if looking for a way of escape. Counseling was mandated. The Vice Principal required her to talk to someone about her anger, which meant opening up to a stranger about the recent events. By this time, Jenene barely spoke when questioned. Yet, she interrogated me

with eyes that asked *"Can I trust you?"* In that moment, I wondered *"In what ways can I help her*?" I felt both deep compassion and sadness for her. As the school social worker, I contemplated how I could make the school community a therapeutic and safe one for her. I thought that one way of doing this would be through a girl's counseling group. The girl's counseling group would be both therapeutic and safe for Jenene.

My responsibilities as a school social worker in an urban school district involve interacting with multi-faceted aspects of the special education students' world. I interface with administrators, teachers, parents, and the community to assist in best-practice interventions for these students. Best-practice interventions are determined by the special education student's Individualized Educational Program. The IEP is a legal document, which contains curriculum goals and objectives and social-emotional goals. Although the IEP does not always extend beyond the educational context for student support, it is necessary for the work I do in the schools. My duties as a social worker require my active participation and investment with the students. I have observed that special education students are more vulnerable in the school than the general education population and that signs of vulnerability and of being less capable of being independent, give the appearance of being easy targets for bullying. Gitterman and Shulman (2005) define vulnerability as "a heightened susceptibility to negative outcomes" in which "the individual appears predisposed to become easily damaged by stress and risk factors. These predispositions could promote "emotional and behavioral disorders" (p.223). Many students in Jenene's school have been predisposed to a number of stress and risk factors to include adverse living conditions, community violence, substance abuse, and other stressors, which have resulted in a proliferation of negative emotional responses from general and special education students alike. However, what is unique about Jenene and her peers in the girl's group is the added stigma of their learning deficits. To counteract the stigma, they have chosen physical aggression over non-aggressive measures as ways to protect themselves and sustain their honor as in the case of the incident with Jenene, George, and Mark. Gitterman and Shulman (2005) also state that inner city students find that "their school and learning are in constant competition with their survival and self-protection. They must feel safe… and valued…in order to be able to learn and grow into healthy competent teens" (p.203). It is helpful and essential for social workers to consider these environmental factors in order to provide support for students and their families. Safety and being valued are important aspects of reducing stigma in the school.

Perhaps, Jenene wanted protection and safety for Mark and her efforts to do so resulted in a strong retaliation against George. What other explanation would validate her behavior under such circumstances? I discovered later in our work together that she and Mark did not experience the protection from her biological mother they needed growing up.

Jenene is the older of the two children living at home. Her maternal grandmother, Ms. Madred, who is laden with health concerns, is the legal guardian for Jenene and Mark. Her biological mother, Ms.Vey, who lives with them, is cognitively limited with a history of alcohol dependency and frequently abdicates child rearing to the infirmed grandmother. Thus, the mother lacks the ability to provide the parental support, which might have allowed Jenene and Mark safety in school. The possible reasons for her altercation in the cafeteria could only be explained by mere conjecture, being called "slow." Such suppositions can only speak to the stigma of being

devalued in the presence of her peers expressed by her aggression towards her brother's antagonist, George. Although her means of coping were inappropriate, her intent was to insure Mark's safety. At this juncture in her schooling, lessening the emotional turmoil in Jenene's life seemed as much a priority as her academics. The care and respect of adults in the school is important according to Gitterman and Shulman for the student's "survival and self-protection" (p. 203). If the recommendation for counseling had not been initiated by the Vice Principal's efforts to help Jenene not only deal with her anger and her behaviors, and to feel valued that day in the office, Jenene might have met more disruptions in her education over time by class suspensions or other disciplinary measures. Group counseling would be the tool to address the stigma Jenene experienced based upon factors, which will be discussed later. The group's dual purpose would be to reduce the stigma and lessen the impact of the vulnerabilities in the girls' lives. As an advocate for school-based group intervention, the support given to the special education student by building healthy relationships in the context of group counseling can help accomplish this. With Jenene we hope to see evidence of better self-regulation through fewer emotional upheavals and improved coping skills, which would minimize distractions in the classroom and increase her learning potential.

Group Introductions

Jenene's girls' group is of mixed categorizations. Several of the students in the group are considered to be *learning disabled* which "…refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by a significant disability in acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning…mathematical abilities, or of social skills." (LaGreca & Vaughn, 1992, p.1). The intellectual abilities and academic performance of learning disabled students are not always in sync. *Emotionally disturbed* categorizes other girls in the group. An emotionally disturbed student often experiences mood disturbances that hinder building satisfactory relationships, and in general present an overall fearful and anxious disposition over a sustained period of time. The emotionality impacts the learning environment and the student's ability to achieve in school. Jenene is categorized as a *multiple disabled* student, which means that according to the New Jersey Administrative Code, multiple disabled students have "the presence of two or more disabling conditions…" (N.J.A.C. 6A, 2006, p.47) and for Jenene they are Attention Deficit Disorder and Specific Learning Disability. Attention Deficit Disorder can manifest itself in frequent emotionality and impulsivity.

The following scenario gave me the insight I needed into how the girls perceived themselves in their special education class and how I could work with the stigmas they faced:

> ME: How do you feel about being in Ms. Darrel's class? (*Ms. Darrel's class is a self-contained special education class.)*
>
> GROUP MEMBER: It's okay. I guess we are in this together (*responding as a question versus a statement*)?

JENENE: Yeah, I guess. But I feel safe there, mostly. Before I was called special ed. I was called slow.

ME: (*I questioned her further.*) What do you mean by safe, Jenene?

JENENE: I am not called slow or stupid. I can think.

GROUP MEMBER (*Chimes in*) I need help and Ms. Darrel teaches us things. I told a guy the other day as I was walking down the hall, that we are smarter than some of them. (*She retorts in a matter-of-fact tone.*)

JENENE: (*Further elaborates*) I don't let it bother me, only when smart things are said to my brother.

GROUP MEMBER: (*Continuing the conversation)* We all need help with things sometimes. Besides, I can do other things (*confidently stated*).

ME: I am happy to hear that you feel good about yourselves in this way. And you are correct. We all need help at times and let me add that there are strengths that we all bring to one another in the group. (*It was interesting to hear their comments.)*

From this brief conversation, I came away with a clearer sense of their self-perceptions and what it meant to have a categorization without using the actual term "stigma" to determine this.

Stigma: External and Internal

I have observed two dimensions of stigma affecting Jenene and the girls--external and internal. For our discussion, we will add to our understanding of stigma through external and internal dimensions. This will be done as we look at the connections between labeling, categorization, and disabilities. Internal stigma (perceptions of self, specifically of Jenene) will be discussed in connection with group intervention.

For Jenene, and those who are marginalized as results of society constructs, stigma is defined by Heflinger and Hinshaw (2010) as the "discrediting of an individual" (p.61). It appears that those who are marginalized or disenfranchised are subjected to stigma based upon societal constructs. To further support this definition Kayma and Haight (2014) suggest that stigma is "the co-occurrence of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status, negative reactions, or discrimination," which "may affect attitudes and behaviors towards them (social stigma)" (p.24). In Jenene's case, with this "discrediting," she may feel diminished and inferior among her peers. This may provoke unacceptable behavior based upon a belief system that says she is limited in her abilities hindering her ability to function productively.

Categorization, a component of external stigma, is reflected in various disabilities experienced by special education students. The categorizations of the girls in Jenene's group can lend themselves to stigmatized ways of thinking about special education students. For example, the group I have assembled, at first glance, are girls of the same age, grade, and interests. Beyond this are common socio-economic and socio-cultural threads that connect them. The issue becomes whether we see the girls as *defined* by their conditions or girls who *have* conditions that stigmatize them. The girls struggle academically and their skills and cognitive abilities are below their grade levels. I see Jenene and the girls as unique persons, and their labels do not detract from the delightful persons they are and the valuable contributions they can make.

Labels, another component of external stigma, can generate further stigmatized perceptions. Labeling attaches itself to symptoms, skill deficits, or appearances (Corrigan, 2000). Jenene's emotional dysregulation and poor coping skills sabotage her school relationships. Lack of proper social skills is anxiety producing. They isolate her and her awkward, irregular responses to situations and circumstances separate her more socially.   In other words, Jenene's behavior contributes to the stigma imposed upon her in school. Owens, Thomas, and Strong (2005) purport that "students with disabilities become more handicapped by their lack of personal and social skills than their academic deficits" (p.238). We see this in Jenene's reaction to being called "slow" in the cafeteria.   However, some students have "what is referred to as 'invisible disabilities' that manifest in ways that are not related to grades at all, but still impact their ability…" and special education services are still required (Fingles, 2011, p.5). For example, these students excel in school academically, but can be predisposed to poor social skill development. It is important to note that connecting invisible disabilities to the special education student reinforces the notion that special education as a term denotes stigma and whatever the perception, it labels the student.

What are disabilities and how are they connected to labels? The term disability has often been construed and defined in terms of physical limitations. Anatasiou & Kauffman reveal that according "to social constructionists, disabilities are defined by arbitrary decisions of those empowered to designate them; thus, disabilities are labels determined by public policy and professionals" (p.372). Stigma's attachment to special education through public laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) and the New Jersey Administrative Code are designators of the girls' categories. This alerts us to the imposing influence of societal constructs upon human beings. Labels can challenge the students' abilities towards more positive internal thinking.

Internal stigma exhibits itself in emotional responses, the girls' affect – how they feel at a given moment- and the resulting behaviors versus the consequences of internal stigma. A feeling of inadequacy at times challenges their self-worth and their "subjective experiences" (Palombo, 2001). What I gain from Jenene and the girls' individual experiences gives me a better understanding of their issues and concerns. These experiences touch the heart of their self-esteem, and the work done in group is an effort to enhance self-esteem and develop identity formation.

Internalized stigma is further illustrated in the context of Group Counseling. However, before moving forward, I think it is important to our discussion to mention the relationship of shame to stigma.

"The basis of shame is not some personal mistake of ours, but the ignominy, the

humiliation we feel that we must be what we are without any choice in the matter, and that humiliation is seen by everyone" (Kudera, M. 2014).

Jenene experienced shame as a consequence of her behavior. She is also challenged by an intellectual condition that she is aware of daily and this sets her apart from others. At the same time, this condition connects her to others like herself. Shame, then, becomes individualized and stigma is of social influence. The pull between shame and stigma complicates things for Jenene and special education students, which is why group support is so important. According to Morrison (1986), "[S]hame... results from a tension that is connected to the threatened ego where the person is left with... abandonment, and rejection. He additionally postulates that shame is a "reflection of...and comparison of self to others (p.350. My observation of Jenene's reflection and comparison of herself to her peers is discussed in the group counseling scenarios.

Group Counseling and Internalized Stigma

Counseling in the schools assists students in developing the skills to cope with various family concerns, academics, and interpersonal issues. This related service for special education students is particularly important to provide guidance as they navigate through the school day and beyond. (A related service is an added component to the special education student's educational plan to help enhance the educational performance of student.) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which states that students with disabilities are to be included with "their nondisabled peers whenever and wherever possible", endorse school-based group intervention (Murdick, 2005). This elucidates the requirement by law, making educators accountable in providing special education students the same opportunities as their non-disabled counterparts. Helping the girls combat internal stigma was the primary focus of group counseling.

In my efforts to sensitize the girls to the importance of positive thought patterns, Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) or simply, self-talk, was introduced to them. The purpose in using this modality was to reduce stigma by sensitizing the group to the importance of changed thought patterns. Initially, I was concerned about the effectiveness of CBT with students who have cognitive deficits, but gave it a try. How CBT works with group process theory is illustrated in in the girl's group. CBT, however, was only one treatment method used towards de-stigmatization. Others included dyadic approaches to teaching communication and interpersonal skills. Deep breathing exercises were taught with anger and stress management skills with the specific intent to reduce learning frustrations in the classroom. Actively listening was used to help the girls understanding thought patterns of each other in the group and to promote respect for each other. There were times when saying to the girls "just walk away from a fight" for which, in their experiences, had caused many problems for them in the past, was not as convincing as I had hoped. Nevertheless, this approach slowing began to make sense to them.

On occasion, human nature lends itself to self-defeating ways of viewing the world and so did the girl's responses. "When people needlessly disturb themselves they produce dysfunctional thoughts" (Ellis, 1992, p.64), it can lead to emotional and behavioral upset. Cognitive Behavior Therapy helps individuals to look at various thought patterns and learn to become less emotional and more in control of their lives. For the special education student, this is done best with consistency and patience. As our attention shifted to Jenene's internal struggles, the group learned that there may be times when an individual is not being stigmatized, but may feel that she is based upon her categorization, which may be the reason for their negative social responses. An illustration of this occurred when Jenene was not chosen to go on the school trip. Jenene's understanding of why she was not chosen (discussed below) led her to believe there was something wrong with her. I was on a telephone call but I could see a figure from the corner of my eye... waiting. When I hung up the phone, I turned to see that the figure was Jenene. She had a puzzled look on her face, and appeared anxious.

> ME: Jenene?
>
> JENENE: May I call my grandmother?
>
> ME: What's wrong? Is everything ok?
>
> JENENE: (Tearful) My feelings are hurt and I want to talk with my grandmother!

Jenene did not share what she was thinking at the time, but, unlike other times, seemed more in touch with her feelings even though she was upset and tearful. I allowed her to place the call to her grandmother. Then she shared.

> JENENE: Ms. Darrel gave permission slips to most of the class for the class trip but not to me.(I could imagine her feelings of isolation, and abandonment, questioning why she was left out...was there something wrong with me? What had I done, as if to challenge her more? As I began to question her, she was informed that I had not heard about the class trip and was a bit confused. After further investigation I discovered that Ms. Darrel had not planned the trip, but that the Vice Principal needed a few extra students to go because the school had been given extra tickets. I realized that Jenene's internal dialogue was fueling her anxiety. We discussed this at length. What I had hoped was that she would learn that the thoughts being generated in her head could develop into positive relevance through rethinking.)

Jenene's encounter and more about Cognitive Behavior was shared during one of our group sessions.

> ME: Today I would like to talk about how what we think makes us behave in certain ways, sometimes. It is called self-talk.
>
> GROUP MEMBER: What is that? Oh, I know, it's when you say things to yourself.

ME: Exactly. But it is important what we say or think. Jenene would you share what happened yesterday afternoon?

JENENE: Ok. Well, I wanted to go on the class trip and saw that some students had tickets to go, but not me. I didn't know why I could not go and got upset."

GROUP MEMBER: *(At this time another girl, teases Jenene and comments*.) Yeah, we had fun (*giggling which engaged the other girls*)!

ME: Girls, let's settle down. *(I firmly suggested.)*

JENENE: (*Continues*) So, I went to talk to you, and the Vice Principal showed up. I thought, no, not again! But this time it was different. I wasn't really in trouble.

ME: Well, how do you feel?

JENENE: (*Looking down at the table answers)* I don't know. Mad, I guess, but I did not lose my temper like before with Mark's problem.

GROUP MEMBER: That's right, Jenene! You didn't lose it!

ME: (I added.) That's great, Jenene. We are so proud of you!

JENENE: Thank you. (*Jenene smiles*)

ME: But, Jenene, what was different this time?

JENENE: I was thinking of Mark. I did not want to embarrass him. I think he was

embarrassed before.

ME: So you thought about it, first?

JENENE: Yeah.

GROUP MEMBER: (Speaking up) So, what did you say to yourself in your head? (*This question become a significant one throughout other sessions as well as it causes the girls to focus on their thoughts. Intervening in this way, helps the girls to focus on specific aspects of their problems.)*

JENENE: I might get into trouble again and who would take care of Mark?

ME: Okay... It seems that you really care about your brother.

GROUP MEMBER: I wouldn't care! I would tell my mother right away. It wasn't fair.

JENENE: (*Ignoring the group member's response*) Yes. So I would look into it more; ask questions, that way I won't feel left out.

ME: Okay, try to remember girls, that what we think can make us feel a certain way. This will not be easy at times. Adults have a hard time with thinking before acting, too.

GROUP MEMBER: You are right about that! (*Giggles*)

(*The group ended on a positive note.*)

Teaching cognitive behavior techniques becomes an elongated process as we focus on reducing stigma for the special education student. However, after considering CBT, and applying it to situations, Jenene was emerging in her development and was beginning to make better choices in school more regularly.

There were times when Jenene would stop by my office to share "what was my mind." During these brief encounters of individual counseling Jenene received the attention she needed to sort out her problems. Additionally, I discovered that these sessions allowed her to return to class and to focus better on schoolwork, as well as provided a foundation for better group work. The following scenario is such an example of how Jenene was empowered through supportive counseling.

ME: Hi Jenene, What brings you by today? Isn't this your lunch period?

JENENE: Yeah. I wanted to talk with you about something before our group session.

ME: Ok. What's up?

JENENE: I noticed that Mark learns faster than me and I am the oldest.

ME: How does this make you feel?

JENENE: Doesn't it seem that I should know more than him?

ME: Jenene, Are you saying that if you're older you should be smarter?

JENENE: You know what I mean...I always feel like there is something wrong with me. It makes me mad!

ME: Do you mean with learning?

JENENE: Yes. I try hard, but it doesn't help. I know that I have a learning problem and that what George said was partly true, I am slower with some things. That is the reason I am in special education classes; I feel different, alone sometimes…

ME: (I *listened. I could feel her pain. She felt alone)* Ms. Darrel is a good teacher. She can help. Jenene some things may be harder than others, but you also do some other things very well. Ms. Darrel says you have good Math skills. Remind yourself of this.

JENENE: I know. I like Ms. Darrel. She always tells us when we do good.

ME: Continue to do your best. I am so proud that you try so hard.

JENENE: Ok. (She smiles.) Talking about it has made me feel better.

ME: Good.

JENENE; I like the group, but some things I don't want to say in group.

ME: (*My eye on the clock.)* Looks like lunch time is almost over.

JENENE: I just had to get that off my mind.

ME: I am glad you came by.

Meeting with Jenene individually was necessary at times, but group counseling seemed most suited for her. Kaplin and Sadock (1971) state:

> "the universal observation by all group therapists is that patients are incomparably more productive in groups than in individual treatment, and that the therapeutic process is greatly accelerated. This process is accelerated due to the care given its members as each relies upon the other…identification, and mutual support" can be "liberating" as the one sees similarities between their problems and those of others" (p.106).

The girls are empathetic and give aid to each other causing Jenene to feel less alone in the world. The group is where problems are deliberated and shared. In my opinion, the group as a social system empowers its members through learning and taking risks in an environment where the girls are not fearful. It is for these reasons that group counseling as a primary modality of treatment was chosen for Jenene.

Jenene began to blossom socially over time. The literature affirms that children with learning disabilities are "less social, less popular, and less empathetic" according to Omizo & Omizo (1988). I would agree with the author's claim that they are "less popular," as the girls are not the first to be considered socially acceptable among age-peers which is important to all pre-adolescent girls. However, the author's assertion that they are "less social and less empathetic" does not fit with my experience of them. Socially, the girls have been able to establish friendships within the group and with classmates outside of the group, and while they may not experience popularity to the degree of some of their non-disabled peers, they appreciate and support one another. Schectman (2002) would agree that the "school is a highly suitable place for practicing group work and children perceive group interventions as part of the daily routine" (p.296). Also, group counseling is the most widely used modality of treatment in the schools. Students learn in groups and often more effectively when smaller groups are developed within the larger classroom context. The group then becomes a subset of the overall school setting where learning occurs on multiple levels.

The school that Jenene attends is a new building comprised of students of multi-ethnic backgrounds. Her class is a small class where individualized instruction is provided most frequently. It is located in the main wing of the building where regular school activity occurs. The school as an institution addresses the bias that is commonly associated with special education through school culture and climate.

School culture and climate are important considerations in combating stigma for Jenene and the group. The culture of the school includes the beliefs and values that administrators place upon their students and the manner in which these are implemented throughout the school's daily operations. Events such as assemblies, class trips, and mandated district-wide testing have competed with group sessions often prohibiting student availability. But, the classroom teacher's willingness to be flexible is helpful. As the teacher plans lessons so as not to further compromise instruction, release time is given the girls for group sessions amidst these challenges. This determines the effectiveness and success of the intervention and whether they will occur at all. Collaboration between the school and myself is important to school culture and climate.

School climate includes the school's aesthetics, its size, structure, warmth, and quality of instruction. Essential for students like Jenene and others whose lives are frequented with violence, is the assurance of safety as was mentioned earlier. "I hear gun shots in the neighborhood when I try to sleep at night" or the girls share comments about the violence that prevents them from playing in the neighborhood with their peers. According to the administration, efforts are made to protect all students. In a personal conversation with the climate control designee, culture and climate are a priority for the school Jenene attends:

> Culture and climate involves academics and behavior, an expectation for all students and the bar is not lowered because the student is receiving special education services, only to the extent necessary. The attitude of the school starts at the beginning of the day when students are greeted by teachers, and administrators. Based upon the needs of the special education student with inference to their categorizations, different behavioral approaches in the implementation of the school's policies and procedures may be applied. The culture of learning extends to all. The school culture supports the

interests of the special education student in its planning of school trips and events. (Administrative personal communication, November 2013.)

Such institutional considerations lend support and lessen the stigma for the student through the intentional efforts of inclusion and acceptance. When Jenene came before the Vice Principal, she was not received with harsh words or loud reprimands but with respect. The Vice Principal's tone was firm but kind. Eye contact was given Jenene and the staff approached her in non-threatening ways. She was given the opportunity to speak, but remained silent. The staff reached out to her. According to Heflinger and Hinshaw (2010), stigmas within institutions are seen in its attitudes and practices and what these may communicate to the students. In my opinion, this can be observed by words spoken, fair or unfair treatment, inclusion or exclusion in activities. In Jenene's school efforts are made to involve special education students. For example, one of the girls in the group is on the basketball team, others participate in the school choir, dance, and art. Opportunities are given for the girls to travel within the district to share their skills and talents.

The Gathering: Group Process/Dynamics

The group I have developed is an open-ended (pre-adolescent) girl's group. This means that new girls are permitted to enter once the group begins. Some girls transfer in and out of the school for various reasons and receive group-counseling services based upon their IEP. It is hoped that the support the girls gain in the group will promote social as well as academic success. According to Yalom, a group psychotherapist, "the success of therapy groups is depended upon two therapeutic factors: Group process and group dynamics. Process and dynamics contribute centrally to …the successful development of the group itself…in which interpersonal interaction occurs to the individual learning about self in relation to others" (Higgins,1995). What happens in the group can be considered the group process and how group members behave in the group can be considered the dynamics. Providing a protective place for the girls is essential. To prevent emotional harm and further wounding by those who would ostracize them with words and attitudes is one of my goals for the group. This is done through supportive intervention, allowing the girls to participate in decision making, setting goals, and establishing rules of conduct. Such dynamics result in the development of stakeholders in group learning. I find that this strengthens the group.

Relationship building takes priority in group work, for little can be accomplished without it. The alliance between the girls and myself is "more predictive of success than techniques or diagnosis" (Baumberger &Roberts 1999). The process of relationship building within the group begins with trust and confidentiality. An important ground rule that the girls respect and follow is that "What we discuss in the group remains in the group." The girls are hypersensitive to outsiders' knowledge of their problems. They do "not want everybody knowing their business," as they so often articulate. Group confidence increases, as they know that their secrets are kept. Occasionally they question me for reassurance, "…do you share what we talk about with…?" I answer "no" but the question I then ask is, "When might we need to share issues of concern with others, parents or administrators?" They have learned that when there is a threat to the group's safety or risk of harm to a group

member we are responsible for informing someone in authority in order to receive extra support. They accept this.

An interesting dynamic revolves around silence. I have observed when there is an absence of words, silence resonates and becomes the language they all understand. A tear falls, or a hug is extended to the girl who was brave enough to share her story. She knows that others care. These group-attunement characteristics seem to have developed quickly with them over time and serves in solidifying group alliances.

Jenene and the girls readily and easily express feelings about things they have seen and heard. Shecthman (1996) considers this expressive-supportive therapy. "Expressive –supportive therapy addresses the children's need for emotional expressiveness, social support and assistance with their practical difficulties. Its primary objective is to help improve life situations, build ego strength, and teach problem-solving skills" (p. 297). This care is used quite frequently in our group sessions as the girls state their opinions about each other's problems and offer ways to help. The support the girls give one another is important, as it helps reduce the internal stigma they experience in the school by also enhancing self-esteem.

The group process begins the moment the girls are summoned for their session by me, leave the classroom, and make their descent to the first level of the building to the room where weekly sessions are held. They chatter on their way. This is evident by the lively conversations that continue as they enter the room. These dynamics also speak to their personalities. The smiles on their faces attest to their zest for life despite their impoverished backgrounds. Their anticipatory attitudes are infectious, creating a climate in the room that energizes.

The conference room where sessions are held is bright and cheerful with colorful posters that make up the room's décor. The mint green walls and white window treatments compliment the variegated chairs of green, white, and brown. The posters convey images of feelings, charts which describe character traits, socially acceptable behavior, and expectations for the group. The images are also helpful in identifying feelings for those students who have difficulty reading. Seating arrangements play an important role in helping the girls adjusting to the group. Each week the girls look for the same seat around two long maple-toned conference tables, and seem less distracted during sessions when allowed to do so. This gives them a sense of security.

The day, setting, frequency, and location of group is predetermined and remains as constant as possible. Efforts to remain consistent in these practical matters influences and helps the group process. When re-scheduling becomes necessary due to a change in my schedule, for administrative purposes or otherwise, I re-negotiate with them. If I see one of the girls in the hallway, even though I may be on a different mission in the building, they ask "Are you coming for me today? Or "Do we have group?" Suggests their need for consistency. According to Foulds, Eggbeer, et al (n.d.), the concept of responsive routines has its place in group work. They have found that "responsive routines" and schedules help support emotional development in children. All "routines are the regular and repeated things we do and the way we do them. Prediction can lead to security and

a sense of competency" (p.2.10). Knowing what to expect helps facilitate the group process and being able to predict sessions is important to girls. Repetition helps with memory and focus and also reinforces learning for the special education student. For example, when giving directions for paper and pencil activities, step-by-step procedures are needed to teach concepts and ideas that are necessary to promote understanding. This addresses the group's cognitive needs, and is appropriate intervention in working with Jenene and her peers.

I begin the session with an icebreaker. At each session I ask the identical questions: "How do you feel today? And "How are classes going?" This helps me gauge the climate in the room and their responses set the tone for how the group will function that day. A typical beginning group session may look like the following:

> *The girls are full of laughter and vitality, out of breath and almost exhausted as they enter the room. Though well aware of the rules of hall conduct in the building, the girls are quite animated and excited about coming together, rushing as if to see who would be the first to enter the room. They look forward to our sessions.*

ME: My, are we excited today! (*Girls giggling*)

Welcome to our group! We will begin today and each group session with telling how you feel. The feeling chart on the wall will help you do this. So, who wants to be the first to speak? (*The feeling's chart is comprised of facial images represented by various feelings. Words are written underneath the images for those who are challenged in reading skills.*) I also would like to know how school is going. (They all raise their hands to speak at once. Jenene lowers her head.)

Jenene, how do you feel today?

JENENE: So-so (*and moves her hand in a back and forth motion conveying uncertainty.*)

The other girls give responses, which relate to the chart comprised of words such as excited, sad, happy, and embarrassed, scared, and other ranges of emotions. Within this group, there is one member who can be oppositional, yet this has little effect upon Jenene, who makes a significant contributor of the group. Her participation demonstrates that she has become more invested with the others and this helps contribute to group cohesion.

Group cohesion is important to the group process. Yalom (2005) notes that "group cohesion is the individual's attractiveness to the group; members feel…a sense of belonging" (p.55). It would have been difficult for Jenene to engage with the group in meaningful ways if she did not have a sense of commonality with them. This cohesion has developed over time and noted as the girls relate emotionally through rapid identification with each other's stories. The sense of belonging or the connections they make is apparent through their self-narratives. Group cohesion reinforces their sense

of confidence in a place where laughter and tears meet, and where the trajectory of the group follows the overwhelming concerns and needs of its members, sometimes pre-empting my planned itinerary.

One day, Jenene came to a session ready to share her feelings about the cafeteria incident with Mark. She was quite animated and the bonding that had taken place over months was heightened between the girls as they identified with Jenene's experience. She had reached the point of having confidence in her group members, which allowed

her to share openly. Jenene was asked by one of the girls to tell the group about that day she got into the fight with George.

GROUP MEMBER: Yeah, tell us Jenene. (*Excitement fuels the atmosphere. It was the first time Jenene was able to express what that meant to her or even what it was like.*)

ME: (*Through inquiry, I prompted her*) Jenene, are you comfortable with sharing? You have been a quiet member of this group. But we are here to listen and help you learn what to do if you ever have a problem like this again.

JENENE: I was mad, she revealed. I don't like people messin with Mark. I am his big sister and I think I should protect him.

GROUP MEMBER: (*Another girl agrees.*) If that were my brother, I would have done the same thing. I sometimes have to let people know that I am no pushover!

GROUP MEMBER: (*Comments from yet another girl in the group*): And if someone talks about my Mom or Dad, It's all over - I *am* going to fight.

JENENE: (*Jenene joins with the other girls as the commotion intensifies*.): That's right, nobody talks about my family and gets away with it. (*As the energy in the group continues to escalate, an additional comment surfaces by yet one of the other girls*.)

GROUP MEMBER: I will fight to protect my brother or sister, too!

ME: (I *thought it was time to interject some other ideas to help de-escalate these dynamics*.): Girls, it sounds like there is a lot of anger in this room. Why do we think fighting is always the only answer to our difficulties?

GROUP MEMBER: It sure helps...that way nobody messes with you and your family!

GROUP MEMBER: That's right! (*Another girl, speaks up.*) And if you don't fight, then people won't leave you alone.

ME: (*In yet increased efforts to calm the girls I stated*) Girls let's talk about some other ways to handle conflict.

JENENE: (*She appears interested.*) Good idea...

ME: *All eyes were on me, ready to listen to what I would say next... I was about to review anger management skills with the group when suddenly the fire alarm went off! We immediately exited the building as instructed to get everyone to safety. It was only a drill. When we returned all eyes were on me again to see how we would proceed with our session. Yet, something had changed from the time the girls left the group until we returned to the building.*

GROUP MEMBER: You stepped on my foot during the fire drill and did not apologize! I don't like you!

GROUP MEMBER: I don't like you either; you are always saying mean things about me to other people!

(*Jenene's eyes widened as she watched the other girls scream accusations to one another. The dynamics between these girls left the group spell-bound. It appeared that some external conflict had entered the room and that there were issues between the girls that were unrelated to the current conflict.*)

There can be times in the group when adversity or conflict surfaces between group members. Yalom (1983) suggests "group members also are faced with the anger that arises from interpersonal and group dynamics" (p.145). Frequently concerns surface around interactions in less structured periods in school such as lunch or recess. For example, an altercation arose with one of the girls over her misperception of an event that took place on the playground. During our group session, two of the girls became very agitated with one another. The agitation began to escalate to the point of verbal aggression. As the group leader, I needed to consider how I would handle this situation as expeditiously as possible. The girls watched me. What I would do next would be a lesson for the group as well as myself. I immediately separated them by directing them to return to class. This incident was used as a teachable moment, although one is not always able to predict how the group process with flow. The following conversation was an important one as we processed what had just occurred. The group and I disclosed our feelings.

ME: Girls, how do you feel about what just happened today?

JENENE: I get nervous when there is fighting. It reminds me of what we hear sometimes on our street.

GROUP MEMBER: I became afraid.

GROUP MEMBER: Why did you split us up?

ME: I felt very uncomfortable and did not want you girls to get hurt by what was happening. I think the other girls might have different needs.

GROUP MEMBER: Oh…

GROUP MEMBER: I am glad they are gone. Things are more peaceful.

ME: There are ways to handle our problems and the behavior we just saw was not the best way. Let's talk about other options.

It is critical for the clinician to bring the group to some resolution before the conflict heightens to insure the health of the group. If not, a group member, such as Jenene would also be exposed to more of the same angry tension from which she was seeking to overcome and gain better control. Shulman's (1992) group practice theory attests to the complexity of group work and how the group itself becomes an additional client, an organism that is a part of the whole. This concept teaches that the group is interrelated; what affects one member affects the entire group. With this understanding, I believe in their ability to learn to minimize group conflict. Teaching the girls about conflict in the group transfers into conflict resolution in relationships. I used a game to teach this concept and alleviate the all-too-common-violence to which they are exposed. It was called the *Game of Change*, a therapeutic game designed to help students deal with a range of emotions including those which surface from conflict. Multi-media have been used in situations involving violence-prevention (Dahlberg and Daytner, 1996). "Until recently, most efforts to reduce violence in schools and among students, involved…traditional didactic approaches" paving the way for "alternative approaches that focus on prevention strategies" (p. 65). The girls enjoy the activities and seemed to learn more with games, videos, and computer-based lesson approaches. Didactic approaches involved reading and due to low reading levels, the girls were less tolerable of this approach. In light of the aggressiveness that they resort to in times of conflict, I felt that this was an important tool to help with conflict resolution. An interaction within the game led us into a discussion about self-disclosure. The girls shared their feelings about the loss of two group members and I exposed my discomfort about what had occurred.

Selective disclosure became an essential factor in group dynamics. In our group sessions, the girls inquired about my life – my family and aspects of my youth. "What would you do?" Or "has that ever happened to you?" I sensed that they needed to identify with an adult outside of their families to help reduce the stigma that remains prevalent in their world. As I engaged in self-disclosure, there were times when I felt uncertain about sharing. I considered whether distancing myself as the professional would allow me to be more objective in treatment and more helpful in helping the girls solve their problems. Audet shares my initial thought on this oftentimes-uncertain dilemma in *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*:

There has been longstanding ethical debate in the literature on therapist self-disclosure and its appropriateness in...practice. Although multiple therapeutic benefits have been documented, risks commonly identified with therapists providing personal information to clients are that it can blur client-therapist boundaries and diminish important professional qualities associated with the therapist's role... (p.85). Furthermore... exposing humanness and imperfections does not always compromise professional appearance" (p. 96).

The purpose of self-disclosure is a risk-taking venture which should be considered carefully with the correct motive. I believe it can become therapeutic if managed properly and has the potential to reduce stigma. Audet also adds that "exposing humanness and imperfections does not always compromise professional appearance" (p. 96). As I am questioned about my life by the girls, I am ambivalent about how much to disclose or if to disclose at all. But I observed that a special bonding began to develop as I shared with them. This was a positive experience for us all and connecting with them in their lived experiences seemed to capture their interests more and appeared to solidify the relationships we were attempting to build. Modeling disclosure appropriately and with sensitivity adds to the group's ability to disclose, as well as helps dissipate any isolation or lack of value they may sense by the group leader. According to Corey (2012), disclosure should be appropriate and essential to the group's growth. Considering this, I thought it might be helpful to share a time when I felt isolated, stigmatized, disconnected, and insecure as they do at times. In doing so, I discovered that disclosure brought stigma to the surface and that with it a degree of vulnerability. Was I willing to be vulnerable to help them grow as they have been vulnerable with me? Would sharing my experiences support and help them be more accepting of themselves? Maybe.

The Bus Trip

ME**:** It seems that you girls have a lot of questions about me.

JENENE: Yeah.

GROUP MEMBER: You don't look like you were in a special class in school like us (*I chuckled to myself. How did they come to this conclusion*?), but did you ever feel the way we have been talking about?

ME: Yes, I affirmed. I was not in a special ed class but if you mean whether I have ever felt different from others, or overlooked, (*I used these terms to define what stigma might feel like to them*.) my answer would, again be, yes. I believe I might have felt like you girls at times.

JENENE: Yes, I feel different sometimes. I can't always keep up in class; it might take me awhile, but I get it, finally. What was it like for you to feel this way?

ME: Let me tell you a story about a bus trip. To my surprise, one of the girls spoke up.

GROUP MEMBER: Were you like Rosa Parks who had to sit on the back of the bus?

ME: (I *again chuckled to myself.)* No. I was like you, a 6th grade girl, taking a trip with my class.

GROUP MEMBER: Oh.

JENENE: But I think that Rosa Parks might have felt lonely, then, too.

ME: Yes, I guess *so......*

JENENE: Where did you go? I have never been on a bus. (*Several of the girls shared the same experience about never having taken a bus ride.*)

ME: My class took a trip to the zoo. (*I proceeded to share what I felt about being the only minority student in my class. During those early years of my social development, stigma was at its heightened peak for minorities.*)

As a 6th grade girl, I was excited about our class trip. I think I was more excited about the bus ride. We came with packed lunches, permission slips our parents had signed....we were on our way. It was a lovely day. Anyway, when it came time to board the bus, our teacher told us to find a partner. A PARTNER? I became nervous, and did not know what to do. I knew my classmates well enough, but a bit shy about paring up with someone and anyway, all the other students had found partners already.

What was I to do? I didn't feel that the classroom teacher was helpful (in hindsight) primarily because I did not know how to ask someone to be my partner. She could have at least helped us out, by using the lottery system or birthdates or some other way of assigning partners. But we were left to our own devices. I felt so isolated and afraid. I felt the stigma of what *I thought* others may be thinking about me because I was the only minority in my class. No one asked me and I had no plans of asking anyone, until Ariel.

Ariel appeared to be disadvantaged in some ways. She was overweight and was not always pleasant to be around. She also had difficulties learning in class. I recalled occasions when the class laughed at her because she would give the incorrect answers in class. I felt embarrassed for her. On this particular day, she was able to muster up the courage to cover up her insecurities to approach another, then, insecure person, me. As she began to approach me before we loaded the bus, I thought... What would I say to her? Ariel was not shy. "Will you be my partner?" she asked. I said, "Sure." I learned that Ariel was a friendly girl, and I became fond of her. We did not become close friends, but as

classmates we learned more about each other and came to value our differences. We also learned something about social skills that day.

As I reflected over this event in my personal life, it felt unusual to be in touch with my own feelings this way. I felt vulnerable before the girls, but thought that this disclosure was purposeful, and that my work with them would be more meaningful.

The girls sat in silence. I could see on their faces that they were thinking about what I was saying. Some presented with serious looks, others with smiles.

> JENENE: (*The first to respond.*) I think it was wrong for the other students to laugh at Ariel. Did you laugh, too?
>
> ME: No. I felt sad for her.
>
> JENENE: I know what it is liked to be laughed at. Your story makes me think that someone else has had my same feelings before; I liked how you treated her.
>
> ME: But I wondered, then, how she must have felt. We both needed a partner.
>
> And she reached out to me first.
>
> GROUP MEMBER: She was brave.
>
> ME: Yes.
>
> GROUP MEMBER: I feel better.
>
> GROUP MEMBER: Me too.
>
> JENENE: (*Jenene Smiles).*

In the course of our time in group counseling, I have assumed various roles. These roles have adapted to their needs, following the course of their concerns and issues. I have accepted what was most meaningful for them. For example, sometimes I am viewed as a teacher or mentor and at other times, I have assumed the role of a surrogate parent. This experience almost has a family- orientation feel to it.

Stigma in the Family

An unseen or silent partner, the family, enters the group and leaves its impact of stigma through the dynamics it imposes. Family issues and peer relationships pose the most stress for the girls, which can encroach upon their school work as in the following example. This is the second occasion in which Jenene shared feelings about her family's influence:

I was sitting in my office, attending to my usual duties when I received an unexpected visit from Jenene. She was tearful and I could feel my own emotions rising as I was caught off guard by her visit. Jenene revealed her fear that her mother did not love her and was partial to her brother because he was doing so well in school. In this way, she was feeling stigmatized within her family. I offered to support Jenene by speaking to her mother and thought this was a good idea, but not Jenene. Before she left my office, she did agree to think more about my offer.

In the past, Jenene had shared that her relationship with her grandmother was a positive one, but not with her mother who appeared emotionally absent from the family. On more than one occasion, she said that her mother "did not believe the things she told her" and that she was "blamed for other things happening in the home." In *What Adults with Disabilities Wish All Parents Knew*, a collection of essays which look at the thoughts and feelings of persons with disabilities, authors Klein and Kemp (2004) share the difficulty of learning in school and the embarrassment and stigma connected with that experience:

> I was constantly being put down by my teacher and scolded by my mother. Many days, I wished I could make myself invisible so the teacher wouldn't call on me when I did not know the answers... but she did...I strayed down many dangerous paths because I felt so bad about myself. Needless to say, my self-esteem was practically nonexistent (p.166).

Jenene has described similar feelings toward her mother. She has tried to articulate those feelings, yet unnoticed by her mother. Her life experienced has not yet allowed for decisions to be made that would determine her future, but the group relationships she has formed has allowed her to begin to make better choices and minimize unhealthy consequences through topic discussions. She wanted to express some of her thought to her family, but found that her mother was not receptive which helped perpetuate stigma in Jenene's relationships within her family. The importance of connecting with families in efforts to reduce stigma should be seen as essential in working with students in the schools. Educating families helps them to understand learning problems and helps students build confidence. Families operate as groups in providing support to students away from school. Self-perception is key. Group matters.

Group Work Matters

Why does it matter that special education girls receive group counseling in the schools? It matters because it has been powerful in reducing stigma for Jenene and others like her in the school where I work. Jenene's sense of self appeared embedded in her experience of being stigmatized. Being called "slow" or "special ed" impacted her outlook on life. As previously stated, Jenene's propensity to lose control when angry was the catalyst that connected Jenene and me. It took her a while to develop trust in me in the beginning, but increased confidence came later in our relationship. Group intervention helped her address her "self-talk" and helped her see herself as a valued person in her school. It is through group counseling that the clinician understands stigma from the special education students' perspective.

Stigma can impede learning and attempts to minimize this are important to the human experience of growth and development. Additionally, the culture and climate of the school reinforces the values needed by all students to thrive educationally and socially, including the girls in Jenene's group. Collective interaction is believed to enhance self-perception through the support of others and group work helps to build foundations for better interpersonal skills in preparation for adulthood. Group members learn coping skills to function more successfully in life as they become more confident in themselves and what they can do with life's problems. This matters and should concern everyone who cares about the future of children, and families, in the diverse world in which we live. My relationship with Jenene over time developed positively. I felt that she was gaining more trust in me. Upon leaving group sessions, she would give me a hug and on one occasion drew a picture expressing her feelings toward me.

There is a challenge to educators to consider the potential in each child despite those deficits that may be masked by social-emotional issues. According to Palombo (2001), "many adults…have learned to hide their disabilities but bear the scars these produced in earlier years…in spite of their success in their careers, feel… shame…[O]thers have learned to compensate for their learning disabilities" (p.302). This unmasking of concerns early on can help to circumvent the outcome often produced by stigma, and result in better planning for the one to whom it applies. Additionally, Heflinger and Hinshaw (2010) concur, "early detection…and intervention are of paramount importance; and if stigma precludes… evaluation and treatment, the consequences may be felt for decades to come." Professionals who are skilled and knowledgeable in providing group intervention to the special education student serve to help navigate them beyond the marginal expectations often believed to be inherent to them.

How is group counseling best facilitated in the educational environment for the benefit of students with learning disabilities? Earlier stated, school culture and climate are important aspects directly affecting group intervention. Administrators' "impact on learning is mediated through the climate and culture of the school" (MacNeil, Prater, Bush, 2009). If the special education student is devalued and feels unsafe in the learning environment, this can become a reflection on the administrators and "student achievement suffers" (p. 75). Thus, I hypothesize that the climate and the culture working collaboratively can produce a quality environment for all students and help reduce stigma of the marginalized few.

How does what happen in the group result in positive interactions with others outside of the group? Of the many theories, which has guided my work and been most effective with the special education student, has been the importance of building of supportive healthy relationships. This has assisted with the students' positive educational adjustment.   My goal with Jenene was both to diffuse anger and offer constructive strategies so that she would be able to make better choices and is more productive academically. She is learning how to handle anger by using the skills taught in group including stress management, communication skills, deep breathing, cognitive restructuring, listening to body cues, and by merely walking away from fights, which continues to be difficult for her and the other girls. Communication skills focused on verbal and nonaggressive ways of problem solving ensure that their voices are heard. They could say how they feel, why they feel the way they do, and what they want from others. Jenene and the girls were given a safe place to openly share those feelings. Confidentiality, important to group dynamics, was kept. The girls learned about themselves through each other. They were able to practice coping skills applied them in their world outside of school. They also learned conflict resolution skills.

As the group leader, acknowledging unproductive behaviors when they occur is essential. After the group begins to solidify, past negative behaviors tried to infiltrate the group. This awareness helped facilitate group change. Most of the girls responded positively to group counseling with the exception of one group member who was referred for outside therapy; her emotional needs were beyond what the school could handle based upon her background and behavior patterns. But, the other girls have improved in their academic achievements, and continue to learn life-long skills for building positive relationships.

Jenene has not experienced an emotional meltdown since participating in group counseling. She appears to be monitoring her thought patterns, regulating her internal states better by less negative reactions to peers, and she is ignoring comments more frequently that could ignite her anger responses. Academically, she continues to have challenges but she is exercising more patience with herself and academic achievement is incremental. It is sometimes difficult for her to accept her limitations--reading remains quite challenging still--and she does not completely understand why the challenges exist. But, she is learning to cope with the stigma that often comes with having a learning disability and her responses are less aggressive as a result of interventions learned within the group. In preparation for teen and adult years, she is making reasonable plans for her future.

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To top

The Role of Educators in Using Play to Improve Social Skills Among Children with Autism

By Sarah Al-Sharif

Abstract

Children with ASD express solitary and lonely behavior. Such instincts can be related to their tendency to play a single game or play for a very long time. Again, it can be relating to their 'staring' behavior. Mainly, they have the propensity to stare at the same object such as a toy or direction. They have unusual interests, taste, and preferences. They may have a singular meal of interest, a typical play, playing ground, site, and even posture. They hardly change such behavior if unnecessary medical, psychological, or corrective dimensions are accordingly implied. In this paper I will illustrate the role of educators in using play to improve social skills among children with autism.

Introduction

Autism is primarily a developmental disorder (Murdock & Hobbs, 2012). It is scientifically called the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Typically, autism affects children social association skills and interferes with their overall behavior. The disorder practically severely affects the communication, language, and social skills. The disease has adverse behavior, and which attracts the interests of psychologists, doctors, and social behavior practitioners/specialists. Their indifference in the society cuts across broad ranges. For instance, the child/children express social dissociation responses. They find it hard to play or evenly jointly connect with others. They tend to be living in their world where sharing, playing together and associating is not allowed. Again, they have challenges sharing their toys and for extended periods of time tend to be playing a single game. Autism children tend to have individualistic attention, focusing on their activity and eventually have challenges making and sustaining the friendship. Collectively, their social challenges entirely affect the way they associate with others (Wolfberg, Bottema & Dewitt, 2012). Their lone behavior contributes to being despised by others and as such advancing the disorder effects.

Additionally, autism children have vast communication challenges (Jull & Mirenda, 2010). Communication in this dimension related to coding and decoding issues. Inability to use gesture is common disorders among them practical behaviors include challenges in waving, nodding, and even pointing. Such challenges are the primary symptoms for infected individuals. Again, the autism children have problems in understanding and following simple instructions. Even at a tender age, healthy children have the mental ability to follow instructions. However, autism children show difficulties in understanding and following elementary instructions. Additionally, they have inconveniences in the use of specific and general words.

Such challenges lead to a comprehensive inability to have a complete and smooth conversation. Besides, autism cause children to have educational problems and primarily associated with the failure to read and write. In some extreme cases, the kid/s can read but without understanding. Collectively, communication challenges inconvenience their development mentally and health wise. Behavioral defects as such may include 'oblivion' characteristics; seclusion in their world (Aaron, 2014). Treating autism may tend to be a great challenge and especially when it is realized at late stages. However, early treatments and use of children involvement may play a critical role in treating its defects (Erin, 2011). Use of behavioral and psychological methods is possible mechanisms for treating the disorder. However, play, games, and children interaction has been established as a social and behavioral method for treating autism disorder. Various scholarly works have approved the thesis and provide a firm foundation on the effectiveness of the play. In this paper, I will review various global studies, which uphold the use of the game as a valuable tool for treating and controlling autism effects on children. Collectively, play attempts to reconcile the adverse effects of autism among children such as social and communication challenges. Erin (2011) establishes her thesis on a firm foundation on the role of play in children behavior. In her article 'How Play enhances your Child's Development', Erin established that play plays a vital role in enhancing physical development, language master, communication eloquence and emotional control. She adds that the degree of children's involvement in play determines their grasp for social skills. Cordially, acquisition of social and communication skills is quite paramount for development. In her argument, she outlines the key role and activities that contribute significantly to children's development. In a brief manner, she points out the role of play in self-realization. Play from the age of zero to three enhances the individuals realize the self-reliance element of the child. Self-realization is a coherent and vital element in understanding one's abilities and challenges. In a similar way, play actualizes physical realization, understanding of physical challenges.

Typically, autism is characterized by both socio-physical and communication challenges (Aaron, 2014; Erin, 2011). As such, play, as argued by Erin, play can identify and solve physical challenges at the pre-school levels. At the age between three and five, play enhances build relationships among friends, parents, and even parents for the schooling ones. Collectively, play attributes significantly to child monitoring. For instance, at the play event, the parents and teachers can monitor how the children play, associate, and even perform. As such, the play opens an opportunity to understand the child's behavior, deficiencies, and perhaps aid in developing corrective measures. In summary, she outlines the specific activities, roles and benefits play throb in the development of children; socially, physically, and in communication dimension.

Play enables children and particularly in the age of up to three grasps outstanding language skills. At the age of three, children initialize jabber and communication behavior during play (Kanga, Maatta & Uusiauti, 2012). They mostly start communicating by using familiar words and use of gestures. Such play events necessarily involve cooperative and associative behavior. As such, each child has his/her moment and role to play. They quickly learn and master to use of gesture and primarily communication skills. As stated earlier, autism victims and especially at the pre-school level have a problem in using gestures and communicating. Collectively, play plays a significant role in treating the autism behavioral discrepancy. Though Erin does not directly relate her play functions and objectives, the practical benefits of play highlighted serves the corrective measure.

Additionally, Erin states that, and especially from the age of three to five years, the play uses symbolism and creativity. Symbolism plays a significant role in enhancing creativity and vocabulary grasp. For instance, in symbolic play, the players assume responsibility and as well require them to develop remembrance skills. An example of a cooking play would require the use of toys, procedures, and tools, which demand mastery of language and skill. Collectively, play ensures kids grasp practical and outstanding skills in language and communication (Lieberman & Yoder, 2012). Typical autism adverse effects fall under language and communication challenges. Primarily, play, as described by Erin, has potential abilities to remedy autism disorder. Again, play enhances early elimination of language and communication challenges. Play starts at the tender age of even two years and extends even to five at which it can significantly engrave language skill grasp among children. Moreover, since plays start early, it as such a suitable remedy to downsize the effects of autism even at the level of pre-school. Aggressive and appropriate use of the game can entirely offer an excellent treatment strategy to controlling autism disorder effects. Erin (2011) as well elaborates on the role of play in engraving social skills. According to Erin, from the age of birth to three, children try to assimilate to language and create a connection in the moment of interaction. At three, associating with peers is a common characteristic. They tend to form relationships and especially play. At the age of five, the nature of games shed from parallel to cooperative games. Collaborative plays are quite critical in engaging relationship-building skills. Typically, identical plays tend to be solitary oriented and as such the collaborative stage plays the vital role in embracing relationship building (Erin, 2011). Again, essential social skills in the cooperative plays include sharing toys, tasks, division of labor and sticking to the game goal or focus. Practically, such social skills match discrepancy behaviors with autism children. For example, given the role of play in a game and as a team teaches the participants on how to work together and hence aids to build relationship skill in the long run. For instance, the block-building game allows the players to work cordially to achieve the desirable design in question.

Moreover, play again has proficiency in engraving social skills (Okcun & Akein, 2011). From birth to the age of five, both parallel and cooperative games allow kids to acquire interaction skills and controlled behavior. Role-playing establishes the fundamental role that could be practical in handling children with autism disorder. Additionally, play allows children to advance their physical coordination skills. Erin developed the assertion by nature of play. For instance, climbing and balancing games teach them on how to clutch the coordination skill. Autism children typically have a problem in coordinating their body movements in line with a rhythm or theme. Play according to Erin (2012) enhances interaction among the peers and such, educators can use the strategy to curb effects among children with autism.

Erin (2011; 2012) as well associates play with emotional maturity benefits. In the event of the game, children make their decisions. Such behaviors and skills enhance their confidence and understanding abilities. Emotional maturity is a vital element in the children development process. A particular case of autism children would ensure comprehensive prevention of stunted development and little esteem cases. Moreover, play provides the players gain exploration skills.

Exploration skill advances individualistic situation analysis and discovery abilities. Collectively, irrespective of the nature of the play, games and active involvement in play enhance children smooth and progressive problem. As such, educators could use play as an important tool to handle children with autism. According to Erin, play plays critical and high priority roles in ensuring progressive growth among children. Educators, teachers, and even parents can strategize associative, cooperative, and parallel games for children and use the plays as controlled remedy motives to handling the children. Collectively, the benefits associated with play are cognitively comprehensive to handle and redeem autism disorder behaviors among infected children. Aaron (2014) establishes play as a vital tool in inscribing social skills in children. In his article, he purports the analogy that play can aid solve disorders among autism children. According to Aaron, play typically characterizes the core social skills and which autism children collectively lack. Social activities such as play entail the participants to gain outstanding interaction and communication skills. Collectively, play has a broad base of vital skills and which embrace engagement in social development. As such, Aaron advocates on the use of the game to attend to needs of children with autism disorder. Again, he elaborates on 'do' and 'don't" of play as they relate to enhancing social skills and overall children development. As a peer educator, teacher and director, Aaron's research entails specific activities that would collectively aid to increase control over anti-social behaviors, attitudes, and practices in autism children.

The 'Dos'

Cultivating for social development is a primary do in enhancing social skills among autism children (Aaron, 2014). Typically, the educators and parental role under the task is sustained by the degree of motivation they undertake. Teachers ought to be the principal motivators of play among children. Aaron gives examples of their educators or parents role in enhancing motivation in play. In his comprehensive article, he points out that the teacher or parent playing with the children has a critical role to ensure the flow of motivation throughout the play. The need for motivation quenches children's concentration and focus. Such behavior has difficulties with autism children. For instance, in a 'cooking monster' game, the parent or educator could play the role of giving the recipes and pooling desirable resources together. By so doing, he/she will attract full attention for the participants and as such sustain the playing motivation. Again, playing with the children encourages their participation and contribution in the game (Aaron, 2014). Collectively, by availing motivation and which calls for educators' involvement ensures the children enjoy the play and perceive it as fun. Such experiences enhance total participation and comfortable grasp of skills and mastery of language. Moreover, playing with the kids and especially the games they love ensures social development and growth of self-esteem. Motivating the children is not the only important role to play in the playground (Aaron, 2014). It makes the educator the focal and reference point. As the instructor plays, the kids watch and importantly admire in the process of watching, the teacher can stop or wait for them to respond to the play. The doing is termed as 'motivate and hold on.' Practically, upon motivating, the educator should 'wait', a strategy that opens opportunities for the children watching to interact. The kids will respond in various ways upon 'motivate and wait' in the play. They can exchange gesture, face eye contact, or even verbally communicate. The event allows the children to learn how to associate and interact. Frequent utilization of the behavior encourages motivation, and even the kids will creatively find their way to play as the educator did. The practice is vital in encouraging interaction, use of

gesture and communication and language grasp. Additionally, the practice aids ensure social development continuity from event to event, play to play and day to day. Collectively it ensures progressive social development.

Aaron (2014) again emphasizes on the environment control for play with autism children. He advocates for the use of the low-destruction environment. Practically, he refers to minimization of external distracters to play. Competition influences the degree to which autism children bend to play focus. Completion represents noise from the outside playroom such as radio, television, or use of electronic toys. Aaron embraces cooperative and associative play in a silent room with minimal interference. Distraction limits concentration and so adversely influences participation. The convenience of the playroom regarding distraction and completion increases the rate of skill grasp. Educators and autism disorder practitioners ought to use a silent environment as a strategy to optimize the social development process. Besides, the educator is the focal point at the play moments and as such utilizing a calm environment makes himself/herself the only focus point. The children will remain attentive and as well ensure quick grasp of social skills. Dedicate time for play (Aaron, 2014). Being a key focus in play and even using the appropriate environment during the game is not enough. The educators need to dedicate sufficient time to play and monitor the children. As such, committing to monitoring and playing with the children demands for entire submission to the task at hand over a stipulated duration. Aaron recommends a two hours period for concise interaction with the children. Practically, children are characterized with short plays and entirely do not submit to long moments in the play. However, with autism children, the educators need to focus on setting a specific time for playing with the children. The physical presence of the teacher, parent, or guardian intrinsically motivates the children. Working parents as such ought to ensure their autism children have direct and appropriate contact with educators and practitioners as a strategy to aid them to treat associated disorders. Moreover, the trainers and educators need to be responsive to children developing behaviors (Aaron, 2014). Autism children will have a slow but practical grasp of social skills such as grip. As such, to ensure sustained remembrance of skill such as the use of gesture or pointing, the educators need to be responsive even to small issues. Responding creates a relationship and memories. It again makes communication effectual and enjoyable.

The Don'ts

Aaron (2014) again comes up with a detailed analysis of practices and activities the educators should not put in action in the play events. First, they should not continuously query the children. Raising question affects the way the brain functions. Practically, questions demand answers. As such, excessive questions teach children on how to respond. The initiating role of the brains as such is left idle and, therefore, fails to develop. However, that should not be the case. Children ought to learn to initiate and respond in a simultaneous manner. Apparently, the educators ought to embrace the initiation function rather than the response function. As a remedy, they should raise comments and only question when necessary. Autism children can learn initiation skills intrinsically as they try to connect, associate, and even cooperatively play. By so doing, the educators will teach the children to grasp initiation skills as the primary abilities and then enhance their responding abilities. The role cuts across pre-school and schooling children. Again, Aaron stipulates that the educators should not

limit kids control in play (Aaron, 2014). The ideology is based on freedom issues relating to the play. However, caution to inhibit destruction of property, self and participant harm need to be echoed. Providing the children with liberty in play opens opportunities to discovery and realization. The educators should not play hard on students and especially in restricting freedom of the game. Besides, with minimal control, the children will have free play environment. Collectively, besides caution, the children ought to be allowed to exercise their play will. It consequently leads to relaxed play.

Connection Needs

In the event of the game, the educators are encouraged not to neglect the children's connection needs and concerns (Thieman, Brandy & Fleming, 2011; Aaron, 2014). Unlike the healthy and mentally stable children, autism victims have challenges in associating with others. During group plays, they are left out and as such, they tend to be living in 'oblivion.' During their interaction with their psychological handlers and educators, they tend to feel acknowledged and as such try to connect, establish a relationship by using gestures or language. The educators ought to ignore even the minor attempted trials to connect. Responding to such trials and attempts builds self-esteem and as such aid in developing social skills. Practically, the autism children will have a slow but progressive grasp of social skills. As such, skills reveal, the educators and trainers ought to be sensitive and responsive to such behaviors from inception to full development. In a similar way, Aaron recommends autism children handlers to as well focus on nonverbal behaviors. Social skill grasp does not entirely revolve the world of verbal communication. Nonverbal elements in communication as well take autism children integral associative behaviors (Aaron, 2014). They tend to have challenges in using verbal communication skills, but as well, they may possess high command in the use of nonverbal skills. Their handler should be as such not focus on getting the children speak. They should as well be attentive on children use of gesture and other non-verbal communication tools. The educators as well ought to establish norms of connecting with the kids without even talking. Aaron gives an example of 'staring' as a nonverbal mode of communication. Typically, mastering nonverbal autism children communication skills helps them learn social skills in a more friend's platform as compared to a situation where speaking is with a strong emphasis.

Play plays an integral role in children grasp for social, communication, thinking and problem-solving skills (Wolfberg, Dewitt, Young & Nguyen, 2014). Practically, autism children are disadvantaged in the playing world since they tend to have a limited grasp for rhythm and frequencies. They tend to focus on a single routine, use of the same toys and as well exhibit antisocial behaviors. Such discrepancies play a significant role in the social development. However, autism is not just a barrier to playing but play an important tool in administering the disorder effects adjustments. Play can be used to control advancement and effects associated with ASD. Practically, the educators, teacher, and parents and who typically associates with autism children are the focal players in ensuring play restores behavior change and skill grasp among autism children. Playing with the kids is a definitive and a primary role in supporting autism children understand for social and communication skills (Wolfberg et al., 2014). Playing with the children mostly provides the educators with the opportunity to spot their strengths and weaknesses. Such information is entirely vital in handling autism children. Additionally, gathering the information aid strategize for effective methods to remedy the shortcomings in hand. Moreover,

the educators have the responsibility to assist the children grasp both social and communication skills. As part of their responsibility, having practical experience on how the children behave grants them 'a bank of information' and which in the long run aids in the treatment of the disorder. In light of plays role in enhancing autism children social development, various plays have different roles, concepts, and analogies in increasing skill clutch (Wolfberg et al., 2014). For instance, exploratory plays encourage children to not only plays but realize texture, size, and shape varieties. The play is characterized by its role in enhancing children's understanding of the world's features and advance. The play might be involved for autism children since they have challenges in decoding hidden information. Educators can use the play equipment and toys to encourage the autism children to realize the associated benefits through physical association. For example, the educators can involve the children in rubbing the toys and allowing them to feel the differences in texture, enable them to use their imagination to understand what they relate to in the actual world.

Cause-and-effect plays as well have an important role in increasing ASD children skill and behavior development (Okcun & Akein, 2011). Games with cause and effect consequences require the child to do an activity, which triggers some resultant consequences. An example includes pressing a button to ignite an electric car. The play teaches children to be responsible for their action and acts as self-control training game. With ASD children, doing the right thing is ascertained as a successful move. They stunted mental disorder renders them to make wrong choices. As such, when they do the right thing they need to be appraised and motivated. Praising their good options and decisions encourages them and collectively aids in skill clutch. The educators by so doing encourage them to continue playing and as well help customize the plays to have toy related cause and effect outcomes. Collectively, allowing the use of different toys simultaneously enables them to learn using different toys. It as well creates fun and heeds responsibility conduct. Introducing turns in the play makes it appropriate to engage the children in inquisitive and associative behaviors. Functional plays and which commonly known as toy games are most common among children (Wolfberg, Bottema & Dewitt, 2012). The typically possess a high degree of symbolism. Children are expected to use them for the purpose typically intended. For instance, a toy phone would be expected to represent actual phones in children plays. Educators can use the play to assist specifically ASD children in improving in their playing behavior. The educators can adopt a focal role-playing to enhance child participation. For instance, the educator can sit, face to face with the child and allow the child watch he/she does with the toy. In most cases, the child will initiate an imitation process. They will, in the long run, do as they saw the educator do. The role-playing and replication strategy enable grasp of various play session involving the use of the different tools. The teacher can then give the toys to the child/children and watch their degree of imitation mastery. In a different dimension, the instructor can try the imitation behavior. For instance, after establishing the toys, the child prefers, he can start imitating what the child is doing. The difference in the two strategies lies in the dimension imitation. In the later, the educator tries to copy the child's procedures for play as oppositely illustrated by the earlier approach. Additionally, where the child expresses difficulties in playing, the teacher can encourage him/her to cooperate (Wolfberg, Bottema & Dewitt, 2012). For example, in a driving game, the educator can pick the toy and start riding in the floor making respective sounds. The strategy allows the child not only to imitate but increase the passion for the play. As well, recognition plays a vital role in encouraging play. Praise and congratulation remarks have long-term

effects in enhancing play and skill grasp. Besides, the educator ought to be keen with boredom and exhausting behaviors. Practically, after a period of the game, the child will be exhausted.

The teachers should be cautious to detect and react to these scenarios. However, continued play with the key player has worn out adds no value and can even lead to loss of skills previously acquired. Constructive plays could as well be used to enhance competence and development growth in ASD children (Frankel, Gorospe, Chang & Sugar, 2010). Typically, the play involves children using assembles and particulars to build a bigger representation and which is the game key goal. For example, they may use blocks to develop a house or building. Due to mental development challenges, ASD children experience problems in organization and structure formulation. Educators can use the same play to motivate and cultivate for development opportunities. In a similar manner as cause and effect plays, the instructor can build the house for instance in the presence and sight of the child. The active participation allows the child to see how it is done. The educators or handlers can as well assist the children, step by step on how to perfect the constructive plays. In most scenarios, valuable games are solitary and such the educators need to set adequate time for every individual to ensure equity-learning process. Again, they (educators) can use this play in hand with physical plays to ensure continuous participation. Physical play may include jumping and running. Typically, physical plays have structure oriented formats. The plays enable the participants to respond to design or structure. Gaining proficiency in outdoor plays could as well aid the children grasp constructive play skills.

Besides the various categories of plays, 'social plays' are critical in skill development among ASD children (Frankel et al., 2010). Typically, social plays involve association and playing with others. Autism creates dissociation and as such, children infected primarily have challenges playing with others. As such, the educators can expose autism children to interaction step by step. The process should start with optimization of solitary games. Solitary games are individualistic and have simple goals and which are easy to achieve. Perfecting single plays allow the children build esteem and courage to react with others. Understanding play benefits and influences remain a critical issue in handling children with ASD behavior challenges. In a similar manner, educators ought to consider integrative mechanisms between children with and without ASD in play environments. Wolfberg, Bottema, and Dewitt (2012) carried out a study to affiliate the necessity of integrating peer with both and without autism as a strategic way of enhancing their development. Practically, autism disorder creates a social and development gap among the victims and typical children. The existence of such discrepancies as such result into isolation and perhaps threatens their (children with autism) development. As a result, the learn little about the society and its culture. They end up missing too much from their peers to fit in their social circles.

Wolfberg, Bottema, and Dewitt (2012) collectively carried out research on the effects on involving both categories of children in social and imaginary play. The study focused on the efficacy of using Integrated Play Groups (IPGs) in dealing with autism challenging behaviors. Due to neglecting issues by other peers, IPG was discovered to reverse the attributes of isolation among children with autism. Play behaviors between the two sets stipulate need for integration. Typically, autism children show great rigidity in their play patterns and associative behaviors. They, therefore, introduce immense variations at the event of play. IPGs designs and

which were designed to close-up the gap aimed at involving both peer groups in social and imaginary plays. It focuses on providing support, guidance, and companionship in gaining play skills. Elementarily, IPGs are characterized by sharing of behavior, skills, and communication tools.

The IPG model involves interaction among three parties; the novice players (children with autism), the experts (typical children), and the IPG guide. The guide plays the vital role in coordinating interaction between the two key groups (Wolfberg, Bottema & Dewitt, 2012). The model aimed at providing an interactive environment for the novices to learn and replicate from the experts smoothly with help of the guides. The play sessions act as therapy phases with control elements from the guide and who particularly is a professional in autism-related concerns. Collectively, the IPGs provide an equal opportunity for all its members to interact, associate, and learn from each other. Since it refers to the same set of peers, the design has been rendered effective in reversing challenging behavior challenges among children with autism.

IPGs were asserted to be effective in handling specific communication and associative behavior challenges (Wolfberg, Bottema & Dewitt, 2012). The model encourages and motivates them to plays. Elementarily, autism children have problems in playing and eventually do not participate in play. They tend to isolate themselves and involve themselves in single games partially. However, IPGs boost their motivation and stir-up their game urges. Again, playing with peers enhances their associative skills. Typical game environment is characterized by isolation and individualistic efforts to play. Due to communication challenges, children with autism find it difficult to associate with others. However, IPGs allows collective and associative interactions among the children. Collectively it boosts their social, command and response skills. Moreover, IPGs initiate relationship-building platform. Autism children have challenges in starting and maintaining relationships with both peers and other individuals. They tend to distinctive and individualistic concerns. Contrary, IPGs initiates and supports development of relationships as the social and imaginary plays purport relationship building. Moreover, the model has collectively established effective ways and customized effort to handle pre-school and adolescent individuals (Aaron, 2014; Frankel et al., 2010). Educators and teachers for autism victims could use IPGs as a strategic and reliable tool to boost behavior reversal among the subjects. Additionally, the model has profound merits in providing a remedy to a big group as compared to sing subject treatment efforts. As a play-oriented mechanism, IPGs remain a priority strategy for addressing difficulty behaviors among children with autism. The play remains an essential training and development tool for all children at their early pre-school and schooling levels (Wolfberg, Bottema & Dewitt, 2012). Play enhances their interaction, communication, and social skills. It additively contributes to their development and plays a vital role in their mental stability. Eliminating play among children is an adverse decision and as such, parents, educators, and teachers ought to invest in encouraging play. Sadly, a case of children with autism is vastly different. They have outstanding challenges in initiating and even participating in games with their peers. Collectively, autism disorder needs motivators to social interaction skills. According to Nelson, McDonnell, Johnston, and Crompton, the visual communication could be a primary tool for enhancing social interaction between children with autism and their peers. Their study aimed at establishing the strategy's efficacy in advancing play and social behavior grasp.

Visual and typically visual-graphic tools could significantly aid to encourage play by reversing challenging behaviors that block play efforts (Nelson, McDonnell, Johnston, & Crompton, 2007). For instance, inability to successfully communicate and perhaps initiate requests affect their esteem to involve themselves in peer group plays. Agreeably, their refraining behavior technically relates to their failure to communicate and associate. As such, children with autism could be encouraged to play by corrective treatment for their challenging behavior. Nelson et al. establish visual interactions as primal in enhancing communication and coherently motivating play. Children with autism could use a visual aid such as symbols t craft and increase grasp for communication and associative skills. Printed words, symbols, and even pictures have been established effective in training children with autism. The visual initiation strategy was developed to be highly effective (Nelson et al., 2007). The study concluded that visual and symbolic tools attracted play among children with autism and even led to their requests to perform using various tools. The study used a key to symbolize need to play. It also used a picture drawing, and which was a request tool to play. Additionally, the study allowed verbal communication for children to claim to and participate in play. Most of the participants were recorded to use a combination of the communication tools to request and even to meet the demands. The participants with autism disorder also used pictures and printed words to request for play. Moreover, the overall strategy initiated a steady and reliable procedure to training children with autism on how to initiate play entry requests. The kids as well were able to request playgroups using verbal and visual-symbolic tools.

Educator should as such note the efficacy and reliability of using visual interaction strategies to motivate play among children with autism (Jull & Miranda, 2010). Besides initiation and request skills, taking the children to playgrounds to primarily view another children play is as essential as teaching them to play. Of the participants who sought to join playgroups, their actions were driven wholly by desire to play. Children tend to be imitative and as such introducing them to play environments increases their urge to play. Collectively, the strategy was deemed useful, and educators could replicate it as a vital tool to train children with autism how to initiate request, interactions and eventually play. The strategy as well supports use of verbal communication tools. Communication skill development is highly responsive to the degree to which children involve in play (Jull & Miranda, 2010). Encouraging play as such increases their grasp for language, request, and response. Vassal strategies increased play phases and duration among children with autism. Moreover, their communication advanced from singular use of symbols such as pictures to request to use of both verbal and gesture. Collectively, the study upheld use of visual strategies to motivate play among autism children. Educators, teachers, and parents ought to replicate the strategies to ensure severe behavior reversal among the subjects. Besides, the plans are easy, simple, and collectively controllable for both domestic and school use. Friendship is an essential element in the play event (Thendorous & Nind, 2010). Either child involves a group or solitary games. However, single games are characterized with minimal development and as such throbs challenging behavior and slows down the pace of development. Isolated plays as well contribute to adverse effects on children with autism. Due to their social and communication challenges, solitary games minimize their chances to associate with other in playgroups. Friendship and which is a social skill is vital to pave the way for group plays. Establishing friendship between autism and typical peer children plays, an important task in aiding reduces challenging behavior. Arguably, friendship creates a pool of interests and especially among peers.

Consequently, it contributes directly to play, communication and social skills grasp. Friend sets primary pillars, and which are vital for social development among autism children (Erin, 2011). Friendship promotes confidence. Confidence could be defined by intrinsic motivation to implement a task or achieve a particular goal. Friendship boosts trust between children with autism since they gain success completion of tasks and goal as they interact with typical fellow peers. Group play as well serves the same purpose, increasing their motivation and compliments. Educators could use praise tools and verbal recognition to motivate them and celebrate their success. Additionally, friendship restores a sense of identity among autisms. Isolation is the biggest social gap-characterizing children with autism. In most cases, they lack real friends and end up playing alone. They as well lack friendship circles. However, strengthening friendship among autism and typical children increases they interactive and associative skill. In the long term, the dissociation gap vanishes, and they gain their sense of identity and personality. Making friends is a pool of massive benefits. It is fun and reduces stress (Aaron, 2014). Adolescents with autism find themselves with depression since they cannot practical do the same things their friends are doing. They distance themselves and hence dysfunctions their ability to interact and play with others. Supporting friendship ties helps them interact and reduce deteriorating mental challenges. Moreover, friendship and especially when integrated with play boosts happiness and association. Friendship as such plays a significant role in fighting challenging behaviors among children with autism. Educators ought to learn how friendship attracts play and how it naturally leads to social and communication skills grasp and development.

Social relationship efforts additionally have a significant role in reducing challenging behavior among autism children (Kangas, Maatta & Uusiautti, 2012). Social relations entail critical components, and which provides a firm foundation for social development. For instance, a successful social relationship attracts imitation. An imitation is a key tool to which children with autism can learn from peers and even educators. It, therefore, lays a foundation for learning communication and social skills for the participants. Again, it is based on learning 'take and give.' The component describes the overall requesting and responding behavior to verbal, nonverbal and cues. It is an element important in decoding communication efforts.

Collectively, it plays a significant role in learning initiation and communication skills. Social relationships as well encourage interaction and which is accrued to massive developmental benefits. Social relationships collectively lead to the use of play to boost social and communication skills among autism individuals (Nelson et al., 2007). Within friendship groups, problem solving among peers is among the greatest achievements. However, teachers and educators can use social relationships to craft games for children with special needs. Success play sessions highly depend on the degree of friendship and familiarity among the members. A group of strangers was established to spend less than three minutes in a single play. On the other hand, members with prior friendship relationships were asserted to take more time to play. As well, little coercions were witnessed in a group of friends as compared to strangers'. Educators as such have a demanding task to set up and monitor their interaction with typical peers to ensure optimal and smooth interaction.

Educators play an important task in administering play schedules for children with autism (Thieman, Brandy & Fleming, 2011). Educators should also in addition to motivating play also support successful play sessions. Respective task includes providing desirable tools for play such as toys. Effective grasp for social and communication skills remains subjective to relevance of the game. As such, the right and effective games should be encouraged. The educators should also outline the game rules and specify the goal. By so doing, the educator will have stipulated a road map and which the players ought to keep in mind and accomplish. The educators again should encourage integration of the players to involve strictly children with autism but also typical peers. The typical peers would be effective in teaching the autisms new skills.

According to Melanie Nind (2010), play is an integral and a learning tool to all children. More specifically, play is crucial for children with autism and related developmental disorders. Nind (2010) asserts in an interview that play is a basic and a 'must' for early childhood. "It is their only learning tool." Correspondingly, she clearly states educators have the primary role to utilize play as a key to unlocking difficult behaviors associated with children with autism. The play is characterized by socio-cultural values and which are important in grasp for social skills and behaviors. Collectively, Nind (2010) uphold the use of play based on its values and early effectiveness in reversing difficult behaviors. Nind as well provides a brief response to ineffective play behaviors among children with autism. Her explanation agrees with previous scholars that developmental challenges in communication and social skills contribute significantly. Practically, autism participants end up not playing their respective roles and which pushes them away from other peers. Agreeably, such dissociation behaviors contribute to isolation and hence hindering corrective measurements' efficacy. So does inability to play lead to developmental challenges? Yes. Nind elaborates on the importance on play in all children's development. Therefore, educators at their disposition and at all dimensions craft effective play environments for children as a strategy to purport their development. Her hope rests on the fact that play can effectively be used to reversal challenging behaviors among children with autism. Nind (2011) requests parents and educators to focus on behavioral gaps in children and implement respective play efforts to encourage play. She highly recommends motivation.

Motivation is an essential tool to play (Nind, 2011). Practitioners, educators, teachers, and parents needs to invest in creating conducive and extensive play environments. Motivation does not only include praise and recognition. It also includes setting a play-irresistible environment. Motivating is attracting, and so, the educators can invest in proving a highly amusing environment that draws play at a glance. More play means more grasp for developmental skills for children with autism. The encouraging play also requires the educators to offer minimal control over what the children do. Providing guidance would be sufficient and allows the children to learn from their mistakes. Again, educators' presence during play is necessary since it is a motivation as well. Educators and parents ought to spare time to play with their children as a strategic approach to reversing challenging behaviors. Nind (2011) as well highlights on the importance of encouraging social and interactive plays by integrating typical fellow peers. Play has profound effectiveness in handling autism disorder adverse behavioral complications. Various play methodologies have been invented and proven highly effective. However, the educators need to be aware and choose the most effective and practical play strategies in encouraging development of social and communication skills. Integrated playgroups mechanism is

among the stipulated active mechanisms. Nind recommended the use of informed decision making in choosing respective plays for children with special needs. She also purported use of technology in training children with autism new skills. Establishing play as an important practice for children with autism is not entirely sufficient to ensure behavior reversal. Educators need to understand how such children play. As such, understanding their nature of the play, challenges, and strengths lay a foundation to effective intervention. In most cases, individual child exhibit specific behavior and which might need special attention to curb the challenges.

Primarily, educators ought to ensure close and participatory efforts with autism children. Various games exhibit different specialty in addressing complex social and communication behaviors among children with autism. Kanga, Määttä and Uusiautti (2011) carried out a study to reinstate the role of educators and play among children with autism. The research typically focused on effectiveness and gaps associated with solitary and group plays. The study as well featured complex social behaviors among children with autism. Kanga, Määttä and Uusiautti (2011) established both lone and group play to be effective in encouraging grasp for social skills. Children with autism were found to participate individually in sensomotric practices.

They were observed arranging toys in patterns and manipulating same arrangements. However, the children had challenges in maintaining a single play for collectively three minutes. Additionally, the children were found to re-enact plays for adults. After observation, they are initiated, and re-enacted play practices as done by adults. The re-enacting behavior was minimal from peer plays. Furthermore, the children expressed interest in functional and imaginary games. Collectively, sole plays were agreed effective in enhancing grasp for the children. On the other hand, group games were found the most challenging for children with autism and particularly when the players included the typical peers. Communication skills were established as vital in successful group plays. Eventually, children with proficiency in communication were found more successful in participating in playgroups. Contrary, children with autism faced challenges in interacting with fellow peer's in-group plays. However, previous studies have supported group games and particularly when children with autism interact with their peers to be active.

According to Kanga, Määttä and Uusiautti (2011), playgroups supports skill grasp through lack of control mechanism could deteriorate their adverse behavioral attributes. Educators as such could use integrated controlled group plays to support children with autism in reversing their communication and interactive skills. The study again embarks on motivation to play as important in encouraging play. Primarily, effective play undertakings are based on efficacy in communication and interaction. Though relating challenging behaviors challenge autism children, play is vital in training such skills (Kanga, Määttä and Uusiautti, 2011). Educators and autism children handlers need to implement play supporting exercises to ensure efficient grasp for social and communication skills. Kanga, Määttä and Uusiautti (2011) recommended use of technologically advanced games and devices to motivate grasp for communication skills. They concluded that parents and educators ought to consider efficient use of television, the internet, play station and other technical devices to train children with autism. Presence and use of technology in play cannot be overlooked in understanding the role of play among children. Previous studies have supported efficacy of SGDs in aiding acquire communication skills. Play Stations as well contributes a lot to request and response skills. Collectively, Kanga, Määttä and Uusiautti

(2011) support use of the game to reduce challenging behaviors among children with autism. Interaction among various studies holds an important task in influencing play and friendship. The play is among the most settled treatment procedures for children with autism and highly dysfunctional social behavior. However, interaction during community play dates and especially among children with autism and typical peers affects play. Frankel et al. in 2011 carried out a study to attest effects of conflict among children with autism with their peers during play dates. The study was focused on the use of the game as a control tool to challenging behaviors, presence of conflicts during play sessions symbolized extreme antisocial behaviors among autism children. Again, minimal conflict would attract more attendance to play dates and even increase in friendship associations in school. Frankel et al. (2011) asserted that frequency of the game increased association, socialization, and communication skills among children with minimal conflicts during plat dates. Play conflicts during play dates were related to challenging behaviors among children with autism (Frankel et al., 2011). The study affirmed that autism children with minimal conflicts with their peers attended more play dates as compared those with adverse conflicts. Attending many play dates increased their interaction and association skills. They ended up having many friends. Again, their communication skills highly improved with an excellent grasp of requesting and responding abilities. Focusing on children who were more involved in plays, their challenging behaviors such as conflict and isolation retarded.

They became more social and responsive to role-playing. Collectively, the study affirms that play is an important tool in handling and reversing challenging behaviors among children with autism. The study as well implicates that increasing the frequency of the game dates and participation is vital in training children with autism on social and communication skills (Frankel et al., 2011). Practically, more play signifies more interaction and participatory opportunities. In a similar manner, play dates involves participants playing together and not solely. It is, therefore, an excellent chance to learn from each other. Play dates offers exposure and which may not be revealed under solitary games. Moreover, educators and teachers ought to consider outside school play events. School-based playgrounds and events may limit friendship, association, and interaction. As such, the responsible personnel ought to strategize, plan and implement outdoor events such as play dates. Such events trigger learning and interactive experiences and which aid curb challenging behaviors. As affirmed by earlier studies, play is important and resourceful of all children. Play delivers particular advantages to children with autism in reversing challenging behaviors associated with the disorder. However, plays' efficacy, successful inclusion in play remain an important element. Theodorou and Nind (2010) carried out a study to find out successful and effective tools and efforts at ensuring children inclusion in play. Teachers and who mainly play the role of educators have primary roles in ensuring children inclusion in play. For instance, the teacher is a supporter in the play. Supporting children in play includes offering guidance such as stipulating the rules of the game. Again, it includes commentary remarks on progress. It serves the typical role of guidance during play. Again, teachers act as mediators. Children with autism tend to be unparticular with games with great tendency to shift from the main goal. For effective learning, the educator serves as a mediator, restoring play behavior in case of unnecessary exclusion. Moreover, the teacher is a player and a partner. Playing with autism children boosts their participatory role and ensures efficient grasp of communication and association skills.

Children with and without autism disorder always have the urge to play. However, children with autism have challenging behavior in their effort to engage, initiate, or join peers for play. As such, they tend to be prone to dissociation and isolation. Educators have a primary role to fill in the gap between autism children needs and their satisfaction. As a play is important for developmental purposes, so is the teachers' role in ensuring inclusion and active participation in play. Practically, the adult has an important task in motivating and supporting play among children with autism. Play needs continued involvement and it is only the adults who can successfully guide and control children. Successful motivation and support contributes significantly to grasp of developmental and social skills. In a similar way, effective interaction, association, and role-playing skills gained through play can be successfully gained through guidance of teachers. Therefore, play is collectively an essential strategy for training children with new skills. However, external intervention is necessary to ensure practical grasp of respective skills. Jull and Mirenda (2010) study upholds on the role of parents and educators in enhancing play among children with autism. Autism has been associated with adverse mental effects and especially when treatments and control strategies are not implemented. It is, therefore, crucial for parents and educators to put in place behavior reversal strategies to reverse challenging behavior among autism children. The major role revolves building social skills through various mechanisms. Lynch and Simpson (2010) stipulate three encounters aimed to control challenging behavior among children with autism. First, setting classroom for autism children is primary in ensuring school-based training. Various interventions such as single subject treatments can be implemented to ensure acquisition of social skills. Classroom interventions include training on communication skills and which contribute to grasp of social skills. Secondly, Lynch and Simpson (2010) stipulate creating play opportunities for children. Collectively play has gained efficacy and familiarity in enhancing social skills among children with autism. Play ensures children solely, in a group interacts with toys, and associates with peers. It enhances collective grasp for social and communication skills. Parents and educators should encourage associative plays since they are rich in training and coaching social skills. Lastly, educators can teach children with autism social skills directly. Though direct coaching tends to face collaborative challenges, the strategy aids drill social skills in their developments. Collectively, Lynch and Simpson reinforce on use of play in teaching social skills since it is based on a natural setting.

Conclusion

Autism children have been established to have social and communication challenges. Their development difficulties possess them to challenging social encounters. Mainly, they face dissociation and isolation. They end up undergoing mental challenges and depressions. Specialists and scholars in children development have identified various mechanisms necessary to redeem the challenges. Play has been collectively being established as a coherent treatment strategy. Play takes various including solitary, group, and use of technical devices. Collectively, play encourages communication, interaction, communication, and role-playing. Such events aid train on social skills and hence providing a problem-solving element in controlling adverse effects of autism disorder.

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About Author

I am Sarah AL-Sharif. From Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. Currently, I am doctoral student at Ball State University-Special Education Department. In 2015, I graduated from master's degree from Ball State University- Special Education Department. I obtained my bachelor's degree from King Saud University - Special Education Department in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. I have started my dissertation in full 2017. I am working at King Saud University as lecture. After I graduate from the PHD, I will back to my work at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. I changed my dissertation topic from "Using Dramatic Playing Center to Improve Social Skills in Children Who Diagnosed with Autism in Early Childhood Education". To "Teacher's Perceptions of The Impact of Peer-Mediated Instruction Intervention Through Social Playing to Improve Social Skills for Children with ASD In Preschool in General Education Classrooms". Actually, I have changed my dissertation topic because I found from my reading that, children with ASD have several social effects especially on the school setting. They have many problems that involve adults or their peers including recognizing non-verbal language, participation in group play, making eye contact, making lasting friendships and responding to conversations and non-verbal expressions. Peer-Mediated Instruction Intervention (PMII) is one of the most effective intervention that assist children with ASD to improve social skills. In this intervention, teacher train peer without disabilities to interact with children with ASD by encourage children with ASD to engage and participate with peer in different activities in classroom in general education classrooms. Additionally, PMII, have shown to improve the non-verbal skills, social interaction, friendships, and reciprocal social communication. All the reviews state that PMI is an effective way of improving the social skills of children with

autism (Chang & Locke,2016). There are short-term benefits of PMII to children with ASD. It shows that interacting with peers during play helps to improve the social skills of children with ASD. There are various types of PMII They include Peer Tutor, Peer Buddy, Group-Oriented Contingency, Peer Networks, Integrated Peer Groups, Peer Initiation Training and Pivotal Response Training. Integrated Play groups are the type where an adult gives the peers and children with autism an environment that would help them interact with one another. Children with ASD enjoy playing like other children without disabilities, but children with ASD face challenges since they only play with few toys in a repetitive way. They may find it difficult to copy some actions, explore the surrounding, share their objects, take turns, and respond to others. Improving the social skills of the children with ASD is the most important aspect to teachers in the school setting. Teachers should observe those peers that children interact with (Chang & Locke, 2016). To support peer engagement that yields interactions, teachers should look at the emotional support given to all the students in class. Teachers should show support to all children and avoid favoring others. It may be difficult to show emotional support to all children. Therefore, professional development and training with support from counsellors can help to improve this factor. Supporting children with autism does not mean only in their behavior and social skills. The workload that the teacher gives to the students is also a way of helping them. The teacher should ensure that the work they give to children with autism either in school or at home is achievable. It should not be too much or too little. Children with autism often find some topics interesting and others not interesting (Chang & Locke, 2016). Therefore, due to this nature, teachers should sometimes give the children a choice on what they want to do. Many studies have been conducted to understand the perception that teachers have in using intervention as a method of helping children with autism improve their social skills. There are many types of interventions that have been used in classrooms to help improve the social skills of the children with autism (Katz, 2014). In conclusion, knowing teacher's perceptions about various interventions for children with ASD assist the school administration to provide to teachers who are working with children with ASD, professional development workshops, in the interventions that teachers believe that they are effective for children with ASD achievement and interaction with peer in general education classroom Katz, 2014).

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Implementing the LRE Provision of the IDEA: Current Status in Florida Schools

By Gordon Brobbey, Abdulmajeed Alzahrani, and Aliyah Killion

Abstract

One of the key provisions of the Individuals with Disability Act (IDEA), the law governing the education of students with disabilities, is the least restrictive environment principle (LRE). This principle requires that all students with disabilities are educated in least restrictive settings on a continuum of services. While the proportion of students with disabilities receiving their education in the general education classes has increased in recent years, our review of the found that the interpretation and implementation of the LRE provision is beset with some difficulties and controversies including confusion over meaning and interpretation. We reviewed annuals LRE implementation targets for three school districts in Florida and found that districts struggles to meet annuals targets. Implications for practice and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: special education, least restrictive environment, disability

Introduction

Historically, students with disabilities were educated in restrictive institutional settings as a result of stereotypical ideologies that viewed them as deviant, defective, and dependent (Winzer, 1993). Students who were diagnosed with deafness, blindness, emotional disturbances, and cognitive disabilities were prohibited from attending public schools. In the 1970s for example, only one in five students with disabilities received a public education (McGovern, 2015), with the rest segregated into institutions. Educators and policymakers rationalized such placements with the thought that institutionalizing would culminate in students being redeemed and regenerated as a result of the countryside settings of institutions that separated them from city folks.

Following parental and professional advocacy to ensure equitable educational access and an end to institutionalization of students with disabilities, Congress passed Public Law 94-142 known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. The law mandated that student with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive setting on a continuum of services (Mclesky, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). To ensure that states and local education agencies provided unfettered access to public education for students with disabilities, the law offered federal funding to states that established policies that promoted access to a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities (McGovern, 2015). The law was reauthorized in 1990 and 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and in 2004 as the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). The IDEA continues to be the flagship legislation guiding the education of students with disabilities.

A fundamental principle of educating students with disabilities espoused in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is the least restrictive environment (LEA) principle. According to the law, students with disabilities are to be educated with their non-disabled peers, to the maximum extent possible, in the general education classroom. The general education classroom is considered the least restrictive on the continuum of services with the most restrictive placement being separate special education schools and institutions (Carson, 2015). Students with disabilities should only be removed from the regular classroom for special classes and separate schooling environments when the nature of their disabilities and their educational needs cannot be met, with appropriate accommodations and support services, in a satisfactory manner in the regular classroom (Alquraini, 2013; Howard, 2003).

The passage and implementation of the LRE provision of the IDEA has increased access to the regular classroom for students with disabilities and also dispelled the myth that students with disabilities would not be successful in least restrictive settings. On the contrary, it has become evident over the years that students with disabilities are capable of meeting higher expectations (Alquraini, 2013; Mclesky et al, 2012) than was previously believed. For instance, Mclesky et al. reported a decrease of 25% in the number of students placed in self-contained and special school settings between 1990 and 2007. Mclesky et al. also reported a similar trend of placement for students with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disorders during the 2007 – 2008 school year. Other studies (e.g. Katz & Miranda, 2002; Teigland, 2009) reported improvements in reading achievement for students with severe disabilities in elementary settings whose reading scores improved by 31.7%, with math skills improving by 23.9%. At the middle school level, students' reading and math scores increased by 13.8% and 12.5% respectively. While it is commendable to see increasing numbers of students with disabilities educated in least restrictive settings, the ultimate goals of IDEA – educating all students with disabilities in the regular classroom – is yet to materialize.

Interpretation and Implementation of the LRE Provision

In spite of the significant strides in educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive settings, interpreting and implementing the LRE provision has not been without difficulties and controversies. According to McGovern (2015), the LRE provision of the IDEA remains one of the hotly contested issues and implementing it "in public schools has become a gray area filled with questions, concerns, and confusion" (p. 122). One of the confusions with the LRE principle has to do with the various terms that have been associated with it. These terms have been "frequently confused as having the same meaning" and are used synonymously (McGovern, 2015, p. 123). The terms are mainstreaming, inclusion, and integration. McGovern explains mainstreaming as referring to the physical placement of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom without supplementary aids and services. On the other hand, inclusion refers to the placement of students with disabilities in general education with support services provided to the students in the general classroom environment. Integration, according to McGovern refers to "the general concept of including

children with disabilities in the regular classroom" (p. 125). Although the IDEA does not use the term inclusion, it appears the law indicates a preference for inclusion (Florida Department of Education, 2005). It is worthy to point out that even though the law expresses preference for inclusion, the law mandates only that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive setting without indicating a preferred method (McGovern, 2015).

Another difficulty with implementing the LRE provision is the problematic interpretation. According to Carson (2015), the LRE requirement can be interpreted in two ways: (1) based primarily on the needs of the students or (2) on the availability of district resources, referred to as the necessity and availability approaches. Both approaches appear to be grounded in the IDEA language, but Carson argues that the availability approach does not fully satisfy the IDEA requirement and therefore is not a better interpretation of the law.

The absence of a clear interpretation has generated debates and has reached the courts through multiple lawsuits (Alquraini, 2013; McGovern, 2015). Court decisions have generally encouraged inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In spite of the court decisions, developing a uniform standard for inclusion across states has proven elusive so far (Alquraini, 2013; Carson, 2015; McGovern, 2015).

In Florida, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) shares a preference for inclusion, involving educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom with their peers in fulfillment of the LRE principle (Florida Department of Education, 2015). In defining inclusion, the FLDOE adopted the definition provided by the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI):

Proving to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society (NCERI 1995, p. 99).

The above definition highlights key ingredients of inclusion as adopted by the FLDOE, namely, supplementary aids and support services, age appropriate classrooms, and neighborhood schools.

In line with the FLDOE's preference for inclusion, a number of school districts under its purview have implemented inclusive education policies over the years to educate students with disabilities. According to the FLDOE, however, data shows minimal increases in the numbers of students receiving appropriate instruction in the general education setting, especially in core subject areas, and that more effort is required to attain the goal of inclusion (FLDOE, 2005).

To attain the goal of inclusion, school districts in Florida set annual goals regarding the percentage of students with disabilities they would like to be included in the general education setting each year. In this paper, we analyze this annual inclusion target policy to ascertain the extent to which three chosen school districts in Florida are meeting the targets. We will evaluate data from these school districts from the years 2014 to 2016 in

order to identify trends of attainment of inclusionary targets, and conclude with recommendations in terms of how to improve.

Implementing LRE in Florida Schools

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), the state of Florida has the fourth highest growth rate in the nation. As a state where the diverse population continues to steadily increase, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at some of the principles surrounding special education and how they are interpreted in Florida. In order to get a snapshot of the current state of the placements of students with disabilities in this state, we have examined exceptional student education data from three Central Florida school districts- Pasco, Hillsborough, and Lake Counties, from the years 2014-2016. The data utilized was retrieved from the Florida Department of Education Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services annual local education agency profiles.

In the year 2016, Pasco County had a prekindergarten through 12th grade population of 70,521students, with 15% of these identified as having a disability. This number increased from the previous two years, as the student population in 2014 was 68,107 with 14% students with disabilities; in 2015 there were 69,302 students, 15% of whom were found to be eligible for special education services. Florida's local and state education agency profiles indicate three areas for a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment: regular class placement for students with disabilities, separate class placement, and other separate environments. Regular class placement refers to students with disabilities who spend 80% or more of their school week with non-disabled peers. Separate class includes students who spend less than 40% of their week with non-disabled peers. Finally, other separate environment refers to those students who are served in public or private separate schools, residential placements, or hospital/ homebound placements.

Recognizing the need to have students with disabilities included in general education classrooms and contexts to a greater degree, each year the state target for regular class placement has gone up while the target for separate class placement has gone down each successive year. In Pasco County, in the 2011-2012 school year, the percentage of students with disabilities who were removed from regular class placement for less than 21% of the day was 81%. With a state target of 72%, this percentage decreased to 80% in 2012-2103, and decreased further to 79% in the 2013-2014 school year. With a state target of 77% in the 2014-2015 school year, Pasco County had 77.67% regular class placement and therefore met the state performance plan indicator for students with disabilities in regular class placements, even though the district percentages went down from 2011-2012. Separate class placement in this district went up, from a percentage of 15% during the 2011-2012 school year, to 16% in 2012-2013, 17% in 2013-2014, 19% in 2014-2015, then 16% in the 2015-2016 school year. With a state target of decreasing the percentage of students with disabilities age 6-21 who are removed from regular class placement for greater than 60% of the day to 10% in 2014-2015, this district did not meet the state performance plan indicator for separate class placement.

Lake County is another district in the region of Central Florida, where the prekindergarten through 12th grade population has grown from 41,801 students in 2014 to 42,438 students in 2016, with 14% of those students

receiving special education services. Regular class placement for students with disabilities in the 2011 - 2012 school year was 65%. This percentage increased to 66% then 67% in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years, respectively. During 2014-2015, 69% of students with disabilities spent 80% or more of their school week with non-disabled peers. This percentage increased again from 2015-2015, to 72%. Although the percentage of students in regular class placements has increased since 2011-2013, Lake County has not yet reached the state target of 77% and as a result has not met this performance indicator. Regarding separate class placement, in 2011-2012, 14% of students with disabilities were educated in settings where they spent less than 40% of their school week with non-disabled peers. This percentage remained at 14% from 2012-2013 and increased to 15% in 2013-2014 and the next two successive school years, through 2015-2016. The state target of 10% has not yet been reached in this district.

Hillsborough County is a much larger district, with a student population that has grown from 203,431 in 2014 to 211,936 in 2016, with 14% of these students having been identified as students with disabilities. During the 2011 - 2012 school year, 66% of students with disabilities were in regular class placements, with this percentage increasing to 68% in 2012-2013 and 70% in 2013-2014. During the 2014 - 2015 school year, regular class placement increased again to 71% and remained at that percentage for the 2015 - 2016 school year, falling short of the state target of 77%. Separate class placement for students with disabilities during the 2011 - 2012 school year was at 15%, decreasing to 14% in 2012 - 2013. Since the 2013-2014 school year through 2015 - 2016, this percentage has remained at 11%, and has therefore not reached the state target of 10%.

An additional consideration regarding the least restrictive environment mandate is school quality, potential inequities, and disproportionality. As is discussed by Carson (2015), schools with high percentages of minority students and schools in urban, high poverty areas may lack the resources to provide a continuum of services and placements. Furthermore, Redfield and Kraft (2012) document the correlation between school quality and the identification of certain disabilities. The over identification of African-American males, for example, in certain disability categories such as emotional behavioral disabilities is well documented and cannot be ignored. Can schools then elect to have students placed in more restrictive settings if the quality of instruction in the less restrictive setting is lacking? What are the implications for the disproportionate numbers of African-American males who are being educated in self-contained classrooms for behavioral disabilities? Are they being afforded the same opportunities for inclusion in general education classrooms as their White counterparts? These are merely a few of the questions that are generated as a result of examining LRE data, and that require further exploration.

All three Florida districts, Pasco, Lake, and Hillsborough Counties, have undergone population growth in the last five years. However, Pasco County is the only district among these three that has met a state target for placement in the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. It is worthwhile to note that according to the annual state and local education agency profiles, Black students are at greater risk for being placed in special education. A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that the students of a particular race are as equally likely as all other races to be identified as having a given disability. In the state of Florida, Black, or African-American students, have a risk ratio of 2.01 for being diagnosed with an intellectual disability and 2.15 for diagnosis of an

emotional behavioral disability. In Pasco County, the risks are 1.49 and 2.56, respectively. In Lake County, African-American students have a risk ratio of 2.80 for intellectual disability diagnosis and 2.40 for emotional behavioral disability diagnosis. In Hillsborough County, the risk is 1.99 and 2.86. Since students with diagnoses of intellectual and emotional behavioral disabilities are often educated in separate class placements, there is a greater likelihood that African-American students will be educated in more restrictive placements.

Recommendations toward the Implementation of the Least Restrictive Environment Mandate

Implementing the LRE provision of the IDEA first requires the assessment or screening of the student to identify their specific learning needs as provided for in the IDEA. The learning difficulties constitute different physical and psychological issues that may deter the practical use of language when reading, writing or speaking including figuring out solutions to mathematical problems in a learning environment. Once identified, the students with learning disabilities and who fall within the age of 3 through to 21 are placed in their respective Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program by the particular district school. The State of Florida's education department runs the Florida Diagnostics and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) (Florida Department of Education, 2017). The system coordinates with all the district schools in the state to locate, screen and place identified students with learning disabilities in district schools with the proper LRE. It also provides training and information to parents and teachers of such students. The selected schools need, therefore, to implement a framework to oversee the smooth coordination of this process.

Since the district schools in Florida receive students who are already in their ESE program, they should proceed to help in developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for them. The IEP constitutes guidelines for instruction and services specifically tailored or designed for the student. The IEP is an entitlement of the student with disabilities as provided for in the IDEA (Almazan, 2009). It thus enables the student to keep up the pace with the rest of the students who are not disabled when placed in the same general classroom environment. Special education and general education teachers from the respective district schools should take part in the development of the students' IEPs. This will require the equal involvement of the parents or a guardian and special education representative from the department of the school in the IEP process. The outcome of the IEP process is the IEP document that presents a detailed understanding of student needs and specifies appropriate services that are needed to enable students function and benefit from an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

Following the development of the IEP document(s) for the identified students, there is a need to place them in an appropriate district school. The appropriate district schools, in this case, must be one with supplementary resources and services to accommodate the students with the disability including the implementation of their IEP. This echoes the meaning of the educational placement process in the LRE – where students will feel equal and valued as members of a learning community (McGovern, 2012). The placement should be supplemented with orientation and transition programs (Jones, Zirkel, & Barrack, n.d.). Similarly, 'jump start' summer programs implemented, for example, after the 9th grade, will potentially help prepare the students who receive special education services for the next level of learning, which, in this case, is high school. Schools should

further recruit enough special education teachers and create an environment that highly values them as close members of the school community. However, there should be an exchange program that fosters collaboration between the special education and general education teachers whereby they can communicate, plan, and spend time with both the students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. These adjustments are crucial in facilitating the education of students in the least restrictive environment and for the efficient implementation of their IEPs.

According to Carson, (2015), and the IDEA, special education students, may be placed in either a least restrictive environment or a highly restrictive environment. The former refers to the general schools and classrooms, while the latter refers to the more specialized schools or classes. Public schools should provide a continuum of services in order to meet the individualized needs of diverse learners. Schools, therefore, must provide both the general classrooms and the special classrooms to accommodate the students with more significant disabilities where necessary. However, all students should be considered to be general education students first. This requirement is in line with IDEA's requirement for integration between the students with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts (Carson, 2015).

After meeting the placement requirements, the district schools should consider adjusting their instructional, curriculum and assessment models. The adjustments are crucial in helping the students with disabilities to fulfill their annual goals, which are integral to their IEPs (Jones et al., n.d.). The adjustments may include having content-certified teachers and special educations teachers take on the instruction processes. In this case, the former offers instructional support while the latter provides exceptional services and demonstrations to any students who may benefit from additional supports. The schools should implement regular practice and school-based or district-based test assessment sessions using the state assessment formats. During the test, the school can provide breakfast, for instance before the test or rewards after the test in the bid to motivate performance improvements. The special education teachers should also use core subjects in providing reading literacy skills. The teachers should consider increasing the reading hours for students struggling with improving on their instructional reading requirements. The schools need resources and support in obtaining instructional specialists who will help build focus among the students with disabilities. The involvement of instructional experts in the curriculum model will help students answer questions, practice higher-order thinking skills, and increase academic achievement. Adjustments such as these will go a long way toward helping students with disabilities achieve their satisfactory annual goals and make progress in general education classes.

Finally, school districts should consider having overall special education compliance personnel and other assistants for each of the classrooms in the building. The compliance team should have the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the IEPs. As earlier stated, IEPs are an entitlement for every student with a disability who must get services and accommodations as provided in IDEA (Almazan, 2009). Since all districts are presumably aspiring to be more effective in their placement of students in the least restrictive environment, it is necessary to have a team to supervise the implementation of the IEPs. They should also monitor the curriculum and instructional processes to ensure that they are inclusive for both the students with disabilities and those without. The compliance team should further check for a balance in the inclusion of students from

minority groups such as students of color and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in the various ESE programs (Grant, 2005). However, the schools' principals should be at the forefront as leaders in making sure that students with disabilities are adequately accommodated in the LRE and get the best learning experience possible.

All American students with disabilities deserve an education. The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 2004 to make sure that all children with disabilities acquire a beneficial education in any public school. It thus governs how public agencies including states provide special education (to children aged 3-21), early intervention (to toddler aged two years) and related services to the over 6.5 million American children who are diagnosed with a disability (US Department of Education, 2017).   It is necessary for additional research to be done in this area in order to ascertain the reasons for the lack of more significant progress in regular class placement in Pasco, Lake, and Hillsborough Counties, as well as other school districts throughout the state of Florida and the nation as a whole. With a diverse and ever-increasing student population, it is critical to examine issues of access and equity for all students with disabilities in an effort to realize the promises of IDEA and increase outcomes for these students.

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Book Review: Leading 21st Century Schools: Harnessing Technology for Engagement and Achievement (Second Edition)

By Judith Tremble

Leading 21st Century Schools: *Harnessing Technology for Engagement and Achievement,* second edition, by Lynne Schrum and Barbara B. Levin provide schools and district leaders with information and resources to help them be effective leaders of 21st century schools. This second edition suggest ways administrators and other leaders can use technology to enhance the engagement and achievement of students. In reviewing this book, the principal criteria included content, organization and references resources. This second edition have a substantially revised and updated about the 80% of information contained in the 2009 book, including : increasing use of tablets, smartphones, You Tube, and social networking tools in and out of school, the rise of BYOD(Bring your own device); online learning and flipped classrooms, twitter, MOOCs, Skype, digital textbooks, Common Core; innovative Makerspaces, including 3-D printers, fabrication, and goals of the " maker" movements; the importance of STEM; and personalized learning. A new future of this book is a companion website that include active links to all the websites and webpages discussed and recommended through the book. Using this website will save time from typing long URLs and will allow readers to keep these links up-to-date.

Toward the end, the book offer strategies for developing shared leadership by building knowledge and skills for using technology, including Web2.0 and social media tools, to meet the educational needs of 21st century teachers and students. The purpose of this book is to encourage school and district leaders, teachers, administrators, academic advisors and curriculum specialists to enhance the knowledge, skills and leadership perspectives required to become even more effective leaders in the 21st century. Technology, particularly new and mainly free social media and other Web 2.0 tools detailed in this book, offers leaders many ways to support changes needed for increased student engagement and learning, teacher instruction and productivity, and communication with other stakeholder groups (parents, alumni, board members, and the wider community). The book suggests ideas for dealing with how technology changes the way in which we are educating our youth in the 21st century. This edition tries to make all aspects of using Web 2.0 tools for teaching and learning transparent by addressing the cost and benefits of doing so in a way that honors complexity of the system in which school leaders operate. Many of the Web 2.0 and social media tools discussed in this book are focused on improving instruction and engaging learners, while others are focused on increasing teacher and administrator's productivity. This book also offers school leaders information about new movements in teaching and learning that many 21st century students and teachers are familiar with but that may not often be used in schools today.

This book is a must read for district, school, and classroom leaders as a holistic reference guide and instructional resource. Schrum and Levin's second edition is an invaluable compilation of how to navigate the digital world and provides the reader a thoughtful and well-organized set of topics and modules to understand and thrive in all things digital. From the importance of culture, staff development, and understanding digital content to social media and attention to new trends and issues, the authors have created a body of information separated by themes and topics aligned with real-world needs and challenges. With this resource, schools and districts can map out the work and seize the momentum of our digital world. Following the main themes covered in this edition:

- What strategic school leaders need to know
- 21st Century students and teachers: Ensuring their success.
- Tools for school leaders: Enhancing communication and building partnerships.
- Ensuring success: Legal, Safety, Ethical, and Curricular considerations for school leaders.
- Issues to decide: One-to-One, BYOD, Smartphones, and More.
- Web 2.0, Apps, Social Media, And Other Tools.
- Content-Focused Curriculum Tools.

Important considerations for 21st century leaders: hard questions and promising answers.

In Part I of this book, the authors offer four chapters to set the stage and stablish the framework for this book. They discuss many of the changes that leaders, their students, and our teachers face in today's world. They present their ideas about leadership for systemic change and discuss several drivers for change. Also, they show new ways to think about 21st century skills, new literacies, and learning. Chapter 2 discuss who are our students and teachers of today and tomorrow and how the next generation of teachers will be discussing how digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001) differ in their uses of technology. In Chapter 3, the authors detailed describe ways administrators can use Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social media to enhance communication within their schools, districts, and the larger community. Chapter 4 provides legal information and commonsense approaches for preparing your community to use these tools in appropriate and safe ways.

In Part II of this book they focus on hardware, software, and the interaction and impact of Web 2.0 and social media on curricular activities. Chapter 5 the authors discuss the important issues about individual network, support, planning, and choices of technology infrastructure. Chapter 6 provides up-to-the-minute information and practical ways in which educators are taking advantage of readily tools for teaching and learning. Chapter 7 they talk about freely available, open-source curriculum resources, using the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework for planning technology-rich lessons, and what administrators should look for in technology-infused lesson. This chapter also provides content- specific examples of ways technology can be integrated into mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, and other subjects.

The book concludes in Chapter 8 with information on some of the newest trends and issues that must be considered as part of leading a 21st century school, including online and distance learning, laptop schools and 1:1 computing, flipped learning, gamification of the curriculum, blending of formal and informal learning, and discussion on the digital divide.

Throughout this book, readers will hear from leaders, including a teacher, principals, superintendents, and other school, district, and state leaders who have saved money, effectively led their schools to integrate technology through the curriculum, and increased their ability to communicate with their student's parents and their communities using Web 2.0 and social media tools.

This book suggests activities to try and provide links to online videos, and list books to read. This feature provokes further though and action on the part of the school and district leaders, and the videos and readings suggested are very useful for discussion in professional learning communities.

To be an effective leader in the 21st century, we know that school and district leaders need to know a lot and possess many skills. Comparing this book with the Michael Fullan's book, Leading in a Culture of Change (2007), they are both agreed that "leading in a culture of change means creating a culture (not just a structure) of change". Unfortunately, many people today have very negative views about the future of schools and public education in general. We need to pay attention to this voice but not let them determine the changes we want to see in education. Fullan (2001,2012) and his colleagues wisely tell us that understanding one's critics, appreciating resistance, and seeing dissent as a source of possible new ideas is essential to a learning culture, to building relationships, and to managing change. Digital tools will continue to invade our schools, whether we like it or not. Furthermore, the information offered in the book reviewed, can help school leaders take risks, embrace change, and be leaders in digitally-rich 21st century. To be successful leader in the 21st century, school leaders need to be open to change, know how to manage change, and be risk-takers. Many schools and district leaders are seeking ways to move ahead as the 21st century progresses by creating an environment ready to change, including a leader who will respond, evaluate, and reflect effectively supporting that change. Everything written in this book is recommended to serve to this purpose. As the entire book has suggested, it is also necessary for each administrator to model, support, and lead his or her school or district to be successful in the 21st century. But they need guidance, leadership, and interaction to be smart, savvy learners who can teach or learn to their full potential.

About the Author

Ms. Judith Tremble received a Master's Degree in Special Education with concentration in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from Florida International University and is currently a Special Education Teacher (ESE) at Doral International Academy of Math and Science. A strong advocate for inclusive classroom, she involves her students with special needs in a cooperative learning environment where all can have access to the curriculum in a regular classroom implementing the appropriate accommodations and integrating technology to serve a

diverse population of students. Her professional interests focus on creating a diverse community of global learners ready to accomplish with the challenges of the 21st Century. In addition, she is an active member of the

National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) and the Autism Society of Florida.

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Book Review: Leading in a Culture of Change

By Lisa Johannes

In Michael Fullan's book *Leading in a Culture of Change* he offers suggestions on how leaders can focus on the five key components of; moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making. These suggested strategies are designed to offer guidance on how to lead effectively in muddled environments, foster leadership, commitment, and responsibilities in others, in pursuit of developing long-term successful educational and business organizations. He further drives home the point of how "It's important to make people feel part of a success story because that's what they want to be."(19). Here and throughout his book he illustrates how not only is it important to have team members feel empowered by self-accomplishments but leaders as well, and in turn creating a powerful learning community.

Fullan does a good job at presenting some examples and offers a broad perspective of specific procedures of the general steps when he declares that the education and business systems we previously had are unsustainable and compares it to the ever-increasing agriculture and human health concerns worldwide. He reveals studies in large scale business reform projects from around the world and continues to point out in comparison how companies are better than the best school systems. Mainly due to proportionality and diligence on the task of improvement and of course profit margin motivators. He reemphasizes the humanistic connection with mild sarcasm in the section on *If Businesses had souls* and pokes fun of how ironic it is that: "schools are in the business of teaching and learning, yet they are terrible at learning from each other" (92). Fullan briefly touches on the inevitable disturbance factors of change however, he doesn't offer much in solutions or maintenance during this complicated journey other than "take as much time as the situation will allow, and how "for many reasons, effective leaderships skills must be learned *in context" (125)*. What he does conclude with is "the lessons for developing leaders in a culture of change are more tortoise-like than hare-like because they involve slow learning in context over time, and in the end how the tortoise won, and people, like tortoises, have to stick their necks out to get somewhere" (121). Fullan 's Leading in a Culture of Change offers reaffirmation of *Our Iceberg is Melting*: By Rathgeber and Kotter in the respect of once a change was noticed by a small group how plotting the course, getting others to buy-in, and dealing with those who want *no change becomes the commitment and slowly* when leadership, team members, and intentional recipients are all on the same page with respects to change, what can begin to take place is incredible, regardless of adversarial conditions. Fullan's 138-page instructional book is an easy and interesting read, he doesn't bog down the momentum of the book with excessive technical terms and what he does use he explains in easy to understand language. At under $20.00 I highly recommend Michael Fullan's *Leading in a Culture of Change* for anyone looking to gain a new perspective and improve their leadership skills.

About the Author

Lisa is a graduate from Georgian Court University in Lakewood NJ where she majored in Special Education and Elementary Education. Recently she graduated Florida International University with a master's in special education and earned an endorsement in Autism. She has also had experience in the private sector with special needs adult program development. Currently, she is working on the development of a dog related service program solely supported by adults with special needs. Her education and experiences have helped her to build a solid foundation and drive her to empower herself and others through self-accomplishments.

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Book Review: What Great Principals Do Differently

By Nicole Phillips

In the book, What Great Principals Do Differently by Todd Whitaker, the author starts the book by highlighting the importance of understanding and studying what makes effective principals successful. The rest of the book focuses on the specific things that set effective principals apart from ineffective ones. The author chose three different perspectives to use while defining his framework; research studies that visited schools with both effective and ineffective principals, personal observations in fifty schools he consults for, and the author's personal core beliefs. The main purpose of this book is to emphasize fifteen trademarks of great principals concentrating on their attitudes, goals, decisions, and practices.

"Outstanding principals know that if they have great teachers, they have a great school; without great teachers, they do not have a great school." (Whitaker, 7) The author emphasizes the importance of identifying what makes a teacher great and how to find these special teachers to add to your team. When you have great teachers, they make your job a lot easier because they follow your vision and make sure that the school's goals are being met. Too often principals focus on making their school "programs", like whole language, direct instruction, open classrooms, and state standards, the best when they really need to focus on creating the best staff; when the staff is top-notch, it follows that they will implement the programs successfully.

The author also mentions that there are only two ways to make your school better; get better teachers and improve the teachers you have (Whitaker, 8). As stated above, principals need to focus on creating a staff that will go above and beyond what is expected of them, but effective principals also have to be willing to work with the staff that they have that may not be "great". Improving the teachers you have is just as important as hiring great teachers.

"The real challenge is to treat everyone with respect everyday- and great principals do." (Whitaker, 21) Respect can mean a variety of different things to different people and it can be very hard to be respectful to people when they are being stubborn or are simply being disrespectful to you. However, principals after to remember that people will always remember that "one time". If a leader ever loses their cool, not only will the person they freaked out on remember, but everyone present will remember as well. Principals need to remember to start every day positively and make sure they are always acting professionally and appropriately. If they do this, their staff will follow.

"Experience is not the best teacher; the best teacher is the best teacher." (Whitaker, 46) This is a common misconception when it comes to determining the best teachers. Most people assume the more experience you have, the better you are. However, especially in education this is not always true. We sometimes see that teachers who have been educating for many, many years are not always up to date on all the most recent

research and evidence based practices. Principals need to be aware of the different qualities that make a teacher great and realize that experience isn't always one of them.

Principals have to be willing to do whatever it takes to do what is best for *all* students, what is best for *all* the teachers, and what is best for the school (Whitaker, 64). School leaders always have to put everyone else ahead of themselves. This can be very hard and time consuming. How can one person possibly know what is right and do what is right for possibly thousands of people (depending on the size of the school)? They have to be able to set goals and follow through with them. The goals also have to pertain to improving the school and the staff in order to help make students successful. This is where many struggle. They know what needs to get done, but sometimes they put them on the back burner or get distracted by other situations that arise and then lose focus on the important things. Maintain focus and follow through with your vision and goals. The end goal is always for your students to leave your school being the best version of themselves; successful and happy.

Another important trademark of successful principals is that they make the people who do the right thing feel comfortable (Whitaker, 77). It is important to thank the people who are doing the right thing in the hopes that it will make those not doing the right thing now do it. For example, if you want your teachers to have grades in by Friday and on Thursday there are many who haven't turned them in yet; instead of sending out an email restating that everyone must have their grades in tomorrow, you could send an email thanking those teachers who handed in their grades before they were actually do. This way you are not making the teachers who did the right thing uncomfortable by sending out a negative email and then those who haven't also know that they still need to do this. This trademark also goes back to school leaders needing to treat everyone with respect every day. Make necessary things positive in some way instead of pointing out the faults. Reward those who are doing the right thing and others will follow.

"What Great Principals Do Differently," is an exceptional resource for any school leader that has the desire to develop effective practices in their schools. The resources in the book can help principals recreate the policies and practices that are already in place in order to make them more successful. Using this book, principals have a resource to help with different situations and can be referred to at any time. In order to be effective, school leaders need to understand the need for the change, how it would be implemented, and initiate the change that is necessary. Anyone who reads this may see that one of the disadvantages is the amount of time that administrators must dedicate to learning about and creating a clear understanding of what their vision and goals are for their schools in order to initiate the change that is required. Principals have to be ready to provide support throughout the process.

Michael Fullan wrote a book called "Leading in a Culture of Change". He emphasizes how leaders can focus on certain key change themes that will allow them to lead effectively under messy conditions. This theme is similar to Whitakers in many ways. They both believe that when something is not going the way it should, change needs to be initiated and it needs to be initiated by the leader. It is the leader's role to have the schools best interest at heart and to do whatever it takes to make the school successful. One of the ways to do that in both

texts is by improving the staff around you. When you have a staff that believes in you, your vision, and your goals, they will follow you until the end (Fullan, 2001; Whitaker, 2003).

Fullan's book also focuses on moral purpose and how important it is for school leaders to have not only in themselves, but in their entire staff. Leading with moral purpose means having a commitment to making a difference in the lives and outcomes of students as a result of their experiences at school. Although Whitaker never uses the phrase 'moral purpose', he frequently talks about how important it is that everyone in the school is on the same page and has the same core beliefs. As an educator, one of our core beliefs should be moral purpose (Fullan, 2001; Whitaker, 2003).

"What Great Principals Do Differently" is not a "how to" book, but it does offer high-quality advice on what to do and how to do it. It doesn't give a cookie-cutter approach to becoming the best principal ever. However, it does give a framework with a plethora of ideas on how to improve your attitudes, decisions, practices, and goals to be more successful. "Every principal has an impact. Great principals make a difference." (Whitaker, 115)

References

Whitaker, T. (2003). *What great principals do differently: 15 things that matter most*. New York: Eye on Education.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

About the Author

Nicole Phillips is a teacher at Believers Academy Charter School in West Palm Beach, Florida. She teaches math and science to high school students with emotional and behavioral issues. She started at the school as an Americorps member. During her time as an Americorps member, she completed 1750 service hours in 11 months and also worked with struggling students on their reading skills. Approximately 80% of her students increased their reading level by at least one grade level in those 11 months. She has an innate desire to help others and to make a difference in the world. She completed her Master's degree in Special Education with the Autism Endorsement through Florida International University in August 2018.

Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following link:

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-october2018/

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-sept2018-issue2/

NEW! Resource Collection on Trauma-Informed Care

Check out the *new suite of resource pages on trauma*, which includes:

- intro info about **trauma**, especially in children;

- what **trauma-informed care** is and what's involved in becoming a trauma-informed organization;

- trauma-informed **schools**; and

- how to prepare for, cope with, and support recovery after a **natural disaster**.

Come to the landing page for the suite and spring from there!

ESSA Fact Sheets in Spanish!

Also completely new! Just *click on the title below* to access the fact sheet in Spanish and download the online version in Word or in PDF. For your convenience, we've also identified and linked the *English* language version of each of the ESSA fact sheets.

Evaluaciones académicas y estudiantes con discapacidades bajo ESSA
English version: *Academic assessments and students with disabilities*

Pruebas para estudiantes con las discapacidades cognitivas más significativas
English version: *Assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities*

Sistema estatal de rendición de cuentas, apoyo escolar y actividades de mejoramiento
English version: *Statewide accountability system and school support and improvement activities*

Enmiendas a IDEA como resultado de ESSA
English version: *Amendments to IDEA made by ESSA*

1...2...3... CPIR Resources to Take Forward

We can't really say we have "favorite" resources, because it's all been a blur and a flurry, but perhaps we are most proud of these CPIR products, services, and *processes*.

The Hub and Its Library
CPIR's Resource Library has been built in stages, of course, with multiple refinements along the way. It currently boasts more than 1,200 resources relevant to the work you do, in English and Spanish, and it's searchable by topics key to Parent Centers and families.

Parent Center Locator
Did you know that, in the last year, visitors to the Hub logged more than 2.5 million sessions searching for

information on disabilities and where to find help and guidance. *Find Your Parent Center* has consistently been in the top 10 most-visited CPIR web pages, leading visitors directly to you.

A Year in the Life: Parent Centers in Action
These two resources are all about *you*–what Parent Centers accomplished last year. Show yourselves off with the data captured in the infographic. Adapt the adjustable infographic to display your *own* Center's achievements.

4...Co-Creation with Parent Center Staff

The active participation of Parent Centers in CPIR product development is a hallmark of teamwork. We especially prize that so many of you have been involved in assembling multiple resource collections and training curricula for the rest of the network to use, share, and build on. Many, many thanks for taking the development lead on:

Resource Collection on Behavior Supports and School Discipline
(RPTAC 1 @ SPAN)

Tool Kits for Board Professional Development *(RPTAC 4 @ WI-FACETS)*

Inclusion Curriculum *(RPTAC 3 @ Parent to Parent of GA)*

Best Practices in Outreach *(Outreach Workgroup)*

Juvenile Justice Toolkit *(Juvenile Justice Workgroup)*

Disproportionality in Special Education Training Module *(Significant Disproportionality Workgroup)* | The link above is to the *draft* version available in the BootCamp 2017 workspace (password needed). *Final* version coming soon!

5...Collaborations with TA&D Colleagues and Others

CPIR has also worked in concert with other ED-funded projects to share expertise relevant to Parent Centers and the families you serve. To mention but a few...

Getting Ready for When Your Teen Reaches the Age of Majority: A Parent's Guide Series
Partners | National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) and the National Post-School Outcomes Center (NPSO)

Act Early Ambassadors and Parent Centers *(Webinar)*
Partners | Act Early Ambassadors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

ESSA and the Assessment of Students with Disabilities
(Webinar, Stakeholder's Guide to ESSA, multiple fact sheets)
Partners | The Advocacy Institute and the National Center on Educational Outcomes

We could go on and on... but we won't. Still, we send our appreciation to our other collaborative partners who lent their expertise to our Webinar series.

Ending Reflections

We have been truly pleased to provide tools that Parent Centers can use or adapt, platforms that enhance the network's capacity to collaborate with each other, and a way to spotlight the knowledge and skills of Parent Center staff and access each other's know-how. Don't forget to use:

Survey Item Databank | For ready-made questions for surveys, evaluations, and needs assessment

Who Knows What? | Capture your skill areas and know-how

Parent Center Workspaces | Great for joint projects and keeping up with important topics!

Latest Employment Opportunities Posted on NASET

* Special Education Teacher-Grades K-12 - K12 is a dynamic company on a mission to provide the most compelling, comprehensive, and effective K-12 education available. Our employees are a critical part of an organization that is providing powerful, new options for the way children can be educated. They have a passion for education and a drive to make a difference. We pride ourselves on maintaining the highest level of integrity. To learn more - Click here

* Director of Special Education - Stevenson HS D125 is seeking to hire a Director of Special Education for the 2019-2020 school year. This individual will serve as a member of the school's leadership team and is responsible for leading the school's efforts in the area of Special Education services. The Director is responsible for supervision of special education programming, leading the district's efforts in compliance under legal standards, managing the special education budget, interfacing with parents, and leading staff development efforts in the Division. To learn more - Click here

* Executive Director - The ED works with the Board of Directors to provide leadership for the development and implementation of the strategic vision and plan of CFEC. Within the framework of the goals, objectives and policies established by the Board of Directors, the ED is responsible for the administration of all components of the Corporation. The ED effectively communicates CFEC's plans and policies to broad audiences and develops and nurtures productive relationships and resources deemed essential for the attainment of CFEC's goals and objectives. To learn more - Click here

* Significant Support Needs - Teacher- Special Education: As a collaborative member of the special education team, this person will be responsible for teaching/evaluating and implementing an education program for significant support needs (SSN) students utilizing inclusionary practices whenever possible. Instruct students utilizing evidenced based literacy and math education methodologies and instructional techniques. Integrate children with severe disabilities and modify/adapt curriculum for general classroom. To learn more - Click here

* Reading Tutor - Tutors needed to provide multi-sensory, systematic, phonics-based instruction to students in grades K-12. Effectively utilize multi-sensory structured language instructional techniques, and demonstrate explicit teaching, modeling, guided practice, and consistent review in lessons. Understand the language processes and how they impact the development of proficient readers and writers. To learn more - Click here

* Special Education Teacher K-12 or Preschool - For over 100 years, HeartShare has been dedicated to improving the lives of people in need of special services and supports. The HeartShare team, now 2,100 employees and growing, helps individuals develop to their fullest potential and lead meaningful and enriched lives. To learn more - Click here

* Special Education Instructor (K-12) - Compass Charter Schools is one of California's leading WASC-accredited virtual charter schools of choice. Families from across the state choose us for the 21st century online and home study learning options provided through our cutting-edge curriculum. Success in balancing the development of the whole child is central to our mission and to leading and serving the parents and scholars of California. To learn more - Click here

* SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER - Mountainside, NJ - The Arc Kohler School, Mountainside NJ is a leading collaborative private special education school serving student's preschool age through high school. The Arc Kohler School is seeking a Special Education Teacher to work full-time with their unique population. Full-time, 8:30 A to 3:00 P. To learn more - Click here

* Special Education Teacher - Pathways in Education (PIE) is a year round Public Non-Profit Charter School who works alongside their students to design individualized learning plans. We work to effectively meet their unique academic, social-emotional, and scheduling needs through a blended teaching model. The primary responsibility for this position is to provide specialized academic instruction to individual and small groups of students, reinforcing language and reading concepts. To learn more - Click here

* Special Education Teacher - The primary responsibility of the SPED teacher is to provide instruction and other related services to Special Education students. The SPED Teacher will also facilitate diagnostic assessment including administration, scoring and interpretation. SPED teachers will review and revise IEP's as needed. To learn more - Click here

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

Acknowledgements

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