

Research to Practice: K-12 Scholarship Journal

**VIRGINIA FEDERATION OF THE
COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN**

Fall 2014, Volume 4

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Our Purpose

The Virginia Federation of the Council for Exceptional Children (VA CEC) *Research to Practice: K-12 Scholarship Journal* is a peer-reviewed journal that publishes research-to-practice articles which incorporate the application of research and how that research applies to best practice in support of the K-12 population.

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Volume 4

Letter from the Editors

We are pleased to present the Fall 2014 edition of the Virginia Federation of the Council for Exceptional Children *Research to Practice: K-12 Scholarship Journal*. This issue includes six articles addressing timely and important topics: (a) oral language difficulties that underlie different types of learning disabilities in reading and writing; (b) strategies for teaching reading comprehension skills to high school students with intellectual disabilities; (c) how families can strengthen language skills of young English language learners; (d) how administrators can support co-teachers in building effective partnerships; (e) an analysis of social promotion and grade retention; and (f) how parents and teachers can utilize available resources to advocate for and support students with disabilities.

While authors present findings from research and discussion on the laws and regulations that govern special education, each have been intentional to articulate implications for practice, providing a range of tools and strategies for parents, teachers, and administrators to employ in order to meet the specific needs of the families and children they serve.

We wish to thank the authors for their contribution to this issue and the editorial board for their careful review and thoughtful suggestions for improving the articles presented in this issue of the *Research to Practice: K-12 Scholarship Journal*.

Sincerely,

Lucinda S. Spaulding, PhD

Sharon M. Pratt, EdD

The Relationship of Oral Language to Subgroups of Learning Disabilities in Reading and Writing

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Youngstown State University

Abstract

A close relationship exists between children's reading and writing learning disabilities due to their nature as language-based disabilities. Reviews of the research, however, generally focus on either the relationship of language to reading disabilities or to writing disabilities, and few reviews have combined those two elements in a comprehensive manner. This article describes the relationship of the oral language difficulties that underlie different types of learning disabilities in the area of reading and writing. A theoretical framework, that synchronizes the Simple View of Reading and Writing models, is also introduced. Within the framework, it is described how individual differences in various language aspects are linked to subgroups of learning disabilities. Educational implications are also discussed.

Keywords: learning disabilities, reading, writing, dyslexia, comprehension

Introduction

Approximately 40% of the school-aged children who receive special education have a learning disability (LD), and at least 80% of the students with LD experience serious problems with reading and language-based difficulties, including poor written expression (Kavale & Forness, 1995; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Reading and writing are language-based skills and there is a close relationship between children's oral (spoken) language and their reading and writing development (Kamhi & Catts, 2005). However, most discussion concerning oral language skills and reading disabilities has focused on the links between phonology (i.e., sound structure) and word reading difficulties. The potential importance of other language aspects (e.g., semantics, morphology, syntax, and discussion) to reading and writing disabilities has been less well documented. More importantly, few attempts have been made to synthesize the existing literature concerning how oral language and various groups of reading-writing LDs are interconnected. Therefore, the purpose of this review of the literature is to: (a) describe how reading and writing are theoretically related to oral language; (b) clarify how the underlying language profiles are linked to the reading and writing subgroups of LDs by contrasting literacy profiles of students with dyslexia and those with specific poor comprehension (SPC); and (c) provide instructional suggestions for the reading and writing subgroups of LDs.

Theoretical Relationships between Oral Language and Reading and Writing Disabilities

Hoover and Gough's (1990) Simple View of Reading provides a framework for differentiating various reading disabilities and portrays reading ability as a product of two language-based processes: decoding (word recognition) and language comprehension. The Simple View of Reading suggests that three types of reading disabilities exist with different etiologies that are uniquely related to their reading difficulties. First, the deficient reading performance of students with dyslexia stems from their weakness in decoding, and not from a weakness in language comprehension. In contrast, the poor reading comprehension of students with SPC stems from their weakness in language comprehension but not in decoding. Students with generally poor reading skills have weaknesses in decoding *and* in language comprehension.

In the area of writing, the Simple View of Writing model was proposed by Berninger and her colleagues. In the model, transcription (e.g., handwriting, spelling) and executive functions (e.g., planning, reviewing) form the foundational base that contributes to text generation within a working memory environment (Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, Graham, & Richards, 2002). In this framework, spelling-level transcription and text generation (composition such as idea generation and structure) are two language-relevant processes (Berninger, 2000). Thus, the framework of the Simple View of Writing suggests that language-based writing deficits can occur due to spelling difficulties, text generation difficulties, or both.

When the language components of the Simple View of Reading and Writing models are combined, both learning to decode and learning to spell require that students come to understand how the oral language is composed and how written words can be decoded. Thus, both decoding and spelling are learning processes of breaking the codes of language. In contrast, both learning to understand and to generate text are forms of meaning-based language. However, the code-based and meaning-based language dimensions are not mutually exclusive; successful reading requires an orchestrated function of various abilities (e.g., decoding and language comprehension), as does successful writing. Neither successful reading nor writing can be accomplished if one skill is missing. This conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

The illustrated framework also clarifies how different types of reading and writing difficulties fall under the categories of code-based and meaning-based language. In terms of reading and the Simple View of Reading, dyslexia can be understood as a type of code-based reading difficulty whereas students with SPC have some form of meaning-based reading difficulties. Similarly, students with spelling difficulties are considered to have a type of code-based writing difficulty while students with text generation difficulties have a type of meaning-based writing difficulty, based on the conceptual framework of the Simple View of Writing.

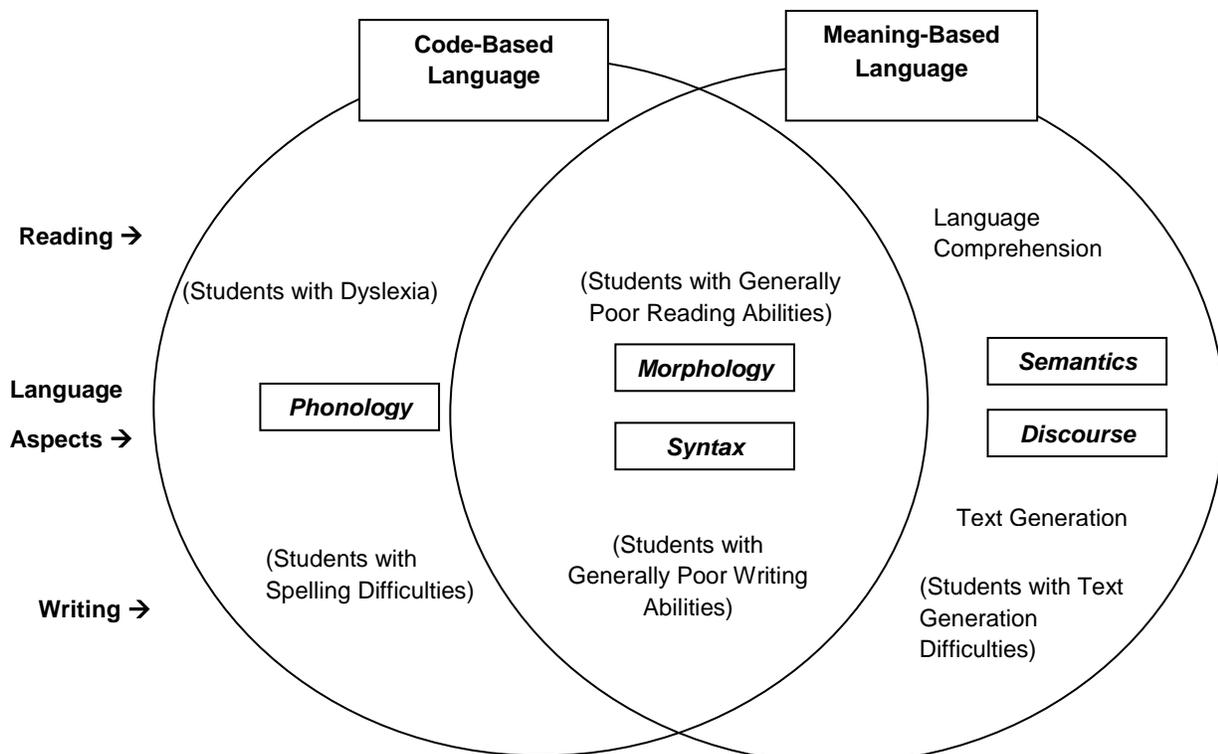


Figure 1. Overall framework of reading and writing based on code-based and meaning-based language and the relationships of the five language aspects to reading and writing learning disabilities.

The Relationship of Oral Language to Different Types of Reading and Writing Disabilities

Oral and written language are interconnected, in that they share several aspects of oral language such as phonology (sounds), morphology (morphemes), syntax (grammar), semantics (meaning), and discourse (story structure). Yet, it remains less clear how each component of oral language is related to the code-based and meaning-based language dimensions, as well as how each component is linked to different types of reading and writing LDs.

The Relationship of Phonology to Reading and Writing Competency

Among several phonology-related skills, phonemic awareness (i.e., the ability to focus and manipulate phonemes in spoken language) has been well documented to show its relationship to reading and writing success as well as disabilities, specifically for the code-breaking and code-generating process for alphabet-based written symbolic systems (Ehri & Roberts, 2006; Melby-Lervåg, Lyster, & Hulme, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000; Plaza & Cohen, 2007). With LDs in reading and writing, poor phonemic awareness is among the most prominent characteristics of students with reading difficulties and those with spelling difficulties. With LDs in reading, strong correlations have been reported between a lack of phonemic awareness and problems in learning to read (Catts, Hogan, & Fey, 2003; Siegel & Ryan, 1984). When it comes to subgroups of reading disabilities, poor phonemic processing performance has mostly been observed in students with dyslexia. These students with dyslexia demonstrate poorer performances in associating sounds with printed letters relative to typical students (Siegel & Ryan, 1984), which indicates more fundamental problems with phonological skills. In contrast, phonological difficulties have not been observed as much in students without decoding difficulties, such as those with SPC (Nation & Snowling, 1998, 1999), indicating that phonological difficulties mainly cause poor code-breaking processing.

Under the premise of shared phonological processing for reading and writing, students with reading difficulties should also demonstrate writing difficulties, specifically in the area of spelling. Students with spelling difficulties generally have poor phonology-related skills and their spelling errors are mostly non-pronounceable spelling patterns, indicating that these students do not have intact phonological representation (Bruck & Treiman, 1990; Friend & Olson, 2008). Poor spelling has been also recognized as one of the main characteristics of students with dyslexia (Bourassa & Treiman, 2003; Carlisle, 1987). The dyslexic spelling patterns demonstrate more errors in spelling consonants in a cluster than when the same letter does not appear in a cluster (Bruck & Treiman, 1990). Nevertheless, one type of reading disability that is not characterized by spelling difficulties is SPC: students with SPC have age-appropriate spelling and phonological processing abilities (Cragg & Nation, 2006), which supports the idea that poor phonology mainly contributes to spelling difficulties.

The Relationship of Morphology to Reading and Writing Competency

English has many irregular words that one cannot successfully read and write by simply applying grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules. Instead, through experience with complex words, children learn to use morphemes (i.e., the smallest unit of meaning) as reusable blocks of words for the multisyllabic word reading, spelling, grammatically correct sentence production, and meaning information (Carlisle, 2007). Altogether, evidences from the existing literature suggest that morphology serves as a scaffold for the code-based and the meaning-based processes of language (Cunningham, 1998; Ku & Anderson, 2003; Nunes, Bryant, & Bindman, 2006).

Students with reading and writing difficulties have poor performances in various written and verbal morphology-related tasks, including oral and written morphological awareness tasks (Rubin, Patterson, & Kantor, 1991). When it comes to different types of reading and writing disabilities, morphology is more related to meaning-interpretation and generation than code-based language as evidenced by more difficulties exhibited in SPC than dyslexic literacy

performances. Few researchers have argued that poor morphology has causal links to decoding difficulties of students with dyslexia. Instead, research suggests that primary deficits of dyslexia presumably stem from phonology-related difficulties (Arnbak & Elbro, 2000). On the other hand, students with SPC demonstrate poor morphology (Nation, Snowling, & Clarke, 2005; Tong, Deacon, Kirby, Cain, & Parrila, 2011), indicating that poor reading comprehension partly stems from poor morphology (Tong et al., 2011).

Deficient morphology also hinders both spelling and text-generation performances of students with various types of LD. Students with spelling disabilities showed poor performance in oral morphology tasks and make little use of morphological analogies in spelling (Carlisle, 1987), demonstrating that their weak underlying morphology skills may contribute to poor spelling performance. However, there are students with LDs who have comparable morphology-related spelling skills to those of their typical peers without disabilities: students with dyslexia. Students with dyslexia took advantage of morphological information when spelling complex words, like the students without disabilities, supporting the idea from reading research that morphology is not the primary difficulty of dyslexia (Bourassa, Treiman, & Kessler, 2006). Morphology performances in SPC and dyslexic writing have been mainly addressed in conjunction with syntax and will be discussed in the following section.

The Relationship of Syntax to Reading and Writing Competency

Syntax governs how words are combined into larger meaningful units of phrases, clauses, and sentences (Kamhi & Catts, 2005). In general, syntax is a type of supporter for the code-based and the meaning-based processes of language: the more sophisticated syntactic skills are acquired, the better a student can figure out the meaning of a sentence, a phrase, or a text by effectively using syntactic cues. In addition, syntactic knowledge is critical for correctly composing sentences and texts.

Poor syntax is one type of oral language disability that is frequently exhibited by students with reading and writing disabilities (Rispen & Been, 2007; Rispen, Roeleven, & Koster, 2004; Siegel & Ryan, 1984). Compared to typical students without disabilities, students with reading disabilities have greater difficulty understanding syntactically complex spoken sentences and are worse at distinguishing sentences that use different stress patterns and article positions (Mann, Shankweiler, & Smith, 1984; Smith, Mann, & Shankweiler, 1987). Considering different subgroups of students with reading and writing disabilities, syntax can be understood as a shared component of both code-based and meaning-based language dimensions even though its degree of relatedness is larger to the meaning-based than the code-based language dimension: students with SPC have more fundamental syntactic difficulties that may be linked to poor reading comprehension compared to students with dyslexia. Compared to typical peers without disabilities, students with SPC demonstrated poor performances in understanding syntactically complex sentences (e.g., passive sentences; Cain, Patson, & Andrews, 2005; Catts, Adolf, & Weismer, 2006; Nation & Snowling, 2000) and weak syntactic awareness (e.g., correct a scrambled word order; Isakson & Miller, 1976; Nation & Snowling, 2000).

Similarly, students with dyslexia demonstrate greater difficulties in understanding syntactic structure compared to typical peers (Rispen & Been, 2007; Rispen et al., 2004). Yet, findings generally indicate that their syntactic deficits are not one of their major linguistic difficulties because there is a subgroup of students with dyslexia who do not show poor syntactic performances (McArthur, Hogben, Edwards, Heath, & Mengler, 2000). More importantly, the students with dyslexia still had less severe syntactic difficulties compared to students with SPC (Catts et al., 2006) and those with specific language impairments (Rispen & Been, 2007). Thus, syntactic difficulty of students with dyslexia may be attributed to other difficulties, such as their well-known difficulties in phonology and/or processing-related difficulties (e.g., verbal working memory; Robertson & Joanisse, 2010; Smith et al., 1987).

Although writing and reading patterns should be similar to each other due to their sharing nature of language, existing yet limited findings suggest that poor syntax is more related to dyslexia than SPC writing, and thus the code-based language is more affected by poor syntax than the meaning-based language dimension. Several studies reported grammatical deficits in the oral and written production of children and adults with dyslexia, specifically when complex sentence production performances were compared to typical groups and those with language disabilities (Puranik, Lombardino, & Altmann, 2006; Sterling, Farmer, Riddick, Morgan, & Matthews, 1997). However, other studies reported no difference in several syntactic parameters, such as simple sentence production, mean length of T-units, and clause density, between written products from children with dyslexia and those from children without dyslexia (Puranik et al., 2006; Sterling et al., 1997).

In regard to SPC writing, only one study by Cragg and Nation (2006) investigated syntactic aspects in writings of 10 year-old students with SPC. Inconsistent with findings from reading research that showed poor syntactic performances in children with SPC (Cain et al., 2005; Catts et al., 2006; Isakson & Miller, 1976; Nation & Snowling, 2000), no differences were observed between children with SPC and typical children in syntactic complexity in a narratives writing task. Nevertheless, cautious interpretation is required for drawing general conclusions solely based on the findings by Cragg and Nation (2006) until future research addresses written syntactic performances of SPC students and can replicate these findings.

The Relationship of Semantics to Reading and Writing

Semantics (i.e., vocabulary) is a tool to understand and establish meaning. Vocabulary occupies an important position in learning to read and to write due to its high correlation with reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Nation & Snowling, 1998) and a sizeable vocabulary allows a writer to translate a richness of thought onto paper (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). Generally speaking, semantics plays an important role in the meaning-interpretation and meaning-generation processes of language.

Poor semantics or vocabulary has been considered one of the major underlying deficits of students with LDs in reading and writing. Students with LDs speak, write, and understand fewer, less diverse, and less complex words compared to their typical peers without disabilities (Morris & Crump, 1982; Nation & Snowling, 1998). Evidences collectively confirm that semantics is mainly related to meaning-based language aspects of reading and writing because semantic difficulties are more related to students with SPC than those with dyslexia (Catts et al., 2006; Cain, Oakhill, & Elbro, 2003; Nation & Snowling, 1998; Nation, Snowling, & Clarke, 2007; Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008; Siegel & Ryan, 1984). Poor semantics is the hallmark of SPC students and has been considered as the primary cause of their poor reading comprehension (Nation & Snowling, 1998, 1999). Students with SPC know fewer words (Catts et al., 2006; Nation & Snowling, 1998) and access and retrieve less efficiently the meaning of words than typical readers without reading difficulties. In addition, students with SPC have difficulty inferring the meaning of unknown words from the contextual information (Cain et al., 2003; Nation et al., 2005; Nation, Snowling, & Clarke, 2007). In contrast, vocabulary is intact for students with dyslexia (Shaywitz et al., 2008). In particular, students with dyslexia tend to have intact vocabulary knowledge and semantic processing skills compared to students with SPC (Catts et al., 2006; Nation & Snowling, 1998; Siegel & Ryan, 1984), suggesting that semantics is not the primary area of deficit of students with dyslexia.

Although little research exists, findings from SPC writing studies mirror results from SPC reading studies: students with SPC produced less various and appropriate words than those used by good comprehenders regardless of the differences in the modality of the prompt (pictorial and verbal) and the text genre (narrative and descriptive; Carretti, Re, & Arfè, 2013; Cragg & Nation, 2006). In dyslexic writing, students with dyslexia produced less variety of words compared to typical students without dyslexia but a lesser extent than students with

language impairment (Puranick et al., 2006). However, their lexical diversity was not different from controls matched chronological-age and spelling-skills (Connelly, Campbell, MacLean, & Barnes, 2006). Altogether, findings from research on SPC and dyslexia suggest that semantics is a part of the meaning-based language dimension.

The Relationship of Discourse to Reading and Writing

Discourse is a unit of language longer than a single sentence (e.g., story, conversation, or lecture; Kamhi & Catts, 2005). The relationship of discourse to reading and writing orchestrates all the necessary linguistic and cognitive skills in order to produce a meaningful representation of language, and thus to understand and express a meaningful text. However, the fundamental aspects of discourse fall under the meaning-based language dimension because discourse is the level of language in which an accurate representation about what a person reads is produced and what a person thinks is transcribed.

One of the important language-related discourse abilities is knowledge of text structure. A few studies demonstrated that the lack of text structure may be a source of deficient reading comprehension (e.g., story grammar; Montague, Maddux, & Dereshiwsky, 1990) and poor text composition (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Laughton & Morris, 1989). Due to their incomplete awareness of narrative prose, students with LD recall less of an ill-structured narrative text and recognize less inconsistencies in a text than typical students (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Montague et al., 1990).

Studies have also reported that students with LD have been found to be less efficient than their peers without disabilities at organizing and producing written compositions that include the essential elements of narrative and expository text structures (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Laughton & Morris, 1989). In text generation, few research studies have reported the existence of a subgroup of writing disabilities whose main difficulties reside in composition-level problems without having poor spelling skills. Yet, findings from composition via dictation studies partly support the possible existence of students with specific text-generation difficulties (Graham, 1990; MacArthur & Graham, 1987). When given the option of dictation, students with LD produced more writings with a higher level of quality because dictation eliminates the transcription difficulties of writing (Graham, 1990; MacArthur & Graham, 1987), indicating that the text generation can be independent from transcription and that a subgroup of students with specific text generation difficulties may exist.

With regard to the relationship between discourse and different types of LDs in reading and writing, only a few studies investigated the discourse-level writing profile of students with dyslexia: written products of students with dyslexia did not differ from those of the controls without writing difficulties on the total number of ideas, organization of ideas, and the length of the text measured by the total words produced (Connelly et al., 2006; Puranik et al., 2006), demonstrating that producing and organizing ideas are not the main difficulties in dyslexic writing. On the other hand, a limited number of existing studies demonstrate that students with SPC produced less coherent and structured stories when given picture and verbal prompts: their writing samples simply describe a list of events without including complicated and advanced story structures such as causal-effect connections between the events (Cragg & Nation, 2006; Carretti et al., 2013). Consistent with the findings from written tasks, students with SPC produced less integrated events with fewer causally related main events in oral story production tasks (Cain, 2003; Cain & Oakhill, 1996). These results collectively suggest that students with SPC have weaknesses in the level of discourse of language while those with dyslexia do not.

Classroom Practices for Students with Reading and Writing Disabilities

Although reading and writing disabilities share common underlying linguistic difficulties (e.g., phonology, semantics, syntax etc.), few intervention studies examine the effects of

language-based intervention on writing performances of students with LD and most writing interventional studies are centered around higher-level cognitive strategy instruction. Nevertheless, this review finds good evidence that the common linguistic difficulties can be manifested into different types of writing difficulties of LDs. Thus, it is important to address language intervention that targets the specific linguistic difficulties of different types of LDs in reading and writing.

In regard to students with dyslexia, the findings from this review suggest that their main language difficulties reside in poor phonology within the code-based language dimension: their difficulties are not directly related to meaning-based language dimension such as semantics and discourse. Therefore, teachers should focus on phonology-based interventions for improving decoding and spelling performances of students with dyslexia. Two examples of the phonology-based instructional approaches are phonological awareness training (including phonemic awareness training) and phonics (National Reading Panel, 2000). More specifically, the phonological awareness training can be effective in increasing word recognition skills when (a) the letter knowledge training is included; and (b) the training is provided in a small group setting (National Reading Panel, 2000). Concerning phonics, systematic phonics instruction is recommended for students who demonstrate foundational level of phonological awareness. There is also a large body of evidence suggesting that, training in phonology can be most beneficial for improving the poor decoding and spelling performances of students with dyslexia (Alexander, Anderson, Heilman, Voeller, & Torgesen, 1991; Shaywitz et al., 2008; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998).

On the other hand, readers with SPC respond best to non-phonology based interventions (e.g., vocabulary, morpho-syntax intervention, and language comprehension intervention) in order to compensate for their limited meaning-based language difficulties in the areas of semantic, morpho-syntax, and discourse. Despite few available research studies, Clarke, Snowling, Truelove, and Hulme (2010) reported the effectiveness of language intervention on reading comprehension of students with SPC: their oral language (OL) intervention consists of non-phonological language instruction such as vocabulary, listening comprehension, figurative language, and narrative. The OL approach was more effective than other types of intervention (i.e., meta-cognitive training and the combined training of meta-cognition and oral language) even 11 months after the training. By combining findings from this review and those by Clarke et al. (2010), it is suggested that students with SPC benefit from non-phonology based language intervention that can collectively target several meaning-based language aspects.

In addition, among the meaning-based language aspects, semantics is considered as a major source for poor reading comprehension and text composition of students with SPC (Nation & Snowling, 1998, 1999). Thus, teachers should strive to provide an evidence-based vocabulary instruction for students with SPC. Although there is no one best method for vocabulary instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000), Robust Vocabulary Instruction (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002) is beneficial for improving limited vocabulary and reading comprehension of students with SPC. This vocabulary training approach stresses richness of semantic coding of word knowledge and has demonstrated its effectiveness for students with reading difficulties. In particular, students are provided student-friendly definitions and ample activity-based vocabulary practices. Thus, students with SPC would easily grasp the meaning of a target word and be given opportunities of remembering the word in meaningful contexts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this review is to synthesize the current literature to reveal the interconnected relationship between oral and written language (i.e., reading and writing) components in learning disabilities (LD). By combining the Simple View of Reading and Writing models, the complex processes of literacy can be grouped into the code-based (decoding and

spelling) and the meaning-based language (language comprehension and composition) dimensions (see Figure 1). As previously explained, these code and meaning-based language dimensions are not mutually exclusive and are interrelated to each other: the code-based language serves as a foundation for higher-level reading and writing processes, several of which are linked to the meaning-based language dimension.

By contrasting literacy and language profiles of students with dyslexia and those of students with SPC within the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1, I can conclude that each of the five language aspects (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse) is linked to code-based and meaning-based language dimensions and to various subgroups of LD in different degrees and unique manners. First, poor phonology is mainly linked to code-based language deficits whereas weak semantics is connected to meaning-based language difficulties. Likewise, poor phonology is mainly related to poor decoding types of reading disabilities (dyslexia) and poor spelling performances. Second, poor semantic skills are connected to reading comprehension and text composition failures, both of which are meaning-based language processes: these patterns are mainly evidenced by poor vocabulary of students with SPC. Third, although a small number of research studies have been conducted, findings demonstrate that students with SPC have weaknesses in the level of discourse of language while those with dyslexia do not. Fourth, difficulties in morphology and syntax are related to both the code-based and the meaning-based language processes of reading and writing. Yet, existing but limited evidence demonstrates that poor morpho-syntax performances are more related to SPC than dyslexia in reading tasks but are more linked to dyslexia than SPC in writing tasks. Such different patterns may reflect performance characteristics from the elicited expression tasks (e.g., story writing and verbal story recall): although morpho-syntax knowledge in the oral domain should impact both reading and writing in a similar way, an individual can choose to write or say a simple and accurate sentence rather than producing a complex but inaccurate sentence in the production tasks. Maybe it is the former case for children with SPC in Cragg and Nation's (2006) study, and is partly the reason why their writing and story recall samples did not reflect their underlying morpho-syntactic difficulties. Thus, it is rather inconclusive how weak morpho-syntactic knowledge is related to code-based and meaning-based language.

In practice, teachers should address distinct types of language interventions for students whose diverse reading and writing difficulties are rooted in different types of linguistic weaknesses: classroom teachers should provide phonology-based language instruction for students with dyslexia whose decoding and spelling difficulties originated from the code-based language deficits. Non-phonology based language instruction should be implemented for students with SPC whose language comprehension and text generation difficulties stem from meaning-based language weaknesses.

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Teaching Reading Comprehension to High School Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

The strategies for teaching reading comprehension skills to high school students with intellectual disabilities are different than the strategies for teaching those skills to elementary students. This paper examines several specific strategies that can be easily implemented in the classroom. Studies show that reciprocal teaching, scaffolding information, and graphic organizers increase students' comprehension. In addition, the issue of relevant literature is also critical to successful reading comprehension. Finally, this paper examines the use that technology can play when teaching reading comprehension. A sample weekly lesson plan is provided in Appendix A.

Keywords: reading comprehension, intellectual disability, high school, reciprocal teaching, scaffolding, graphic organizers

Introduction

Teaching reading comprehension to high school students with intellectual disabilities is an often overlooked challenge for special education teachers. The vast majority of reading curriculum is geared toward students at the elementary level and is not appropriate for struggling high school readers. An intellectual disability is defined as an IQ of less than 70 and varies between mild, moderate, and severe. The focus of this paper is on those in the mild to moderate range. These students are generally high-functioning. They are able to participate in some general education settings, such as elective classes, with assistance as appropriate. Students in this category face a variety of learning difficulties across the curriculum. Some of the struggles, such as issues with grasping concepts in social studies and life skills classes, can be helped with stronger reading comprehension skills.

Review of the Literature

The review is divided into four sections. First, strategies for teaching comprehension are addressed. These strategies are specific to high school students and clearly define what works and does not work for this population. Second, motivation and use of relevant literature is discussed. If a student is not motivated, he will not learn. This section gives concrete examples of strategies that have been proven to motivate the unmotivated learner. Third, the use of technology in teaching reading comprehension is addressed in detail. High school students are very technologically savvy. This section gives examples of ways to incorporate technology into the learning process. Finally, conclusions based on the literature are discussed. This section gives detailed ideas on what needs to happen in the high school setting in order for students to increase their comprehension skills.

Strategies for Teaching Comprehension

Known as metacognition, or thinking about thinking, readers must first learn to comprehend the text in order to be successful readers (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009). Students need to be able to "clarify a purpose before reading, monitor comprehension during reading, and reflect after reading" (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 4) in order to fully comprehend the text. These skills are not inherent but must be taught through explicit instruction in the classroom.

The vast majority of current research on teaching reading is focused on the elementary level. Very little research is done on teaching reading to struggling secondary students. Those students who are intellectually disabled are even more neglected when they should be getting

more help. In fact, “. . . remedial support for literacy is typically provided only at the elementary school level” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 1) when studies have shown that “. . . adolescence is not too late to intervene and even older students with learning disabilities benefit from targeted interventions . . . that focus on word study, developing word meanings and concepts as well as comprehension strategies” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 1).

In the general education classroom each subject area is generally taught individually. For students with intellectual disabilities, studies have shown that subjects should be taught together to gain the best results in the area of comprehension (Alfassi, Weiss, & Lifshitz, 2009). For instance, reading skills can be taught when students are reading social studies literature. Teachers can have the students do a graphic organizer to aid in comprehension while reading a biography about an important historical figure.

Strategy instruction has been found to increase the comprehension skills of high school students with intellectual disabilities. “The focus of strategy instruction centers on developing readers’ procedural and conditional knowledge to improve their comprehension of texts” (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996, p. 66). According to Dole et al. (1996), studies of fluent readers have shown that they use specific strategies during the entire reading process to gain the most understanding of the text. These strategies are skills that have been taught in the general education classroom at every level. In order for students with intellectual disabilities to learn these strategies, the teacher must model the strategy multiple times. The teacher must also scaffold learning by first working closely with the student and then gradually allowing the students to do more independently as they gain mastery of the strategy. Finally, it is imperative that the teacher communicate the benefits of each strategy. In general, high school students are more apt to follow rules if they know how the rules are going to benefit them, unlike elementary students who follow rules simply because they are there.

The results of a study by Dole et al. (1996) show concretely that strategy instruction works to substantially increase the comprehension skills of students who are significantly behind grade level. The students in the strategy instruction group were given very specific directions while the students in the other groups were given vague directions. The students in the strategy instruction group were taught to read actively by answering questions about the text. The students in the strategy group outperformed the students who were in the vague instruction group by scoring 19 out of 30 versus 13.5 out of 30 on a standard test. This study suggests that students with intellectual disabilities do have the ability to learn comprehension skills when given very specific instructions.

Students with intellectual disabilities also need more exposure to words and texts than those who are not intellectually disabled (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009). Comprehension instruction is “best achieved by employing multiple instructional approaches” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 7). Of those strategies studied in a comprehensive meta-analysis review of interventions used with high school students, “the strongest research base includes comprehension monitoring, use of graphic and semantic organizers, answering and generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 4).

One strategy that has been shown to be successful is *reciprocal teaching*. The strategy involves two major components. First, students read a passage one paragraph at a time and practice the comprehension strategies of generating questions, summarizing, attempting to clarify texts that may be confusing, and then predicting what may be in the next paragraph. Second, is the notion of guided practice or scaffolding. The practice of scaffolding involves adding new skills to previously mastered skills. In order for it to be successful, the teacher must make connections between the new skills and mastered skills. Initially, the teacher takes the larger role by working closely with the student but, gradually, the student takes on more responsibility until he or she is doing all of the work independently (Alfassi et al., 2009).

A study of 35 students, with an average age of 18.95 years, was conducted to see if reciprocal teaching did, in fact, increase students with intellectual disabilities reading

comprehension skills (Alfassi et al., 2009). The study used literature that was relevant to the process of transition, such as daily living and job skills. Students were given a pretest prior to intervention then tested again after intervention. Students who were taught by reciprocal teaching showed a significantly higher rate of comprehension than those students were taught using traditional reading comprehension strategies.

In the same vein as reciprocal teaching, the strategy of using shared stories, or reading aloud to students with intellectual disabilities has been studied as a means of teaching reading comprehension. In a study of five students conducted at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Mims and colleagues sought to find out if reading aloud to students would help in their comprehension of texts that they were also reading individually (Mims, Browder, Baker, Lee, & Spooner, 2009). To ensure accurate results, the researchers used three texts—*Dirty Bertie* by David Roberts, *Alexander and the Terrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Voirst, and *I Missed You Everyday* by Simms Tabak. The study took place over several months and used the same ten basic questions to assess comprehension. Their results consistently showed that when the books that students with intellectual disabilities were reading were also read aloud their comprehension was significantly higher than when the student read the book alone.

Understanding text structure is paramount to learning good comprehension skills. It gives students “schema to draw on when processing new text” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 7). Text structure is traditionally taught at length in elementary schools. Even though research has shown that teaching text structure to secondary students with intellectual disabilities can help them to become stronger readers (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009), it is rarely practiced at the secondary level. By using different types of texts such as narratives, poems, letters, and notes, students learn to use comprehension strategies in a variety of ways (Erickson, Hatch, & Clendon, 2010). Doing so is important, because high school students will need to be able to comprehend a variety of things once they transition into the real world. For instance, they will need to be able to read instruction manuals related to work, simple menus in a restaurant, and personal correspondences.

Graphic organizers can also help with this process by providing the students a visual representation of the text and giving the students a way to concentrate on specific elements such as plot, character, setting, or conflict/resolution (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009). Graphic organizers can take the form of something simple, such as the traditional bubble map, or something more complex, such as a timeline or story structure diagram (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009). Assigning mnemonics to the words in the graphic organizer can also help students to relate the words in the text to their meanings.

It is important to note that, “some studies of the effectiveness of graphic organizers have shown that they improve students’ ability to recall information recorded on the organizer more than they improve general comprehension” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 7). Specifically, a study done with seventh graders showed that the students could remember what was on the story maps but could not recall the plot of the story (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009). This finding gives credence to the point that a multi-strategy approach is the best way to teach comprehension. A sample lesson using graphic organizers can be found in Appendix A under the Tuesday heading.

Nonconventional strategies are also beginning to be used more frequently in the classroom. Developed by Matthew Ignoffo (1994), mental theater is becoming increasingly popular as a means of increasing the comprehension skills of students with intellectual disabilities. Mental theater, as the name implies, asks the students to think of their mind as a theater stage. The strategy consists of three major strategies. First, the students are asked to focus all their attention on the stage where the story will be taking place. In doing so, the abstract notion of concentrating becomes a concrete activity, thus making it easier for the students to accomplish.

Second, the students are asked to incorporate new knowledge into old knowledge (Ignoffo, 1994). Although this concept is not new, the way in which it is taught is new. The students are told to think of the new knowledge as special effects. For instance, if a book is talking about something tasting salty, Ignoffo has the students think about something that is sweet and imagine the two tastes together.

Finally, in mental theatre, the students participate in three activities based on inner-child therapy. (Ignoffo, 1994) The idea is for the students to acknowledge and then rid themselves of any negative feelings about reading which are ultimately impeding their comprehension abilities. They are asked to write with their non-dominant hand. They are also asked to draw a portrait that depicts their feelings about reading. Finally, the students write an actual script about themselves as a reader. At the end of this phase, the students are more aware of their feelings and are able to deal with the issues that have come up.

Motivation and the Use of Relevant Literature

In order to get students to read, they must be motivated. “Research has shown that motivation facilitates engagement in reading” (Morgan & Moni, 2008, p. 92). If a high school student is asked to read a third grade level book because it is at his or her reading level, he or she will not be motivated to read because the content of the book is too juvenile (Beers, 1996a). They see the reading exercise as simply “saying words, looking at sentences, answering questions for the teacher” (Beers, 1996a, p. 32), not as an activity that they could actually enjoy. Without motivation from relevant materials, students will not willingly read and, thus, will not improve their skills.

In 2004, Young and colleagues performed a study with 11 females and 9 males with intellectual disabilities, ranging in age from 18 to 23 to see what effect the use of relevant materials had on their ability to learn comprehension skills (Young, Moni, Jobling, & vanKraayenoord, 2004). The participants all attended a day school program that focused on increasing their literary skills. Prior to assigning reading texts and tasks the researchers conducted surveys and interests then assigned texts according to interest. The study found that both comprehension and writing skills increased when the student was asked to use texts that interested them.

According to Beers (1996b), six things that students are more likely to read are (a) choice, (b) nonfiction, (c) books with pictures, (d) teachers reading aloud, (e) activities such as art projects, and (f) magazines. Most importantly, students want a choice. They want to be able to decide for themselves what they will and will not read. They need to be given choices based on their likes and dislikes. In order to give these choices, the teacher must take the time to get to know the students. Just as the students vary in ability, they vary in interests. By having the students fill out a simple questionnaire at the beginning of the year, the teacher can assure that there is literature available on a wide variety of topics. Second, students overwhelmingly choose nonfiction when offered it. Third, even at the high school level, students want the book to have pictures to aid in comprehension of the text. Fourth, the students want the teacher to read aloud. This practice also has been proven to aid in comprehension when used with students with intellectual disabilities who are struggling to read. Fifth, the students want activities, such as art projects, that will get them to concretely engage with the text. In doing so comprehension increases.

Finally, high school students ultimately prefer to read magazines (Beers, 1996b). To that end, Scholastic Incorporated offers several magazines for struggling readers. Magazines, such as *Scope* and *Action* focus on vocabulary and other reading skills. The printed magazines are written on an approximately third grade reading level while the topics, such as peer pressure, drug use, and popular culture, are important to teens in high school. They look much like the teen magazines currently on the market but are smaller and do not contain advertisements. They also include comprehension assessments, such as multiple choice

quizzes and puzzles, at the end of each story. Every issue also contains a reader's theater piece that is based on a movie or television show currently popular in the media.

Additionally, each magazine comes with resources available on the web (Scholastic, 2011). For instance, a teacher can access specific articles from the printed magazines that are rewritten for multiple reading levels while the content is essentially the same. The teacher can then give the students the same comprehension test that is also available with the magazine subscription. This feature allows the teacher to personalize each student's reading program while keeping the content the same for all students. A sample lesson plan using this strategy can be found in Appendix A.

There is also a concern among educators about the lack of resources available to high school students who are struggling to read. Teachers are turning to adapting texts that are at a higher reading level yet relevant to the students in an effort to create more resources. Readability formulas exist but are not always reliable. To ensure success, teachers often use leveling procedures, which are newer and more subjective, in conjunction with readability formulas (Morgan & Moni, 2008).

Teachers are also creating original texts to use in the classroom based on students' individual likes and cultural status. Teachers use target vocabulary within the context of something that is meaningful to the students such as current music, current sports, etc. to engage the students in reading. Additionally, the teacher can involve the students in finding information about something that interests them which, in turn, causes them to want to engage further with the text (Morgan & Moni, 2008). The process is very labor intensive for the teacher but very necessary for a successful outcome for the students.

Relevant literature must not only include things that the student is interested in but also things that the student needs in order to transition into the adult world. Real life skills are being taught simultaneously with literacy instruction in groups such as LATCH-ON in Queensland, Australia (Moni, 2000). The program focuses on teaching reading skills needed to survive in society. The students are given tasks that will directly impact their lives. These tasks are tailored to individual needs and desired outcomes. For instance, they are taught to read and fill out job applications. They are taught how to read food labels and signs in stores. The program also tries to form partnerships with businesses and organizations in the community (Moni, 2000). "Such activities provide connections between their learning and their present and future lives" (Moni, 2000, p. 5). When students can see first-hand that the ability to read will help their lives in a positive way, they are more likely to stay with the program.

In August 2001, the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centers published a handbook to aid educators who are striving to help high school students and adults with intellectual disabilities increase their reading skills. The manual offers many strategies for teaching every aspect of reading. It also includes specific lesson plans that can be implemented easily into any curriculum. In addition to a large section on strategies to teach reading skills, the handbook offers very specific readings and activities directly related to the ability to read after transitioning into adulthood (Lockert, 2001).

Use of Technology

Assistive technology, such as hearing and seeing devices, has been around for decades. The use of technology in literacy instruction has also become a major research issue when teaching young adults with mild intellectual disability. It has become increasingly more apparent that "traditional approaches to literacy teaching are linked to computer-based learning and internet training" (Moni, 2000, p. 3). Several studies have addressed this issue and offer many suggestions on how to incorporate modern technology into teaching literacy to high school students with intellectual disabilities.

Currently, the electronic book, or e-reader, is quickly becoming a more popular way to read in society. Digital text is everywhere. Known as supported eText, Anderson-Inman (2009)

defines it as “digital text that is modified in some way for the express purpose of improving students’ reading comprehension or enhancing their ability to learn from the text” (p. 1). Unlike printed text, digital text can be manipulated. For instance, The National Center for Supported eText (NCSeT) has identified 11 categories in which eText can be useful in helping high school students learn to read. The categories include presentational, such as font size; navigational, such as links to other documents; translational, such as synonyms, explanatory or definitions; illustrative; summarizing; enrichment; instructional or tutorials; notational or highlighting of important text; collaborative or blogs; and evaluative or tests (Anderson-Inman, 2009).

Unlike most research where there is an individual study, in one location, with one or two researchers, and with a finite number of participants, the NCSeT study consists of research teams that study groups all over the United States (Anderson-Inman, 2009). The populations are ethnically diverse and participants are primarily intellectually disabled. The researchers focus on text-to-speech, captioning of text, and the use of digital note taking. Unlike research that has a narrower focus, the NCSeT research is designed to pinpoint areas that need more study. The research also focuses on finding the best way to conduct future studies. To date, the NCSeT has discovered that the best designs are those that employ random assignment and those that the therapy is introduced, then withdrawn. In addition, the researchers have also discovered that the area of most difficulty was simply getting the students to participate with eText willingly (Anderson-Inman, 2009). Surprisingly, in this age of technological advances, some students still prefer printed books.

Another significant study was reported by The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) in 2009. The NELP focused on three studies and found that “programs such as *Literacy through Unity* and *Tango to Literacy* teach students with significant intellectual disabilities to identify words while teaching them to use sophisticated augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices” (Erickson et al., 2010, p. 10). The ability to identify sight words is key to students becoming stronger readers. Additionally, they found that the program MEville to WEville offered teachers much needed assistance by providing specific instruction on how to integrate technology into the classroom while still using traditional teaching methods.

Interestingly, the NELP (2009) found that several programs for general education show promise in helping those with intellectual disabilities learn to read. For instance, Co:Writer and Word Maker are used in many general education classrooms to help beginning readers learn letters and sounds and how they relate to each other in text. In general education, students work with the programs independently. The key to using these programs with students with intellectual disabilities is that teacher interaction is needed more often than for students in the general education classroom (Erickson, Hatch, & Clendon, 2010).

Born out of a Congressional directive to identify the reasons why students are struggling to read, the National Reading Panel (NRP) was developed in 1997. The goal of the NRP was to research the research. Again, “the NRP found that there has been relatively little systematic research conducted on using computer technology to deliver reading instruction” (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009, p. 4). In 1997, the NRP strongly suggested that high school students may be more motivated to practice new reading skills if they can use the latest computer technology to do so. In addition, the computer can accurately model good reading which the students can mimic. It also allows students to work at their own pace mastering each new skill prior to moving on to the next new skill. Current programs, such as The Peabody Literacy Lab, allow students to monitor their progress which then motivates them to work harder (Malmgren & Trezek, 2009).

Finally, a study was done in 2003 to investigate how incorporating use of the software *Delta Messages* could aid in increasing comprehension skills of students with intellectual disabilities. Unlike other programs that replace the teacher, the key to using *Delta Messages* is the close involvement of the teacher with the students and the program. The study focused on six students with intellectual disabilities and covered a variety of reading issues, but placed

emphasis on comprehension. Students were given very specific tasks to do based on their reading level. They were all closely monitored by teachers and/or assistants in the classroom. All students showed significant gains in comprehension (Basil & Reyes, 2003).

Conclusions

Based on the research, several things must happen in the classroom to improve the reading comprehension skills of high school students with intellectual disabilities. First, teachers must take the time to model strategies repeatedly. They must break the strategy down into small steps and gradually build on those steps. Second, high school students, unlike elementary students, need to understand why the concepts being taught are important. Teachers must connect the information they are teaching to things that are important to the students and make those connections clear. Doing so will provide students the motivation to learn.

Second, more literature needs to be written that is on a lower reading level, but on topics that are important to high school students. It should not be the responsibility of the teacher to create these materials. There are many publishers who specialize in education materials. These publishers need to actively seek out authors to write for this population of students.

Finally, there needs to be more technological development for high school students with intellectual disabilities. Programs such as Reading A-Z and News 2 You on the internet, as well as various software packages, exist to help typically developing students learn to read. There is little to no technology specifically geared to struggling readers at the high school level.

High school students with intellectual disabilities are capable of increasing their reading comprehension skills. They cannot do it without help. They need to be taught by teachers who are trained to use a multi-strategy approach, who are willing to teach and re-teach until the students master the concept, and who are willing to make the instruction meaningful to these students. These students deserve to be given every chance at a successful outcome so that they can ultimately become productive members of society.

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Appendix A: Application Product—Week of Lesson Plans

Description of the Class: The class is a self-contained reading class consisting of 10 students, Grades 9 through 12. Currently, four students are reading at a lexile number of 550 which translates to a Grade 3.0, four are reading at a lexile number of 700 which translates to a grade level of 4.1, and two are reading at a lexile number of 800 which translates to a grade level of 5.0.

SOL: 9.4 The student will read, comprehend, and analyze a variety of literary texts including narratives, narrative fiction, poetry, and drama.

Monday

Research issue(s) addressed: Students need to have relevant literature written at their reading level. Student's comprehension is increased by hearing the story read aloud.

Materials: Copy of *Scholastic Action* article "I Survived Being Bullied" from the January 31, 2011 issue according to lexile level.

Introduction: The teacher will introduce the story. The teacher will read the vocabulary and discuss what the words mean.

Activities: The students will divide into groups by lexile number. The teacher and paraprofessional will meet with each group to read the story aloud. The group without a teacher or paraprofessional present will read the story together as a group.

Daily Assessment: The teacher will ask the students general questions about what was read.

Tuesday

Research issue(s) addressed: Students need to have reading comprehension strategies taught and modeled multiple times. Students need to understand how the information will help them.

Materials: Article from Monday, graphic organizer, pen/pencil

Introduction: The teacher will introduce the Somebody Wanted But So (SWBS) graphic organizer. He or she will read a simple story and demonstrate how the organizer works.

Activities: As a class, the students will review the contents of the story. Together, they will fill out a graphic organizer. The teacher will review each part of the process and explain how it will help the students understand the meaning of the story. He or she will explain the importance of the information in the story. The class will discuss the main points of the story and relate those points to real life.

Daily Assessment: The teacher will monitor class discussion.

Wednesday

Research issue(s) addressed: Students need to have reading comprehension strategies taught and modeled multiple times. Students need to have hands-on activities to keep them interested.

Materials: *Scholastic Action* article "Should Parents Ready Your Texts" from the January 31, 2011 according to lexile level, graphic organizers, pen/pencil, poster board, markers

Introduction: The teacher will introduce another article. He or she will remind the students of the SWBS organizer and why it is important.

Activities: The students will divide into groups according to their lexile level. Together, they will read the article. The teacher will put the sample graphic organizer up so that the students can review it as necessary. The teacher and paraprofessional will assist the students in filling out the graphic organizer. They will remind the students of what facts go into which blocks. Once the graphic organizer is complete, each group will create a poster that depicts the main ideas of the article. The poster will also explain why the information is important to the students.

Daily Assessment: The teacher will check graphic organizers and posters to make sure all information is correct.

Thursday

Research issue(s) addressed: Relevant reading material needs to include real life applications. Students will be more successful when they are able to do activities associated with reading.

Materials: Food labels, pen/pencils, food pyramid posters, poster boards labeled healthy and unhealthy, markers

Introduction: The teacher will explain to the class that part of being a good consumer is being able to read food labels.

Activities: The class will first place the foods into categories such as vegetables, snacks, meats, dairy. Guided by the teacher, the students will take a product and read the ingredients. As a class, they will decide if the food is a healthy choice. Once that decision is made, they will draw the product on the correct poster. The teacher will repeat often what words constitute healthy and what words constitute unhealthy. Upon completion, students will discuss how they can make changes in their diets to promote healthy eating.

Daily Assessment: The teacher will monitor the activity to see if students are correctly reading ingredients and to see if they comprehend the difference between healthy and unhealthy.

Friday

Research issue(s) addressed: Students with intellectual disabilities need more exposure to works than those without intellectual disabilities. Teachers need to integrate technology into reading comprehension instruction

Materials: Computers, software *Delta Messages*, journal, pens/pencils

Introduction: The teacher will review proper behavior in the computer lab. He or she will set the students up on computers in the lab and introduce the lessons on the computer.

Activities: Students will perform tasks on *Delta Messages* based on their individual reading levels.

Daily Assessment: Students will take the unit assessment at the end of the lessons.

What Families Can Do to Strengthen Language Skills for Young English Language Learners

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Abstract

With an increased number of children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds enrolled in P-12 schools, bilingual education has become a hot topic. This study aimed to understand how CLD families teach their young children two languages. Five CLD families participated in the study and shared information about teaching methods as well as perceived benefits and challenges in bilingual instruction. Results show all five families recognize the importance and value of bilingual education, and they mainly teach their young children native language through daily conversations and family activities and teach English through literacy activities such as book reading and games. The implications of this study are cultivating interests in bilingual instruction among young children, and delivering bilingual education through hands on activities, facilitating English acquisition through increased native language proficiency, and building bilingual instruction methods into pre-service teacher training programs to better prepare future teachers to work with young English language learners (ELLs).

Keywords: young ELLs, CLD families, interview, hands-on activities, multicultural, bilingual instruction

Introduction

With an increased number of children who speak another language than English at home enrolled in the U.S. P-12 schools, bilingual education has become a hot topic. Learning two languages at the same time poses challenges to these English Language Learners (ELLs) especially those during early elementary years. This study aimed to understand how culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families teach their young children two languages. A qualitative study including interview and observation was conducted to increase professionals' understanding of the CLD families' perceptions of bilingual instructions, the teaching methods as well as perceived benefits and challenges in bilingual instruction.

Background

The United States has grown more diverse in the past decade (U.S. Census, 2010). Compared to statistics in 2000, Asians alone increased 43.3%, Native Hawaiians and other Pacifica Islanders increased 35.4%, Hispanic or Latino population increased 43.3%, and two or more races increased 24.4% according to the U.S. Census 2010. With an increased number of children from CLD families enrolled in the U.S. P-12 schools, teachers, especially those teaching elementary grades, should learn how to address these young English language learners' (ELLs) special needs such as language delays, and social and behavioral deficits. During the early elementary years, ELLs need more support and help from both family members and teachers. Compared to preschoolers or children at an older age, children at early elementary years may struggle more academically due to the following reasons. For example, preschool ELLs are not really involved in intense academic activities yet, so they won't feel as frustrated as those in early elementary years. On the other hand, older children have already passed the stage when they struggle in bilingual education since they should have already mastered both their native language and English by this age.

Research indicates U.S. teachers are generally not well prepared to address special challenges ELLs face in school (Lewis, Maerten-Rivera, Adamson, & Lee, 2011). Without

proper training teachers may not realize the challenges the ELLs experience in learning English at school. Not only the P-12 teachers, but the school leaders such as principals and vice principals also need to learn more about the ELLs' "linguistic and cultural backgrounds in order to value the cultural perspectives and languages these students bring to schools" (Rosa, 2011, p. 1859). Family members, including parents, grandparents and other extended family members, could play a role in voicing the special challenges the ELLs may face at school and sharing their cultures with the professionals. In addition, they also can help their child acquire their native language and improve English at the same time. The current study informs researchers and practitioners of the experiences that CLD families have with bilingual instruction, bilingual instruction methods adopted by CLD families, and expectations CLD families have for support and collaboration from professionals.

Methodology

Participants

Five CLD families (Table 1) living in a northeastern state in the U.S. participated in the face-to-face interview. They all speak a language other than English as their native language and their children range between two and seven years old. Three participating families have two children, while the other two have one child. Two families sent their children to private schools and the other three chose public schools. One family complained of their child being hyperactive and having behavioral issues in school; however, the family opted not to have their son assessed by professionals for they didn't perceive special services as necessary at this point. This family, together with another two participating families, has both parents involved in the bilingual instruction. In the other two families, the mother plays a major role in the bilingual instruction, while the father travels a lot or manages family business overseas.

Table 1
Demographic Background of Participating Families

Pseudonym Occupation	Children and their age	Educational backgrounds	Ethnicity
Su K-12 teacher	Daughter: 5 years old	Ph.D.	Chinese
Mei Higher Education	Daughter: 5 years old Son: 3 years old	M.S.	Chinese
Qing Family Doctor	Son: 5 and ½ years old Son: 3 years old	M.D.	Chinese
Sung Min Higher Education	Son: 5 years old	Ph.D.	Korean
Jae Hong Family Business	Son: 7 years old Daughter: 3 and ½ years old	M.S.	Korean

Setting

The interviews with the four out of five families occurred at the participants' home. The other one family received the interview at a community church and this family also agreed to participate in the observation of the bilingual instruction. Besides this family, another family also

agreed to participate in the observation and invited the researcher to their home to observe the bilingual instruction.

Interview and Observation Protocol

The participating families were notified of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the information they provided in the interview, their rights to withdraw from the study, and value of their input. Mothers in four participating families accepted the interview and the other family included both parents in the interview. Before the interviews, basic family demographic information was collected, such as when the child was sent to English speaking early childhood education programs and who in the family played major roles in teaching bilingual education. Other basic information that was also collected included the participants' age, educational background, occupation, ethnicity, and number of children and their ages. All the questions in the interview were open ended questions. Sample interview questions included "What are the strategies you used when you taught your child the bilingual education?" and "What are the foreseen benefits of teaching bilingual education?" The interview lasted no longer than an hour.

After the interview, the researcher observed two families for twenty minutes while they taught their child/children bilingual instruction. The families were observed on how they interact with their child during bilingual instruction and the methods of bilingual instruction. The observation focuses on the way that caregivers interact with their children (passive teaching or interactive learning), whether and how the cultural knowledge is embedded in the bilingual instruction, and the child's interests in learning two languages with parents. Notes were taken during both the interviews and observations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since the researcher shared the same native language (Mandarin) with three participating families, the interviews with these families were conducted in their native language. The researcher took notes on site in the native language and translated the notes into English afterwards. For the other two families with whom the researcher doesn't share a common native language, the interview was in English and notes were taken in English. After each interview, the notes were transcribed and summarized immediately. Data analysis consisted of an examination of families' responses to the interview questions and the notes taken during the two observations. Codes were identified and common themes were summarized. The two observations supplemented information collected through the interviews about the bilingual instruction methods used by the families in this study.

Results

According to the analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and observations, three main themes were identified including (a) bilingual instruction methods, (b) benefits and challenges of bilingual instruction, and (c) training of pre-service and in-service teachers.

Bilingual Instruction Time

All of the five families admitted that they started bilingual instruction for their children at birth. Three participating families mainly used their native language to communicate with their children at home and in the meantime they read books or did other literacy activities in English with their children. The other two families spoke their native language and English approximately 50% of the time respectively at home. In these two families, the fathers only spoke in English while the mothers in their native language only, although the parents communicated in their native language between them. The mothers mentioned sometimes their children were confused about what to use when both parents were present.

Four families admitted they spent less than one hour on English instruction, although they incidentally taught their children their native language for at least four hours daily. This included the normal routines of meals, baths, and play. Only one family who has one parent speak English with their daughter consistently admitted they spent more time in English instruction. For example, when the father was playing with the daughter or when he took her shopping, it was more like an English-only environment since the father only spoke English to their daughter. Compared to the ELLs in the other four participating families, their daughter is more proficient in areas of English such as good vocabulary size, better conversation and writing skills, and good receptive skills. The father of this family was not as concerned as other parents about his daughter's social interactions with peers in school. However, among the ELLs in the participating families, this little girl struggled the most in native language acquisition. She had difficulty communicating with her family in their native language. Although the other four families also complained about their children's limitations in their native language as compared to the same age native speaking children, they admitted their children mastered basic communication skills in their native language.

Methods of Bilingual Instruction

Four of the five participating families mentioned they used native language for daily conversations at home because they hope their children can master native language before becoming fluent in English. All of the participating families read books to teach their children in English. Two participating families read books in native language first, then reminded their child of the equivalent English terms. When reading English books, the mother paused and asked questions in native language, so that the child could think in native language and English at the same time. The other two families read books twice, once in native language and then in English. One participating family only read English books and did not plan to introduce books in native language until the third grade, because they worried that it is too confusing to learn two phonological systems at the same time. The finding of learning a language through reading correlates with Uchiyama's (2011) conclusion that using both simple reading and character imagery improves ELLs' vocabulary-building and thus improves comprehension.

Other than learning English through book reading, these young ELLs also learn English through playing games and other literacy activities such as nursery songs at home. All of these children were enrolled in English speaking early education programs before three years old. One of the families even sent their son to daycare at birth because they wanted their child to be exposed to English as early as possible. All the families attributed daycare and preschool programs to helping their young children improve their English skills.

Benefits of Bilingual instruction

All of the families believed that only when their young children start learning both languages at a young age can they reach the native speaker's level. Although bilingual instruction may cause the ELLs to lag behind their monolingual speaking peers, they can catch up in both languages later.

Increase marketability. Being raised in a bilingual environment is an advantage for the ELLs; they have opportunities to learn and practice both of the two languages, which help them gain extra skills and thus become more competitive in the future. All of the five participating families realized the importance and value of bilingual education.

Cultural diversity and plurality. Two families mentioned "through bilingual instruction, my son learned the importance of cultural diversity and plurality." One family even emphasized that "bilingual skills will benefit my child's cognitive development and language skills in the long run." Both parents in this family have a degree in education and have a background in teaching

ELL students. Compared to other families, this family taught their daughter phonological knowledge in a systematic way from a young age in addition to book reading and playing games to practice the bilingual skills.

Challenges in Bilingual Instruction

Phonological similarity. Given that certain words in some native languages sound similar to certain unrelated words in English, bilingual instruction causes confusion and difficulty for young ELLs at the early stage of studying two phonological systems. Consequently, one family mentioned postponing the instruction of phonics until a later age. When asked “why do you plan to hold off from teaching your daughter phonics in your native language until third grade?” this mother answered, “because by third grade, my daughter should be able to master English phonics so it will be less confusing for her to learn phonics in our native language.”

Lack of native community. The participating families all live in rural areas of a northeastern state. Two families complained that the lack of a native speaking community limits their child’s use of native language. Although the other three families all speak the same native language and there is a larger group of native speakers in the community, these families also stressed that their children have limited opportunities of using native language in the community, which hindered their native language acquisition. One family shared that when they brought their children to a native speaking community either in large cities of the U.S. or in their home country, their children felt pressured to practice the native language. When they went back to the home community, however, the young ELLs gave up practicing their native language because nobody around them used that language except their family members. Only one family is an exception. This family immigrated to the U.S. when their grandparents were young, so the child’s father was raised in the U.S. and preferred to speak English to the native language. For most of the ELLs, however, they only have limited time at school to use English. It appears a lack of English instruction during early childhood caused language barriers among these ELLs.

Self-identity was another issue brought up by the participating families. Due to lack of use of native language and exposure to the native community, young ELLs struggled to identify their own culture and who they were. One family shared that their son woke up one morning, looked at himself in the mirror, and screamed “Mom, look at my eyes, it became blue; and my hair turned brown.” The mother mentioned that her son really wanted to be like his Caucasian friends as he is the only child of color in his class. He obviously did not understand his own culture.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper reported findings from an interview study with five CLD families and observation of two of these families during their bilingual instruction session. Overall, all five of the participating families feel fortunate to have their children raised in a bilingual environment. These families feel that bilingual education benefits young children’s cognitive and language skills, and it provides them extra skills so that they have more choices and become more competitive in future careers. All of these families encouraged their young children to study and practice native language at home through daily conversations, while also teaching them English through book reading and playing English games. These young ELLs mainly learned and practiced English through daily interaction with peers in school. However, since these ELLs spent less time in school than at home, most of them lagged behind their same age monolingual peers. This delay in English negatively impacted the ELLs’ social skills and self-confidence, which were pointed out by four out of the five participating families. This language deficit partly comes from the schools, since the parents felt the schools did not provide enough support to

these young ELLs and teachers were not well prepared for addressing their children's special challenges and needs. Below are some suggestions and implications from the current study.

Implications

Interest as the best teacher. One participating family mentioned their son was passionate to learn two languages before three years old. He was curious about how to say certain words in the native language, but he lost interest in learning the native language when he started preschool. He refused to use native language and when his parents talked to him in native language, he persisted in using English to respond to questions. The mother was puzzled about why all of sudden her son stopped using native language. She happened to find out what caused this change when she went to pick up her son one day. She noticed her son was being teased by his classmates for speaking in his native language and no teachers were there to stop this behavior. After this incident, the mother tried every means to bring other cultures to the classroom. She volunteered to come to her son's class to talk about their native festivals, traditional attire, and food.

In order to draw ELLs' interest in bilingual instruction, teachers can arrange special sessions to introduce diverse cultures and languages during class periods, celebrate holidays that other cultures observe, and teach students simple daily conversations in other languages. These activities will also cultivate multicultural views among young children. One of the five families mentioned the preschool program their children attended hosted multicultural activities such as celebrating festivals of other cultures and taught them to count and sing songs in another language. This practice broadens young children's horizons, facilitates their understanding of other cultures, and triggers interest in learning other cultures. Reading books about other cultures also helps young children understand other values, traditions, and in turn respect others' cultures.

More hands-on activity. It is recommended that before third grade, when these young ELLs still haven't mastered native speaking language skills in both their native language and English, school should offer more hands-on activities to ELLs and put them in small groups with native speaking peers to maximize the ELLs' communication and interaction with peers and build their self-confidence. Lewis et al. (2011) reviewed previous literature on science instruction with ELL students and summarized that ELLs benefit greatly from hands on activities. When teaching other skills such as reading, writing and mathematics, hands-on activities are preferred in early elementary years. For example, teachers can ask children to match pictures to difficult words or words for which ELLs lack experience. When teaching the St. Patrick's Day topic, teachers can involve students in cutting, making, or coloring leprechauns and shamrocks. First, teachers can ask each child to share about his project, and then teachers can talk about the tradition of St. Patrick's Day. In order to enhance families learning English traditions at home, teachers can send home flyers about the tradition and what their child did in school to keep CLD families updated with school activities and projects. When the CLD families are well informed of the English traditions, they become more involved in engaging their children in hands-on academic activities at home.

Relaxed language learning environment. CLD families should reduce pressure on ELLs and avoid pushing them to practice either their native language or English. It takes time for young ELLs to catch up with their monolingual peers. Bilingual instruction at home can cause delays in both the native and English language acquisition. One of the participating families mentioned their daughter started speaking their native language in English syntax at three years old. The parents decided to speak naturally to their daughter and gave her time to grow. When they noticed some combination of native language and English in one sentence, they modeled the correct way to say it in both native language and English respectively. By age

six, this little girl had fewer syntax issues and her language proficiency in native language had greatly improved. Occasionally she still spoke native language in English syntax but not as much as when she was three or four years old. Modeling is the key. Parents modeled for her how to speak in their native language every time they noticed she struggled speaking certain words in the native language. Also, parents encouraged her to talk freely without worrying about making mistakes. Although it took time for her to realize what she said was not in the correct syntax, she gradually learned to self-adjust her discourse. This is a good example that bilingual learners can learn two languages at the same time, although some ELLs may spend a longer period of time in one stage, such as putting two words together or making simple sentences in either English or the native language.

Create a literacy rich environment. Huennekens and Xu's (2010) study showed reading stories in native language could strengthen young ELLs "early language and literacy skills while encouraging continued involvement with home culture" (p. 25). Improving reading in the native language also helps ELLs learn English. Family should be informed the value and "benefit of supporting ELLs' language and literacy development in the home language" (Gorman, 2012, p. 119). Knowledge in native language also helps ELLs generalize what they know in native language to increase reading comprehension in English. For example, one participating family shared that their daughter struggled with several words when she read a story about a Hispanic family celebrating traditional festivals. But when the mother reminded her of their own traditional festival celebrations, she guessed several words right and predicted what would happen in the following section of the story. Increasing vocabulary supports "word decoding and reading comprehension" (Gorman, 2012, p. 119).

Development of self-confidence. Parents should help young ELLs develop self-confidence and self-concept through bilingual instruction and reducing behavior issues. Another issue the majority of the participating families are concerned about is language deficits impairing their children's self-confidence. It is true that due to a language delay, young ELLs may feel intimidated or uncomfortable when talking in front of strangers or a large group of people. Two of the participating families pointed out that their children can answer similar questions at home, but not in school. One family said their daughter failed a kindergarten screening test the first time because she refused to answer any questions the teachers asked or follow the test directions. Her test results came out as not understanding English and having severe internalizing behavior problems (e.g., shyness, no eye contact). Her former preschool teacher disagreed with the result, because she was confident that this girl could answer all the questions correctly and communicate well in English. This former preschool teacher pointed out this girl would not talk when she was with strangers or when she felt tense and stressed in the environment. According to her previous teacher, she is a slow-to-warm up child. It is recommended that elementary school teachers should not only use the screening test to evaluate young children's development, but refer to other sources such as consulting previous teachers to get authentic data about the child's current level of development. It would also be helpful to adopt alternative types of assessment, such as observation of play. Once this child was enrolled in the elementary school, the teachers immediately realized that the test result was misleading. This girl proved herself to be a completely different child in her classroom once she became familiar with her homeroom teacher and peers. She was active, liked to talk, and willingly offered help to peers.

Similar unpleasant experiences with school teachers also happened to other families who participated in the current study. Due to one mother's work schedule, their child had attended two different preschool programs. The mother noticed her son behaved completely different in the two schools he attended. Teachers in one school shared with her that the boy was very active and liked to play with others and talk to teachers in their school. The boy even

brought a book to this school in order to read to his peers. On the contrary, in the other school the boy behaved quite differently. His teachers said he did not listen to authority and constantly had behavior problems. He acted wildly when he was outside on the playground. The mother complained teachers in this second school did not provide a nurturing, loving environment, which led to her son's behavior issues in the second school. It is speculated that the teachers in this second environment did not understand the language delay this boy experienced and failed to provide support to him.

Training of the pre-service and in-service teachers. The above example leads to the next suggestions and implications for future pre-service teacher training programs and early childhood education programs. Bilingual instruction should be embedded into program requirements. In order to become certified early childhood and early childhood special education teachers, teacher candidates should master basic knowledge and develop an understanding of the struggles and special challenges young ELLs experience in bilingual acquisition. This way, future teachers develop a better understanding of ELLs' cultural backgrounds and special challenges to better serve them. Rosa (2011) recommended that support should be provided to educators and leaders on "obtaining research-based instructional practices for ELLs" (p. 1863). Not only the pre-service teachers, but also the in-service teachers require training and support in order to better serve young ELLs and their families.

One participating family shared their interaction with school teachers regarding the English as a Second Language (ESL) program their daughter attended. The family only received information about the ESL program once per year. The letter showed their child's test score in an English proficiency test, but only knowing the score is not enough. When they contacted school teachers for more information about this ESL program curriculum and their daughter's progress and weak areas in English, the school did not provide the information they wanted to know. The teachers just explained the test and their daughter's test results, which the family did not perceive as helpful. After one year of the ESL class, the parents still were not sure what their daughter's strengths or weaknesses were. The family was very upset with what had happened to their daughter and frustrated because they believed the school was not helpful. They decided to continue their intensive bilingual instruction plan at home for their daughter by purchasing bilingual textbooks to teach their daughter reading, mathematics, science and social studies themselves.

It is evident that more communication between CLD families and school teachers will help clarify ELLs' English language skills and weaknesses that ELLs still need to improve. Professionals at early childhood education programs should develop collaborative partnerships with CLD families, look for better ways to understand young ELLs' special needs and challenges in the process of bilingual education, and support families in bilingual literacy activities at home. Teachers can develop connections with families through sending home projects their children participate in and notify parents of their child's English level and special programs they attended in school, the curriculum in these programs, the frequency of attending these programs, and the progress their child made at these programs.

Limitations and Final Thoughts

Given there are only five participating families in this study and all of them live in rural areas which lack diverse populations and communities, it is hard to generalize the findings to other CLD families who live in metropolitan areas in the U.S. and have more bilingual learning opportunities both in school and community. This study, however, informs professionals of the bilingual methods CLD families used to teach their child their native language and English at home, the CLD families' perceived benefits and challenges of bilingual instruction, and their expectations of school teachers and professionals in the process of bilingual instruction.

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Building Mentorships: How Administrators Can Support Co-Teachers in Mentoring and Coaching Each Other

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Abstract

This article discusses how administrators can support co-teachers in building effective partnerships in which they mentor and coach each other. Findings are shared from a grounded theory study of effective co-teaching partnerships in regards to what they desired, appreciated, and sought from their school administrators as they worked collaboratively together. School administrators play a significant role in setting the tone in schools for collegiality by establishing structures that encourage and enable teachers to collaborate for improved instruction and student learning.

Keywords: administrative support for collaboration, co-teaching; peer mentoring, peer coaching

Introduction

Current educational pressures dictate a need for school cultures that embrace collaboration in school improvement and instruction. As teachers are held increasingly accountable for student learning, teaming with colleagues across the school building has become a necessity to survive the mounting pressures for high performance from not only federal legislation, but also public expectation (Hardman & Dawson, 2008; Paulsen, 2008; Winzer, 2009). Teaching only the students on the listed class roster without consultation or collaboration with other teachers has become less possible. Rather, teachers are reaching across academic disciplines and departments to improve the performance of *all* students, including those with special needs (Friend & Cook, 2010; Leatherman, 2009). In particular, teachers are utilizing co-teaching models that bridge the general education and special education departments. These models benefit not only students, but also provide an opportunity for teachers to mentor and coach one another (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Scheeler, Congdon, & Stansbery, 2010).

As teachers build collaborative partnerships, school administrators play a role in setting the tone for collegiality in their buildings through establishing structures that enable teachers to work together (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008). Teachers report how critical administrative support is to successful co-teaching relationships that benefit both students and teachers (Pratt, 2014; Santoli et al., 2008). Teachers want to know that their administrators value collaboration and support it not only in words, but also in actions. Yet, specifically how can administrators set the tone for collaboration in planning and instruction in their buildings? It is often left to chance or the discretion of school administrators as to how to build this culture; however, there are practical ways administrators can ensure collaboration is not only talked about, but implemented in their school buildings.

Literature Review

In order for school administrators to effectively support their teachers, they also need to understand important elements of collaboration and co-teaching (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). These elements include effective instructional models as well as the planning strategies teachers use to incorporate their different backgrounds and expertise (Pratt, 2014; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Instructional models that involve both teachers teaching, rather than one primarily serving as an assistant, provide both higher quality instruction and professional satisfaction from co-teachers. Teachers also need to

plan their units together in order for both to feel confident in the material and instructional strategies. Special education teachers often provide expertise in scaffolding learning, making accommodations, and differentiating assessment. Alternatively, general education teachers can support their colleagues in understanding the content area standards and appropriate instructional techniques for the discipline. Blending these differing expertise together takes a willingness to learn from each other and seek the best practices for their students

The research on administrative support of co-teaching points to several important considerations including: a) arranging quality professional development, b) providing common planning time, and c) navigating conflict resolution with co-teachers (Damore & Murray, 2009; Jang, 2006; Kritikos & Birnbaum, 2003; Leatherman, 2009; Paulsen, 2008; Santoli et al., 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). One of the hindrances to co-teaching is the lack of preparation for teachers in the roles they will undertake in co-teaching relationships (Paulsen, 2008). Friend et al. (2010) stated “it is not reasonable to expect educators to understand and implement [collaboration/co-teaching] without specific instruction in the pertinent knowledge and skills” (p. 20). Teachers should receive instruction in both effective co-teaching practices and communication skills (Austin, 2001; Carter et al., 2009; Damore & Murray, 2009; Idol, 2006; McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009; Murray, 2004). Murray (2004) explored the impact of training general education teachers ($N=40$) on their individual roles in collaborative teaching partnerships with how teachers’ preconceptions of collaboration were addressed. The findings of this study point to positive benefits in addressing preconceptions that can hinder effective collaboration. Furthermore, Damore & Murray (2009) found communication skills to be one of the most important contributors to successful collaborative teaching in elementary schools ($N=118$ elementary teachers). Teachers need to be able to approach difficult conversations assertively and respectfully in order to resolve conflicts. Administrators can schedule professional development trainings on these topics, as well as support teachers in implementing these practices into their classrooms (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006).

Administrators also support teachers daily by ensuring they have a common planning time in their schedules (Bouck, 2007; Damore & Murray, 2009; Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley, 2011; Jang, 2006; Leatherman, 2009; Santoli et al., 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). Having a shared planning time helps teachers understand their responsibilities and individual roles for instruction in a co-taught classroom. Jang’s (2006) findings point to the critical nature of administrative support for successful team teaching. Two secondary mathematics teachers in Jang’s quasi-experimental study were able to thoroughly plan how they would structure their classes using a modified station teaching approach, because of support they received from their school administrator. This finding is also substantiated by Bouck (2007) in a case study of an eighth-grade history co-teaching partnership. The teachers believed common planning time allowed them to establish parity in their classroom authority and instruction. Without a shared direction and instructional plan, parity would have been more difficult to achieve. Teachers would have had to defer to each other in making decisions during the moment of instruction.

Because co-teaching is not inherently natural for some teachers, conflicts can arise in differences in learning philosophies and teaching practices (Leatherman, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007; Timmons, 2006). When these disagreements occur, administrators play an important role in helping teachers navigate discussions of their perspectives to find possible areas of agreement, as well as how to consider alternative perspectives. Most importantly, administrators can help teachers focus on students’ learning as the primary goal of working collaboratively (Carter et al., 2009; McDuffie et al., 2009).

In this article, I present seven key strategies administrators can use in supporting co-teachers as they work to mentor and coach each other in the classroom. These strategies come from a grounded theory study which investigated how effective secondary co-teaching partnerships in an urban school district in Iowa resolved challenges inherently found in collaborative relationships. The objective of this study was to explain both the process and the

strategies co-teachers used as they addressed both external and internal challenges to a successful co-teaching relationship. As reported in an article focusing on special education teachers and teacher educators (Pratt, 2014), participants overcame challenges by using their individual expertise as they became interdependent in their respective co-teaching relationship. This article focuses on the data teachers shared related to administrative support.

Methods

Five co-teaching partnerships ($N = 10$) participated in this study and were selected based on the following criteria: (a) the partnership was composed of a general education and a special education teacher, (b) the length of their co-teaching relationship was longer than one school year, and (c) parity of instructional roles in the classroom as evidenced by both teachers actively teaching students, rather than one teacher consistently taking an assistant role. The teachers taught at either the middle school or high school level and represented a range of teaching experience and co-teaching experience (see Table 1). Participants co-taught general education classes which integrated students with learning disabilities and those who were considered at-risk for academic failure.

The study took place in three phases to allow for concurrent data collection and analysis. Phase one included focus group interviews with each partnership and administration of an interpersonal behavior theory questionnaire for each co-teacher (Schutz, 1992). Classroom observations were conducted during phase two, including at least two observations per partnership. A third observation was done for one partnership, since the first observation involved primarily independent student work. During phase three, I conducted individual interviews with each co-teacher. Data analysis involved looking for recurring themes throughout each piece of data and conducting member checks to ensure conclusions reflected participants' experiences. Beginning with the first piece of data collected, I looked for themes reflecting the challenges teachers experienced and how they resolved these challenges through open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As subsequent pieces of data were collected, I compared and generated new codes and then began to organize the codes into a hierarchy. Finally, the themes were represented in a visual model that portrays the process teachers go through to resolve challenges in co-teaching (Pratt, 2014). Each step of the data analysis process underwent a peer review and member checks were used to confirm the visual model portrayed their individual experiences with their co-teaching partnerships.

Table 1
Participants

Names	Teaching Position	Teaching Experience	Co-Teaching Experience
Vicki	Gen Ed – English	6 years	3 years
Angie	Spec Ed	27 years	4 years
Brent	Gen Ed – Science	9 years	8 years
Cindy	Spec Ed	26 years	26 years
Tyler	Gen Ed – English	4 years	2 years
Gordy	Spec Ed	9 years	3 years
Thelma	Gen Ed – Soc Studies	7 years	5 years

Louise	Spec Ed	8 years	5 years
Alex	Gen Ed – English	10 years	5 years
Bianca	Spec Ed	11 years	7 years

Strategies

Participating teachers shared recommendations for the type of administrator support they found helpful, or would like to receive, from their administrators. Themes that emerged from the data included the following seven strategies: (a) model, model, model; (b) thoughtfully pair teachers; (c) train the teachers; (d) structure schedules to allow for co-planning; (e) set reasonable expectations; (f) demonstrate a hands-on support; and (g) celebrate successes. This section discusses these strategies based on participants' perspectives, and provides connections to the literature on educational leadership and co-teaching.

Model, Model, Model

One of the most effective administrative techniques is to model the actions wanted from the members of the team (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Not only do students benefit from teachers modeling, but teachers benefit just as much from seeing collaborative behaviors demonstrated by their administrators. Teachers in this study discussed a disconnect between what administrators said they wanted in their buildings for collaboration, and what they saw them doing in their interactions with other administrators or teachers. If collaboration is a desired trait in a school environment, then administrators should model it by consulting colleagues and teachers when making decisions. Administrators can also model how they mentor each other by having other administrators observe them during faculty meetings or professional development sessions. This shows the value placed on peer mentoring by actually demonstrating it in front of teachers.

Thoughtfully Pair Teachers

Teachers in this study emphasized the importance of administrators strategically pairing people together to ensure compatible partnerships. Although co-teaching is a beneficial way to provide peer mentorship, teachers did not believe those in their first year of teaching should be placed in a co-teaching partnership because it would “add additional stress to that very difficult first couple of years” (Alex, Focus Group). Additionally, using first year teachers could create an unbalanced peer mentoring relationship. These situations can leave the veteran teacher doing most of the training, while the new teacher is unable to contribute equally. One teacher stated that pairing teachers who can work well together ultimately benefits students, as well as teachers. Administrators can consider the philosophies teachers hold towards integration of those with special needs into general education classrooms, teaching styles, and personality styles as they choose teachers to work together in collaborative classrooms. The teachers in this study believed administrators could use careful observation of teachers in their building, both in the classroom and in departmental meetings, to make wise pairings.

Train the Teachers

One of the most common critiques of co-teaching is that teachers are not prepared for the peer mentoring and interactive relationships found in a co-teaching partnership (Carter et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010). Generally, this lack of preparation is tied to a lack of effective professional development. One teacher in this study stated the importance of training by saying “on a grander scheme I think co-teaching is good, but it’s not intrinsically good . . . and that like we’re going to throw this together and now it’s going to be perfection” (Tyler, Focus Group).

When teachers begin co-teaching relationships, they need initial training in what co-teaching is designed to do, how to co-plan together, and how to implement different co-teaching models.

As teachers continue co-teaching, they also desire ongoing training that is individualized to their unique needs. The teachers in this study believed professional development given at the district level was not effective because it was uniformly given to all co-teaching teams. These co-teachers stated teams encountered different challenges or were in different phases of building their relationship. For example, some teams might need professional development on how to utilize their different strengths during instruction, while other teams might need training on how to more effectively plan together. Specific topics for instruction could include how to differentiate lessons, how to use flexible groupings where both teachers are instructing, or how to provide tiered levels of assessments. Professional development on planning could include how to use technology that enables both teachers to enter ideas in the plan book, such as the use of Google Docs. Ongoing training in interpersonal relationships is also important for building co-teaching partnerships. Interpersonal training could include how teachers mediate conflicts in their relationship or how to handle differences in communication styles.

Structure Schedules to Allow for Co-planning

Another way administrators support effective co-teaching teams is through scheduling common planning times for co-teaching partners (Jang, 2006; Leatherman, 2009; Santoli et al., 2008). Teachers in this study felt the common planning time was critical to their success in co-teaching together. During co-planning time they were able to work together to design lessons that would ensure their students met the learning standards for their content areas. Teachers also mentioned using their individual knowledge and understanding of teaching practices to mentor one another as they worked to improve classroom instruction. For example, some of the general education teachers shared that they learned how to differentiate assessments or writing activities from their special education colleagues. After they had co-taught longer together, teachers used this time for reflection on student learning and modifications that needed to be made to improve student achievement. By the seemingly simple act of providing common planning time for teachers, administrators enable teachers to work collaboratively. Ultimately, this collaboration time provides co-teachers the opportunity to coach each other to higher quality practices.

Set Reasonable Expectations

Teachers in this study experienced challenges with co-teaching when they believed their administrators held unrealistic expectations for the length of time they would need to become effective teams, as well as the number of students with special learning needs integrated in their co-taught classes. Teachers felt teams needed differing lengths of time to move through the process of learning about each other to achieving an interdependent relationship in which both teachers learned from each other. They wanted their administrators to understand the variety that occurs between different teams, and support each team as they move through this process.

Additionally, teachers believed administrators are sometimes supportive of co-teaching by scheduling co-taught classes; however, they do not always support it by creating an environment in which inclusion can effectively occur within the general education classroom. Teachers felt the percentage of students they had with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) was increasing. Class rosters with 50% of students with IEPs made it difficult to differentiate learning and still hold high standards for student performance. Alex stated “I am confident that the kids are learning in this situation, but I am not confident that it is the equal education to a regular ed classroom. And when I can’t say that, then it’s not working” (Focus Group). Administrators can address this challenge by not only looking at the individual needs of students, but also considering the class roster as a whole and ensuring the overall composition of the class includes student role models. Additionally, administrators should have frequent

conversations with co-teachers and school counselors as they determine class enrollments and placement of students with special learning needs.

Demonstrate a Hands-on Support

Co-teachers need to know their administrators not only believe in co-teaching, but also support it in their building through a hands-on approach. One of the teachers in this study said “from my perspective, their management and leadership approach is we put it here, we support it” (Gordy, Focus Group). Gordy felt as though the administrators supported co-teaching only through making the schedule for co-teaching classes and co-planning times, but did not take a genuine interest in ensuring the co-teaching classes were successful. Frustration about a passive approach by their administration was shared by other teachers in this study. They wanted to know their leaders would provide support to teachers through classroom observations or suggestions for improvement. Ideas given by the participating teachers included arranging classroom observations of their peers to see instruction or peer mentoring approaches. Administrators can ask teachers for specific things they want them to observe in the classroom or can note things they observed that the teachers might not be aware are occurring in their classrooms. Observations are most helpful when teachers have interactive, meaningful conversations with their administrator after the observation to discuss future changes to practice (Colasacco, 2011; Danielson, 2011).

Teachers also desire administrators who demonstrate their willingness to take on the sometimes difficult task of mediating conflicts. Thelma shared how her administrators helped her work through a difficult time with her first co-teaching partner by “facilitating meetings and setting us up for observations with other successful co-teachers” (Focus Group). While some teachers may ask for assistance from their administration, school leaders also need to be involved enough with their co-teaching teams to know when administrative support would be beneficial for teachers.

Celebrate Success

Although providing support through observations and suggestions for improvements is important, people also desire to know when their good work is noticed and appreciated (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Administrators can recognize the accomplishments of their co-teachers by leaving positive notes on small note cards for teachers after classroom observations. Additionally, administrators can share experiences of effective co-teaching teams with other teams throughout the building to capitalize on the expertise they have among their staff. Effective approaches could be shared verbally, through encouraging emails or classroom demonstrations. Even recording teams and sharing these videos with other staff can provide opportunities for teachers to mentor each other beyond their own co-teaching partner. Whatever the method administrators choose, what is effective is acknowledging the efforts and accomplishments of their staff as they seek to improve their instructional practices through peer mentoring and coaching.

Conclusion

As is the case for any qualitative study, the uniqueness of the setting and participants can limit generalization of the study’s findings. Furthermore, transferability of the findings are dependent on readers’ judgment of whether the participants and setting are similar to their own educational contexts. Because the study sought to understand the experiences of the participants’ through the author’s interpretation, biases may exist. However, this study provides a more contextualized analysis with a fuller understanding of participants’ experiences and actions than could be explained solely through numerical data (Charmaz, 2006).

Because this study looked at what co-teachers desire from their administrators, it would also be helpful for future research to explore what administrators actually do in practice that

supports co-teachers as they work together. This could include determining the correlation between effective administrative support and effective co-teaching practice. Most importantly, research should consider how administrator action can ultimately result in increased student achievement within co-taught classrooms. Larger sample sizes with more diverse districts would also help generalize these findings to other educational settings.

This study not only confirms previous findings on what is effective for co-teachers in the area of administration support (Carter et al., 2009; Jang, 2006; Leatherman, 2009), but offers practical strategies for administrators that can be immediately implemented. The strategies in this article provided by effective co-teachers can help administrators build environments that set the tone for collaboration. Teachers will not only be motivated but also enabled to collaborate in peer mentoring and coaching for improved instruction and student learning. However, administrators must do their part in supporting teachers as they mentor and coach each other. As Lyndon B. Johnson (1965, June 4) said, "it is not enough just to open the doors of opportunity, all our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates." Thus, the highest calling of school administrators is not just to provide the opportunities for teachers to collaborate, but to also equip them to be able to do so.

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An Analysis of Social Promotion and Grade Retention

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Abstract

Social promotion and grade retention represent two sides of a multifaceted issue that is not limited to these two options. Social promotion is difficult to quantify, but statistical data on grade retention clearly show its frequency and outcomes. Substantial evidence exists to suggest that students experience greater negative consequences from social promotion and from wholesale grade retention, including increased likelihood of retained students dropping out, thereby placing a greater burden on society. A carefully structured retention program can have benefits. Recommendations include (1) gaining parental support; (2) identifying at-risk students early; (3) establishing quality preschool programs; (4) incorporating a full range of school-based support services; (5) engaging community support agencies; (6) extending the school day/year for at-risk students; (7) hiring, retaining, and providing appropriate professional development for highly qualified teachers; (8) promoting well-established instructional strategies; (9) implementing a credit recovery program; and (10) ensuring that retention is only conducted with an appropriate plan to address learning deficiencies.

Keywords: social promotion, grade retention, at-risk students

Introduction

Grade retention and social promotion have both been used to address issues associated with graduation rates and with old-for-grade students. Students struggling to achieve performance standards frequently find one of two options applied: (1) grade retention in which the student remains behind his or her peers to repeat a year of school; or (2) social promotion, which the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) describes as “the practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards and academic standards to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements” (Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p. 259). In the current age of high stakes testing, student performance is paramount to school accreditation, and performance on state standards-based tests can determine if students have the requisite knowledge and skills to advance to the next level. At the same time, there are implications for students being retained and subsequently grouped with students of lower ages. There has been substantial evidence to indicate that neither grade retention nor social promotion provide a benefit that outweighs the negative impact (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA [Center for Mental Health], 2008; Davis School District, 2012; Franco & Patel, 2011; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2011). As such, it has been argued that the issue needs to break away from the dichotomy of retention or promotion in favor of evidence-based practices that result in academic success for students (NASP, 2011).

The State of the Issue

Currently, grade retention and social promotion are used at varying degrees in the United States. It is difficult to quantify either one in statistical data since is not maintained at the federal level and states vary in methods of reporting student retention (NASP, 2011). What is constant is that both methods are employed out of a belief that they are effective (Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber, 2003; Hauser, 2000). Retention does not necessarily begin once students are in school. Teachers tend to believe that there are benefits to preprimary nonpromotion to allow students to mature (Oliver, Osborne, Patel, and Klieman, 2009). However, upon further

examination, there are clear issues surrounding both practices. Examining these issues at both the national and state levels provides insight into their overall lack of effectiveness as well as the monetary cost (NASP, 2011).

The most common reason for retention is academic failure. Typically this is defined as reading difficulty between grades one and five or failing to earn course credit in grades 9 through 12 (Picklo & Christensen, 2005). Other justification includes the need for greater maturity before entering primary school, resulting in delaying student entry to or repeating kindergarten (Oliver, et al., 2009).

Social promotion is often justified on the belief that students should remain with their age peers. Some experts suggest that it may be more prevalent than retention. However, quantifying social promotion is difficult as data is scarce and unreliable (“Social Promotion”, 2004).

Status of the Issue Nationwide

Grade retention statistics are difficult to compile as the practice is inconsistently applied from state to state, down to the local level (NASP, 2011). With no federal mandate to report such data, there is no national database of information (Center for Mental Health, 2008). Few studies address how it is implemented, but frequently it means a repeating of the prior year’s experiences. Some states have passed legislation requiring additional accelerated instruction for at-risk students and those who are retained, but there is little done to monitor implementation (NASP, 2011).

Conflicting data cloud the picture of grade retention rates. Some studies indicate that retention rates overall have fallen (NASP, 2011). There is some evidence, however, suggesting that retention rates are rising, particularly as outcomes from standards-based exit exams for courses or grades are evaluated (Center for Mental Health, 2008). What is known is that certain age groups and certain racial and socioeconomic demographics have higher rates of retention. Younger children, for example, are more frequently retained to address developmental issues such as maturity (Frederick & Hauser, 2008; Lapkoff & Li, 2007). Black students at age nine are 50% more likely than non-Hispanic white students to have been retained, although this is frequently attributed to socio-economic and geographical factors (Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000). By the age of 11 this trend is firmly established (Frederick & Hauser, 2008).

Social promotion rates are more difficult to quantify than grade retention rates. There is even less available data as social promotion is not a formal policy for schools. School systems on the whole do not like to admit to engaging in this practice, but a majority of teachers admit to having promoted unprepared students (“Social Promotion”, 2004; Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1990). There is little or no monitoring of this practice and its implementation (NASP, 2011). Students who are socially promoted may differ substantially from retained students. This is largely due to the more subjective criteria upon which social promotion decisions hinge. Retained students frequently have quantifiable factors such as grades and other performance indicators to guide the decision, whereas social promotion hinges on other factors that are more often observed by teachers than researchers, including maturity, motivation, or behavior (Babcock & Bedard, 2009).

Status of the Issue in Virginia

Virginia has a mandatory testing requirement which can gauge certain factors that contribute to retention. Grade level performance standards are the benchmarks by which student retention or promotion are measured (Davis School District, 2012). While there is no mandate to retain struggling students, Virginia requires, for example, that districts identify struggling readers by third grade and provide remedial help (Layton, 2013). This creates some degree of uniformity across the state in determining retention and promotion (West, 2009). It does not provide a sole criterion by which the decision to retain can be made (Va. Code Ann. §

22.1-253.13.3, 1988).

Virginia was an early adopter of an anti-social promotion policy, relying more on statewide assessment scores to determine promotion versus retention (Department of Education, 1997). Beginning in 1997, the General Assembly has provided annual funding to implement remediation, early intervention plans and reading instruction, and additional hours of instruction and teacher training to support these initiatives ("Early Intervention Reading Initiative," 2012).

Requirements for students with disabilities differ a bit, as students must demonstrate progress according to an individual education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan to advance to ninth grade. However, students without disabilities must meet performance indicators on literacy tests. Passing Standards of Learning (SOL) test scores are required for all students unless alternate assessments or demonstration of proficiency are specified in the IEP (Quenemoen, Leh, Thurlow, & Thompson, 2000). While some accommodations are made for students with exceptional needs, the practice of social promotion has become more difficult in courses with statewide assessments. More recently, former Governor Bob McDonnell unveiled a series of initiatives that would, among other things, move more aggressively toward ending the practice of social promotion in Virginia (Editorial Board, 2012).

Key Issues Surrounding Grade Retention and Social Promotion

Numerous factors must be considered in evaluating the effects of grade retention and social promotion on the populations they are designed to assist. Research suggests that both policies have limited positive impact, and potentially greater negative impact on students. Furthermore, there are significant potential consequences for special education populations that must be taken into account in a full analysis of these policies (Babcock & Bedard, 2009; Crothers, et al., 2010; Frederick & Hauser, 2008; Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Range, Pijanowski, & Holt, 2009).

Grade Retention Issues

Grade retention is used for a variety of reasons. Students may lack specific academic skills or have poor attendance patterns that preclude acquisition of essential skills and knowledge. They may have been placed in classroom settings that do not meet their particular academic needs. Still others may be socially and emotionally immature for their grade level, while some may have extenuating circumstances – family difficulties, socioeconomic factors, etc. – that make schoolwork difficult to complete to a satisfactory level. However, retention is not always carried out in a consistent fashion as the criteria themselves vary. Inconsistent remediation during retention years coupled with inconsistent application of policies have the effect of impacting which students are retained and what outcomes are achieved (Stone & Engel, 2007).

Social Promotion Issues

Social promotion has similar issues to grade retention. Students whose academic progress is unsatisfactory are identified as in need of remediation. It has been used as an alternative practice to grade retention with attention given to the comparative effects of the two policies on educational and socio-emotional outcomes. As a practice, it has been in government crosshairs for several years because of its perceived low rate of positive outcomes. In 1998 and 1999, President Clinton called for an end to social promotion in his State of the Union addresses. He made the case that standardized test scores would help end social promotion as they would serve as an objective indicator of student achievement. This has in part come to fruition as many states now use performance on state-mandated tests, frequently used to conform to the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), as a criterion for promotion (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). However, research on the topic is limited and difficult

to quantify.

Special Education Issues

The general school population is impacted by both retention and social promotion, but special education has its share of issues as well. In particular, government mandates under NCLB calling for meeting and maintaining adequate yearly progress has put special education into the spotlight as a subgroup that need specific attention. Standardized test scores have become increasingly important, and special needs students often require testing accommodations, meaning increased resources and expenditures (Chambers, Parrish, & Harr, 2004). With the risks associated with dropout from grade retention, focus has naturally been on improving graduation rates with increased performance levels on standardized tests (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008).

Retention Outcomes

Outcomes from both retention and social promotion tend to be negative with fewer positive outcomes. These require timing and well-planned implementation to achieve successful outcomes. Research in the 1970s demonstrated that retention is harmful to students (Range, Pijanowski, & Holt, 2009). Picklo and Christenson (2005) cite several meta-analyses studying the effects of grade retention, and the evidence in these studies without exception show that grade retention is not an effective practice for academic remediation. Specific issues noted include poorer self-concept and attitude toward school, poorer social and personal adjustment, and poorer employment outcomes for students who have been retained. Additionally, there is an association between retention and the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; USDOE, 1999). Similarly, an evaluation of the Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) Ending Social Promotion policy found that students retained frequently had complex and multiple problems. Retained students also report that retention is generally ineffective. Many state that the retention year felt similar to the previous year and that the methods of instructional delivery did not differ substantially from one year to the next. Few indicated that they learned new content (Stone & Engel, 2007).

Grade retention is associated with certain societal costs, including higher educational costs, decreased lifetime earning potential and higher rates of imprisonment. Those who finish school do so with additional years, a cost on average of \$10,000 per student per year. Additionally, the average dropout earns less money and has a lifetime net negative fiscal impact of over \$5,000, whereas the average high school graduate makes a net positive lifetime contribution in excess of \$287,000. This results in greater dependence on public assistance and a higher likelihood of criminal activity (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). A 1997 study found about 75% of state prison inmates and about 59% of federal prison inmates did not earn a high school diploma. Further examination found about 36% of violent criminals in state prisons had failed to earn a high school diploma (Franco & Patel, 2011; Picklo & Christensen, 2005). The likelihood of arrest for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) is four times that of their peers, and research indicates a 73% chance if they drop out of school (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008). While a reasonable expectation of similar return on investment from an extra year of school would more readily justify retention as a practice, there is no demonstrable benefit and taxpayers pay more money for worse results in the end (Welner, 2012).

Retention has a limited time window within which positive outcomes can be expected. By the time a student is in fourth grade, retention is almost guaranteed to produce a negative outcome (Meador, n.d.). Students retained in early grades show short-lived improvement in reading and math, but those improvements are rarely sustained after two to three years (Range, Pijanowski, & Holt, 2009). When supported with academic remediation, retention can have positive effects; however, when intervention is simply a recycling of the previous failed school

year the effects are predominantly negative (Stone & Engel, 2007). High-stakes testing may also provide some motivation. CPS provides some evidence that low-achieving students tend to increase their work effort when testing is a significant determinant in promotion, but a full one-third of the students observed showed little increase in effort despite a desire to not be retained (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). The Chicago system, similar to the one created by NCLB, includes a restriction on social promotion, and by removing social promotion as an option the district experienced an increase in the number of students meeting minimum test requirements for promotion. However, exceptions were built into the system for students with special needs and need for English language support. Consequently, nearly a third of all CPS students were excluded from the policy.

Students in kindergarten through second grade have the highest rates nationwide of retention (“Social Promotion”, 2004). Overall, 10-30% of students nationwide, depending on student age, the time period, and the source of data, have been retained at least once (Frederick, & Hauser, 2008, p. 720). Crothers et al. (2010) found that from kindergarten through eighth grade 9-11% of students are retained annually, and that delayed entry of kindergarten-age students is at about nine percent annually.

Students most likely to be retained come from lower-income households in which parents tend to have less involvement in the educational process (Center for Mental Health, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2012). Male students are held back more frequently than females. African American and Hispanic students are held back more frequently than other ethnicities (NCES, 2003). Retained students more often have birthdays later in the year, making them younger than their classmates. Frequently their parents have attained lower education levels than those of students who have not been retained. Single-parent homes are also overrepresented among retained students. Finally, students with learning or behavioral difficulties and English Language Learners are retained at a greater rate (Center for Mental Health, 2008; Oliver, et al., 2009; Picklo & Christensen, 2005). While some evidence shows an overall decline in retention rates, they remain high among poor, minority, and inner-city students (NASP, 2011).

For special education students, early detection is critical. Significant percentages of students (e.g., 58% in Indiana in the late 1980s; 72% in Michigan in the early 1990s) were retained prior to being identified with learning disabilities (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). The pressure to provide adequate support while avoiding retention and social promotion is expected to increase as estimates from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services predicts a rise from the current level of 20% to nearly 50% of all students identified with mental disorders by 2050 (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008). The societal cost for students with emotional or behavioral disorders is substantial if they do not finish school. While they already have a 58% higher chance of being arrested within five years of high school graduation, that likelihood increases to 73% if they drop out of school. Therefore, it is essential that these populations have access to remediation that increase their potential for success while keeping them with their social peers. This includes programs that allow for credit recovery when students do not meet competencies sufficient to advance and graduate (Franco & Patel, 2011).

Frequent positive outcomes from retention are not supported by research and dropout potential increases when a student is retained. This is particularly true for certain demographics, including Hispanics and African Americans, who already have higher than average dropout rates (Davis School District, 2012; Franco & Patel, 2011; “Social Promotion”, 2004). So significant is the correlation that retention is considered a predictor for dropping out (Poland, 2009). Ninth grade is a pivotal year for achievement. Historical longitudinal data indicates that freshmen who fail at least one course are four times as likely to not graduate in four years (Franco & Patel, 2011; Maushard, 2009).

Retention is viewed by schools as an academic decision, but socio-emotional consequences come with it. Some students describe being retained for a year as an event as

stressful as losing a parent or going blind, while other students with a history of juvenile detention described grade retention as more emotionally troubling than detention (Poland, 2009). Students who are retained tend to develop negative attitudes toward school, have more behavioral issues, and have poor attendance. This is particularly evident by the time students enter middle school (CPRE, 1990; Davis School District, 2011). Retention has a negative impact on all areas of achievement as well as social and emotional adjustment (Crothers et al., 2010; Davis School District, 2012; Poland, 2009). It does not work to assure mastery of skills, curtail future failures, or lower dropout rates and there is no evidence of long-term benefits for students (CPRE, 1990; Davis School District, 2012; NASP, 2011). An additional consideration for retention is the difference in age that results in grade levels. Old-for-grade students tend to display more victimizing behaviors and to show outright aggression toward students around them (Crothers et al., 2010).

Social Promotion Outcomes

Social promotion is more difficult to quantify as a body of research and data is lacking overall. However, the ease with which social promotion is carried out has decreased in the age of high stakes standardized achievement tests. In some states, if students do not demonstrate acquisition of knowledge or skill on a performance test, they do not move to the next level, regardless of the grades assigned by teachers (Franco & Patel, 2011). With the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the practice of social promotion has become more difficult in courses with performance assessments that determine whether students matriculate to the next grade. If a student does not meet the prescribed level of competency, he or she is not promoted (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). This does not, however, mean that the practice cannot continue in courses lacking end of course assessments. While no definitive data exists to prove it, some experts have suggested that social promotion is more prevalent than retention (“Social Promotion”, 2004).

There is little evidence to suggest that social promotion prepares students to succeed in academics or in life. Students find themselves unprepared to advance to the next level where they continue to struggle and become frustrated (“Social Promotion”, 2004). They tend to fall further behind their classmates over time and frequently graduate from high school without the skills and knowledge expected of a high school graduate. An evaluation to identify outcomes of the CPS program found that students retained tended to show smaller gains than socially promoted students. Achievement trends showed that socially promoted students still fell farther behind their peers. Those who did not meet the test cutoff but were promoted for other reasons met the next test cutoff at a rate of 27% (Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon, & Easton, 2000). Similarly, a Florida program requiring students to meet a minimum proficiency score on a standardized test to advance from third to fourth grades showed that students subject to the policy outperformed non-subject peers. Students subject to the policy outgained students not subject to it by 1.85 percentile points in reading and 4.76 percentile points in math. Furthermore, those actually retained showed gains of 4.10 percentile points in reading and 9.98 percentile points in math above those of students promoted (Greene & Winters, 2004).

Grade retention and social promotion both bring increased financial costs, most of the burden being borne by the states and localities. In 2006-2007, Texas had 202,099 students retained for a rate of 4.8%. This came at a cost of \$10,162 per student, or more than 2 billion dollars in additional expenditures (NASP, 2011). Texas is one example, but estimates of the cost of retention for the nation as a whole are in the billions of dollars annually (Franco & Patel, 2011). Social promotion advances students through school to graduation frequently unprepared for work and future occupational pursuits. The financial costs, while more difficult to quantify, are found in detrimental consequences for students in the working world. This leaves them with lower income expectations over a lifetime, and subsequently lower contributions through taxes

and increased need for government assistance. Additional costs are borne by colleges and businesses to provide remedial assistance in basic academic areas such as reading (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The Brookings Institution estimates a cost of 2 billion dollars annually on remedial education, particularly at the community college level (Sawhill, 2014). Students who drop out represent another burden to society. Young male dropouts show a remarkably higher rate of incarceration as compared to more educated peers. Among the general population between ages 16 and 24, 0.1% with bachelor degrees, 0.2% of college students, 0.7% with one to three years of college, and 1.0% of high school graduates were incarcerated. However, dropouts lacking a GED were incarcerated at a rate of 6.3% (Sum, et al., 2009). This higher rate suggests that society bears the cost of housing and care during a prison term. While the cost of housing prisoners varies from state to state, the average annual cost in a federal prison was \$25,251 in 2009 (Lappin, 2011).

Ultimately, both grade retention and social promotion fail to address the specific issues that lead to failure to demonstrate competency, and the evidence shows that they are both counterproductive (Center for Mental Health, 2008).

Recommendations

School leaders have a responsibility to provide for educational opportunity for all students in an environment that is geared for success. Students must have adequate support from the school, family, and the community in order to achieve at the necessary levels to become productive members of society (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008). The overall success of the school hinges on cooperation with stakeholders to support their programs.

The question itself needs to be modified from the traditional dichotomy of retention versus social promotion (Center for Mental Health, 2008, p. 4; NASP, 2011). There are numerous interventions that require neither if they are properly implemented. Administrators must be informed and aware of alternatives to retention and social promotion as this knowledge better empowers them to advocate for quality interventions (Poland, 2009). They can also utilize school psychologists to communicate with faculty, staff, and parents about effective strategies and risks associated with retention (Crothers et al., 2010). However, when the decision comes to retain or promote, it is really more a question of identifying intervention strategies to promote the child's cognitive and social development to facilitate learning and school success (Center for Mental Health, 2008; Davis School District, 2012.)

Recommendations for Schools

Schools must be proactive in their approach to academic failure. A full range of support needs to be in place to address classroom needs and barriers to learning, including transitions between schools and grades, home involvement, crisis response and intervention, community involvement, and student and family assistance. Evidence shows that the best interventions happen early, particularly with at-risk students (NASP, 2011; Poland, 2009). Therefore, early intervention should be adopted as a policy to stop academic failure before a decision must be made with respect to promotion or retention. Addressing the learning, behavioral, and emotional need of students is essential to success.

Students with learning difficulties need to be identified as soon as possible so that intervention efforts can address those needs (Davis School District, 2012; Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Poland, 2009). Strategies such as response-to-intervention (RTI) can be particularly effective as students with needs are identified early and are monitored in the general education environment (Crothers et al., 2010; Davis School District, 2012). Regular assessments of student responsiveness to intervention strategies provide a clear indicator of whether these strategies are having the desired effect. Student progress measures are dynamic in that they measure changes in individual performance. This provides valuable data for instructors to

adjust to student needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Students also benefit from tutoring and individual enrichment programs that target specific areas of deficiency (Jimerson, Plechter, & Kerr, 2005; Shinn, Walker, & Stoner, 2002).

Addressing behavioral problems has been demonstrated to be effective in improving academic performance (Jimerson, Plechter, & Kerr, 2005). Students who are retained have a demonstrably higher likelihood of engaging in risky behavior, such as drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, violent behavior, and suicide. Therefore, regular monitoring of students identified as being at risk is essential, and school-based support programs need to be implemented (Jimerson, Plechter, & Kerr, 2005; NASP, 2011; Shinn, Walker, & Stoner, 2002). Behavior management and cognitive-behavior modification strategies should be used in the classroom to reduce disruption to the learning environment (Jimerson, Woehr, & Kaufman, 2007).

The emotional fallout from grade retention can be significant for students. Some students experience loss of self-esteem, lowered confidence, and lack of a sense of belonging. Schools must provide emotional support for students who are retained, to include school-based mental health programs. A student support team, comprised of teachers, administrators, and students support personnel, can be effective at monitoring the emotional well-being of such students, ensuring that intervention is provided in a timely fashion. Finally, collaboration between administration, teachers, and parents provides the needed support in the home environment (Jimerson, Plechter, & Kerr, 2005).

Other interventions include extended school year, extended school day, and summer programs (Center for Mental Health, 2008; Davis School District, 2012). An additional strategy that must be considered is scheduling so that time for intervention exists within a student's schedule (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Promotion of social and emotional well-being, implementation of school-based mental health resources, engaging community agencies, and regularly monitoring the status of special education services are all essential (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008; Poland, 2009).

Recommendations for the Instructional Environment

The most important step in providing a quality instructional environment is in hiring and retaining highly qualified instructional personnel (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008). Teachers also need access to professional development to ensure that well-trained teachers are in the classroom (Picklo & Christenson, 2005).

Effective teaching strategies also lead to increased student success. Programs that promote mastery learning, direct instruction, cooperative learning, and differentiated instruction show more positive results, and programs that incorporate peer tutoring and team teaching often meet with greater success (Davis School District, 2012). When limited instructional options are employed, fewer students' needs are being addressed. Such an approach is unlikely to increase success for students under NCLB (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). However, when solid motivational strategies are used and learning becomes personal, students perform at a higher level. Teachers must be well-trained in implementing these strategies (Center for Mental Health, 2008).

A preemptive approach is another key to reducing retention and social promotion. High quality universal preschool programs have been identified as particularly effective in reducing retention, and students show improved pre-reading, pre-writing, and pre-mathematics skills (NASP, 2011; Poland, 2009).

When failures occur, students need not be held back for an entire grade, and they need opportunity to recover lost credits. An increasing number of school districts offer credit recovery via online learning, which allows students to keep pace with their classmates and make progress toward graduation. In doing so, students who would be more likely to drop out of school can be motivated by the opportunity to graduate on time. Such programs offer students

virtually any credit necessary with classes available at any time (Franco & Patel, 2011).

There are times that retention cannot be avoided, and in those cases the retention year must not be simply a repeat of the prior year's experiences (NASP, 2011). Retention must be accompanied by a plan for action that addresses specific deficiencies in the learning experience. It remains preferable though to try to advance students while providing the appropriate interventions (Davis School District, 2012).

Recommendations for Reaching Parents

While schools have the legal responsibility to provide opportunity for education, parents need to partner with schools to facilitate the best possible experience both in the classroom and at home. Therefore, school leaders should establish activities that encourage parental involvement in the schools. Parental involvement in schools tends to create better communication between school and home, which promotes learning and appropriate behaviors for students (Davis School District, 2012). Families can also have a financial stake in schools, and a nominal fee for additional services and programs can create buy-in. People tend to undervalue that which costs nothing. However, a modest fee can potentially be the catalyst for conversations within families about the importance of using additional resources and second chances wisely (Franco & Patel, 2011).

Conclusion

When considering student achievement and how failure to achieve at an acceptable level impacts students and society on the whole, one must take many issues into account. Traditional methods of addressing academic failure have not adequately addressed the needs of students and the impact of their failure on society. Social promotion and grade retention are not successful strategies to remedy failure, and research has shown that they actually do more harm than good (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Range, Pijanowski, & Holt, 2009). When students fail, the likelihood that they will drop out increases (USDOE, 1999), and with it comes an increased burden on society as they are more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Sum, et al., 2009). They are also statistically destined to earn less over their lifetimes (Welner, 2012), meaning less lifetime taxes paid. By implementing positive strategies to reform schools, placing the right people in classrooms, providing support to personnel, and engaging parents and the community, leaders can make a positive difference in student performance.

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The Critical Parent and Educator Liaison for Students with Exceptionalities: Points of Consideration

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Abstract

Children with exceptionalities who need an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or have an existing one in place may not be able to speak for themselves. They need advocates. Much can be accomplished if parents and teachers work together to put the child's needs and desires first to improve instruction and student learning. This paper provides an overview of essential items and issues both parents and educators should be knowledgeable of as they embark on the road to individualized special education. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate the need for successful liaison between parents and educators of students who require a special education. This discussion addresses the what, how, and why education law is happening in divisions, schools, and classrooms and offers resources for further information. It is imperative that teachers know and follow federal as well as state and district special education law. School districts do not write the special education law, but outline procedures to follow the law and to work with teachers and parents to fulfill the law. Parents must be aware of their rights and the rights of their child and put the exceptional needs of their child first.

Keywords: advocacy, parents, educators, exceptionality, rights, law

Introduction

When parents and educators embody the same goal to provide equal opportunity for the successful education of every child, this exemplifies a good parent and educator liaison. Research posits that parental involvement for all students in the K-12 setting has a positive effect on student educational outcomes (Duncan, 2014; Hoover-Demsey & Sandler, 1995). The National Education Association (NEA) reports that partnerships between parents and families bring effective parent involvement (NEA, 2012a; NEA, 2012b). According to the United States Department of Education (USDOE), current legislation mandates this partnership (USDOE, 2012). Educators, including district leaders, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, teacher aids and school staff together with families need to communicate opinions and concerns regarding the education needs of all youth, especially those with exceptionalities who may not be able to advocate for themselves.

Education leaders may notice a growing trend in parental involvement and an increase in their knowledge of education law and student learning. Experts assert that creating school and family partnerships, especially concerning academics, positively affects student achievement for all students (Michigan Department of Education, 2012; Richardson, 2009). However, each child and circumstance is unique and there may be times when parents and district or division educators disagree on the special education services that a child requires.

Implications for Practice

This article provides an overview of essential items and issues both parents and educators should be knowledgeable of when implementing individualized special education. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate the need for successful liaison between parents and families and all levels of educators who work with students that require a special education. The discussion addresses the what, how, and why education law is happening in divisions, schools, and classrooms and offers resources for further information. The areas of discussion include organizations who offer valuable resources – the Council for Exceptional

Children (CEC) and the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) these organizations inform and educate in areas of advocacy and legal implications. Special education law and those areas that address individuals with disabilities are identified in this review as well. It is reiterated and explained that the implementation of laws written are the responsibility of both educators and parents to insure that every child's special need is identified and addressed through special education practices. There is further identification of special education practices including the Individual Education Program (IEP) and the transition out of special education services when the child becomes an adult (USDOE, 2013; United States Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 1997).

It is important for educators and parents to have knowledge of the federal and state education law. There must be a clear foundational understanding and communication of the law. The interpretation and application of the law by the school district or division, as well as the parents or families, are key elements for successful liaison.

Research and national data reported in this review of the literature indicate that successful parental and educator liaison increases student achievement (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2007; Epstein, 2009; Karger, 2005; Keith & Keith, 1993; Richardson, 2009). According to Epstein (see Richardson, 2009), parental involvement is the most powerful influence in any type of a child's education. Experts assert parental involvement as an important strategy for the advancement of the quality of education (Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005). A strong home-school partnership means teachers perceive that parents are concerned about their children's education, which is another reason districts and schools should ensure a cooperative parent and educator liaison.

A strong home-school partnership results in agreement and a smooth implementation of special education services for children with exceptionalities. Practitioners and parents can utilize these data collected in this research to describe persons, organizations, and settings and ensure open and knowledgeable communication. It is every child's right to receive appropriate services and a comprehensive IEP. In their mission statement, the CEC (2012) stresses the importance of families engaging in the life and education of their children with exceptionalities.

Communication

Communication between parents and teachers is very important. As teachers plan for the school year, they should establish means of communication between the school and families. Regularly scheduled communication meetings assure open communication opportunities about instruction and possible problem areas. Parental engagement in the education process supports and promotes student achievement (Smith, 2001). The more parents communicate with teachers, administrators, and resource personnel, the more successful the child's education may be.

Parent Teacher Talk

Ideally, parents and the school work together in creating an educational program to meet children's needs. It should not always be the teacher's responsibility to communicate with the parents. Perhaps parents may be able to establish a collaborative relationship by approaching the school from the start. Once families become aware of their parental rights, they may contact the educators who work with their child. When issues arise in the classroom or school, students, as well as parents and educators, benefit from good communication at the outset. Issues are often the result of miscommunication (Wright, 2012a; USDOE, 2004; USDOE, 2010; Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), 2012a).

Educators who welcome parents as an important part of their child's education may increase that child's educational success. Parent input can provide pertinent historical information that may give insight into the exceptionality. Under federal and state law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act of 1997 and its amendments (IDEA, 2004),

educators and parents have the right to have their opinions heard and considered. The child's family has the right to disagree with the district's findings, plans, or actions regarding their child. On the other hand, after considering the parent's opinions or requests, the district has the right to disagree as well (Wright, 2012a; Wright 2012b).

While parents are very important members of the education team, this was not always the case, necessitating the need for the United States Congress to mandate parental involvement as part of the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHC), now referred to as IDEA (USDOE, 2012a). The reauthorizations of IDEA in 1997 and 2004 expanded parental roles and rights to give parents the opportunity to become active participants (Smith, 2001).

Special Education Organizations

Though the laws are in place to protect and support the needs of children with disabilities, there is still a strong need for organizations to continue to support and advocate for those needs to be addressed.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

The CEC is an international community of professionals who are the voice and vision of special and gifted education worldwide. The CEC's mission is to improve, through excellence and advocacy, the education and quality of life for children and youth with exceptionalities and to enhance engagement of their families (CEC, 2012). Thirty thousand CEC members help serve 7.1 million children and youth with disabilities and 3 million children with gifts and talents. CEC members represent the myriad of professionals in the field of special education. Virginia CEC membership is about 1500 (CEC, 2013; U. N., 2006).

An example of advocacy leadership is depicted below by past CEC President Margaret McLaughlin's response to the announcement that the U.S. Senate voted down the U.N. Convention on Persons with Disabilities. She responded in a letter stating, "Special educators call the vote not to ratify the landmark civil rights treaty a "missed opportunity" (2012). She wrote further:

The CEC remains dedicated to the ratification of the U.N. Convention on Persons with Disabilities and to celebrating contributions to society made by persons with disabilities. The CEC stands by its belief in the dignity and worth of all individuals, as well as the need for inclusiveness and social justice for all. (CEC, 2012)

The CEC consists of several different units, including state and provincial, which embrace the parent-educator liaison as an avenue to the success of each individual child. The standards, mission, and vision encapsulate the integrity of the organization, and its wish to expand these values to all parents, educators, and state and provincial units.

Vision. The Council for Exceptional Children is a premier education organization, internationally renowned for its expertise and leadership, working collaboratively with strategic partners to ensure that children and youth with exceptionalities are valued and full participating members of society. As a diverse and vibrant professional community, the CEC is a trusted voice in shaping education practice and policy.

Standards. As the recognized leader for special education professional standards, the CEC develops standards, ethics and practices, and guidelines to ensure that individuals with exceptionalities have access to well-prepared, career-oriented special educators.

Logistics. The CEC membership is comprised of parents and educators in American State Units, Canadian Provincial Units, Special Interest Units, and International Memberships. In America, each state holds an active membership made up of parents and educators and is

called a unit by the CEC. A state unit is an organization of all CEC members within a state. For example, Virginia CEC is composed of all CEC members in the state of Virginia. In 2013 Virginia CEC membership was about 1500.

The CEC is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving the educational success of children with thirty thousand members serving 7.1 million children and youth with disabilities and 3 million serving children with gifts and talents. CEC members represent the myriad of professionals in the field of special education. The CEC advocates for appropriate governmental policies, sets professional standards, provides professional development, advocates for individuals with exceptionalities, and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for effective professional practice (CEC, 2012). Parent-educator liaison is a critical component at the heart of this organization internationally, including the Canadian provincial and United States units (CEC, 2012; United Nations' Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; U. N. 2006).

Canadian provincial units. The Canadian Educational Provincial Units hold active membership in the CEC. Canadian Provincial Units are funded and overseen by federal, provincial, and local governments. A provincial unit is an organization of all CEC members within a province. For example, British Columbia CEC is comprised of all CEC members in British Columbia (CEC, 2012). Education is within provincial jurisdiction and the curriculum is overseen by the province. Education in Canada is generally divided into elementary education, followed by secondary education and post-secondary (The Council of Ministers of Education, 2012; The Canadian Education Association, 2012).

American state units, US districts, and divisions. The United States of America has state units that hold active membership in the CEC. United States Public School Divisions and Districts are geographic divisions over which a state school board has jurisdiction (USDOE, 2012b; USDOE, 2012c). An exception to the use of the term *district* occurs in the Commonwealth of Virginia where a district is called a public school division. Divisions in Virginia are political subdivisions that depend on appropriations and budget approvals from its associated general-purpose local government (VDOE, 2012b).

The federal and state laws contain most of the provisions governing the delivery of special education and related services. The federal and state departments of education have also created regulations under both laws that guide their implementation and have the authority of law. Local school districts are responsible for providing appropriate special education instruction and related services (USDOE, 2012a; Wright, 2012a; Wright, 2012b).

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)

The NICHCY is an organization dedicated to children with special needs and is responsible for a noteworthy source of information on disabilities in infants, toddlers, children, and youth. NICHCY is a good source for information on IDEA – the law that authorizes early intervention services and special education. It is also a resource to help parents and teachers connect with disability agencies and organizations in their state (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY), 2013).

These very valuable sources inform and educate families as they find themselves entering the world of special needs and education. Parents' initial realization of an exceptionality occurring in their child could possibly begin at home before the family has received notice that their child needs special services in the school setting. Some areas of concern or special need may become obvious to the family before the school years begin. Early intervention and early childhood special education services for children who have yet to be identified are guaranteed under the NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) USDOE, (2004).

Some families find out about a learning difficulty once their child attends school (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). It can be difficult for parents to receive news that their child has a special need as they may have been unaware of the presence of a special need until a teacher points it out. While early intervention is beneficial, the tendency of parents is to deny the presence of a special need.

Conversely, a challenge is also found when teachers do not recognize the presence of a special need that parents are convinced exist. Parents must then consult with a medical professional to obtain a diagnosis. "From a medical perspective, parents and teachers are not technically qualified to diagnose a child's disability" nor is it their job to label a child; only medical professionals, such as child psychologists or developmental pediatricians are qualified to make a diagnosis ("Autism United", 2012). Educators may present evidence of a disability and request appropriate assessment (Autism Speaks, 2012). Parents and educators should document behavioral and developmental delays they observe in the home or education setting. For a diagnosis to be made, a medical evaluation is necessary (National Institute of Mental Health, 2012).

Evidence must demonstrate that a disability directly affects educational performance. To learn more about the eligibility process under IDEA (2004), parents are encouraged to read *Evaluating Children for Disability*, in the NICHCY files and search specifically for the section on determining eligibility and what to do if they disagree with the determination (USDOE, 2012a; USDOE 2012c; USDOE 2012e; USDOE 2013; NICHCY, 2013).

The National Council on Disability (NCD)

NCD experts report on individuals with disabilities and accountability. Overall, there is strong support for increasing expectations for students with disabilities and helping them to improve their academic outcomes. At the same time, there is concern about how states and schools will manage this process, largely due to lack of knowledge of effective interventions and strategies. At times, there appears to be some lack of will to undertake the difficult change; and fall back on excuses, but findings reveal a hope that these laws and policies will result in outcomes that are more equitable for students with disabilities (NCD, 2004).

For example, there may be some situations where a child begins school with a medical diagnosis that already determines the delays that may exist. On the other hand, some children come to school without a diagnosis and teachers may detect an issue and begin to note learning problems and document them with early data collection. To determine the eligibility, the teacher would begin by making a recommendation for a Child Study Team (CST) to be formed. The CST process has three steps: determining eligibility, developing the IEP, and determining placement and/or services (NCD, 2004; VDOE, 2012c).

Laws Affecting Special Education

Ideally, parents and educators could sit down and work out what is best for a child. Both care deeply for the welfare of a child but may not always agree on how to educate the child. Special education is a law driven process that prescribes the process for determination of eligibility and services for children with special needs (IDEA, 2004; USDOE 2012a). The government or governing body behind special education law is the protector of the rights of children with disabilities in the United States of America. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was created in response to grievances from educators and parents. They observed that children with disabilities were not receiving the same education opportunities as nondisabled children, and were often isolated from nondisabled children.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA (2004) is the United States' federal special education law. This law replaces all earlier versions of Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (IDEA,

2004). IDEA emphasizes assessment and accountability through the Improvement Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-446). The IDEA (2004) requires that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. Their instructional programs are delivered in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). IDEA determines who is eligible for special education services. The student would be between the ages of 3 and 21 and has an identified disability that prevents access to the general curriculum unless administered specially designed instruction or related services. IDEA guarantees a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to those students (IDEA, 2004; USDOE 2012a).

Lawmakers and experts write what IDEA requires when evaluating a student:

- Individualized testing
- Evaluation in the native language or mode of communication
- Nondiscriminatory evaluation
- Standardized tests to be validated for the specific purpose for which they are used
- Tests administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel
- Tests administered in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of such tests

(USDOE, 2012a; Wright, 2012a; Wright, 2012b).

IDEA establishes six guiding principles that are key in understanding the intent and spirit of the law. They are the following:

- Free and appropriate public education (FAPE)
- Appropriate evaluation
- Individualized education program (IEP)
- Least restrictive environment (LRE)
- Parent and student participation in decision-making
- Procedural safeguards

(LDA, 2013; IDEA, 2004)

When a child has any type of handicap, law requires the public school system to give that child a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Each student suspected of having a disability must have appropriate evaluation in all areas of suspected disability.

Evaluation. Evaluation is a critical component of the special education process for students with special needs. Once a teacher suspects a special need, she or he should take steps toward appropriate action. The CST is a school-based committee whose members determine if a student should be evaluated for special education eligibility. The team consists of the student's parent, a school psychologist, a learning disabilities teacher/consultant, and school social worker who are employed by the school or district (Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, 2012). Sometimes parents may be overlooked as integral members of the CST. Current legislature recognizes that parents are a very important part of the IEP team. Their input and cooperation is necessary to the success of their child's educational future. Based on their findings, the team would make a recommendation for assessment (USDOE, 2012).

IDEA (2004) requires that before a student can receive special education instruction and related services to determine eligibility they must receive a comprehensive evaluation (USDOE, 2013). Parental consent for the evaluation of the student is required. The evaluation is conducted by a team of qualified evaluators using a variety of non-discriminatory evaluation materials individualized for each child to provide information that will determine eligibility. Assessment must be administered in the native language or mode of communication of the student. If students are found eligible to receive special education services, the evaluation team must develop an IEP; a written document designed using the evaluation information gathered on the individual needs of the student. One significant element of the IEP is determining the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for the student.

Least Restrictive Environment. All students must have meaningful access to same age peers without disabilities along a continuum called the LRE. IDEA states that to the maximum extent possible, each public agency must ensure children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, including children in public or private institutions or other facilities. Special Education is not a place – it is a service that follows the child. Parent and student participation in decision-making is required by IDEA. Students over the age of 14 ½, along with their parents, participate in each step of the education process. Parents are equal partners in the decision-making in their child’s education. IDEA has Procedural Safeguards to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected. They ensure that information is shared and procedures are in place to resolve disagreements. (LDA, 2013; IDEA, 2004; USDOE, 1994)

IDEA requires the following:

- Parental consent for the initial evaluation of the student
- Nondiscriminatory evaluation
- Evaluation by a team
- Evaluation of the student in all areas of suspected disability
- Use of more than one procedure to determine the student’s educational program
- Assessment in the native language or mode of communication of the student (IDEA, 2004)

Mandated by IDEA, students with disabilities are those who have one or more of the following disabilities:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Developmental delay
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment, including blindness (IDEA, 2004)

Experts from the NICHCY (2013) reveal:

Despite the fact that AD/HD is specifically mentioned in IDEA’s definition of OHI, some students with AD/HD may not be found eligible for services under IDEA. The AD/HD must affect educational performance. (To learn more about the eligibility process under IDEA, read Evaluating Children for Disability, looking specifically for the section on determining eligibility and what to do if you do not agree with the determination.) If a student is determined not eligible for services under IDEA, he or she may be eligible for services under a different law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (NICHCY, 2012a; NICHCY, 2012b).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). In the United States, all states are to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to every child. The districts provide a general curriculum designed to meet the needs of most children. Districts must provide special education supports and services to students with a disability; who need these supports in order

to learn and reach these same goals as the general education students. The student with a special need must have the opportunity to participate in normal school culture and academics as much as possible and with specialized assistance when necessary. It is the goal of IDEA to provide services and supports to students who are placed in their LRE alongside students without disabilities. Districts must follow the process outlined in IDEA (USDOE, 2012).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Like IDEA (2004), NCLB (2001) requires that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and be included in statewide and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. NCLB is instrumental in encouraging and promoting parental involvement in their child's education. The U. S. Department of Education released a parent guidebook recording "three decades of research that provides convincing evidence that parents are an important influence in helping their children achieve high academic standards. When parents are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve" (NCLB, 2012b, p.1, USDOE, 2004, USDOE, 1997, USDOE 1994).

United States Secretary for Education, Arne Duncan in *The Title One: Parenting Guide, Parental Involvement* declares:

My vision for family engagement is ambitious...

I want to have too many parents demanding excellence in their schools. I want all parents to be real partners in education with their children's teachers, from cradle to career. In this partnership, students and parents should feel connected—and teachers should feel supported. When parents demand change and better options for their children, they become the real accountability backstop for the educational system (USDOE, 2010).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a statute that is enforced by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). For many years, its main purpose was employment for individuals with special needs. It has evolved more recently toward the application of its provisions to the education of children with special needs. The organization has expanded to determine eligibility beyond that of IDEA in that it defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a person's major life activities (Office of Civil Rights, 2012).

Section 504 guarantees that accommodations permit equal access to general education, but are less expansive than the IDEA. It is noteworthy that all students in special education are also covered by Section 504; however, some disabled students are covered by Section 504, but are not covered by IDEA (OCR, 2012).

Meeting the Needs of Students in Special Education

Special Education

Special education means specially designed instruction and related services, provided at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique educational needs of students with disabilities, whose educational needs cannot be met fully with modification of the general instructional program. Special education provides a full continuum of program options to meet the educational and service needs of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. This instruction can include a special education classroom, general education setting, pullout program, home instruction, instruction in hospitals and institutions (NICHCY, 2012a, NICHCY2012b). Parents spend a significant part of the day with their children, often only with the exception of the time that teachers are with them. Because of this, parents are often the most informed of a child's needs, in addition to the child's teacher. Both parents and teachers must all work as a team to help a child with special needs effectively. There are specific services put into place by IDEA to help children benefit from special education. These are referred to as Related Services.

Related Services

The NICHCY defines Related Services according to IDEA to mean transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes:

- Audiology
- Adaptive physical education
- Counseling and Guidance services (including rehabilitation counseling)
- Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children
- Interpreting services
- Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
- Occupational therapy
- Orientation & mobility services
- Parent counseling and training
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Recreation (including therapeutic recreation)
- Speech-language pathology services
- School health services and school nurse services
- Social work services in schools
- Transportation

This list does not include every related service a child might need or that a school system may offer. To learn more about these related services and how IDEA defines them read the NICHCY discussion of Related Services (NICHCY, 2012a).

The term related services also refers to early identification and assessment of disabilities in children that determine medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes that may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. It includes early identification and assessment of disabling conditions in children in schools. School health services and school nurse services are designed to enable a child with a disability to receive a free appropriate public education as described in the IEP of the child (Medicaid, 2012; NICHCY, 2012b; USDOE, 2012c; VDOE, 2012d;).

Assistive Technology

Another area of assistance for individuals with exceptionalities is in Assistive Technology (AT). The United States Government mandates services and support. The United States Department of Education promotes educational excellence for all Americans under IDEA 2004. Statute: Sec. 602(1) defines the term assistive technology device as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability” (USDOE, 2012d, p.1).

AT is a term used in special education that refers to assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices used for people with disabilities. AT also refers to the services offered by an AT expert to select, locate, and to teach people with exceptionalities, their families, attendants, and teachers to use the devices. The purpose is to enable equal access and promote greater independence in the world for those with special needs (USDOE, 2012).

AT commonly refers to, “products, devices or equipment, whether acquired commercially, modified or customized, that are used to maintain, increase or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities” according to the definition proposed in the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (NICHCY, 2012a, 2013, USDOE, 2012d). Assistive Technology and services may be incorporated into the IEP special education support by the IEP

team in the areas of daily living, listening, mobility, organization/memory, reading, speaking, and writing (USDOE, 2012d).

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a unique education program designed and written to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability. This required document details the education plan and related services a student with disabilities will receive. This plan is developed and reviewed by an IEP team and every student who qualifies for special education must have an IEP as mandated by IDEA (USDOE, 2013; VDOE, 2012).

IEP components include the student's academic and behavioral Present Level of Performance (PLOP) – some states refer to as PLAAFP, or Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, measurable annual goals, observable and measurable objectives written toward the annual goals, services, program modifications and accommodations, and a setting that is the LRE for the student. The student is invited to attend the IEP meetings at 14 1/2 years of age. Transition out of the school system planning begins at age 16, or earlier (NICHCY, 2012A; USDOE, 2013, VDOE 2010).

Purpose of an IEP

The state is required by law to educate children with disabilities with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The IEP is written to fit the student. It is in place to help educators to understand the disability and how it affects the learning process for this individual. The student's placement is chosen to fit the student's need. Districts may not fit a child's need into a pre-existing program for a particular classification of disability. The IEP must be tailored to the individual needs as identified by the CST and the eligibility evaluation results. If a child's IEP is written to fit the system, rather than having the system fit the child, the district is breaking the law (USDOE, 2012; Wright, 2012a; Wright 2012b).

IEP Team Members

Members of the IEP team are parents, school district representative, teacher specialist or special education coordinator, school psychologist, and general education teacher if the general education classroom is the LRE for the student. Parents may invite other professionals who play an important role in their child's life, like a scout leader or music therapist or yoga teacher. Individuals, who provide related services such as speech and language, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and assistive technology, also participate and submit written recommendations (USDOE, 2012d).

It is a necessity that parents are an active part of the educational placement decision for their child. IDEA ensures that parents are members of the IEP team. A triennial evaluation must be done every three years after a child has been placed in special education. IEP reviews are required annually although either a parent or teacher may request an IEP review at any time. IDEA specifically allows parents as IEP team members to provide information to the IEP team related to their child (USDOE 2012).

Parents should be invited and encouraged to be active members of the team. They are equal members who must participate fully along with the district educators as part of the IEP team. Parents have the right to ask questions and discuss the evaluation and identification of their child's disability. They share equal input and may argue a point for the student into the IEP development and the determining the placement of their child. They may request modifications in the plan just like each member of the IEP Team. The USDOE funds at least one parent information and training center in each state to ensure that parents are informed and can effectively advocate for their children (USDOE, 2013).

Triennial Evaluation

Once an IEP is in place, the school must reevaluate the child every three years unless the parent and the school agree that a reevaluation is not needed (USDOE, 2013). Triennial evaluations are administered in order to reassess a student's disability and to determine if current programming or supports are appropriately meeting their needs. Reevaluation can occur more frequently if conditions warrant, or if the parent or teacher requests a reevaluation. A child may be reevaluated more often if the parent or teacher requests it or if conditions justify a reevaluation to determine if the student continues to have a disability and remains eligible for special education. However, a school or educators may not conduct a reevaluation more than once a year or less than every three years unless the parent and the school agree otherwise (Telzrow & Tankersley, 2000).

Transition

Transitions can be challenging for students with disabilities. The IEP should outline plans to help students with special needs move from one setting to another or from one grade to another. Additionally, the following transitions might seem simple to most people but can be challenging for students with exceptionalities. These transitions include coming from home to school, going from one school to another school, going to one classroom from another, or as simple as moving from one task to another task. Planning for earlier transitions and building those strategies into the student's IEP is considered good practice in special education. In fact, IDEA requires it (IDEA, 2004; USDOE, 2012a; USDOE, 2013). Careful planning in the development of the IEP should support students and their families through all transitions. Transition services, as defined by IDEA, is "a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be a results-oriented process" (IDEA, 2004; USDOE 2013). It should be focused on academic and functional achievement.

A major transition occurs when a student is preparing to leave high school and enter the world as a young adult. Planning for this transition must begin by age 14 ½ and involves preparation of a document called an Individual Transition Program (ITP). Parental input is crucial to ensure appropriate advocacy for the interests of the students. Transition services are based on the individual student's needs and the program must take into account his or her preferences and interests (NICHY, 2012d). Transition should facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities. These activities are described as postsecondary education, vocational education integrated employment, continuing adult education adult services, and independent living that includes community participation (IDEA 2004; United States Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 1997; Wright, 2012a).

As noted above, the purpose of IDEA is "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available a free, appropriate education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living" (IDEA, 2004, USDOE, 2012a). Legal experts translate the law:

The phrase "further education" and the emphasis on effective transition services are new in IDEA 2004. Section 1400(c) (14) describes the need to provide "effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment and/or education. Congress also made significant changes by adding independent living into the legal definition of "transition services" in IDEA 2004. (Wright, 2012b, pp. 45-48)

Everyone has the right to receive the kind of education they need (FAPE, 2012). For students who receive special education, IDEA mandates that if students need training in different types of community work before they graduate (IDEA, 2004; USDOE, 2013) this is something to request in the ITP and the IEP meeting.

Since 2004, many Americans with exceptionalities have become fully integrated members of their communities thanks to their access to general curriculum and other advances made in educating students with special needs (IDEA, 2004; USDOE, 2013). Some high school graduates with labeled special needs participate in post-secondary education. Many adults with

special needs are capable of working in the community, but some may require a more structured environment. Public exposure of this population through media, public education, and public social interaction seems to have heightened the awareness of the equality that should exist for all people. There appears to be an increased acceptance and positive attitude toward the inclusion of persons with exceptionalities into the general population (Hunter & Hunter, 2010).

General Curriculum and Adaptive Curriculum

In special education, the General Curriculum serves students from across the whole range of mild to moderate disabilities. These settings follow the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) guidelines. Emphasis is placed on collaboration, evidence-based instructional practices, instructional accommodations, behavior management, and assessment strategies (Hunter, 2011; IDEA, 2004).

Alternatively, Adaptive Curriculum serves students from across the whole range of moderate to severe disabilities in a variety of settings including inclusion classrooms, modified resource rooms, and self-contained programs. Emphasis is placed on collaboration, access to the general education curriculum and instructional accommodations, learning functional skills, effective communication through multiple modalities, positive behavior, and transition to adulthood (Hunter, 2011; IDEA, 2004).

IDEA legislation mandates that a student can earn a high school diploma or certificate in either (K-12) Special Education General Curriculum or (K-12) Special Education Adaptive Curriculum. This is determined by:

Both IDEA 1997 and IDEA 2004 contain three requirements pertaining to a student's individualized education program (IEP) that specifically mention involvement in the general education curriculum – the requirements concerning present levels of performance, annual goals, and supplementary aids and services, program modifications and supports for personnel. IDEA 2004 maintains the major focus of the provisions found in IDEA 1997 while at the same time introducing a number of changes. (USDOE, 2012a)

The USDOE's implementing regulations for IDEA (1997) further elaborate "a child cannot be removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum" (IDEA.gov 34 C.F.R. § 300.552(e) 2012). The latest 2004 legislation further supports the LRE stating the following criteria:

The IEP must include a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. (USDOE, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1414(d) (1) (A) (i) (I), (II), (IV))

Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards

Parents have the right to examine records before an IEP meeting occurs to reconsider past decisions. They have the right to request an IEP meeting and to be given advance notification of intent to change the educational program. They have the right to engage in mediation and the right to an impartial due process hearing. Parents and districts may have a difference of opinion (USDOE, 2013; VDOE, 2012d). If a parent does not agree with special education support and services, and does not wish to give his or her consent, he or she can request a new IEP meeting or a facilitated IEP meeting where independent facilitators not affiliated with the school or team come in to conduct the meeting (USDOE, 2012; San Diego Unified School District, 2012).

Actions that Require Parent’s Written Consent for a Special Education

The district must obtain parents informed consent in writing before services may begin. Additionally, they may not commence with the change of a student’s services, discontinue special education supports and services, evaluate or reevaluate a child for special education, or provide a child with special education supports and services unless they have this written consent first.

By signing their name on the consent form, parents are stating that they understand, give permission, and agree with the action for which consent is required. It is important for parents to become as informed as possible about what they are consenting to. Parents should not be concerned that once they sign the IEP it is unchangeable from that point forward. It is a binding document. However, any member of the team, including parents, may call a meeting at any time to edit the IEP (USDOE, 2013; VDOE, 2010).

Disputes

Since the enactment of the PL 94-142, now IDEA (2004), many Americans with special needs have become fully integrated members of their communities. This can be attributed to their access to general curriculum classrooms and other advances made in educating students with disabilities.

The new law passed in the 108th Congress in 2005 referred to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), Public Law 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004), has many changes that may affect opportunities for the child with a special need to be fully included in school and in society in general. The underlying theme of the many changes in the law reflect a weakening of the law and can be interpreted by some as challenging the rights of some children to participate in their regular school. This new law has many changes that are likely to interrupt the parent’s right to participate fully in their child’s special education (IDEA, 2004).

The regulations should clarify and reinforce that children with disabilities should participate in the regular curriculum. They should have meaningful goals with a plan for implementation of these goals. Parents are to be apprised of their child’s progress with written, comprehensive reports at least as often as non-disabled children receive report cards. Districts should be supportive and ensure parents and their child with special needs the right to an appropriate education in line with the original spirit of FAPE. There may be a lack of commitment to the education of the disabled on the part of all stakeholders (NICHCY, 2013).

Experts in the field are well aware of the dangers that can come about when districts and educators water down the law for convenience rather than using appropriate interpretation for the good of our students. One asserts:

Do No Harm. When Medical doctors take the Hippocratic Oath, they pledge to ‘do no harm.’ There is some discussion in education about teachers and educational leaders taking a similar oath. I have been in the field of education for nearly 35 years now. I remain appalled at the amount of harm I see that teachers do to students. We also expect that if we approach from a *Loving our Differences for Teachers* – perspective to also make a positive difference. More than “do no harm” – let us do some good! (Jordan, 2011).

It may not be a good idea to sign the IEP at the IEP Team meeting. Within 3-5 days after the IEP is developed, parents should receive a copy of the IEP for their review and signature. Parents have 30 days after the meeting to sign and return the IEP to the school. It is important to take the time to read and thoroughly understand what one is signing. Some IEPs are written to fit the system, rather than having the system fit the child. Parents should make sure that their child is receiving the appropriate support in the least restrictive environment.

Involve Others

The teacher may need to enlist help to plan an appropriate program for their child. Involve the school principal. Parent input is very important here. Contact your district to request district based not school-based personnel to help solve disputes. They may be able to assist in the IEP planning and implementation of the IEP. The child's teacher may need a teaching assistant in the classroom. The child may need para-professional support. The child may need access to a resource teacher or school counselor (NICHY, 2012a).

Education Settings

Children with special needs can sometimes be included in the general education setting, depending on their disability. Some children with disabilities require a smaller self-contained setting, but in a regular school. Depending on the severity of the disability some children will receive their education while homebound or in the hospital setting. In special education, there can be an academic setting, nonacademic setting, and comparable facilities. Depending on the severity of the disability, this instruction can include a special education classroom, general education setting, pullout program, home instruction, instruction in hospitals and institutions. Special education is a service not a location and in all circumstance the least restrictive environment for learning is sought (NICHCY, 2012a; USDOE, 2013).

Least Restrictive Environment

In all things, educators and parent must seek the least restrictive environment (LRE) for children. IEP teams must place emphasis on providing the appropriate program in the least restrictive environment. Placement in general education settings is the first placement. IDEA requires the IEP team to consider a continuum of least restrictive environments when identifying the setting in which the instructional program for students with disabilities will be provided. The instructional program setting for specific students may range from inclusion in general education classes all day to instruction provided all day in special education classrooms (IDEA, 2004 USDOE, 2013).

The continuum of placements listed least-to-most includes full-time in a general education classroom. Placement in general education with modifications must be the first placement option the IEP team considers. If general education is not the LRE, then a continuum of alternative placements must be provided and one chosen based upon that child's individual needs including part-time in a special education resource room or full-time in a special education self-contained classroom, separate special education school, residential facility, homebound, or hospital (IDEA, 2004; Wright, 2012a).

Self-contained and Inclusive Education Environments

In the growing body of evidence, research shows that students in the inclusive learning setting show growth in the areas of behavior as well as academics. The indicators also recognize that students that are placed into segregated self-contained special education rooms do not demonstrate those same positive effects of students in the inclusion setting. The most positive student outcomes are evidenced by the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education with the appropriate accommodations (Hunter & Hunter, 2010; Hunter & Jordan, 2012 Stainback, Stainback, Moravec, & Jackson, 1992; York, Vanderbook, Mac Donald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992).

Even though the special education law is written in specific, understandable and straightforward directives, it may be misinterpreted by state and district legislation for various reasons. Some reasons are lack of funding, lack of appropriate space, or personnel are inappropriately interpreting the law.

The idealistic philosophy behind inclusion also may suggest that IDEA is possibly the perfect answer to the equal rights quandary. That appears to be a constant philosophy in the education of our students with special needs. If practices and policies are based on misinterpretation of the law, insufficient resources, lack of services and result in inappropriate placements, it could be destined to fail. Appropriate placement, sufficient staffing and other needs of the institution must be educationally sound and in compliance with state and federal law (Rutherford, 2002; USDOE, 2013; VDOE, 2010 IDEA, 2004; CEC, 2012).

Inclusion

Inclusion describes services that place students with disabilities into general education classrooms with appropriate support services, that of a general and a special education teacher. Parents need to be good advocates and understand that their student with special needs may not know the difference between their difficulties in the classroom and an inappropriate placement. They may not understand why they do not understand what is going on in their classroom. They may find that they do not want to participate and they are embarrassed to ask for help. Parents should not be embarrassed to go outside the IEP team to seek help for their child (NICHCY, 2012a; Werts, Wolery, Snyder, & Caldwell, 1996; Yell & Shriner, 1996).

Co-teaching model support. Research indicates the most effective way to sustain student learning for those with disabilities in the general education classroom is by utilizing, not having perceptions of, real support models toward the individual student's needs like co-teaching, collaborative teaching with paraprofessional support, and the use of assistive technology. These supports are critical to the success of inclusion programs and the co-teaching model would create the setting where students with exceptionalities are valued as full members of the student body and provided opportunities to participate in all aspects of school life (Friend, 2008a). The co-teaching support model consists of a special education teacher collaborating with a general education teacher to meet the instructional goals of students with and without disabilities in a general education setting. Two teachers work together to meet the needs of not only students with disabilities assigned to the general education class, but also students without disabilities participating in the class. Both teachers share responsibility for planning, delivering instruction, assessing, and managing classroom discipline and student behavior (Friend, 2008b).

Paraprofessional support. A paraprofessional is a teacher's aide who provides critical support to special needs students who are placed in inclusive settings. In the general education setting, para-professionals may work with a small group of students, review concepts that have been taught, and assist with monitoring (Friend, 2008a).

Para-professionals can be assets in the general education setting. Para-professionals who are assigned to general education classes as a special education service may offer classroom support to all students both special and general education learners. A para-professional who is assigned to support a student one on one must focus attention on that one student. This service may help to increase parent and teacher communication concerning a child's daily activities reports.

Para-professionals, special education teachers, and general education teachers can change lives if they work together in the inclusive education setting. The IRIS Center sponsored by CEC develops modules and other instructional resources for professional development to provide research-validated information about working with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The IRIS Center defines inclusion as:

Inclusive education is the integration of children with exceptionalities into the general education setting in the classrooms and school community areas. Inclusive schools are defined as those that educate students with disabilities in age-appropriate general

education classes with modified instruction and appropriate supports and accommodations as required by their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Ideally, this approach maintains the integrity of the general and special education environments while maximizing the educational potential of the individual student (CEC, 2012; IRIS Center, 2012; USDOE, 2013).

Conclusion

As parents and special educators, our goals for our students are that they will attain the highest levels possible in academic areas and gain independence with less supervision and to receive more of their education in integrated settings. This will promise a more optimistic future in terms of integrated employment and life in general. A continued focus on student learning and successful parent-educator liaisons in our 21st Century classrooms will set the tone for student academic success. Although the changes in services that began in the 1970s did result in improvements in outcomes for some students who require special education services, it is also evident that the changes made in policy in 2004 do not necessarily always lead to the implementation of more effective services for all students.

Educators know that learning begins with the student and the appropriate utilization of special education law will provide a level of individualization for creative teaching and learning in the classroom. Public school educator, education professor, and parent, Caruana (2000) shares the philosophy, “be grateful for parents who involve themselves in their child’s education; they can make your job so much easier” (p. 23).

Additional Resources

If you would like to learn more:

- Visit the section of NICHCY’s website called *Resolving Disputes* www.nichcy.org/schoolage/disputes/
- Visit the CADRE, the National Center for Dispute Resolution www.directionservice.org/cadre

You may also call the PTI center in your state. PTIs are an excellent resource for parents to learn about special education. Your PTI is listed on NICHCY’s [State Resource Sheet](#) for your state.

Many of the resources for this article are referenced from the USDOE, VDOE, IDEA and the CEC. Please resource from your own state district or province for local department of education governing body resources and information.

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Research to Practice: K-12 Scholarship Journal

Author Guidelines

Types of Manuscripts

Appropriate submissions include empirical research reports, literature reviews, practitioner articles, position papers, policy papers, or book reviews. All manuscripts must be research-based and provide clear implications and recommendations for practice.

Formatting Guidelines

Articles submitted for review should:

- Be 10 – 20 pages in length
- Be double spaced
- Have 1" margins
- Be Times New Roman 12 pt. font
- Be a Word.doc or .docx (no PDFs)
- Include both research and practice content
- Have numbered pages starting with the title page
- Include a reference page
- Follow American Psychological Association (APA) 6th Edition Guidelines
- Page one should include:
 - Running head (top left)
 - Page number (top right)
 - Article title
 - Author name(s), highest degree, & affiliation(s)
 - Submission date
 - Address, phone, & e-mail of submitting author
- Page two should include:
 - Running head & page number
 - Title
 - No author(s)/affiliation(s)
- Page three should include:
 - Abstract (100 – 120 Words)
 - Keywords (5-7 listed for search purposes)

Permissions

Authors are responsible for verification of authenticity of all citations, tables, and figures and are responsible for obtaining written permission from original sources (include written permissions in appendices).

It is the author's responsibility to obtain all necessary institutional permissions and informed consents/assents if data reported was collected from human subjects.

Cover Letter

Manuscript submission must include a 1 page cover letter affirming the following:

- The manuscript is the author's original work and all sources are properly cited.
- This manuscript is not already published (in part or full) nor is it currently under review by any other publication.
- Written permissions to use tables and figures from other sources have been obtained.
- If data was collected from human subjects, proper institutional and individual permissions to publish the data were gained.

Review Process

Manuscripts will go through an initial editorial review to ensure the guidelines stated above are met. If the guidelines are met and the manuscript has clear implications for practice it will enter a double-blind peer-review process. Authors may be required to make revisions prior to publication as part of the review process and will have the opportunity to review their final article proof prior to publication.

Manuscript Submission

Submit manuscript and cover letter electronically via email to Lucinda Spaulding at:

lsspaulding@liberty.edu