ACRES
American Council on Rural Special Education

2014 Conference Proceedings

Developing Partnerships to Meet Individual Needs Across Rural and Urban Cultural Contexts

March 19-22, 2014
Tucson, Arizona

Proceedings Editor:
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Table of Contents

Innovative Personnel Preparation

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS USED IN CLINICAL SETTINGS.....4-12

TRANSITION TO TEACHING: AN ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM TO PREPARE SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR HIGH NEED SCHOOLS.....13-21

LESSON LEARNED: DEVELOPING A CONSISTENT LESSON PLAN IN A RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM.....22-26

ADDRESSING EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL ALASKA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LOWER 48?.....27-34

TEACHER COLLABORATION TO ASSIST SPECIAL LEARNERS IN A KENTUCKY MENNONITE COMMUNITY.....35-42

Technology Applications

UTILIZING THE INVERTED CLASSROOM WITH UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS IN A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM.....43-46

SHRINKING DISTANCES: USING TECHNOLOGY TO OPEN THE WORLD TO RURAL STUDENTS.....47-52

INTEGRATING TEACHLIVE TO PREPARE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS FOR RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOLS.....53-58

BUILDING COMMUNITY IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM: THE USE OF VOICETHREAD TO FOSTER DISCUSSION.....59-64

Strategies for Addressing Unique Learning Needs

THREE D's of IEP GOALS *(Document, Deliver, and Distribute)* 65-72

FACILITATING COMPREHENSION FOR RURAL READERS THROUGH PERSONALIZED PLACE BASED CONNECTIONS 73-79

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN RURAL SCHOOLS: THE MONTANA AUTISM EDUCATION PROJECT.....80-85

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

SCALING UP IN RURAL SCHOOLS USING POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS.....86-91

RTI PARTNERSHIPS: SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS.....92-100

Enhancing Social-Emotional Skills

STAYING CONNECTED! PROMOTING CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL SKILLS USING DIGITAL SOCIAL STORIES FOR PLAY, FRIENDSHIP, AND LEARNING.....100-108

CHILDREN SUCH AS THESE: DAILY CHALLENGES OF A CHILD WITH PHYSICAL AND HEALTH IMPAIRMENTS.....109-116

A BACKPACK FULL OF HURT: BULLYING AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.....117-123

Families of Children with Special Needs

PARENTS AS LEADERS IN THEIR CHILDS EDUCATION.....124-128

TRANSPLANTING UNITED STATES CONSTRUCTS OF DISABILITY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION WITH CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.....129-139

PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR CHILDREN.....140-145

Transition to Adulthood

A BETTER LIFE: CUSTOMIZED EMPOLYMENT OPPORTUNITES FOR RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES.....146-155

DISCLOSURE CHOICES.....156-159

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INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS USED IN CLINICAL SETTINGS

The current political landscape calls to leave "No Child Left Behind." Yet schools, and particularly teachers, are left unsure of how to tackle this enormous task. To ensure all students meet adequate yearly progress, teachers are asked to make effective instructional decisions on a daily basis. Because of the federal focus to leave "no child behind," states are increasing funding for commercial instructional reading, math, written expression and spelling intervention programs (Fisher & Ivey, 2006). Unfortunately, this intervention model often falls short of meeting the academic need of the students in individualizing instruction (Allington, 2011; Fisher & Ivey, 2006). Further, intervention programs not designed to meet these specific needs can have adverse effect. *Reading Today* (2007) states, "Cycling students through programs that are not responsive to their needs has the potential to lead more children being identified as learning disabled rather than few" (p. 11).

Allington (2011) recommends that qualified teachers make instructional decisions about students rather than following a "single intervention design" (p. 33). Instead, he suggests an instructional model in which the "teacher largely elects the instructional materials and the lesson components, and these would vary widely depending on the needs of the reader" (p. 99). Consequently, teachers are continually called upon to make instructional decisions based on student data in which "instruction is based on individual needs and development" (Strickland, 2005, p. 4). By following a teaching cycle beginning with assessment, teachers can better meet the needs of their students; time on task is greatly improved resulting in higher achievement scores and performance.

Data-Based Decision Making in a Teacher Education Setting

Data-based decision making which relies heavily on student data is essential in today's classroom (Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006). According to the RTI Action Network, data-based decision making is a process of collecting, analyzing and summarizing information that has been collected over a period of time that will assist and guide instruction to meet student academic needs. In this model, "the teacher identifies the student's problem behaviorally, formulates an academic goal, and then implements an intervention" (Johns & Lenski, 2010, p. xvi). Assessment is regarded as a "continual cycle of inquiry" (Barrentine & Stokes, 2005, p. 1), rather than solely as a means for teacher accountability. This allows teachers to continuously use formative assessment to make instructional decisions, which ensures student progress and performance.

Allington's (2011) approach to data-based decision making (2011) calls for teachers to adopt a "responsive teaching approach" (p. 99) to their instruction. This approach draws on

assessment data to formulate instructional goals and ensures that struggling students receive the quality of instruction that will keep them on pace with their peers. In pre-service programs the mastery of these skills are minimal as teacher candidates struggle to collect, understand, and utilize data. For teacher candidates, often the cognitive demands of balancing multiple tasks at once including both management and instruction are overwhelming, and the pre-service teacher tends to focus on crisis or abnormal experiences (Johnson, 1992). For that reason, teacher candidates need experiences which scaffold their future role as "teacher as a professional decision maker" (Strickland, 2005, p. 3). The implication of the responsive teaching approach for the instruction of pre-service teachers is that they become continually engaged in an inquiry cycle in which they search for information. Teacher candidates begin the inquiry cycle by first examining any data that is present about their individual student. Montana State University Billings (MSUB) offers teacher candidates opportunities to become knowledgeable on data-based decision making. Courses with required practicum hours (i.e., 45 hours) in Reading and Special Education encourage teacher candidates to implement the process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing student data.

This process and preparation begins in the early stages of one's teaching career. At MSUB, we recognize the importance of building and collecting student data to make appropriate educational decisions. MSUB teacher candidates are taught to focus on student strengths and support any weaknesses through interventions, methods, and materials. This allows teachers and students to make progress towards the curriculum standards.

MSUB offers two courses which address the complexity of making instructional decisions based on student data. These courses are taken when general education and special education pre-requisites have been completed, generally in the student's second year in the Teacher Education program. The Reading Clinic and Learning Clinic programs are designed to tutor/serve children from the Billings area and have provided these services for over forty years. The programs enlist the skills of pre-service teachers majoring in reading and special education to tutor struggling students within 10 instructional sessions. The community students we serve range in age from pre-kindergarten to adult.

Both clinics are required by students who have declared a double major in Elementary Education and Reading/Special Education. The Reading Clinic solely addresses reading difficulties by instructing teacher candidates to develop reading interventions based on miscue analysis data. The Learning Clinic provides individualized instruction to community students in reading, math, written expression, and spelling. Both courses require a data-driven instructional model in which students are required to use assessment data to drive individualized age-appropriate lessons.

The Teaching Cycle

Using a teaching cycle allows teacher candidates to make appropriate data-based instructional decisions. The teaching cycle used in the MSUB clinics requires teacher candidates to assess, plan, teach, evaluate, and reflect (see Figure 1). The teaching cycle enables our candidates to serve in the role as a classroom decision maker. This practice also allows our teacher candidates to demonstrate the skills necessary to develop a data-based instructional

program for the children based on academic need. Both courses begin with a pre-assessment process of collecting performance data which ultimately identifies student academic level and students' needs. This information allows for the teacher candidates to develop instruction, the method of delivery, and the materials needed to support student progress. Following instruction, our teacher candidates evaluate results, reflect on their teaching, and plan their subsequent lesson based on the data and analysis of the previous instructional period. The continuous cycle provides a platform of confidence in making educational decisions and carefully includes all phases of student response.

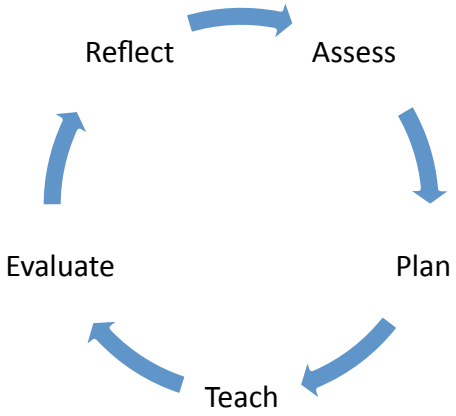

Figure 1. Data-based decision making model.

The teacher candidates are given continuous feedback and support throughout their time in clinic, but ultimately, they are taught to make decisions based on the individual student's learning and behavioral needs. Although each clinic is taught by different instructors, the format and the teaching model are identical. In Table 1, we describe how each feature of the Data-Based Decision Making Model is used in the MSUB Reading and Learning Clinics.

Table 1
Model Implementation in Clinics

Features	Reading Clinic	Learning Clinic
Assess	The use of Miscue Analysis in addition to a variety of informal reading assessments, such as the Informal Phonics Inventory (see McKenna & Dougherty Stahl, 2009), the Garfield Reading Inventory (see McKenna & Dougherty Stahl, 2009) and daily anecdotal records.	The use of AIMSweb a web-based tool to screen and progress monitor students in Reading, Math, Spelling, and Writing.
Plan	MSUB College of Education lesson plan format; written goals and objectives based on collected data	MSUB College of Education lesson plan format; written goals and objectives based on collected data
Teach	(2) instructional periods using two teaching models: gradual release of responsibility and pre, during, and post read	(2) instructional periods, lesson plans, materials, strategies, accommodations
Evaluate	Student assessment, Instructor observation and support, written feedback on plans, teaching, and reflections	Student assessment; Instructor observation and support; academic, behavioral
Reflect	Teacher-candidate response to one's own teaching and student learning	Teacher-candidate response to one's own teaching and student learning

Assessment and instruction. The following indicates the timeframes of each clinic followed by Table 2. Instruction in both clinical settings is based on formative assessment data. Students complete assessments during each clinical session which informs their instruction. Fisher and Ivey (2006) advocate for the use of continuous and ongoing assessment as the foundation for instruction, stating, "in addition to good initial assessments…ongoing assessments will be necessary to determine students' purposes for reading and writing, what they already do, and where they could use some help" (p. 183). To that end, we structure the clinical experiences to ensure that students collect the necessary data to make powerful instructional decisions.

Table 2 illustrates the various course requirements and the process that develops within each clinic. These clinical courses involve 15 hours of direct contact/service with a student on a weekly schedule. In the subsequent sections, we will describe in more depth the five aspects of the model.

Reading Clinic

- 4:30-4:45 Interactive Read Aloud for younger children; Silent Sustained Reading for older children
- 4:45-5:00 Gradual Release Lesson
- 5:00-5:10 Snack
- 5:10-5:20 Informal Assessment based on Needs of Student
- 5:20-6:00 Pre, During, After Lesson

Learning Clinic

- 4:30-5:15 Instructional period 1: Reading
- 5:15-5:20 Snack
- 5:20-5:50 Instructional period 2: Math or Written Expression
- 5:50-6:00 AIMSweb assessments

Table 2

Clinic Format

Clinic	Reading Clinic	Learning Clinic
1	Interest and Attitude Surveys completed	Pre-Assessments screenings done in reading, math, written expression. Grade level screening and (2) below to establish instructional level.
2	Benchmark Assessment Completed: Perform Miscue Analysis	Complete student profile.
3	Establish goal for the semester based on miscue analysis	Clinic goals for the entire semester established.
4	Implement needs-based instructional strategies	Technology night-the use of computers or Ipad to conduct lesson.
5	Implement needs-based instructional strategies	Parent progress reports
6	Implement needs-based instructional strategies	Behavioral incentive plans are designed to increase student performance
7	Implement needs-based instructional strategies	Learning Strategies are developed and presented
8	Implement needs-based instructional strategies	Technology night-the use of computers or Ipad to conduct lesson.
9	Complete post assessments to determine student engagement and reading benchmark	Final Report-A complete educational report is written describing the instruction, goals, lesson plans, incentive plan, strategies, accomodations, websites, and overall clinic sessions.
10	Parent/Teacher conferences Final Report: A complete report is written describing assessment and instruction, student strengths and needs, and recommendations for futher instruction	Parent/Teacher conferences.

In the Reading Clinic, teacher candidates complete engagement and learner profile information, such as the Garfield Reading Inventory (McKenna & Kear, 1990) which provides still limited data about the child. On the second night, students further the process of understanding the child as a reader through a choice Benchmark Assessment including Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 2001), the Rigby PM Benchmark Kit, or the Johns and Lenski (2010) Informal Reading Inventory. In addition to finding the student's reading level, the pre-service teachers perform a miscue analysis (Goodman, 1973) from the Benchmark assessment. By examining every oral reading error the child makes, the pre-service teacher is able to determine the effective and ineffective cueing systems the child uses effectively and efficiently. The teacher candidate then bases the subsequent lesson on the ineffective cueing system with the hopes of increasing efficiency. As the semester progresses, students continue to gather data through various assessments outlined in our text (McKenna & Dougherty Stahl, 2009) based on the needs of the students. By the end of the semester, the data is aggregated into a ten page clinical report that is shared with parents, and if the parent wishes, the child's teacher.

The Learning Clinic emphasizes curriculum familiarity, curriculum analysis, evaluation, individualizing programs, implementing programs, decision-making and preparing children for success in general education classrooms. The general objective for the Learning Clinic is to prepare teacher candidates for teaching and working with students with mild disabilities. The course utilizes a combination of lectures, readings, PowerPoint presentation, class discussion, out-of-class assignments, and observations, designed to promote student knowledge of a wide range of topics in teaching students with learning disabilities. Teacher candidates are asked to pre-assess their student using the screening web-based tool of AIMSweb. These data then determine the instructional level in reading and math or written expression. Clinic goals are then established and are to be obtainable in the ten clinics. In Learning Clinic, we have adopted the RTI third tier of instruction and assessment. Our teacher candidates are required to teach one-on-one and perform weekly assessments. Consequently, the last ten minutes of class our teacher candidates administer a 1 min reading probe and either an 8 min math probe or a 4 min story starter.

Lesson plans are completed for each clinic with feedback and support. Often teacher candidates will seek support or ideas for additional activities or strategies. In each clinic, we use adapted variations of the MSUB College of Education lesson plan format which has recently been adopted by the entire college. Students will be expected to use this template throughout their careers at MSUB. Students are required to explicitly explain the development of objectives based on data collected on their student. They then implement research based strategies which work specifically on the skills (i.e. reading, math, written expression and spelling) in which the student struggles. During the instruction, students assess using informal assessment measures and anecdotal records to gauge the lesson's effectiveness. Upon completing these assessments in addition to another informal assessment, students move to the next phase of the teaching cycle: evaluation and reflection.

Evaluation of assessment and reflection. Evaluation is defined as "the process of reflecting upon data that we have collected" in which "students are compared for both individual growth and normed for growth among peers (Hill, Ruptic & Norwic, 1998, p. 17). The process of

evaluation is valuable because it gives the assessment meaning (Savickieni, 2011). It is the evaluation of assessment results which drives the reflection process.

The foundation of the COE's conceptual framework is that of *reflective practitioner*. Allington (2011) defines reflective teachers as those who "examine their teaching to be more thoughtful teachers" (p. 121). Because of the ambiguity associated with the actual act of teaching, Dewey (1933) advocates for the process of deep reflective thought to guide future instruction. This reflective process aligns with the idea of "teacher as decision maker" in which the teacher takes an active role in planning instruction. Ultimately, it is the reflective process which empowers the teacher to make sound instructional decision.

In the Reading Clinic and Learning Clinic, students answer a series of reflective questions based on assessment results, daily lesson plans, and/or student response which ultimately lead to an impetus for the next week's instruction. Table 3 displays the reflective questions posed in the respective clinics.

Table 3
Reflective Questions

Weekly Reflections	Reading Clinic	Learning Clinic
Analyze today's assessment results	Using both the daily assessment and your individual lesson assessments (i.e. anecdotal notes, comprehension questions, graphic organizer, etc.), was your assessment effective in terms of student learning?	Using the formal assessment AIMSWeb, did your student meet their weekly goal? Is the trend line heading towards your clinic goal? When looking at your lesson plan and the informal assessments (i.e. anecdotal notes, observations) were your goals met?
Reflect on the impact of the lesson on student learning.	Reflect on teaching performance and link performance to student learning results. You may use your own self-reflection or feedback from the supervisor. What changes would you make to the lesson plan?	What did you like about your teaching today (i.e. materials, instruction, voice, praise, enthusiasm, support)?
Use data to plan next week's instruction.	How will you use the data collected today and your own reflection to drive instruction next week?	What would you change about your teaching or lesson plan (i.e. materials, instruction, voice, praise, enthusiasm, support)?
Plan a goal for next week.	What goals do have for your student next week?	What are your plans/goals for next week based on today's lesson?

Conclusion

Data-driven decisions are an effective means to meeting the challenges of "No Child Left Behind." Many of the community students we serve and tutor in our clinics are at risk of being "left behind." By scaffolding teacher candidates through a well-designed teaching cycle, our programs help ensure both the success of teacher candidates and their students. Allington (2011) states,

> In most schools struggling readers fall further behind each year. These schools work better for the higher achieving students because the curriculum materials and instructional plans are best suited to the needs of those students. Unless that trend ends, many schools will face federal sanctions for failing to create schools that work well for every student (p. 43).

We believe we can do better. By helping teacher candidates make quality decisions based on data, we ultimately help those struggling learners to not fall behind, but also to thrive.

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TRANSITION TO TEACHING: AN ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM TO PREPARE SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR HIGH NEED SCHOOLS

Abstract

Transition to Teaching is a collaborative project between a land-grant university, a state education agency, and local school systems to develop and implement an alternative certification program in West Virginia, a rural state with multiple high needs school systems. This post-B.A. teacher education program prepares secondary teachers to work with students with high incidence disabilities while they are employed in middle and high schools. The West Virginia Department of Education recruits college graduates into the program and assigns a mentor who supports the new teacher and interfaces with the school system and the university. West Virginia University employs multiple technologies to deliver courses online in real time, while mentoring and supervision is provided by school system personnel on site in each teacher's classroom.

The paper will accomplish two (2) objectives:
1. to present the project context and components;
2. to summarize project outcomes to date and discuss future plans for this alternative certification program.

The procedures and outcomes described in this project may be useful for state, regional or local education agencies that are considering the development of alternative certification programs in collaboration with colleges and universities.

Overview of the Transition to Teaching Project

The Transition to Teaching Project is a collaborative alternative certification program developed in Summer 2008 by a partnership between the West Virginia Department of Education and West Virginia University on a personnel preparation project funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs. The goal of this experimental program was to design, deliver and evaluate an alternative certification program leading to initial teaching certification in Multicategorical Special Education for Grades 5 through Adult to prepare and certify special education teachers working in middle and high schools in 21 high need school systems throughout the state of West Virginia. The program was based on the criteria outlined in Section 126-114-9 Alternative Preparation Program Requirements for Special Education Teachers in the West Virginia Board of Education's Policy 5100 Approval of Educational Personnel Preparation Programs.

Context of the Transition to Teaching Project

The critical shortage of special education teachers has been well documented and is widely accepted as a chronic condition in the field. The U.S. Department of Education (2004) has encouraged the development of alternative certification programs as a way to get more teachers into service quickly to address these shortages and has even offered funding to stimulate their implementation. Many special education leaders are concerned about the quality of alternative certification programs and the impact of special educators trained in these programs on learning outcomes for students with special needs (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). Nevertheless, a national study identified over 200 alternative certification programs in special education (Rosenberg, Boyer, Sindelar, & Misrah, 2007), with the largest concentration in the states with the most severe shortages.

Many alternative certification programs do not incorporate the research-based components of effective preparation programs (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005). Some alternative certification programs require minimal qualifications for admission, minimal preparation before assuming responsibility for classroom, and minimal coursework and supervised practice for licensure (Dal, Sindelar, Denslow, Dewey, & Rosenberg, 2007). Often, teachers who complete an alternative certification program acquire only basic pedagogy skills and require more intensive professional development early in their careers (Leko & Brownell, 2009). However, some studies have shown that alternatively prepared teachers feel well prepared by the university portion of their preparation (Bell et al., 2010) and that they are as likely to continue in their jobs as traditionally prepared teachers (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004). However, others have shown that many of these teachers have more difficult transitions to teaching due to insufficient preparation. The quality of alternatively prepared teachers varies with the quality of the preparation they receive (Sindelar, Daunic, & Rennells, 2004). Ultimately, comparisons of traditional and alternative certification programs have produced conflicting findings, many showing no significant differences between the two models (Tissington & Grow, 2007), perhaps because of the many variations within each model. A recent more carefully controlled study found no major differences between teachers prepared in traditional and alternative programs (Henry, 2014). As a result, many teacher educators recognize the need for multiple high quality pathways (including alternative certification programs) to teaching (National Research Council, 2010) to ensure a sufficient supply of well-trained teachers.

Alternative certification programs typically require alternative delivery mechanisms. Online programs are becoming increasingly common in personnel preparation in special education, especially in rural areas (Ludlow, Collins, & Menlove, 2006). Online technologies have been used successfully in special education for course instruction (Steinweg, Davis, & Thomson, 2005), practicum supervision (Pemberton, Cereijo, Tyler-Wood, & Rademacher, 2004), peer coaching (Knapczyk, Khe, Frey, & Wall-Marencik, 2005), and professional development for groups (Forbush & Morgan, 2004) and individuals (Stowitschek & Guest, 2006). Because this alternative certification program needed to serve multiple individuals across a wide geographic area, it was only natural to select online technologies for course delivery.

Components of the Transition to Teaching Project

The Transition to Teaching Project is a post-Baccalaureate program leading to initial certification in Multicategorical Special Education for Grades 5-Adult with a restricted content endorsement in at least one of the following content areas: English; Mathematics; Science or Social Studies. The project includes the following components:

Selection/admission. Individuals are recruited into the program by the West Virginia Department of Education via its web site and print promotional materials. If they meet the minimum requirements of a Bachelor's degree with a minimum GPA of 2.5, a criminal background check, and passing scores on the Praxis Pre-professional Skills Tests, they can be admitted into the program if a high needs school system offers them a special education teaching position in a middle or high school program with students with mild/moderate disabilities. The individual may them submit an application to West Virginia University, including the required academic transcript, tests score report, and application for alternative teaching certificate signed by the school system. The Department of Special Education admits them to the Transition to Teaching Project (which has its own major code) and registers them for the first courses, which start in mid-September.

Special education courses. The courses in the Transition to Teaching Project, a post-Baccalaureate alternate certification program in Multicategorical Special Education for Grades 5-Adult, were developed to reflect the intensive program of study needed to complete all work between September and June of a single year and to provide knowledge and skills needed for survival and success in the initial year of teaching as well as passing of the Praxis Content Tests required for this area of specialization. Project courses are offered through three (3) levels that proceed from initial learning, to refinement of skills, to reflection on practice and across three (3) skill clusters of professional responsibility that include instruction, management, and collaboration with others. Levels are designed to address knowledge and skills a new teacher needs immediately upon assuming a special education position, while skill clusters address major activities associated with providing effective educational programs for students with special needs. The content is designed to teach knowledge and skills needed by a new teacher to be successful in a special education program, meet state certification requirements, and pass the state-mandated Praxis tests, which include Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching Test (secondary levels) and Praxis Content Test for Special Education: Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate Applications.

All required special education courses are offered in a one (1) year program cycle at the rate of three (3) 2-credit courses every 10 weeks from September 15 through June 15 for a total of 18 credits. Each course is offered in Blackboard's online learning management system with a wide array of technology formats for content presentations, learner interactions, and learning assessments. In addition, live class sessions are offered on alternate weeks using Blackboard Collaborate, a desktop conferencing program that permits real-time interactions between instructor and students. Live sessions are held on alternating weeks from 5-7 pm Eastern Time; an archive is made of each session and is available immediately and throughout the course. A team of adjunct faculty who are currently employed as special education teachers and have extensive experience in the field teach these courses under the supervision of a full time faculty member working as a Teacher in Residence at the university. Instructors make class sessions

practical and are available to help the new teachers troubleshoot any problem of practice. An overview of these courses is included in Figure 1.

Level 1 Courses

SPED 593B **Individualizing Instruction for Special Needs** **2 credits**
Course addresses planning, implementing and evaluating modifications to curriculum units and lesson plans as well as instructional materials and methods to teach academic content standards.

SPED 593C **Designing Supportive Learning Environments** **2 credits**
Course addresses use of settings, schedules, activities, and rules to promote engagement in learning and prevent emergence of behavior problems.

SPED 593D **Co-planning/Co-teaching with General Educators** **2 credits**
Course addresses developing working relationships, implementing models of collaborative instruction, and coordinating planning and teaching activities.

Level 2 Courses

SPED 593E **Using Specialized Intervention Strategies** **2 credits**
Course addresses current best practices for teaching reading, math and content areas, applying Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction, and selecting and applying instructional and assistive technologies.

SPED 593F **Managing Group and Individual Behavior** **2 credits**
Course addresses behavior problems associated with various disabilities, modifications to classroom management plans, and interventions for specific problem behaviors using functional assessment, individual intervention plans, and positive behavior interventions and supports

SPED 593G **Creating Opportunities for Family Involvement** **2 credits**
Course addresses strategies for developing meaningful partnerships, providing opportunities for communication and involvement, and responding to concerns and problems.

Level 3 Courses

SPED 593H	**Promoting Successful Learning and Achievement** Course addresses assessment instruments and procedures for progress monitoring and outcome evaluation, including curriculum-based assessment for student feedback and grading and standardized tests for measuring adequate yearly progress.	**2 credits**
SPED 593I	**Providing Support for Challenging Behaviors** Course addresses conducting a functional assessment of behavior, designing a behavior intervention plan, using positive behavior support strategies, and using data to evaluate program effectiveness and behavior change.	**2 credits**
SPED 593J	**Working Effectively with Professional Teams** Course addresses team-based strategies for working with families and professionals in developing IEPs, conducting placement and program planning meetings, and planning for transition to adulthood.	**2 credits**
	TOTAL:	18 credits

Figure 1. Alternative Certification Courses

Content courses. The restricted content endorsement requirement for secondary special educators requires 15 credits in a specific academic area plus 6 credits of content methods. These requirements may be met by undergraduate coursework, graduate coursework, or professional development courses offered through the West Virginia Center for Professional Development. After individuals are admitted, state personnel conduct a transcript review to determine whether they have completed any of the courses that meet the 21 credit requirements in a single content area (associated with their specific teaching assignment). Those who have a major in a specific area (e.g., English) may already meet most requirements and will only need the methods courses, while others may need more coursework, so an individual plan is developed for each individual. Any additional content courses usually are completed in the year AFTER the required special education courses are completed, using the online courses available through the West Virginia Professional Development Center.

Induction/mentoring. The West Virginia Department of Education conducts an initial orientation session at the beginning of the school year with all project participants. Once the individual is hired by the school system an administrator assigns a local mentor teacher and initiates the state-mandated induction program provided for all new teachers. The state education agency representative for the Transition to Teaching Project also assigns an academic coach to support multiple new teachers in a geographic area. These coaches not only conduct observations and feedback conferences with the teachers, but they also interface the coordinator of the coursework to ensure that the project functions smoothly and any problems are addressed as quickly as possible.

Completion of certification requirements. The university's Transition to Teaching project coordinator conducts an annual online session to prepare individuals for the Praxis tests, which they take after coursework is over during June or July. Individuals who have not met all content course requirements then complete professional development courses during the second year and apply for initial certification as soon as those requirements are completed, typically during Spring of the second year. West Virginia Policy 5100 specifies that individuals may renew an alternative teaching certificate for up to three (3) years and they are considered highly qualified as long as they are working under that certificate.

West Virginia University also allows successful program completers who meet admission requirements for a graduate degree to transfer into the Master's degree program in Multicategorical Special Education. Once a request is made to the department chair, the individual's major code is changed and the courses completed with a grade of A or B are translated into equivalences of required courses (each track equals one (1) required course) or elective credits. Then these individuals complete the remaining courses in that program option, which includes a culminating project, which is the capstone course required for degree completion. The degree program option can be completed in a single additional year and after graduation, participants can use the diploma to apply for a salary increment for earning a Master's degree.

Outcomes and Future Plans

The Transition to Teaching Project is now in its fifth year, having successfully completed the four (4) program cycles funded by the grant paying costs for all new teachers and one (1) program cycle (with one (1) additional cycle underway this year) supported by school systems paying costs for their own teachers. The project has enrolled over 60 individuals (with more enrolled this year). Less than 10% dropped out for personal reasons or were dismissed due to poor academic performance. The remaining completers continue to be employed as special educators in the same high need schools in West Virginia. These outcomes document the success of the Transition to Teaching Project, showing that the coursework design and content has succeeded in preparing teachers to not only pass nationally standardized tests of knowledge and skills but also teach effectively in high needs schools. The collaboration also has been effective in supporting these new teachers in ways that enabled them to survive and thrive as special educators.

Future directions for the project include:

1. developing more courses for use in a new track to prepare teachers to work with students with high incidence disabilities at the elementary level, which has emerged as a new shortage area in the state;

2. extending access to the alternative certification program to other school systems in the state that are not identified as high needs but are also experiencing teacher shortages;

3. considering the possibility of developing other courses to offer the project in additional areas of specialization (e.g., severe/multiple disabilities, early childhood special education, vision or hearing impairments).

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Additional Resources

Transition to Teaching Recruitment Site: http://wvde.state.wv.us/transitiontoteaching
Blackboard Learning Management System: http://www.blackboard.com
Blackboard Collaborate: https://www.blackboard.com/platforms/collaborate/overview.aspx

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LESSON LEARNED: DEVELOPING A CONSISTENT LESSON PLAN IN A RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Abstract

Despite much speculation about the importance and immediate need of incorporating clinically-rich field experiences in teacher preparation programs, there are few investigations that clearly inform colleges of education how to implement evidence-based practices in their preparation programs. Upon the recommendation of our rural school districts, university faculty and professional staff, a small group of higher education personnel was invited to construct a consistent lesson plan format throughout all four undergraduate field experience courses which incorporate evidence-based practices. This joint collaboration by the State University of New York (SUNY) at Fredonia and neighboring Jamestown Community College standardized our lesson plan across both campuses. We hope that it will continue to provide a developmental sequence for our teacher candidates to follow as they learn to plan more effectively for their students.

Teacher Education at SUNY Fredonia

The State University of New York (SUNY) Fredonia has a long history in teacher preparation. The comprehensive college started as a normal school almost 150 years ago. SUNY Fredonia is located in western New York State approximately 50 miles south of Buffalo, near the Pennsylvania state line in a rural setting surrounded by grape vineyards and dairy farms.

The Childhood Inclusive Education program is a "merged" undergraduate general and special education teacher preparation program addressing the needs of elementary students with high incidence disabilities as described by Blanton, Pugach, and Florian (2011). Approximately 55 dually certified teacher candidates graduate from this program each year.

The College of Education prepared only general education teachers at the elementary and secondary levels until 2007 when a dual certification program was established at the elementary level (i.e., grades 1-6 childhood and childhood with disabilities). One unique aspect of SUNY Fredonia's teacher education program is that special education faculty members were always included in general education programs and curricula without any departmental divisions (for more complete program descriptions see Maheady, Harper, Karnes, & Mallette, 1999; Maheady, Harper, Mallette, & Karnes, 1993; Maheady, Jabot, Rey, & Michielli-Pendl, 2007).

The Childhood Inclusive Education program had an existing infrastructure for integrating clinically-rich experiences throughout candidates' preparation experiences. Undergraduate

teacher candidates complete a minimum of five structured field experiences prior to graduation, often in rural settings. Each field experience is linked to a specific course and the assignments are designed to document P-8 student learning. There is a field experience associated with an education course during the first, second, and third year of the undergraduate teacher preparation program. Two courses share a joint field experience during the third year. Finally, in the fourth or professional year, there is student teaching. Teacher candidates have actual teaching experience in classrooms during each field experience that requires lesson planning, instructing, and gathering student performance data from the instruction. The lesson plan work was focused on the early field experiences during the first year, second year, third year, and fourth year (methods courses only).

The initial field experience requires teacher candidates to plan and implement two detailed lesson plans. Next, the second field experience expands to tutoring one student for an entire semester. The third field experience associated with two courses has teacher candidates focused on small group instruction with some whole class instruction throughout the semester. During the fourth year in methods, teacher candidates prepare to teach discipline-specific content in mathematics, science, social studies, and literacy. Finally, teacher candidates plan and instruct the whole class more frequently during two eight week student teaching placements during the professional year.

Neighboring Jamestown Community College has a two year teacher preparation program that provides many teacher candidates for our SUNY Fredonia teacher preparation program. These community students enter SUNY Fredonia during their third year. Both institutions of higher education try to parallel their teacher preparation programs as much as possible. The graduates of the four year program often stay in the area and teach in our local rural school districts. By developing a common lesson plan for both institutions of higher education, we hoped to make the transition seamless for the teacher candidates. Jamestown Community College provides the first two field experiences which transfer easily to SUNY Fredonia's teacher education program. This collaboration of faculty has reinvigorated the partnership between the two institutions of higher education.

Early Field Experience Work Group: Leading the Charge

The need for consistent lesson plans was brought to the forefront during conversations with our teacher candidates, our rural school partners, our rural community college colleagues, and College of Education faculty and professional staff. In order to address this need, the College of Education Early Field Experience Work Group was formed to include full and part-time instructors in the College of Education, community college instructors, as well as professional staff from the Office of Field Experiences. Professional staff supervise most of the teacher candidates in the early field experience placements.

The Early Field Experience Work Group gathered information from a variety of sources. We discussed suggestions from all the instructors and teacher candidates themselves and formally verified the need for a consistent lesson plan through electronic surveys of school and university partners. The Early Field Experience Work Group met monthly from April 2012 through April 2013. Initially, we examined a variety of lesson plans used within the teacher

preparation programs at SUNY Fredonia and Jamestown Community College. A majority of the time was spent examining the intended learning outcomes of the field-based courses as well as the lesson plan formats linked with each course. The goal was to review and map out the developmental sequence of each course and attempt to link the lesson plan format in a consistent and practical manner across the program. In addition, the work group reviewed lesson plan templates from area rural school districts focusing on common vocabulary and developmental progression.

After several meetings, the work group came to consensus on a pilot lesson plan format which incorporated evidence-based practices, consistent vocabulary usage, formal and informal assessment, and a common layout. Both institutions of higher education were targeting the developmental progression of the lesson plan template that provided more detail throughout the program. The lesson plans were piloted in Fall 2013 with revisions anticipated during Spring 2014 semester.

The teacher educators worked toward not only increasing teacher candidates' pedagogy but to also enhance the alignment of lesson planning throughout the field-based courses. In addition, it is anticipated that the sharing of the enhanced lesson plans will strengthen our school district partnerships and lead to more continuity of teacher candidate expectations. Listed below is a brief summary of the process that was utilized by faculty and professional staff to develop a consistent lesson plan format in the SUNY Fredonia and Jamestown Community College teacher preparation programs.

1. Invited instructors by designated field-based course to share their current lesson plan. Involved community college instructors during the entire process to help teacher candidates make a smoother transition to a four year institution.

2. Started with earliest field experience (first year) and worked through the fourth year (methods only). Focused on intended learning outcomes and progression of field-based expectations and requirements. It was a great opportunity to collaborate and have conversations with colleagues throughout the program including the first two field experiences at the community college.

3. Developed a common vocabulary and assessment protocol across courses and curriculum. We are working toward a common framework of language and pedagogy leading to certification requirements.

4. Worked toward selecting a core of evidence-based practices to be used across the teacher preparation program.

5. Piloted lesson plan templates in Fall 2013.

6. Revised lesson plan formats during Spring 2014 as needed and compared exemplary lesson plans from the pilot semester.

Conclusions

Overall, school and university personnel are seeking ways increase teacher candidates' abilities to be successful and effective in field-based courses, especially in rural school districts. It is anticipated that by enhancing our lesson plans, we will be able to be more consistent at both the community college and comprehensive college level. The Early Field Experience Work Group has collaborated on embedding evidence-based practices in the lesson plan, using consistent vocabulary across courses, and increasing knowledge of appropriate assessment. It is hoped that teacher candidates will impact student learning in a positive manner as result of the consistency of expectations at Jamestown Community College and SUNY Fredonia.

In addition, the standardization of the lesson plans and implementation across several semesters should help teacher candidates implement the New York State Common Core Learning Standards within rural classrooms. Due to the close ties to the rural community, institutions of higher education should be graduating teacher candidates to better meet the needs of students in our locale.

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ADDRESSING EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL ALASKA:IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LOWER 48?

Serving children with special needs in rural Alaska presents unique challenges. Politicians, educators and native groups have worked together to develop practices to meet the early childhood special education (ECSE) needs of families in rural communities. Recent innovative advances in technology have improved service delivery; however, cultural considerations, organizational and community collaboration lay at the heart of the success of early intervention Infant Learning Programs (ILP) promoted throughout the majority of the state.

The mission statement of the state of Alaska's ILP states that its purpose is, "To promote positive development and improved outcomes for Alaska's families by creating a culturally responsive and accessible service delivery that links services providers, empowers families and engages communities" (Kinavey-Wennerstrom, Balivet, Johnson, Borghols, & Atuk, 2012) Alaska's ILPs serve children ages 0-3 years old who have been identified as qualifying for Individuals with Disabilities (IDEA) Part C services. While ILP providers or early interventionists are early childhood educators, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists or social workers, the writers address the training and retention of early educators who have a teaching certificate.

The authors' purpose is to describe: (a) the geographical make-up of the largest and often described wildest state in the nation; (b) associated challenges in pre-service ILP training and early intervention delivery; (c) and most importantly, the importance of culturally relevant practices in serving rural communities in Alaska. The extent to which considerations may be appropriate to communities other than Alaska are also considered.

Geography

Alaska's unique geography and population present distinct challenges in both the delivery of services to meet the needs of children with disabilities and the training of personnel. Alaska is larger than the next three largest states combined, yet it ranks only 46th among all other states in total road miles. Due to harsh terrain, climate, and vast distances between the over 300

communities, many Alaskans must travel by plane, snow machine, or boat. An estimated 25% of Alaskans live in communities of less than 1,000 people (State of Alaska, 2013 retrieved from http://alaska.gov/communit.html).

Two census areas in Alaska highlight the exceptional difficulties of ILP service delivery. The Yukon-Koyukuk Census District covers a land area roughly the size of Montana. It contains 16 small communities and is home to around 5,600 people. This District encompasses Alaska's largest school district, serving nine communities, seven of which are accessible only by small aircraft. Sixty nine percent of the population of the area is Alaska Native, largely Athabaskan (State of Alaska, 2012).

The Wade Hampton Census District covers a land area roughly the size of Maryland. It is home to around 7,700 people, almost entirely of Alaska Native descent (91%). More than 50% of households speak a language other than English (primarily Yupik) in the home. The Lower Yukon School District, one of three districts in this region, is half the size of Louisiana, and serves 11 villages with no connecting roads. While the district has begun to make academic gains, prior to 2005, none of their schools made Adequate Yearly Progress. Only 66% of residents over the age of 25 are high school graduates and only 9% have a Bachelor's degree or higher (State of Alaska, 2012)

Referrals to the state of Alaska ILP programs for 2012 exceeded 3,000 children. This represents an increase of 25% since 2011. Of the 3,008 children referred, 1,952 were enrolled to receive IDEA Part C services. The average age of referral was 15 months old. Most of the enrolled children qualified due to early childhood developmental delay (ECDD) however, children also qualified for other diagnosed physical conditions.

Need for ECSE and Challenges for Service Delivery

A multi-year IDEA Part C Pilot Study (State of Alaska, 2012) projected additional increases in the need for specialized services across the region. This has implications for the need for additional early interventionists in the state. Historically the availability of professionals for early care and learning programs in geographically isolated communities have been very limited. Rural school districts, with student populations spread over vast geographical areas, experience unique difficulties in service delivery. Many of these districts do not have preschool programs and are served by Head Start and early Head Start programs with cooperative agreements between local districts for service delivery to children who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). One special education teacher from the district may be assigned to provide itinerate support to several different villages. These visits require travel by small plane, boat, or snow machine and, consequently, may be infrequent. Further compounding the problem, traveling teachers often possess a K-12 teaching certificate, despite minimal infant learning, special education training or the preferred ECSE endorsement. Educators often lack cultural knowledge of the rural community they are serving and find enlisting family engagement difficult to establish. This may be due to the itinerant nature of services delivered but a deeper examination and an honest assessment of the situation might reveal a lack of a collaborative approach that incorporates native understanding of child development. It may be that native early educators

from their own village provide the most effective ILP services. While this may be ideal it is difficult to realize for many reasons.

Cultural Considerations

Alaska Natives have difficulty achieving academic success in university settings. Retention and graduation rates are lower for Alaska Native/American Indians than other student cohorts (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004). In 2008, the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska Anchorage reported a 60 % retention rate for Alaska Native freshman as compared to the overall retention rate of 72 % (Kassier & Hill, 2008). Other researchers have found significant barriers for Alaska Native/American Indian student retention include: lack of preparation, financial aid, changes in the environment (high school to college, rural to urban), single parenthood, prejudice and social isolation (Larimore & McClellan, 2005) on campus. According to Yang, Byers and Fenton (2006), many minority students face similar challenges, however, it appears that Alaska Native/American Indian students experience more cultural displacement on university campuses.

Gloria and Kurpius (2001) suggested that academic principles are closely identified with "white, male, middle-class perspectives" (p. 9). This can be difficult for native students who attempt to balance two cultures. According to Guillorty (2006), many Alaska Native /American Indian students experience a university culture that might be at odds with their own value and belief system. For example, academia tends to value individual effort while a native student tends to hold more value on community.

On the other hand, Hill and Hirshberg (2006) found the teacher turnover rate in Alaska for early childhood education was approximately 45%. In a study of Alaskan teachers exiting the profession, 45% of teachers cited dissatisfaction with the job and its responsibilities as a reason for leaving (McDiarmid & Larson, 2002). The high turnover rate among Alaska's early childhood teachers exacerbates the shortage of qualified teachers in early childhood settings. Alaskan districts report filling teaching vacancies with (often inadequately trained) long term substitutes, by combining classes, by assigning teachers out of field, using teacher aides or using emergency certification (Hill & Hirshberg, 2006). Seventy percent of certified teachers in Alaska come from outside the state (UAA, 2013) Because the majority of educators in rural Alaska are non-native teachers, the need to adjust to a different culture and way of life different from their own is often necessary. The converse of Guillorty's (2006) statement describing Alaska Native/American Indian adjustment to universities may apply. That is, native culture and ways of learning may be at odds with non-native teacher's value and belief systems (i.e. the value of individual effort over community).

To address this, the University of Alaska is committed to developing programs based on holistic approaches to aid native students on-campus and to require non-native students in teacher preparation programs to take courses on Alaska Native culture. Programs that explore similarities in culture while embracing cultural differences are promoted, as opposed to prior expectations of assimilation to the dominant environment. The promotion of cultural consideration may be useful for increasing native retention in university settings and non-native teacher retention in rural settings (Saggio & Rendon, 2004). However, according to Hayes and

Juearez (2012) this may not be enough. The authors indicate that although program commitment may be present in higher education and in teacher preparation, culturally relevant pedagogy still does not exist. Faching-Varner and Dodo Seriki (2012) refer to this argument when describing the still dominant "whiteness" of the U.S. Educational System at the present time.

In Alaska, while urban areas have considerable white majorities, Yupik, Athabaskan, Inupiat, Aleut, Inuit peoples make up the majority in many rural communities. Educators who are able to speak the distinct languages, understand and participate in the traditions among their own Alaska Native cultures, will likely be most effective in working in rural schools and with families. In early childhood, native early interventionists who are able to employ traditional ways of learning and knowing in their practices may be far more capable of ensuring family engagement and participation for their children with special education needs. Early intervention services are most effective when delivered in a child's natural setting and when caregivers are engaged and involved in the intervention and the interventions are embedded in the family's typical routines and practices (Dunst, Trivette, Hamby, & Bruder, 2006).

Procuring educators from within Alaska Native communities could improve the likelihood of having ILP providers who are more likely to stay and be effective in their community. By "growing" teachers from within those communities, the State of Alaska ILP and UAA hope to alleviate rural shortages in this field. For this reason, UAA has developed systems designed to recruit and retain Alaska Native students by training them in their communities when possible or on the university campus. Statewide outreach to traditionally underrepresented groups is part of UAA's charter (UAA, 2013**)**. To this end, UAA offers a robust distance delivery system to rural communities. This system makes it possible to complete a program through the College of Education (COE) from many rural communities. The COE is engaged in ongoing efforts with other colleges at the University, urban and rural educators, Alaska business and community groups, and the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to improve flexibility and accessibility of programs for students across the state. For example, the COE increased the number of courses offered via distance from 17% in 2003 to almost 60% in 2008. This distance delivery utilizes a wide variety of technologies, including on-line courses offered through Blackboard and eLive!, audio conferencing, video conferencing, and the use of e-books accessible through UAA's Consortium Library. Additionally, UAA's six extension campuses utilize polycom systems for services such as video conferencing, and have made internet connectivity accessible for students living in rural Alaska.

Additionally, professors from UAA travel to rural villages to provide live courses in conjunction with online classwork. The first of these programs, the Chevak Project, was initiated by the Elders in the community who had a vision of education for their village. Collaboration with UAA took three years to be realized in 2010. A curriculum inspired by the native vision is used to provide coursework that leads to teacher certification. Another example of Alaska Native inspired education was the development of an Alaska Native curriculum used in Nome and across the Berring Straits School District in Head Start Classrooms based on Native principals of education. This curriculum was developed by the Native Corporation of Kawerak, Inc. in cooperation with employees from Head Start. Continued projects such as these may increase the likelihood of native student success and non-native awareness of new methods of teaching and learning.

UAA and its extension campuses also work locally with many rural Alaska school districts to make professional development opportunities available to Alaska Native populations. UAA's work with school districts provides settings for student practica, faculty development, and field-based research using culturally sensitive approaches designed in cooperation with rural communities.

For students matriculating on the Anchorage campus, UAA offers several programs designed to increase the likelihood of success for Alaska Native students who participate on campus. The Alaska Native & Rural Outreach Program (ANROP) supports incoming UAA students making the transition from rural Alaska to Anchorage. ANROP provides re-arrival outreach, post-arrival one-on-one contact, and academic support. In addition, the ANROP Coordinator serves as an advocate and provides additional support for Alaskan students that may be in crisis. Further, the UAA Native Early Transition (NET) program assists incoming rural Native students through a four-day training program designed to familiarize rural students with life in a large urban setting, This training includes exposure to student support services offered at UAA along with skills such as setting up bank accounts or riding the city bus system. In addition**,** weekly gatherings ensure that students are able to connect with other students on campus for community support.

Other Collaboration

UAA also works collaboratively with System of Early Education and Development council (SEED), a statewide professional development guiding agency, to refine the development of early learning and training competencies. SEED has operated for more than ten years to assist in building a professional development infrastructure for early care and learning providers in Alaska and is formulating a comprehensive statewide professional development plan. Through SEED, UAA has an established, comprehensive system for collaboration with agencies throughout the state on professional development issues for early childhood programs serving children from birth to age eight and their families. These agencies include the Alaska's Early Intervention/Part C, Head Start, early Head Start, Preschool Special Education, Title I, Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), and the statewide Early Childhood Chapter Child Care Contact Council, along with mental and behavioral health agencies throughout the state. This collaboration with agencies working directly with children provides invaluable information to ECE program directors at UAA, permitting them to continually shape and refine their program delivery to teachers in training. Collaborative forums provide ample opportunities to explore and employ culturally appropriate pedagogy and early intervention practice inclusive of the variety of different Alaska Native cultures across the state.

For remote areas that do not have access to direct service providers, ILP programs are beginning to coordinate and implement services using telehealth and other remote technologies. In Ketchikan, ILP uses polycom video and audio technology to provide remote supervision and interaction with staff in their satellite office in Craig, on Prince of Whales Island. In addition they have purchased polycom equipment for Metlakatla (Alaska's only reservation for Alaska Natives) in order to ensure connection with two locally hired paraprofessionals. In that community, hiring local staff has increased participation in ILP sponsored playgroups. In

addition, the local ILP paraprofessional providers in Metlakatla have the ability to facilitate more frequent visits and, as needed, have highly qualified ECSE staff "in the room" with them via distance audio and video technology. Speech Language Pathology services have been provided from Anchorage to other more remote locations such as Seward via telehealth technologies. Many areas of the state still lack the necessary technological infrastructure however state resources are working to increase the access for teleservice delivery to rural communities.

Celebrating Success

The Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program measures child outcomes by comparing infant and toddler skills before and after receiving early intervention services. The child outcomes focus on children's abilities to be successful in everyday activities and routines, and skills children need to be successful in future school settings. Three outcome areas are measured: (a) positive social relationships (emotional), (b) the use of developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills (knowledge) and (c) the ability for children to meet their needs (action). Overall, the majority of children served demonstrated progress across the areas assessed (Kinavey-Wennerstrom et al., 2012). It is hoped that continued efforts to bring culturally appropriate services will increase the efficacy of ILP programs across the state. Future data tracking Alaska native graduates and Alaska Native service providers may provide additional support for the collaborative and technology based methods described.

Summary

Based on Alaska's ILP early intervention outcomes, it appears that to be able to meet the needs of special needs families in rural areas collaborative, culturally relevant processes need to be incorporated at pre-service training and during service delivery. This means addressing the need for professionals to be trained to work in specific rural communities. By addressing the "whiteness" of the process of education, non-native professional retention and native student on-campus retention might increase. Despite the use of innovative technology in distance education, telepractice and professorial travel, state-of-the-art technology or distance delivery cannot compensate for the lack of authentic collaboration that takes seriously the cultural considerations of the population. On-going research to evaluate the processes employed by UAA and the State of Alaska's ILP in cooperation with Alaska Native participation will provide more information as to the practical value of incorporating these principals in the future.

The geography of Alaska has forced UAA and State ILP programs to consider what early educator preparation and service delivery can be the most effective spanning Alaska's vast distance. There are implications for community programs even in less massive rural/native regions. In some ways, the geography of the immense space between rural communities in Alaska is a metaphor for the distance between western approaches to education training and the varied native cultures. Bridging the differences may occur only by laying aside old processes and embracing possibilities that can occur through collaboration, exploration and willingness to change. As a native educator at a Berring Straits teacher orientation in Nome said, "It has to do with using what is best from both cultures. Then we can focus on what really matters and we can truly educate" (personal communication, August 29, 2004).

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TEACHER COLLABORATION TO ASSIST SPECIAL LEARNERS IN A KENTUCKY MENNONITE COMMUNITY

"A group becomes a team when each member is sure enough of himself and his contribution to praise the skill of the others." -Norman Shidle

Developing collaborative relationships has been one of the foundational precepts in special education since its inception. Special education teachers stood at the forefront of developing co-teaching strategies and collaboration strategies with families, general education teachers, and related services colleagues (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Collaboration itself is far different than simply working alongside another. A well-developed collaborative relationship creates a new entity, capable of much more than any of the individual parts. This results in greater quality of service and more team satisfaction than working in isolation (Gardner, 2005).

Collaboration is paramount in schools today due to the inclusive nature of the classroom. The general education teacher is expected to service students with varied academic backgrounds and skill levels. Further, the cultural diversity within classrooms continues to change requiring a redistribution of the collaborative needs of teachers to include not only academically diverse learners but culturally diverse learners as well. University teacher preparation programs have been charged through state standards, as well as through accrediting agencies, to increase preservice teacher awareness of cultural diversity (Gay, 2010; National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education, 2008). Research suggests the experiences most beneficial to developing cultural sensitivity are those that involve personal experience and interactions (Garmon, 2003).

Many teacher education programs have turned to urban areas and study abroad opportunities to interact with differing cultures, but that may not be the only option. Perhaps a wonderful opportunity located on our rural back roads has been overlooked. To initiate this project, an invitation to discuss students with special needs was received from two Old Order Mennonite (OOM) Community teachers through an established monthly healthcare program by the university Nursing program. This speaking engagement slowly progressed to collaboration amongst two university faculty, four special education teacher candidates, and two OOM teachers teaching students with moderate disabilities. The purpose of this paper is to outline the four key principles that directed our work. These principles may be beneficial to other rural education entities working with Mennonite or Amish communities. The key principles include (a) invest the time to cultivate a relationship; (b) discover the needs of each involved; (c) implement effective strategies; and (d) make a commitment to learn and grow. Each principle will be reviewed with the particulars of this collaboration.

Four Keys to Effective Collaboration

Invest time to cultivate a relationship. Members from two different cultures cannot begin to share how each respective culture is different since each member only has knowledge of their own culture. Curiosity is acceptable while judgment is not. It takes time and exposure to develop trust that allows comfortable sharing (Gardner, 2005). The nursing faculty presented our team with the wealth of knowledge they gained during the 20-year relationship they developed with the OOM community during the long-term healthcare program (Jones, Main, & Garrett-Wright, 2011). That relationship and knowledge was a strong foundation for us to build upon. However, three areas were immediately recognized as possible barriers to collaboration: (a) rhythm of the two cultures; (b) forms of communication; and (c) myths held by the university faculty and students.

Mennonite communities vary in degree of conservative lifestyles. This collaborative venture includes a conservative Old Order Community located in Kentucky. Community members use horse and buggies for transportation and farming. Cars and drivers are hired if extended travel is warranted. Members make a living from raising crops and farm animals, and selling animal products, farm produce or hand crafted items. They speak Pennsylvania Dutch and learn English as they begin school at age five. Phones, electricity, computers, television, radios, or any form of motorized machines are not part of their way of life. Education is important and all children attend school until age 14. Children are grouped according to age levels and not grades. The members do not participate in politics, do not vote, do not use government assistance or buy insurance. The Community assists members when a need arises beyond the individual's ability. Women do not cut their hair or wear makeup. Women have the responsibility of education under the direction of the Community leaders. Little is published on this community of approximately 800 to 1,000 people (Old Order Mennonite Communities, 2009).

Every culture has an established rhythm or a time element, and this is one area of contrast between the OOM and American cultures. These Mennonites refer to modern, American culture members as the English. This term denotes all non-Mennonite, non-Amish people (Roth, 2005). The English culture is one full of many distractions that occur at a very rapid pace. The university faculty and students discussed our lifestyles as typical in our culture in several ways: lives lived by the clock, common references to having no time, and lives filled with machines. Machines are supposed to save time by faster transportation, faster and easier production, faster communication, faster daily chores and endless entertainment. By extreme contrast, this OOM community moves at a much slower pace. Some of the driving factors for them are the seasons, sunlight hours, and planned times to visit, worship, and socialize. Given these differences between cultures, building the relationship took time and a conscious effort on our part to slow our pace to the surroundings. Times for visiting and asking about each other's lives were respected. It became very evident that the art of communication was a treasured skill by the OOM community; a skill that may be in peril in the modern American culture and one that the university team had to consciously and deliberately sharpen.

The Mennonites are respectful, intense, active listeners who are proficient with face-to-face conversation. Notably lacking in their conversations are interruptions or confrontational

statements. Instead, questions are raised to artfully clarify ideas and to ask pertinent questions probing for more details to increase student learning, engagement, feedback, and progress. Teacher training in this OOM community is completed through generational practice and teaching methods passed down by prior OOM teachers; there is no formal teacher training from outside the OOM communities (i.e., no college teaching degrees). Several older OOM women that taught prior to marriage joined some of our conversations and shared their teaching knowledge. The current OOM teachers respected their experience and words. Written communication is also notably as refined as direct conversation skills. Letters from the Mennonite teachers always included personal communication in addition to project information. Letter writing is the only form of communication available to arrange appointments and organize visits regarding our project. This slower pace of communication required better thoughtfulness and preparation. The level of conversation broke some myths and presented better understanding between the two cultures of the participants.

The OOM women and teachers are very well read. The Mennonites refer to themselves as "plain people" but that is not to be confused with "simple-minded." While their dress was deliberately plain and similar, the women themselves are very distinct in their thinking. Daniel Lee (1984) noted this aspect in his encounter with the Pennsylvania Weaverland Conference Mennonites, "This society seems characterized by uniformity in action, yet diversity of thought" (p. 3). Our team found the OOM teachers well versed in numerous educational concepts. The OOM teachers actively searched for effective practices to implement with their students with special needs; this desire was the basis that led to our relationship. It took time to define what each party needed for the collaboration to be successful. The Mennonites always insist on paying for, or trading for services. Our time was highly valued by the OOM teachers and community. We left several early visits with produce, baked goods and various gifts. Using this experience for research and for training our students was our need to help balance the collaborative scale.

These first steps, rhythm of the culture, communication and breaking myths were practical obstacles we needed to overcome to further our relationship. Perhaps the greatest challenge was gaining IRB approval as it could not be completed with a simple handshake as is customary in the Mennonite culture. This necessitated compromise and understanding each other's needs. The Mennonite leaders would not sign any official paper with "letter head" but offered to write a note to the IRB committee. Eventually the particulars were conveyed via letters to gain approval. Further, the project needed to be extended when a baby was born or when an OOM teacher left for an extended visit to another community. Cold weather also slowed the process, as did the schedule of the university students who needed to take finals and work around student teaching. Understanding cultural differences brought both parties to a win-win paradigm (Gardner, 2005) that promoted respect and allowed needs to be met through a collaborative effort.

Discover the needs. As the relationship developed and a sense of trust was established, the needs of the OOM community quickly became apparent. The OOM teachers sought out the university special education faculty in hopes of gaining assistance with programming needs for their special education students. The OOM teachers gave considerable thought to the needs of their students and provided histories of student learning and prior educational practices. Further, they invited the university faculty and preservice teachers to their classroom to observe the

students and their teaching practices. The OOM teachers also sought guidance regarding their delivery of instruction. Although many of the OOM teaching practices are very effective for the general education students, these teachers desired more current practices, especially regarding the teaching of students with moderate cognitive disabilities. Given that the OOM teaching practices come through generational experience and mentoring, and the use of evidence-based practices in special education is relatively new, it explains the limited interventions available for students with disabilities within the OOM curricula. This creates a disconnect with the very inclusive nature of the OOM community and their desire to respect and appreciate every individual. It also explains the desire of the OOM teachers to have the best teaching practices available for their students with disabilities. The final request of the OOM community regarded more general, community-wide training covering broad categories and treatment of disabilities; specifically, ways in which lay members can assist and most fully interact with the children with disabilities in the OOM community. Again, this is consistent with the inclusive nature of their culture and was requested as a follow-up to a very well received community discussion presented earlier by the first author at one of the monthly health Q&A sessions held in the OOM community.

The needs of the Mennonite teachers and community matched well with those of the university. The university viewed this collaborative effort as a way to not only improve the knowledge base and promote evidence-based practices to a population unfamiliar with current research, but it also provided a medium to promote cultural awareness for the preservice teachers involved in this collaborative effort (Initial Preparation Standards – Council for Exceptional Children, 2013). Further, this partnership provided the opportunity for the preservice teachers to apply studied classroom principles to real-life teaching situations while interacting with similarly aged teachers from a very different background. It was hoped that this experience would provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to apply their knowledge, assist the teachers in measuring student progress, and then reflect and make data-driven decisions based on the results of the progress monitoring.

Regarding the needs of the university faculty, this collaborative venture was viewed as an opportunity not only to provide an additional opportunity for students to increase cultural awareness, but also as a way to measure first-hand how well the preservice teachers could problem solve and apply their classroom knowledge to situations involving real children with learning struggles. Additionally, this setting provided the forum to measure how well evidenced-based practices could be implemented by teachers without formal training and in a setting free of many of the confounding variables often found in applied research (e.g., similar teaching/intervention by other teachers in the school, motives of the teachers implementing the intervention, etc.). This project also provided the opportunity for development of preservice teachers as researchers, hopefully a skill that would generalize into their classrooms.

Once all of the needs were discovered, the OOM teachers, university faculty, and preservice teachers met to develop goals. These goals were very specific and measurable. They also involved the collaborative effort of all parties. The OOM teachers and university personnel worked together to develop goals for the individual Mennonite children. Additionally, goals were set for the OOM teachers, preservice teachers, and the project as a whole.

Implement effective strategies/education. The goals developed through this collaborative effort set the foundation for determining the types of interventions and training to be shared. The university preservice teachers used the developed goals to create evidence-based interventions through the use of task boxes specifically designed for each student. The task boxes consisted of materials needed to teach specific skills at the students' instructional level (i.e., counting, sight words, etc.). Functional skills were also covered to include tasks such as tying shoes, buttoning, and learning to follow patterns for stringing beads to make necklaces and bracelets that could be sold at the community store. When possible, preservice teachers designed the same task box for multiple students by designing different skills specific to the individual student needs while using the same materials. For example, the shapes could be used for matching with one student and counting skills with another. The preservice teachers presented the OOM teachers with direction sheets for each student along with a data collection form to be used by the OOM teacher as she worked daily with the students. This provided the OOM school with many different learning opportunities while maintaining the simplicity sought by their culture, and required limited space, which was important given the size of their school. This was also an amazing opportunity for the preservice teachers to go beyond the academics by considering the cultural relevance of their final product and developing a cultural sensitivity for the OOM teachers, students, and their surroundings. The preservice teachers completed training about the OOM culture prior to beginning the project; however, nothing was as powerful as being immersed as an active participant in the learning process and reflecting on the activity (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

To strengthen the skills of the OOM teachers, the university faculty conducted separate training sessions and mailed additional materials to the OOM teachers to introduce important evidence-based practices into the Mennonite schools. Examples of these practices include explicit instruction, using scope and sequence, training in progress monitoring, and instruction in how to use the data collected to make instructional decisions. The university team continues to make monthly visits to the OOM school to bring additional task boxes as needed, provide follow-up training in evidence-based practices, and answer any questions the OOM teachers have. This is also a time for the preservice teachers to observe their materials in use, analyze the data, and make any instructional changes that are necessary. The university faculty are present to oversee the recommendations and make additional suggestions as necessary. The car ride back to campus often provides a time for reflection and discussion among the preservice teachers and the faculty.

During the period between visits letters are often sent between the OOM teachers and the university faculty. These letters are a means to check progress between visits and the OOM teachers include reflection of their current teaching practices and ask questions about the progress of the students or specifics about instructional procedures. Collaborating with the OOM teachers is a great honor for the university team. It is a pleasure for the university faculty and preservice teachers to see the excellent decision-making skills and natural instincts of the OOM teachers. The receptiveness to new ideas and appreciation for the guidance given them is a refreshing experience for all those involved. Collaboration between the OOM teachers and the preservice teachers provide both groups with invaluable information and many different opportunities to learn from each other.

As with all teaching, the true degree of success can be measured by the learning outcomes of the students (Educational Teaching Service, 2008). This project is in the middle stages of development so student progress continues to be monitored and gains in student learning have been noted. It is too early to really know the progress the OOM students with disabilities will make; however, the gains made by the collaborative parties are clearly evident. For the OOM teachers, progress is evidence in the confidence in their teaching practices, the addition of evidence-based practices within the curriculum, and an increased efficiency in teaching through progress monitoring and measuring goals. Knowledge of these practices allows the OOM teachers to know what teach, when to teach new skills, and when additional practice is needed to reach mastery. Gains made by the preservice teachers are evident in the cultural awareness gained, the ability to analyze current practices and make changes as necessary, and also in their ability to interact and collaborate with fellow teachers from different backgrounds. They also learned how to be researchers and have had opportunities to share their knowledge through poster presentations and discussions. For the university faculty, this collaborative venture provides the opportunity to observe the preservice teachers in practice, note areas of strength and weakness, and make programming decisions accordingly. The faculty also has the opportunity to interact with teachers from varied backgrounds, and increase their cultural awareness of another population of learners, not to mention the pleasure of interacting with the OOM community. Plans are underway to further this partnership by providing educational opportunities for interested members of the OOM community through additional disability awareness and training.

Continue to learn and grow. Carl Rogers, one of the most influential psychologists in the 20th century, placed continual self-assessment and reflection at the heart of teaching (Petty, 2014). Making this a research project moved our collaborative efforts from an interesting community service to one that promoted systematic review of current practices and new information to make changes as necessary for all parties. The Mennonite teachers changed their focus as the relationship developed. They developed a better understanding of what they needed to know and asked more sophisticated and targeted questions. The more they learned, the more they wanted to know. Their quality of questions prompted preservice teachers and faculty to more specifically address and refine the information presented to the Mennonite teachers.

University preservice teachers determined the need to further breakdown information presented to Mennonite teachers. They received invaluable real-life practice in collaboration. Their directions and suggestions became more succinct and easier to follow. Data collection sheets needed to be simplified for use by classroom teachers to make data collection easier while working with the students simultaneously.

University faculty assessed needs for both university preservice teachers and Mennonite teachers and then made changes as needed. They examined which evidence-based practices were needed and provided information or additional training as required. Faculty continued to monitor progress of Mennonite teachers and provide continual guidance and assistance until teachers could implement and progress monitor with fidelity. It was an excellent opportunity for university special education faculty to see their students in practice. Information can be used to help the preservice teachers involved in this project as well as possibly make changes to overall

program instruction to ensure all preservice teachers are well prepared to effectively use evidence-based practices in the classroom.

Conclusion

This collaboration continues to be a wonderful learning opportunity for all involved. The benefits of this collaboration were directed at the students in the OOM community with disabilities by assisting the Mennonite teachers to acquire and use research-based practices that are culturally and developmentally appropriate. This project has come to fruition through listening and learning from each other. It took time to cultivate the relationship and develop a sense of trust as we discovered each other's needs. It was through learning from each other that we could implement and then refine educationally appropriate and researched practices. This is a fluid process that continues to grow and improve. The benefits of this project go well beyond the gains made by the OOM students and their teachers. The University preservice teachers gained real life experience and broadened their understanding of a different culture within our own state. It has been a wonderful learning experience and privilege for the university faculty to work with such dedicated preservice and OOM teachers. We look forward to a continued collaborative relationship and the learning opportunities that are yet to come.

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UTILIZING THE INVERTED CLASSROOM WITH UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS IN A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Inverted Classroom Model of Instruction in Higher Education

Recent research on instruction in higher education has documented an emphasis on "pedagogical content knowledge," a fusing of the subject matter and teaching methods as equal components in effective instruction (Major & Palmer, 2006, p. 620). With the growing popularity of the Flipped Classroom Model of instruction in P-12 education (Bergman & Sams, 2012) and the increase in online and blended courses in rural universities (Cole & Kritzer, 2009), the Inverted Classroom Model (ICM) for higher education has allowed instructors to model instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners in an inclusive "real-world student learning environment" (Lage & Platt, 2000, p. 11).

Faculty in postsecondary education have differentiated instructional methods to meet diverse student learning needs and to increase interest in course content while maximizing time when they utilized the ICM (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000; Lage & Platt, 2000; Bergman & Sams, 2012). Students enrolled in classes that were inverted utilized technology to watch class lectures and participate in online activities in addition to completing required readings prior to class. During face-to-face class time, students completed activities and assignments with the instructor and classmates that had traditionally been completed on their own. Cole and Kritzer (2009) documented benefits of the ICM for postsecondary students that included increased student self-efficacy, increased use of authentic activity, more timely and effective instructor feedback, and more efficient use of class time. While there is research in K-12 education that links increased student learning to flipped math classrooms (Fulton, 2012; Schumacher, Allen, & Spalding, 2013), research on achievement results in higher education appear limited to date.

Students in postsecondary coursework reported positive perceptions of classes that utilized the ICM citing the opportunity to review the lecture multiple times and the increased opportunity to work with peers in groups during class as benefits (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). Additionally, faculty perceived increased student motivation and student comfort participating in inverted classrooms. They reported more active participation from female students during in class activity when the classroom was inverted in comparison with traditionally taught classes (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000).

Herreid and Schiller (2013) uncovered two "difficulties" with the ICM through polling of STEM instructors in postsecondary classes (p.63). Some students were unprepared for class

because they did not do the work at home that was required. Also instructors reported finding high quality digital materials for students to use outside of class was difficult and creating them was time consuming and out of their area of expertise.

Adult Learners

Connections between the ways adults learn and their developmental stage in life have been affected by the proliferation of social media culture and communication (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011). According to learning theory, adults bring life experience and self-direction desiring cooperative learning experiences that make traditional classroom methods in higher education less effective. They possessed practical knowledge and were task and goal oriented; adult learners wanted experiences that were immediately applicable to their academic and work environments (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

McDaniel and Caverly (2010) reported ICM use in higher education provided control of learning for adult learners through lectures delivered via technology, so learners could view them as often as needed. In addition, in class time was spent in more cooperative learning activities that focused on the application of concepts.

Faculty Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Major and Palmer (2006) reported that college and university faculty espoused strongly held beliefs about the connection between their content and instruction that dominated classroom decision making regarding content delivery methods. The ICM challenged the widely held understanding that faculty "only needed expertise" (p. 619) in their discipline and capitalized on the growing trend in postsecondary education of the development of a "pedagogical content knowledge" (p. 621) that fused content knowledge with application of effective instructional practice. The ICM provides higher education faculty the ability to develop pedagogy not bound by the time and space constraints of the traditional classroom, yet inclusive of traditional methods of lecture through use of technology, thus broadening their overall pedagogical content knowledge.

Current Study

The current study was a follow up to a presentation at the 2013 ACRES conference, *Teaching Diverse Learners Online: Flipped Courses and Other Strategies* regarding action research on flipped methods with high school math students with disabilities (Schumacher, Allen, & Spalding, 2013). Three faculty from a small rural university in the south incorporated the inverted classroom strategy into teacher education classes through a combination of undergraduate and graduate courses, traditional and online classrooms, and courses in special education and general education. In each class and with all participants faculty were looking at the effectiveness of the inverted classroom by providing a lecture or presentation via video clip for students to view prior to class while using class time for practice and deeper discussion and interactions.

The research questions investigated during this study were:

1. How do inverted classes affect teacher education candidate achievement?
2. What are success factors in implementing an inverted classroom model in a teacher education program?
3. What are perceptions of candidates on inverted classes?

Researchers utilized a mixed methods approach in data collection and analysis through conducting a pre-course/post-course participant survey regarding flipping P-12 and inverting higher education courses that contained both quantitative and qualitative elements. Researchers collected pre-assessment and post-assessment data for each lesson utilizing the ICM. Finally, researchers described the process used in developing and implementing the inverted class periods and identified the challenges and lessons learned from their experiences.

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SHRINKING DISTANCES: USING TECHNOLOGY TO OPEN THE WORLD TO RURAL STUDENTS

Remember those fun and educational trips outside the school building that students looked forward to taking? With retail gasoline prices hovering above $3 per gallon throughout most of the United States, the cost for a bus driver increasing, missing school time for unproductive travel, losing time which could be spent on Common Core and other test-related activities, and concerns over safety and insurance costs, many schools have either totally curtailed or severely limited these educational trips. This has been especially true in rural areas. Just getting to an appropriate field trip site takes a major effort and substantial costs.

By following the fairly simple procedures included in this article, teachers can once again expose their students to the world outside their school classroom without the issues mentioned earlier becoming major concerns. Is this virtual experience the same as an actual trip? The answer is obviously "not the same" but virtual experiences can help fill in the experiential gap and create a more level field for rural students as well as those who might have other difficulties in traveling. Sometimes in rural areas and especially with special students, this leveling is even more relevant in order to make sure there is equity for all students.

As with any lesson, the first task is to decide what outcomes need to be taught and then decide if a virtual field trip (VFT) can be used effectively in helping students achieve the objectives. Once this preliminary question about using a VFT has been answered, it will be possible to begin the multistep process of creating an effective and rewarding learning experience for students, as well as teachers.

Certainly the procedures mentioned in this article are not the only way to create these learning experiences but over many years of trial and error, they have been found to work well at K-12 levels. As has been noted by educators over the years, teaching is part science and part art (Marzano, 2007). Creating VFTs is no different; if you find a better way to accomplish learning objectives and have fun in learning, please share your efforts with others.

Once the specific learning objective is determined, you can begin to decide what resources are needed and where they can be found. A simple idea map is a good place to start because, in a practical way, it helps to ensure that activities are congruent and support the teaching/learning objectives. A sample of a simple idea map for a desert VFT is shown in Figure 1. It is based on the National Science Teaching Standards around the Structure and Function in Living Systems and conforms to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Living systems at all levels of

organization demonstrate the complementary nature of structure and function. This map was created with the free X-Mind software (http://www.xmind.net/). There are numerous other idea-mapping software programs available. Regardless of the idea-mapping tool selected, one of the most important things to remember is that ideas may change as you create the VFT experience.

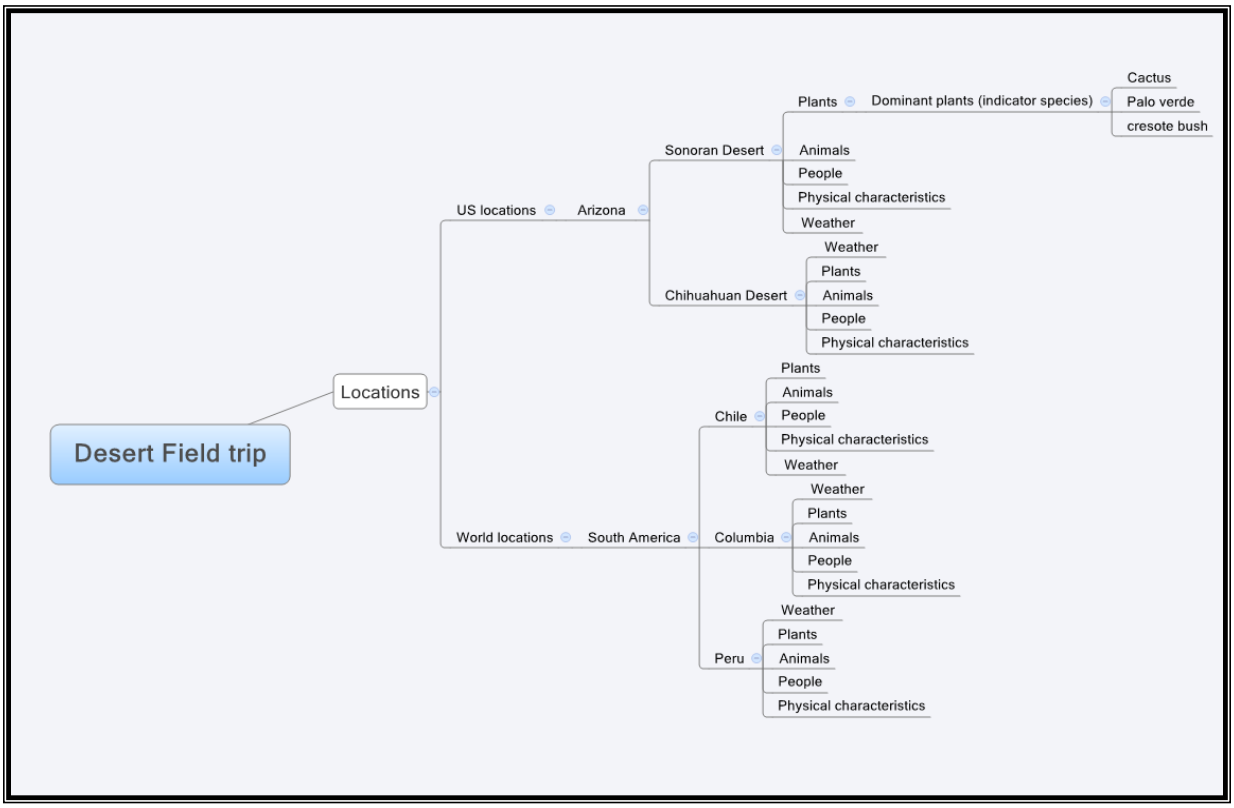

Figure 1. Desert field trip idea map example created using X-Mind software. (Canipe, 2009)

Once a teacher creates one or two of these virtual experiences, students often desire to emulate the techniques and technology in subsequent student projects, thereby gaining valuable technology skills, and also creating meaningful, authentic products, which can be used over and over in the classroom or posted online for others to use. Students at grades 3-12 can easily create these virtual experiences, which can be shared with classmates or with lower grade levels.

Whenever a VFT is used, whether created by the teacher or by students, it is very important to make sure that all legal, ethical, and fair use issues are considered. The idea of copyright is a very important concept to present to students and teachers in this day of easy "copy and paste."

If students' images appear in the project, be sure to get specific parental clearance, even if your school has a blanket permission form that goes home on the first day of school. Applicable school board policies must always be followed with regards to student images. These policies might vary depending on school/district but the most current ones need to be followed.

Using images and videos taken from the internet requires special consideration of copyrights. Some individuals and websites give educational users special permission regarding

use; however, care must be taken to ensure compliance with fair use principles. Some online sites provide copyright free images, while others are provided in a copyright friendly mode. *Copyright friendly* generally means that as long as the material is being used for non-commercial, educational purposes the requirement is only to properly cite the owner. The best policy is to use sites that are either copyright free or copyright friendly. One favorite copyright friendly site, which has thousands of static images, is Pics4Learning (www.pics4learning.com). Others can be found via an internet search. When in doubt about copyrights, the best policy is to ask and seek appropriate permission.

VFTs, just like actual field trips, should not be undertaken just to do them--consult and follow your curriculum and syllabus guides. A danger that teachers sometimes fail to see is that since VFTs are relatively easy to do, they are done without a clear learning objective. This type of thinking is detrimental to learning and is an inappropriate use of student and teacher time.

Starting with the outcomes from the curriculum allows focus on the specifics that need to be included in any learning activity and VFTs are no exceptions. A well-thought out VFT can be simple such as using a website, a PowerPoint presentation, a video stored on a DVD, or virtual reality images. To help inform the format-type decisions, it is important to think how students might use the experience to enhance both the breadth and depth of their learning. With the widespread prevalence and educational penetrance of personal devices like smartphones, tablets, and similar devices, it is possible to have a substantial impact on classroom learning. If the ultimate goal is to stimulate and enhance learning, the presentation should focus on the type of format: linear, branching, static, interactive, etc. that is the most attention grabbing. It is necessary first to get the students' attention before information can be absorbed (Battle, n.d.).

Static images like a photograph or moving images like a video can now be created easily with narration using widely available software like iMovie™ and MovieMaker™. Some minimal animation is also easily possible using software like GoAnimate and Amine Studio. It is now possible to create an interactive image called 3D-VR (three dimensional-virtual reality) cheaply and easily. Most current model digital cameras and smartphones have the ability to create 3D-VR giving a 360° view of a place or object. Two of the easiest apps to use are available for free on both the IOS and Android platforms and are called 360 Panorama and Photosynth. This technology is the same one that allows a consumer to examine a product, a car, or even a house from many different angles. Imagine using this technology to present views of sites that the teacher might have visited but because of either danger and/or cost students cannot easily go there. It allows vicarious visits where a single person might be able to go but a classroom of students would not be welcome. Be sure to check for any needed permissions. The creator/designer of a VFT today has delivery choices that are nearly limitless. These various choices seem to be increasing almost weekly with new software and apps being produced and coming on the market. If one looks closely at the 360 Panorama in Figure 2, it looks very similar to the holodeck in Star Trek television and movies!

Figure 2. 360 Panorama

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a tutorial on the direction that a teacher might take in creating a VFT. The primary purpose is to encourage the VFT designer to simply start and try the process, paying close attention the caveats mentioned. Using the constructivist model, a teacher can allow his/her inner creativity to come forward. Thus far it has been noted that the creator of a VFT should:

1. Decide on the purpose of the VFT matching the purpose to one or more specific curricular learning objective(s)/outcome(s).
2. Procure various images (still or moving) which are needed to create the project.
3. Decide on the specific delivery method (PowerPoint, Prezi, video, internet, a mash-up, etc.).
4. Produce a VFT and try it with students.
5. Evaluate the process and make modifications as needed.
6. Continue to explore the options and be creative.

The most efficacious way to begin a VFT project is to follow the KISS principle (keep it simply simple) and not attempt too many different things on a first try. The available processes now allow the VFT creation to include static images, websites, videos, 3D-VR, panoramic images, and others.

So what options should be in a VFT creator's tool box? The following types of programs/tools are listed as suggestions only. Specific hardware and software is left to the VFT creator.

Table 1
Program and Tools for VFTs

VFT Creator's Tool Box
Image viewing and manipulating software
Digital camera
Website creation tool
Image presentation software
Panorama creating software or app
Video creation software with ability to create titles
Site(s) listing copyright free or friendly images

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INTEGRATING TEACHLIVE TO PREPARE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS FOR RURAL & URBAN SCHOOLS

This paper presents an overview of how one university is integrating TeachLivE™ into a pre-service educator preparation program in special education. Our aim is to improve the quality of pre-service teacher experiential learning opportunities to prepare our students for positions in surrounding rural and urban school districts. In addition to providing experiential learning opportunities, the implementation of TeachLivE™ provides authentic teaching experiences (Elford, James, & Haynes-Smith, in press) and new opportunities for students to demonstrate attainment of course and program learning outcomes.

Our Rationale for TeachLivE™ in Teacher Education

Teacher preparation programs are tasked with preparing teachers to meet the diverse needs of students. A troubling number of students, many from culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse groups, fail to achieve in school (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Students identified with significant reading needs, which is more than half of students ages 6-21 with specific learning disabilities, spend more than 80% of their time in the regular education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Teachers in today's inclusion-focused classrooms must not only foster literacy skills and deep content area knowledge (National Research Council, 1998), they must also support students to become college and career ready, and develop deeper and broader knowledge in the disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

We believe our implementation and integration of TeachLivE™ addresses these needs, and that it has the potential to be easily replicated by other universities and teacher education programs equipped with TeachLivE™ labs. In the TeachLive™ lab at Texas Woman's University (TWU), our students practiced implementation of Strategic Instruction Model (Bulgren & Lenz, 1996) and Universal Design for Learning (www.cast.org). These research-based approaches are aimed at including students with a wide array of learning needs. Professional teacher preparation programs are charged with providing more opportunities and experiences for students to apply the knowledge acquired in their programs. To this end, this paper shares our experiences in our initial year integrating TeachLive™. We first discuss the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM), as SIM strategies were heavily used within our implementation of TeachLive™. Following this discussion, we provide a brief overview of the TeachLivE™ technology and research. Finally, we explain the implementation of TeachLive™

within coursework and offer concluding comments with suggestions for integration of the technology into special education teacher education.

Strategic Instruction Model. The Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) has been developed and researched at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KUCRL). The goal of SIM is to create independent, successful learners who can effectively deal with the demands of the general education curriculum (University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, 2009). Based on the reports of 70 educators, success in content-area courses depends on the mastery of content knowledge and manipulation of that knowledge, in addition to basic skills and instructional strategies for students without disabilities (Bulgren, 2006). Instructional strategies are methods and tools educators use to deliver content, information, and/or direction to students to facilitate student learning. SIM is one instructional tool already integrated into our program and used in conjunction with TeachLivE™ to support pre-service teachers.

TeachLivE™. TeachLivE™ is a virtual learning environment (VLE), developed and researched at the University of Central Florida, providing novice teachers with simulated teaching opportunities. Participants in this VLE have a physical presence in the lab, and the interaction is with virtual students, or avatars, who respond in real time (Dieker, Hynes, & Hughes, 2008). VLEs hold promise as an instructional technology tool that supports educator development of the knowledge, skills, and application of these approaches (Dieker, Rodriguez, Lignugaris/Kraft, Hynes, & Hughes, 2014).

Our First Year Integrating TeachLivE™

Implementation of TeachLivE™ at TWU is planned and discussed using the language and conceptual framework from implementation science research (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). We describe our initial year activities and events in three stages: exploration and adaption, program installation, and initial implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005). It is important to note we are only in the third stage, initial implementation, however we to plan and discuss the needs and progress toward remaining stages: full operation, innovation, and sustainability (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Exploration and Adoption. Students seeking special education teacher certification at the undergraduate level complete a set of six courses as part of their general education teacher certification requirements while attending Texas Woman's University (TWU) in Denton, TX. The special education certification at the undergraduate level is delivered in a blended delivery format, with a combination of face-to-face and online instruction. Woven throughout the six courses is instruction in SIM learning strategies and content enhancement routines. These research-validated strategies are incorporated into identified classes to address course and program learning outcomes. In addition to coursework, students complete field-based assignments in area rural and urban schools.

TWU's *Learn by Doing* school-wide motto guides our incorporation of experiential learning for our students. Since TeachLivE™ aligns with this larger university initiative, members of our department collaborated on a proposal to fund the necessary technology to establish a TeachLivE™ lab in the TWU Department of Teacher Education. The grant

competition was internal to TWU, and we were successfully funded. This application for the lab was developed following a visit to the University of Central Florida as part of a pre-conference session at the 2013 American Council on Rural Special Education. It was during that pre-conference session, in which a demonstration of TeachLivE™ was conducted, that we determined the fit between TeachLivE™ and the TWU guidelines for *Learn by Doing*. Further, it was clear that TeachLivE™ could be a very appropriate vehicle for students to have authentic experiences teaching actual lessons from SIM materials already incorporated within the special education cognate. Because students take courses across all four program areas (Special Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Bilingual/English As a Second Language, and Educational Leadership), all faculty in the Department of Teacher Education at TWU were also provided more information and opportunities to include TeachLivE™ in their courses.

Program Installation. The installation of the lab was coordinated by one faculty member, one doctoral student, a senior administrative staff member, and representatives from the TWU Office of Technology. Together, this team coordinated the budgeting, selection of technology, ordering, and set up of the TWU TeachLivE™ lab. During the previous stage, once adapted a space was designated. Concurrently during this stage, the professional development with the full faculty began. The special education faculty planned initial training and experiences. To address systems issues, as well as help ensure that all faculty in the department had the necessary information and skill to use TeachLivE™ within their courses, the following steps were taken:

- The lead special education faculty member for TeachLivE™ sent information about TeachLive™ to all faculty via email.
- A TeachLivE™ coordinator was designated to provide planning support for individual faculty, scheduling with UCF, coordinate technology issues and updates, and turn on the technology for faculty.
- Discussions for use of TeachLivE™ were included on the agenda for each monthly faculty meeting.
- Representatives from each of the four program areas attended the Inaugural TeachLivE™ Conference at the University of Central Florida.
- A consultant with a background using and collecting data with TeachLivE™ visited campus prior to the start of the school year to provide an overview of TeachLivE™ to groups of interested faculty and doctoral students. These sessions focused on support for the TeachLivE™ lab/room set up, identification of possible appropriate classes, support for faculty planning to integrate TeachLivE™ in a course, and problem solving research possibilities. Extended time was spent with the designated TeachLivE™ coordinator.
- A second visit on campus by the consultant included a presentation on TeachLivE™ opportunities during a faculty meeting and follow up visits with faculty members interested in TeachLivE™, again including research opportunities. In addition, during this visit, faculty had the opportunity to practice teaching in the lab with a follow up conversation/briefing with the consultant.
- The consultant has been available by phone and email to discuss ongoing questions.

Another early integration step was the planning of numerous opportunities for demonstration and experience in the lab across a six-month timespan. These experiences have been open to faculty, staff, and doctoral students. This has proven to be a critical component of the start-up process, because the enthusiasm for working with TeachLivE™ students was expressed not only by faculty in the department, but also by the provost, dean of the college, student teacher coordinator, secretaries, and faculty from other departments at the university. This meant a good start with high energy for a new opportunity and a solid base for data collection. In addition, it has become clear that faculty who intend to require students to teach in the TeachLivE™ lab must first have experience themselves with TeachLivE™.

Initial Implementation. In our program, two different courses were selected for initial implementation of TeachLivE™ in the undergraduate special education certification area. Those two classes were EDSP 4263 Behavior Management Strategies for Students with Disabilities and EDSP 4203 Learners with Exceptionalities. The SIM material was selected for the first course, EDSP 4263, due to the content match with Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) information.

The first course: *Behavior Management Strategies for Students with Disabilities (EDSP 4263).* One example of how we have integrated the use of our university's TeachLivE™ lab and is through teaching demonstrations in the lab of Lesson 2 & Lesson 3 of *Focusing Together,* a foundational program in the Community Building Series of SIM (Vernon, 2013). Specifically, *Focusing Together* teaches self management of behavior to students in association with a set of classroom expectations that define responsible work habits, respect, and emotional safety (Rademacher, Pemberton, & Cheever, 2006). The structured methods and procedures outlined in *Focusing Together* can provide teachers with the tools to create a learner-friendly culture. A learner-friendly culture is about creating an environment in which students can flourish through co-construction of norms with students and reinforcing them when they act consistently within the norms (Knight, 2013).

In addition to *Focusing Together,* SIM includes two major categories of interventions that are known to be effective in teaching students with learning disabilities (LD) in a learner-friendly culture. These include Learning Strategies and Content Enhancement Routines. Learning Strategies are designed to provide the skills and strategies students need to learn the content. Content Enhancement Routines are designed to help teachers think about, adapt, and present critical content in an interactive way with students (University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, 2009).

The second course: *Learners with Exceptionalities (EDSP 4203).* A second example of utilizing the TeachLivE™ lab occurred within the introduction to special education course, which is a required course for all students in the Teacher Education program at our university. Students typically take this course prior to being accepted to the Teacher Education program, or just following acceptance. Many of the students in this class have had very little experience with disability prior to taking the course, and thus a major focus of the course is on learning about the nature of special education services and supports (law, definitions, procedures), and on learning the characteristics of the disabilities covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. However, evidence-based inclusion strategies are also a component of the course, with a particular focus on Universal Design for Learning. The final assignment for the

course was the creation of a lesson plan that incorporated Universal Design for Learning principles as well as an evidence-based strategy for including students with exceptionalities. Students had the opportunity to write a mini lesson early in the semester that they could teach in the TeachLivE™ lab. The requirements for this portion were that the lesson (a) include at least one general research-based strategy for inclusion and (b) at least one strategy that was specific to the Universal Design for Learning guidelines (http://www.cast.org). After instruction in the lab, students received feedback from the TeachLivE™ coordinator and the professor that would enable them to improve their lesson plan for the final assignment.

Conclusion

Data indicate that pre-service and in-service teachers need more practical experiences incorporating evidence-based practices (Deiker et al., 2008). TWU special education faculty have spearheaded implementation of TeachLivE™ in order to provide students with opportunities to apply their knowledge of SIM and Content Enhancement Routines as well as Universal Design for Learning. We took steps to ensure that all faculty in the department had access to the materials and skills to integrate TeachLivE™ in their courses, encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration. Our experiences this semester have been positive. Administration, faculty, and students have been energized by their time in the lab, and students have reported it has improved their learning. We suggest programs considering implementing TeachLivE™ consider the implementation in stages. Anecdotal data from our implementation suggest early communication with the full faculty supports buy-in. Additionally, we believe it was critical to offer faculty development opportunities prior to implementation, ensuring the appropriate courses are selected for use of TeachLivE™ and the support is provided for designing the TeachLivE™ lessons and activities to align with course and SLOs. Program area coordinators continue to reflect and address this with their program area faculty. At TWU, our future direction is working toward the final stages of implementation: full operation, innovation, and sustainability (Fixsen et al., 2005). This will include analysis of data collected this first year, continued research on effects of using TeachLivE™ in our program areas, revising and improving current course integration, and consideration of options to sustain the funding and use of TeachLivE™. We believe continued study of TeachLivE™ in teacher education programs holds promise for informing teacher preparation practices aimed to better equip educators for teaching in the inclusive classroom, supporting diverse groups of students including English language learners (ELLs) and students with, or at-risk for, learning-related disabilities in grade K-12, and therefore may improve teacher retention and success in rural and urban teaching experiences. We intend to continue our implementation of TeachLivE™, collecting and analyzing data on our implementation.

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BUILDING COMMUNITY IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM: THE USE OF VOICETHREAD TO FOSTER DISCUSSION

Abstract

The landscape of instruction has vastly changed teaching and learning in education during the last 10 years. With the emergence of technologies such as high speed Internet, virtual classrooms, blogs, wikis, and a plethora of other online tools, asynchronous online education has also become prevalent. A shift from face-to-face classes into the virtual world can seem a daunting challenge to many instructors and students, particularly those in rural areas. We have searched for ways to replicate the type of community and discussion that occur in face-to-face classrooms within the online environment. In this article, we describe our use of a promising practice, the use of VoiceThread, in our technological quest to develop community within online classes.

Introduction

Learning is a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978), requiring that we take part in meaningful interactions with peers and pertinent content. Thus, the challenge we confront in this article is finding a way to build community and discussion in online coursework, not simply designing assignments that ask students to respond in isolation to prompts. Early work by Keller (1983) suggests that manipulation and exploration of ideas might sustain and increase learning when students are in charge of their learning environment. However, one challenge of online teaching is often the student's lack of opportunities for such exploration and manipulation of ideas and student interaction with one another.

Central to our understanding of how we learn is sociocultural theory, requiring that community and interaction play critical roles in learning (Vygotsky, 1978), and in fact that the process of communication- verbal or nonverbal- is social and can serve as a bridge between one understanding of a situation and another. We learn, process, are challenged, and have to rethink prior assumptions through interaction with others. It is our belief that such experiences can occur in a virtual classroom. Rogoff (2003) explains how cognitive development often occurs

within communities of thinkers, and that in such instances cognition is "distributed across people as they collaborate with each other and with tools" (p. 270). Such distributed cognition can lead toward new understandings, and we believe that New Literacies such as VoiceThread can be the tools to foster such development.

Access to technology offers many opportunities and challenges to instructors and students involved in online coursework including an expansion of services to previously hard to reach, rural areas. While this has meant significant progress toward closing the access gap, as faculty in teacher preparation programs, we struggle to engage students through technology in online environments.

Most online courses are housed within Learning Management Systems that often include common tools such as discussion boards, tools which most college students who have taken online courses have experienced. Discussion boards typically require students to respond to a prompt from a teacher or text and students can see all of their peers' written responses. Although students feel comfortable with discussion boards, as the technology is not very challenging, faculty see limits to the use of this tool. For example, it is difficult to really get to know someone through a discussion board, so that sense of the face-to-face community is absent within the class that only uses such a tool.

Faced with the limits of discussion boards, we sought an alternative. The promising practice we describe here is intended to build a sense of community and discussion within an online environment for our students. Thus, we wish to answer the following question: Within an online environment, how do we best allow for the benefits of distributed cognition-- growth in understanding, shared knowledge and experience, a sense of community, and challenges to our held understanding? We chose to use VoiceThread to encourage such an environment within our online classes.

Brunyard and Byrd (2011) describe VoiceThread (http://voicethread.com) as an "interactive, multimedia slideshow tool," which allows users to hold discussions around "images, documents, and video. This tool is easily accessible, cost-effective, applicable across most subject matter and grade levels, and adaptable to many learning settings" (p. 28). In addition, VoiceThread allows users to choose their form of participation. One can choose to post an image or a video, type a response through speech bubbles or in a PowerPoint slide, use their phone to receive a call from VoiceThread which allows them to speak their response, or a combination of the above. This ability to choose can increase intrinsic motivation (Malone & Lepper, 1983). Students who are considered passive are encouraged to become more active as they interact with content, visual media, and voice, regardless of their ability (Lerner & Johns, 2009).

Methods and Results

Participants in this study included students at a south central university in a graduate level literacy education course for practicing teachers. Many students who apply to the program live in rural areas and until recently have not been able to take such courses due to the long distance between their homes and university. We, as instructors, decided to experiment with

VoiceThread to create a sense of community when our students were physically far apart. Within this course, students used Voicethread in various ways: to introduce themselves, to answer questions based on readings, and to describe literacy lessons that they had taught for the course. Because of the multimodality of VoiceThread, students could include pictures of themselves, families, favorite vacation destinations, etc. while explaining what their peers were seeing, adding a level of familiarity and humanity to the online environment.

At the end of the course, students completed a questionnaire comparing their use of VoiceThread versus Discussion Boards. Questions explored strengths and weaknesses of the two tools, ways students prepared to use the different tools, and ways students' sense of community was shaped by the tools. Results from the questionnaire were analyzed using content analysis to find patterns and are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1
Patterns in Student Responses Regarding VoiceThread and Discussion Boards

VoiceThread: Positive responses	VoiceThread: Challenges	Discussion Board: Positive responses	Discussion Board: Challenges
Convenience	"New" factor	Familiarity	One dimensional
Intimacy	Mechanical difficulties	One dimensional	Response repetition
Rigor	Time consuming to create		Not true discussion
Multimodal	Requires more preparation and effort		Time consuming to read
	Multimodal		

In response to the questionnaire, students elaborated on positive aspects and challenges to both VoiceThread and Discussion Boards. Students remarked that VoiceThread offers convenience, in that it is multimodal and is easy to use. It also adds a level of intimacy to the class; students liked seeing the instructor and classmates, which made the class seem more personal and interactive. VoiceThread was also reported as adding to the rigor of the course, increasing the depth of responses required, and the knowledge learned by listening to other students' VoiceThreads. As one student wrote, "You can't fake your way through it." Students commented that the ability or need to edit and review a VoiceThread before publishing it added to their understanding. Several reported that the process was more complicated because they wrote notes, created a script, practiced, recorded, and sometimes re-recorded their responses before sharing with the group.

The multimodal aspect of VoiceThread intrigued some students and frustrated others. Some liked the ability to choose whether to speak, type, or video their answers while others seemed to be intimidated by the options. Some reported that they didn't want to sound stupid or unprepared and wanted to hide within the anonymous feeling of the discussion board. Other students embraced this multimodality, with a feeling of a greater need or desire to captivate the audience-- not to entertain, but to enlighten. As one student said, "the goal is to answer the question in a manner that leaves the impression with the listener that they haven't wasted their time listening to the presenter, and the presenter has introduced 'food for thought' that encourages response."

Some students complained that a discussion board is unidimensional, saying that "some people just put anything down to have a post," while a VoiceThread can "convey a myriad of things and emotions, letting the listener know how strongly one feels about their response. Written words can leave more room for conjecture, but oral delivery gets more to the point quicker."

A challenge to online instructors, as we have stated previously, is the creation of a sense of a community of learners among students who are geographically dispersed. However, one student wrote that "the VoiceThreads resemble the classroom setting more, which made me feel the need to be as prepared as possible." One student wrote that "my first experience with Voicethread was your (instructor's) introductory VoiceThread, in which you commented that you were looking out at the snow. That made it seem like a fireside chat! It made me want to listen, to pay attention. It created visual imagery. No written discussion board has ever done that."

Discussion and Implications

Clearly, VoiceThread offered the students in these courses a sense of community and a variety of ways to respond to course work. They felt as though they were in more of an authentic classroom with interaction and a feeling of familiarity. The inclusion of VoiceThread in the class offered an opportunity to share within a broader dimension through various modes of communication, and suggested a greater sense of self through the perceived value of their contributions. For some students, the sense of community was not truly a priority and did not embrace this added dimension offered by VoiceThread and found it to be burdensome.

Future research might explore the use of interactive tools such as VoiceThread in an effort to increase student retention in online courses. VoiceThread has been shown to be a useful tool for differentiating instruction for struggling students due to the expanded options for demonstrating understanding (Brunyard & Byrd, 2011). These options promote engaged collaboration that strengthens student participation in their learning environment. One of the features of VoiceThread for students with disabilities is the inherency of wait time, which allows students valuable time to form responses, read at their own pace, and practice as many times as necessary when posting an audio response, often not available in the face-to-face pace of the classroom (Brunyard & Byrd, 2011). Future studies of this access to learning are warranted. In addition, VoiceThread Universal is available, which is a way of viewing and using the tool that is more accessible to students with disabilities. Universal access, 508 compliance, has become a

priority for institutions and is another important avenue for research. Universal access is typically used by nontraditional learners; some of its uses include video conferences between deaf students, use of video commenting by students with dyslexia, and use with screen readers.

With these promising practices in mind, educators may need to reevaluate our roles, methods, and tools used in order to teach in this online setting and transform into more inclusive and community-building "designers of learning experiences, process, and environments" (Duderstadt, 1999, p.7).

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Funding for this study was provided by The Division of Extended Learning & Outreach, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

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THREE D's of IEP GOALS

(Document, Deliver, and Distribute)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and goals be written to support student with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Goals are written to indicate need, strength, and a process in which teachers, staff, and related services adhere to a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). As indicated by IDEA, ultimately IEP goals are written and aligned to support student learning and student growth. According to current legislation in IDEA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB)/ Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), teachers are responsible for delivering these recommended goals and activities.

Student with disabilities may face several educational issues. It is not uncommon for a student who is eligible for special education to have a many goals and services. It has been stated several times throughout the history of special education (SPED) that teachers need to be more accountable, more specialized, and more collaborative in their daily responsibilities (Turnbull, 2005). In addition to the general knowledge of IDEA's eligibility categories and their characteristics SPED teachers should have a thorough knowledge of the legislation surrounding the support of students with disabilities, ranging from the referral process to eligibility to IEP development to goal implementation (Sayeski, 2009).

Besides the responsibility of teaching, special education teachers are expected to manage a caseload of students who are eligible for SPED services. Yet, SPED teachers need to find a simpler way to manage and navigate through a multitude of goals that have been written to support individualized student learning (Lingo, Barton-Arwood, & Jolivette, 2011). Data collection is the source that fuels teacher decision making and the foundation for the development of student IEPs (Gunter, Callicott, Denny, & Gerber, 2003). The IEP has been required by law since 1975 in the development of P.L. 94-142. IDEA mandates the IEP service two important issues. First, the IEP must include how the students' progress toward annual goals will be measured, and that the IEP include the extent of which progress is sufficient to enable the student to achieve them (Gunter et al., 2011).

However, the IEP mandate does not cultivate itself; it has been determined that collaboration between general and special education teachers is essential for the growth and academic development of students with disabilities (Rainforth & England, 1997). Documentation of daily activities, lessons, and assessments are used to make daily instructional decisions. As educators, monitoring and documenting the daily actions of the students is a time consuming task that requires detail and immediate attention. This may include academic goals, behavior plans, social and organization skills, accommodations, modifications, and related services. As a result of these tasks, The Matrix is designed to meet the needs of students, the accountability and documentation for teachers, and continuity for progress.

Step 1: Document

Documentation of student progress in the classroom is vital in today's classroom. Teachers are asked to document attendance, assessment scores, goals, and progress (Sayeski, 2009). As indicated in IDEA Part B and on IEP documents, accessibility and responsibilities must be indicated, included, and signed in all IEP meetings.

Documentation comes in all forms (i.e. anecdotal notes, journals) but there is an organized system that will allow all adult personnel (i.e. teachers, paraprofessionals, related service) to effectively document student progress. The IEP Matrix highlights and profiles the goals and needs of students with disabilities. The IEP Matrix becomes the road map for planning, implementing, and monitoring IEP goals in the classroom. Documentation templates such as the Matrix can provide common language thus creating a mutual understanding of the child and his/her disability (Lingo et al., 2001). Thus, it ensures continuity and progress toward meeting student goals. The Matrix is based directly from the IEP goals approved and written by the IEP team.

For example, Student A with the following IEP goals:

- Using hand-over-hand support, Susie will use a fork during meals 100% of the time.
- While sitting in student chair, Susie will independently sit up-right with minimal support 100% of the time.
- To communicate and to express her needs, Susie will point to pictures on her communication board for "help," "Thank-you," "yes," and "no," 100% of the time.
- Using large colored letters, Susie will identify, recognize and point to letters A-G 8/10 trials.
- Using felt numbers, Susie will identify, recognize, and point to numbers 1-9 8/10 trials.

Abbreviated goals from her IEP are listed on the horizontal upper row, while her daily schedule is posted on the vertical column. The date of each school day is posted at the top of the entire Matrix and room is available at the end of the daily Matrix for any additional notes that

need to be made on that day's activities. Also listed are the classroom and testing accommodations the student is entitled to and ones that have been developed by the IEP team for student support and success. This Matrix is now individualized as the student's schedule dictates the accuracy of implementing the IEP goals. This set-up process does take time and a thorough look at the student's goals is imperative for success. The discussion with teachers, staff, and related services is extensive as the development of the Matrix occurs. Figure 1 is a Matrix designed to indicate IEP goals that are addressed daily within a student's school schedule.

DATE: 1/25/2014						
	Student's abbreviated IEP goals					
Student's daily school schedule		Hand/hand eating w/fork	Sitting in chair	Communication board	Letters A-G	Numbers 1-9
	8:00-8:15 Breakfast					
	8:15-8:45 Bathroom					
	8:45-9:30 Morning circle					
	9:30-10:00 Reading					
	10:00-10:15 Recess					
	10:15-11:00 Math					
	11:00-11:30 Lunch					
Accommodations:						
NOTES:						

Figure 1. *Documentation in a matrix.*

Step 2: Deliver

Continuous delivery of services and execution of IEP goals will ultimately support student progress (Cornelius, 2013). The ability to monitor and provide services (i.e.

academically, behaviorally, and socially) will only enhance the educational services for students with disabilities and improve the overall educational experience (Cornelius, 2013).

As an IEP team, collaborate on the goals and when they should be addressed during the time block of the student's daily schedule. For instance goals such as "eating with a fork" can only be addressed during breakfast and lunch. Therefore the boxes are checked, thus allowing for consistency and reminders that during this time block these specific goals should be addressed. A Matrix like the one in Figure 2 should be available at the beginning of each school day. The date at the top of the Matrix is written in for documentation purposes and recording of daily execution of goals. The ** indicate when and how often during a school day a student's individualized goals will be put into practice.

DATE: 1/25/2014						
	Student's abbreviated IEP goals					
		Hand/hand eating w/fork	Sitting in chair	Communication board	Letters A-G	Numbers 1-9
Student's daily school schedule	8:00-8:15 Breakfast	**	**	**		
	8:15-8:45 Bathroom			**		
	8:45-9:30 Morning circle		**	**	**	**
	9:30-10:00 Reading		**	**	**	
	10:00-10:15 Recess			**		
	10:15-11:00 Math		**	**		**
	11:00-11:30 Lunch	**	**	**		
Accommodations: • Use of computer • Frequent breaks • Verbal/communication board responses						
NOTES:						

Figure 2. *Specific goals indicated on student schedule.*

As indicated in Figure 2, goals have been executed numerous times throughout the day, as a result it will allow for continuity, consistency, and increased rate of progression of meeting the annual IEP goals.

Step 3: Distribute

Under the federal mandate of IDEA and student IEP's, teachers must have evidence that the goals have been distributed, communicated, and discussed with the appropriate educators involved with the student. The goals, accommodations and modifications must be implemented in order for the student to receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The following statement of the distribution of goals is embedded into the IEP that the team signs:

> This refers to how will each teachers, related service provider, transportation provider and others working with this student be informed of his or her specific responsibilities for implementing this IEP and the accommodations, modifications, and support that must be provided for this student? This data supports teacher instruction and is mandated by federal law. However, documentation lends itself to another whole level when we add Special Education to the mix. The complexity of goals, the reassurance of addressing the goals and the documentation of implementation (OPI, 2014).

Once the individualized daily schedule and the abbreviated goals are inserted in to the Matrix, distribution is necessary to all personnel responsible for the student. This Matrix now becomes a roadmap of goals, time, and date. Alberto and Troutman (2012) state that recording observations of student performance allows for a more complete picture of engagement and student experience. Figure 3 shows observational documentation on student response, progress, and/or issues relating to the implementation of the specific goals during the time frame of the daily schedule.

DATE: 1/25/2014						
	Student's abbreviated IEP goals					
		Hand/hand eating w/fork	Sitting in chair	Communication board	Letters A-G	Numbers 1-9
Student's daily school	8:00-8:15 Breakfast	** Used minimal	** Was stiff this AM,	** Pointed at YES when asked if she		

schedule	8:00-8:15 Breakfast	force; able to eat eggs, tater tots with fork.	massages legs before seating.	wanted ketchup.		
	8:15-8:45 Bathroom			** Pointed to NO when asked to go to the bathroom; Took her anyway.		
	8:45-9:30 Morning circle		** Massaged prior to seating, but was able to sit for 30 mins. in chair.	** Pointed to and used appropriately "Yes, No, Thank –you"	** When asked pointed to B, G during letter song.	** When asked pointed to day of the month. 19
	9:30-10:00 Reading		** Used stander during this time.	** When asked questions on story, was able to point to Yes and No appropriately	** Using large letters was able to put in alphabetic order A-D	
	10:00-10:15 Recess			** Used Yes, No, and Thank-you during recess with her friends.		
	10:15-11:00 Math		** Was able to independently sit for 20 mins.-then used lifting straps for support. Susie was getting tired.	** Was quiet today. Did not use board when asked simple questions but shook her head Yes and No.		** When asked to identify numbers, pointed to 1, 2, 3, and 5 consistently. Had trouble with 4 and 6.
	11:00-11:30 Lunch	** With minimal support; used a fork for chicken	** Sat in chair during the entire lunch period while eating her	** When asked if she was hungry, pointed to Yes. Pointed to NEED today; through		

		nuggets and fruit cup.	meal.	series of questions, she needed Ranch Dressing.		
Accommodations: • Use of computer • Frequent breaks • Verbal/communication board responses						
NOTES: Student did well today; she was not very hungry as she ate 4-5 bites at each meal. She came to school with a parent note asking for a parent/teacher conference.						

Figure 3. *Documentation of response, progress, and/or issues.*

Over the span of half a day, the student was able to effectively and consistently address all of her IEP goals. This Matrix does create a prompt to the adults on her goals and offers the time slots in which implementation of these goals would work. As her day continues, this Matrix for the date of January 25, 2014 serves as documentation of her IEP goals. Teachers, paraprofessionals and related services can write notes, responses, and triumphs immediately as they occur. Over time the Matrix will serve as a progress monitoring system for students.

Conclusion

The ideas of an IEP Matrix outlined in this article are intended to provide a platform in addressing the development of teacher, paraprofessional, and related service collaboration that will ensure the delivery of individualized education goals and services. Although in some cases, the Matrix can be time consuming at the initial set-up process, once the Matrix has been designed for the individual student and is being used, the IEP team now essentially will have 180 days of documentation, a daily schedule with goals of student support which is ideal for substitutes, and a running record of student success.

The job and responsibilities of a special educator are endless. Although exciting and challenging at times, the focus should never derail from the progress of student achievement. It has been proven that individualized instruction ensures the constant collaboration, documentation, delivery and distribution of student goals. When an IEP team can address daily changes, responses, and progress of students, they can in turn easily adjust instruction, pace, and/or opportunities that will ensure student success (Cornelius, 2013). By using this information to guide instructional decisions and planning, teachers will be more knowledgeable and accountable for their students, make better and more accurate data-driven decisions, and have written documentation of student progress.

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FACILITATING COMPREHENSION FOR RURAL READERS THROUGH PERSONALIZED PLACE BASED CONNECTIONS

"For readers, there must be a million autobiographies, since we seem to find, in book after book, the traces of our lives."
- Stan Persky (as cited in Zimmermann & Hutchins, 2003, p. 43)

Finding traces of oneself in a book can be a transformational experience. The reader gets lost, loses track of time, and becomes immersed in the story. Books help us, as readers, to understand ourselves better. The reader begins to feel at home in the book. How readers make these powerful connections, however, is somewhat complex. Each reading experience is unique, and as Rosenblatt (1983) states, "the reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of a particular reader." Much of the reading experience is influenced by the reader's schema (which originate from prior experiences), and so in turn, each individual's schema varies with each individual reading experience.

One of the most influential aspects of the reader's schema is their experiences with place. Place is a critical component in identity formation (Raymond, Brown, & Weber, 2010). One way to utilize place knowledge is through *place based connections* (Waller & Barrentine, in review). Place based connections are made with text which are directly related to place, or an individual's local geography. When readers connect to their place, they increase the potential for deep connections, and for finding their own autobiography in a book. As a result, place can be a powerful tool in which to make rich personal connections with text. In this paper, we will delineate how readers make connections through place, as well as provide several effective literary sources for children which can facilitate place based connections.

Making Connections

Making connections is critical to the reading process because it helps readers comprehend deeply. Keene (2008) defines making connections as "the realization that newly learned concepts 'fit' with and extend existing background knowledge, and make sense in relation to what is already known; they affirm our existing knowledge" (p. 24). According to Miller (2002), "one of the most important things readers do when they read is make connections from what they already know to information in the text" (p. 57). Making connections, then, becomes an important component of the process of active meaning making, which enables students to "retain and reapply information" (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 72).

Readers' use of background knowledge is an important component in text comprehension (The National Research Council, 1998). Utilizing background knowledge through activating

schema is also how readers make connections with text (Miller, 2002). Meaning is created when readers intertwine background knowledge with new knowledge (Zimmermann & Hutchins, 2003). Readers make connections in a variety of ways, typically through text to self, text to text, or text to world connections. However, reading professionals such as Harvey and Goudvis (2000) suggest readers generally make text to self connections first.

Making Place Based Connections

The place based connections approach to comprehension originates from the concept of place based education. Sobel (2005) defines place based education as "the process of using local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies and other subjects across the curriculum" (p. 7). In order to facilitate effective personal connections, teachers need to recognize and use the prior experiences readers bring to the classroom. In the case of many rural readers, a strong connection to place and community is common (Barley & Beesley, 2007), making place based connections an effective reading strategy for rural readers in particular.

Often, schools take the stance in which the learner is in the position of standing *within* the world, rather than acting as an outside observer (Sobel, 2005). However, this type of educational experience devalues the experiences students bring to school—their schema. Dewey (1990) calls for teachers to use student experience as a basis for instruction; when they fail to do so, school becomes a waste. He states:

> The great waste in the school comes from the inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. That is the isolation of the school---its isolation from life" (p. 75).

Place based pedagogy not only makes school more relevant, but "increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens" (Sobel, 2005, p. 7).

Place Based Literature

One of the biggest challenges in scaffolding place based connections is the lack of curriculum that draws upon the experiences of rural readers, those which will yield strong place connections. Often, literature represents only mainstream cultures (Cox & Galda, 1990), and because rural communities are often marginalized (Donehower, 2007), rural students are often not fairly represented. Further, many commercial curricula appeal to a wide consumer base, often leaving out stories which are applicable to rural settings (Waller, 2011). Sobel (2005) states,

> Generic textbooks designed for the big markets of California and Texas provide the same homogenized, un-nutritious diet as all those fast-food places on the strip. State-mandated curriculum and high stakes tests put everyone on the same page

> on the same day and discourage an attention to significant nearby learning opportunities. (p. 5)

Woodrum (2004) suggests that differing definitions of community, between rural communities and urban communities, complicate the role of nationalized curriculum and high stakes testing. Edmonson and Shannon (2003) also assert that standardized curricula can be inappropriate for rural school districts because they "deny the importance of the local" (p. 32).

Teachers wishing to help facilitate connections with texts should have a well-developed library which includes literature that is representative of the student's place. The following list of books provides examples of high-quality literature that pays close attention to place:

1. ***The Places to Love,*** by Patricia McLaughlin (1994), is an excellent story to begin discussion of place based texts. This is a narrative text told from the perspective of Eli, who grows and passes down his love of the prairie to his sister, Sylvie. This books tells a story of how the prairie is engrained in the soul, beginning at birth. It is emotionally powerful and demonstrates a love of place, as depicted in the following excerpt:
   > What I saw first were all the places to love:
   > The valley.
   > The river falling down over rocks,
   > The hilltops where blueberries grew.
2. ***What You Know First***, by Patricia McLaughlin (1995), depicts the rural Wyoming setting beautifully, emotionally, and vividly. The story's simplistic plot tells a story of a young girl whose family is leaving their farm, and will be moving to the coast. The theme of leaving and staying is an important topic of discussion for rural children. Most impressive in this book is the strong attention to detail, further enhancing knowledge of place. In this except, notice how the narrator understands the very being of her favorite tree, and the pain she experiences in leaving it.
   > Or maybe I'll live in a tree.
   > The tall cottonwood that was small when Papa was small
   > But grew faster than he did.
   > Now has branches
   > And crooks where I can sit
   > To look over the rooftop,
   > Over the windmill,
   > Over the prairie
   > So big that I can't see
   > Where the land begins
   > Or where it ends.
3. When helping readers make place based connections, it is important to provide literature that is geographically relevant. Children familiar with prairie life will be able to make deep connections to ***If You're Not from the Prairie*** by David Bouchard (1998). It is an exquisite poem, and is written from a non-deficit perspective which places value on the experiences of students coming from the prairie. Bouchard effectively depicts both the beauty and challenges of prairie life. For example, he depicts the cold winters.
   > Still you're not from the prairie and yet know cold…you say you've been cold?

Do you know what to do to relieve so much pain
Of burning from deep down that drives you insane….
A child who's been cold on the prairie will know
"I've conquered the wind on a cold winter's day."
If you've conquered the cold, you don't know the cold. You've never been cold.

4. ***A Prairie Alphabet*** by Yvette Moore and Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet (1992) is another story about the prairie which can facilitate deep connections. It is an alphabet book which describes a diverse and interesting landscape of the prairie. For example, various types of agriculture, including both ranching and farming are portrayed. The characters are modern and accurate, although overwhelmingly white. The book does contain many local and rural connections in which rural students can relate. *A Prairie Alphabet* concludes with detailed factual information which elaborates on each concept in the book.
5. In ***The Mountain that Loved a Bird,*** by Alice McLerran (1985), "Joy" is the name of a bird who yearly visits "a mountain made of bare stone" who "stands along in the middle of the desert plain" (p. 2). When Joy tells the mountain she will not be able to stay because there is no food and water on the mountain, the mountain experiences deep pain, crying deep tears. These tears allow vegetation to grow. The story concludes with, "I am joy, and I have come to stay" (p. 30). The book provokes a strong connection to place in that Joy recognizes the sacredness of the mountain and the difficulty in leaving it.
6. ***Crow Call,*** by Lois Lowry (2009) evokes rich personal memories in this beautifully told memoir. In this story, Lowry narrates as a young girl who goes on a hunting trip with her father who has been at war. The description of the woodsy setting is exquisite and could be used to awaken personal memories of place. Here is an excerpt:

   Grass, frozen after it summer softness, crunches under our feet; the air is sharp and supremely clear, free from the floating pollens of summer, and our words seemed etched and breakable on the brittle stillness.
7. ***Up North at the Cabin*** by Marsha Wilson Chall (1992) tells the story of a young girl's summers at Lake Mill Lacs in central Minnesota. Chall's use of place is represented through metaphor. The book begins…

   Up North at the Cabin, I am a great grey dolphin. The lake is my ocean.
   Up North at the Cabin, I am a fearless voyager guiding our canoe through the wilderness.
   Up North at the Cabin, I am brave.

   Children can relate to the feeling of being somewhere that makes them *feel* their true selves. To further the sense of place, Chall's beautifully created oil paintings enhance the tone, and create a feeling of powerful memories of childhood.

This is just a small sampling of high quality literature with a strong sense of place. The students in the classroom will come from a diverse background, and it's important for a teacher to understand and respect the differences. Any of these stories can serve as an impetus for reading response in which students describe their special places. An individual's place schema may also be diverse. For example, when Rachael taught in Grand Forks, North Dakota, many students connected strongly to both stories of the prairie and to spending summers in the nearby lake country of Minnesota. Another example of diverse place connections is where we both now

live in Billings, Montana. Because the city is a juxtaposition between rolling prairie and the Rocky Mountains, students can easily connect with both places.

Facilitating Instruction to Help Students Connect with Text

Although choosing high quality and personalized literature is an important ingredient in facilitating connections, the teacher also plays an important role in assisting children to make connections with text. The gradual release of responsibility model is an effective means to helping reach this end (Miller, 2002). In this model, teachers first model their own connections with text, and can draw upon their own experiences with place. For instance, as Montanans, we can model stories of cold winters while reading *If You're Not from the Prairie.* Next, students make connections with assistance from the teacher, which could be facilitated through a whole class discussion or during a guided reading group. Finally, students independently make the place based connection.

Another effective strategy for making connection to place is intentionally build and activate background knowledge prior to the reading event, as recommended by Harvey and Goudvis (2000). For example, a lesson observed which was taught on a cold winter day in a small Midwestern community, and is discussed in Waller (2011) and Waller and Barrentine (in review), focused on a story which took place in Iceland. The climate in Iceland was much like the climate in this small community. In order to make an effective place connection, the teacher can draw upon student knowledge of the cold winter day and then help the students to connect their own knowledge of place to the new place being studied.

The use of basal and commercial curricula is often not a popular choice in today's classrooms. For teachers who are mandated to use commercial curriculum that may not as easily evoke connections with place, we recommend using the curriculum flexibly (Waller & Barrentine, in review). By doing so, teachers can help students draw upon critical background knowledge to make connections to literature that are more remote from their own surroundings.

Finally, by putting place at the center of instruction, students will build and enrich their background knowledge of place. By studying local geography and history, making place connections will be more seamless.

Concluding Thoughts

Place based connections can be a powerful tool in helping children from rural communities find relevance in what they read, thus increasing comprehension. By drawing on the known, the reading experience becomes richer. Further, by making connections with place, rural readers begin to see value in their own lives as residents in sometimes isolated places. By doing so, they become empowered individuals to make a difference in their community, thus increasing the sustainability and vibrancy of small town and agricultural America.

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IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN RURAL SCHOOLS: THE MONTANA AUTISM EDUCATION PROJECT

In 2009, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) created the Montana Autism Education Project (MAEP) to address the educational needs of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This sub-division of the State Education Agency (SEA) consisted of one full-time employee and another .4 FTE for part-time consultants to provide autism training services to over 90 school districts across the state, including hundreds of teachers, paraeducators and speech therapists in rural schools. The overwhelming nature of the task has not stood in the way of progress for the MAEP.

Students diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) display significant challenges in social-communication or social interaction deficits and restricted, repetitive behaviors and interests (Lord & Jones, 2012). The number of students clinically diagnosed with ASD has risen dramatically to 1 in 50 children or 2 percent of the total population (Centers for

Disease Control, 2013).

According to OPI Child Count Data, the number of students with autism across Montana increased from 642 in 2009, to 950 in 2012 representing a 48% increase over the first three years of the MAEP. These students were located around the state and their numbers were similar to the general education population. However, higher instances of students with autism were found in metro areas like Billings and Missoula (OPI, 2013). Other authors have suggested that metro areas have higher concentrations of children with autism due to their proximity to seemingly higher quality services (Pennington, Horn, & Berrong, 2009; White, 2012).

Montana is the fourth largest state in the U.S. in square area but is one of the lowest in population density at fewer than seven persons per square mile. Vast uninhabited areas create instances of rural isolation. In addition, when considering travel during the winter months (November to March), ice and snow storms combine with dangerously windy conditions to create extremely hazardous roads.

Since its inception, MAEP activities have built upon existing networks to overcome training difficulties including hazardous weather and remote travel challenges to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in evidence-based practices for students with autism.

The goals of the MAEP involved (a) inter-agency collaboration, (b) on-site technical assistance, (c) sustainable groups of trainers, and (d) video training for teachers. Subsequently, a large part of the project's effort has been spent on training, technical assistance and outreach.

Partnerships

At the start, MAEP activities focused on building relationships with agencies and forging partnerships to improve educational programs for students with ASD. These agencies included *Parents Let's Unite for Kids* (PLUK), *Disability Rights Montana,* school district administrators, Part C providers, Health & Human Services agency administrators, Institutions of Higher Education, and regional education organizations. Regular communication to these organizations occurs via a Web blog at http://opi.mt.gov/users/dougdoty/blog/. The MAEP blog provides readers with pertinent information organized by recent posts and searchable through twenty filters such as Adulthood, iPad, Training, Treatment, and Webinars.

On-site Technical Assistance

Six part-time consultants were hired to provide on-site technical assistance to schools in all regions of the state. These technical assistance consultants came from a variety of backgrounds and included retired special educators, speech therapists, psychologists, and

college-level faculty.

The number of schools visited by MAEP staff increased from year 1 (23 schools visited) to year 3 (43 schools visited), the annual totals represented an 87% increase (Figure 1). Rural schools benefitted greatly from technical assistance. For example, in years 2 and 3, schools designated as rural were visited more often than metro-area schools and these visits increased from seven in year 1 to eighteen visits in year 3, representing a more than 150% increase.[1]

[1] Rural codes used in this evaluation were determined by the U.S. Census and used in classifying schools in the *Journal of Research in Rural Education* (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Beeson & Strange, 2003).

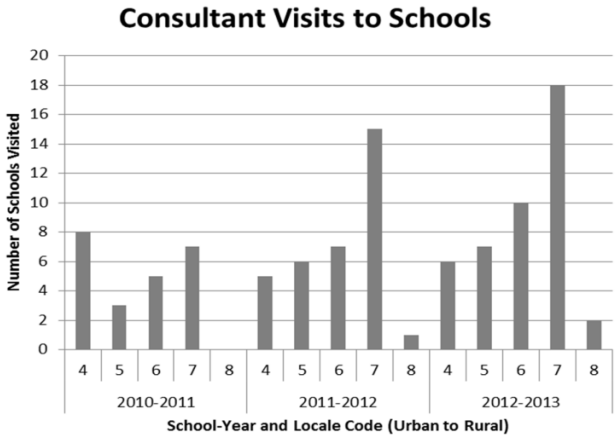

Figure 1. Consultant visits to schools. Locale Codes represented here were categorized as follows: (4) a mid-size city; (5) population of 25,000 or more and defined as urban; (6) a population of at least 2,500 but less than 25,000; (7) Place not within a CMSA or MSA and designated as rural; and (8) Place within a CMSA or MSA designated as rural.

Sustainable Groups of Trainers

MAEP technical assistance personnel became part of training 'teams' which developed and presented workshops on the following topics: Autism Spectrum Disorders (general information), Autism for Administrators, Asperger's Syndrome, Behavior Interventions for Students with Autism, iPad Apps for Students with ASD, and Functional Behavior Assessment. These workshops were held in a variety of locations and generally 1-2 days in length.

On some occasions, MAEP provided 'scholarships' for teachers to attend trainings offered by non-MAEP personnel (e.g., Picture Exchange Communication System or PECS Basic and Advanced, Video Modeling). For these workshops, MAEP paid for registration, and in some instances, travel expenses. Presentations designated as 'outreach' were made by the project coordinator and some MAEP providers at regional and state conferences and were usually limited to breakout sessions of 1-2 hours in length.

Since the start of the project, 102 trainings have been provided where the MAEP led a presentation, sponsored a presentation, or provided scholarships for teachers to attend workshops.

Video Training for Teachers

During this evaluation period, MAEP contracted with two online providers, Rethink Autism (RA) from the Rethink First Corporation (2013) and Advanced Training Solutions (ATS,

2013), to train teachers and paraeducators in best practices for students with ASD. In 2011-12, 10 accounts for RA were offered to schools with five of them being carried over to the following year. In 2012-13, MAEP contracted for 26 schools to receive ATS online accounts. In the Fall 2013 the online training group included, 250 people from 90 districts. To date, they have completed 4,000 hours of the online ATS training. Schools that were considered rural (according to locale codes) were twice as likely to request online video training as their counterparts in towns and small cities.

The Autism Training Solutions video library contained over 2,000 clips covering more than 40 hours of training and instruction. In regard to Evidence Based Practices (EBPs), the following videos were aligned with the National Autism Center's (2009) list of EBPs: Reinforcement, Behavior Reduction, Antecedent Interventions, Instructional Control, Consequence Interventions, Functions of Behavior, Verbal Behavior, Mand Training, Intensive Trial Teaching, Discrete Trial Teaching, Naturalistic Teaching, Imitation / Mimetic behavior, Teaching Verbal Imitation / Echoics, Receptive Language / Listener Responding. Some of these topics were also determined to be EBPs by the National Professional Development Center on ASD (Odom, Collet-Klingenberg, Rogers, & Hatton, 2010).

In 2012-2013, fifty-one survey respondents reported overall satisfaction with ATS and indicated a satisfactory or better level of confidence in implementing evidence-based practice for children with ASD.

Future Directions

During the three years from 2010 to 2013, MAEP has provided 100 schools with technical assistance visits, 103 workshops/presentations, 15 annual accounts for online technical training/consultation through RA, and 51 online video training accounts through ATS.

A major limitation in this program evaluation was apparent in the self-reporting of data by participants in autism training whether it was offered through online technology, face-to-face workshops, or technical assistance visits. However, limited resources of MAEP must be acknowledged. MAEP is a state-wide project with one full-time employee and six short-term (part-time) consultants. It was neither feasible nor reasonable for MAEP to measure fidelity to EBPs. However, there may be opportunities to conduct 'spot-checks' or otherwise measure autism programs for EBPs during scheduled visits to schools for other purposes such as compliance monitoring.

In the future, MAEP activities will be assessed and evaluated in a more systematic fashion as they occur. The benefits and challenges faced by MAEP will be monitored by the project coordinator as well as the SEA. A considerable portion of ongoing outreach will be made

to rural and tribal areas.

Montana remains a vast, expansive state with pockets of isolated schools and districts, where differences in culture and language play a significant role in professional development needs. New and updated strategies in the educational programming of children with ASDs has become possible through the use of traveling consultants, online training, and outreach efforts from the MAEP.

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SCALING UP IN RURAL SCHOOLS USING POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

Why PBIS?

Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities, especially emotional and behavioral disabilities, can be made more effective by "providing incentives for whole-school approaches…positive behavior interventions and supports, and early intervening services" (www.pbis.org). Reaching as far back as 1972, Congress and the Courts have defended the rights of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities to be educated with their peers. During the 1990s, as schools moved away from zero tolerance policies toward policies that promoted positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), subsequent reauthorizations of IDEA also supported this policy shift. In 1997, IDEA was amended to require schools to formally complete a behavior intervention plan (BIP) based on a functional behavior assessment (FBA) for each student with a disability who has significant behavior problems or whose behavior impedes his or her learning (Killu, Weber, Derby, & Barretto, 2006). Reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 further required the BIP to be based on the Individual Education Plan (IEP), yet noted that many states were struggling with this effort. Thus, these amendments illustrate Congress's recognition of the potential of PBIS to prevent exclusion and improve educational results. Congress provided additional support for PBIS by authorizing states to use professional development funding to provide training in PBIS methods. Congress also provided for competitive grant funds to ensure appropriate in-service professional development in PBIS for school-wide systems and professional development for the entire spectrum of school personnel, noting that in order to implement PBIS with fidelity, knowledge of PBIS methods and discussion regarding specific school-district data and practices are necessary.

Although there have been advances in approaches and techniques for behavior management, schools still face significant road-blocks such as lack of time, lack of resources, lack of support, competing discipline philosophies or theories, and lack of knowledge about assessment and intervention planning. According to Killu et al. (2006), little or inconsistent dissemination of resources, lack of uniform practices – presumed to be the result of a lack of basic knowledge about PBIS, and a less-than comprehensive approach used by states to design

and implement BIPs – have led to reactive, rather than preventative behavior management practices.

Systems Change

Our nation's educators are faced with increasingly difficult tasks and responsibilities as the student population becomes more and more diverse and the performance standards become more and more rigorous. As a result of poverty, changes in family structure, community disorganization, drugs, alcohol, and violence, students are at greater risk than ever before of developing emotional and behavioral problems. The increase in the number of students with emotional stressors necessitates the need for policies and procedures that address social, emotional, and physical health needs in schools (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). All too often, those with stakes in student success feel overwhelmed and challenged by students who do not meet the behavioral and academic expectations schools deem necessary to keep students safe and engaged. "The task of addressing emotional and behavioral problems within school settings is complex" (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010, p. 85). Behavior problems result in loss of productive instruction and learning time for the student engaged in the behavior, as well as his/her classmates.

Clearly, the most effective method of reducing disruptive behavior is prevention. Educators often, though, use reactive disciplinary measures as the primary means of addressing problem behavior in schools. If we are to prevent or respond appropriately to troublesome behavior, we must first determine what constitutes disruptive behavior and examine the contexts under which it occurs. For the purposes of our program, we defined disruptive behavior as any behavior that interferes with the teaching, learning, or safety of oneself or others. These behaviors can be viewed on a spectrum that ranges from less severe activities, such as sleeping in class, tardiness, unpreparedness, and inattention, to more significant actions, such as refusal to comply with requests, verbal or physical violence, threats, and destruction of property. While some of the less severe behaviors are tolerated or managed by some faculty members, others may not tolerate even the most minor infractions. This continuum of responses, in conjunction with inconsistency, presents a variety of challenges for educators, students, and families. These challenges become increasingly complex for students with emotional or other mental health complications.

Nationally, about 1-7% of students have significant emotional and behavioral problems, while roughly 5 – 15% of students are at-risk of developing emotional and/or behavioral problems (Eber, 2001). According to Eber, Lewis-Palmer, and Pacchiano (2002), "more positive and effective school environments can serve to prevent the development of severe behavioral problems, as well as contribute to the success of interventions for those students with the most comprehensive needs" (p. 181). It is not feasible to assume that schools can do this work alone – schools need help. Research has indicated that solid, positive connections among schools, community agencies, and families is related to higher school functioning and achievement.

Wraparound Services

Research has also indicated that a wraparound approach to service planning and delivery for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties is effective (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010). Systematic implementation of wraparound – a strength-based process that blends natural supports with services from multiple service providers - increases the likelihood that students will receive appropriate supports and interventions (Eber, 2001). The process, according to Eber (2001), "focuses on improving options and outcomes for students with or at-risk of emotional/behavioral problems by building collaborative teams around students, their families, and teachers" (p. 2). The essential elements of the wraparound process include commitment to unconditional support of the student, as well as his/her family, other caregivers, and teachers, thoughtful interventions with clearly articulated outcomes, and a balance of natural supports and traditional interventions. As such, the wraparound philosophy has begun to become integrated into existing structures in human services, juvenile justice, and education sectors (Eber, 2001). School components of wraparound align very well with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports since effective behavioral and academic interventions are a critical part of inclusive wraparound programs for these students (Eber, 2001).

Constructive support systems and healthy relationships are positive assets that are especially important for youth with emotional/behavioral challenges. While schools are being encouraged to use more effective disciplinary approaches for all students, for a large number of these children, their needs are not met through the universal interventions embedded in the PBIS model. "By using a wraparound approach at the targeted intervention level, teams can ensure that family, student, and teacher voices guide the interventions" (Eber, 2001, p. 5). This integration of the principles of wraparound with the model of positive behavioral interventions and supports aims to build school capacity for addressing emotional/behavioral problems and scales up the level of interventions available to students school-wide.

University partnership with Chautauqua Tapestry. For the last four years State University of New York (SUNY) at Fredonia's College of Education (COE), located in Chautauqua County, has had an active P-16 Leadership Team consisting of COE faculty and administrators, P-12 educators, principals, superintendents, and professionals from local related service agencies. This partnership was formed to develop short and long term collaborative initiatives to improve local public schools and enhance the university's capacity to produce high quality beginning educators and school leaders. Chautauqua County is a rural county serving several small rural school districts and two urban school districts. The Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene participated in the P-16 Leadership Team.

In Fall, 2008 the Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene received a six million dollar grant to enter into a six-year co-operative agreement with the Child and Family Services Branch, Center for Mental Health Services, in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration. The program, entitled The Tapestry of Chautauqua Initiative (henceforth referred to as Tapestry or Chautauqua Tapestry), focuses on weaving together a rural system of care that was culturally and linguistically competent, family-driven, and youth-guided. This system of care aims to transform service delivery for children and families, with particular attention to students with serious emotional disturbances (SED). Even more specific, the program targets Hispanic and African American children with SED and their families. While the project had many goals, ensuring that a team-approach throughout all service systems was emphasized.

After a planning year, Tapestry decided that a critical component of a comprehensive system of care would be to increase the capacity of the participating schools to serve their students with SED. As faculty with expertise in PBIS, the two authors offered to design and implement PBIS professional development to teams of educators from each of nine school districts participating in Tapestry activities. School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a systems change process for an entire school or district. This process involves purposeful and direct teaching behavioral expectations just as a district generally approaches teaching core curriculum. During summer 2011 the authors implemented *Camp PBIS* - a week-long training designed to prepare a team of approximately five representative members of each participating school/district to identify behavioral expectations and to create a plan for implementation that suit the needs of their school/district. In addition, ongoing guidance in the form of on-site coaching during the 2011-2012 school year was provided to each participating team. Camp PBIS, Part 2, which focused on team-building, year-one reflection, embedding current mandates, and the wrap-around process, was implemented during summer 2012. Ongoing on-site coaching was provided during the 2012-2013 school year as well.

Brocton Central School District. Of the nine participating building/district teams, one team emerged as the most motivated and successful in terms of generating ideas and implementing PBIS. This team is from Brocton Middle/High School, which houses grades 6 – 12, with shared staff and one administrator. Approximately 60 miles south of Buffalo and 45 miles northeast of Erie, PA. BCS attended the first Camp PBIS with their administrator and one teacher volunteer. It should be noted that at the time of Camp I BCS teachers were in the process of negotiating a new contract and their current contract stipulated no additional compensation or reimbursement for attending training or workshops in the summer. BCS presented a summary of Camp I during opening day in-services for teachers for the 2011-2012 school year. In addition to the PBIS overview, the principal also stated, “I believed in it, I’m committed to it, and we need a PBIS team to work on making positive things happen for our students” (J. Delcamp, personal communication, January, 2013). This administrator's dedication and enthusiasm would become the hallmark for BCS and PBIS development over the next two years.

One of the main tenets of a PBIS team is outlining team members’ roles and responsibilities as well as developing a mission statement. The BCS team was quick to act on both tenets and developed a mission statement focused on developing and implementing positive behavior reinforcement strategies that promote academic and social success through a variety of internal and external support structures. In addition, team members have commented that they enjoy participating in PBIS because it is a productive team and because they have found that it helps them to be more positive as well, all while keeping the best interest of students as the central focus.

BCS readily began implementing several initiatives that proved to be successful for students and faculty. The authors attended several BCS PBIS team meetings, acting as coaches and providing research-based resources and other requested information for BCS.

Results

The BCS PBIS team represents an excellent model of collaboration and PBIS based initiatives that support school wide positive intervention supports. Through collaboration and commitment, transformative change in the school's climate and culture was achieved. The PBIS team created an accommodating, inclusive, and safe environment where student strengths are emphasized and celebrated. School-wide, there are high expectations for student academic and behavioral success, with ongoing progress monitoring and supportive programming. As a result, student attendance has improved and disciplinary referrals have decreased.

Implications

Although the bulk of this research focuses on one example of successful school-wide PBIS action planning and implementation, the implications are far-reaching. The school that was highlighted has very limited financial resources, yet through teamwork and genuine concern about improving the school's climate and culture, the PBIS team developed creative and attainable activities and initiatives that had a positive impact on students, faculty, and staff. For many schools, however, this may seem an insurmountable task, especially with the current emphasis on common core learning standards and teacher accountability. Often, educators feel there is little time during the school-day for anything other than instruction strictly focused on state and federally-mandated standards, even though research indicates that positive school climate and culture and positive behavioral interventions and supports provide the necessary foundation learning and academic success. In addition, many states have specified neither what type of data should be documented, nor what the reporting requirements will be in regard to PBIS.

Another limitation of this study is that it focuses primarily on high-school students, with some middle school incorporation. Staff commitment and implementation would likely look quite different at the elementary level, which could have significant impacts on student buy-in, adherence to, and ultimate success of the PBIS approach. Alternately, elementary students may be more willing to participate in activities and more motivated to earn recognition and praise from adults (Benner, Nelson, Ralston, & Sanders, 2012). In addition, elementary curricular and performance standards may allow more time for instruction around character building and conflict resolution. Also, with recent Dignity for All Students (DASA) legislation, school district codes of conduct must include policies on harassment, discrimination, and bullying. The Dignity Act impacts curriculum as well. Educators in grades K-12 will are now required to teach students civility and social skills to encourage a welcoming and positive school environment. Positive Behavioral Interventions and supports provide a logical framework for the creation and/or maintenance of a positive school climate and culture.

Conclusion

Research indicates that preventing disruptive behavior, rather than reacting to it, provides the most efficient and effective system of behavior management, and serves to provide a solid foundation for safe and healthy schools. Through the examination of one school's PBIS implementation, we have shown that PBIS can be an effective tool to bring together teachers and students, build on community and school wide positive behavior supports systems, and demonstrate efficacy of team building and student empowerment.

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A longer version of this manuscript was submitted to Rural Special Education Quarterly (October 10, 2013) for review for publication.

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RTI PARTNERSHIPS: SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Introduction to the Challenge

In the prologue to his introductory textbook, Heward (2009) stated that "teachers should not wait patiently for an exceptional student to learn" due to inherent attributes or faulty processes (p. 4). He encouraged the teacher to select evidence-based practices, measure student performance, and modify methods as needed to teach students. Although this may be the ultimate goal, teachers of students with special needs face significant challenges with this task. Today, special educators must adapt to a changing job description and also collaborate effectively with the many stakeholders involved in the optional Response to Intervention (RTI) Model of addressing individual needs. Through the regular education initiative (REI), the role of the resource teacher has evolved into more of a consultative role, with some schools even adopting a co-teaching model (Bender, 2008). Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen (2009) have indicated that even with classroom support it may be difficult for general education teachers to teach the demanding instruction needed for the exceptional student to excel. Additionally, administrators usually make decisions concerning these changes without direct input from experienced, special educators or paraeducators who are specially trained and have gained experience by working directly with students. School principals may face another growing area of concern, the constant need to reduce the percentage of students with disabilities utilizing accommodations on state or district assessments (Quenemoen, Thurlow, Moen, Thompson, & Blount Morse, 2003). Also, the provision of incentives for school districts to limit identification of students for special education services can present an additional challenge (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Literature Review

While there are both advantages and disadvantages to the RTI Model which was implemented primarily to encourage less identification of special education students, research results have indicated that "RtI does not have a significant impact on the number of referrals made for special education services year to year" (Hare, 2008, p. 2). The RTI Model, according to Kame'enui (2007), is "actually a variation of 'old' ideas, constructs, approaches, and models" that is "underdetermined empirically" (p. 6). As Kame'enui (2007) has stated, RTI is a construct that "will require careful federal guidance and direction that is forthcoming, particularly in the due process procedures invoked in identifying [or failing to identify] students who may have a learning disability" (p. 7). Though the process of RTI is seen by some educators as a preventive model that will enable earlier and more valid means of identification, it is seen by others to

present the opposite result for students with a dual diagnosis (McKenzie, 2010). Special educators, now serving as intervention specialists, must embrace the new methods of service delivery for students utilizing the RTI Model without evidence of positive student results.

Currently, states are utilizing three to six RTI tiers of intervention in their schools, with three tiers being employed more frequently. These services may be of help to some students, but Heward (2009) added that "Compared to other students with disabilities, students with severe disabilities learn at a slower rate, require more instructional trials to learn a given skill, learn a fewer number of skills, and have extreme difficulty learning abstract concepts" (p. 457). Although special education students should usually receive all three tiers of intervention, they are sometimes denied access to even Tier Three, the intervention that should be provided by or supervised by a trained special educator. Although Bender (2008) stated that Tier One is the first step where schools usually attempt to remediate potential difficulties, all three tiers can be provided simultaneously to serve students with an individualized education program (IEP) when the special educator appropriately collaborates with the RTI team to modify instruction. This modification of instruction can occur during Tier One and/or Tier Two instruction in the general education classroom. Collaboration of general education teachers with special education teachers should begin at least at Tier-Two instruction, or sooner if the student has an IEP. Such instruction should be, as recommended by Fuchs and Fuchs (2006), provided by either a special education teacher or paraeducator supervised by a special educator in a group of no more than two to three students. If administrators, interventionists, or specialists form large groups this presents challenges to special educators, limiting their ability to appropriately serve students with special needs.

RTI, according to Batsche (2004), involves data collection and is the mechanism by which to screen children in order to decide which children may have a learning disability. This process is now being implemented in a number of states to replace the forty year old discrepancy model. Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) does indicate that a local educational agency may utilize the RTI Model as part of the intervention process, legal protections and ramifications concerning the IDEA requirements of individualized assessments are often overlooked during the evaluation process. As stated by Kame'enui (2007), "Use of RTI as a potential substitute component of LD{learning disabilities} in federal law is no small matter" (p. 6).

Now the general education teachers, interventionists, and administrators will be faced with the challenge of providing the due process protections of the law and ensuring that students with disabilities receive the appropriate identification, placement, and services required under the IDEA, sometimes without the close scrutiny provided in the past by special education administrators and staff. As Kovaleski (2007) stated, the IDEA (2006) clearly places the burden on the school principal of ensuring that school-wide programs, core curriculum, and supplemental interventions are implemented with fidelity, and that the provision of additional preservice and inservice training is provided to ensure proper monitoring and assessing of student progress. Intervention specialists, without special education background and training may be responsible for scheduling students, forming groups for instructional purposes, and determining what assessments will be utilized.

Ball and Green (2014) mentioned that the special services director looking to improve inclusion opportunities for high school students with disabilities must consider the capacity and capabilities of the building principal. The special education directors for school districts are responsible for provide building principals with training to develop an understanding of special education laws, research-based practices related to special education, and the challenges faced by special education teachers. In order for teachers in general education classes to help students with disabilities close the achievement gap with their non-disabled peers, they need to collaborate with special education teachers (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Without significant collaboration with trained personnel who understand the needs of students with disabilities, litigation will be forthcoming since the RTI assessment process does not replace the need for a comprehensive evaluation, not just RTI assessment data, and instruction provided by qualified personnel (IDEA Regulations, 2006, p. 46, 648).

Many schools use the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to assess the success of reading programs. DIBELS is a comprehensive reading assessment system that is widely used in elementary schools across the country (Hoffman, Jenkins, Dunlap, & Carroll, 2009). Ardoin and Christ (2009) suggested that consideration should be given to using other tests in place of, for example the DIBELS reading assessment instrument, particularly in the case of students with disabilities because they may have a higher measure of validity for individual student monitoring. Of further concern is the lack of additional Curriculum Based Measures (CBM) used to make instructional and placement decisions for individual students. CBM progress monitoring was not originally designed for use with students with disabilities and should only be used in conjunction with other measures.

Measurement of academic growth through the RTI Model is a major issue since the IDEA is structured for individual development of students instead of the NCLB subgroup focus. Hulett (2009) mentioned in the epilogue to his textbook that schools may be returning to tracking since NCLB rules fail to include assessment protocols that measure status and growth. He stated that "NCLB focuses on achievement for subgroups of students in a given school, whereas the IDEA is structured for the individual development of each student participating" (p. 196). Zirkel (2007) also noted that services under the IDEA are not limited to just scientifically based instruction, broadening this to include other types of support for students with special needs, including the doubling and tripling of service time. Additionally, teaching subjects that have been eliminated, such as formal instruction for spelling proficiency, may need to be provided to some students with special needs who are performing significantly below grade level.

A few potential conflicts also exist between No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA/IDEIA, 2004) in the area of free appropriate public education (FAPE). The *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* (1982) established the basic floor of opportunity to an education, not maximizing benefit as appears to be the goal with NCLB on assessment and annual yearly progress requirements. In *Polk v. Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit 16* (1988/1989), the court interpreted the *Rowley* decision to mean that the anticipated benefit must be meaningful and more than minimal progress must be noted in order for the benefit to be deemed adequate. In another decision, *Kirby v. Cabell County Board of Education* (2006), the plaintiff in the case thought that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) imposed certain obligations on

school districts; however, the court rejected this claim, stating that no such language was used to place additional obligations on how a student's IEP is developed or progress assessed (Daniel, 2008). Also, even though the law indicates the need to provide accommodations and modifications to students with special needs not just during assessments but also daily during classroom instruction, this does not often take place. Decisions regarding accommodations must be made on an individual basis, student-by-student since there is still no standard definition of what is considered to be adequate (Hulett, 2009; Luke & Schwartz, 2010).

Sugai and Horner (2009) pointed out that there is little evidence supporting the use of RTI in what they call "high stakes decisions for students" (p. 226). Even the potential use of assessments conducted in the general education classroom that are not always formal in nature, as still required by the law, may lead to legal issues. Schedules that are modified by administrators in some states to address RTI rotations may not honor documented IEP service times. Changing IEPs to fit RTI schedules is not always appropriate for student service delivery needs, especially since a regular schedule is usually more effective for students with difficulties with attention and memory issues. Bender (2004) discussed the fact that children with learning disabilities frequently display a lack of attention or an inability to focus, needing specific help. Heward (2009) added that "Although research has clearly shown the social benefits of general education class participation for students with disabilities, as well as for their peers without disabilities, the effects of full inclusion on the attainment of IEP goals are not yet known" (Heward, 2009, p. 485). Small group settings, pull-outs with one teacher, and personalized lessons based on a student's improvement may be more helpful to students. Bender concluded that perhaps helping students reach at grade-level capabilities should be the main concern of the administration, not inclusion. Though many of these students can be successfully educated in the general education classroom, there are still such challenges as limited resources, intensity and inconsistency of student behavior, teacher attitudes and lack of training, and limitations to curriculum that make inclusion difficult for some students (Muscott, 1996). Attention to future case law will be of interest to special educators as this intervention model is analyzed by the courts.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to determine whether legal issues related to the IDEA are being addressed when the RTI Model of service delivery is implemented for students with disabilities. With this purpose in mind, the following hypothesis was formulated: When the RTI Model of service delivery is properly implemented, the major principles of the IDEA are difficult to honor.

To obtain information about the hypothesis, a questionnaire was developed using closed-ended questions so response alternatives were the same for all respondents. To allow participants to express themselves, a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was utilized. The Response to Intervention (RTI) Questionnaire included the following directions and questions:

Directions: Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please read the questions, and then type an "X" in the appropriate boxes below. After completion, e-mail the questionnaire to:

Guide: Tier One = gen. ed. services; Tier Two = gen. ed., remediation services; Tier Three = special ed. services; IDEA/IDEIA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; DK = Do Not Know.

Questions:

1. School administrators evaluate special education teachers.
2. School administrators (not the Director of Special Education or the Supervisor of Special Education) observe special education teachers and visit classrooms on a regular basis.
3. A student with an IEP always begins RTI services at Tier One.
4. All students qualifying for RTI services receive the same amount of time (usually 30 to 90 min.).
5. Students with an IEP receive RTI services using the same curricula and/or reading or math programs as other students.
6. Students with an IEP receive RTI Tier Two and/or Tier Three services from someone other than the special education teacher.
7. Administrators and interventionists make decisions concerning the RTI service delivery model for a student with an IEP.
8. Reading specialists or interventionists decide on the amount of RTI time a student with special needs should receive without regard to the IEP.
9. School administrators decide on the reduction of the accommodations and modifications for assessments that will be provided to students with IEPs.
10. RTI should take precedence over the IDEA when schools make procedural decisions.

After the questionnaire was refined, an Internet survey was developed with an e-mail invitation for participation. All administrators of special education in the states of North Carolina and Colorado as well as all state directors of special education in the United States were invited to participate. Results were analyzed from the Internet survey and tabulated utilizing a computerized analysis program.

Preliminary Results

Information is in the process of being collected and analyzed, with final results to be completed by January 2015. With the preliminary results analyzed, it is clear that school administrators usually evaluate special education teachers without support from supervisors or directors of special education. Special education students begin services at Tier One and often receive the same amount of time as general education students without regard to the required service time indicated on the IEP. School personnel other than special education teachers provided services to students for Tier One, Tier Two, and often Tier Three services without

special training and experience. Decisions concerning the method of RTI service delivery were made mainly by administrators and interventionists without consultation with special educators. Usually the same curriculum for reading or math programs was utilized with groups that included students with IEPs, ignoring individual needs. School administrators decided on the reduction of the accommodations and modifications for assessments that were provided to students without regard to the IEP. The RTI Model of service delivery often took precedence over the IDEA when schools made procedural decisions, indicating that the major principles of the IDEA were not honored and legal issues were not properly considered.

Recommendations

Since the data collection is not complete, the following preliminary recommendations were developed to provide information to schools preparing to implement an RTI Model of service delivery for students with special needs:

1. The RTI Model should be accepted cautiously since it is the application of an older model of service delivery, needing further research.
2. Changing to the RTI Model deserves serious consideration.
3. Consideration of due process procedures and other legal issues, monitored by specialists with special education background, is required to address any legal issues.
4. Special educators should be considered as true interventionists with valuable expertise to contribute to any decision process.
5. Students may need to enter the delivery system at Tier One, Tier Two, or Tier Three for appropriate IEP services.
6. Tier Three instruction times should vary, depending on individual student needs.
7. Tier Three service delivery groups should be small in size, consisting of approximately two to four students.
8. The addition of general education students to Tier Three groups should be determined by the special educator providing services to the students with IEPs.
9. Decisions concerning alternative curricula and/or programs for students with IEPs should be made mainly by the special education teacher or in consultation with that teacher.
10. A combination of the RTI model and Discrepancy Model might be the best approach to identification of students with disabilities, especially since formal assessments are still a requirement of the law.
11. Services under the IDEA should not be limited to just scientifically-based instruction, broadening this to include other types of support including the doubling and tripling of service time.
12. Instruction should sometimes be provided on a one-to-one basis, especially for students with moderate to severe needs.

Further Research

Further research is needed to determine how to encourage reading specialists, curriculum interventionists, coaches, and administrators to appropriately collaborate with special educators when planning schedules, selecting alternative programs, and addressing the special needs of students with individualized education programs. Of special concern is the need to address the inclusion of students with moderate to severe needs who are now often included in general

education classrooms under the RTI Model without the support services needed for educational success. Additionally, paraeducators serving students are often not provided with the training needed for student success. Since special education teachers are expected to fulfill the responsibilities of not only the inclusive teacher but also the moderate to severe needs teacher who must supervise paraeducators, issues surrounding burnout of teachers who are assuming these additional RTI responsibilities needs to be studied.

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STAYING CONNECTED! PROMOTING CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL SKILLS USING DIGITAL SOCIAL STORIES FOR PLAY, FRIENDSHIP, AND LEARNING

Importance of Social Skills for All Young Children

Lacking the ability to initiate and maintain social interactions with peers, children may not be meaningfully involved as participating members in several of the learning opportunities in rural early childhood special education classrooms. Consequently, if teachers have expectations for improved social development for all young children, including children with disabilities it is critical to (a) first identify the citizenship social behaviors needing support and (b) secondly, develop highly engaging opportunities within the classroom to increase peer competence, citizenship, and leadership with peers.

Social skills are learned behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Social skills have significant influence on children's development relating to behaviors, and presence of social relationships (McClelland, Morrison, & Holmes, 2000; Odom, McConnell, & Brown, 2007; Piaget, 1926; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). Specifically, social skills includes behaviors that impact peer acceptance, school adjustment, and interpersonal dynamics (Brown, Odom, McConnell, & Rathel, 2007; McClelland & Morrison, 2003). Furthermore, children who have sufficient social skills to initiate in turn taking, respond to peers, and solve conflicts with peers are more likely to be successful in forming peer friendships (Buysse et al., 2008; Rheams & Bain, 2005). Social skills support children to become confident and successful citizens, capable of meaningful contributions to their families, schools, and communities.

When teachers are asked to identify important positive outcomes for children as they enter school, they tend to focus on the social and emotional aspects of school readiness rather than preacademic skills (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). Research indicates young children who can listen, take turns, pay attention, and get along with peers are likely to be successful in reading, mathematics, and other academic areas (Fox & Harper-Lentini, 2006; Ladd, 2007; Quesenberry, & Doubet, 2006). For example, turn taking, initiating relationships, requesting help, giving compliments, and using appropriate manners such as 'please' and 'thank you' all are social skills children use with peers at home, school, and in the community.

While it may be easy for children without disabilities to develop peer friendships and maintain social interactions with their peers, for children with disabilities it is harder to be successful in forming new friendships and engage in many learning opportunities found within the typical early childhood classroom. Consequently, if teachers have expectations for improved

positive outcomes for all children in social development, it is important children without disabilities are given guidance and opportunities in the classroom to increase citizenship social skills.

Citizenship Social Skills

Citizenship social skills focus on social skills related directly to interpersonal interactions. Citizenship social skills are established in principles related to social interactions; including, the initiation and response interchange required for engagement with others (Howes, Droege, & Phillipsen, 1992). Additionally, citizenship social skills increase higher levels of peer acceptance, creating opportunities to form new friendships, and taking responsibility to contribute as a member of society. The development of citizenship social skills supports a sense of belonging to and responsibility for family, community, and environment. As a result, children appreciate and respect themselves, their peers, culture, and home/school community.

Full Participation and Engagement of Children with Disabilities

Inclusion for children with disabilities is not just a mere coincidental social experience. An inclusive classroom does not magically occur by having children with and without disabilities physically together in the classroom. A meaningful inclusive atmosphere exists when children with and without disabilities are physically engaged and interacting with one another in classroom activities. Research is substantial indicating the mere presence of children with disabilities in a classroom does not guarantee full participation and engagement (Bergen, 2003; Gurnalnick, 2001). Although research has taken place for over 30 years, we still have not implemented everything known regarding effective ways to include children with disabilities in regular classrooms, resulting in continuing educational mediocrity for all children (Odom et al., 2004).

Inclusion supports belonging, having worth, and having choices (Allen & Cowdery, 2005; Odom, 2002). Full participation and engagement of children with disabilities with typically developing peers is a necessary foundation for inclusive programs. A compelling argument for inclusion is that children with disabilities have the right to participate in educational activities available to other children. Children with disabilities need to experience the same participation and engagement of learning as children without disabilities. This is demonstrated by Odom (2000), who advocates: “If we expect that children with disabilities will learn from, interact with, and form relationships with typically developing children, then the children with disabilities need to be around typically developing peers for a substantial part of their day” (p. 22).

Although many inclusive settings advocate full participation and engagement for children with disabilities, the quality of instruction and social interactions with typically developing peers are often contrary to appropriate practice. Research confirms inclusive experiences are limited to a substantial proportion of children with disabilities and their families (Cavallaro, Haney, & Cabello, 1993; Kochanek & Buka, 1998). Considerable differences exist among inclusive settings in terms of full participation and engagement. Building meaningful peer relationships through participation between children with and without disabilities is one of the most important goals of inclusion (Jones & Schwartz, 2004; Missall, 2002; Pianta, 2007). As a result, classroom

teachers have a viable role for supporting children with full participation and facilitating increased opportunities for social skills with typically developing peers and children with disabilities.

Peer Competence

The ability to interact with peers in a socially appropriate manner is an important developmental goal for all young children (Missall & Hojnoski, 2008). Effectively interacting with peers is considered a critical component of school readiness and a strong predictor of children's positive adjustment to school (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Furthermore, successful peer interactions have been identified as an important contributor to self-efficacy, as well as a critical starting point to demonstrating citizenship and general community adjustment as an adult (Guralnick, 1990).

Peer competence is the ability a peer demonstrates to solve fundamental challenges of leading and initiating interactions, resolving conflicts, and building friendships with children with disabilities (Kemple, Davis, & Hysmith, 1997). For example, peer competence includes initiating conversations and prompting turn taking with peers, leading play organizers with classmates, and demonstrating respect for other children (McClelland & Morrison, 2003). Peer competence behaviors relate directly to interpersonal interactions (Howes, Droege, & Phillipsen, 1992). Thus, peer competence supports citizenship opportunities for young children to develop a sense of belonging to and responsibility for their family, community, and environment.

Social Stories

Since the early 1990s, social stories have been widely accepted and used as a positive support intervention for children with autism and other developmental disabilities (Gray, 1994). A social story is a story comprised of specific elements (i.e., types of sentences arranged according to a formula) that is used as a social skills intervention. In addition, social stories assist children with memory development and self-regulation (Berk, 2003). Social stories help children understand acceptable behaviors and languages needed to interact positively with other peers. Additionally, social stories support empathy by providing children with opportunities to understand the others point of views (Berk, 2003).

Social story interventions are simple to design and easy to implement in a classroom setting. Social stories provide visual support for children who may benefit from the extra cues. They depict concrete visual cues and reminders of basic social situations (Pellegrino, 2012). Social stories also enable individualization and create a story in a child-specific format. With this, young children gain autonomy and increased gains in language and physical growth (Allen & Marotz, 1999). Social stories are often written in a simple language reflecting the target child's developmental level. Therefore, social stories support a variety of learning styles. The goal of a social story is to strengthen a specific target skill the child needs to improve and the steps needed to achieve it.

Significance of Social Stories for Citizenship and Social Skills

Social stories are significant for supporting citizenship and social skills for several reasons. First, young children show high interest in words and letters at an early age. A social story involves the combination of a written and verbal cue for a child. Second, social stories can be directly written about measurable, observable behaviors. For example, a story can be written for greeting a classmate who is an English Language Learner; turn taking with a friend; or going on a fieldtrip to a library. Third, social stories can be easily written and implemented in an inclusive classroom with peers or in a general rural education classroom. Social stories are convenient to use and capitalize on the interests and strengths of children. As a result, social stories allow teachers to identify a concern for a child and develop a related story based upon the child's interest and strengths. Social stories are often designed with a specific sentence structure with defining characteristics using four basic sentence types including (a) descriptive, (b) perspective, (c) directive, and (d) affirmative (Gray). See Figure 1 for steps used to develop social stories.

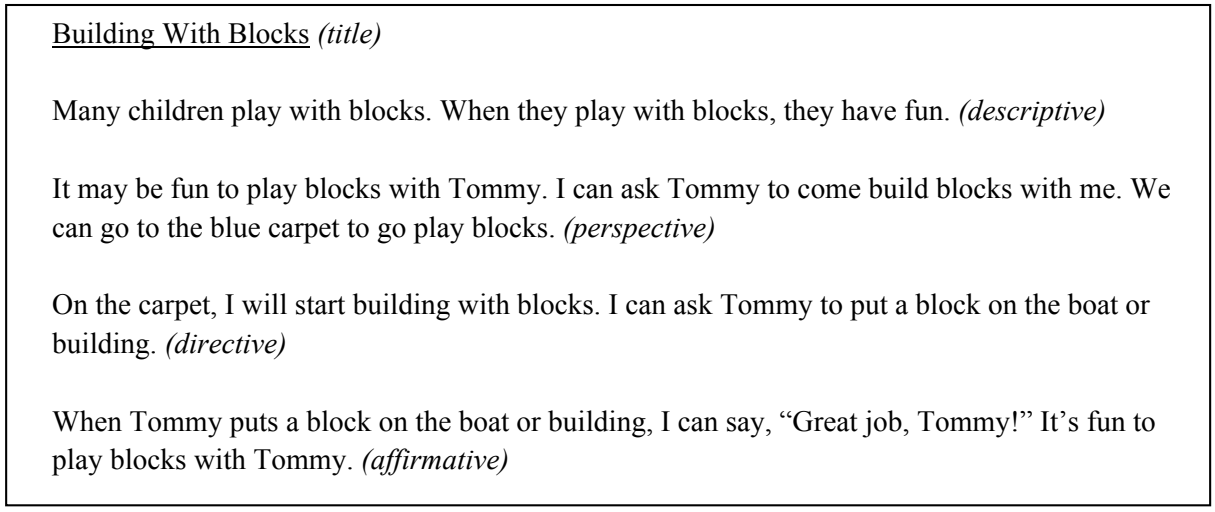
1. Write in the child's language according to current functioning and abilities.
2. Use a combination of descriptive, perspective, directive, and affirmative sentences for creating the social story:
    - Descriptive statements guide the telling of the story. Descriptive sentences describe what people do in a given social situation, why they are doing it, when and where the event will take place, and who will be involved.
    - Perspective sentences refer to other people's feelings or opinions in the story. Perspective sentences may be related to consequences; they describe how another child may react when the target child engages in the social behavior.
    - Directive sentences state the goals of the social story and provide behavioral choices for the target child and peer mediator.
    - Affirmative sentences affirm the goal of the social story for the target child and peer mediator.
3. Place one or two sentences on each page. The presentation of the social story is dependent on the child's functioning level and abilities. One sentence per page is sufficient and allows the child to focus on a specific concept.
4. Use photographs, drawings, and/or pictorial icons to enhance a child's understanding of the social story.
5. Read the social story to the target child and role model the desired behavior (i.e., turn taking with a friend).

Figure 1. Steps for developing a social story.

Considerations for Implementing Social Stories

As teachers and family members consider using social stories as a social intervention in their classrooms and homes, several steps should be considered for constructing and evaluating social stories. They include the following:

(1) Identify the positive social behavior to be changed. Thus, improvements in the positive behavior should likely lead to increased peer interactions and/or social functioning
(2) Identify a social target skill that will increase social competence (i.e., the skill is functional for the child)
(3) Collect baseline data by observing, recording, and/or documenting the occurrence of targeted negative positive behaviors in a variety of classroom activities
(4) Design and create the environmental set up in the classroom for the activity including toys, materials, manipulatives, specific class areas in the classroom and/or play centers that are described in the social story
(5) Create the social story – refer to Figure 1, "Steps for developing a social story" -- Additionally, consider the following criteria (a) write the social story in the first person and /or third person; (b) write the social story in present or future tense; (c) include the interests, strengths of the child; (d) label the social story with a title; (e) give the story an introduction, body, and conclusion; (f) answer "wh" questions: what? When? Why? And Who: and (g) state behaviors positively
(6) Consider the visual cues and materials including digital photos, drawings, clip art, icons, and graphic bulleted schedules
(7) Practice and rehearse the social story with a peer who will be prompting and/or initiating the target skill. Refer to Figure 2, "Sample social story"
(8) Collect data by observing, recording, and graphing the performance of the desired target social behavior(s)
(9) If possible, promote generalization into other activities, routines, and/or schedules throughout the day with peers and finally, gradually and systematically, fade out the social story



Building With Blocks *(title)*

Many children play with blocks. When they play with blocks, they have fun. *(descriptive)*

It may be fun to play blocks with Tommy. I can ask Tommy to come build blocks with me. We can go to the blue carpet to go play blocks. *(perspective)*

On the carpet, I will start building with blocks. I can ask Tommy to put a block on the boat or building. *(directive)*

When Tommy puts a block on the boat or building, I can say, "Great job, Tommy!" It's fun to play blocks with Tommy. *(affirmative)*

Figure 2. Sample social story for turn taking with a peer.

Technology and Social Stories

Today more than ever, all young children are attracted to various types of technology. Social stories can be displayed on devices such as iPads, Smart boards, and DVDs for television viewing. For example, Stories2Learn is an iPad app that teachers and family members can use at home or in the classroom. The app is pre-programmed with stories that teach social skills such as turn taking, reciprocal play, and playground rules. Children have the opportunity to view and follow along to learn or be reminded of what the acceptable positive social behaviors are. In addition, teachers and family members can add their own audio and have the option to depict dialogue. Turn Taker – Social Story & Sharing Tool for Preschool, Autism, Down syndrome, and Special Needs by Touch Autism is another recommended program. The program uses visual and audio cues to assist in turn taking and sharing.

As young children in rural early childhood special education classrooms become more engaged using technology, it is critical for teachers to integrate technology with a variety of disciplines in a developmentally appropriate manner and to use guided participation with peers rather than use technology in isolation. Educational technology is here to stay! For technology to fulfill its promise as a powerful contributor to learning, it must be used to deepen children's engagement in meaningful and intellectually learning experiences. Children need to be taught how to use these exciting tools in ways that promote social interactions so that they will become confident and skilled users of technology as they progress in their school as future citizens. Social stories use children's interests by creating situations and providing information regarding social needs for children in digital media to provide instruction by focusing on improving positive social communication skills and reducing negative social behaviors. The positive outcomes from this positive support intervention increases the "heartbeat" of inclusion with improved social skills and visibility for belonging and participation for all young children attending rural classrooms.

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CHILDREN SUCH AS THESE: DAILY CHALLENGES OF A CHILD WITH PHYSICAL AND HEALTH IMPAIRMENTS

Who are "Children Such as These"?

For nearly forty years, the education of students living with disabilities has been governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted by the United States Congress in 1975 and reauthorized in 2004. Congress intended to open schools to all students with disabilities to make certain this population received appropriate educational opportunities. At its inception, IDEA benefited students ages six to eighteen; Congress has since expanded the group of students who have a right to special education. The law now applies to infants and toddlers from birth to age two, young children ages three through five, and older students through age twenty-one (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013).

While there are numerous challenges involved, the goal of special education is to provide those students who benefit from modifications and/or accommodations with instruction that is accessible and equal to that received by non-disabled peers. It is commonly accepted that special education is an explicitly outcome-driven enterprise. According to Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, and Shogren (2013), four main outcomes are:

- equality of opportunity
- full participation
- independent living
- economic self-sufficiency

Current efforts to increase the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms reflect a belief that the general education classroom is the preferred social and educational environment for the majority of these disabled students. However, if the ultimate goal is to foster meaningful participation among students, this is necessarily contingent upon students' abilities to fully participate in the general education environment. The ability to fully participate in such an environment depends, to some degree, on a student's ability to perform

relevant skills including social and behavioral skills often required by classroom activities (Bishop & Jubala, 1994; Dowrick & Raeburn, 1995; Fox & Lentini, 2006). While the majority of students and well-meaning educators may prefer the social and learning environment of a general education classroom, the fact of the matter remains that many students do not thrive in such an environment due, in part, to deficits in their social and behavioral skill-sets.

The federal government considers physical disabilities (often used interchangeably with the term orthopedic impairments) and health disabilities as separate special education categories. Students in the physical disabilities category have problems with the structure or the functioning of their bodies. Students in the category referred to as other health impairments are those described collectively as having conditions and diseases that create special health care needs or health disabilities. These two unique special education categories are not as separate or discrete as their definitions may have them appear. Students receiving special education and related services under these categories frequently exhibit health-related disabilities along with limitations to their overall physical wellbeing and require ongoing medical consultation and care. Other common impairments for students in these categories include: speech or language issues, sensory deficits in sight and hearing, learning disabilities, seizure disorders, intellectual impairments, and so forth. The problems faced by this population of students, and those professionals who work with them, are complex and diverse, requiring thoughtful and well-planned intervention. It is understood that their handicaps may be temporary and improved upon or they may be intermittent, chronic, progressive, and terminal. Regardless of the specific handicap or condition, room environment is critical to these students as there must be adequate room so that everyone can move around easily.

Teachers of such students are best served when they are willing to seek advice from others and listen to suggestions that may be helpful in providing a warm and welcoming classroom. They will benefit greatly if they are willing to be flexible and listen to others including colleagues in the therapy professions, psychology professions, veteran teachers, and parents. It is critical that parents be welcomed and included in the educational process of their children. School days are full of learning and activities designed to help students grow and develop. These include daily academic or life-skills instruction, physical and health care procedures, and social and emotional skills, which are crucial if the student is to receive the full benefits of their school experience.

Background on the Study Setting and the Authors

Authors Peter Kopriva, Ed.D. and Sijmontje Renema-Kopriva, M.A. are a married couple who have been involved with the education of students for a number of decades. Between the two of them, they have taught in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Both currently live and work in the large metropolitan city of Fresno, located in the Central Valley of California. The city and surrounding rural and mountain areas are inhabited by a population that, like American society as a whole, is becoming ever more diverse in terms of ethnicities, cultures, belief systems, and languages. Successfully navigating life within this context requires individuals not only to attain normal life skills, but also apply them with an understanding and appreciation for human diversity. The task of acquiring and applying such skills is frequently very difficult for individuals living with disabilities, which may create the additional burden of social deficiencies.

The great majority of Kopriva and Renema-Kopriva's careers have been spent in special education including preschool, grade school, and adult education. Renema-Kopriva is currently an active elementary classroom special education teacher of the physically and health impaired in the Fresno Unified School District of Fresno, California. Fresno Unified School District has an enrollment of over 80,000 students and serves children starting with early education programs on through high school. Kopriva is a faculty-member within the School of Education at Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, California. Fresno Pacific University is a private Christian university serving approximately 4,400 undergraduate and graduate students on the main campus and up and down the Central Valley via satellite campuses. The University's online programs serve additional students throughout the United States and around the world.

Kopriva and Renema-Kopriva have studied together, taught together, shared professional presentations, and, in the case of this specific study, enjoyed active research and instruction with students in need of skill-building in areas of social understanding and development. Both understand from teaching and personal experience, that individuals who live with disabilities and/or the additional burden of social skills deficits pay a tremendous price in terms of academic achievement, fostering and enjoying friendships, and meeting societal expectations in school, home, and the greater community. This deep concern and growing understanding of the importance of social understanding and navigational skills led the two to plan and implement the study that will be shared as a presentation at the 2014 ACRES Conference.

Social Skills Deficits and Social-Emotional Learning

Appropriate social behavior is critical to functioning successfully in society. It is a complex, dynamic interaction of multiple stimuli making it difficult to define. While there is no set definition, many would say they recognize adequate social skills when they see them and are certainly aware when adequate social skills are absent. Experts working in fields of study concerned with social learning and attaining competency in areas critical to personal and social well-being agree that social skills can, and often must, be taught (Riley, San Juan, Klinknes, & Ramminger, 2008). These same experts, however, acknowledge that there is little consensus regarding the specifics of what constitutes appropriate social behavior (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004).

As children age, they interact with an increasing number of people: family members, classmates, peers, teachers, and others in a variety of settings and situations. Some children navigate these social encounters seemingly without effort, while others lack the ability or motivation to use positive social behaviors in such encounters. Well-developed social skills contribute to academic success. Conversely, deficits in social skills can lead to feelings of poor self-worth in a child as well as poor academic success (Guralnick, 1990; Kopriva, 2011). According to Bishop and Jubala (1994), long term success is dependent upon social skills, also known as emotional intelligence. It is vital that a person be able to interpret and regulate their personal emotional state of being in addition to being able to interpret the emotions of, and react appropriately to, other people (Bishop & Jubala, 1994). In their work together to uncover factors associated with the success or failure of students with special needs placed in educational settings with non-disabled peers, Bishop and Jubala (1994) conclude that social skills include

understanding and using social conventions in addition to the ability to understand the hidden curriculum: the ways peers communicate and interact, reciprocity, and the ability to build interpersonal relationships.

There is wide and growing concern for children and young adult school-age students who live with social skills deficits and lack understanding of social expectations. Misunderstanding and inappropriate behavior in social contexts affects both students living with disabilities as well as those students not identified as having special needs. It is a pervasive developmental problem that plagues hundreds of thousands of individuals each year in our nation's schools and, aside from hampering abilities to create and maintain friendships, it is a detriment to academic success as well.

The individuals with these deficits can be found in early intervention, K-12, and adult education settings. Frequently, a host of environmental and academic modifications are necessary to accommodate the variety of needs that students must have met in order to benefit from education. Too often, social skills instruction and social-emotional learning are not included in the list of accommodations offered. Importantly, social skills can be developed and improved. According to Best, Heller, and Bigge (2010), teachers of students with physical and multiple disabilities have a responsibility to aid their students in developing appropriate tactics they can apply in social situations. It is important to note that without intervention, social skills deficits usually persist. If the ultimate goal is to facilitate academic success and life-skills competency, it becomes vital for educators to identify and provide intervention in the instruction received by students who live with social skills deficits in addition to their physical and/or health impairments.

The term social-emotional learning (also called social-emotional development or social-emotional competence) appears to best capture this vital area of human growth because it highlights the interdependence of the two component parts (Epstein, 2009; Raver, Izard, & Kopp, 2002). Social learning addresses principles and strategies for interacting successfully with others. Emotional learning refers to the knowledge and skills required if a person is to self-regulate their feelings. When social and emotional learning are studied together, it becomes clear that the two dimensions often overlap given that the ability to deal with one's own emotional state is often a prerequisite of effectively socializing with others.

Child development and educational literature differ only slightly in their determination that social-emotional learning includes four components:

- emotional self-regulation and self-awareness
- social knowledge and understanding
- social skills
- social dispositions

Emotional self-regulation and self-awareness refers to responding to experiences with an appropriate range of immediate or delayed emotions, and recognizing and being able to control one's own feelings. Social knowledge and understanding is having and possessing knowledge of social norms and customs. Social skills means an individual has the necessary range of strategies for interacting with others assisted by cognitive development, especially perspective-taking and

empathy. Finally, social dispositions represent enduring character traits shaped by innate temperamental differences and environmental influences such as: curiosity, humor, generosity, open-or closed-mindedness, argumentativeness, and selfishness (Epstein, 2009).

Pilot Study Setting and Methods

Prior to offering social skills instruction to select students enrolled in Renema-Kopriva's classroom, Kopriva cultivated a presence on the Edith Storey Elementary School campus via other research projects. Kopriva spent time working in kindergarten and preschool classrooms (serving both disabled and non-disabled students) in areas of social skills understanding and development. Additionally, for the year prior to the implementation of the study, Kopriva spent time visiting Renema-Kopriva's classroom so the students could become comfortable with his presence. In preparation for his research, Kopriva planned the particulars of the study, garnered Renema-Kopriva's support, and received approval from the school principal to move forward with the project. These several years of active and ongoing engagement at the school in a number of classrooms helped give Kopriva an understanding of the work involved, as well as insight into materials useful for both teaching social skills content and assessing student progress.

Questions asked prior to the initiation of this study were the following:

- Will subjects identified as having high need social skills deficits increase abilities within those deficit areas as a result of explicit instruction provided via this study?
- Will subjects show evidence of skill development in high need areas across conditions commonly encountered at school during the duration of this study?
- What is the effect of the instructional introduction of video self-modeling on skill development within the high need social skills deficit areas of the subjects when introduced during the research phase of the study?

The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) authored by Elliott & Gresham (2008) was the primary means of instruction and the assessment method of choice throughout the study. The SSIS Rating Scales that accompany the SSIS enable targeted assessment of individuals and small groups to help evaluate social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence. Teacher, parent, and student forms help provide a comprehensive picture of a student's use and understanding of social skills, competing problem behaviors, and academic competence across school, home, and community settings. The four skill areas evaluated by the SSIS are:

- pro-social behavior
- motivation to learn
- reading skills
- math skills

Student performance levels using criterion-referenced descriptions of classroom behavior in the SSIS Rating Scale were obtained. The four students selected for study indicated six areas of high need for improvement:

- listening to others
- following the rules

- paying attention to your work
- asking for help
- staying calm with others
- doing the right thing

A total of twenty-one days of individual and small group instruction over a period of six weeks was conducted with the four students. Individual instruction was followed by small group instruction so the participant might have the opportunity to share and illustrate their understanding of what was just learned in their one-on-one session. This model of instruction was utilized, in part, because both authors noted that students took their one-on-one instruction more seriously when they knew they would have the opportunity to share what they'd learned with a classmate of their choice once the one-on-one lesson was completed. Interest in the lessons offered was so high that students who missed a lesson due to illness or therapy sessions were anxious to catch up, especially when they recognized the progress their classmates were making after having completed a particular lesson.

Each of the four children selected for inclusion in the project showed varying levels of increased understanding in each of the areas being addressed by the instruction. Parents of children enrolled in the social skills improvement project enjoyed receiving updates regarding their child's progress. Renema-Kopriva, as the classroom teacher, reported marked behavior changes in the students both in the classroom and in the school environment at large. Observation revealed students practicing, and reminding their classmates to practice, the skills they learned through instruction associated with the study.

While the SSIS was the dominant means of instruction, there were secondary instructional materials used, including homemade curriculum based on the suggestions of the children themselves. Prior to implementing the research plans, parents of the selected children gave parental authorization for assessment and instruction of their children. In addition, parents signed consent for the use of photography and video-recording during instruction and activities. This consent was crucial as an integral part of the project was the recording of everyday activities taking place within the classroom and other areas of the school frequented by these students. Areas such as the playground, cafeteria, adaptive physical education areas, and bus loading zones were all potential training grounds and opportunities to capture the students practicing social skills. As the study progressed, the novelty of seeing tripods, cameras, and video-recorders was little distraction for the children and teaching staff. Technology was used along with print materials for reading activities and instruction. A laptop computer was a mainstay for the delivery of SSIS lessons which were recorded and role-played on video for the purpose of instruction and initiating discussion.

One particularly helpful form of technology used as an instructional tool in this study was video self-modeling (VSM). Video self-modeling has accumulated a relatively impressive track record in research literature as being an effective tool across behaviors, ages, and types of disabilities. Using only positive imagery, VSM gives individuals the opportunity to view themselves performing a task just beyond their present functioning level via creative editing of videos using VCRs or video software (Buggey, 2009; Buggey, Hoomes, Sherberger & Williams, 2011; Corbett & Abdullah, 2005). Kopriva and Renema-Kopriva used this exciting instructional

tool for the first time in a purposefully limited time period to allow them to adequately practice, gain necessary experience, and observe the effect such instruction would have on and with the students in the study. In addition to VSM, other devices such as an iPad and iPhone were used to explore evolving technologies and applications for photography and video as components of meaningful instruction.

Authors' Inspiration and Closing Thoughts

While some of the authors' inspiration is academic in nature, such as Vygotsky's decades old conclusion that the understanding of language within the context of social interactions is essential to human growth and development (Wink & Putney, 2002), much of their inspiration comes from an interest in humanity in general. They wish to honor the lives of people like Temple Grandin (2006) and other individuals who, in an effort to improve the learning experience for future students and teachers, used their personal struggles to be understood as a foundation for instructional practices and curriculum creation (Fox & Lentini, 2006). Additionally, the authors believe their work with physically and health impaired students contains a spiritual component. Individuals such as Wil Hernandez (2006), like Henri Nouwen before him, support the authors' conviction that human imperfection should simply be accepted as a part of human life. Given this, the authors cannot help but conclude that those who live with disabilities are full human beings, worthy of respect and love (Vanier, 1998). Ultimately, children such as these offer educators an opportunity to become more fully human; that is, more compassionate, gentle, forgiving, understanding, and filled with the joys of life and human interaction.

Students with skill development deficits create an untold burden on themselves and those they interact with in the home, school, and community resulting in poor academic achievement, strained or non-existent relationships, and even violence against themselves and others. For these reasons and more, the topic of social skills deficits and the need for deliberate, well-planned, and explicit instruction to counter these deficits is relevant regardless of a person's status as an educator, administrator, parent, or community member. A person's source of inspiration, number of years in their field, school locale, and so on are secondary to the importance of addressing this very real and current need for children such as these.

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A BACKPACK FULL OF HURT: BULLYING AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Introduction

Bullying is a national topic that schools are inherently aware of and have made demonstrated attempts to take measures to improve safety. Bullying has been linked to serious violent acts that have ended in deaths, suicides and emotional distress among victims and their respected families. The research literature clearly denotes that bullying is at its highest at the middle school as children generally speaking during this time period are changing both physically and mentally. Vulnerability is common during this time period, but for children with special needs being vulnerable can be magnified which ultimately places these children at risk and thus potential targets in the bullying milieu. In 2011 the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) documented that, nationwide, 20% of students in grades 9-12 experienced some type of bullying behavior. In 2008–2009 the School Crime and Safety (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009) indicated that, nationwide, 32% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying. This paper will define what bullying is, the different types of bullying will be addressed, and how bullying affects children with special needs.

Bullying as Defined

Bullying has a long and antiquated history within our school culture; this is not a new phenomenon and as such definitional terms have emerged which reflect societal and cultural norms. In 1996, Olweus defined bullying as, "the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength argue or fight" (p.9). An updated version of Olweus's definition now includes the "social forms of bullying such as excluding someone from a group of friends or attempting to make others dislike someone" (Solberg & Olweus, 2003, p. 246). Further, other researchers have further defined bullying by stating that the target is weaker than the aggressor in physical size or social power and that they repeat the acts of aggression, intimidation, or physical abuse (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Olweus, 1997; Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). Social media and technology have greatly influenced how bullying behavior

has changed and or is portrayed (i.e., the virtual world has ushered in a new form of bullying called cyberbullying). Horner (2011) asserts that bullying is not subjected to a particular setting or population, "bullying is not a "normal" part of growing up, is not limited to disorganized schools, or only performed by low-status students " (p385). Bullying behavior can happen to anyone at any time now, every day with no time limits.

Categories of Bullying

As identified by Philips and Cornell (2012) four different categories of bullying behavior exist: physical, verbal, social, and now cyberbullying. Physical bullying is when the aggressor (the bully) purposely has physical contact with a target (the victim). Physical bullying entails hurting a person's body or possessions by hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, intentionally tripping or pushing and taking or breaking someone's things.

Verbal bullying is when the aggressor (the bully) seeks to tease or belittle the target at will. This type of bullying behavior is saying or writing horrible things with the intent to hurt or belittle another person. Bullying of this nature encompasses teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting or threatening to do harm (Philips & Cornell, 2012; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010).

Bullying that is social in nature, sometimes referred to as relational bullying occurs when the aggressor aims to ignore, exclude the target, and or seeks to harm someone's reputation or relationships with others. Social bullying entails leaving someone out on purpose, telling other kids not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, and or embarrassing someone in public (Olweus, 1993, 1994; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). This type of bullying aims to destroy relationships among friends or group of friends.

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, websites or fake profiles. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles.

Cyberbullying happens more frequently today and can with a click of a button reach millions of people. It is difficult to stop as often the bully is unknown or difficult to track down. This type of technology has given society and children the perfect venue of participation as children of all ages can partake with very little consequences (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Cyberbullying differs from other types of bullying in that children who experience this are usually bullied in person as well. These children have a harder time getting away from the bullying behavior and person since the aspects of technology have permeated all aspects of culture, including schools. As stated before this type of bullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can reach a child even when he or she is present or alone. Bullying of this nature can happen any time of the day or night. This type of bullying behavior has huge consequences as messages and images can be posted anonymously, distributed quickly to wide, varied and large audiences in social media sites, and more often than not are difficult or sometimes impossible to trace the source (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Bullying Types

Olweus (1993, 1994) communicated that bullying behaviors are manifested in two ways, direct and indirect. Direct bullying can be described as an obvious and easily identified form of bullying, such as aggression and an assault on another person in an open manner. Direct bullying can be quickly observed. This is when bullies disturb victims through embarrassment via verbal and physical bullying behavior.

Vanderbilt and Augustyn (2010) affirm that indirect bullying is not easily observed and can and does make victims feel uncomfortable. Indirect bullying causes victims to feel unwanted, insecure, and can result in the exclusion from a peer-group. When a person is excluded, the bully will use their power to pressure peers from interacting with the victim (i.e., the victim is not allowed to participate in group activities or converse with other students). Unfortunately, females are known to use this type of bullying behavior against each other via gossip/rumors aimed at discrediting and attacking their victims. Social and cyberbullying are associated with indirect bullying.

Who is the Bully?

A bully is an individual who is skilled at discovering and targeting the vulnerabilities of their victims (Heinrichs, 2003). Bullies repeatedly hurt their targets on purpose and on a daily basis. Graham (2011) has reported that bullies perceive themselves in a positive light and believe that bullying behavior has the potential to give them higher social status. Good, McIntosh and Gietz (2011) also found that bullies not only attain higher social status, but also attain physical advantage and acquire power in numbers. The power and positive reinforcement that is acquired provides aggressive bullies with the false notion that this behavior is acceptable and that no harm is being done. Other characteristics within the aggressive bullying persona indicates that bullies make friends easily, like large peer groups, but are prone to problematic behaviors in schools (Carlson, Crow & Kral, 2005). Most bullies are capable of talking themselves out of conflict and are not afraid of using deception to get what they want or need.

Passive bullies on the other hand are those individuals who rarely initiate the bullying, but rather are quick to join when the opportunity arises (Omizo, Omizo, Baxa & Miyose, 2006). Passive bullies do not demonstrate aggression, but are rather insecure in nature. They are less popular with their peers and often have a low self-esteem. Rather than initiating a bullying interaction, passive bullies tend to hang back until one is already under way — usually at the instigation of an aggressive bully. Once a bullying incident begins, passive bullies become enthusiastic participants. In fact, passive bullies are very quick to align themselves with and display intense loyalty to the more powerful aggressive bullies (Olweus, 1994).

Children with Special Needs and Bullying

Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center (2012) reports that children with special need are much more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers. As a matter of fact, these children are bullied much more often and yet there is little or no research this addresses this topic. To date only 10 U.S. studies have been done that relate bullying to children with special needs. Yet, these studies indicate that 60% of children with special needs report being bullied

regularly when compared to non-disabled children. These figures to say the least should put bullying on the top of the agenda for any school district and yet U.S. schools when compared to schools abroad tend to be reactive instead of proactive.

Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) convey that because children with special needs often suffer from lack of confidence, are shy, or have a difficult time with social adjustment, they tend to become easy prey for bullying behavior by classmates at schools. According to these authors, three factors increase the risk of children with special needs being bullied in schools. These factors include: (1) these children bear a stigma related to their disability, making them obvious targets for the bully; (2) children with special needs in an inclusive classroom may not have the protection from this environment as classroom size is generally large and teacher to individual student ratio is challenging; and (3) certain children with special needs may react aggressively and become victims-bullies themselves as they try to assimilate and/or belong to their peer groups.

In most instances children with special needs are already experiencing problems with their inability to learn in an educational setting. Bullying behavior as stated previously is not part of a natural phenomenon nor is it part of any school curriculum. The manifestation of the impact of bullying behavior for children with special needs can be seen in the following ways: school avoidance, along with higher rates of absenteeism, decrease in grades, inability to concentrate, loss of interest in trying, and fear to go to the bathroom alone (Wolpert, 2010).

When bullying behavior is attributed to a child's disability, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) consider this to be a violation of someone's civil rights as it impedes their ability to an equal opportunity to an education. Parents have legal rights in this area as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) all offer protection when children with special needs' rights are being violated. According to OCR, "states and school districts also have a responsibility under Section 504, Title II, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is enforced by OSERS (the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services), to ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students with disabilities. Disability harassment may result in a denial of FAPE under these statutes" (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, 2012, p2).

Children with special needs have resources that are distinct to their needs and targeted for their situation. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) can play a key role in developing a bullying prevention plan for each child. The IEP assures that each child, their teacher(s), and school based personnel are aware and responsible for ensuring that the child with special needs is receiving a free appropriate public education (FAPE; i.e., bullying can be an obstacle to that education; PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, 2012).

The teaching of self-advocacy can play a huge role in the stopping of bullying behavior among children with special needs. This skill can often be difficult for children with special needs as many have trouble with self-esteem issues, are shy, cannot tell, or simply do not know who to tell or how to identify what is happening to them. Self-advocacy for children with special needs entails: speaking up for oneself; describing (if you can) what are your strengths, needs and

wishes; taking responsibility for yourself; learning about your rights; and obtaining help or knowing who to ask if you have a problem. All of these skills can be taught to children with special needs either through the implementation of goals within the IEP, parental teaching, or through the school curriculum in individual classrooms by the regular education teacher if in an inclusive classroom, special education teacher, school counselor, and/or school psychologists. (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Rose & Simpson, 2011, p.17). Our premise is that all children in today's society can benefit from some training in self-advocacy.

Almost all bullying behavior can be prevented it someone intercedes on behalf of another person. More than 50% of all bullying behavior can be put to an end when a peer mediates and steps in. Thus, peer advocacy can play a huge role in hindering acts of bullying in schools. This approach empowers children to protect those being targeted by bullying behavior. Peer advocacy works in that children are more likely to know and see what is happening with their peer group as peer influence is remarkable in its power and children telling someone to stop bullying has a greater impact than an adult giving the same advice (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, 2012).

After thoughts

As a postscript we profess that schools are supposed to be safe places for learning, playing, trying out new things, discovery, making friends or for just being who you are. As past k-12 special education teachers ourselves, we have witnessed that bullying behavior has increased especially among young girls who participate in social media outlets and is happening with much more frequency (Beran, 2012). We profess that we are dismayed when we hear that a child with special needs has been bullied and in our opinion safety, security, and protection is needed even more so in this instance. However, this is not to say that the non-disabled child is not in need of the same.

All bullying behavior as defined in this paper should not be tolerated as no child should have to endure any type of this behavior. Yet, countless incidents of children being bullied across the U.S. are reported some of which have horrific consequences such as deaths by suicide. Bullying behavior in our opinion does not belong to an individual, but is a reflection of a community, school, its individuals, and a society (i.e., the behavior belongs to all the participants). We adhere that children with special needs are not immune nor are they the exception as they too should be treated with dignity and respect – they are not alone. Nothing can be more tragic or painful then sending children to a school full of richness in opportunities to learn with a backpack full of hurt.

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PARENTS AS LEADERS IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION

Parents have always and will always be a major factor in all educational settings. However, when it comes to the student with special needs parental involvement in education is not only beneficial but it is essential. Parental involvement in education fosters the overall development of children by strengthening parents' knowledge about child development, building parenting knowledge and skills, strengthening relationships between parent and child and promoting age appropriate care and activities that can promote a child's development and school readiness (Hepburn, 2004).

Each year certified educators and classified personnel are trained to deal with the day-to-day needs of special education students. In this presentation we will demonstrate the importance of also providing this training to parents to help further support their child with special needs. We as educators understand the importance of parent involvement in the student's school work. By training the parents of students with special needs to continue, at home, the work started at school is taking this concept one step further for these students.

This presentation will focus on two different case studies completed over a period of time with children with special needs and the difference that parental training can make in the progression of the student. Participation in parenting classes can be associated with increased readiness for parents who are more consistent and have a predictable routine for their child (Halfon & McLearn, 2002).

Case Study 1

I first met Lance and Martin (names have been changed) in 1996 when I took a position as a paraprofessional in a developmental preschool. Both Lance and Martin had been diagnosed with Autism. Both boys responded well to physical therapy, occupational therapy, icon communication techniques, and sign language used within the classroom. The main difference between the two boys was the level of parental participation and parental buy–in.

Lance was a 4 year old child that came from a family who had a father that worked and a mother who stayed home to care for Lance and his younger brother. The area that they lived in was a large city where a great deal of help for parents of special needs children was available. Lance's parents worked closely with both the school and with outside agencies that could provide services for their son. They had many home visits and learned what they could do to

further Lance's progression. They were extremely active in helping him and reinforcing what was being taught by the teacher, physical therapist, occupational therapist and keeping him active with other children in the area with similar special needs.

Martin was also a 4 year old child. Martin's parents were both professionals and they both had highly prestigious occupations. Even though Martin had been tested and diagnosed as Autistic, his parents refused to accept that and continued to push him to be what they considered "Normal". They refused to get any of the outside help available to him because they felt there was nothing wrong with him. So even though they allowed him to have the school services offered, they would not allow him to receive any home visits or be involved with organizations offered by the county.

I watched these two boys for 3 years as their development progressed. Lance flourished because his parents used the same kinds of systems for communications and self- development that the school was using. By the time he was in 2nd grade he was able to use his communication board to tell the teachers what he needed, he was allowed to go to the restroom on his own, and was able to "partner up" with a regular education student that helped him with lunch and recess. He continued to receive special education services, but was in the classroom with a regular education teacher a good share of the time.

Martin, did not make much growth developmentally, he was still in diapers in the 2nd grade. His parents were still saying that he was just being lazy and stubborn. He had to have a full time aide with him and caring for him on a continuous basis and he was not making the academic progress that the teachers had hoped he would be making by this point. The parents would not continue the work that the special education teacher, physical therapist, and occupational therapists would start at school. He only received this within the walls of the school.

This experience really showed me evidence of the importance of parent participation and training to better serve their special needs child. Some of the strongest evidence available on the efficacy of parenting behavior in fostering positive developmental outcomes comes from evaluations of interventions focused on parenting (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000). In this case study, it was very apparent that the parents willingness to have home visits, learn to work with their child themselves, as well as the work of the special education program at school all working together made the difference between these two young men.

Case Study 2

I came to work with Cameron and Dustin (names have been changed) in the year of 2011 as a Special Education Teacher. Both Dustin and Cameron had been diagnosed with Autism. They lived in a rural area which did not have outside agencies that offered services for special needs students, so they only had access to the special education services that the school district could provide.

Cameron was a 2nd grade age appropriate student. He had a one-on-one aide assigned to him for the 2 years he had been in school. He had basically been in the special education classroom with the aide working with him. He had learned to identify 6 of the 24 letters in the alphabet and had been able to count to 10. He was being raised by a mother and father, the mother the mother worked as a registered nurse and the father stayed home and cared for him and his little brother. The family was actively involved with Cameron.

Dustin was also a 2nd grade age appropriate student. He also had a one-on-one aide assigned to him for the 2 years he has been in school. He too had spent most of his time in the special education classroom receiving services from his aide. He had learned to identify 10 of the 24 letters in the alphabet and could count to 20. He was one of seven children being raised by a single mom in a nearby reservation.

When I began to work with Cameron and Dustin, it was the first time (according to the one on one aids) that a teacher had actually pulled them and worked with them personally. As I began to work with them, it was evident that both boys were capable of learning. We worked on the letters and their sounds, it was not long before both boys could recognize all the letters and say the basic sounds that went with the sounds. It was at this time that I remembered my previous experience with the two boys earlier. I set up meetings with the parents to discuss what we could do together to help the boys.

Cameron's parents were delighted. They immediately started using the same icon program for communication, the father came in and watched me work with Cameron and learned along with the paraprofessional the system I was using to teach him his letters and sounds. He would then work with Cameron in the evenings the same way, he called it "helping him with his homework". As Cameron's progress continued, this same routine would take place over and over. The father would visit the classroom and learn what we were doing. He would also come in and learn what the Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, and Speech Pathologist were doing and do his best to also practice those routines with Cameron at home.

Dustin's mother on the other hand said that she just did not have the time to come in to the classroom, and would not allow for me to come into the home to train her. She felt that it was just too much for her and she did not think she could do it. She said that at home Dustin would go into his room and watch television, this kept him away from the other children because the interaction with the rest of the family seemed to agitate Dustin.

Again I worked with these two young men for 2 years. Even though Dustin's progress with the same amount of help over the previous 2 years had been greater than Cameron's and he was at a slighter higher starting point his progress did not excel as did Cameron's once his parents started to be trained how better to help him. By the end of the two years, both boys had made progress, they both could identify the letters and say their basic sounds. Cameron could put the sounds together to make words and read small beginning level books. Dustin, cold say the sounds, pick out beginning letter sounds, but could not put the sounds together to make words. Cameron with the help of the Tap Counting System could do simple addition and subtraction. Dustin could do the tap counting and could do the simple addition problems but could not make the transition from addition to subtraction.

One day toward the end of the two years the whole special education reading class, which both Cameron and Dustin set in on was reading a story about some kids who had found a treasure map. They also found a older neighbor who had been a pirate in his earlier life and together they followed the map and sailed to the location of the treasure and found it. Well shortly after reading this story, I gave the boys a paper and told them to draw a picture. Cameron drew a picture of a small ship sailing to an island with a treasure on the land. This was a clear sign to me that he was not only listening to what the rest of the class was reading and talking about but that he understood some of it, even though he was looking all around the classroom.

From these two case studies it became apparent to me that by training the parents to be part of their child's educational progress is imperative to their students success. In both cases those parents that accepted the opportunity and embraced being part of their child's solution was a great benefit for their children. It is extremely important that as we as Special Educators train ourselves and others to work with these special needs students, we should take the time to reach out to parents and give them this same training. Allowing parents to see what you are doing with their students and helping them to be a part of "team" is not only an effective way to better serve the special needs students but to also serve their parents. Engaging families in relationship-based parent education programs relies heavily on the capacity of providers to build relationships with participants and offer responsive services (Gomby, 2003; Klass, 2000; Zero to Three, 1998). There is no better way to build a relationship with the parents of the special needs students than to become a partner with them in the education of their student.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the involvement of parents in their child's education is invaluable. They should not only be trained to be their child's advocates, part of the IEP team and parent, but also as part of their educational support team. We give homework to 'regular education" students on a daily basis. We send home weekly homework slips so that the parents can sign that they either had their student do their homework or helped them with it. Then why is it that in the Special Education realm we cannot do the same? The only reason is because we have not taken the time to train the parents how to serve their special student. It is time that we do begin to train these parents and allow them to be the educational motivational factor in their special education students' life that we all know they can be with the regular education students.

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TRANSPLANTING UNITED STATES CONSTRUCTS OF DISABILITY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION WITH CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

This study focuses on the perspectives of a group of immigrant families regarding their views of their children's disabilities and the services received within the special education system. The study is important because of the requirements under special education law that service providers seek to build collaborative relationships with families of the children they serve. Over the years, this law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), has undergone different reauthorizations, which have gradually expanded the role of parents in the special education process. Particularly, IDEA mandates that parents should be considered as equal partners in the educational decision-making process for their child with disabilities.

Although the law specifies certain steps that service providers must take with regard to encouraging family involvement, it cannot legislate genuine mutual understanding between these providers and the families. Numerous researchers in the field of special education have noted challenges that make the goal of collaboration difficult to attain, including parental reactions to the diagnosis of disability as well as parents' lack of information and understanding of their rights under the law (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011); deficit views of cultural differences held by service providers (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Knotek, 2002); and parents' differing cultural interpretations of the meanings of those diagnoses and of special education services (Harry, 1992, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Lynch & Hanson, 2011). For culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families, these challenges can be particularly great.

In order to explore the views of CLD families, I focused on immigrant families because of the challenges they are known to face as they learn to adapt to their new country, and because the education system is one of the main avenues through which children must be socialized into the new culture (Spindler & Spindler, 1990). While all foreign-born residents are grouped under the umbrella term immigrants (Deaux, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Pryor, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001), there are certain constants that can be expected but there are also many differences across groups. In their research on immigrants in the United States, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) suggested that there are several main motivations as to why immigrants migrate; for example, some groups migrate to flee religious and political persecutions while others migrate in pursuit of better social mobility. Regardless of the motivations behind their migration, all immigrants have to deal with the dilemma of moving to a new country and adjusting to the different cultural practices and norms (Berry, 2007). The period of adjustment can have a tremendous impact on the immigrant family's dynamics as well as on their interactions with other critical entities. The education system is one of the main entities with which these families

can experience difficulty, primarily because of the potential mismatch between their cultural frame of reference and that of the school system.

In the case of special education, an examination of immigrant families' perspectives regarding their experiences and interactions with public school settings addresses an important sub-set of the education system. In many countries, special education as a set of services does not exist, and where it does it often refers to totally separate schooling for children with very severe disabilities (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012).

Moreover many scholars have pointed out that the definitions and interpretations of disabilities vary widely across cultures, indicating that the concept of disability is socially constructed (for example, Davis, 2006; Harry, 1992; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). Specifically, an inquiry of immigrant families' understanding of the construct of disability and their involvement in the special education process is timely in light of the growing influx of immigrants from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the U.S. as well as the recent changes regarding family involvement as stipulated in the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

The process of cultural reciprocity (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) proffers an avenue for educators to examine their own cultural self-awareness and ultimately recognize the impact of the nation's cultural underpinnings on its education system. Educators' awareness and recognition of their own cultural beliefs, values and assumptions will aid in the nature of the conversations and interactions they will have with CLD families. Also, such cultural awareness and recognition will enable educators to better identify the values and beliefs that underlie CLD families' priorities, dreams and aspirations for their children. Through the process of cultural reciprocity, educators will not only learn about themselves but they will also learn about the families with whom they are working. Further, the families will acquire knowledge about disability and special education from the cultural perspective of the United States, which will ultimately enable them to make better-informed decisions about educational services for their children with disabilities.

Cross-cultural competence and cultural reciprocity are two main concepts that may help to close the communication gap in the education system. Both cross cultural competence and cultural reciprocity purport that educators and CLD families can come together and talk about educational concerns (e.g., issues associated with disability and special education) with cultural differences not hindering but enhancing the conversation. If educators are respectful of and responsive to CLD families' beliefs, practices, and values, they can help to bring about more positive educational experiences during the interactions and ultimately more positive outcomes for children.

Therefore, this study utilized components of the conceptual frameworks of cross-cultural competence and cultural reciprocity as put forth, respectively, by Lynch and Hanson (2004) and Kalyanpur and Harry (2012). I decided to utilize these two conceptual frameworks because of the changing demographics of the United States. Overall, immigrants to the U.S. have become increasingly diverse over the years. So, as immigration increases, there are reasons why further

application of cross-cultural competence and cultural reciprocity are important in enhancing the experiences of immigrant families.

The culture of special education is also a reason for using cross-cultural competence and cultural reciprocity frameworks to ground this study, because of the shift to a family-centered approach in special education service delivery in U.S. public schools (Shelton & Stepanek, 1994). IDEA (2004), the law that provides services for children with disabilities, mandates intensive efforts to inform and engage parents in the placement process and specifies several steps that educators must take to ensure opportunity for such involvement. With continuity and change in the U.S. demographics landscape, it is important for educators to show appreciation and respect to the variety of cultural views, beliefs, and traditions.

Turnbull et al., (2011) pointed out that the U.S. education system is fraught with many challenges for everyone dealing with it, regardless of social and cultural status. Indeed, these authors reviewed a large literature on parental reactions to their children's disability, much of which includes parents' personal accounts of how the experience sometimes clashes with the requirements of the educational system. However, these scholars also acknowledged that there are added layers of challenge for CLD families, such as cultural views, beliefs, parenting styles, socioeconomic status, and having a child with disabilities. These compounding factors make education, especially special education, a complex system to navigate, so complex that it has been referred to as "the special education maze" (Anderson, Chitwood, & Hayden,1997). Kalyanpur and Harry noted in their 2012 analysis that IDEA is legislated based on the cultural assumptions of the U.S. culture where the underlying beliefs in this law are individualism, independence, personal choice, and equity. They further contrast these values with those found in some cultures, such as group identity, inter-dependence, group rather than personal choice, and value inequity (whereby social hierarchies may be more important than individual value). While IDEA mandates that every child is entitled to a free and appropriate public education, the core belief in promoting individualism is the assumption that the individual comes first rather than the group.

Furthermore, in this component, the focus is on education services and due process for each child. By attending to individual services for all children, there is an assumption that all children will develop the necessary skills that will propel them in the direction of gainful employment and thus become independent, productive citizens post high-school. Another underlying assumption of IDEA is the notion of choice. This assumption is displayed in the principles of the least restrictive environment and parent participation. Thus, parents are expected to have a say in decisions about placement and services.

The embedded assumption in this principle is that all parents are aware of how to be involved in the education of their children. A final underlying assumption of IDEA is that of equity, where the focus is on zero reject, nondiscriminatory assessment, and strengthening parent participation in the education of their children with disabilities. However, because CLD families often rely on educators to make the best education decisions on the behalf of their children, it is likely that families may not be aware of the potential for discriminatory decisions on their children's rights under the law. Overall, consideration must be given to the fact that if CLD families do not understand the U.S. cultural underpinnings of this law they also may not

understand the concept of disability and the reasons for recommended treatments. They may find it difficult to participate in a meaningful way.

Method/Strategy of Inquiry

This study was designed to examine ten immigrant families' culturally-based understanding of disability and special education, their involvement in their child's education, and their experiences and interactions with school personnel and service providers. The data for this study was gathered conducting individual interviews with each family. Nine out of the ten families were interviewed twice and one participated only in the first interview (N=19 interviews). The family that was interviewed once voluntarily ended her participation at the time of the second set of interviews because she no longer had any desire to speak on the topic under investigation.

Sample selection. The selection of the setting and participants for this research was based on convenience sampling, since I resided in one of these counties and the other was relatively close by. However, both were particularly appropriate choices because both had some of largest concentration of children of immigrant descent. The sampling was aimed at ensuring that participants had direct experiences with the special education processes and were willing to share their perspectives openly with the researcher. The group, however, had some variations, in that the families' children varied in ages and displayed different types and levels of severity of disability.

The setting of this study was rather broad, spanning over two public school districts in South Florida. First, I sought permission from the University of Miami's Institutional Review Boards to conduct this study. Once the study was approved by the IRB, I distributed both electronic and hard copies of recruitment flyers to several K-12 schools and community based agencies in both counties inviting immigrant families who had a child receiving special education services and spoke English to participate in the study. In order to ensure that none of the families felt compelled to volunteer in this study, they were asked to respond voluntarily to the researcher's contact information provided on the recruitment flyer.

Procedures. Each of the families received a copy of the recruitment flyer either from school personnel or from a local community parent agency. Upon receiving the flyer each family contacted me either by email of phone call and stated their interest in participating in the study. My initial response to the families then ascertained if they had met the following criteria: (a) are self identified as immigrant to the U.S., (b) have a child who has been determined eligible for special education services in a K-12 setting either in Broward or Dade County, and (c) are able to consent and interview in English. Once I had established that the families met the criteria for participation, I scheduled the first interview at a time and location convenient to each individual family. The primary focus of this study was on immigrant families' understanding of the concepts inherent in the education process they are required to navigate.

Participating Families and their Children

Ten families (all mothers) participated in this study. All identified as immigrant families and had a child with a disability. Five of the mothers were married and the other five were single and six were working outside of the home while the other four were stay- at-home mothers. The children included two girls and eight boys ranging in age from three and half years to twenty years old. The parents' age ranges were between 34 and 48, and education levels varied (see Table 1). Four of the children were diagnosed as being on the Autism spectrum, three as having profound cerebral palsy, two had mild speech and language impairments, and one was recently diagnosed under the disability category of specific learning disability.

Data Collection

Data was collected during fall 2012 and spring 2013. Two sets of qualitative interviews were done with each family. The interviews were audio-taped lasted approximately one hour. The use of interviews helped me to shed light on the views of these immigrant families. Their responses were used to clarify their role in the education of their children with disabilities. The use of interviews in this study also allowed me to ask questions that either substantiated or refuted my impressions of families' perceptions, or to clarify misunderstandings I as a researcher had gained due to previous interactions with some of the cultural backgrounds of some of the participants in the study. All interviews in this study were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

After each interview was conducted, I transcribed, reviewed and entered it into ATLAS.ti.7 a qualitative software program (Muhr, 1991-2012). The analysis relied on strategies recommended by Strauss and Corbin (2008) and Charmaz (2006). Specifically, I inductively created initial codes that closely reflected the data. In the initial coding process, I stayed very close to the data and used small phrases or single words that best captured or summarized the core ideas and/or gave an account for each segment of the data. As described by Charmaz (2006), initial codes "are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data" (p.48). In essence, they are provisional because they help the researcher to remain open to other analytic possibilities and create codes that best fit the data gathered. In addition, initial codes also prompt the researcher to see where the gaps are in the data and how to attend to them.

At times, however, I found that some statements so directly reflected a research question it seemed most logical to assign a code that was based on the question. Subsequent steps included grouping these codes into families (which is the term used by ATLASti), or conceptual categories (which is the term used by Strauss and Corbin, 2008), and then finding themes that underlie and cut cross the data. The results of the analytic process was a set of explanatory statements explaining families' views of disability and their various experiences and interactions with school personnel and other service providers.

Findings

The primary focus of this study was to find answers to my research questions: How do immigrant families interpret the constructs of disability and special education? What factors contribute to these families' interpretations of disability and special education? What role do

culturally based understandings of the concepts of disability and special education play in these families' participation in the special education process? What other factors influence their participation? In grounded theory methodology, the inductive nature of the analysis meant that outcomes may not map directly onto the questions. In this case, however there was strong consonance between my analysis and the research questions.

Analysis of the data from nineteen in depth interviews and reviews of special education documents resulted in 110 initial codes, 14 conceptual categories, and four themes. The findings therefore are presented in the following four themes that emerged: (a) Families' experience reshapes the "disability" construct; (b) families the reconciling disconnect between feelings and reality; (c) the professional-family disconnect: "the humanity was missing"; and (d) eligibility, IEP, and services: a flawed system? The interpretation of these themes illustrates one overarching explanatory statement that is: Families reconciling their cultural views and their personal experiences within an unresponsive system.

Summary of the findings. Overall, all families believed that in addition to the actual educational settings, how and who delivers instruction is also essential. The families' discussion of expectations of service outcomes denotes many concerns and challenges in the process of navigating the special education system as well as forging meaningful partnerships with their children's educators. Furthermore, as the findings of this data analysis illustrated, the most important issue for these families was reconciling their cultural views and their personal experiences of the construct of disability within an unresponsive system. Basically, humanity that connects was intensely personal in a way that it conflicts with scientific perspectives of the system.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to explore immigrant families' perspectives of disability as well as their experiences and interactions with service providers. Key concepts that guided my thinking were, the concept of culture as a predominant influence on parental views and practices (Rogoff, 2004); the possibility that the process of acculturation might modify these views (Berry, 2007); the influence of U.S. culture on the way special education services are delivered (Skrtic, 1991); and the concepts of cultural competence (Lynch & Hanson, 2011; Barrera & Corso, 2003) and cultural reciprocity (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) as practices that can assist service providers in building effective partnerships with families. Based on information in the literature on parental participation, I theorized that parents' views of disabilities and special education would be predominantly influenced by their culturally based beliefs about disability and schooling. While a few of my questions were focused on gaining that kind of information, I also included open-ended questions that sought any other factors that might be influential.

As in my pilot study (McLeod, 2012), I found that parents' views of disability and special education had initially been influenced by their native cultures, revealing a predominantly negative view of these issues. However, as in the pilot study, the data in the present study indicated that, over time, parents' views shifted to more practical and more positive views. In this study, parents' statements about their children clearly showed that it was the actual experience of loving and caring for their children that drove the change in their views. With

regard to views of special education, parents' statements revealed the belief that their interactions with professionals (i.e., both physicians and school personnel) were often negatively affected by the lack of *humanity* in the way the service providers communicated information about the children's conditions. They also saw this approach as being intensified by service providers' extreme reliance on *red tape* and bureaucracy. Such approaches are reminiscent of Kalyanpur and Harry's (2012) analysis of special education processes as being heavily influenced by technocratic practices that are intended to ensure accountability and efficiency, rather than reciprocity with families. In the same vein, Skrtic (1991) described the structure of special education as a *machine bureaucracy*. Although the present study did not include observations of parent-service providers' interactions, the data suggest that, generally, there was little practice of cultural competence or cultural reciprocity in the way services were delivered to these parents. Overall, my analysis has resulted in the statement that parents' native cultural beliefs about disabilities were trumped by the actual experience of parenting, but that their efforts to reconcile these sets of views were often challenged by the unresponsiveness of the medical and special education professionals.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study confirmed much of what is already known in the literature and provided new insight into CLD families' interactions and experiences both with disability and their children's service providers. The analysis of findings indicated a few significant ways in which service providers and CLD families can develop more meaningful partnerships in order to better serve children with disabilities. Previous research evidence along with the findings in this study indicates that disability is a social construct. Thus, when the term "disability" is used in discussions with CLD families it often creates an immediate divide between the families and their children's educators and service providers. Consequently, Lynch and Hanson's (2004) concept of cross-cultural competence can be used to create opportunities for both families and service providers to work together. Cross-cultural competence is defined as "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build on ethnic, [socio-] cultural, and linguistic diversity" (Lynch and Hanson as cited in Lynch and Hanson, 2004). Simply put, cross-cultural competence is an understanding of how to interact effectively with individuals from another culture. For educators and service providers, disability is grounded in scientific explanations, and services are based in a technical approach to identifying and serving children. For many CLD families, disability may go beyond scientific explanations to include spiritual explanations. While this perspective was not evident in this study's data, the main gap that was evident was the absence of a humane approach to what parents were going through. I believe that special education's culture of technocratic and bureaucratic practices at least in part contributed to parents' view that service providers lacked "humanity".

Although it is difficult to isolate or even identify the role some cultural beliefs, attitudes, or sociocultural factors play in CLD families' involvement in children's treatment, an openness and willingness by families, educators and other service providers to others' cultural traditions and nuances is warranted. Because cultural beliefs, attitudes, and sociocultural factors are not always easy to pinpoint in CLD groups, it becomes rather challenging to assert that these factors are the primary cause complicating the process of developing meaningful partnerships between services providers and CLD families. Educators and service providers need to be aware of both

the obvious and subtle elements that are associated with the cultural perspectives of CLD families.

These differences are important elements of how families come to think, function, and even respond to situations. Therefore, sociocultural factors of CLD families are important indicators that should be considered valuable to service providers. This is where Harry and Kalyanpur's (2012) concept of *cultural reciprocity* becomes most relevant. This process goes beyond the idea of developing "competence" in others' cultures, to the idea that reciprocal relationships can be helpful in bridging the gaps between families and services providers. These authors recommend that service providers become aware of their own beliefs and biases, and explicitly seek information on families' beliefs and biases, in order to create authentic dialogues with parents. Thus, both parties' culturally-based perspectives and understandings of disabilities and parenting styles are made explicit and allow for genuine collaboration. Reciprocal dialogues with the parents in this study might have allowed them to appreciate the reasons for the "red tape", while the service providers might have learned that sensitivity to parents' feelings could have allowed them to participate in the system rather than become alienated from it. Further implications for practice, based on the findings of this study, suggest that at the initial diagnosis process (i.e., medical or subjective diagnosis), CLD families need provisional supports such as therapy and direct guidance as to what their roles are in the delivery of services process. The success of a meaningful partnership will depend on service providers' abilities to see that CLD families are willing to participate, but might not have the means to be active participants. Service providers must realize that, if guided, CLD families can become assets their child's education and service delivery team. It is important for educators to acknowledge and work from families' cultural capital as opposed to from a deficit perspective.

Implications for Future Research

The findings in this study provide a basis for engaging educators and other professionals in meaningful discussions regarding the cultural beliefs and views families from cultural diverse backgrounds are using to navigate the U.S. education system. Specifically, because many families from culturally diverse backgrounds migrate to the U.S. with the belief that education means upward mobility, having a child receiving special education services may be a more traumatic experience for them. Several areas for further research include additional studies in the role the severity of disability diagnosis on CLD families' perspective and attitude towards disability, the role of showing compassion in the initial diagnosis process, studies with immigrant fathers of children with disability, and studies with service providers regarding their interactions and experiences with CLD families. The subsequent section will address the above recommendations. First, it will be important to conduct additional research into the effect of the nature and severity of children's disability on CLD families' attitudes toward disability as well as on their willingness to care for and advocate for their children. Further studies examining subtle or less severe types of disabilities is warranted as it would help in the ability to distinguish more clearly between different responses to the disability construct. Second, research on the role compassion plays in the delivery of initial disability diagnosis might alleviate some of the undue tension between CLD families and service providers. The style in which diagnosis is delivered as well as how future services will be delivered could include some type of counseling and therapy session for care-givers. Often times in this process it is clear what needs to be done for the child with the disability but very little on how to help care-givers deal and or respond to the diagnosis.

Third, research is needed to explore immigrant fathers' perspective on the construct of disability. The majority of the current body of literature on CLD families focuses on mothers' (and other females') perspectives. It could be advantageous for researchers and service providers alike to shed light on fathers' perspectives as well because their interpretation may not only complicate their interactions with service providers but also impact family/home dynamics. Finally, future research should include more extensive interviews not only with families but also with educators and perhaps include observations of family-school communication events.

Conclusion

The findings of this study yield timely, informative, and helpful insight into a topic that has been at the center of much discussion within education circles. As this study and the literature demonstrate, CLD families' experiences with educators and other service providers are multilayered and continue to complicate development of meaningful partnerships. Particularly unique in this study is its exploration of how families' experiences reshaped their construction of disability. The most important implication of this study, though, is the need for the educational system to be sensitive to the diverse cultural and personal experiences that affect familial involvement in special education.

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PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR CHILDREN

Families provide the primary care for their children. Program personnel and classroom teachers come and go in a child's life, but families are constant. Families may consist of two or more generations, exist on a long-term or short-term basis, and be large or small. Regardless of the membership of the family unit, it is a social system that is structured by rules, patterns of communication, and positions of power related to the membership of the family. Professionals who understand the inner workings of a family are better able to understand, appreciate, and support the family.

According to Lambie and Daniels-Mohring (1993), four fundamental principles of family system theory help to explain the functioning of a family unit:

1. No individual can be understood outside of the context of the family. Family history, interactions, and racial and cultural orientation, both consciously and unconsciously, dictate behaviors of family members. For example, an athletic father who grew up with a family that valued and played physical sports may have a more difficult adjustment to having a child with a physical disability such as cerebral palsy, than he might if the child was deaf. We are all a product of our upbringing.
2. Families have rules for structure and change. These rules organize the day-to-day functioning of the family and allow for adaptation to new circumstances. For instance, when a child with a disability is born into a family, one parent may need to quit his/her job to stay home and care for the child or take on a new household job (e.g., doing laundry or paying bills) so that the other parent can focus on the needs of the child.
3. Interaction with external units is essential to the life of the family. When one family member is a child with a disability, linkages to hospitals, clinics, family support services, and other external units become vital. All families rely on external units, but when a family member has a disability, a greater reliance on outside sources surfaces.
4. All families have productive and nonproductive interactions. Families with a child with a disability are faced with multiple stressors and cannot always function as professionals believe they should. Issues within the family, as well as problems with outside sources, may cause family members to function in less-than-perfect ways.

What does this mean to professionals who are working to establish partnerships with family members? Professionals can obtain insight into the behaviors and learning habits of a child by gaining a deeper understanding of the family as a system. By doing so, the professional is better equipped to work effectively with the child and family and establish a viable partnership. Collaborations between professionals and families often result in successful experiences for children because the goals of the family help create the direction for assessment, instruction, and evaluation related to the child.

Family-centered services and supports in programs for young children birth through age eight are critical to the success of practitioners and administrators. However, working collaboratively with families of young children with disabilities continues to be a challenge for both general and special education professionals. Families, too, are challenged when interacting with professionals who are not knowledgeable about and competent with evidence-based practices. Relatedly, many practitioners do not know how to review research and apply the recommendations to their everyday practices.

Research with Families of Children with Disabilities

While the body of research related to families continues to grow, practitioners still need information and assistance to effectively use evidence-based practices to support families of young children with disabilities. The literature offers guidance in how to form partnerships with families. For example, in a study conducted by Fish (2008), parents of children with disabilities included a welcoming atmosphere, teachers' respectful attitudes toward parents, teachers encouraging parents to participate in educational decisions, and parents' own understanding of the special education system as the most important factors impacting their level of satisfaction with their children's schools. When parents are satisfied with their child's education, they are more likely to form viable partnerships with school professionals.

Parents' understanding of their children's disability (Brown, Moraes, & Mayhew, 2005) and knowledge of special education laws (Fish, 2008; Span, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003), services, and programs (Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006) facilitate parents' involvement in educational decisions regarding their children (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). In fact, research suggests that the level of advocacy chosen by parents is related to their understanding of parental rights and responsibilities related to the education of their children with disabilities (Trainor, 2010). Parents of young children with disabilities have indicated the need for schools to educate them about special education laws and their children's specific disabilities in order to help parents become better advocates for their children (Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2008; Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003) and to improve school-parent collaboration. Having said that, parents often rely on information and technical support provided by professionals working with their children (Garwik, Patterson, Bennett, & Blum, 1998; White & Hastings, 2004). For example, parents of children with autism have indicated the importance of professionals' knowledge about their children's disability and professionals' ability to successfully work with their children (Deris, DiCarlo, Flynn, Ota, & O'Hanlon, 2012; Ruiz, 2012). When parents are confident in the abilities of the individuals teaching their children, they are more likely to pursue partnerships.

One of the major ways that partnerships with family members can be established is through shared decision-making in the child's special education process, including but not limited to, assessment, program planning, Individualized Educational Plan development, and evaluation. Preliminary research suggests that parents' involvement in school related activities at home and school promote academic progress in children with disabilities (McDonnall, Cavenaugh, & Giesen, 2010; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Parental involvement with schools enhances the implementation of the special education process as school professionals and parents are able to collaborate in designing and implementing educational plans that address the child's needs. In addition to improving outcomes for the child, collaborating with parents facilitates practitioners' work as parents may be more willing to support and reinforce jointly selected behaviors and skills at home. Parents are more likely to contribute information and observations about their child when professionals facilitate the active participation of parents in their child's educational process and use language that is family-friendly. Also, parents who serve in leadership roles in the school and community are more likely to become involved in school policies, practices, and decisions about system changes and improvements. When parents are involved and engaged in decision-making for their child and with the school, a win-win situation for families and practitioners is established.

The literature discusses characteristics that facilitate partnerships between professionals and parents. Parents have identified "trust" as one of the most important factors in a partnership with professionals (Johnson & Duffett, 2002; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006). Other specific qualities that assist in the creation of a partnership are communication, professional competence, respect, commitment, equality, and advocacy. Parents' views of educators' attitudes toward their child and family make parents more or less likely to collaborate with professionals working with their children (Hess et al., 2006; Zionts et al., 2003).

The Role of Culture

Everyone has a cultural heritage. However, many people may not be aware of how personal behaviors, preferences, and habits are culturally based. Culture plays a role in defining who individuals are, how individuals relate to and interact with others, and the expectations that they have. Culturally and linguistically diverse families may have different beliefs about child development and disability and favor different parenting styles (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Kozleski et al., 2008; Langdon, 2009). Their life experiences influence their perception of the special education system and their interactions with educators (Harry, 2002). In turn, parents' perceptions affect their communication and collaboration with practitioners (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003) as well as their assessment of the services provided to their children (Fish, 2008).

However, differences in beliefs and practices may occur among people who are sometimes presumed to share the same culture. For example, a Mexican parent may hold some beliefs and practices that are different from those accepted by a parent from Argentina, or any other Latin American country. Yet, both parents are globally referred to as Hispanic or Latino based on commonalities in their ethnic heritage, such as their use of the Spanish language. Professionals who are cognizant of different practices among particular cultural groups may be

better able to provide supports and services to diverse families. In addition, members of an ethnic group may differ in the ways they relate to their heritage, even if they originate from the same country. Practitioners must be aware of family members' individual differences beyond those predicted based on their cultural background.

Practitioner's attitudes and understanding of cultural and linguistic differences undoubtedly shape their communication with diverse parents (Langdon, 2009; Olivos, 2009). People who share common values, goals, and experiences are more likely to trust one another (Flynn, French, & Buzwell, 2000). Professionals and family members who share the same racial/ethnic background and have had similar life experiences may be more willing to establish trusting partnerships with others who are more aligned with their beliefs. Thus, professionals whose racial background is different than a parent's should put their energies into becoming cross-culturally competent. The provision of culturally competent, family-centered supports and services requires that professionals first understand the priorities of families and then how to transfer that knowledge into practices with families. Understanding the concerns, priorities, and resources of families is paramount in effectively working with parents and their children, especially when the individuals are from different racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

Conclusion

Parent-professional partnerships are critical to the success of young children with disabilities. Striving to create partnerships among family members and professionals in which all members of the team are equally valued and considered experts is a major consideration. Professionals who work with culturally and linguistically diverse families need to be cross-culturally competent and value the uniqueness of each family. Partnerships are built upon the assumption that families are equal partners in the educational process.

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A BETTER LIFE: CUSTOMIZED EMPOLYMENT OPPORTUNITES FOR RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

Abstract

If people with intellectual disabilities are to become truly self-determined, they have to be allowed to express choice throughout their daily lives, including employment options. Typically, expectations for competitive employment tend to be low for this population, if considered at all (Citron, Brooks-Lane, Crandell, Brady, Cooper, & Revell, 2008). Theoretically, integrated employment practices, including customized employment and supported employment, have been in place for a number of years. However, there seems to be a disconnection between theory and practice with gaps between current methodologies, practices, and agency policies in the employment field for people with disabilities (Rusch & Wolfe, 2008). This article presents one rural special education teacher's efforts to provide her students with an opportunity for customized employment through an After School Work Camp. Implications for replicating this camp or embedding it within the school curriculum are discussed.

Keywords: Customized employment, integrated employment, competitive pay, competitive employment, school work camp, work, employment, rural, choice, decision-making, severe disabilities, intellectual disabilities, autism, self-determination, Vocational Rehabilitation, & MIG grant.

Rural Employment Practices

According to the National Organization on Disability's 2004 survey, only 35 percent of all people with disabilities, ages 18 through 64, are employed either part or full time in comparison to 78 percent of people without disabilities. Only thirty-four percent of people with disabilities reported they are very satisfied with their lives, compared to 61 percent of people without disabilities. Employment practices are impacting people with severe disabilities both financially and socially.

The standard employment practice for students with severe disabilities is to enter into a segregated facility-based program, such as a Community Training Center (CTC), upon exiting school (Braddock, Hemp, & Rizzolo, 2004). Most CTCs offer those with severe disabilities little in the way of job selection with employees at CTCs typically paid for piece work or at a flat rate, which is considerably lower than minimum wage (Wehman, Brooke, & West, 2006). In some rural areas CTCs are not available as an employment option; students with significant disabilities end up staying home, rather than entering the workforce. They graduate to the couch instead of to a jobsite. Segregated facilities are inconsistent with community inclusion and independence (Wehman, Revell, & Brooke, 2003).

In some areas, supported employment, which is employment in a community setting for commensurate wages/benefits driven by need of the local job market, is available through Vocational Rehabilitation Training (VR) for people with severe disabilities (Wehman et al., 2003). Compared to employment at a CTC, supported employment better encompasses the decision-making process and preferences of people with disabilities. It looks to support their rights to explore job preferences and then match choice and skill sets to an employment position within the community (Criton et al., 2008). One significant problem with supported employment is that people with disabilities are being placed at competitive community job openings, instead of identifying and negotiating positions that best fit the strengths of the people seeking employment.

An alternative to supported employment is customized employment. Customized employment is designed through person-centered planning and takes into consideration the strengths, preferences, and desires of individuals with intellectual disabilities in regard to competitive employment options. The Federal Registry (June 6, 2003), defines customized employment as a means to individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized determination of strengths, needs, and interests of persons with disabilities, and is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer.

Key means of accomplishing customized employment include: (a) job carving – creating a new job from a previous one encompassing some, but not all aspects of the original job; (b) job negotiation – creating a new job from parts of several existing jobs; (c) job creation – creating a new job based on unmet workplace needs; (d) job sharing – two or more people sharing the same job; and (e) self-employment, including the use of a micro enterprise (Citron et al., 2008). These methodologies are individualized to fit the preferences and strengths of those seeking employment.

The After School Work Camp

Excited about the prospect of customized employment in a rural community, a comprehensive life skills special education teacher wrote, and was awarded, a MIG for $16,400.00 to assist her in creating such employment opportunities for her students. The After School Work Camp was designed with two main purposes: (1) to develop potential career preferences through hands-on experiences at a variety of employment experiences and, (2) to

open dialog and build relationships with local businesses and agencies in order for customized employment to become a reality for her students with severe disabilities.

Community

According to the United States Census Bureau in 2010, the overall community population for the rural school district in which the camp took place is 16,528. The nearest urban area with a commercial airport is 180 miles away. Per the state website, the rural school district in this article has 3,434 total students with 508 of those students in special education. Of those 508 students with disabilities, 32 are considered to have severe disabilities, which are defined here as those students qualifying to take the alternate assessments to the high school proficiency assessments mandated by the state.

Camp Participants

Students. The camp consisted of 18 students, ages 14 to 22, with severe disabilities (see Table 1).

Table 1
Student Participants

Disability Category	# of Student Participants	Previous on-the-Job Training
Autism	7	0
Multiple Disabilities	2	0
Deafblind	2	0
Intellectual Disabilities	6	0
Orthopedic Impairments	1	0

Parents. All parents of the students were invited to attend the classroom lessons and guest speaker presentations. Three parents participated in the entire camp, while others attended sporadically based on interest in a given topic. Seventeen of 18 parents participated in the final camp celebration.

Staff. Staff for the camp was four special education teachers, six paraprofessionals, and four transportation personnel. All teachers and paraprofessionals were from the high school and were familiar with the participating students. The teacher who wrote the grant served as the project coordinator. The three other special education teachers assisted in securing businesses/guest speakers, mailing information, obtaining and serving as job coaches, and prepping materials. Five paraprofessionals were trained by the project coordinator to be job coaches at the work sites. One paraprofessional's position was to capture each student's and business' employment experience on video so that a DVD of the camp could be produced. The transportation personnel were the students' daily bus drivers and bus aides. They provided transportation to and from job sites for students and coaches via bus and district vehicles.

Agencies and Businesses. Guest speakers were secured from four local agencies including VR, the local community college, a state-funded job skill training corporation, and a private life-coaching company. A total of 15 local businesses agreed to participate in the camp with 10 actually being used during the camp. Those businesses were selected based on students' preferences and strengths.

Camp Design

The After School Work Camp ran Monday through Friday from 3:30 to 5:30 pm and Saturday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The daily schedule along with targeted skills and agencies are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Daily Schedule Indicating Targeted Skills and Agencies Represented With Topics Presented

Week Day	Targeted Soft Skills	Agency & Topic
Monday	Honesty on the job	Vocational Rehabilitation, intake process & services available to students
Tuesday	Applying for jobs, the application process, resumes, & appropriate attire	Take interest inventory via state website, mock job interviews
Wednesday	Importance of job attendance, when/why/how to appropriately miss work	Local community college, classes available, courses of study available, & how to apply for special education services
Thursday	Following directions on the job, asking for assistance when needed, & self-advocacy such as asking for enlarged print or pictures/word schedules of tasks	State funded employment training corporation, services and certificates available, agency coordination, application support, & core job readiness skills
Friday	Interacting with co-workers & customers	Private job coaching agency, services offered, natural supports, & self-advocacy

Saturday was an all day work experience for students at a local community business (Table 3). Students selected a job site based on their interests and strengths, and then a job coach was assigned per employment site for assistance. Special education teachers and paraprofessionals served as the job coaches. The specific work experience was determined by a web-based employment interest survey as well as student choice and strengths. The number of hours spent

on the job was determined individually with one student spending only 2 hours on the job due to health concerns and others spending 7 hours.

Table 3
Customized Employment Positions for Saturday Work Experience

Student Strengths & Interests	Job Location & Typical Employment Task	Customized Employment Position
Welding safety techniques, standard beads & basic tacks, taken welding I at the high school, reads printed word; interests are welding, farming, & bowling	Welding company: standard beads & basic tacks, Arc & Tig welding, safety procedures a must	Student began by laying down basic tacks then passed the metal to another worker; he progressed to laying down beads while following all safety procedures.
Good small motor skills, very precise when competing tasks, follows 1-2 step directions well, counts 1-15 very well; interests are all kinds of movies, video games, & track	Movie theater :wait on patrons at candy counter, fill popcorn bags as needed, fill nacho cups	The student was great at quality control as he was very specific with handing out food items; during the rush, he began counting and handing out the movie tickets as the other worker took the ticket money, which sped up the process.
Follows multi-step directions well, cleans, sorts, wraps, alphabetizes, shreds, uses scissors/glue/tape independently, has good people skills, asks for help when needed, reads printed word; interests are reading magazines, office work, & shopping with friends	Gift Shop: wait on customers, run register, assist customers in finding items	The shop became very busy and had many customers wanting their purchases gift wrapped and so the student became the designated gift wrapper.
Computer programming, computer software, installing computer hardware, great at memorizing anything to do with computers, reads printed word; interests are video games, bowling, & computers	Computer repair shop: assist computer repair technicians as needed	The shop had a number of computers that needed to be wiped clean of viruses and have basic software programs loaded on them; this student did those tasks so that the technicians were freed to work on other repairs.
Sorting, alphabetizing to the third letter, cleaning, packaging items together,	County library: checking in and out books, shelving books, assisting patrons in	The library had a story time activity that needed to be packaged together for the

following directions, computer keyboarding, Microsoft Office, reads printed word, uses a Kindle; interests are reading, movies with friends, bowling & track	locating books	next day and so in between checking in and out books, she worked on that task. She was so efficient that the library staff had her package all activities for the following week as well.
Computer skills, Microsoft Word, Keyboarding, great at multi-step directions, great people skills, asks for help when needed, reads printed word; interests are trucks, old cars, computers, Facebook, bowling & track	Trucking company: dispatching trucks to locations, requesting assistance for drivers as needed	The student entered the truck number, driver name, and site location into the computer for daily tracking which freed up the other dispatcher to order parts and compete office work.
Auto-tech I class at the high school, has good gross and fine motor skills, can use basic auto mechanic tools, follows 1-2 step directions well, has a great attitude; interests are cars and auto mechanics, bowling, track, dances, & movies with friends	Trucking company: basic auto mechanic duties, changing tires, parts running	The company had many tires that needed to be moved to a specific location and so the student rolled them to given destination, stacked, and counted them.
Good social skills, good gross motor skills, follows 1-2 step directions well, works well with people; interests are shopping, eating out, bowling, & movies with friends	Mexican restaurant: fill water pitchers, tortilla chip baskets, and salsa cups for waiters and waitresses	The restaurant became very busy for the lunch rush with many tables needing refills of water and so the student refilled water at the tables as needed which helped out the wait staff.
Good social skills, good gross motor skills, follows 1-2 step directions well, works well with people; interests are eating out, track, music & movies with friends	Mexican restaurant: fill water pitchers, tortilla chip baskets, and salsa cups in back for waiters and waitresses	The restaurant became very busy for the lunch rush with many tables needing refills of chips & salsa and so the student refilled them at the tables as needed, which helped out the wait staff.
Very friendly, greets people well with a smile and wave, good gross motoring with arms and hands, follows 1 step directions well; interests are all sporting events & being around	High school concession stand: wait on patrons for sporting event, stamp hand of those who are leaving for re-entry	The hand stamping for the re-entry process was congested as no one was designated to do the job and so this student sat at a desk and stamped the hands of the patrons for re-entry

people		purposes.
Very friendly, counts money, counts items up to 100 well, follows multi-step directions well, good social skills, keyboarding skills, Microsoft Office skills, reads printed word; interests are high school events (especially sports), friends, & dancing	High school concession stand: wait on patrons for sporting event, stamp hand of those who are leaving for re-entry	The concession stand staff needed to take inventory so on down times this student counted and recorded daily inventory so that re-ordering of items could take place.
Able to independently run industrial dishwashing machines, reads printed word, follows multi-step directions, works well by self; interests are horses, dogs, movies, magazines, shopping, & bowling	Pizza restaurant: dishwasher, make pizzas, stock pizza toppings	The pizza restaurant had three people making pizzas, stocking inventory, and washing dishes as needed; this student was so proficient at running the dishwashing machine they had her just do that which helped to make everything run more efficiently. (Her co-workers loved her as they hated doing the dishes!)
Able to follow 1 step directions well, friendly and greets people appropriately, good social skills, good gross motor skills; interests are being around people, cooking, music & dancing	Pizza restaurant: dishwasher, make pizzas, stock pizza toppings	This pizza restaurant had a lunchtime buffet that waitresses tended to along with waiting on customers and so this student took over the buffet by taking out fresh pizzas, keeping it clean, and filling sauces and cheese shakers freeing up the wait staff to better accommodate customers.
Able to follow multi-step directions, good with math and numbers, counts money, enthusiastic about working, reads printed word, keyboarding skills, Microsoft Office skills; interests are Magic card game, video games, & movies	Local bowling alley concession stand: waiting on customers, taking money, wiping down tables, and shelves, stock inventory	This business got very busy at lunchtime and so this student just stayed on the cash register totaling purchases, taking money, and giving change while the other workers made the food and took it to customers, which helped to make the business run more efficiently.

Results of the After School Work Camp

Outcomes of the camp. As a result of the After School Work Camp, doors opened in the local employment market for these rural students through customized employment. Dialog and partnerships among local agencies, businesses, and students with disabilities developed. VR, the United Cerebral Palsy Foundation (UCP), the school district, businesses, and families are working together to make competitive employment goals realities for these students.

One student with an intellectual disability enrolled at the local community college in the Nursing Assistant program and will access VR services. Another student with multiple impairments, including dual sensory and intellectual disabilities, completed a 6 week paid internship through VR at the county library. This employment position was secured through job negotiation from the customized employment model. This same student is currently preparing for an 8 week paid internship at a local restaurant with the assistance of VR, UCP and the local high school. Yet another young man with autism completed a 3 month internship at a local computer repair shop and will do an 8 week paid internship at that same store a year following the After School Work Camp. His employment position was created utilizing job carving from the customized employment model.

Pursuing self-employment from the customized employment model, a young lady with an intellectual impairment opened her own business selling soaps and cleaning products that she organically makes herself. Four other students with severe disabilities are currently in the intake process with VR for assistance in achieving their career goals.

Perceptions of the camp. At the conclusion of the camp, students, businesses, and parents were given a survey to complete outlining their thoughts about participating in the camp. The survey asked about the following components: lessons, guest speakers, work experience, self-determination, and changes in thoughts or practices as a result of the camp.

Of the 18 students who participated in the camp, all students reported having more control and choice over their lives as a result of the work camp. Fifteen of 18 students stated wanting to seek community-based competitive employment. Six of 18 students reported wanting to go on to college or a career technology school, and seven students indicated their desires to live independently through supported living. All 10 businesses that participated asked to be included in future work camps. The opportunity for businesses to visually observe the students working in the actual employment environment was invaluable.

Implications of the After School Work Camp for Practitioners

Formally integrating the After School Work Camp into school and community settings could maintain the outcomes and benefits demonstrated for students with severe disabilities. In the school setting, a formal Job Club could be created with membership open to students with and without disabilities. This club could meet weekly or bi-monthly with members researching and exploring various employment opportunities through hands-on experiences. If not a Job Club

or in addition to a Job Club, practitioners might incorporate the key concepts from this work camp into the curriculum at the high school level, targeting transition age students ages 18-22.

Potential challenges. Continuing the After School Work Camp in this rural setting has been requested by businesses, students, and parents. Funding may be a potential barrier to replicating the work camp, although the dollar amount needed to replicate a work camp within the same parameters could be significantly less than $16,400.00.

Summary

Customized employment seeks to individualize the employment relationship between people with intellectual disabilities and local businesses. By building upon an individual's strengths and preferences, work experience opportunities can be provided and, with the person's and business' approval, potential jobs are carved out specifically for that individual. The end result is competitive pay for competitive work of the person's choice, in the local community. These are the very same ideals that people without disabilities seek when looking for employment.

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DISCLOSURE CHOICES

From the short story, *The Little Engine that Could*, by Watty Piper, the famous expression, "I think I can, I think I can" has been inspiring people of all ages to be the very best they can. Special Education students endure the challenges of fulfilling the idiom and achieving the success they desire. The terms self advocacy and disclosure are synonymous when referring to students with disabilities. It is essential we educate our students on self advocacy skills, teaching them strategies that are practical and functional that they will be able to use during the journey of life. In the roundtable discussion, participants will take an active role in these activities demonstrating the importance of disclosure, its purpose, while responding to examples of specific scenarios.

According to the Wrights Law, the definition for self advocacy includes the ability to speak up for yourself, learning how to obtain information, working with people who will support you through your journey of life, reaching out for help and self determination (Wrights Law, 2014). Each of these areas of need is closely related to the term disclosure and has substantial impact for our special education students. Keeping that in mind, *The 411 on Disability Disclosure* defines disclosure "as the process of intentionally releasing personal information about yourself for a specific purpose" (National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2005, p. 14). The magnitude of teaching disclosure to our students and providing them with a specialized tool kit, one which they will appreciate and use, may be an ultimate life saver. Consequently, understanding the different types of advocates and the roles they play in our students' world is a must.

Many special education teachers in conjunction with parents and other school staff have accepted the role of advocates for our students. However, what happens to that child when they leave our side and move onto the next phase of their life? After all, isn't teaching independence the ultimate goal? Absolutely!!!! Therefore, educators, lay people, and school personnel have the responsibility of "acting on behalf of the child" (Wright & Wright, 2013). This means they will work together to collect information, organize documents, plan, prepare, maintain records, identify problems, and propose solutions (Wright & Wright, 2013). At some point, the child needs to be comfortable with their disability and be able to communicate needs and wants in an adult manner; in other words disclosure.

A child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) allows for many provisions throughout their school years. However, once they leave the site, everything changes for them. The child will need to explain what accommodations and modifications work best for them. In our school, we are diligently working with our students developing individualized scripts which they will be able to take with them upon graduation. By designing their script they will be able to become

successful advocates. The practical applications will demonstrate to the participants how the students can make informed decisions while teaching a young person about his or her rights and responsibilities in disclosing their disability.

"Disclosure is a very personal decision, and takes thought and practice" (National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability, 2009). Choosing what to reveal is an essential part of the disclosure process and skill. The 411 on Disability Disclosure has created a workbook for adults and youths. The Adult workbook focuses on strategies which an adult may use to support the young person with disabilities. "The ultimate goal of this workbook is to help the young man or woman in your life make an informed choice about disclosing his or her disability" (National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability, 2005). There are nine units, starting with explaining the term disability, "viewed as a natural part of the human experience, it is not to be ashamed of or feared." Remember, I think I can syndrome? The next unit is an in-depth guide to The 5 Self and Goals - setting. These are known as self-determination, self advocacy, self esteem, self efficacy and self sufficiency. Each area is defined, followed by two questionnaires, used to determine the youth's areas of strengths and how his goals may be used to enhance the strengths. Unit 3 discusses disclosure, its importance, unit 4 explains the disadvantages and advantages, unit 5 refers to the student's rights under the law, and unit 6 covers accommodations, followed by unit 7 discussing post secondary disclosure, unit 8, speaks about the work force and unit 9, refers to disclosure within the community.

The content of the Youth workbook focuses on strategies for the student, so they will be able "to make an informed choice about disclosing their disability" (National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability, 2005). The units from this section have become a mandatory part of the regular curricula in our special education classes. The freshman class will begin with Unit 1-3, Self Determination and Disclosure, Importance, and Advantages and Disadvantages. Sophomore and juniors will read about the rights and responsibilities and accommodations. Seniors will focus on unit 6-8, which will "reiterate the need to disclose in order to get reasonable accommodations in college, at a university, in a career and technical school" (National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability, 2005, p. 48). When used in the proper sequence, the 411 document is a great resource to prepare our students for life after high school. They will exit with a strong sense of how to use their strengths, thus achieving their goals and instead of saying, I Think I can, they will say, I know I will.

The empirical or theoretical base of information contained in The *Cyber Disclosure for Youth with Disabilities* highly recommends and supports the information. Teachers within our school district are utilizing the ideas and will attest to positive results and feedback from both students, parents and general education teachers. The material discussed is designed to target families, educators, youth service professionals and adults who are involved with and tend to students with disabilities. Once the young adult becomes comfortable, then they will be able to transfer these skills as they enter into post secondary education and the workforce. We hope our message will help teachers to empower their students. Disclosing sensitive information is a lifelong skill, critical to ensuring their success in the future.

As special educators we have accepted the challenges of working with students with disabilities. We believe that knowledge is power and providing this to our students and

communities will enrich everyone's lives. Self advocacy and disclosure are two terms which match very closely and must be taught to our students so they will gain the confidence needed to achieve success regardless of their geographical location. We need to spread the word to our community members and dissolve their misconceptions of the label, Special Education. It is our belief that our students are capable of learning and becoming successful and responsible members of society. We stand firm on our convictions that educators and businesses should view young adults as our future. Rural businesses need to consider them as an investment, rather than a liability. We leave you with this last thought, once said by Benjamin Franklin, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance" (Wright & Wright, 2013).

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