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Table of Contents

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THE IMPACT OF INITIATIVES AND MANDATES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS AND THE STUDENTS THEY SERVE

Abstract

This study surveyed more than 300 special education professionals regarding their perceptions of recent initiatives in education. Professionals ranked the impact they perceived each initiative had on their job, as well as the impact they perceived each initiative had on student outcomes. Responses were compared across rural, suburban, and urban settings. Rural educators felt funding had the most significant impact on their jobs and student outcomes. Professionals also shared which supports they considered most beneficial when implementing a new initiative and the initiatives on which perceived themselves to be considered "the expert".

Introduction

Throughout the history of education, policymakers have proposed reforms focused on improving the educational system. Even though schools may adopt some components of an educational reform, the actual foundations of teaching and learning within a classroom remain constant (Elmore, 1996). According to Cuban (2013),

> While the structures of schooling and classroom teaching have indeed changed over the past two centuries there has been a deep-seated continuity in both schooling and teaching that has made what occurs in classrooms familiar to generation after generation of parents and observers (pp. 109-110).

Why haven't educational reforms transformed the foundations of teaching and learning within the classroom? One reason may be a phenomenon known as initiative fatigue. The Law of Initiative Fatigue is "when the number of initiatives increases while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant, then each new initiative, no matter how well-conceived or well-

intentioned, will receive fewer minutes, dollars, and ounces of emotional energy than its predecessors" (Reeves, 2010, p. 27). Based upon this law, educators may not have the time, resources, or emotional energy to fully implement these reforms in a way that transforms teaching and learning within the classroom.

Although not directly referred to as initiative fatigue in research, Valli and Buese (2007) studied the effect educational policies had on the tasks and roles of elementary teachers. Their findings showed that policies caused the tasks that teachers performed to change, as well as increasing, expanding, and intensifying the teachers' roles. In addition to the changes in tasks and roles, the Valli and Buese noted the teachers' quality of instruction, relationships with students, and professional well-being declined.

While the study by Valli and Buese (2007) showed that educational policies impacted elementary teachers, one might contend that special education professionals would also experience similar effects. For example, when many states adopted the Common Core State Standards, all teachers found it necessary to revisit their respective curricula and approaches and make adjustments what was taught and how it was taught. For special educators, who are often not considered "content experts", this meant not only reviewing the curriculum and expectations for students, but also thinking about ways to scaffold new information to accommodate their students' present levels of functioning to allow them the opportunity to meet these higher standards. Thus, creating an environment of sustained educational improvement is difficult when the daily demands of teaching are coupled with the increasing goals, expectations, and initiatives (Fullan, 2007).

Of particular concern when considering initiative fatigue in special education is how the adoption of initiatives relates to teacher burnout in special education. Maslach and Jackson (1981) define burnout as a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind" (p. 99). The three dimensions of burnout are emotional exhaustion, dehumanized perception of others or cynicism, and dissatisfaction with personal accomplishments (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Many variables may contribute to teacher burnout in special education. Because this study focused upon initiatives, the researchers were most interested in variables related to school level or district level policy. In a review of past studies on special education teacher burnout, Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014) organized burnout variables from proximal or teacher characteristics to distal or district policy characteristics. Brunsting et al. included several studies that identified school level variables as work hindrances, meeting emotional needs, role ambiguity and role conflict, and support for others as school level variables associated with Special Education Teacher (SET) burnout. At the state or district level, Brunsting et al. included only one study that showed a correlation between financial support and personal accomplishment.

Purpose

The purpose of the current study was to ascertain special education professionals' perceptions of the effects of various initiatives and mandates. For example, teachers and

administrators were queried about the significance of specific mandates on their performance, time, etc. In addition, special education professionals were asked how likely it was that they were relied upon to serve as the expert as new initiatives were being implemented. Not only was data gathered on how the changes impact the lives of professionals, perhaps more importantly, opinions were sought regarding the consequences for students. Furthermore, the researchers wanted to examine the possibility of the seemingly near-constant change affecting teachers and administrators' intent to remain in their role(s).

Participants and Method

An invitation to participate in an online survey was emailed to all Special Education Directors in Illinois. In addition to being asked to participate, the administrators were asked to forward the request to respond to the survey to the special education professionals within their school, district, or cooperative. After the initial invitation and a reminder email sent two weeks later, 357 professionals completed the twenty-item survey. Of these, 17.36% reportedly served in an administrative role while the other 82.64% served students with disabilities in another capacity (e.g., special educator, social worker, speech pathologist, etc.) in the school setting. Of those who responded, 89.5% were female, while 9.57% were male. Age ranges of students served and types of programs were diverse. Students most commonly receiving special education services under the categories: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Learning Disabilities (LD), and Other Health Impairments (OHI). Almost a quarter (23.99%) of participants had served in their current role for more than 20 years while nearly a fifth of them (19.65%) had less than four years of experience. Two thirds (66.28%) had attained Master's Degrees while 23.84% had earned a Bachelor's. In all, approximately one-third of respondents were from rural schools (as defined by the participants) and this subgroup will be the focus on which the results and discussion are based.

Results

Rural professionals perceived funding as having the greatest effect on their job performance and professional time. The Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) and data-driven instruction also received high impact ratings. When compared with the ratings by professionals employed by urban and suburban districts, funding remained one of the initiatives of most significance; however, suburban special educators and administrators considered data-driven instruction more impactful on their professional lives while research-based practices were rated at the same impact level as funding by those teaching in suburban schools. Professionals in urban schools did not rate PERA as one of most impactful initiatives. Much like those working in suburban schools, research-based practices fell within the top- rated initiatives by this subgroup. Mean ratings of the perceived impact each initiative has on the professional and student are displayed in Table 1.

In terms of the impact various initiatives are perceived to have on student performance and outcomes, those from suburban and rural schools felt initiatives related to funding had the greatest impact, while professionals working in urban schools perceived technology integration most impacted their students. Technology was also rated as having a significant impact on

students in rural settings whereas those in suburban settings seemed to believe their students were more affected by data-driven instruction and research-based practices.

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Initiative Impact

	Impact on Professional/Impact on Students Served		
Initiative	Rural	Urban	Suburban
Standards Implementation	3.35/3.15	2.88/2.66	3.06/3.0
PARCC Assessment	3.01/2.91	2.86/2.42	2.70/2.54
DLM Assessment	2.41/2.27	2.23/2.21	2.19/2.13
PERA	3.68/2.53	2.91/2.28	3.28/2.46
RtI/MTSS	3.23/3.10	3.60/3.22	3.64/3.41
PBIS	3.02/3.13	3.64/3.42	3.43/3.37
SB 100/Discipline	2.77/2.53	3.19/2.83	2.79/2.53
Data-Driven Instruction	3.63/3.10	3.88/3.67	3.94/3.53
Research Based Practices	3.51/3.13	3.75/3.53	3.86/3.51
Results Driven Accountability (RDA)	2.61/2.40	2.61/2.36	2.99/2.67
Mental Health Needs	3.18/3.16	3.68/3.50	3.45/3.26
Technology Integration	3.37/3.32	3.63/3.73	3.45/3.46
Co-Teaching	2.72/2.75	2.86/2.93	2.72/2.74
Inclusive Practices	3.16/3.18	3.47/3.38	3.41/3.30
Certification and Shortage of Special Education Professionals	3.08/3.04	3.38/3.36	3.21/3.09
Funding	3.80/3.59	4.02/3.60	3.86/3.86
ESSA	2.84/2.65	3.12/2.58	3.13/2.72
Identification of Learning Disabilities	3.21/3.06	3.58/3.28	3.33/3.18
Transition	2.88/2.63	2.79/2.72	2.85/2.70

Note: Weighted Average; Scale of 1= no impact to 5=extreme impact; PARCC = Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers; DLM = Dynamic Learning Maps; RtI/MTSS = Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered System of Supports; PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act.

When comparing rural settings to urban and suburban settings, it can be concluded from the data collected that rural special education professionals are often perceived to be or expected to serve as the expert for a number of trends, initiatives, and mandates. Co-teaching, Transition Planning, PERA as well as the PARCC and DLM Assessments are areas where rural special education professionals often fill the role of "Expert". On the other hand, rural special education professionals are less likely than their urban or suburban colleagues to possess a high level of expertise related to the topics of RtI/MTSS, PBIS, RDA, Mental Health Needs, and Data-Driven Instruction.

Related to professional development, over a third of rural special education professionals reported to have spent more than thirty hours learning about the mandates or initiatives included in the survey. Those in urban and suburban areas noted similar results. Across all geographic locations, approximately a quarter of respondents had received less than ten hours of professional development focused on any combination of the initiatives or mandates described. When asked to identify the topics on which they most needed professional development, rural professionals noted: mental health needs, RtI/MTSS, and standards implementation as the areas they perceived more training was necessary whereas suburban professionals felt PBIS and RtI/MTSS along with standards implementation and research-based practices were areas for which to seek additional training. For those working in urban settings, mental health needs and RtI/MTSS were listed as professional development needs followed closely by SB 100/Disciplinary training needs.

Professionals also rated the degree to which various supports contributed to their respective ability to adapt to changes in the field. Those in rural settings most valued administrative support and a positive school culture, which professionals from urban and suburban schools also considered most impactful. Interestingly, having instructional coaches as a support was significantly less likely to be available in rural settings as compared to larger schools.

In an attempt to ascertain how initiative fatigue might affect professionals' lives, participants were asked to estimate the number of years they intend to remain in their role as a special education professional. As shown in Table 2, over a third of urban professionals (37.93%) expect to leave their current role within the next four years. In suburban areas, this number decreases to 31.43% and it is even lower for those in rural areas (25.52%). Conversely, special educational professionals who plan to remain in their current role for more than twenty years ranges from 12.07-15.71% across the three types of geographic locations with urban professionals rating this at the lowest level. Furthermore, to determine the extent to which participants perceived the initiatives/mandates influenced their decision to remain in their current professional role, respondents were asked to rate the impact of the initiatives on a scale of 0-10. Overall, rural professionals perceived the impact in a similar manner to those working in urban and suburban settings.

Table 2

Level of Impact on Professionals' Decision to Remain or Leave their Role

Type of Setting	Mean
Rural	7.29
Urban	6.78
Suburban	7.55

Note: 0= "no impact" to 10 = "extreme impact".

Discussion

When analyzing participants' responses, one might conclude that special education professionals experience numerous similar challenges across settings and types of schools. For instance, funding initiatives were noted as having a great impact that could certainly produce a compounding effect as many other initiatives require financial support for implementation. Moreover, many of the mandates were considered as having a similar impact on teachers and students. Exceptions include changes in teacher evaluation procedures (PERA) and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (now known as ESSA) which is in the very early stages of implementation perhaps making it difficult to discern the effects this law is currently having or may have on students with disabilities.

Another important finding was that while all special education professionals are expected to "wear many hats" and that many feel overwhelmed by role ambiguity and role expansion, this is often exacerbated for those in rural settings. However, burnout and the intent to leave do not seem to be major concerns for this subgroup of professionals. While a few teachers or administrators shared qualitative comments related to a countdown of days before retirement, rural special educators reported being the least likely to leave their current positions within the next four years. Perhaps they are more rooted in the community in which they teach, or it may be that those in rural areas are place bound for other reasons. In either case, given the state of teacher shortages in rural areas, this was reassuring.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the current study was that a multi-level "snowball" sampling technique was utilized to locate participants. In addition, responses were based solely on self-report data. While more than fifty participants who completed the survey indicated they were willing to take part in follow-up interviews, these interviews have not yet been conducted. Another limitation was that participants self-defined the geographic classification of rural, urban, or suburban which was used for filtering and sorting across analyses. Finally, when asked about

the impact on themselves and their own role, as well as the perceived impact on students, special education professionals were not asked to differentiate between a negative or positive impact.

Recommendations for Future Research

As many of these initiatives continue to be implemented in schools, descriptive research related to how these initiatives are impacting professionals is warranted. Future research is needed to determine the tasks special education professionals must perform to implement each initiative. Additionally, research is required to examine exactly what role special education professionals assume within the implementation of each initiative. Of particular interest would be an examination of possible variance in the tasks and roles of special education professionals based upon their demographic location.

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LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS FOR INSIGHTS: OUR VISITS TO SCHOOLS/ADULT FACILITIES IN FRIESLAND PROVINCE, NETHERLANDS

A Dream of Travel and Scholarship Together Springs to Life for Two Educators

The life of a university faculty educator can be frightful at times when one considers the professional responsibilities that accompany such work, but–then again–some aspects of the work can be very sweet. One of these is the privilege of earning a sabbatical leave that is commonly based on a sound record of teaching and obtaining a scholarship every six years based on an academic timetable. Having received this opportunity, the authors of this presentation carefully planned Kopriva's sabbatical leave to coincide with the conclusion of Renema-Kopriva's retirement from classroom teaching, following over four decades that involved the education of both students without disabilities and those who live with disabilities. Such planning allowed this couple to dream a bit regarding the activities that would encompass the approved leave plan with the university: incorporating a visit to the birthplace of Renema-Kopriva, coinciding the trip with visiting family, and experiencing the Netherlands, possibly experiencing them like never before.

The Sabbatical Leave was carefully developed to include three distinct aspects of scholarship. Part 1 of the plan was designed to return to the elementary school that was Renema-Kopriva's workplace for over 25 years and resume work with young children, who were known to experience difficulty in social/emotional development, enrolled in Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes. The spring semester of the 2017 school year was devoted to weekly instruction of more than 25 children who benefited greatly from the planned instructional lessons prepared and offered by the couple. Immediately following this semester, Part 2 of the approved plan called for travel to the Netherlands to visit and learn about education for children, both with and without disabilities, in that country. Initially, the intended goal was to focus on Montessori Schools and other private and public schools that provide education to children. Part 3 of the plan was to travel from the Netherlands to Prague, Czech Republic to attend and participate in the 28th International Montessori Congress, Prague. This premier conference is held once every five years in a different country and has educators (particularly Montessori trained educators) attending from all parts of the globe to collaborate and share research and practice in education within their countries. Our hope, one year prior to the Congress, was to have our presentation proposal, which focused on recent work conducted with students experiencing delays in the

development and understanding of social skills, accepted to share with individuals attending the Congress. To our great dismay and disappointment, our work was not selected for presentation at the Congress. However, our attendance and participation during the week was a significant milestone, gathering with other educators from over 72 countries represented and connecting with others who teach and work with students as a vocation, not as a means to make a living. Our contact made with others by means of shared meals, coffee gatherings, and visiting select sites in Prague resulted in numerous invitations by other attendees to visit schools and Montessori Training Institutions throughout the world!

Do you note the deliberate and fine planning that this couple crafted together to help make the sabbatical leave a special experience for the two of them? Plans were made and approved by the university a full year prior to implementation of the plan. What could not be known at the time was what was to unfold for the couple when attending and participating in the 36th Annual ACRES Conference held in Asheville, North Carolina, March 2017. While enjoying this remarkable conference with other ACRES Members, the authors heard over and over again during coffee and meal periods, "If you are visiting the Netherlands–for gosh sakes–why don't you make a point to visit special education settings and then plan to submit a proposal to present at the 37th Annual ACRES Conference in Salt Lake City, UT!" Before the conclusion of this extraordinary conference in Asheville, plans were already evolving in the couple's hotel room regarding how they would revise long arranged plans and set a new course for visiting numerous special education settings in the Netherlands, in addition to those schools and classrooms already arranged to visit following their arrival. A great deal of excitement was felt regarding the new plans. It was determined that one goal of the visit would be to not only look forward to attending the 2018 ACRES Conference in Salt Lake City but, in addition, to hopefully be selected to present–to all those members attending the conference–a most-remarkable presentation of what was seen and experienced regarding special education as practiced currently in the Netherlands.

Education in the Netherlands: Historical and Current Practice for Pupils and Adults with Disabilities

The Dutch historiography regarding the origins of special education aimed at individuals who, in the terminology of the time, were considered to suffer from a 'feeble mind' often underlines that the Netherlands were slow in developing institutions for special education (van Drenth, 2005). The Netherlands did not have a specific expert regime in handling mental retardation in the nineteenth century. This condition contrasted greatly with the situation that existed in France, Britain, America, and Germany, where respectively, psychiatrists, philanthropists, general physicians, and teachers dominated the field of care for and treatment of individuals with mental problems and deficiencies (van Drenth, 2005). Dutch institutions in the 1850s devoted to serving psychiatric patients failed in many cases to have a medical officer or a well-educated, non-medical superintendent, let alone a proper system of classification of the patients. One exception to this was Meerenberg, a new asylum for the insane founded in the Netherlands in 1849. Among those visiting Meerenberg to learn of practices used with patients in this institution was Dorothea L. Dix, the American female reformer of the asylums for the insane in the United States. It is reported that following her visit Dix confirmed the "deservedly high reputation" of the institution (van Drenth, 2005). Dix, as well as other noted individuals in the forefront of advocacy for those living with mental conditions, was strongly in favor of an

individual and educational approach for people with mental problems. It was at Meerenberg in the early 1850s that the first Dutch initiative to educate pupils with mental retardation was undertaken. A special program for mentally-retarded children was developed, in addition to classes for adults and for those nurses and attendants in the institution who were themselves unable to read and write (van Drenth, 2005). It was noted by the authors of this article (both special educators) that earlier initiatives in special education in the Netherlands had all been aimed primarily at children with impairments in seeing and hearing. In the 1850s, four schools existed for these children: three of them for the deaf and one for the blind.

Historians in the field of mental retardation and special education have described how a gradual transformation took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Once considered as one all-encompassing category, the mentally disturbed, ill, and retarded individuals began to be considered as individual human beings. Imagine the significance of this for a moment. Such thinking has led to our current day philosophy and practice regarding those who live with and experience disabilities. Their well-being, also in terms of the development of an individual identity, became an issue of concern. The traditional treatment of exceptional individuals, often characterized by neglect or even cruelty, now changed with the introduction of the new regimes of treatment, care, and education (van Drenth, 2005).

Being present in the Netherlands as an adult and experiencing a visit with one goal of learning about education as practiced currently in the country was a tremendously exciting opportunity for both authors. Particularly so for the co-author having recently concluded a career in education spanning well over 40 years serving children with and without disabilities and in settings as diverse as Catholic schools, county schools, and public schools. Nearly seventy years had lapsed since her birth and the opportunity to be raised in that country prior to immigration with her family to the United States of America. She was extremely interested in the changes she saw and learned about, both in reading select articles on education in the Netherlands prior to departure for the visit and the actual planned visits to select schools and adult settings that formed the agenda. What she saw with her eyes was often also felt in her heart as she interacted with children, teachers, administrators, medical personnel, and staff of these facilities. It needs to be stated that these visitations were usually very emotional due to the depth of feelings and appreciation for the opportunity to be there. The authors could not get over the generous outpouring of respect felt by those hosting them and the willingness they showed in giving freely of their time. It was almost universal during each visitation that we would be welcomed to return again. In several cases, it was encouraged that we could engage in teaching with children. Additionally, a planned workshop to share our knowledge of educational practice in the United States would be greatly welcomed.

A great deal of interest during the planned visitations was focused on how pupils were served in school and on the schools that were attended by the pupils. Likewise, we were curious how adults living with disabilities were afforded employment opportunities, training programs, and living accommodations if they were no longer living at home with parents. What were the opportunities to attend school or to live and work among non-disabled persons? Select readings prior to and during our visit provided a good deal of information regarding these questions.

There is speculation about the potential long-term benefits of school choice in the United States. The authors were taken aback–more than a little bit–to realize that, within our own country, school choice until very recent times was actually 'no choice' depending on a person's skin color and ethnicity: add to this the faith he or she may or may not practice, and family income. However, according to the article "School Choice in The Netherlands" (Louis, & van Velzen, 1991), *freedom of education* in the Netherlands has existed for over 85 years, and the experiences of this country present useful lessons about issues, both positive and negative, that may arise in a mature system of family choice.

Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution states that "all persons shall be free to provide education" and that "private primary schools that satisfy the conditions laid down by Act of Parliament shall be financed from public funds according to the same standards as public-authority schools." This obligates the government to fund all schools at an equal level. Our visits to a variety of schools and conversations with school directors/principals of these schools taught us that the basic implication of Article 23 is that any group of parents who share a set of values can establish a school without financial constraints. In practice, this means that over 65% Netherlands schools are private. Most of these are Catholic or Protestant, with slightly over 5% "neutral" private schools (Montessori, Jena, Steiner, etc.). A foundation and a board of directors composed largely of parents and appropriate community members govern private schools. Municipalities provide the administrative and policy making authority for public schools. Parents may freely choose any school, and private schools may select among those children who apply.

Stated in Article 29 there is assurance that schools (or municipalities) are free to develop their own curriculum. The government may not interfere with how the "quasi-autonomous" schools will instruct students, with texts used, or with the precise content of the curriculum. The government can intervene only indirectly in the curriculum through specific and narrow interpretations of the constitution and by setting the final exams for secondary schools.

As one considers the many consequences of the Dutch choice system, three particular points that may be germane to the United States clearly appear. The first is finance. In the Netherlands, freedom of choice has resulted in a very large number of schools which, in turn, increases inefficiency and administrative overhead. In the Netherlands (considered the most densely populated country in the world), the average size of an elementary school is only 175 students. Imagine this when elementary schools in the U.S. commonly exceed 1,000 and more students in city or suburban school districts.

A second area is that of autonomy, innovation, and competition. In the U.S., supporters of choice assume that, if parents freely decide which school their children will attend, their choices will reflect available information about the effectiveness of the school and that less popular schools will respond by improving their performance. The Dutch experience (based on reading and discussions with educators by the authors) suggests that this free market model is naive. Despite the freedom to found and operate alternative schools, a relatively uniform curriculum, pedagogy, and structure are the norm. Freedom of choice does not seem to have provided robust interest in how content and delivery of education might be most ideal for students, nor has the Netherlands been a hotbed of innovation. Most observers seem to agree that the requirement for schools to develop and revise their own "school work plan" has challenged only a few staffs and

boards to engage in serious change or improvement plans. Uniformity appears to be the norm, with little or no demand for variety or requirement to dramatically change. Most parents in the Netherlands appear satisfied with their schools, and families generally use their own criteria to determine which school their child should attend, at least at the elementary level.

The third area of consequence regarding school choice for the U.S. is equity. The experience of the Dutch supports the position of some American educators that choice exacerbates problems of equity, especially racial and social class segregation. Refugees fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries have found assistance in the Netherlands, who has welcomed immigrants by the tens of thousands. Many of these expatriates are Muslim and non-Dutch speaking who have cultural traditions foreign to the Dutch. Prior to their planned visit the authors were made very aware of tensions felt both in schools as well as communities regarding the large influx of immigrants to the country. The increasing racial segregation of non-Dutch children from Dutch children is seen in the "white flight" from schools with increasing numbers of immigrant children; this "white flight" is particularly rapid in the Netherlands because of Article 23. The Dutch have a known dilemma, one that is understood as critical to those of us in special education. It applies to students who experience disabilities. Minority students in segregated classrooms appear to perform more poorly than those in integrated classrooms, despite compensatory policies. Nonetheless, Dutch parents are using the policy designed to guarantee freedom of religion to desert "black schools." In turn, private religious schools can be accused of becoming "white havens" if they do not accept immigrant children because their parents do not support the school's religious programs. The authors stayed and headquartered in the north of the country, but it was made clear that Amsterdam and other large metropolitan areas are predominant residential areas for Muslim children and families. Since the influx of immigrants seeking safety, many white Dutch families have sought relocation, as well as new schools for their children.

In the article "Fighting Segregation in Special Needs Education in the Netherlands: The Effects of Different Funding Models," Sip Jan Pijl (2016), stated that just in the past few decades, the number of students attending segregated special schools in the Netherlands has risen considerably. In 1975, 2.2% of all students between 4 and 11 years old attended a special school; this percentage nearly doubled to 4.3% over the next 20 years. In an effort to stop further growth, two new education policies came into force in 1995 and 2003: Together to School Again and the so-called Backpack. These policies differed in the way that special needs funding was allocated. Together to School Again was based on lump sum funding to schools, while Backpack was linked to the individual and based on individual needs. Pijl, suggests that neither of these policy initiatives have been particularly successful in reducing the number of students with special needs in segregated settings. In theory, lump sum funding seemed a promising option, but the combination of two different ways of funding special needs education proved to be problematic.

The opportunity by the authors to secure an understanding of the many factors facing the provision of education in the Netherlands was a large undertaking to be certain. However, their own experiences and beliefs as to how valuable education is in the lives of students and their families rest on several shared and deeply held values. One, the belief that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God. Two, diversity and human difference is God's creative tapestry, and it should be sought, celebrated, and shared, especially socio-economic and racial

ethnic diversity. Finally, a school that depends on students, teachers, and parents working together cooperatively has a good chance to be successful…maybe even beautiful! Having prepared for months together for this planned visit to the Netherlands it was time to begin the visits!

Three Select Visitations in the Netherlands that Highlight Special Education Services to Children and Adults Living with Special Needs: Our Astonishment of What We Saw and Experienced!

Visitation #1: Talant: Care and support of children and adults with special needs. The visitation of this facility opened the two of us to the broad spectrum of services made available in the city of Drachten, which is located in the northern province of Friesland. The invitation was extended to us by Dr. Linda van Rijn-Lugthart, M.D., an in-house physician with Talant. Dr. van Rijn-Lugthart graciously gave of her time to sit with us in her office to first orient us to the extensive scope of the facility that provides multi-tiered care and support to a wide age-range of children and adults. This includes care and support from infancy and early years of life for a child and continues into later years of life for those individuals who are aging and require continued care.

Following our discussion with various staff members, we embarked on a "walk-a-bout" for several hours. Visitations to individual program areas were provided to us. These included classrooms, hospital care, and living areas–independent living apartments, recreational, and dining opportunities made available to the greater community. The café/restaurant is operated by adult clients of Talant with supervision provided by staff. A highlight of our visit was to have lunch in the café and have the opportunity to meet and interact with the adult clients working in the café. They appeared thrilled to meet us and engage with us in conversation. One big selling point to them was the fact that the two of us live in the United States; the second selling point was residing in California. In their opinion, life in California must be the best! *For more information, visit www.talant.nl

Visitation #2: School Lyndensteyn. Just when we thought that we could not possibly visit a school or facility better than the previous site, the half-day spent at School Lyndensteyn completely changed our minds on making assumptions. This comprehensive facility is situated in a lovely, scenic village that is rural and surrounded by dairy farms and open fields. Our visit began with coffee and Dutch pastries requested by the Director for a welcoming setting held in his office, so that he would have opportunity to greet us, while orally informing us of the history and the nature of School Lyndensteyn. Within the confines of his office, a short, recently created video was shared. The video depicted the school's purpose and the many, many educational programs that are available for physical and health impaired students who attend School Lyndensteyn. There are many programs that will be shown and presented via photographs and videos during our conference presentation in Salt Lake City. Suffice it to say, the authors were so impressed by the school and its staff that they intend to return in the future and enjoy multiple days learning much more about this wonderful special educational setting. *For more information, visit:

School Lyndensteyn
Hoofdstraat 1
9244 CL Beetsterzwaag
Tel.: (0512) 389800
info@schoollyndensteyn.nl

Visitation #3: Zorgboerderij De Ripen. This particular visitation was unexpected; it was not formally planned but came to our attention while visiting family. We learned that the "Care Farm" was owned and operated by co-author Sijmontje Renema-Kopriva's cousin and his wife. Upon being made aware of this, a telephone call was made to request a visit that very afternoon. Our request was granted. Following morning coffee, we bid one family goodbye and–with much excitement–made the lovely drive to the country setting of the farm and residence.

The farm was established to provide programs for men and women 16 years of age and older who experience disabilities and who can benefit from a day program. The farm makes available a variety of work experiences such as gardening, caring for farm animals, participating in arts and music, wood working, and providing services to the local community where these individuals live.

The setting is a beautiful and peaceful environment. Most recently a B & B has been provided for volunteers and visitors. It is our hope to return and spend several days working, as well as relaxing as we visit family. Should you have opportunity to make a visit while in the Netherlands we highly suggest it.

This farm is one example of the rich variety of extended programs that exist for the benefit of children and adults who live with disabilities and who are provided support and caring by those who understand the benefits of such programs. *For more information, visit:

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Background on the 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 decades at all levels and in urban, suburban, and rural settings, the great majority in special education. Both live and work in Fresno, part of California's Central Valley, whose population is becoming ever more diverse in ethnicities, cultures, belief systems, and languages. Renema-Kopriva recently retired from elementary teaching as a special education teacher of the physically and health impaired in the Fresno Unified School District, which has an enrollment of nearly 73,000 students. Kopriva continues as a faculty member in the School of Education at Fresno Pacific University, a Christian university serving approximately 6,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The desire to share the benefits they have enjoyed in their teaching and work together as educators (especially those living with challenges in learning and understanding) led to this presentation.

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USING ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK TO DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION AND IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe how to use assessment teacher feedback to improve instruction and enhance student outcomes. This process is designed to assist educators to assess and modify instruction for students with unique learning needs.

Introduction

Schools in the past decade have experienced a rise in enrollment of ethnically and linguistically diverse students, including students who speak English as a second language and whose families earn below the poverty line (Kena et al., 2016). In addition to the ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity of students within classrooms, students also possess varying levels of reading ability (Connor, Morrison, & Katch, 2004). One solution to addressing diverse academic ability is to individualize instruction based on student needs identified through assessment of reading skills.

Assessment Feedback for Planning

Research has demonstrated that changing instruction in response to student data results in enhanced reading achievement (Connor et al., 2009). In addition, the more students receive instruction aligned with assessment generated recommendations, the greater the improvement in reading outcomes (Connor et al., 2009). In practice, this approach includes classroom activities tailored to meet each student's needs as well as using progress monitoring and flexible groupings in response to the constantly changing individual academic needs (Tomlinson, 2014). Children in the same classroom are provided very different amounts and forms of instruction to accommodate the complex and changing classroom environments (Connor et al., 2004) and academic growth. This instructional approach and reciprocal assessment to instruction process is based on the concept that individual instructional needs at the beginning of the year will be different at the end of the year (Connor et al., 2004). For example, teachers begin by collecting assessment data to identify individual student decoding skills. These data are then used to predict the amount and type of instruction (i.e., child x instruction interaction) necessary to develop stronger decoding skills (Connor & Morrison, 2016). Teachers then design and implement instruction based on skill level and regularly monitor progress to assess decoding skill development. This approach and process identifies assessment as fundamental for the improvement of individualized reading outcomes.

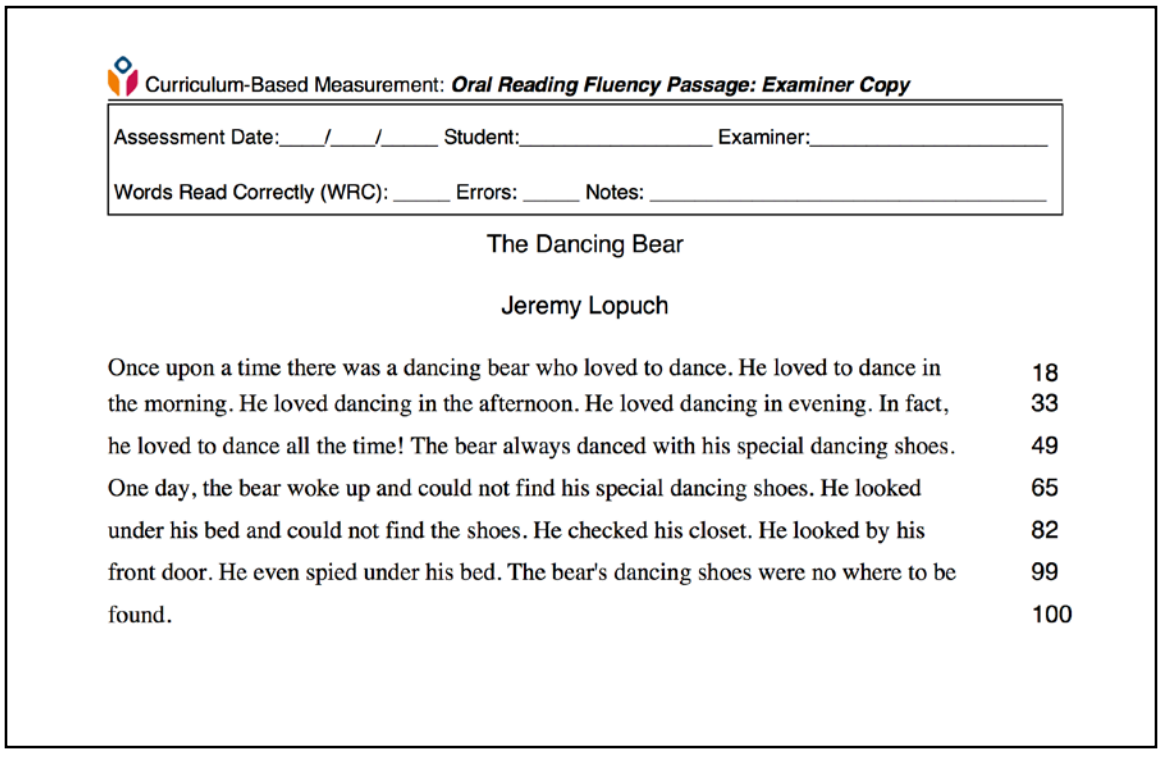
Assessment Feedback Steps

The steps for using progress monitoring data were outlined in a seminal review of the effects of CBM data on student achievement (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005). The authors concluded that for improved teacher planning and student achievement to be realized, several steps must be implemented. These steps are listed and briefly summarized in the following section.

Step One: Collect Data on Individual Students

Use research-validated methods of assessment such as curriculum-based measurement (CBM; Deno, 1985). CBM are short measures of achievement developed to be indicators of important reading skills. The measures use material from the grade-level, which provides a direct assessment of the skills from the assessed level. CBM are brief and can be administered frequently to collect data on a child across time. The CBM procedure has over 30 years of evidence to demonstrate effectiveness (Tindal, 2013).

The most commonly and most widely researched reading CBM is oral reading fluency (ORF). The student is provided a reading-level appropriate passage and asked to do his or her best reading. The student reads the passage aloud for one minute. The examiner follows along and makes a slash through words the child incorrectly pronounces. The total of correct words per minute (WCPM) at the end of one minute is the score for the assessment.



Curriculum-Based Measurement: ***Oral Reading Fluency Passage: Examiner Copy***

Assessment Date:____/____/_____ Student:_____ Examiner:_____

Words Read Correctly (WRC): _____ Errors: _____ Notes: _____

The Dancing Bear

Jeremy Lopuch

Once upon a time there was a dancing bear who loved to dance. He loved to dance in	18
the morning. He loved dancing in the afternoon. He loved dancing in evening. In fact,	33
he loved to dance all the time! The bear always danced with his special dancing shoes.	49
One day, the bear woke up and could not find his special dancing shoes. He looked	65
under his bed and could not find the shoes. He checked his closet. He looked by his	82
front door. He even spied under his bed. The bear's dancing shoes were no where to be	99
found.	100

Figure 1. ORF passage created from www.interventioncentral.org

Step Two: Set Goal and Graph Data

Once baseline data has been collected, the next step is to set a goal for the student. This is helpful because it provides educators with an observable and quantifiable goal for students to achieve. Research has provided educators with rates of growth for ORF (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Walz, & Germann, 1993). These rates reflect how much growth a student should make across a week of instruction. For example, using the weekly growth rates in Table 1, a teacher selects an ambitious goal of three WCPM for a first-grade student. The student has baseline score of 10 WCPM and will be monitored for 10 weeks. So, for each of those 10 weeks the student should be improving by three words which equals 30 WCPM. Next, the teacher would add that product to the child's baseline (10 words) and come to a product of 40 WCPM.

Table 1

Weekly Growth Rates for Oral Reading Fluency CBM: Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM)

Grade	**Realistic** growth rates per week	**Ambitious** growth rates per week
1	2	3
2	1.5	2
3	1	1.5
4	0.85	1.1
5	0.50	0.80
6	0.30	0.65

After student achievement data is collected and a goal is set, it is helpful to put the performance into context. In other words, the data needs to be graphed so practitioners can view the growth of student achievement. If the slope of the student data points is steeper than the predetermined goal, it can be assumed the student is making adequate progress in response to the instructional procedures. As Figure 2 illustrates, the target student is below the goal line (Aim on graph) and does not appear to be making progress toward the predetermined goal.

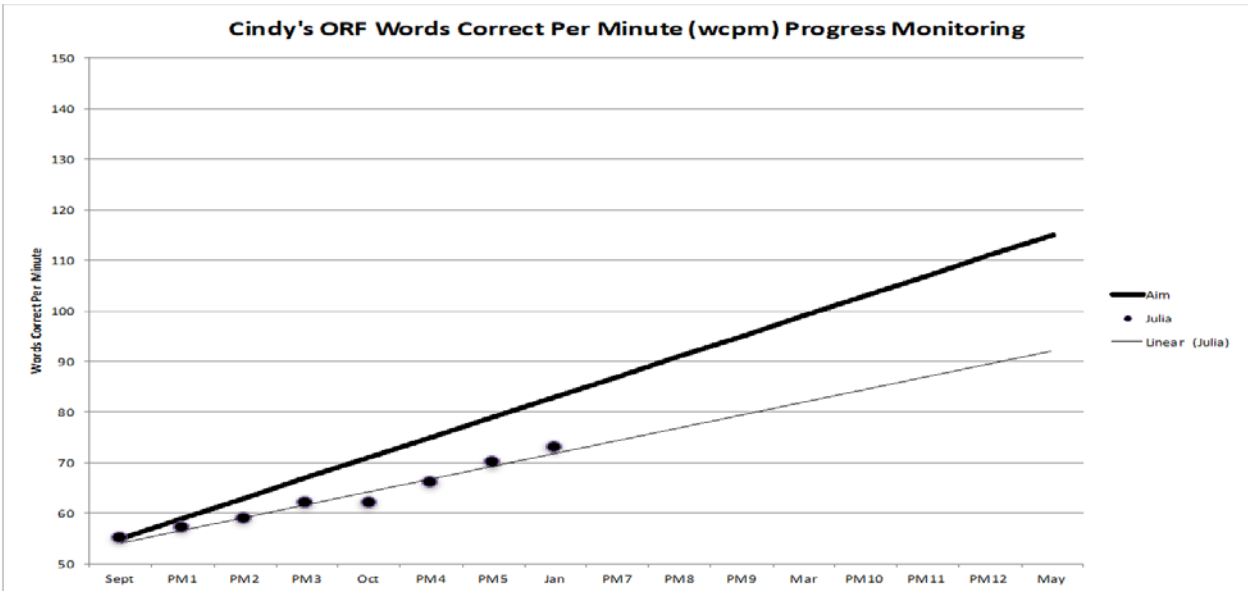


Figure 2. ORF Progress Monitoring Chart

Step Three: Data Decision Rules

Imagine a game named the "candy" game. The game requires individuals to stand up and split into several lines. The person at the front of the line is given a piece of candy and provided no further directions. This should prompt the response, "now what?" The purpose of this example is to illustrate the need for decision rules. The lack of rules leads to confusion and frustration for individuals playing the game.

This situation corresponds with instructional decision making in education. Educators need guidelines to make decisions using student assessment data. These rules must be clear and easy to follow. One commonly used data decision rule in interpreting graphed data is the four-point rule (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2016). This rule requires a teacher to collect at least 7 data points. Then, a review of the graphed data is necessary. If the four most recent data points fall below the aimline, it can be inferred the instruction is not powerful enough to move the student to the goal. Conversely, four data points are above the aimline suggest the student is progressing in response to the instruction. As Figure 2 shows, Cindy's recent ORF data points are below the aimline. This should lead Julia's teacher to reflect on the effectiveness of the current strategy she is employing.

Step Four: Diagnostic Assessment

Knowing that a student is struggling in reading is not enough to plan meaningful instruction. To do so requires teachers to collect additional diagnostic assessment data. Diagnostic assessment data is used before instruction is implemented. Using diagnostic assessments allow educators to review student performance and look for patterns of student responding. This form of assessment is critical to target individual student skill strengths and needs. Using diagnostic assessment data has been shown to improve teacher instructional

planning (Capizzi & Fuchs, 2005). Table 2 illustrates how a teacher can review an ORF probe for diagnostic information from a student.

Table 2

Curriculum Based Measurement (Oral Reading Fluency Error Analysis)

Target	Error	*Target*	Error	*Target*	Error
typical	tropical	*Need*	Needs	*Talk*	Walk
day	morning	*The*	(omitted)	*grandmother's*	grandma's
It	I	*all day*	(omitted)	*Awe*	Awn
did not	didn't	*thrifty like the squirrel*	Thirty-five	*greenery*	greeny
you're	you are	*Her*	His	*Fun*	(omitted)

As can be surmised from the table, the student makes many errors in her passage reading. For example, the target student consistently omits words when reading a passage. This is important because if the student regularly does this they may miss critical terms or concepts when reading independently.

Step Five: Adapt Instruction

Now that progress monitoring data and diagnostic information has been collected, meaningful instruction can be designed. Although instruction can be adapted to individual student needs in many ways, we will review several practical changes. First, time of instruction can be changed. For example, a teacher instructs a group of students for 30 minutes and decides to add 5 additional minutes to the group. Second, teachers can manipulate the size of the group. To illustrate, a teacher changes a group size from five to three so the students can be provided more opportunities to respond. Finally, the amount of practice and teacher feedback can be controlled. For instance, one of the students reads passages slowly and makes lots of word reading errors. The teacher decides to modify the current instructional plan to allow for more controlled practice in reading connected text. In addition, whenever the student reads a word incorrectly, the teacher immediately corrects the student (i.e., "This word is sugar. What word is this?").

As Figure 3 illustrates, Cindy was underachieving in response to intervention one. However, when the teacher adapted the instruction based on Cindy's progress monitoring data and diagnostic data, a more specific plan was created (e.g., more practice in passage reading and immediate feedback on errors). Consequently, a more individualized plan was developed and implemented which lead to improved reading achievement in line with Cindy's goal.

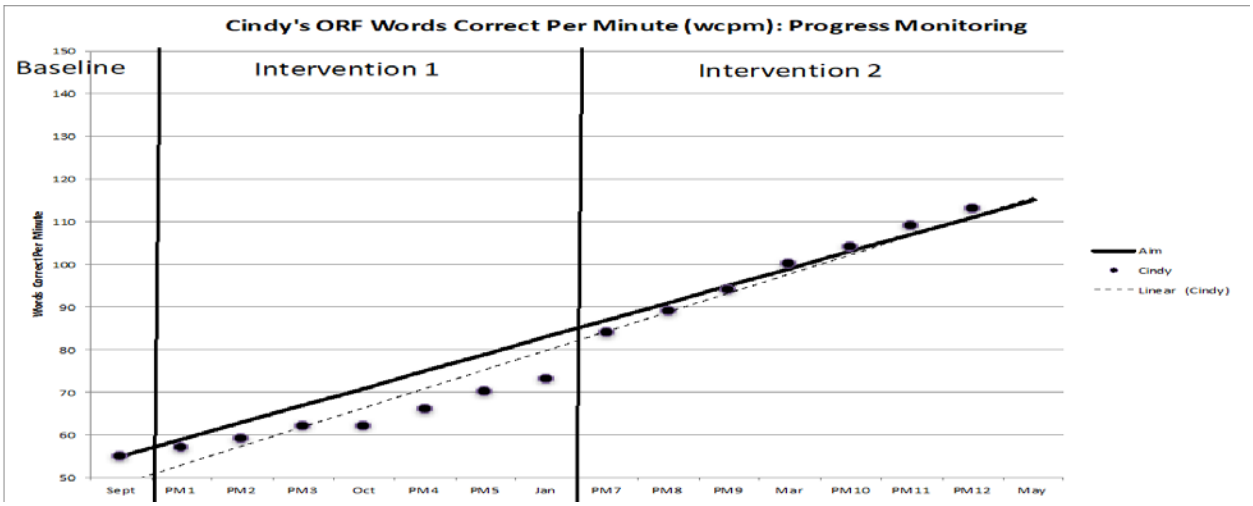


Figure 3. WCPM after progress monitoring data was used to adapt instruction.

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IMPROVING RURAL STUDENT OUTCOMES: LITERACY INSTRUCTION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WTH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABLITES

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of adapted materials paired with evidence-based strategies during literacy instruction for high school students with moderate to severe disabilities. Historically, students with severe disabilities have been denied consistent and quality literacy instruction in the educational setting. If reading instruction was provided, it traditionally centered on sight words used throughout a student's daily life (Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Spooner, Mims, & Baker, 2009a). No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002) and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) mandated that students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities participate in school accountability through large-scale assessments for annual yearly progress (AYP). Those alternate assessments no longer target daily living skills and functional activities, but instead focus intensely on academic alternate state standards, aligned with the general education state standards/Common Core State Standards for core subjects (English Language Arts and math) that are assessed at designated grade levels (Mims, Hudson, & Browder, 2012). This study focuses on literacy instruction using adapted materials that incorporate photo/line drawing support delivered through systematic instruction to enhance the literacy skills of high school-aged students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Key Words: Literacy, reading instruction, vocabulary instruction, functional academics, shared reading, comprehension, constant time delay, adapted materials, photo/line drawing support, moderate to severe disabilities, significant disabilities, high school

Literacy Instruction for Learners with Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disabilities: A Chance for Growth

Literacy is an educational right for all individuals, not a privilege
~ Lumsford, Molgen & Selvin ~

For more than a decade, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) set the expectation that all students would show adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, writing, math, and science

beginning in third grade and continuing through 12th grade. Prior to this law, literacy instruction for students with significant disabilities at the high school level was sporadic, if present at all (Browder et al., 2009b). High school is defined as students who are 14 – 22 years old; with moderate to significant intellectual disability defined as scoring under a 55 $\pm$ 5 standard score on an adaptive behavior assessment scale and having an IQ of between 55 $\pm$ 5 and 25 $\pm$ 5; and who have limited speech and language skills, adaptive living skills, and academic skills in comparison with same age peers as aligned with NRS 388.520 (Nevada, 2011). In the 2016-17 school year, as NCLB dissolved and growth models and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) surfaced, adequate yearly growth must continue to be shown for all students, including those with moderate to severe disabilities.

Browder et al. (2009b) report three potential explanations as to why literacy instruction has been disregarded for this population. First, the absence of teaching literacy to students with severe disabilities may originate from cultural denial of competence traditionally associated with this population. "Disability becomes an idea that precludes the possibility of human development, including, importantly, the development of a literate presence" (Kliewer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2006, p. 175). Assuming that students with IQs below a certain benchmark are unable to acquire the skills necessary to read is an example of such bias.

A second explanation reported by Browder et al. (2009b) regarding the lack of literacy instruction for learners with severe disabilities at the high school level may be the belief that this population can learn basic functional sight words only, and are unable to learn to decode. In support of this explanation is the work from Browder et al. (2006) indicating that the majority of studies focus solely on sight words, with only a select few focusing on other components of reading (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension) as outlined by the 2000 National Reading Panel.

The third plausible explanation, according to Browder et al. (2009b), is that students with significant disabilities may have such severe delays and impairments in speech and language development that it is thought to preclude literacy instruction. Both receptive and expressive communication is an integral part of literacy instruction. Unfortunately, the students' inability to verbally express themselves is often equated with the inability to comprehend literacy instruction.

No Child Left Behind, Common Core, and the pressure on public schools to make AYP is assisting education in overcoming the lack of literacy instruction for students with severe disabilities. Literacy instruction for students with severe disabilities has begun to make some positive changes. Societal norms for the competence of students with disabilities are beginning to increase (Browder et al., 2009b). "This is the first time in the history of educating students with significant intellectual disabilities that schools have been held accountable for this population to meet state standards through alternative assessments" (Browder et al., 2009b, p. 270). A definite step forward for this population.

Additionally, although there has historically been a strong emphasis on teaching little more than sight words to students with severe disabilities, current educational resources are beginning to provide evidenced-based frameworks for literacy (Browder & Spooner, 2006). This

broader approach to literacy will assist students in deepening their knowledge base as the sole focus will no longer be on teaching rote sight words.

This study adapts general education literacy instruction for students with moderate to severe disabilities at the high school level by incorporating systematic instruction with specific strategies paired with photo/line drawing support. It takes the basic components of good reading instruction (word study, guided reading, shared reading, locating information in text, and comprehension) and enhances them so that learners who have moderate to severe disabilities can enhance their reading skills. Through systematic literacy instruction students of this population used the adapted materials and evidence-based instructional strategies to enhance and sustain their literacy skills, as well as overcome preconceived notions that they are unable to engage in literacy activities meaningfully.

Research Questions

How did the implementation of adapted materials paired with evidence-based strategies delivered through systematic instruction during literacy instruction affect the literacy learning for high school students with moderate to severe intellectual disability?
Specifically, did students increase:

1. The number of vocabulary words read aloud correctly through the use of adapted materials paired with evidence-based instructional strategies?
2. Locating information within a text passage through the use of an adapted text paired with evidence-based instructional strategies?
3. Their correct answers to "wh" questions about a text passage read aloud through shared reading using adapted multiple choice questions that incorporated photo/line drawing support paired with evidence-based instructional strategies?

Method

Participants

In order to be included in the proposed study, participants needed to meet the following criteria:
(1) Have moderate to severe intellectual disability regardless of origin of etiology (moderate to severe disabilities is defined throughout this study as scoring under a 55 $\pm$ 5 standard score on an adaptive behavior assessment scale, having an IQ between 55 $\pm$ 5 and 25 $\pm$ 5, and having limited speech and language skills, adaptive living skills, and academic skills in comparison with same age peers as aligned with NRS 388.520 (Nevada, 2011). The term "moderate to severe disabilities" may be interchangeably used with the term "significant disabilities" throughout this study;
(2) Communicate through spoken words;
(3) Have limited use of independent written expressive communication, as indicated by the adaptive behavior scale scores;
(4) Have limited independent reading and understanding of printed word, which is defined as under a 14 reading level (end of 1st grade) on the Developmental Reading Assessment-2 (DRA-2);
(5) Have a symbolic level of understanding at the photo or line drawing level as demonstrated by a symbol assessment;
(6) Have not had direct instruction on how to locate words and phrases in a text passage;

(7) Have regular school attendance (e.g., no more than 10 absences in the past quarter);
(8) Be of high school age (high school age defined throughout this study as 14-22 years of age);
(9) Have a signed *Parent Permission Letter for Study* on file (developed to meet IRB requirements); and
(10) Have a signed *Consent* form completed by participant on file (developed to meet IRB requirements).

One girl and two boys ages 14 – 22 years met the selection criteria and participated.

Setting. Participants attended the Comprehensive Life Skills (CLS) program at a local public high school in a rural district in the western United States. Individual baseline, intervention, generalization, and maintenance sessions took place in two CLS classrooms at the high school. The first classroom is 8 x 9 meters with a full kitchen attachment that is 2.5 x 4 meters, a private bathroom, and a shower that is 4 x 2.5 meters. The second classroom is a traditional classroom. Sessions were conducted one-on-one with each participant, with the other participants not present in the room when sessions were occurring. However, other students or staff were present at times. For baseline, maintenance, and generalization each session was 15-20 minutes in length. During intervention, each session was approximately 30 minutes. All trials took place between the hours of 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. Individual data were collected and digitally recorded for each session for all participants

Research design. This experimental study used single case research design methodology as it best assisted in answering the research questions by allowing the researcher to evaluate individual data and then compare it within and across participants in the study. Single case research designs present sufficient detail in accordance with the scientific method to allow for replication of the study thus validating the research and contributing to the field (Gast, 2010).

A multiple probe across participants design, a variation of the multiple baseline design, was selected as it is flexible and lends itself well for demonstrating accountability in educational settings (Gast, 2010). Horner and Baer (1978) used the multiple probe design to satisfy the need to collect data intermittently across participants in the baseline phase. An advantage of the multiple probe design is that it does not require a plan for continuous measurement of all target conditions prior to the introduction of the independent variable as does the multiple baseline design. Per the multiple probe design, participants will be probed, but not remain in constant baseline, prior to introducing the intervention condition.

Dependent variables. The dependent variables for the study were:
(1) The percentage of vocabulary words read correctly out of 10 per passage;
(2) The percentage of correct locations of text information out of five per passage;
(3) The percentage of "wh" questions out of five answered correctly per passage.

Independent variables. The independent variables consisted of adapted materials paired with evidence-based instructional strategies. The materials for each component were:

- Text Passages. Four baseline text passages from Katherine Hall's (2002) *Reading Stories for Comprehension Success* were used in the study: Text 1 - *The Pupfish of Devil's Hole* Text 2 – *Teamwork,* Text 3 – *Stories in the Stars*, and Text 4 – *Set a World's Record*.

- Word Study Materials. Vocabulary flashcards were presented on 5 x 2.5 cm rectangles for baseline and intervention phases. Vocabulary words were stored in a 3-ring binder with tabs to divide each text passage. The following were also created for use: vocabulary sheets, definition sheets, random vocabulary lists, vocabulary mat for data collection, and vocabulary data sheets.
- Shared Reading Materials**.** A title/cover walk sheet was created for researcher use for each text passage that specified the questions to be asked and types of comments to be made. Similarly, questions for discussion to ask at the end of pages 1 and 2 while reading were specified. Five specific questions were developed along with data sheets for locating information in text for each text passage.
- Comprehension Materials. **F**ive "wh" questions were developed and presented through multiple choice formats. A highlighter was also used during the error correction process. A data sheet for each text passage was created.

In order to provide embedded feedback, definitions were given for each vocabulary word during matching, during 0-second trial for word search, and within error correction during comprehension multiple choice questions. Prior to shared reading, the interventionist discussed the passage title and what it meant, cued the participant to look at the picture included as part of the passage, asked each to think what the text passage might be about, asked each to make a prediction about the story or inference based on the title and picture, and activated prior knowledge by making personal connections to the title and picture.

Constant time delay was used for various aspects of intervention and consisted of the initial trial at 0-second delay followed by one trial at a 3-second delay interval. Shared reading was used as an interactive reading strategy to guide the participant as each read aloud with the interventionist. The interventionist used shared reading to explicitly model proficient reading skills such as fluency, expression, and print concepts. Instruction was also paired with a systematic error correction procedure (described below in Procedures). Finally, specific positive verbal praise was given to each participant when each answered correctly and independently for all areas including word study, locating information in text, and comprehension.

Data collection. Data for the dependent variables were collected through event recording using data collection sheets. Event recording was the best method for data collection in this study as the dependent variables have clear beginnings and endings and the frequency was low enough so that the behaviors were easy to record. For each dependent variable the researcher immediately recorded the participant response on the data sheet as the behavior was performed. All 15-30 minute baseline, intervention, generalization, and maintenance sessions were digitally video-recorded so that the dependent and independent variables could be reviewed for inter-observer reliability and procedural integrity.

Procedure. The duration of the study was 10 weeks with data being collected five times weekly in the areas of word study, locating information in text, and comprehension. Study phases included the baseline phase, which included exposure to four passages of written text only and flash cards with printed word only presented to all participants using standard reading instruction strategies (read to self, reread text to locate information, verbally answer "wh" questions without prompting or visual cues). An intervention, introduced in a staggered manner,

consisted of adapted materials paired with evidence-based instructional strategies and positive verbal praise for correct independent answers. Maintenance probes were conducted for each participant after he or she completed intervention for the four text passages. Maintenance probes consisted of returning to previously taught text passages and used adapted materials, but excluded any teaching or verbal praise. Maintenance probes were conducted for the four text passages for each participant in the order specified in Table 4. Generalization probes were conducted after maintenance probes for the four text passages for each participant. Generalization probes consisted of a return to baseline procedures to determine if participants transferred acquired skills from the adapted materials to printed word only.

Results

Study Outcomes

Question 1. All participants demonstrated stable levels of correct unprompted responses during baseline and all participants' correct unprompted responses increased after intervention; indicating a possible functional relationship between the intervention package and the number of correct vocabulary words read aloud. This improved performance supports previous findings that adapting text to a student's symbolic level of understanding increases students' ability to access and create meaning from literacy instruction (Beukleman & Mirenda, 2013; Browder et al., 2007; Demchak, 2010; Hudson et al., 2013; Knight et al., 2013; Michael & Trezek, 2005; Mims et al., 2012; Roberts & Leko, 2013; Westling & Fox, 2009). These findings also contribute and support the current literature in the use of constant time delay as an evidence-based practice for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Browder et al., 2009a; Knight et al., 2013; Riesen et al., 2003).

Question 2. All three participants demonstrated low and steady levels of correct unprompted responses for locating information in text during baseline and all participants' correct unprompted responses increased after intervention. A functional relationship between the intervention and the dependent variable was demonstrated, and the increase in performance was replicated across all four text passages and all participants. The outcomes for locating correct unprompted information in text supports the established literature that read alouds are an effective evidenced-based strategy for creating meaning when reading text (Browder et al., 2007; Mims et al., 2012) and that shared reading as an evidenced-based instructional strategy allows for access to literacy instruction for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Hudson et al., 2013; Roberts & Leko, 2013). This study also contributed to this component of literature by demonstrating that through adaption of a minimal quantity (e.g.10) of vocabulary words for a text passage, selected with specific purpose of creating meaning, students could enhance their comprehension of the text.

Question 3. All participants demonstrated increased levels of correct unprompted responses for answering "wh" through multiple choice questions after intervention. A functional relationship between the intervention and the number of correct unprompted responses was demonstrated across all four text passages and all participants, with the exception of Text 4 for Erwin. The outcomes for correct unprompted responses for comprehension questions support the findings in the literature as previously stated for adapting materials. The outcomes also

support and contribute to the literature for use of systematic instruction as an evidence-based practice for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Browder et al., 2007; Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2013) at the high school level.

Generalization and maintenance. Overall outcomes may indicate that adapted materials paired with selected evidence-based strategies taught systematically to students with moderate to severe disabilities have a positive impact on literacy in the areas of reading vocabulary words, locating information in text, and answering comprehension questions. Vocabulary and comprehension demonstrated the most growth across participants and maintained improvements, while locating information in text appeared to be the most difficult. Data may also indicate that for students with more severe disabilities transfer of skills to printed word only may not be realistic. Further studies should be conducted to evaluate if transfer of skills to printed word for students with more moderate intellectual disabilities may occur.

Limitations of the study. Limitations of this study included the inability to generalize findings across grade levels; the inability to generalize outcomes to those students with higher or lower IQs than the parameters of the study (55 ± 5 to 25 ± 5); the inability to generalize findings to adults of this population (adults being over the age of 22); and lack of use of grade level (English I-IV) literacy material. Long-term maintenance and generalization research for the participants will need to be conducted in a follow-up study to examine maintenance and generalization of skills under natural conditions, across settings, and over time.

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EVALUATING INSTRUCTION TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC DISABILTIES FROM MULTILINGUAL BACKGROUNDS

Abstract

The new focus on multilingual education, requiring the restructuring of teacher education to address the complex process of language acquisition and proficiency, is addressed including the primary language (L1) and the new language (Ln) from a student instructional perspective. The process of evaluating achievement and instructing students with specific disabilities from multilingual backgrounds is covered, with emphasis on appropriate strategies to improve efficiency in the primary language, leading to mastery of the new language (Ln). Information to address the importance of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), the understanding of content area information, is included as well as a list of specific strategies, with instructions for implementation.

Evaluating Instruction to Improve Educational Outcomes for Students with Specific Disabilities from Multilingual Backgrounds

Evaluating instruction for students from a multilingual background with specific learning disabilities creates a dual challenge for special education teachers working within the general education in inclusive classroom settings. General education teachers and most special education teachers study the development of a primary language as they prepare for student instruction (Wang, 2015). Special educators also receive training on how to screen and identify students with special needs. The missing elements in these training programs are the lack of emphasis on multilingual backgrounds and the complex process of language acquisition for these students (Wang, 2015).

Theoretical Base

Although multilingual education began as early as the 1800s, specific educational

changes for students did not occur until the landmark court case of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). This court case as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) led to the provision of programs in schools to address language barriers and specific needs of students with disabilities (Jochum, 2011). Recently, multilingual education has centered on the provision of transition programs to provide a bridge to the general education classroom and maintenance programs to support general education and enrichment programs to help students become proficient in language development. Students must acquire English as part of the American Public School System, and they are required to pass high stakes tests in order to be promoted (Hakuta, 2014). Some students face greater challenges as they acquire a second language and also overcome a learning disability (Kangas, 2014). The current issue is how to evaluate these students in order to select the correct programs leading to educational success. As part of the evaluation process, a teacher must be trained to identify academic, language, cognitive, emotional/social, health, and any other needs. Even with the help of educational specialists such as school psychologists, speech/language pathologists, nurses, guidance counselors, and other specially trained school personnel, the task can be challenging.

Literature Review on Current Trends in Language Acquisition

Although research has been conducted to address the issue of what to do if the student struggles to master a new language and how to decide when it is necessary to teach content area information in the primary language, today teachers must learn how to evaluate language achievement and how to instruct students with multilingual backgrounds. The purpose of this review was to identify the available instructional delivery models for teaching English language learners with multilingual backgrounds as well as the new training needs of general education and special education teachers serving these students.

Understanding the implications of language acquisition research is essential in order for classroom teachers to be able to provide the scaffolding needed for their students to be successful in the classroom (Parviz & Somayyeh, 2012). Although general education teachers study the development of a primary language, they will now need to master multilingual language development (Wang, 2015). Since the process of acquiring a language is complex, it will also be necessary to study language acquisition theories and learn how to conceptualize the process of language acquisition for students with a multilingual background. According to Olague and Ekiaka Nzai (2013), multilingual education is in need of a new political strategy. This strategy could include preservice training that would include evaluation of language achievement and how to instruct students with multilingual backgrounds as well as identification of special evaluation tools needed to address multilingual language acquisition (Shenoy, 2016).

Assessment and Support for Multilingual Learners

Beginning English learners are often able to understand more language than they are able to express. Students learn the language gradually, learning to recognize the words that they hear and see long before they learn to speak them. Classroom assessment is often language based, requiring expansive grade level vocabulary to read and answer questions. Assessment strategies for English language learners must be adjusted to evaluate how much of the concepts being taught the students understand, and assessments for English language learners should be

individualized (Douglas, 2004; Herrell & Jordon, 2012). Assessments should also include performance sampling to watch the students' reactions and responses and document growth.

Performance sampling, where students are asked to perform tasks and the teacher observes and documents their responses is also very effective in monitoring and documenting growth. Performance sampling is an authentic assessment, that evaluates how well the tasks are completed. It includes anecdotal records, scoring with a rubric, and checklist evaluation (Herrell & Jordon, 2012). Portfolio assessment (a file of assessments collected over time) is a good way to maintain records of observations, performance sampling, and ongoing growth. When these assessments are combined they provide a wealth of information about English learners as they give a more complete picture of their growth and development.

One of the best ways to support these students is to provide training sessions to the student and the family members. If a student develops a level of proficiency in his or her primary language (L1), this provides a basis for the mastery of the second language (L2). It is important to determine the level of proficiency in the primary language, and then provide any needed instruction in the primary language to support mastery of content area subjects. This is the basis of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), the understanding of content area information. It may be necessary to teach content area information in the primary language if the student has not mastered the second language in order to support mastery of content area subjects (Ramirez, 1991). The next step for teachers would then be to develop language teaching principles (Allahyar, & Nazari, 2012). First, students with a multilingual language background need comprehensible input to ensure that information is received and understood (Krashen, 1983). The teacher must then identify strategies and receive instruction on the appropriate methodology to utilize (Englund, 2015).

Instructional Delivery Models

There are many studies that focused on instructional delivery models for English language learners (Kangas, 2014; McKenna et al. 2015; Murphy, 2016), and English language learners with learning disabilities (Boardman et al. 2016; Carter et al. 2015; Klingner et al. 2014; Watnick & Sacks, 2006). According to Baker et. al. (2012), these students can benefit from small group instruction while Murphy (2016) noted that bilingual language programs can have a positive impact on learning. Lopez and Iribarren (2014) reported similar positive results with inclusive instructional models; however, Jaeger (2015) indicated that student improvement can often be attributed to creating a nurturing environment that is responsive to individual needs. When a student is placed in a stressful situation the ability to learn or produce spoken languages is impaired. Therefore, the student's motivation and self-esteem must be supported and anxiety must be diminished, in order for the student to be a successful language learner. Students know who the supportive teachers are and they know which classrooms are safe for optimal learning to take place. These students can be seen flocking to the supportive teacher and the safe haven that the teacher has created (Herrell & Jordon, 2012; Reed, & Railsback, 2003).

Strategy Instruction.

Strategy instruction can be used to provide the positive support needed by these students. Following are three strategies for reducing the anxiety of English language learners with

explanations of how to implement and evaluate student progress.

Predictable routines. Predictable classroom routines are easy to implement and extremely important in reducing anxiety in the student (Herrell & Jordon, 2012; Reed & Railsback, 2003). Begin the class with journal writing, but if students do not want to write, they can make lists or draw. The activity lasts for three minutes, with a timer that dings at the conclusion of the time. A prompt is written on the board for students to use, or they can create their own writing idea. The date and a list of the day's activities are always listed on the board. Assignments are written on the board, as well as book and page numbers. Students know what is coming next, so they can relax. They can depend on the daily routines; their environment is stable. Routines save time, because the student knows what is expected and often will automatically get ready for the next activity.

Leveled questions. Leveled questions are used to adapt the way questions are asked so that students can respond based on their language acquisition skills. The teacher ensures that the student will be successful in answering by asking a question on the students' ability level (Cooley, 2015). Using leveled questions most appropriate to the students reading ability meets the needs of different learners. The general rule of thumb when creating leveled questions is to use the following guide:

1. Students in the preproduction stage of English language learning will nod, point and physically demonstrate.
2. Students in the early production stage, give one or two word responses, and will make choices from different language samples.
3. Students in the speech emergence phase, use phrases or short sentences with grammar errors.
4. The final stage before fluency is the intermittent fluency stage where students use longer sentences and have fewer errors. The teacher may also use the leveled questions to prepare students for a class discussion or activity or as an assessment (Herrell & Jordon, 2012).

The type of question is of the utmost importance. Well thought-out questions stimulate the curiosity of the learner and encourage active participation and learning. The learning that takes place in this environment is more likely to be permanently stored in the brain (Herrell & Jordon, 2012).

Cooperative learning. The benefits of using cooperative learning for teaching English as a second language are:

- The students work toward a common goal, and the academic work becomes an activity valued by peers.
- Students explain information to one another, strengthening their own learning as they engage in thinking that builds on other ideas (cognitive elaboration).
- The teammates provide individual attention and assistance to one another and raise achievement of all students.
- Cooperative group members gain the interpersonal, social, and collaborative skills needed to work with others.

- The group task is structured so that each member of the group is expected to perform an assigned task and appropriate training and structure is introduced into the process (Herrell & Jordon, 2012; Loes, Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012; Morgeson, Reider, & Campion, 2005; Nam & Zellner, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2010).

Supporting Context and Promoting Understanding

Cummings (2000), maintained that although social and academic language are not mutually exclusive, the differences between the two are real. Students may acquire basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and be able to communicate in English while socializing; however, this is not the same as having the level of language proficiency necessary to benefit from academic English instruction. This academic proficiency is called cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). According to Cummings (2000), it is important to teach academics to English language learners through the use of visuals manipulatives and multiple examples to provide context and promote understanding. The following are strategies to support context and promote understanding:

Visual scaffolding. Visual scaffolding is a display of drawings or photographs that allows students to hear English words and connect them to visual images. Visual scaffolding refers to the visual guidance and support a teacher gives when the student is learning a new idea and functions very much like the physical scaffolds you see at a building site (Herrell & Jordon, 2012).

Realia. Realia refers to real concrete objects. Realia is used to build background knowledge and vocabulary and provide experience on which to build and provide students with the opportunity to use all the senses to learn. Realia (a concrete object to represent the vocabulary) is useful to provide learners with a visual so that students can understand the vocabulary in a direct way (Herrell & Jordon, 2012; McDermott. 2012). When students see the object, it is easier for them to remember the word. Mastering vocabulary permits the students to communicate effectively using their knowledge; therefore, the more vocabulary the students learn, the better they can communicate their ideas.

Modeled talk. Modeled Talk is concurrent verbal and physical demonstration of directions, vocabulary or concepts; it is the use of gestures, visuals, and demonstrations as explanations are given (Hill & Flynn, 2009; Herrell & Jordon, 2012). Students copy your self-talk. They may even think that you are unaware that you talk to yourself. They learn an internal language that sounds much like your self-talk and are able to think through problems step-by-step. Teachers who model their thought process are often the best examples. They teach the students how to think effectively and thoroughly. The teacher is not only teaching subject matter but also teaching students how to think.

Overall, the most successful lessons are the ones that bring in visuals, realia, photos, and modeled talk to make the lesson come alive by constantly referring to the props and supporting materials. For example, a math unit on the banana could involve weighing the banana on a food scale and documenting the weight and then peeling the banana and weighing the peel and the

edible part of the banana separately. Then questions could be asked. The next part of the lesson would naturally transition into science as the groups discuss the questions and answers.

Conclusion

Urban school districts often have staff devoted to educating students in multilingual language programs, whereas educators in rural areas often have to develop their own appropriate programs. Furthermore, administrators in rural areas must purchase materials and provide teachers with training on how to work with students with disabilities who are learning a new language as well as find someone in the community who speaks the language to interpret for parent-teacher conferences (Kangas, 2014). It is now imperative to focus on the appropriate preparation that is needed for the demands of new language (Ln) acquisition. This information can be used for the training of administrators and special educators in rural school districts to appropriately serve students with multilingual backgrounds who are also receiving individualized educational services for specific disabilities. Suggestions for successful planning and coordinating of services for students with multilingual backgrounds are provided as well as instructional strategies that can be implemented in the inclusive classroom. Information would be of specific interest to administrators responsible for training school personnel in rural areas who provide services to students from multilingual backgrounds.

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SELECTION, NOT DIRECTION: TRAINING TEXAS TEACHERS IN BEHAVIOR-ANALYTIC INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

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Abstract

In 2016, The University of Texas at San Antonio's Autism Research Center received a two-year grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to train 960 special education teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with autism throughout the state of Texas in the basic principles of applied behavior analysis. To date, we have trained 694 special educators who report providing direct services a total of 5,195 children with autism. The current paper describes the program along with participant data to support the efficacy of our distance, project-based training methodology to provide FAPE - a free, applied behavior analytic, public education - to students with autism.

Introduction

Across the state of Texas, teachers are responsible for educating more than 5.1 million students each year (Texas Tribune, 2015). Of the 1,227 school districts in the state, more than half have less than 1,000 students, two-thirds have less than 1,600 students, and three-quarters of these districts have less than 3,000 students. More than 2,000 campuses (>20%) are classified within rural areas of the state (Texas Education Agency, 2016). This equates to a large number of students with disabilities receiving special education services in rural districts.

Presently there are more than 55,000 students receiving special education programming in Texas under autism eligibility. However, this number is less than half of the estimated 130,000 Texans with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) below 22 years of age (Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders, 2014). To address the needs of students with autism throughout the state, the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) received funding from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Autism Grant Program to allow us to scale up an existing Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) training program that we have offered locally since 2015. The RBT credential is the newest level of certification offered by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, and is designed specifically for individuals providing direct implementation of behavior-analytic services, such as teachers/paraprofessionals working with students with autism.

The Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) training combines the evidence-based practices of professional learning communities (Hoadley & Kilner, 2005) and project-based learning (Martin, Dixon, & Hagood, 2014), while leveraging the capacity of distance learning (Wainer & Ingersoll, 2013) to provide Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) instruction to teachers and paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals who participate in this project receive 42-hours of training in ABA by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst over a 5-week period. These educators are trained according to the guidelines for RBT put forth by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB). The RBT is primarily responsible for the direct implementation of skill-acquisition and behavior-reduction plans identified within each student's individualized education plan (IEP). The RBT may also collect data and conduct certain types of assessments (e.g., stimulus preference assessments). The BACB's RBT Task List includes the core tasks that are likely to be performed by behavior technicians, organized in the following areas: Measurement, Assessment, Skill Acquisition, Behavior Reduction, Documentation and Reporting, and Professional Conduct and Scope of Practice.

Our program format includes both synchronous and asynchronous instruction offered entirely via distance technologies (e.g., online modules, videoconferencing, and email) and founded upon best practices for teaching ABA principles (e.g., ShaperSpace; Mason et al., 2016). Program participants complete the asynchronous online modules to obtain the declarative knowledge related to the target ABA principles. These modules employ the effective elements of online learning including: written and verbal instruction (Wainer & Ingersoll, 2013) and video examples (Hamad, Serna, Morrison, & Fleming, 2010). Additionally, live web-based group instruction is provided by a BACB certificant each week for two hours. The live instruction incorporates project-based learning to facilitate generalization of the content from the modules to the classrooms in which each participant works. The data from these weekly projects serve as the basis for the weekly discussions in each face-to-face meeting. Participants take turns presenting their projects and receive feedback from both the instructor and other participants. Here we describe the results of our distance, project-based RBT training to date.

Method

To address the needs of teachers/paraprofessionals who work with children with autism throughout the state of Texas, we plan to replicate the Project ECHO model (http://echo.unm.edu/). Project ECHO embeds multi-point video conferencing within a hub-and-spoke model for developing networks of experts to create virtual clinics and provide interdisciplinary solutions. Using this model, we aim to develop virtual professional learning communities (VPLCs) in which teachers/paraprofessionals work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and data-based decision making to achieve better results for the students with autism that they serve. The purpose of these VPLCs is to build knowledge through "purposeful conversation around content in context" (Hoadley & Kilner, 2005). Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improving classroom instruction for students is through continuous professional development for educators (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The use of teleconferencing software allows us to reach special education teachers and paraprofessionals in rural parts of the state. Using Project ECHO's hub-and-spoke model, UTSA

serves as the academic hub by providing a BACB certificant to serve as the facilitator for each VPLC. Educators working with children with autism, the spokes in our model, make up the remainder of each VPLC, in which they give and receive mentoring and feedback from one another. Together, they discuss how the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) can be applied in the classroom so that students with autism get the supports they need to make adequate yearly progress. Within the scope of this project, educators engage in weekly synchronous discussions in a group-coaching format. These meetings last for 2 hr each week and are facilitated by a BACB certificant using Zoom video conferencing software. Zoom is a HIPAA-compliant, cloud-based video conferencing format that works across platforms, computers, tablets, and smartphones. The agendas for these meetings varies based on the content for that week but generally entails a guided discussion regarding the week's content, presentation by educators, feedback given to the group as a whole based on the educator examples, and time for question and answer.

Throughout the 5-week course, we employ project-based learning (Martin, Dixon, & Hagood, 2014; Vossoughi & Bevan, 2014) to facilitate the acquisition of the content within the RBT task list, while providing a real-life context for the implementation of behavior-analytic intervention. Importantly, special education teachers and paraprofessionals are learning to apply these basic principles of behavior analysis within the context of the students with autism in their respective classrooms. Each week of the program, participants are required to complete a data-based decision record (DBDR) in which they take data on student behavior to determine the efficacy of the various RBT skills they learn about within the online video modules. The data from these weekly projects serves as the basis for the weekly discussions in each face-to-face meeting. Participants take turns presenting their projects and receive feedback from the other participants and BCBA facilitator.

Participants

Our funding guidelines state that participants must provide direct services to students with autism ages 3-21 years old. The special educators who take part in these professional development webinars are grouped into cohorts of 10 and assigned to one BCBA throughout the 5-week training. The cohorts of 10 then proceed through the curriculum together, allowing participants to work collectively and collaboratively to address the unique challenges of educating students with autism. To facilitate the development of these learning communities, our waiting list asks about the specific autism-related needs faced by each participant (e.g., challenging behavior, early childhood, transition services, social skills, etc.). Additionally, we group participants according to job function to better facilitate discussion and interactions within the VPLCs. This additional information allows us to stratify cohorts according to the similar challenges faced by participants.

Procedures

The RBT Task List serves as the curriculum for our 42-hour professional development training. The material on the task list is presented through online, interactive video modules.

- Week 1 - Defining Behavior
    - Introductions (20 min)
    - Outline of the program (30 min)
        - Project-based learning
        - Online video modules
        - Role of the RBT
        - RBT task list
    - Overview of the behavior-analytic perspective with emphasis on behavioral definitions (30 min)
    - Homework assignment (10 min)
        - Select a behavioral deficit exhibited by a student with autism with whom you work and provide a functional definition of the behavior.
    - Pre-test (30 min)
    - Asynchronous video modules (8 hr) - Measurement and assessment
- Week 2 - Observing and Recording Behavior
    - Review of modules (10 min)
    - Clinical review of behavioral definitions provided by participants (70 min)
    - Overview of recording methods/behavioral dimensions (30 min)
    - Homework assignment (10 min)
        - Select a recording method for the target behavior and record baseline performance
    - Asynchronous video modules (8 hr) - Skill acquisition
- Week 3 - Fidelity of Implementation
    - Review of modules (10 min)
    - Clinical review of recording methods/baseline data provided by participants (70 min)
    - Overview of skill-acquisition procedures (30 min)
    - Homework assignment (10 min)
        - Develop a fidelity of implementation plan for a reinforcement-based intervention; Begin collecting intervention data and recording student performance.
    - Asynchronous video modules (8 hr) - Skill acquisition (cont'd); Behavior reduction
- Week 4 - Visual Analysis
    - Review of modules (10 min)
    - Clinical review of intervention data provided by participants (70 min)
    - Overview of behavior-reduction procedures (30 min)
    - Homework assignment (10 min)
        - Revise/continue reinforcement-based intervention, record student performance, and graph results.
    - Asynchronous video modules (8 hr) - Documentation and reporting; Professional conduct and scope of practice
- Week 5
    - Review of modules (10 min)
    - Clinical review of graphing conventions/intervention data provided by participants (70 min)

- Course wrap-up (10 min)
- Post-test/Course evaluation (30 min)

To assess the results of our training, we compared pre/post test results and collected feedback from participants using an anonymous course evaluation.

Results and Discussion

To date, we have recruited 1,521 participants, enrolled 843 in our program, and trained 694 special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Of these 694 special education teachers and paraprofessionals, 505 completed both the pre- and post-tests, and 207 returned the course evaluation survey. Participants have ranged in age from 23 to 69 years of age, and have been in the field anywhere from less than one year to more than 34 years. Participants were 95.7% female, and 87.8% of participants have earned a bachelor's degree. Of those who completed the course evaluation, 56.5% were Caucasian, 28.3% were Hispanic, and 5.4% were African American.

We have trained participants from all 20 education service centers throughout the state, although 47.8% of participants came from Region 20, which includes Bexar county - home to UTSA - among other rural and urban counties. More than half of the teachers who took part in the training report challenging behavior as the primary reason for taking part in the training.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, participants gave our training a score of 4.61. Furthermore, 96.6% of participants would recommend this training to other professionals who work with students with autism.

Figure 1 displays the results of the pre- and post-test results on a mock RBT exam collected on weeks one and five. A t-test showed that there was a significant difference between scores on the pre-test (M=57.45, SD 13.01) and post-test (M=883.47, SD 11.42) results; $t(169) = 28.129$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that our five-week RBT training effectively increased the declarative knowledge of our participants.

This project aims to train 960 teachers of students with autism throughout the state of Texas. Although we received high rates of attrition across the five-week program, participants highlighted the flexibility of the asynchronous online modules in combination with the face-to-face time with a BACB certificant as the primary strengths of the program. Our results support the use of online, project-based learning to train special education teachers and paraprofessionals who provide services to students with autism in rural areas. Specifically, participants showed significant gains across pre- and post-test scores, and more than 96% of participants would recommend this training to other special educators.

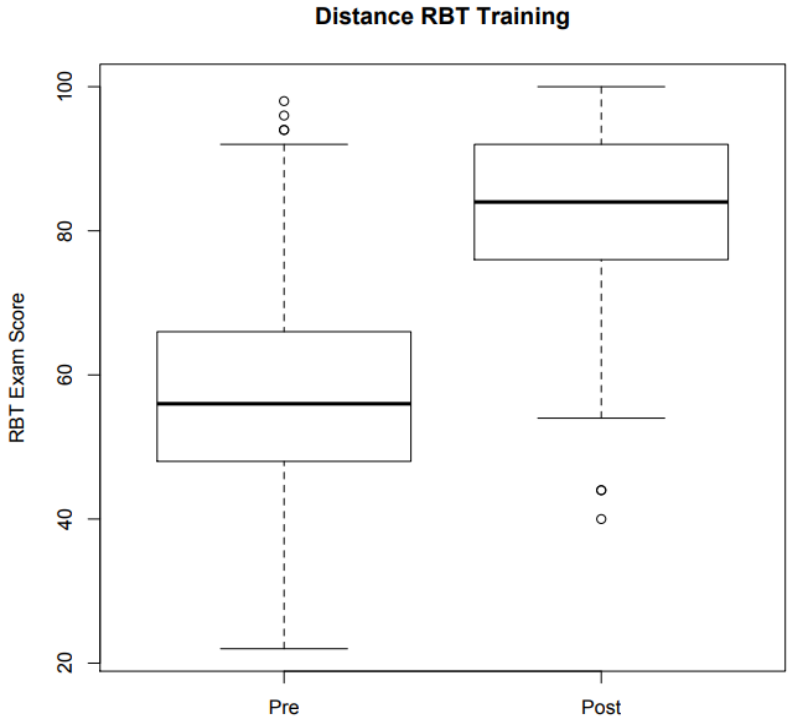

Figure 1. Pre- and post-test results on a mock RBT exam.

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COOPERATIVE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Abstract

There is substantial literature on the importance of family-professional partnerships, but little information exists on teacher education programs preparing future educators to establish and support successful family partnerships. Further, the extent to which the success of family partnerships is measured is even less researched. This article describes two family partnership projects in two teacher education courses (one undergraduate and one graduate) and how both instructors implemented the project with family-focused relationships in mind, with the intent to measure its success both from professional and family perspectives. The possible uses of these projects and measurements are discussed.

Introduction

Partnerships can be defined as "mutually supported interactions between families and professionals focused on meeting the needs of children and families that is characterized by a sense of competence, commitment, equality, positive communication, respect, and trust (Summers et al., 2005, p. 66). It is longstanding knowledge that positive school-to-family partnerships are immeasurably important to students' academic achievement, social-emotional development, and health and well-being in schools and at home (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Summers et al., 2005). However, the development of these partnerships may be unsuccessful if projects are not developed with empirical understanding of the role of partnerships and how to accurately measure the extent to which these partnerships are successful from professional and family vantages (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Further, there is a critical need to prepare professionals for these partnerships earlier in their careers, as they often feel unprepared and ill-equipped to work with families across diverse settings (Bryan & Henry, 2012). As the authors investigated this area, a major gap in the literature was identified in the areas of developing and sustaining successful teacher education family partnership models to train future educators, approaches to measuring professional success in creating and sustaining partnerships, and approaches to measuring families' perspective on the success of the partnerships. Few studies point to empirical support and models (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Murray & Meroiu, 2014), but only one study offers a model to teacher education programs with the intent to support future educators in learning how to develop successful family partnerships (Murray & Mereoiu, 2014). Epstein and Sanders (2006) explain this exceptionally well by saying "the lack of attention in higher education to educators' skills in conducting family and community involvement activities is puzzling because major directives for school improvement, comprehensive school reform, and district leadership call for this component" (p. 82). What deters these models from being replicated are the unique challenges of partnering with families in an individualized way.

Summers et. al (2005) describes several issues with the challenges of family partnerships in practice:

> Too often partnerships between families and professions fall short of recommended practice. Partnerships are often a source of stress and concern for both parents and professionals. Parents describe problems communicating with (professionals) and believe that professionals fail to understand and respect cultural differences. (p. 66)

Recommended practices for creating family-professional partnerships have common characteristics such as establishing communication, respect, and being dependable to families, as well as ensuring a sense of commitment, quality in service delivery, and a sense of competency to families (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Bryan & Henry, 2012). Murray and Mereoiu (2014) posit these same components in a teacher-parent partnership model and expand upon areas such as communication with specific discrete skills that professionals need such as clarity, openness, empathy, and coordination. Their model was replicated in 20 teacher education programs to increase knowledge and skills in developing effective family partnerships and focuses on communication, strengths-based approaches, developing trust, creating spaces of respect, and effectively resolving conflict. This model offers a comprehensive view of professional-family partnerships and key components for making concerted efforts to establish responsive and successful relationships with families in mind.

Available literature on partnership reveals that most of the research is qualitative in nature and lacks agreement on approaches to partnerships (Blue-Banning et. al. 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Willemse, Vloebergh, Bruine, & Van Eynde, 2015). Adapted from Summers et al.'s (2005) discussion on the needs of families and professionals, these four questions emerge as essential to measuring the success of family-professional partnerships: 1) What are the skills and behaviors professionals need to have in order to have a successful partnership with families; 2) In what ways can those skills and behaviors be quantitatively measured when applied to practice in family partnerships; 3) What is the extent of satisfaction from families when services are provided; and 4) What is the extent of satisfaction from families on the care and concern they receive from professionals? Summers et al. (2005) offer a comprehensive look at how to measure partnerships through piloting a scaled family survey in two separate studies. After sampling for high internally consistent factors and eliminating low rated items, nine questions were used to identify how families felt about their care from professionals. Another nine questions were used to identify how families felt about the skills or service delivery from the professional. The authors could not find a comparable study that reviewed how to measure the success of partnerships as perceived by professionals.

In an effort to better understand family-professional partnerships, the authors describe two different approaches to structuring and measuring quality or success of family-professional partnerships in teacher education courses. One undergraduate and one graduate course serve as pilots for describing the two partnership models in an effort to further explore how to sustain and measure success for family-professional partnerships in teacher education programs.

Service Learning and Family Project Descriptions

The projects outlined below are part of a service learning initiative at our School of Education, where service learning has effectively been integrated into teacher preparation coursework. The instructors carefully examined course content, and made connections between community needs and our course outcomes. The service learning portion of our courses allowed teacher candidates the opportunity to develop parent partnerships through authentic experiences. The service activities we developed were reciprocal in nature, benefiting community partners while enhancing teacher candidates' learning in real life/real time contexts as they solved very real problems. Additionally, the process of service learning contains a reflection component. The teacher candidates were able, through reflection, to make sense of their experiences, and the struggles that many of the families they worked with experienced. Teacher candidates also had the opportunity to clarify their thinking, reflect on their own skills, and anticipate how these interactions may impact them as future practicing teachers. Both projects are described in detail in the next sections.

Management in the Inclusive Classroom Family Project

The family partnership project was developed as part of the Management in Inclusive Classrooms undergraduate course. The curriculum contains a substantial focus on working collaboratively with families. Our community partner was a Parent Advocacy Center whose mission is to support people with disabilities and their families, helping them to fulfill possibilities in education, employment, health, and community living. Teacher candidates, in teams of four, were assigned a family to work with. Families that previously worked with the Advocacy Center were invited to participate in the service project. These families had training from the center in presenting their personal stories about living with a child with a disability. Parents provided a redacted copy of their child's IEP. Each copy of the IEP was numbered and teacher candidates signed them out. The importance of confidentiality and responsibility for the IEP was conveyed. Teacher candidates were directed to return the IEP at the end of the project.

After the family presentations, candidates were randomly assigned to a family and a team. The teams met to develop an introductory letter that contained pictures and bios of the teacher candidates, and an invitation to arrange an introductory meet and greet. Depending on parent/guardian preference, some of the students were present at these meetings, while others chose to initially meet teacher candidates before introducing their child. Teacher candidates brought with them a set of previously developed interview questions, and at this meeting, in collaboration with the families, identified a problem that needed to be solved.

Once a problem was identified, the teams selected a topic for their literature review that helped them gather foundational knowledge about the problem. Teams identified, reviewed, and synthesized the literature related to the families identified areas of need or interest, and looked for related resources. Teacher candidates discussed potential causes of the root problem, and creatively worked to develop strategies and supports the family could utilize to resolve or improve their situation.

Each team had ongoing communication and worked with their family partners throughout the entire semester. Families provided ongoing input through updates to their team. At the midway point, families and teacher candidates got together informally for a social gathering that the student would enjoy. One of the students enjoyed being on the college campus. His team took him to dinner in the college cafeteria on several occasions. Another team took their family to a college football game. At the request of the parent, one team visited the mall. Teacher candidates learned that for many families, there is a good deal of planning that occurs for what many would see as just a typical outing.

At the end of the semester, families returned to the classroom to hear strategies and suggested solutions. Each team also turned in a binder that documented their communication with the family, their team mission statement and meeting minutes, their joint literature review, a list of the strategies and resources in the format of an annotated bibliography, individual reflections and evaluation materials.

Critical Literacy in Social Studies Shelter Housing Family Project

The family project in the Critical Literacy and Social Studies course was developed in collaboration with a nonprofit agency that primarily serves up to 6,000 people a year with a range of service programs from child care to elderly assistance. One particular service this agency offers is housing and support services for homeless individuals and families. The instructor and students were connected directly with one shelter house that serves families of children of all ages for short term needs. Teacher candidates, in teams of two, were assigned to work together on creating learning kits for the children and piloting learning activities in the shelter with children who temporarily live in shelter housing. Prior to developing the learning kits, teacher candidates received three hours of selective training on topics related to poverty, reasons for family homelessness, the housing crisis in the community, and necessary communication and boundary setting in working with families who are in housing transition. Teacher candidates were introduced to a resiliency curriculum created by the Service Learning and Civic Engagement Center at the College. Teacher candidates read a responsive teaching book as part of their course learning outcomes and connected this reading back to their activities in this project. The partnership began with setting two main goals and setting expectations for both partners. The goals were:

1. Teacher candidates will experience and work with culturally and linguistically diverse families who are currently experiencing homelessness in order to prepare them for improved communication and cooperation with potential families in their future classrooms.
2. Teacher candidates will create and implement learning activities in the aim to create learning kits that can be used by agency volunteers to further support resilience and literacy development in children who are in a shelter setting.

Based on the two dimensions of family-professional partnerships model from Summers et al. (2005), each component area was discussed and agreed upon by each partner. Components were: commitment to project, level of competency of all parties, expectations of respect and boundaries, expectations of safety, dependability, expectations of communication, and

expectations of cultural competency (i.e. equality). Teacher candidates journal each session about the outcomes and are directed to connect it back to course readings and to the family-partnership model introduced to them. The timeline of activities and training are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Timeline of Family Project in Critical Literacy and Social Studies Graduate Course

Session Order	Time for Activity	Outcome
Observation	4 hours	Set baseline to experience and partnership
Poverty/Homeless training	1 hour	Baseline understanding of context
Communicating training	1 hour	Set expectations for partnership
Observation w/engagement	4 hours	Interact with families with support
Debrief with manager	1 hour	Solidify partnership expectations
Pilot learning activities	2 hours	Create and revise learning activities
Solicit family feedback	10 min	Survey families on care and service delivery
Pilot learning activities	2 hours	Finalize learning kits
Solicit family feedback	10 min	Survey families on care and service delivery
Solicit partner feedback	20 min	Receive direct feedback from partner
Create learning kits	4 hours	Learning kits to shelter
Solicit partner feedback	20 min	Determine resource usage and support

The project lasted eight weeks in length and was connected to learning outcomes of the graduate course. Students were graded using a service learning rubric that directed them to connect their course work to the project, to effectively communicate with partners and family, to produce a learning kit with two pilot attempts, and to attend and solicit feedback to the trainings by the partners.

Family Partnership Project Impact

The Family Partnership projects have been shown to have significant impact on teacher candidates, community partners, and families alike. Previously, data from the service learning office shows that 96% of college student participants felt their service project enhanced their learning and understanding of content.

In the Management in the Inclusive Classroom family project, impact was measured

through a variety of assessments. Each teacher candidate completed a reflection that focused on collaborating with families and working member of a team. Using the DEAL Model for Critical Reflection the teacher candidates used written reflection as a vehicle to describe their experiences (Ash & Clayton, 2009). The steps of the Deal Model-Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning allowed the instructor to closely assess the impact the project had on the teacher candidates.

The director of the Advocacy Center, our community partner, and the parents the teams worked with also provided oral feedback in a project debriefing session, first with the entire class, and then as a follow up, directly with the instructor. All partners indicated that their needs were met, and parents were excited to try the strategies and suggestions provided by the teacher candidates. Subsequently, teacher candidates felt like they were making a difference in the lives of these, and potentially, the families they would work with in the future.

Impact was measured in two ways in the Critical Literacy and Social Studies family project. First, teacher candidates were asked to solicit responses to a series of open-ended questions to determine if families were satisfied with the activities. These questions were first asked of the agency partner and families were asked to provide input on drafts of questions. These questions emerged as the final items to measure satisfaction. Teacher candidates were required to take this feedback and consider ways to improve or adapt their communication and delivery style. The impact of this partnership will be further analyzed in another study by the authors. Teacher candidates were encouraged to connect with families by learning their names, thoughts about their child, and how they were feeling that day, and most importantly, to adapt the questions to make the family and child feel most comfortable. If families did not want to answer any question or wanted to talk about something else, the teacher candidates were encouraged to take the families lead. Teacher candidates were directed to begin each question with the person's first name and explain why they were asking the questions. Examples included, "I am learning to become a better teacher" or "I really care about being here and learning about your child."

1. What are some of the *great* things about [child's name]?
2. [Purpose of the activity explained]. Is there anything else you would love to see today with our activity?
3. How do you think this activity went for [name of child]?
4. Would you be willing to share if you really liked anything about this activity?
5. Would you be willing to share if there was something I could do differently?
6. Do you have any advice for me as I go into teaching?

Teacher candidates were also prompted to thank the family for their time and to exit the session once the child has transitioned to another play activity. These questions were piloted during the interactive session as a class and then formalized during the after school session. The survey information was used to reflect on communication with families and areas to improve as future educators.

Discussion

In both projects, family-centered practices were considered important to the project partners, the instructors, and to the families being served. These initial descriptions of two family project models serve as a first step in exploring successful family-professional partnership models in teacher education programs. Each project focused on different aspects of family-centered communication and collaboration that strongly indicates that partnerships require a consistent communication plan and goal setting for teacher candidate outcomes. By including families in defining the components to a partnership (as discussed in the management course) and by soliciting their feedback for measured success (as discussed in the social studies course), it is evident that the extent of family involvement is in the "defining stages," or in a "feedback is a valuable and necessary aspect of family-professional partnerships" stage. Both projects set clear learning outcomes and parameters for teacher candidates which served to refine their skills and service delivery to the children and families.

Although impact is currently being more closely reviewed, it is evident that offering family-professional partnerships projects in teacher education has significant impact on numerous skills required by teachers simply based on the initial results of both projects. Whitte and Sheridan (2011) assert given the needs of rural communities and the high demands placed on them, they must use all resources available to them, and one of those resources are families. Yet, rural schools are failing to connect with families. Often, due to their geographic location, many families have to travel great distances to access services, and school partnerships could possibly address this obstacle, as schools tend to be more accessible to families. Subsequently, the authors posit that teacher candidates need pre-service training for this type of collaboration to effectively occur.

Studies about parent collaboration in teacher education preparation are minimal, and when focusing on rural geographic areas, the literature for such studies conducted in the United States is absent. Sawyer (2017) asserts that parent involvement is linked to increased student academic skills, and strategies to increase parent involvement are necessary for parents and teachers to work collaboratively. While the two projects conducted by the authors lend themselves to improving outcomes for rural families, the authors have discovered there need for more structured and comprehensive research.

Conclusion

What has become glaringly obvious in the research of family-professional partnerships is a clear gap in the literature on models of family-professional partnerships in teacher education programs and how to effectively measure those partnerships with professional skill improvement and family needs in mind. More exchange and support with family partnerships is essential to ensuring that future educators feel more prepared and equipped to working with families across a variety of settings and circumstances. By including these projects in teacher education programs and offering feedback as the authors describe, it may result in teachers feeling more comfortable in making these connections which will ultimately improves ways that Teacher education programs can support development in skills of developing family-professional partnerships. The initial results of impact from the undergraduate course family project serves as a first positive rationale for including family-professional partnerships in teacher education programs. Despite the fact that other results are currently being reviewed, this paper makes clear that both models

can serve as models for measuring success in partnerships as determined by families and professionals in the projects. This paper also supports evidence that improvements can be made for teacher education programs to support these types of projects in order to further prepare teacher candidates for working with and collaborating with diverse families.

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