THIRD, FOURTH, AND FIFTH GRADE TEACHERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF METHODS

USED TO IMPROVE THE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING

DISABILITIES

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by

Sally Greenberg Berkowitz

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this document to my husband, Lenard Berkowitz, without whose continuous support and steadfast encouragement this degree and paper would never have happened. He knew that earning this degree was a dream that I had held since before we met. He was determined that I succeed, and helped to make it a reality.

I further dedicate this paper to all my darling daughters. From the time that I began this program until its completion, I have proudly watched as my older three daughters graduated from college, now all in graduate school themselves, and my youngest graduated from high school and now attends college. To Esther Feuer, Lauren Smolar, Shayna Berkowitz, and Adelle Berkowitz, who were also invested in my success, and were cheering for me from near and far, I thank you for allowing me to be a student alongside you.

During the time that I worked on this degree, I welcomed two new sons-in-law and a grandson into the family, with another son-in-law "on the way." To George, Hayim, and Henry, and to Eric who is himself in school, I appreciate your understanding of my desire to attain this goal. With a special appreciation to my mother, Nancy Greenberg, who always knew I loved being a student, and to my father-in-law, Melvin Berkowitz, ZL, who encouraged me to complete my degree, a quiet respect for my determination to reach this goal allowed me to finally achieve it.

ABSTRACT

Berkowitz, Sally Greenberg, *Third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers' descriptions of methods used to improve the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities*. Doctor of Education (Educational Leadership), May, 2017, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers reported they successfully improved the reading achievement of students with LD as documented by an increase in test scores on standardized tests in reading. Moreover, this study is an examination of productive ways in which elementary classroom teachers reported that they increased the interest and motivation of students who have historically had difficulty in school, specifically, students who have been identified with LD.

Method

This qualitative study was conducted with five Grade 3, 4, and 5 general education teachers with at least three years of experience teaching students with LD in reading. The teachers were selected from schools which had attained a Reading/ELA Distinction in the Accountability Ratings for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 administrations of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The schools also had a minimum of two self-contained special education classrooms. The semi-structured interviews were the basis of the phenomenological study of the experiences of the teachers in working with these students to be successful in reading.

Findings

Teachers who participated in the study shared indicators of student success. In addition to an increase in test scores, the teachers shared that increased participation in

classroom discussions and the facial expressions of their students with LD were signs that the students had improved their reading performance. Other indicators were a decrease in negative behaviors and an increase in independence.

Themes of success that the teachers shared focused on positive relationships and interactions with students, reliance on the support of school-based personnel, collaboration with parents, and positive strategies and incentives that the teachers used to motivate their students with LD. Students with LD are successful when they benefit from a variety of factors, including relationships with caring and interested general education teachers. General education teachers benefit from and are better able to provide support to their students by having positive relationships with other members of the school staff, including teaching assistants and teacher interventionists. Equally important are the positive relationships general education teachers have with students' parents.

KEY WORDS: Relationships, Learning disability, General education teachers, Motivation, Reading achievement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

For the last few decades, instruction in the United States has focused on academic

pursuits, frequently excluding art, music, and interpersonal skills (Flink, 2014). During

this time, success has been expressed as high scores on standardized tests U.S.

Department of Education, n.d.). In addition, during this same time period, the cultural,

economic, and family structures have changed, providing less support for children at

home (Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Learning is dependent upon having a nurturing, safe

environment (Dewey, 2015; Steward, 2007). This is especially true for individuals with

learning disabilities (Flink, 2014). The current emphasis on inclusive instruction means

that students with disabilities will be educated in a general education classroom to a

greater degree than in previous years, placing the responsibility with the teachers of

general education classrooms for providing academic instruction as well as a nurturing

environment (Winzer, 2009).

Background of the Study

Even before the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required all states to

implement testing for all students, Texas required public school educators to assess

students to determine mastery of basic skills (Texas Education Agency, 2010). In the

original Texas examinations, the test scores of students with documented special

education needs were not counted in school accountability formulas. The NCLB Act

mandated that all public-school students, including students with disabilities, must be

assessed to determine their mastery in reading and math beginning at the third-grade level

(U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The requirement of school districts to educate

their special education students, at the same academic level as their students without disabilities, has increased the need to find effective ways of teaching students with disabilities (Shippen et al., 2011).

Although in current educational reading curricula there are a number of techniques presented to address reading strategies for most students, few recent studies have been conducted to determine techniques used by teachers specifically to increase the reading performance of elementary students who have a learning disability (LD). To help support struggling readers, teachers need to have targeted strategies to engage these students to perform well. Through this qualitative study, teachers in a large urban school district have described methods they have used to increase the reading skills of Grade 3, 4, and 5 students with LD.

Statement of the Problem

Students with LD frequently fall behind their classmates in academic success. Teachers who teach students in a mainstream setting will invariably be responsible for teaching students who have LD. Many teachers have difficulty working with students who learn differently than the average student. If students with LD are not provided with motivation and supportive instruction, students with LD may eventually drop out of school or not reach their full academic and career potential. A need exists to find and replicate successful strategies for working with students with LD to maximize the learning of these students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers reported they successfully improved the reading achievement of students

with LD as documented by an increase in test scores on standardized tests in reading.

Moreover, this study is an examination of productive ways in which elementary

classroom teachers reported that they increased the interest and motivation of students

who have historically had difficulty in school, specifically, students who have been

identified with LD.

Significance of the Study

Through this study the effective methods used by elementary teachers who

improved the reading achievement of students diagnosed with LD have been identified.

These effective methods may be used by other teachers who work with LD students to

help them to be more successful in reading in the mainstream classroom. There have

been few studies documented in recent years that discuss the positive engagement of

general education elementary teachers with their students who have LD (Demirkaya &

Bakkaloglu, 2015). If teachers who have been successful in teaching and motivating

these students to improve their reading skills shared their strategies for success, other

teachers might duplicate their practices to enable other teachers to help other students

with LD. Federal law and Texas state requirements emphasize the need for students with

disabilities to be educated in their least restrictive environment (LRE) to the greatest

degree possible for each student to be successful (Texas Education Agency, 2012; U.S.

Department of Education, 2015).

Students with learning disabilities have had difficulty learning in traditional

settings and with traditional methods (Ayala, Brace, & Stahl, 2012). As more students

were returned to the mainstream setting, teachers in general education classrooms were

held accountable for direct instruction of special education students (Ayala et al., 2012).

Regarding this study, suggestions for techniques that have been successful will be provided for teachers who work with students with LD and students who struggle with learning reading.

Research Question

In this study, I sought to determine how third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers potentially influence the reading performance of their students with LD. Teachers with previous experience working with students with LD in a general education setting were asked to participate in the study to determine how they perceive they positively influence the reading success of their students with LD. The following grand question was addressed: How do selected Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers describe their motivational strategies, instructional practices, and instructional resources that have helped students with learning disabilities to become successful readers?

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed by learning theory, social learning theory, and expectancy-value theory, as well as constructivism. In Vygotsky's learning theory, children's learning and acquisition of skills is intertwined with their development (Glaser & Bassok, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978, 2005). Students must be taught at their current level of functioning to be successful. Students with LD need to have teachers who can engage them with strategies that are effective for their needs (Flink, 2014).

Bandura (1977) explained his social learning theory as follows: "successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them" (p. 195). When students were given positive feedback for their work or were positively encouraged, they usually performed at a higher level than when they received negative feedback or did not receive any

feedback. Teachers of students with LD have a responsibility to encourage the students to be successful (Flink, 2014).

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) described their expectancy-value theory as follows: "individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (p. 68). Teachers can motivate students to believe in themselves and to value their school work. I have sought to determine in what ways Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers positively engage their students with LD so that the students increased their performance on district level assessments.

Reading instruction during the second half of the 20th Century evolved to include the constructivist theory as a sociocultural learning process which emphasized group learning and addressed the prior learning of students as well as how a student's abilities and interests would affect their learning to read (Alexander & Fox, 2013). The constructivist approach is appropriate for the research of teaching literacy because the constructivist view is focused on the natural desire of children to understand language as part of their need to interact socially (Vacca, Vacca, & Bruneau, 2005). Constructivist education promotes sociomoral development in students (DeVries & Zan, 2015).

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study have been defined based upon their usage within this study. To avoid confusion about the understanding of these terms, I have defined the words and phrases that could be confusing or have meanings that may otherwise be misunderstood.

Accommodations. "Changes within the general education classroom to enable students to keep up with the education program" are accommodations (Martin, 2011). Examples of these changes are shorter assignments or extra time; being provided a specific seat in the classroom that helps the student focus; or the use of computers, charts, or calculators.

Admission, Review, Dismissal (ARD) Committee. The Admission, Review, Dismissal Committee is the team in Texas which is comprised of a student's parents and school staff. It makes decisions on behalf of a student with special needs, including eligibility, instructional and related services, and the development of the Individualized Education Program (Texas Project First Glossary, 2015).

Engagement. Engagement is the social connection between the student and the learning, including relationships with other students and teachers (Reschly & Christenson, 2012. "Engagement happens when students are involved in activities that spark a desire in them" (Ridnouer, 2011, p. 1).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). A free appropriate public education is defined as 'special education and related services' that are (a) provided at public expense; (b) meet the standards of the state educational agency (SEA); (c) include an appropriate education at the preschool, elementary, and secondary level school levels; and (d) are delivered in accordance with the child's IEP (20 U.S.C. & 1401 [8[]1998]) (Simon & Kule-Korgood, 2011, p. 687).

Individualized Education Program (IEP). An Individualized Education Program is a document that specifies a plan for a specific student identified with a

disability. The contents of this document are decided upon by the ARD Committee (Texas Project First Glossary, 2015).

Inclusion. Inclusion refers to the educational placement in the least restrictive setting, ideally in the general education environment, for a student with a disability to receive special education and related services (Martin, 2011).

Learning Disabilities (LD). Learning disabilities is "an umbrella term for neurological difficulties in the brain's ability to receive, process, store, express, and respond to information" (Flink, 2014). According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities,

> Learning disabilities (LD) are a group of varying disorders that have a
> negative impact on learning. They may affect one's ability to speak,
> listen, think, read, write, spell or compute. The most prevalent LD is in
> the area of reading, known as dyslexia (National Center for Learning
> Disabilities, 2014).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The least restrictive environment is the setting which most nearly approximates that of a student without disabilities; it is a setting where the least amount of support is needed, but which allows a student to be successful (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The term least restrictive environment (LRE) is used to describe the right of students to be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with non-disabled peers (HISD, 2010-2012, Section I-2).

Literacy. Literacy is the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate" (ILA, 2015) using a variety of materials and modalities.

Placement. The placement of a student who has been identified with special education needs is the type of program in which the student will receive services. The determination as to in what type of placement the student will be instructed, whether in a special education or regular education setting, is made by the ARD Committee (Texas Project First Glossary, 2015).

Reading performance. Within this study, reading success refers to the ability to read and understand what is read as demonstrated by passing scores on a grade level local assessment.

Relationship. "A successful relationship occurs when emotional deposits are made to the student, emotional withdrawals are avoided, and students are respected" (Payne, 2005, p. 111).

Students with Disabilities. Students with disabilities are students who have been identified with a disability and who are receiving special education services in public schools in the United States. They may have one or more of 14 different disabilities as identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Harr-Robins, Song, Hurlburt, Pruce, Danielson, Garet, & Taylor, 2012).

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study include several factors. The study was confined to schools in a large urban school district that met the standard for the state accountability rating and had a distinction in Reading/ELA for the state assessment in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The study also is restricted to teachers of students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 who have met the criteria for LD placement in reading. Further, this study was focused only on the success of students in reading. Participants were teachers who had had at least 3 years of

experience teaching students with LD. In addition, an ambiguous temporal precedence may exist, in which unknown factors may affect the success of the students of the teachers in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Limitations

My study was limited by several factors. Due to the nature of a qualitative study, the sample was small; thus, limiting the scope of the information that was derived from my study (Griffin, 2004). In addition, the findings may not be transferable to other populations (Atieno, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Temporal validity may also be a concern because the study addressed the success of teachers who were teaching before and during the time of the study, and may not be applicable to another time when teaching and testing expectations are different (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

My study was limited further by the specific needs of the population of students being studied at the time of the study, the skills of the teachers participating, and the limits of the teacher questionnaire and interview protocol. The types of interventions that teachers attempted due to the culture of the school may have also limited the types of interventions that they attempted. In addition, the study was limited by the materials, resources, and time the teachers had available to provide support to the students they served.

In a qualitative study, consideration must be taken for the researcher's personal biases due to familiarity with the research topic. Moustakas (1994) described the epoché process as one in which "we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (p. 85). My professional experience has provided me with an awareness of how some general education teachers work effectively with students with disabilities.

For this study, I considered the effects of those experiences on my own perceptions of how teachers are able to encourage positive outcomes for students with LD in reading.

A qualitative study requires an interest in the subject by the researcher (Saldana, 2011). The influence of the relationships of teachers on their students is a topic about which I have a strong interest. When I worked with students with LD in a pull out resource setting, much of the effort I exerted was to promote a positive self-image in the students. After having experienced failure repeatedly in school, these students frequently believed that they were not capable of learning to read. In the general education setting, students with LD were frequently held to lower standards and expectations, which in turn led them to believe that they were not capable of performing to the same level as their peers.

My teaching career began shortly after federal laws were passed to provide for the education of children with disabilities in a school setting. I realized when I worked in a self-contained setting with students diagnosed with emotional disturbance that once we had a positive relationship, I was able to request more academic work from them. As their academic skills improved, so did their confidence. This process promoted positive behavior, allowing the students to begin moving into a mainstream setting for instruction and socialization.

My bias was further influenced by my professional experience as a special education resource teacher and school counselor, when I worked with general education teachers to establish a positive relationship with struggling students. I encouraged general education teachers to work with the strengths of the students with disabilities, even as they worked with the students to address deficits. I offered suggestions to

general education teachers to offer students different techniques to complete assignments to the greatest extent that the students were capable of doing.

Teachers who invested time and effort in building relationships with students appeared to provide greater support and to see more success with their students with disabilities. In addition, these teachers were more willing to attempt different techniques to promote success with their students. Students verbalized that they liked teachers who helped them. Students interpreted time spent with them and positive interactions with adults as being reasons to focus more on learning. The study was limited, therefore, also by my bias that teachers have a strong influence on the motivation of their students (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Assumptions

There are several basic assumptions for my study that were considered. One of the assumptions was that teachers would be able to articulate the ways that they were successful with their students with LD. Another assumption was that the students on each of the campuses being studied did not have influences outside of the school setting that also influenced their success during the school years being addressed. Finally, I made the assumption that the standardized tests that were being used to determine success were valid and reliable.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the study and describes the background of the study, then identifies the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study, explains the significance of the study, describes the conceptual framework, states the research questions, defines terms used, and describes the

delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of my study. Chapter II presents a review of

the literature supporting my proposal. In Chapter III, I describe the methods that I used

to conduct this study, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

In Chapter IV, the results of the study are described, along with how the data was

analyzed. Finally, in Chapter V, I report on implications of the study, recommendations,

and possible future studies based upon the results of my study.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Organized educational programs, including programs for children with

disabilities, have existed in the United States since 1817 (Winzer, 2009). However, it has

been only since 1974 when Congress addressed the need for students to be educated with

non-disabled students as much as possible that including and providing instruction for

students with learning disabilities was required of teachers in general education settings

(Winzer, 2009). There are now many more expectations of teachers who were trained

with the expectation of teaching children who were performing at their assigned grade

level. Successful teachers are able to teach all students assigned to them, using a variety

of techniques and methods that allow their students to be successful.

Introduction

Most students with LD have difficulties learning to read, with more severe

problems in reading than students without a diagnosis of LD (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams,

& Baker, 2001). Students with LD in reading also had more difficulty with

comprehension due to dysfluency as a result of a lack of phonemic awareness (Chard,

Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). For students with LD in reading, reading was influenced to a

greater degree by oral reading, repeated reading, correction, and feedback than by reading

silently, which would have been sufficient for students without LD (Chard et al., 2002).

Students with LD frequently required more specialized instruction than students

who did not have LD (Farrell & Sherman, 2011). In the United States, educators were

still learning how to teach students with LD effectively (Farrell & Sherman, 2011).

Teachers who had taught for many years were accustomed to teaching all students in their

classrooms at the same time in the same way (Flink, 2014). Students with LD were not always successful with being taught in the same way as students who did not have LD.

Positive, supportive relationships with teachers and other adults enabled students to learn effectively (Cozolino, 2013; Dee, 2014; Kohl, 1984). The history of identifying and teaching students with LD in the United States, the current process of providing services for students with LD, and the type of classroom environment conducive to positive performance for students with LD is discussed in this chapter.

History of Special Education

Education for individuals with disabilities predated compulsory education for non-disabled students in the United States, which did not occur until 1852 (Winzer, 2009). Early history of learning environments for individuals with physical or learning differences began in the United States with separate learning environments for students who were deaf or hearing impaired (Osgood, 2008; Winzer, 2009). "Persons with disabilities either were kept at home, tolerated and even supported by communities, or expelled, prosecuted and even condemned" (Osgood, 2008, p. 7). The first school for students with a hearing impairment was opened in the United States in 1817; thus, beginning the process of providing a learning setting for individuals with special needs (Winzer, 2009).

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, programs were developed to serve also students with visual impairments, speech impairments, and intellectual disabilities (Winzer, 2009). Prior to legislation requiring LRE, children with disabilities who required a significant amount of a teacher's time and focus were isolated in their learning environments, educated away from students without disabilities (McCarty, 2006;

Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014; Osgood, 2008). The election of John F. Kennedy brought a new recognition of the disabled to lawmakers, due to Kennedy's sister Rosemary, who was born intellectually disabled.

Legislation providing for students with disabilities. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) proclaimed education as a civil right (Simon & Kule-Korgood, 2011). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was enacted as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's initiative to provide a fair education to children of poverty. It included federal funds to help states provide support on students' behalf. In *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* (1972), the court determined that avoidance of discrimination applied to children with disabilities just as it applied to children of different races, cultures, and those living in poverty (Simon & Kule-Korgood, 2011).

In 1974, the ESEA was amended to include the concept of LRE, which mandated the instruction of students with disabilities in an environment which resembles that of the general education population to the greatest extent possible, while still providing the students with disabilities the best placement for learning (Winzer, 2009). In 1975, Public Law 94-142, known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, mandated FAPE, requiring an education for all children, including those with special learning needs, as well as those with cultural and language differences (Winzer, 2009). This law also encouraged mainstreaming and addressed the benefits of mainstreaming (Osgood, 2008). An amendment to ESEA first identified learning disabilities specifically in a federal law in 1977 (Winzer, 2009).

It was not until 1984 that the term inclusion was used to describe the direct participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting (Winzer, 2009). The Regular Education Initiative (REI), which was proposed in 1986 under the Reagan administration, was intended to decrease costs associated with separate educational programs for students with disabilities while including these students in the general education setting (Winzer, 2009). In 1990, PL 101-476 updated the Education for All Handicapped Children Act by adding additional types of disabilities to the provision of education for students with special needs while also changing the phrasing of disability descriptions to "stress people-first terminology—for example, a child with a disability rather than a disabled child" (Winzer, 2009, p. 284). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed in 1990, requiring that public schools provide services for students with disabilities (Simon & Kule-Korgood, 2011).

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 the general education setting was determined to be the first placement of consideration for students with disabilities (Winzer, 2009). President George W. Bush signed reauthorized legislation for ESEA, then entitled No Child Left Behind, in 2002. The requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act included the need for teachers to provide high academic standards for all students, including those with disabilities (Shippen et al., 2011). It included mandatory testing for all students, including those with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

In 2004, PL 108-446 provided for FAPE in the LRE. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 also established the response to intervention (RtI) process as a means of providing interventions for students who struggled with learning before evaluating and

identifying them with a diagnosis for special education services (Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). Updates to IDEA are mandated for reauthorization each 5 years (Simon & Kule-Korgood, 2011).

In January, 2015, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called for an additional reauthorization to ESEA to support equity in education and success for all students. His recommendations included eliminating the provisions of No Child Left Behind that provided for the focus on school and student failures, as well as excessive testing (Duncan, 2015). On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law the most recent revision of the ESEA with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Among the provisions of the new act are a reduction in the participation of the federal government in education to the extent previously held, yet there is still an expectation that states will be held accountable for the identification and education of students with special needs (Executive Office of the President, 2015). Also included are recommendations for techniques and strategies to address the needs of diverse learners, including those with disabilities (Samuels, 2016).

In the accountability systems of testing, special education students were initially not included (Texas Project First, n.d.). Schools did not push to educate students with disabilities since their test scores would not be part of the schools' ratings. School districts encouraged the identification of students with special learning needs to increase the ratings. Schools were first required to include the state assessment scores of students with special needs in 2006. As the assessment scores of students with disabilities increasingly became part of the accountability system, schools were forced to provide better instruction for students with LD as well as for students with other disabilities.

Assessments for students with disabilities. The first state assessment specifically designed for special education students in Texas was the State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA), released in 2001 (Texas Education Agency, 2015a). The purpose of this assessment was to allow for testing that more accurately reflected the learning of students with disabilities. Those alternate assessments were allowed for students with LD who qualified and whose ARD committee chose that as an appropriate assessment, with accommodations. The SDAA was generally given at a lower grade level than the grade level placement of the student. Students routinely passed the given assessment, but were not challenged to learn and achieve at grade level.

The No Child Left Behind Act forced the state to change the assessments allowed for students with disabilities to address grade level learning standards. The next assessment developed was the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). A modified version of this assessment was available to students with disabilities who qualified, but this still was not considered a grade level assessment by federal government standards (Texas Project First, n.d.).

The next assessment given to public school students was the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The current assessment for students with LD is the STAAR, which is the same assessment as for students without disabilities. Students with LD who qualify for accommodations for the STAAR Reading assessment, and whose ARD Committee documented the needed accommodations, are eligible to take the STAAR Accommodated, which is currently offered as an online or paper assessment.

Difficulties of Students with Learning Disabilities

Individuals with LD and ADHD dropped out of high school at a rate that was double that of individuals who did not have LD and ADHD (Flink, 2014). Lackaye and Margalit (2006) compared the social-emotional adjustment of adolescent students with and without LD to the academic achievement of both groups, as well as the effort that the students with LD committed to studying. They indicated that students with LD tended to have decreased levels of self-esteem, mood, and hope compared with students without disabilities. Goleman (2011) suggested that emotions can interfere with learning.

Adolescent students with disabilities tended to believe that they had low levels of competency, yet believed that they worked hard. However, evidence was provided that they invested less effort in doing their school work than did their peers (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006). This lack of effort may be because students with difficulties in reading worked more slowly and became tired more easily than did students who did not have difficulties with reading (Flink, 2014). Students who continued to experience failure in school may have become discouraged (Fox, 2008). Students with LD in reading usually had difficulty in other school subjects as well. Beginning in the fourth grade, learning in mathematics, social studies, and science was highly dependent upon the ability to read and comprehend textbooks and classroom material (Wilson, 2011).

Academic challenges. Rousseau (2009) believed that children should learn through experience. For a student whose brain is not yet ready to learn to read, the brain will try to create different connections than the same way as students whose brains are mature enough for reading (Sprenger, 2013). The process of reading then becomes

challenging, stressful, and unpleasant. Students who struggle with learning to read lose

confidence in their ability to learn (Flink, 2014).

Dewey (2015) stressed that one of the functions of education should be to help

children discover their strengths. Students with difficulties in school frequently have

strengths in areas that are not assessed in school (Fox, 2008). Children tend to reject

activities that they do not perform easily or well (Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010).

Students with LD in reading frequently required more time to complete school work,

which left them with less time to pursue other, more enjoyable, activities. Those more

enjoyable activities may have included pursuits at which they excelled, such as art,

sports, or music (Flink, 2014).

Having less time to spend on activities at which they excelled had negative

repercussions on the self-esteem and self-confidence of students with LD, as they did not

see themselves as capable individuals (Flink, 2014). Reschly and Christenson (2012)

noted that students considered at risk were more likely to be academically successful

when they were connected to school, including having a mentor and other positive, long-

term relationships at school. Students need also to have an understanding of the

expectations for the class (Breaux, 2015).

Social challenges. People are social beings and education is a social activity

(Dewey, 2015). Caine and Caine (2011) explained that learning has a social and

emotional component. Freire (2000) discussed the relationship between language, or

verbal communication, and trust, hope, and faith in people. There is a correlation

between positive peer relationships and academic competence (Wentzel, 2005).

A child who was not successful socially had difficulty focusing on learning in a classroom setting, especially when group work was involved (Fox, 2008). A child who was challenged in maintaining himself emotionally was unable to concentrate on learning, which also affected his social relationships in the classroom. Children needed the guidance of the adults in their lives to learn how to navigate social situations; they needed encouragement to continue an academic path if they had experienced failure in learning to read or do math (Fox, 2008). Specific skills in understanding social cues as well as how to respond to peers may need to be taught directly to students with LD (Wiseman, 2011).

Children with learning disabilities frequently have difficulty with understanding oral as well as written language, and in communicating with their peers (DeNisco, 2015; Wiseman, 2011). Wiseman (2011) found that students with LD were more likely also to have difficulties with receptive language, expressive language, and processing language. This difficulty with language could have impeded the ability of the students with LD to communicate with their peers. These students were then objects of teasing or bullying, which could have further affected their self-confidence and self-esteem (Wiseman, 2011).

Students with LD Benefit from Inclusion

Hernandez (2016) discussed elements of a positive environment for students at risk in an inclusive setting. Among those elements were structure, enthusiasm, teacher adaptability and flexibility, and work that is interesting and challenging. In addition, two-way communication and respect are essential for at risk students to be successful.

Lindsay (2007) maintained that there is not one system that will work ideally for all students with disabilities. Placement for students with LD is determined by the IEP

committee based upon the needs of the individual child (McCarty, 2006). Students with disabilities spent increasingly more time with general education teachers as their primary instructors as the requirements for the reauthorization of the IDEA of 2004 were continuously updated and implemented, requiring the LRE to the greatest extent appropriate for each student (ESC20.net, 2015; Shippen et al., 2011).

Students with disabilities achieved greater academic and social success when they spent more time in learning environments with non-disabled peers (Comstock-Galagan, 2008; McCarty, 2006). Participating in an inclusive environment allowed students with disabilities to learn not only from their non-disabled peers, but also provided opportunities for their non-disabled peers to interact with, understand, and accept individuals with differences from an early age (Comstock-Galagan, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2006; DeNisco, 2015; Osgood, 2008). Effective teachers provided a classroom environment that was welcoming to students of all learning abilities (Hall & Simeral, 2015; Marzano, 2007). Students who are accepted by their peers are more likely to achieve academically (Wentzel, 2005).

Teachers assisted all students in learning when they provided a classroom environment that was amenable to students of all ability levels (Darling-Hammond, 2006). There may have been some students in the classroom who had not been identified as LD, but who could have benefitted also from accommodations that provided support to students with disabilities (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). Children may have appeared to have LD if they were taught in a way that was incongruent with their primary learning modality (Fox, 2008). Fox (2008) explained that having a disability was specific to the

environment of the individual; schools that provided appropriate accommodations for students would have allowed for the greatest degree of student success.

Instructional support of students prior to referral for special education services is part of the RtI process (Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). Wanzek and Cavanaugh (2012) found that a variety of interventions were offered to general education students in kindergarten through third grades who struggled with learning to read. Those interventions included intervention sessions offered in and outside of the general education classroom, smaller instructional group sizes of one to seven students, published intervention programs, re-teaching skills using teacher-developed materials, and interventions provided by paraprofessionals. The majority of the interventions occurred inside the classroom by the general education teacher.

Although inclusion can be beneficial, the attitude of the classroom teacher can influence the effectiveness of the general education classroom for students with LD (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014). Shippen et al. (2011) noted a negative factor in inclusion was the difficulty of general education teachers to address many different learning needs. "Positive teacher perceptions influence the success of students with disabilities in general education classes and are directly related to accommodations teachers are willing and able to provide" (Shippen et al., 2011, p. 37). In addition, teachers require training and support to successfully provide appropriate services for students with LD in a general education classroom (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014).

The Importance of Studying Relationships

"Children won't learn academics if they don't feel cared for" (Shrum, 2015, para. 4). People have a natural need for social connections (Caine & Caine, 2011). Caine and

Caine stated, "much of the way that we all think and learn is grounded in relationships with each other" (2011, p. 112). "Education is ultimately a people-centered business" (Hall & Simeral, 2015, p. 5). Bolman and Deal (2008) shared the benefits of positive relationships on members of an organization: groups were more productive when individual's needs were respected. Leaders of an organization were responsible for facilitating communication and supporting the members of a group; in a classroom, the teacher was the leader.

Stoddard (2004) described the dimensions of human greatness as a need (a) for identity, (b) for close relationships, and (c) to learn and understand the world. For learning to occur, students needed a caring connection with teachers who provided a trusting, caring, and safe environment (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Fox, 2008; Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Goleman (2011) stressed the connection between emotions and the ability to make good choices. Kaufman et al. (2008) stressed that teachers must build positive relationships with students before requiring academically challenging work.

Kaplan (2009) described a teacher's relationship with his or her students as including respect for the students, teaching them not just to follow rules, but also to think for themselves. Kaplan shared Dewey's belief that teachers should set up the environment in a classroom to enable students to learn appropriate social interactions; students need to have a sense of their place in the school community. Positive relationships with teachers helped students to have a more positive experience in a school setting (Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Van Damme, 2009).

Fox (2008) suggested that schools should not only remediate for the weaknesses of students with LD, but also should build upon the strengths of these students. Students

with LD needed to hear about the strengths they possessed so that they can build on those strengths and learn effectively (Flink, 2014). When students with LD were uncomfortable with their learning challenges, they may have engaged in inappropriate behaviors to provide a distraction from their discomfort (Flink, 2014). Students with behavioral or learning challenges learned better when they had an adult in their lives who would take the time to develop a caring relationship with them (Kohl, 1984).

Significance of Engagement

Most students performed better when they had a positive relationship with the adults in their lives (Flink, 2014; Kohl, 1984). The students of special education teachers who motivated and engaged the students in learning to read demonstrated greater gains in academic achievement (Seo, Brownell, Bishop, & Dingle, 2008). Special education teachers who were most successful in teaching reading were able to show an interest in students' individual backgrounds, had a classroom culture of respect, and provided encouragement to students in academic and behavioral contexts.

Positive relationships with adults provided positive learning opportunities for students (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Flink, 2014; Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010; Kohl, 1984). Anderson et al. (2004) recognized that positive student relationships with adults in the school setting could positively influence student engagement, including increasing students' desire to learn, perseverance in completing work, and accuracy in assignments. Not only teachers, but also paraprofessionals, had a positive influence on students in an inclusive setting (Howes, 2003).

The degree of engagement of general education teachers who worked with students with disabilities influenced the progress of students in the mainstream setting

(Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001). The best results for students with disabilities was from "general education teachers who . . . expressed attitudes that reflected high levels of ownership and responsibility for the education and inclusion of students with and without disabilities" (Giangreco et al., 2001, p. 79). Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins, and Herman (2002) suggested that teachers could guide students to develop attitudes and habits that would benefit the students in school settings as well as after graduation. Baker (2006) discussed the positive effects that having "relationships characterized by high degrees of warmth and trust are associated with positive school adjustment and academic achievement" in elementary school students (p. 213).

Joseph and Eveleigh (2009) reviewed journal articles written over a 20-year period that discussed studies conducted with students with disabilities who self-monitored their reading. The self-monitoring process involved students observing, then recording, their behavior as it related to school reading assignments. In these studies, adults provided guidance to the students as to how the students could monitor themselves. The results of the studies indicated that students showed improvements in (a) the number of questions completed, (b) accuracy, (c) oral reading rates, and (d) on-task behaviors (Joseph & Eveleigh, 2009).

In conducting a study of how high school teachers communicated with students with disabilities, Adams, Lenz, Laraux, Graner, and Pouliot (2002) learned that teachers benefited from having a system for connecting with students. Teachers with tools to communicate with students more effectively are more likely to see positive results (Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010; Kohl, 1984). Margolis and McCabe (2006) discussed ways to help struggling readers increase their beliefs in their abilities to succeed in

academic tasks. When students who had, a low self-efficacy were provided with opportunities to improve their self-image, such as (a) encouragement, (b) charting successes, (c) frequent, specific feedback, and (d) the stressing of positive characteristics of their efforts, they were motivated to succeed (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

In two of her 10 practices in which master teachers were engaged, Breaux (2015) discussed the importance of teachers telling students that they cared about them. Breaux also emphasized the need for teachers to stay calm with students, even in challenging situations. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2015) noted that one of the necessary ingredients for the success of students of poverty was "a nurturing and supportive classroom" with positive relationships.

Flink (2014), identified with dyslexia as a child, described the power of having positive relationships in his life regarding his ability to improve his learning. Through his mentoring program for students with LD, Eye to Eye, Flink learned that those mentors who helped mentees to see their strengths also helped mentees gain self-confidence and a belief and trust in themselves. In addition, mentors were able to guide mentees to realize that they could be successful, and that someone cared about them and their success.

When students were offered free college tuition for graduating from high school and being accepted to a public state university or trade school, the school climate was positively influenced in the Kalamazoo Public School district in Michigan (Miron, Jones, & Kelaher-Young, 2011). A survey conducted after the Kalamazoo Promise over a three year period showed that students (a) had an increased sense of school pride, (b) had a higher level of accountability, (c) were more prepared academically and socially, (d) had better social skills, and (e) had better behavioral skills, whereas teachers (a) were

motivated to work harder to promote academic success, (b) showed an increase in intra-staff cooperation, (c) had increased expectations of student achievement, and (d) noted an increase in school population as more families sought to participate in the program (Miron, Jones, & Kelaher-Young, 2011). In this program, the school climate was influenced by the motivation of students receiving the free college tuition, which then led to more positive academic results. The teachers were also motivated to work harder as the school climate improved and the students were more actively engaged in the learning process.

Bright's (2011) Five Habits of Highly Effective Teachers provided a formula for a successful classroom environment. His five habits described an effective teacher as someone who (a) looked at student success beyond the present, (b) delivered instruction in an interesting manner, (c) felt a sense of personal responsibility for student learning, (d) understood student motivation and gave students a reason for learning, and (e) valued continuous learning for himself. Bright recognized that the classroom teacher is the most important variable related to student success.

Positive Relationships with Teachers Empowers Students

Students spend most of their waking hours with teachers; for students with LD, these teachers have become general education teachers to a greater extent than in the recent past (Winzer, 2009). Teachers with positive relationships with their students increased the social and academic success of their students (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2016). Students who had a positive relationship with their teachers had better school attendance, focused better, and performed better in reading. Teachers with high

expectations for their students were more likely to have students who had high expectations of themselves and who performed at a higher level (Urdan & Turner, 2005).

The first of the five core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2016) was "teachers are committed to students and their learning" (p. 11). In addition to transmitting knowledge to students, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards identified the importance of teachers addressing the individual needs of students, including their interests, abilities, personalities, skills, prior knowledge, cultural differences, life circumstances and family relationships. The standards further described the need for teachers to make "knowledge accessible to all students . . . and to build meaningful relationships" (p. 12, 2016).

"The teacher is the number one factor in student achievement" (Hall & Simeral, 2015). Comer is frequently quoted, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (1995, as cited in Payne, 2008, para. 3). Payne stressed the need for teachers to have respectful relationships with students, including addressing students by name and using nonverbal messages that convey support (2008). Hall, Meyer, and Rose (2012) described groups of brain networks that operate during learning; the "affective networks" (p. 3) address the motivation and emotional involvement in learning and engaging in tasks. Teachers, as the primary influence in classrooms, provide a powerful influence on the emotional environment of their students (Goleman, 2011).

Students with LD encounter more challenges with behavior, as well as social and emotional difficulties in a school setting, than do students who do not have LD (Al-Yagon, 2010; Dyson, 2003; Estell et al., 2008; Lackaye & Margalit, 2006; Swanson, Harris & Graham, 2003; Weiner & Schneider, 2002). Positive relationships between

teachers and students empowered students to be successful (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Flink, 2014; Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Kohl, 1984). Johnson and Sessions (2015) suggested relationships require communication and respect. Bergin and Bergin (2009) described a positive relationship between a teacher and student as being one which involved frequent communications, high expectations, support of choices, and acceptance of the student's preferred learning modality.

Sprenger (2013) noted that relationships are essential for learning to take place. For a teacher to build a relationship with her students with LD, building trust is essential (Ridnouer, 2011). Having a positive relationship with the teacher allows students to take risks within a safe environment and to accept guidance as to appropriate classroom behavior and academic strategies. Chenoweth (2009) described the "atmosphere of respect and caring that emanates from the teachers and principals" at It's Being Done Schools (p. 22). From the administrators to the teachers to the students, there was a sense of respect and personal caring through relationships that increased the behavior of the students, which then increased the academic success of the students (Chenoweth, 2009).

Greenspan and Greenspan (2010) recognized the importance of emotions in learning. Children with LD tended to have a difficult time with relationships with their peers, which could have led to loneliness, as well as to difficulties with academic activities (Flink, 2014; Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010). The emotional significance of struggling with decoding and the sounds of letters can affect a student's ability to comprehend texts, but can also extend to social situations and comprehending conversations (Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010). Having a caring teacher allowed a student to begin to develop social skills, which were transferred to an interest in learning

(Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010). A supportive learning environment provided a setting for lower levels of stress and anxiety, thus allowing for greater learning opportunities (Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010).

General education teachers require diverse skills to work with students of many different abilities, learning styles, and interests (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). Programs are being developed that help to prepare teachers to address the many needs of students, including those with LD. One of those ideas is the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Whereas programs such as UDL will provide suggestions as to how to provide instruction, it is the teacher who conveys acceptance of students.

FuelEd is a teacher training program that provides guidance and support for teachers, allowing the teachers to develop meaningful social and emotional relationships with students (FuelEd, n.d.). The trainers for FuelEd model for teachers the type of supports that benefit students, allowing teachers to experience positive benefits of relationship building. Barlis (2013) described the benefits of supportive relationships to students from high-poverty schools. The students demonstrated a desire to succeed when adults were able to instill the attributes of resiliency through noticing the struggles that the students endured, connecting learning to real life, and showing confidence in their abilities.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Sprenger (2013) stated that "every brain has a need to belong. Recent research supports that learning is emotional and often based on relationships" (p. 66). Emotions are strongly involved in learning (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Teachers have a unique opportunity to provide students with learning and practice in social and emotional learning (SEL).

Dewey (2015) noted children are molded by their social interactions with people in their environment. Effective schools addressed and conformed to the needs of students (Winzer, 2009). Focusing on those needs included addressing the needs of the whole child, or meeting the social and emotional needs of the child, in addition to academic success (Miller, 2010). The movement in schools that addresses social emotional learning "teach[es] the whole spectrum of emotional intelligence abilities" (Goleman, 2011, p. 71).

Caine and Caine (2011) stated that learning is a natural process and is connected to social interactions with other people, including adults and peers. Goleman stated that academic scores increase when SEL programs are implemented in a school setting. The three areas that address the SEL competencies are (a) emotional understanding and behavioral control; (b) understanding verbal and nonverbal cues, and interpersonal skills; and (c) attention, memory, and self-regulation (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013).

Daunic et al. (2013) discussed the interconnection of academic learning with social-emotional growth. A trial program they created, the Social-Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF), was developed to teach reading to struggling students through the use of content that also teaches SEL concepts. The program was designed to help build literacy skills while also addressing social and emotional skills. The results of their study indicated that the program provided improvement in student academic, behavior, and executive functioning skills. A meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs showed a statistically significant increase in academic performance for students in grades kindergarten through high school (Durlak et al., 2011).

Characteristics of teachers with positive relationships. In the interview that Bembenutty (2012) conducted with Wigfield, Wigfield described effective ways that teachers can enhance students' beliefs in themselves when the teachers provided meaningful and interesting activities that had value to the students. In addition, Wigfield stressed the importance of teachers letting students know how they were improving and how their efforts improved their achievement. Teachers with strong SEL competencies provided students with appropriate role modeling, promoted positive relationships with students, and maintained a well-managed, calm classroom environment (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013).

Bergin and Bergin (2009) noted that students with emotionally supportive teachers perform better in reading than do students whose teachers are not as emotionally supportive. Beach and Ward (2013) discussed the influence of a classroom teacher on a child's perception of his reading ability. The classroom teacher had more effect on how well the child believed he could read than any other source. Students who were able to choose reading material that was relevant were more likely to engage in the reading activities.

Dweck (2012) described teachers with a growth mindset as those who had expectations that their students would achieve at a high rate. Their students lived up to the expected potential. Lemov (2010) described successful teachers as those who encouraged students to believe in themselves and to want to learn for intrinsic reasons. These teachers related to their students through an expressed and implied respect and faith, using language to convey kindness and civility (Lemov, 2010).

"To honor students as human beings worthy of respect and care is to establish a relationship that will provide for enhanced learning" (Payne, 2005, p. 111). Teachers who have experienced success with students have classrooms which exhibit two-way respect, learning that is relevant, differentiated instruction that respects levels of learning and interests, and an atmosphere with low levels of threat to learning (Caine & Caine, 2011; Kaufman et al., 2008). Urdan and Turner (2005) shared that children are motivated by teachers who demonstrate positive relationships with them.

Goleman (2011) discussed how individuals can connect in a direct, positive way with others through (a) focusing directly on the other person, (b) using non-verbal connections, and (c) conveying positive feelings. Faber and Mazlish (1995) remarked that teachers need to acknowledge and accept the feelings of students in their classes. Social and emotional competencies are necessary for teachers to positively influence students by (a) listening, (b) empathizing, (c) discovering strengths, (d) recognizing body language and tone of voice, and (e) demonstrating a calm manner (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013).

Hall and Simeral (2015) noted that effective teachers made students feel special, had high expectations, and showed interest in students as individuals. In addition, Hall and Simeral (2015) shared that teachers attended to the interests and abilities of each student while building strong relationships, promoting self-confidence, and adjusting instruction to the individual needs of the students. Effective teachers were aware of students' learning during the class time, not just when tests were given and used also a variety of methods and adjusted or changed techniques when needed (Hall & Simeral, 2015).

Through their relationships with students, teachers supported and guided students in learning how to see their strengths (Desautels, 2015; Flink, 2014; Fox, 2008). Bergin and Bergin (2009) recommended the following ways that teachers can have positive relationships with students: (a) understanding child development and responding appropriately in sensitive interactions with students, (b) providing a meaningful classroom experience with high expectations, (c) providing choices when appropriate, (d) providing logical consequences in a respectful way for a violation of rules, with explanations for their implementation, (e) creating a classroom culture of respect among students, and (f) focusing on building a positive relationship with challenging students.

Fox (2008) described how having teachers who believed in her ability to learn gave her the strength to be successful. When teachers pointed out and nurtured her positive traits, it enabled her to see them in herself, and to build upon those strengths while discovering other skills that she had. Fox (2008) revealed how resiliency can be fostered in children whose strengths are recognized and encouraged.

Flink (2014) was able to use his personal experience with navigating the educational world as a student with a learning disability to provide support for other students through an organization he co-founded, Eye to Eye. Flink (2014) described the challenges of students with learning disabilities and their deep need for belief in themselves. The students' sense of self-confidence usually began with external support from adults who aided in developing their self-esteem, advocating for them, and providing encouragement for them.

Faber and Mazlish (1995) described how teachers may need to assist students in expressing their feelings. Young children, in particular, may have difficulty expressing

their feelings verbally. Flink (2014) also found that comfort with using identifying

words, including dyslexia and learning disability, helped the students to continue to

access accommodations and request needed help as they progressed from school to

school and into the workforce. In addition, using descriptive words to represent

themselves provided the students with a way to express their challenges, accept all facets

of themselves, and to remove the stigma of having a disability, which increased

opportunities for success in all areas of the students' lives (Flink, 2014).

Woolfson and Brady (2009) found that the attitudes of general education teachers

toward teaching students with disabilities were more important to the self-reported

effectiveness of the teachers than were teaching experience, experience with children in

need of learning support, or amount of extra training. Lindsay (2007) also addressed

teacher attitudes as being important in the success of students with disabilities. Those

teachers who had a strong sense of their own ability to influence positive educational

benefits for students with LD in a mainstream setting were more likely to provide

beneficial learning environments for their students with special needs and to attain

positive outcomes (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). In addition, these teachers tended to have

a greater comfort level with individuals with disabilities in general.

Tough (2012) described how students in the fourth through eighth grades from the

South Bronx achieved exceedingly well with strong support and a sense of community

provided by the teachers at KIPP Academy. David Levin and Michael Feinberg taught

not just academic lessons to students in the KIPP middle school in Houston that they

operated, but also social and emotional skills (Tough, 2012). Long-term academic

achievement required the help of a teacher or mentor who helped students develop

optimism, character, personal growth, achievement, self-control, willpower, motivation, perseverance, grit, social intelligence, self-control, good study habits, and time management.

Although the emphasis in an educational setting is on the learner, there is a significant benefit to having a positive relationship with the parent of a student with LD as well (Ridnouer, 2011). Teachers who worked successfully with students also had a good relationship with the students' parents (Faber & Mazlish, 1995). Some of the positive ways that teachers were able to interact with parents included (a) sharing positive aspects of the child's school experience and of the child, (b) speaking respectfully to the parent, (c) asking what has worked at home with the child, and (d) developing a plan with the parent to increase the student's success (Faber & Mazlish, 1995).

In addition, Ridnouer (2011) stressed ongoing communication with parents, thus including them in the process of educating their child. Jung and Han (2013) showed that kindergarten students with low reading abilities whose teachers put a lot of time into supporting students and parents outside of the classroom exhibited greater gains in reading than did students whose teachers did not spend additional time with students and parents. Teachers provided support through such activities as newsletters, workshops, and parent contacts. The gains in reading ability were improved particularly if the students read outside of school.

Hernandez (2016) emphasized the need for teachers to develop rapport and maintain a connection with students. Phillips (2010) described the results of studies of the relationship between "schools and teachers on student achievement. The majority of these studies concluded that teachers are one of the most important factors that explain

the variation in student test scores, preceded only by individual and family background characteristics" (p. 466).

Teachers with positive attitudes regarding inclusion of students with disabilities were perceived by their students to have more positive classroom environments (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014). Those teachers tended to have students who were happier and got along with their classmates better than the students of teachers with lower levels of interest in having students with disabilities in their classrooms. Their students also perceived that they had less difficulty in learning.

Fisher (2005) described teacher interactions with students through the process of teaching reading. Teachers who offer open-ended questions and provide a classroom environment that encourages students to ask questions and engage in a dialogue have better results with teaching children to read (Fisher, 2005). The manner in which teachers phrase questions pertaining to a reading selection may encourage or hinder the students' responses and therefore the students' interest and participation in a classroom discussion.

Creating a Positive Environment. Education is a process of people working together and respecting one another's points of view, including a teacher respecting the value of a student's ideas and opinions (Freire, 2000). Jones (2009) shared Dewey's ideas of accessing prior knowledge and using brain-based learning to support learning. Dewey (2015) noted that the environment in which a child was educated had a positive effect on his learning. It is the duty of people in a school, Dewey believed, to provide an environment in which a child is exposed to the best influences and ideas. Steward (2007)

noticed that "students who attend schools with a supportive and inviting environment have significantly higher academic achievement" (p. 199).

Darling-Hammond (2006) shared the positive effects of well-trained teachers in working with students who have diverse needs. Teachers who were proficient in working with students who have special needs related learning to the lives of the students, had high expectations of students, and individualized learning strategies. In addition, successful teachers were aware of family circumstances that may affect student performance, and which family members should be called if a student was ill. Kaufman et al. (2008) related that an environment conducive to learning includes social interactions and emotional connections, is absent of threat, and provides a place in which students feel confident in their abilities.

Shrum (2015) shared characteristics of teachers who had strong relationships with their students. These teachers responded appropriately to students based upon their developmental levels and individual needs, encouraged students to make choices, provided meaningful activities, and promoted positive interactions between students (Shrum, 2015; Urdan & Turner, 2005). Teachers who are able to effectively motivate their students also worked to provide interesting and motivating lessons such as "using humor; adding elements of fantasy and variety into the tasks; taking advantage of the social desires of students by having them work together; using puzzles and games; and choosing content that is likely to appeal to most students" (Urdan & Turner, 2005). With these processes in place, more time was devoted to learning than in classrooms where strong, positive relationships did not exist (Shrum, 2015).

Banatao (2011) revealed a positive correlation between students who felt connected to school and academic achievement. Schools with a positive school climate (i.e., schools which were productive, solved problems) were managed effectively, and had a high level of trust between employees and supervisors, as well as a higher level of student achievement, than schools with a negative school climate (Webb & Norton, 2003). A healthy organizational climate in a school setting positively influenced student learning and teacher morale (Haghiglat, 2005; Marcus, 2012). Standard 2.1 of the Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) Standards promoted a positive school culture, including promoting the benefits of the variety of cultural differences within a school, which increases student success (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002).

Structure is important for a group of people working together (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Teachers encouraged social emotional learning with organized, well-managed classrooms with opportunities for students to make choices and make good decisions (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). Hall, Meyer, and Rose (2012) stated that motivated learners were provided opportunities for feeling valued, making choices in their learning, setting personal goals, and managing their emotions. Positive learning environments: (a) were challenging but not overly demanding, (b) had clear expectations, (c) provided choices, (d) were mutually respectful and inclusive, and (e) had a sense of joy and celebration (Gregory & Chapman, 2013).

Having a strong sense of community within the classroom setting was conducive to a positive learning environment (Cozolino, 2013). Students were able to learn better in an environment of "supportive encouragement properly balanced with an appropriate

level of challenge" (Cozolino, 2013, p. 18). Caine and Caine (2011) stressed that positive classroom environments provided two-way respect, promoted student motivation, addressed developmental stages in learning, provided a setting in which students were responsible for their own learning, and were taught by adults who knew the students and were familiar with the students' needs.

Educating students with disabilities in the general education setting is beneficial for all students (Sapon-Shevin, 2008; Shippen et al., 2011). Although students with LD are only one segment of the classroom population that may need accommodations and consideration for special needs, students acquiring English as a second language, and students with physical disabilities, behavioral problems, different learning styles, and students who come from poverty may all be a part of a diverse learning environment with special learning needs (Winzer, 2009). Serving students with a multitude of needs allows all students to understand and appreciate the diverse community of which they are a part, and to become more accepting of the many different types of people they will encounter in school as well as in the population at large (Sapon-Shevin, 2008).

Marzola (2011) believed that cooperative learning activities promoted positive reading instruction outcomes for students with learning disabilities in reading. Some cooperative learning activities included having a student with LD work with a partner or small group to understand a reading passage; or peer-assisted learning, in which a strong reader serves as a role model for fluency and accuracy in reading for the struggling reader. Other strategies that Marzola (2011) recommended are (a) the use of graphic organizers, (b) the use of questioning by the students before, during, and after reading a

passage, and (c) organizing comprehension questions in categories based upon the level of difficulty students will have in responding to them.

Providing a positive environment means not only teacher acceptance of students with LD, but also teacher encouragement of the acceptance of the student with LD by classmates. The teacher would need to build a culture of inclusiveness of the varying abilities, strengths, and needs of students in the classroom setting, including students with LD. An environment that establishes that each student receives what he or she needs, but not necessarily the same thing as every other child in the class, would help all students understand that individual needs can be addressed for all students (Flink, 2014; Kohl, 1984).

Ridnouer (2011) discussed a variety of different ways for teachers to create a positive classroom environment, including: (a) being accessible to students during the learning process, thus creating positive interactions with students, (b) helping students learn to value themselves, (c) allowing students to be successful in the classroom, focusing on effort and improvement, yet also allowing them to learn from their challenges, (d) showing students what success looks like in their classroom, and (e) addressing different learning styles and interests. Lemov (2010) stated that positive results are achieved when teachers (a) teach students expected behavior, (b) promote intrinsic motivation and desire to achieve from students, (c) maintain active involvement in the work presented, and (d) implement positive involvement in the class. Providing a strong support system for the student increases the success of student achievement.

Bolman and Deal (2008) described the positive results of teachers having high expectations of students. Effective teachers encouraged students to see themselves in a

positive way while providing a classroom environment of structure and management;

teachers should work on building relationships with students as soon as the students walk

through the door of the classroom (Lemov, 2010). Teachers vocalized expectations of

students in a positive way, as to the behavior that was expected. A positive classroom

environment helps to build a positive teacher-student relationship (Jones et al, 2013).

Lemov (2010) stated,

> An emotionally constant teacher earns students' trust in part by having them know
>
> he is always under control. Most of all, he knows success is in the long run about
>
> a student's consistent relationship with productive behaviors. The affect he
>
> requires is productive, respectful, and orderly. (p. 219)

Successful teachers "deliberately make their expectations clear, rational, and

logical" (Lemov, 2010, p. 220). Students need to be actively engaged in the lesson

taught, invited by the teacher to participate in the activity, with clear expectations of the

students. Students should listen to peers as well as to the teacher. Wait time can generate

richer, higher quality answers (Lemov, 2010). Encouraging the participation of all

students raises the success of all students. Students are empowered when they believe

that the teacher has confidence in their ability to contribute successfully to a classroom

lesson (Lemov, 2010).

One way to ensure participation of all students in a classroom setting is through

small group activities (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2008). When students are engaged in

projects with their peers, academic and social skills increase, and self-concept intensifies.

These projects should be meaningful, relevant, and connected to students' prior

knowledge.

Tough (2012) described the interventions used in an early childhood program, Tools of the Mind, to develop self-regulation: "controlling their impulses, staying focused on the task at hand, avoiding distractions and mental traps, managing their emotions, organizing their thoughts" (p. xii). Teachers needed to take the time to teach expected behaviors, including academic behaviors (Lemov, 2010). Children were more productive and happier when they were encouraged to build upon and develop their strengths (Fox, 2008).

Teachers who were effective: (a) helped all students feel that they belonged in the classroom, (b) believed that each student could learn, (c) believed that each student could be successful, (d) provided learning experiences that addressed the different learning styles of students, and (e) had a positive mindset that was contagious with students (Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Students needed to feel physically as well as emotionally safe in order to learn; students needed to believe that they could be successful for learning to take place (Gregory & Chapman, 2013).

Marzano (2007) discussed steps that teachers took as they developed positive relationships with students. These teachers (a) discovered something special about each student, (b) created opportunities to interact with students in a positive way, (c) used student interests as a part of classroom activities, (d) used humor appropriately, and (e) engaged in behaviors that conveyed interest in students, such as smiling, maintaining eye contact, and showing interest in student discussions. In addition, Marzano (2007) suggested that effective teachers maintained a calm demeanor and respectful tone toward all students, even when the teacher was upset. Effective teachers also addressed the behavior of the student and not the emotions of the student, with respectful body

language, which included using a calm tone of voice, and maintaining appropriate personal space.

Faber and Mazlish (1995) offered suggestions as to how to gain the cooperation of students through positive interactions: (a) describing the problem, (b) giving information, (c) offering a choice, (d) using a word or gesture instead of a warning, (e) talking about feelings instead of using sarcasm, (f) writing a note, or (g) using a humorous voice. Payne (2008) described strategies teachers can implement to increase academic achievement of students, including: (a) developing respectful relationships with students, (b) providing a culture of acceptance in the learning environment, (c) teaching the hidden rules of the educational setting, (d) connecting abstract concepts with concrete concepts, and (e) teaching students how to ask questions in a way that they can promote their own learning. Shippen et al. (2011) noted that general education teachers may struggle with working with students with disabilities due to the specialized needs of these students and the lack of training for individualizing instruction.

Consideration of Individual Needs

Stoddard (2004) stated that "it is literally impossible to standardize children who are each a unique creation" (p. 40). Students with a diagnosis of LD have been evaluated individually to determine that a disability exists (Flink, 2014). After the diagnosis, an ARD meeting is held with the participation of the required committee members. An IEP is determined at the ARD meeting to address specifically the needs of the student. It is then the responsibility of the classroom teacher to follow the IEP, including providing accommodations and strategies that will support the student's learning (Flink, 2014).

Students' individual needs should be addressed in the classroom (Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Jones (2009) discussed how the benefits of a learner-centered environment, in which students are actively engaged in the learning process, promote the individuality of the learner. Johnson and Sessions (2015) discussed the need to address students' individuality. Successful teachers provided individualized feedback to students (Hall & Simeral, 2015, p. 5). In addition, successful teachers adjust assignments for students (Gregory & Chapman, 2013; Kohl, 1984).

Children should be allowed to work with their strengths (Fox, 2008; Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Beers (2003) stated that teachers teach "specific children with specific needs" (p. 301). When a teacher provided a student with the tools that addressed the student's specific individual needs, the student was more motivated and more likely to be successful (Flink, 2014; Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010; Ridnouer, 2011). The resulting success built also a positive teacher-student relationship: the student had a strong incentive to work for a teacher who had shown a personal interest in the student by adapting the teaching styles and techniques to the needs of the student (Flink, 2014).

Students with LD needed to be taught specifically how to relate to others socially, and how to develop relationships (Fox, 2008). Students with LD tended to struggle socially as well as academically; Flink (2014) described this struggle as being "socially bankrupt" (p. 216). Risk-taking behavioral issues, as a result of academic and social frustrations, further complicated the learning process. Effective teachers were able to help provide instruction in social and emotional learning to help students express themselves, which allowed them to be more successful in school (Singh, 2015).

Social goals in the classroom influenced a student's motivation to achieve: to please the teacher, to seek approval from peers, or for culturally-based reasons, as in family obligations (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011). Teachers who taught students how to identify and respond to their emotional responses so that they were able to focus on the learning and not their feelings, and who encouraged a positive outlook with positive statements, had students who achieved greater success (Ridnouer, 2011).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Students with LD have challenges in accessing grade level curriculum in the same way as students without special learning needs (Flink, 2014). Lawmakers infused ESSA with references to strategies and techniques that address the needs of diverse learners, often referred to as Universal Design for Learning, or UDL (Samuels, 2016). The benefit of UDL is that instruction is presented in a classroom setting that provides for the individual students' diverse learning needs for differentiation in what is taught, how it is taught, and how they interact with the learning material (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). Allowing students to relate to a lesson in a way that is appropriately challenging and motivating to them increases their chances for success (Ayala et al., 2012).

In a UDL classroom, the processes are research based, systematic, and maintain the integrity of the original lesson (Ayala et al., 2012). The techniques used in UDL are designed to address the individual learning styles and needs of students (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). The UDL approach uses brain science to individualize the instruction through (a) a variety of ways to present the material, (b) different ways for the students to demonstrate their learning, and (c) diverse ways of engaging students in the learning (Gordon, Proctor, & Dalton, 2012).

One technique of UDL is the use of technology to provide text-to-speech, vocabulary supports, and word processing capabilities to allow students with LD to connect to the lesson (Gordon, Proctor, & Dalton, 2012). Technology also helps students who are easily distracted to focus on their work. Use of technology helps to encourage students to stay engaged in the lesson, while providing teachers with a way to individually support students with diverse needs (Gordon, Proctor, & Dalton, 2012).

Limits of Technology

Technology has had a significant supporting role in all content areas of education for all students (Hecker & Engstrom, 2011; Riddle, 2011). Students currently educated in primary and secondary schools were born into a digital world, with the expectation that they will make use of technology in their daily lives (Fieldhouse & Nicholas, 2008). Caine and Caine (2011) acknowledged that students of today will use technology when they enter the workforce.

Lankshear and Knobel (2008) explained that to benefit from technology, which is a necessary part of the modern world of literacy, one must be able to read and comprehend what is read. Ribble (2011) described teachers, along with parents, as being primarily accountable for teaching children how to be digital citizens. Students must be taught to use technology in an appropriate, legal, and ethically responsible way.

Although technology might be a useful tool in teaching reading skills to struggling readers, technology is no replacement for the guidance of a caring teacher providing support to students as they learn the process of learning (Ayala et al., 2012; Gordon, Proctor, & Dalton, 2012; Hecker & Engstrom, 2011). Children require relationships in which they spend time directly interacting with other people so that they

can learn (Sprenger, 2013). Skilled classroom teachers who maintained an inviting

classroom environment which included visual supports, thinking processes that were

modeled, and encouragement of appropriate interactions among the students in the

classroom provided a learning experience which cannot be provided by a computer

program (Rose, Gravel, & Domings, 2012).

Hill, Song, and West (2009) discussed how the successful use of technology in

classrooms should include group activities and interaction between students and the

teacher. Successful teachers provided feedback and helped students analyze what they

gleaned from information accessed via technology (Ribble, 2011). Fieldhouse and

Nicholas (2008) emphasized that students need the guidance of teachers to discriminate

between relevant and irrelevant information on the internet, as well as to understand the

context of what they read from websites accessed online.

Differences in Motivating Students

Having an interest in learning is a strong motivator (Urdan & Turner, 2005).

Riggs and Gholar (2009) discussed conation, or the desire to achieve a goal and succeed,

as a necessary element for learning. Having the ability to pursue a goal and make good

choices builds resiliency. Students who are resilient will continue to work at learning

even when it is difficult.

Dweck (2012) described the persistence of students who will continue to work at

a task even when it is difficult as a growth mindset. She described the lack of effort of

students who believe that their abilities are set and unmovable as a fixed mindset.

Students with a growth mindset continue at a task and work harder to complete it, with

more positive outcomes.

Atkinson and Birch (1978) stated that an individual's ability "is fully expressed in the level of performance only when (and if) the person is optimally motivated at the time given the requirements of the task" (p. 156). Additionally, motivation influences achievement in combination with the individual's abilities and beliefs. Achievement is also affected by the time spent on the task and the performance level while working at the task. Atkinson and Birch (1978) further discussed the tendency of young children who experience low levels of achievement to be less motivated to choose tasks that are more difficult.

Linnenbrink (2007) believed that students are motivated to achieve academically either to increase their abilities, or to exhibit their abilities. Students may also achieve academically when they have friends who are motivated to achieve academically (Wentzel, 2005). Urdan and Turner (2005) believed that students are more likely to achieve academically when they are socially motivated by peers, or to please their teachers or parents.

Adelman (1978) discussed the role of motivation as an influence on the behavior of students with LD. When children with LD are confronted with learning situations that are too challenging, they may lose the motivation to learn and direct their energies instead toward an activity in which they feel more competent. Adelman further speculated that the school environment may play a role as a positive or negative motivator for students for whom learning is difficult.

Being motivated to read is an indicator that a child is ready to read (Sprenger, 2013). "Motivation and achievement have long been recognized to have a close cause-

effect relationship" (Johnson & Sessions, 2015, p. 69). Children will naturally be motivated to explore and learn when appropriately encouraged (Caine & Caine, 2011).

Having a reason to complete an assignment that is compatible with their interests is important for students to complete reading tasks (Thomas, 2015). Thomas includes having choices in the selections to be read, having a variety of tools to provide feedback, and positive feedback as other motivators for students to engage in reading assignments. In his interview with Bembenutty (2012), Wigfield emphasized that students need to have goals for reading and to understand the relevance of their assignments to increase their motivation for learning.

Differences in motivating students are as different as students' interests, ability levels, background knowledge, and home situations (Caine & Caine, 2011). Children can be motivated to learn when teachers make learning exciting, relevant, and related to the children's learning styles and interests (Johnson & Sessions, 2015). In addition, students are motivated to learn when they understand how they learn best (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008).

Goleman (2011) described motivators for people, including the need to be with other people and the need to achieve. Students have different learning styles, interests, and types of intelligence, which effect their understanding and motivation in learning (Caine & Caine, 2011; Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Caine and Caine defined motivation as "the general term used to describe the totality of the factors that propel a student toward or away from a course of action" (2011, p. 108).

Caine and Caine discussed extrinsic motivation, or influences outside the individual, versus intrinsic motivation, which comes from within the individual. The

relationship between a student and an adult can influence a student's choices because the student wishes to please the adult. Individuals are motivated to learn when they believe in their own ability to perform (Caine & Caine, 2011). Caine and Caine (2011) listed examples of displays of motivation by students, including (a) attendance, (b) extra time spent working on assignments, (c) perseverance on long projects, and (d) active involvement in classroom discussions.

Bozhovich (2009) described the difference in the degree of effort exerted by children in solving problems as the emotional-volitional component. Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, and Guthrie (2013) found a strong correlation between motivation and reading comprehension among fourth grade students, even when background knowledge and cognitive reading strategies were controlled. Motivation for learning is increased when students consider the learning relevant, are able to have some choice in their learning, and are provided with learning opportunities that are developmentally appropriate (Riggs & Gholar, 2009).

Students need to be guided toward finding their strengths and interests (Fox, 2008).   Brophy (2010) stressed that teachers should promote students' confidence in their learning. Teachers can support students in becoming more self-confident by helping students to set goals that are short term, specific, realistic, and challenging but attainable. In addition, Brophy suggested that teachers stress to students the value of learning and experience, rather than grades.

Cultural differences can also account for what achievement means and how to motivate students. Different cultures place value on whether achievement is based upon the amount of effort exerted or the intrinsic ability of the student, if the student works

effectively in groups or alone, or attends quietly or actively participates in class discussions (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011). Cultural differences also affect how students accept praise or criticism; in some cultures, praise is not a useful technique to inspire students (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011).

Positive Academic Outcome Defined

Student success is traditionally measured using state assessments, local assessments, and class grades (Education Service Center, Region 20, 2015). Determination of success also might be based upon class participation, attendance, and assignment completion, as well as entry into postsecondary education and the workplace (Nagaoka et al., 2013). Students who are in a nurturing school environment are more likely to be successful as determined by test scores and grades (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011).

Students who see school as a positive place tend to participate more in classes and are more focused on succeeding in school (Smith, Ito, Gruenwald, & Yeh, 2010). Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) revealed a positive correlation between teachers who demonstrated caring attitudes with their students and the academic success of those students, as demonstrated by high standardized test scores and grades. Barile et al. (2011) found a positive correlation between student participation in school organizations, student connectivity to school, and positive teacher-student relationships with student academic success. Teachers who prioritized developing positive relationships with students saw an increase in student grades and test scores (Shrum, 2015).

Lucio, Rapp-Paglicci, and Rowe (2010) identified 23 school-related factors that were shown to influence academic achievement positively. Among those factors were

(a) a supportive environment, (b) teacher relationships, and (c) teacher support. A sense of school belonging showed a statistically significant correlation with grade point average.

Caine & Caine (2011) described routine classroom conditions that promoted learning in students as a positive effect which brought about positive feelings. For an individual with LD to recognize, accept, and acknowledge his LD enables him to use his strengths, ask for help, and to be successful in school and in other pursuits (Flink, 2014). For most students, the ability to accept themselves with all of their attributes, both positive and negative, begins with being accepted by and encouraged by the adults in their lives (Flink, 2014).

Success of Students with LD in Reading

Caine and Caine (2011) described a state of mind in which students are prepared to learn, which they called *Relaxed Alertness*, as a feeling of motivation and confidence (p. 121). Students need to feel safe so that they are receptive to learning opportunities (Caine & Caine, 2011). A positive learning environment must provide specific feedback and a setting which allows for growth, with appropriate levels of support for learning. One way to describe success is by task completion (Atkinson & Birch, 1978).

One technique of teachers who provide strong reading instruction for students is to model expected reading behaviors (Lemov, 2010). Because reading is needed in all areas of learning it should be an integral part of all classes throughout a school day. Effective teachers also will develop a plan for a struggling student, to assist with deficiencies (Beers, 2003).

Hall, Meyer, and Rose (2012) noted that students with LD are more likely to be successful when they are taught in ways that address their brain networks. Some of those ways include using the students' primary learning modalities, providing different ways of interpreting information, and seeking ways students positively engage with the materials presented for the lesson. Beers (2003) stated that successful teachers support students toward independence as readers, by promoting students' confidence in reading competencies as well as in having social and emotional confidence.

Conceptual Framework

As explained by Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), a qualitative study is an appropriate means of researching special education concerns. My study was framed by learning theory, social learning theory, and expectancy-value theory. In addition, my study was guided by constructivism.

Learning theory. According to Vygotsky's learning theory, children's learning and acquisition of skills is intertwined with their development (Glaser & Bassok, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978, 2005). Students must be taught at their current level of functioning to be successful (Flink, 2014; Fox, 2008). Daniels (2008) described Vygotsky's belief that the symbols used in reading provide a means for children who are learning to read to develop higher cognitive functioning. Daniels further explained Vygotsky's position that children's social development is the first step to the building of their cognitive development. Students with LD need to have teachers who engage them with effective strategies that meet their needs (Flink, 2014; Fox, 2008; Greenspan & Greenspan, 2010).

Vygotsky saw social and cognitive development as intertwined (Daniels, 2008; Gredler, 2012). In addition, Vygotsky believed that the use of language in social

interactions aids in understanding (Armstrong, 2015). Vygotsky also believed that as a

child grew and developed, his cognitive ability progressed to a higher level (Gredler,

2012). Learning is a process related to experiences, Vygotsky believed, that progresses

as a child ages and as he or she is exposed to more challenging and abstract ideas.

Dewey (2015) also discussed the process by which a child learns by observing

adults. In addition, Vygotsky introduced the concept of zone of proximal development

(ZPD), or the process of a child learning to complete a task with the guidance from an

adult or through observation of someone modeling a task until the child is able to

complete the task independently (Bozhovich, 2009; Gredler, 2012; Sprenger, 2013).

Armstrong (2015) shared the results of a qualitative study of university students in which

the use of ZPD processes allowed the students to maintain engagement in a program due

to classmate support and the instructor's adjusting the lessons to allow for student

understanding.

Fernandez, Wegerif, Mercer, and Rojas-Drummond (2015) described scaffolding

as a concept similar to ZPD, but which can include also the parallel learning and problem

solving of students with similar abilities working together in small groups. This process

would necessitate the use of effective communication and social interactions between the

students. Scaffolding provides students with a form of support that is different than ZPD,

but which is effective also in learning new concepts through a process related to

experiences.

Support may also be provided by the use of models or tools which enable the

child to understand a concept (Bozhovich, 2009). The degree of support needed varies

from child to child (Bozhovich, 2009). In this manner, a child is able to accomplish tasks at a more complex level than he or she would be able to do on his or her own.

Brophy (2010) believed also that learning could occur from watching others perform tasks. Expectations should remain high, even as teachers provide support in the learning and encouragement for continuing in an assignment. Seo et al. (2008) shared the success of a teacher who modeled new skills for her students.

Social learning theory. Eversgerd (2014) recognized Bandura's social learning theory in her dissertation on how teacher behaviors affect student learning. Bandura (1977) explained his social learning theory as follows: "successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them" (p. 195). When students were given positive feedback for their work, or were positively encouraged, they usually performed at a higher level than when they received negative feedback or did not receive feedback at all. Teachers of students with LD have a responsibility to encourage the students to be successful (Flink, 2014).

Social learning theory emphasizes connections between learners and other people (Hill, Song, & West, 2009). Learning occurs when a student interacts with other students or adults within a social context. Social learning theory also includes the concept of learning through the observation of a desired behavior being modeled or demonstrated.

Hill, Song, and West (2009) discussed additional aspects of social learning theory in relation to the characteristics of the learners involved. Some of those characteristics included the learners' individual learning styles, their confidence in their abilities to learn, and their motivation in learning. In addition, within a social learning theory context, prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds must be considered in the learning

process. When teachers engage students in the learning process, the students are more likely to perform at a higher level (Bandura, 1977).

Expectancy-value theory. Rudek (2015) discussed expectancy-value theory as it related to her dissertation on reading achievement among boys. Atkinson was first to discuss the expectancy-value theory, which addressed motivation in achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Wigfield and Eccles (2000) described the expectancy-value theory as an "individuals' choice, persistence, and performance [that] can be explained by their beliefs about how well they do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (p. 68). The enjoyment, usefulness and importance of an activity all support the value that someone places on an activity (Bembenutty, 2012).

Children will choose activities and the degree of effort involved in participating in those activities based upon their expectations and beliefs about their ability to be successful (Brophy, 2010; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Urdan & Turner, 2005). The adults in a child's life can influence the child's beliefs and values; teachers can motivate students to believe in themselves and to value their learning (Bembenutty, 2012). I will seek to determine in what ways Grade 3 teachers positively engage their students with LD so that the students increase their performance on district level assessments.

Constructivism. Nutter (2015) based his dissertation on constructivism. Within his study, Nutter identified themes that emerged among teachers working with students from diverse backgrounds that enabled them to work with the students. The teachers' perceptions of the types of practices used within the classroom influenced their work with students from diverse backgrounds, including students with learning disabilities, low SES, and students of color.

DeVries and Zan (2015) stressed the importance of interpersonal relationships and mutual respect on the development and academic progress of children in a learning environment. Constructivist education promotes natural and logical consequences rather than punishment, focuses on cooperation rather than strict classroom management, encourages the self-discovery of students in the learning process, and allows students to participate in the process of making choices for learning (DeVries & Zan, 2015). In addition, a constructivist environment increases participation in the learning process by providing a purpose for learning through including the students' interests, and promoting sociomoral development in students (DeVries & Zan, 2015).

Alexander and Fox (2013) described the evolving views of reading instruction throughout the second half of the 20th Century. They described the constructivist theory as a sociocultural learning process which emphasized group learning and addressed the prior learning of students as well as how a student's abilities and interests would affect their learning to read. This period of education research acknowledged that student motivation and social influences affect learning; learning is individual (Alexander & Fox, 2013). Reid and Valle (2015) explained that students with disabilities, just as their classmates who have not been identified with disabilities, are capable of achieving at high levels, participating fully in classroom activities, and understanding and contributing to classroom discussions.

Jones (2009) described the constructivist view of a child's natural desire to learn and experience learning, with an emphasis on the process. A teacher who utilizes a constructivist perspective guides the learning rather than presenting facts to be memorized (Gould, 2015). Children feel safe to learn, to ask questions, and to have the

time to process their ideas. Students are provided opportunities to choose topics, collaborate with one another, and plan for activities.

Gould (2015) described a constructivist classroom as one in which the teacher encourages problem-solving with materials and information that are of interest to the students in the class. Such a classroom would encourage exploration of learning with consideration of the interpersonal relationships between the students and teacher (Gould, 2015). Jones (2009) mentioned that teachers need also to feel that they are able to make choices with respect to what activities they provide for their students.

Vacca, Vacca, and Bruneau (2005) described constructivism as an appropriate approach for teaching literacy. Children have a natural desire to understand language as part of their need to interact socially. Using previous knowledge to interpret new information, children learn better by being actively involved in analyzing written language.

Summary

This chapter has described the history of educating students with special needs in the United States, with an emphasis on the needs of students with LD. The chapter has also addressed the significance of the relationships of students with LD with the educators who work directly with them, and the pathways to academic success of those students. The literature that I have reviewed and summarized described the findings of other researchers in working with students with LD, characteristics of teachers who provide a positive environment for students, and how the relationships that those students have had with the educators in their lives positively influenced student academic

progress. In Chapter III, I will describe the methods that I will use to conduct this study,

including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER III

Method

"If a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach" (Creswell, 2003). The methods used in a qualitative research study allow for the understanding and inspection of the experiences and viewpoints of the participants (Harwell, 2011). There have been few studies documented in recent years that discuss how general education elementary teachers engage their students who have LD in a way that improves their reading performance (Demirkaya & Bakkaloglu, 2015). This study was conducted using a qualitative method to understand how Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers positively provided instruction and support to their students with LD.

This study was bound by restricting the participants to teachers in the designated school district who were teachers of Grades 3, 4, and 5 with experience working with students with a diagnosis of LD in reading. The criteria for selection of these teachers was based upon the success of the students at the school in the previous 3 years on the state assessment in reading. The interviews and questionnaires were completed in the fall of 2016.

Introduction

This chapter includes information regarding research design. The following sections are included: (a) participant selection, (b) data collection, (c) procedures, and (d) data analysis procedures. This study considered emerging methods of providing reading instruction to students with LD in a general education setting (Creswell, 2003). The study was conducted in a phenomenological study approach through interviews and

questionnaires with Grade 3, 4, and 5 general education teachers who worked with students with LD in reading.

Research Question

Through this study, I sought to determine how Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers affected the reading performance of their students with LD. Experienced teachers who worked in a general education setting were asked to participate in the study to determine how they perceived they positively influenced the reading success of their students with LD. The following grand question was addressed: How do Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers describe their efforts, activities, and assessments to improve reading achievement of students with learning disabilities?

Research Design

A qualitative study can provide awareness of practices that are effective in a way that a quantitative study cannot (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). As a qualitative study, this research project involved interpretation based upon the researcher's bias (Creswell, 2003; Harwell, 2011). A qualitative study also allows for information to be presented in detail (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). In addition, qualitative research "is emergent and evolutionary in its process" (Saldana, 2011, p. 66). This study was a phenomenological qualitative study that described the experiences of general education teachers who worked successfully with students with LD in reading (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Approach to inquiry: Phenomenology. Phenomenology as a method of research is based upon the philosophy of Husserl (Eberle, 2014). Phenomenology uses first person descriptions, usually gathered from interviews, of the experiences of the participants (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015). Phenomenological research is

used for analyzing social phenomena (Eberle, 2014). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003) describe phenomenology as "a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behaviour (sic) as determined by the phenomena of experience" (p. 23).

Gentles et al. (2015) explained that the data source for a phenomenological study is specifically and exclusively people. Eberle (2014) discussed the connection between the perception and the properties of an experience; the researcher must find the consistencies of the phenomena. I looked for the essence, or commonalities, of the experiences of the teachers that provided support for the students. I next used the process of horizontalizing, treating each piece of information equally. Eventually, themes were clustered from the topics, and organized into a description of the phenomena of the teachers' perceptions of their work with their students with LD (Moustakas, 1994).

Paradigm: Social constructivism. "Interpretivists take the position that social or cultural phenomena emerge from the ways in which actors in a setting construct meaning" (Schensul, 2012, p. 76). In this study, I have sought to gain an understanding of the dynamics between general education teachers and their students with LD that increased reading achievement of the students. I used interviews with open-ended questions to develop the process of uncovering ways that general education teachers were successful with students with LD. Using my own knowledge and perspective of relationships and the needs of students with LD, I sought the patterns of interaction that increased student achievement in reading (Creswell, 2007).

Interpretive community: Disability theories. According to Creswell (2007), students with disabilities are one of several groups with unique needs which are

specifically appropriate for qualitative research. A qualitative study on children with disabilities relates to inclusion and the differences in educational needs of these students versus a focus on the students' disability (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, students with special needs are frequently marginalized in an educational setting due to restraints within a school system as a result of legislation and biased views of stakeholders who are in a position to decide policy (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004).

Context of the Study

General education teachers are expected increasingly to provide direct teaching and support of students with disabilities (Shippen et al., 2011). Even with the new ESSA law, all public school students in the United States, including those with LD, will be expected to participate in state assessments. This phenomenological study will help to provide information for general education teachers to have knowledge of techniques that have been shown to be successful in working with students with LD in reading within a general education setting.

Role of the Researcher

After obtaining permission from the proposal committee, I requested permission to conduct my study from the school district that I have selected for my study. Next, I submitted my proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval (Creswell, 2003; Schensul, 2012). I then requested permission from the principals of the schools that met the criteria for my study (Appendix C) and asked them to allow teachers on their campuses who met the guidelines for participation in my study to be a part of the study. I then contacted potential teacher participants by email.

I took an etic perspective, which is the "perspective of someone who is not participating in the culture being studied" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). Schensul (2012) describes an etic perspective as the "theoretically framed analysis of the researcher" (p. 97). I was an observer, not a participant, in the study.

Participant Selection

Qualitative research has fewer participants than quantitative research to "acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon" (Gentles et al., 2015). I selected participants who met selection criteria that provided information based upon their experiences that would best inform my study (Galletta, 2013). Prior to the study, it was impossible to determine how many teachers would ultimately participate in the study (Gentles et al., 2015). Ultimately, five teacher participants were interviewed from among Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers whose schools were in a large urban school district that had a Reading/ELA Distinction in the Accountability Ratings for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 administrations of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and whose schools also had a minimum of two self-contained special education classrooms.

Although students with LD do not participate in a special education self-contained setting, the resources available for teachers can be reduced at schools in which there are a substantial number of self-contained students. This reduction in resources could affect the amount of support available for other students with special education needs. Teacher participation was further restricted to schools in which self-contained classes consisted of students whose grade placement required them to participate in the state assessment. Additionally, the teachers interviewed and surveyed had at least 3 years' experience in

teaching reading to students with LD, and the schools had a distinction in Reading/ELA

on the STAAR Assessment for 3 years of the assessment: 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-

15.

Data Collection

As recommended for a phenomenological study, I used a nonrandom criterion

sampling strategy for selecting teachers to participate in the study. The participants met

the following criteria: (a) they taught at a school with at least two self-contained classes,

(b) they worked at a school that met the state criteria for distinction in Reading/ELA on

the STAAR for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 administrations, and (c) they had at least 3

years' experience as a teacher of special education students with LD. All cases that met

the criteria selected were contacted. I conducted interviews with five participants, the

minimum recommended for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007).

I served as the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Saldana,

2011). However, multiple sources of data included interviews and questionnaires

(Creswell, 2007). The interview questions were adapted and revised as interviews were

conducted to allow for the individual interviews. As I documented the data, I also

documented my impressions and inferences (Saldana, 2011).

Procedures

Participants for this study were selected from the Texas Education Agency lists of

elementary campuses which met the standards for Indexes 1, or 2, and 3, and received a

Reading/ELA Distinction on the Accountability Ratings for 2013, 2014, and 2015.

Campuses met the state standards for accountability for 2015 if they met the target for

acceptable performance on Indexes 1 or 2 and Index 3 and Index 4 (Texas Education

Agency, 2015b). The measured standards for the Indexes are as follows: Index 1 is an indicator of student achievement based upon a performance of Satisfactory on the STAAR for all assessed subject areas for all students on the campus; Index 2 is an indicator of student progress for all subject areas assessed showing growth for the student population as a whole, as well as different demographic groups, of which students with disabilities is one; and Index 3 reflects that the school has satisfactorily closed performance gaps for economically disadvantaged and the two groups that performed the lowest for the previous year. The last measure of performance, Index 4, was not used as an indicator for this study because it is a measure of postsecondary readiness, which includes high school graduation rates and graduates that successfully completed advanced level courses (Texas Education Agency, 2015c).

In addition, the participants were further narrowed to those campuses that maintained a minimum of two self-contained classrooms in their special education departments. The justification for this requirement was that campus resources and personnel were utilized to support the needs of students in a self-contained special education setting to a greater degree than for students who were not in a self-contained special education setting. This support for students with more severe needs necessitated greater efficiency and proficiency of the general education teachers on a campus to provide for students in the mainstream setting.

After obtaining consent from the appropriate district department to obtain permission to conduct the study within the district, I submitted a request to and obtained permission from the IRB committee of the university to conduct the study. After I determined which campuses met the criteria, I then contacted the principals of the

campuses to request permission to conduct the study on their campuses, as well as to contact the general education teachers who met the teacher participant criteria. Once I received permission from the campus principals, I contacted the teachers on each campus via email to elicit their participation in the study.

When teachers agreed to participate in the study, I set up appointments for interviews. I began interviews with introductions and appreciation to the participants for their agreement to take part in the study. I provided each teacher participant with a copy of the Teacher Letter (Appendix B).

I continued with the signing of a consent form for the Questionnaire (Appendix C) and completion of the Questionnaire. Next, I presented tach interviewee with a consent form for the study, and allowed time for the signing of the consent form for the study, which indicated the purpose of the study, and guidelines for the study, including a right to pass on answering any question and to conclude the interview process at any time (Galletta, 203). The interview process proceeded with permission from the participants to record the session, rapport-building, including sharing my personal experiences in working with students with special needs, and asking the teachers about their experiences.

I elicited stories from the teacher participants about their positive experiences. I asked also about frustrations they may have encountered with providing for the needs of students with LD while providing for the instruction of their students without special needs. I used Appendix D to guide the interview process, with adjustments relative to the completed Teacher Questionnaire and to the discussion per teacher as each interview progressed.

Galletta (2013) described a semi-structured interview as a guide to a study through insight into the "lived experience" (p. 9) of a study participant. Using Galletta's approach as a guide to a semi-structured interview, I began each interview with open-ended questions, focusing on more specific, structured questions as the interviews progressed. I was mindful also of the responsibility for reflecting on the progress of the interviews, as well as requesting clarification of information shared, as the interviews continued.

As the study progressed, interview questions were adjusted to address the changing information obtained from participants (Creswell, 2003; Galletta, 2013; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Strategies used to validate the findings included informal member-checking, or reviewing the findings with the participants to verify accuracy (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used a reflective journal to record my impressions and observations (Schensul, 2012).

Because my study was a qualitative project, I was part of the process as I reflected on the information that I gathered (Richards, 2009). As I proceeded with the data gathering, I used my reflective journal to record interviews as well as to state my impressions and reflections of the information gathered.

As data collection continued, I added, clarified, and adjusted my interview questions and reflections to accommodate new information. "If preplanned methods are not working, you change them to secure the data you need" (Saldana, 2011, p. 90). My reflections changed also as I accumulated more information (Richards, 2009). My ideas were recorded in first person. My data was stored in a paper journal as I interviewed participants, then was transferred to a digital spreadsheet for storing and organizing.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data was analyzed through within-case analysis, cross-case analysis, holistic analysis, multi-site, and cross-theme analysis (Creswell, 2007). Research tools included teacher questionnaires, teacher interview notes, and a personal log (Schensul, 2012). The information gathered was categorized and organized based upon themes which arose (Richards, 2009).

Coding and development of themes. Shank (2008) suggested that a qualitative researcher look for patterns and categories to organize data, searching for the way that categories affect each other. In a qualitative study, coding refers to retention of the original data collected and processing of the data until categories and patterns are determined (Galletta, 2013; Richards, 2009). Coding "is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2011, p. 95-96). This study used coding from interviews and questionnaires of teachers to find patterns of techniques that general education teachers used in successfully working with students with LD.

Richards (2009) describes the process of coding as (a) selection of the information and deciding what it refers to, (b) creation of a category for storage, and (c) coding by placing data in categories (p. 99). Richards also describes categories for data as nodes, or the place where specific information is stored. Descriptive coding, topic coding, and analytical coding were used to describe and process the information gathered. Descriptive coding was used to describe the attributes of the teacher participants: the participants' gender, size of the school, number of self-contained special education

classrooms at the campus, years of experience in teaching, and years of experience in working with students with LD (Richards, 2009). Topic coding categorized the data that was gathered. Analytical coding required interpretation of the data.

Phenomenological reduction. As part of the process of reflecting on the phenomena of general education teachers' work with students with LD, I had to remove my opinions and preconceived ideas from the study, referred to as bracketing by Moustakas (1994). I focused on the information that I received from the teachers who were providing direct instruction to students with LD at the time of the study. The information was then organized into shared ideas of ways of providing instruction that are successful with students with LD.

Ethical Considerations

"Human science researchers are guided by the ethical principles on research with human participants" (Moustakas, 1994). Teachers participated in this study voluntarily (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). They were given an explanation as to the purpose of the study and their role in the study. Teacher participants also were given a copy of the results of the study upon its conclusion. No harmful effects on the participants was expected. The identity of the participants, as well as the schools involved, will remain confidential. Participants were apprised of the reason for the study, the anticipated amount of time required to participate, and how the results of the study would be used (Galletta, 2013). Participants were given also an opportunity to review their data to validate the results before the study was published (Moustakas, 1994).

CHAPTER IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers described the methods they used to successfully improve the reading achievement of students with LD as documented by an increase in test scores on standardized tests in reading. Moreover, this study was an examination of productive ways in which elementary classroom teachers report that they increase the interest and motivation of students who have historically had difficulty in school, specifically, students who have been identified with LD.

In this qualitative study, I interviewed five general education teachers of third, fourth, and fifth grade students who had a diagnosis of LD in reading to determine the methods and strategies that they used to increase the reading skills of those students. The teachers all work at schools in a large urban school district with a student population of more than 800.

First, I determined which schools in the large urban school district met the criteria of having met the standard for the state accountability rating and had a distinction in Reading/ELA for the state assessment in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and of having at least two self-contained special education classrooms. Next, I received permission from the research department of the school district as well as the IRB committee of Sam Houston State University (Appendix A). I then requested permission of the principals to conduct my study on their campuses (Appendix C).

Of the four campuses meeting the criteria, the principals of three of the schools granted permission. Of those three campuses, teachers at two of the schools responded to my requests for an interview. Initially, I met with and interviewed a total of three teachers of Grade 3.

When I was unable to find enough teachers of Grade 3 who were willing to participate in the study, I requested an amendment to my request to conduct my study to the school district and to the IRB committee of Sam Houston State University to include teachers of Grade 4 and 5. After I received permission to conduct my study with the new criteria (Appendix B), I again emailed the four principals with a request to conduct my study on their campuses using the new criteria. The same three principals responded.

Teachers from the same two schools responded, resulting in a total of five teachers in Grades 3, 4, and 5 from the two campuses. Each interview lasted less than an hour. Following the interviews, the audio recordings of each interview were transcribed and sent to each of the teacher participants for review.

Research Question

In this study, I sought to determine how third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers potentially influence the reading performance of their students with LD. Teachers with previous experience working with students with LD in a general education setting were asked to participate in the study to determine how they perceive they positively influence the reading success of their students with LD. The following grand question was addressed: How do selected Grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers describe their motivational strategies, instructional practices, and instructional resources that have helped students with learning disabilities to become successful readers?

Participant Characteristics

The participants in this study were from two schools, each of which had three classes for special education students. Both schools had a student population of over 800. Two of the three special education classes on each campus had students who were in grades 3 through 5. Each participant was female. Three of the participants were Black; two participants were White. All teacher participants had been at their schools for five years or less. Pseudonyms were used for the participants in this study to maintain their confidentiality and anonymity.

I contacted potential participants via email. After potential participants expressed interest in participating in the study, a mutually agreed upon date and time were determined. I met each teacher participant at the school, in the classroom, in which she worked. This location provided the teachers not only the convenience of not needing to travel for the interviews, but also the comfort of their own working spaces and access to the reminders of their interactions with their students.

The Teacher Letter (Appendix D) was used to explain the purpose of the study and to describe the eligibility criteria to potential teacher participants. The Teacher Engagement Questionnaire (Appendix E) was used to establish eligibility for the study. The Interview Questions form (Appendix F) was used for each interview, with interview questions adapted and revised as interviews were conducted to allow for the individual interviews. As I documented the data, I also documented my impressions and inferences (Saldana, 2011).

Interview times ranged from just under 26 minutes to just over 47 minutes. Interviews were conducted between August, 2016 and November, 2016 and were

recorded on my password protected SmartPhone using the Voice Recorder application. After each interview, the audio recording of the interviews was transcribed to a document. Later, the document of the transcript for each teacher's interview was sent by email, encrypted, to the teacher for an informal review. A separate email provided the password to open the encrypted document.

Each participant displayed a passion for teaching, and for her students. Each of the participants easily provided examples of her positive experiences in working with students with LD. All five teachers who participated in the study shared examples of collaboration with other professionals, including special education teachers, other general education teachers, and a reading specialist or interventionist. Three of the teacher participants specifically spoke about the value of the assistance of the teaching assistants on the campus who helped provide support for the teachers by assisting the students with LD.

The three participants who were interviewed in August, before the school year had begun, all mentioned ways in which they wanted to improve their ability to be successful with students. Two of the teachers shared their own struggles with learning to read with their students, and two of the five teachers were confused about the difference between students with a specific learning disability and special education students with a diagnosis other than LD who were placed in the mainstream setting. Teachers with more years of teaching experience appeared to be more confident in their practice of teaching and to have more ease with relating how they were successful with students with LD. Table 1 is a description of the demographics of these participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Experience Teaching LD	Gender	Ethnicity
Anne	5 to 10	3 to 5	F	Black
Beth	3 to 5	3 to 5	F	Black
Cathy	20 +	11 to 15	F	White
Donna	11 to 15	11 to 15	F	White
Emma	20+	6 to 10	F	Black

Anne. Anne had been teaching at her school for 3 years at the time of our interview. She had just completed training on inclusion practices for students with special needs at the time of our interview. She actively gestured with her hands, pointing out areas of the room she used for different activities. Her animation in describing her teaching practices validated her assertion that she gives her students "a good model" for reading: she varies her voice for different characters in stories, and changes the inflection of her voice while demonstrating how a story should be read.

Anne expressed a strong belief in the effectiveness of students with disabilities being served in the mainstream setting. She considered "seeing children adapt to their environment" in an inclusive setting as one of the positive experiences she had had as a teacher working with students with LD. Helping students with special needs included providing a supportive environment by being a role model for acceptance by the other students in her class. Anne provided an understanding also of how the students without

disabilities could be an "extension" of her by giving the students without disabilities guidance as to how the needs of special needs students are different from the needs of the majority of the students.

In addition, Anne stressed how she would "give them the normalcy" of a general education classroom and have the expectations that they would achieve to their greatest ability level. She provided positive reinforcement while encouraging a continued striving for improvement. She had similar expectations of herself: "I'm still learning. . . . But I want to do more. I feel like I can do more."

Beth. Beth had 4 years of teaching experience at the time of the interview. She tried to help her students understand that everyone struggles with learning. For students with LD, she would speak more calmly, and more slowly. Beth was careful to provide additional instruction time for her students with LD as compared to students who did not have special needs.

In addition, Beth let students know that as a child she hated to read, allowing them to see her as someone whom they could emulate. She tried to provide reading materials that were of interest to her students. Beth would adjust assignments and expectations to address the needs of individual students.

Believing strongly that students should feel successful, Beth shared a story of working with a student who initially acted out in her class. He began participating more appropriately after she worked with him more individually to help him catch up in his reading skills. Beth shared that her students with LD are "not afraid to read in front of the class" even if they struggle with reading certain words, indicating that her classroom is a safe place.

Beth shared that she communicated with parents "a lot." Through email, phone calls, the student calendar, or notes, she worked with parents to ensure that students were getting assignments home and returning them to school. She tried to accommodate parent and student requests for assignments that were similar to the assignments that general education students were given.

Cathy. Cathy had been at her campus for over 4 years at the time of the interview; she had materials and techniques available that she had used successfully in previous years. This year was her first year to teach only reading and language arts. It was also the first year for her to have three groups of students to teach, as well as the first year for the campus to have a reading interventionist.

Cathy suggested the students with LD should have the message that "the expectation is the same for them" as for all students. She believed that it was important to "have the same goals, and [to] share those goals with them in advance." Cathy spoke repeatedly about "seeing those gaps close."

Cathy shared the importance of knowing her students. She stated, "You really have to get to know who they are. You have to sit down and build a relationship with them." She shared some of the ways that she fosters those relationships by saying, "I'll go to their games, I go to their recitals. . . . So, just knowing that, they're validated."

Cathy shared challenges she faced in providing a program for students with LD which included, "the grading, and the actual 'how are you going to get things to flow in the classroom' [as being] the most frustrating things." Although she appreciated the support of the reading interventionist available for that year, having students pulled out of her classroom for part of the period created a challenge in providing the grades for the

missing assignments for those students. She found also a need to restructure her class

when students were missing instruction in her class so that the students receiving pull out

services still received the information presented while they were benefitting from direct

support for their academic deficits.

Donna. Donna was a teacher of math and science at the time of the interview, but

had previously taught reading at another campus. Because reading is required in solving

math problems and in learning science, Donna used her previous knowledge of teaching

children to read as she guided them through activities in her present position. Donna

shared with her students that she "struggled in school and that it wasn't easy" for her, and

"you just have to keep working through it."

Donna conducted individualized goal-setting conferences with each student. She

emphasized that she differentiated instruction based on the needs of each student,

including flexible groupings for small group work. She stated that, "the struggle is just

trying to reach them at their level at the right time."

A sense of culture within the classroom community was a goal for Donna. She

tried to include the names of students in the class on test questions or work station

activities to personalize the work and maintain the interest of her students. She was

aware of the potential for embarrassment of students with LD in reading to read aloud in

front of the large group, so she had them practice reading content material in a small

group setting. She shared that, "you have to be able to work around what your kids

need."

Although Donna had had over 10 years of teaching experience, she continued to

look for ways to improve her skills, especially in documenting student progress. She

collaborated regularly with the special education specialists to support the students who had already been identified with a disability, as well as students who may have needed help but had not been identified with a special education need. Regular communication with parents was also a priority for Donna.

Emma. Emma had had more than 20 years of experience as a teacher, including at the middle school level, when we spoke. She was very animated, and at times emotional, during the interview as she shared stories of how she worked with students with varying educational needs. She shared also how her personal experience as a parent influenced and guided her work with students with disabilities.

Emma viewed teaching students with disabilities as "an honor and a privilege." She was determined to provide parents with "lots of good news phone calls and notes home." She believed that "a parent needs to know that their child's place in their school community is not looked at negatively, that they are accepted and that their child is in a safe place, and in a safe self-esteem place."

A priority for Emma was discovering the interests of students so that she could encourage them to read books with topics of interest to them. She was aware of the varying learning styles of her students and how to use the individual needs of the students to increase their reading skills. She maintained the interest of the students during instruction by "acting out the voices" of the characters in the stories being read. Emma also used creative environments within the classroom to encourage student engagement in reading: making a fort with two jackets, reading standing up, or converting the entire room into a comfortable pajama party "Read-in Day."

Working "with every professional on this campus to help," as well as working with the parents aided Emma in providing services for her students with LD. For Emma, collaboration was "everything." She saw "everybody working as a team." She believed that the trust that she established with parents was key to working with the parents to improve student achievement.

Results

I analyzed the data by categories based upon the interview questions (Appendix F) and additional discussion held during the teacher interviews. The teachers with more experience were more confident in their replies, and had more specific responses. Two of the teachers included ways that they intended to continue to improve their practices based upon prior experience. Three of the teachers provided self-disclosure to their students regarding their own struggles with learning. Each participant discussed the value of relationships in their teaching, including relationships with students, other teachers, and parents. Both schools provided teaching assistants for the teachers, to enable the teachers to provide instruction and support for all students in their classrooms. The teachers interviewed did not always provide different incentives for their students with LD and their general education students. The teachers focused on positive feedback, encouragement, and improvement that led to success.

Teachers shared also their positive experiences as they taught students with LD. Donna, Beth, and Anne noted that seeing the progress of the students was something that they enjoyed. Beth talked about how "you see growth over time. They're excited when they catch on to certain concepts." Cathy enjoyed seeing the gaps close, and seeing the students meet her expectations as well as their own.

Anne and Cathy both appreciated seeing the students with LD adapt to the mainstream setting. Emma believed that students with disabilities provided a unique perspective in classroom conversations, making a positive contribution to the classroom environment. Donna and Emma enjoyed developing the rapport with students so that students trusted them.

The following themes emerged consistently in the interviews: (a) positive interactions and relationships with students, (b) collaboration and relationships with other school personnel, (c) collaboration and positive relationships with parents, and (d) positive strategies and incentives. Teachers found value in asking for help from parents and other school personnel to aid in providing support to students. In addition, the teachers expressed appreciation of the support of the teaching assistants and special education staff of their schools to allow them to help all students succeed.

Relationships with students. The most consistent ideas of the teachers during the interviews referred to the relationships they had with their students and how they built those relationships through positive practices. The teachers expressed the importance of the relationships they had with their students in a variety of ways. These ways included knowing the interests of their students, working with their students' strengths to motivate them, and using different strategies to find the most effective way to teach each student in their care.

The teachers shared examples of how the positive relationships they had with their students were manifest. Some of the examples included Emma going outside when a student was upset to encourage him to go to back to her class or providing books in the

class library that targeted her student's interests. Beth and Anne used tangible incentives that were of interest to the students.

Donna stated that she encouraged her students with statements such as, "Let's just try, and I'll help you when you need [it]." Donna included the names of students in her teacher-made tests as one way of building relationships. She mentioned also working with her students, "each of [them] as an individual." Elaborating on the value of having a strong rapport with her students, Donna shared,

> It's important to build relationships, but especially with students that (sic) are struggling. 'Cause if they trust you, they'll pretty much do what you want them to do. And that's where you see the progress, is when they trust you.

"You really have to get to know who they are. You have to sit down and build a relationship with them," Cathy related. "Building relationships, having relationships with their parents, positive emails, positive notes in their agendas, just random things like that that make them human." Cathy also discussed repeatedly that she focuses on "the whole child" and do[ing] what's best for the kid."

Emma made a specific effort to learn about the shows and characters that her students spoke about, including those connected with Pokéman, the Cartoon Network, the Disney Channel, and Nickelodeon. Anne referred to "celebrating their successes," while Beth tried to provide reading material that addressed the areas of interest of her students. Emma also made a point of letting her students with special needs know if she was going to be absent by "personally and privately" telling them that there would be a substitute the next day and that she was "*really* excited to hear about what a great day [they would] have and . . . be ready to tell me about the good things."

Collaboration with school personnel. All five teachers discussed how they consistently collaborated with other teachers and teaching assistants to provide support for students. The principals of both schools which were part of this study provided teaching assistants to help with classroom instruction and to provide direct support to students with a special education diagnosis. This classroom-based support allowed the teachers whom I interviewed to address the needs of all students in their classes.

Additionally, the schools provided teacher support in the form of time for collaboration. Each teacher was supported also by the availability of pull out services from the special education resource teacher, and reading specialist or reading interventionist to provide direct services to struggling readers. Cathy and Emma spoke of the team effort of the school personnel, together with the parents, to provide support for the students with LD.

The special education teaching assistant was particularly helpful to Beth. Donna mentioned the support of the school counselor as being helpful, in addition to the other school personnel. Anne shared that the other students in her classroom are often very helpful in providing peer support to the students with LD.

Collaboration with parents. The teachers all shared stories of working closely with parents to support student success. Cathy and Emma specifically mentioned that they called or emailed parents with positive news. Trust was of extreme importance to Emma, who shared,

> building trust with those parents, knowing, or making sure that *they* know that *I* know they want their child included, *and* mainstreamed, *and* accepted, *and* liked,

and invited to the birthday parties, and . . . picked to play on the team, . . . that's
what everybody wants for their kid.

Beth felt confident that she had a good working relationship with the parents of
her students with LD, but sometimes struggled with trying to explain to the parents that
the students had a harder time learning due to their disability. Communicating with
parents was a major source of support for Beth in working effectively with her students
with LD.

> We talk on the phone, um, notes, and the agenda book. I may have to send things
> earlier, like if they have a project. A lot of it is through email, like making sure
> that they keep up with their assignments, they turn things in. . . . They're allowed
> to make corrections at home with their parents.

Anne relied on parents to give her "background information" that would help her
in working with students whose performance on a given day might have been effected by
a frustrating or upsetting situation that the child may have experienced. "It's like a heads
up. So you do need that communication with parents to help you increase how they're
gonna progress through the day." In addition, Anne valued parent input regarding
student interests and incentives that might motivate the students: "what helps to, how
you, how they get them to do things, you know, in home and maybe I can transfer that to
the school."

Communication with parents was very important to Donna. Her primary methods
for parent contact were email and school blogs. For Donna, communicating with parents
was a way to avoid possible misunderstandings and to let parents know how their
children were doing.

Positive strategies and incentives. These teachers were focused on providing a positive classroom environment for their students with LD. Each teacher had her own way of motivating and encouraging students to persevere. Types of motivational techniques varied, but all were based upon the interests and motivations of the students.

Cathy had high expectations, but also used goal-setting and growth tracking to encourage her students to excel. By sharing and discussing goals in advance with her students, Cathy provided a class environment that she saw as collaborative. For her students with LD, she sent "a subliminal message to them that the expectation is the same for them" as for the students who did not have LD. Cathy did have a prize box, but did not use it more for her students with LD than for the other students. She considered "the class itself is pretty fun," and therefore a motivating environment.

Cathy provided short lessons to maintain the interest of her students. Small group instruction, and "leaning in" if the students appeared to need help were some of the ways that Cathy provided support to her students with LD. Her instructional practices included a frequent use of graphic organizers, fluency checks, book clubs, and spiraling the concepts so that the students were constantly reviewing the skills.

For Anne, praise, encouragement, and celebrating successes were a normal part of the routine of her class. She gave tangible rewards to students who were successful, which could be a stamp or a treat. A reward might be also "lunch with the teacher," which was a prized reward.

Anne expected her students with LD to do their "personal best." Working with the general education students to help them understand that she needed their help, Anne explained that some of their classmates "learn a little differently." She taught concepts

on different levels, as well as implementing the students' accommodations, to provide the instruction that each student needed. As a motivating technique, she also provided to students examples of individuals who had experienced success after failure.

Beth used tangible incentives for her students, including stickers and treats. Using also praise and encouragement, she helped students to see themselves as being like anyone else. Beth modeled correct reading skills, and used supporting strategies such as small group instruction, leveled readers, vocabulary cards with pictures, and graphic organizers.

Goal setting with her students was also a process that Donna used with her students. Donna has built a strong culture of support with her class. She encouraged her students with positive phrases such as, "We all want to be scholars," and we "want to be our best," and with encouraging remarks such as, "You're not alone," and "I'll help you when you need, and "We've got to help each other."

Some of Donna's techniques for supporting her students with LD include providing a break when needed, flexible groupings for her small groups, checklists, and breaking down assignments. She will present the information also in different ways to provide for the different needs of students. Donna tries to provide what the students need in the way they learn the best.

Every day, Emma tried to find a way to motivate her students. Stickers, pencils, bouncy balls, and high-fives were just a few of the ways she kept the interest of her students. When the Book Fair came to her school, Emma was aware of students who may not have been able to purchase a special book and she carefully planned for that book to be in her class library.

Emma strategically placed students in her classroom in the way that would be most beneficial to the students and the learning environment. She walked around the room as she taught unless she was working with students at her small group table. Allowing students to read during "free reading" time encouraged students who did not like to read to become involved in their reading. Emma also used an animated voice when reading aloud to encourage her students to appreciate books.

Indicators of success. Each teacher shared a variety of ways that she was able to determine that her students with LD had been successful and shown progress. Emma shared that, "They'll raise their hand. They participate. They're engaged in centers. They're engaged in conversations." Donna shared indicators that her students were successful; they were more independent, and were able to read entire books on their own.

Anne noticed that student success was evident when she saw the students with LD had increased their reading fluency, reading test scores, and ability to express themselves more clearly. For Beth, indicators of success included seeing how her students' thinking had changed, how they participated in class more, and that they were willing to read out loud in class. Beth noticed also that students were less likely to be disruptive in class when their reading skills increased.

Cathy could tell by. . .

> the look on their face[s] when they [got]their results [on the state
> assessment] . . . when the LD student is particularly successful. . . . You
> can just see all of their hard work, is just finally, they've internalized it.
> And they know that they can do it just like anybody else can.

When asked about any frustrations in trying to balance the needs of their students with LD and the needs of their students without special needs, four of the five teachers shared challenges. These teachers struggled with trying to meet the needs of so many students at different levels and with different needs. These teachers also shared ways that they would persevere in helping all students. Donna stated that, "if it doesn't work, then we're going to go back to something else . . . you have to be able to work around what your kids need."

For Cathy, having students. . .

reading on a first-grade level, and . . . some that are reading on a, maybe an eighth-grade level, . . . the grading is very difficult. When I have five kids pulled out, um, for, you know, that pull-out time. . . .We need to move on with the lesson, . . . to restructure the classroom, as a whole, . . .and meet the kids' needs is one of the hardest things.

The fifth teacher referred to getting the support of other personnel when she needed to provide for the varying needs of her students. Emma, though, expressed frustrations with some parents when parents were unwilling or unable to accept that their children needed extra academic help at school due to a disability. It was difficult for Emma to see the students struggle without the support that the special education services might have provided them.

During the interviews with the five teachers, there were references that were repeated relating to the relationships the teacher participants had with their students, the parents, and the support personnel at the school level. Moreover, references also to strategies and motivators used to help the students with LD to be successful in reading.

In Table 2, I have shared the references that were repeated most consistently, along with the number of references made during the five interviews. I then grouped those words or phrases based upon the themes of the references.

Table 2

How Teachers Engage Students to Improve Reading

Motivators	Teaching Strategies	Relationships with Students	Collaboration/Support
Success/successful, 25	Pull out, 23	Relationships, 14	Help, 49
Goals/high expectations, 23	Small group, 17	Include/inclusion/inclusive, 5	Parent/parents, 39
Motivate/motivation, 12	Accommodate/accommodation, 9	Individual/individualized, 4	TA/teaching assistant/aide, 10
Interests/interesting/interested, 10		Trust, 3	Teacher specialist/interventionist, 9
Stickers, stamps, treats, prizes, 9		Attend student events, 1	Communicate/Communication, 9
Encourage, 8			Resource teacher, 6
Positive (experience), 8			Trust, 3
Modeling or animated reading, 6			
Engaged, 6			
Celebrate/celebrating, 5			
Praise, 5			
Lunch with teacher, 3			
Not failing, 2			
Monitoring/tracking, 2			

Note. Number of references in the five interviews.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore methods in which third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers reported they successfully improved the reading achievement of students with LD as documented by an increase in test scores on standardized tests in reading. Through a questionnaire and an interview with each of five general education teachers of students in Grades 3, 4, and 5, I was able to elicit successful strategies and techniques that the teachers from high performing schools used in working with students diagnosed with a learning disability in reading. Themes of success that the teachers shared focused on positive relationships and interactions with students, reliance on the support of school-based personnel, collaboration with parents, and positive strategies and incentives that the teachers used to motivate their students with LD.

CHAPTER V

Implications, Recommendations, and Future Studies

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to explore ways in which third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers described how they successfully improved the reading achievement of students with LD as documented by an increase in test scores on standardized tests in reading. Through personal interviews with five general education teachers who have experience working with students with a diagnosis of LD, I was able to ascertain several themes relative to their working with these students that help guide the students to be successful in learning to read.

Discussion

As indicated in this study, general education teachers in Grades 3, 4, and 5 who work with students with a learning disability in reading believe that success with students with LD is enhanced by their relationships with students. Positive relationships of teachers with parents increases also the probability of student success. The relationships with other school personnel were also mentioned as essential to the teachers' ability to provide a supportive and successful environment to the students with LD.

Teachers with a greater number of years of experience appeared more relaxed and shared techniques more easily than teachers with fewer years of experience. Having had the opportunity to find tools and techniques that were successful provided those teachers who had greater experience the benefit of extra time and energy to devote to building strategies and relationships that would benefit students. Teachers with more experience

seemed also to place a greater value of their relationships with their students as being important to their students' success.

I learned also that there were many changes for the teachers to adapt to each year. The teachers had all taught other subjects or combinations of subjects in previous years. All but one of the five teachers had experience teaching at other schools prior to working at their current campuses. For the more experienced teachers, the methods of providing services for students with learning disabilities had changed since they first began teaching, due to changes in state and federal laws as well as the way that individual campuses provided support.

When I began this study, I anticipated that I would find that the relationships of general education teachers with their students with LD, and with the special education resource teachers, increased the performance of the students. What I learned was that the teachers relied on a team effort to provide the needed instruction and support. In addition to the relationships with the students and resource teachers, the general education teachers relied upon their relationships with the parents as well as the other members of the school team, including teaching assistants and reading support personnel, to support their work with the students with LD.

I learned also that two of the participants had not been teaching at their respective schools during all of the years that the assessments used as a basis for documenting success were given. I would need to assume that the principals at the schools studied continued the culture of the schools by hiring teachers with similar attributes as those who were teaching during the school years that the students were tested in 2013, 2014,

and 2015 school years. But, it is worth noting that one of the schools experienced also a change of principals during the years that these assessments took place.

Connections to the Literature

As explained by Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), a qualitative study is an appropriate means of researching special education concerns. My study was framed by learning theory, social learning theory, and expectancy-value theory. In addition, my study was guided by constructivism.

Students with LD learn best when they are guided through the learning process in a way that addresses their cognitive and emotional development (Daniels, 2008; Gredler, 2012). Their needs are best met in a positive environment guided by adults who have realistic expectations and a warm relationship with them. The teachers in this study focused on cooperation rather than strict classroom management and allowed students to participate in the process of making choices for learning (DeVries & Zan, 2015).

A healthy learning environment provides a purpose for learning, as the participant teachers did by goal-setting with their students with LD. A positive environment was established also by including the students' interests, which was evident in the choices teachers made in reading selections. The incentives that were used to motivate the students were based also upon the students' interests.

The literature reviewed was an indication that students with LD have challenges, which require more support from teachers so that they can be successful, than students who do not have LD. Students with LD particularly benefit from positive relationships with the adults in their lives. Validated through this study was the premise that students in a positive environment with caring adults will increase their reading skills.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Based upon the results of this study, school personnel should establish education policies that would require professional development for teachers in the area of SEL as well as academic knowledge and strategies. Student success is dependent not only upon the skill of the teacher to convey the subject matter of the courses being taught, but also upon a relationship with the teacher of trust, acceptance, and understanding. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2016) addresses this need for positive relationships in the first of its core competencies.

Administrators in school districts should instill opportunities for positive policies by providing professional development opportunities for general education teachers, teaching assistants, and reading support personnel to collaborate on co-teaching strategies. These professional personnel should learn how to establish and maintain positive working relationships for providing services to students who struggle with learning to read. These professionals would need to have adjusted schedules to allow time for preparation and practice to fully implement the services to benefit students.

Implications for School Leaders

The implication of this study is the nature of positive relationships between teachers and students is important to the success of students with a diagnosis of LD in reading. In addition, my findings in this study indicate that the relationships of these teachers with support personnel at the school level, as well as with the parents of the students with LD, contribute to the success of these students. The teachers in the study used strategies with their students that could be looked at more closely to determine if replicating those strategies would benefit students in other schools.

Furthermore, students who do not have learning challenges could be presumed also to benefit from the same strategies and supports, including positive relationships with their teachers. In addition, it would be valuable to replicate the collaborative relationships that the interviewed teachers had with support personnel at their schools. School leaders would provide benefit to their campus students by hiring and training staff personnel at all levels, including support staff, who have a high level of desire to develop positive relationships with students. Professional development opportunities could include continuous support for SEL and positive interactions with students as well as with other members of the school staff.

Recommendations

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs are becoming more prevalent in the United States as the positive outcomes are becoming better known and understood (Goleman, 2011). Teachers of Grades 3 through 5 would benefit from training designed to increase their positive relationships with students with a learning disability in reading. This training would also provide opportunities for teachers to develop positive relationships with non-disabled students in their classrooms. Consideration should be made for similar training for teachers at other levels in public school settings. To encourage teachers to establish and maintain a routine practice of building positive relationships with students, the teacher evaluation process would place as much value on the rapport that teachers have with students as is placed on achievement test scores.

Additionally, teachers would benefit from training to distinguish between the different types of identified disabilities so that they could better understand the specific needs of, and ways to provide interventions for, the various groups of special needs

students. The routine use of support personnel, including reading specialists and teaching assistants, in schools is recommended to increase the reading achievement of students at all schools. Training teachers to communicate effectively and routinely with parents is recommended.

Conversely, training parents to communicate effectively with teachers to facilitate parent involvement is recommended. Parent involvement at the school level would provide parents with a comfort in being at the school for reasons other than student redirection. Examples of parent involvement would include volunteer opportunities, attending class field trips, and participation in school fund-raising events.

Campus administrators should consider allowing teachers to teach the same grade level long enough to establish successful working relationships with other teachers, which would provide for more effective support of students of all ability levels. In addition, allowing teachers the opportunity to become proficient in teaching a particular subject area would benefit students. To facilitate teacher retention in a school, as well as in a specific assignment, administrators would benefit from training on working effectively with, and providing positive support for, teachers on their campuses.

Future Studies

Researchers may pursue other studies in similar areas of education research to further extend the results of this study. Some of those areas would include the effect of school climate on student success. The effect of teacher experience on student success and the relationships of general education teachers with other teachers and staff members are other areas for additional study. A study of the relationships of general education teachers with minority students would also provide insight into student achievement.

Similarly, a study of teachers working with students younger or older than those considered in this study would be of benefit to the education community.

Additional areas of research that could extend from this study include how the support of a school's community involvement and parent support influence student achievement. In addition, a study of the significance of administrative support and administrative relationships with teachers on student achievement would be of benefit. Research about the difference between the achievement of students with disabilities who come from other schools versus students with disabilities who began at high-performing schools would also provide insight into how to target interventions for students. Another area for study would be the effect of intervention and identification of learning challenges at earlier grades to provide for greater success.

Conclusion

Students with LD are successful when they benefit from a variety of factors, including relationships with caring and interested general education teachers. The general education teachers, in turn, benefit from and are better able to provide support to their students by having positive relationships with other members of the school staff, including teaching assistants and teacher interventionists. Lastly, but equally important, are the positive relationships general education teachers have with their students' parents.

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    doi:10.1002/pits.20532

APPENDIX A

Sam Houston
STATE UNIVERSITY
A Member of The Texas State University System

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448
Phone: 936.294.4875
Fax: 936.294.3622
irb@shsu.edu
www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/

DATE:	June 28, 2016
TO:	Sally Berkowitz [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. George Moore]
FROM:	Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	*Third Grade Teachers' Perceptions Regarding How They Engage Students Who Have Learning Disabilities in Ways That Improve Reading Performance [T/D]*
PROTOCOL #:	2016-06-29148
SUBMISSION TYPE:	INITIAL REVIEW—RESPONSE TO MODIFICATIONS
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	June 28, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE:	June 28, 2017
REVIEW TYPE:	EXPEDITED
REVIEW CATEGORIES:	7

Thank you for your submission of your **Response to Modification**s for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

Sam Houston
STATE UNIVERSITY
A Member of The Texas State University System

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
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Phone: 936.294.4875
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DATE:	June 28, 2016
TO:	Sally Berkowitz [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. George Moore]
FROM:	Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	*Third Grade Teachers' Perceptions Regarding How They Engage Students Who Have Learning Disabilities in Ways That Improve Reading Performance [T/D]*
PROTOCOL #:	2016-06-29148
SUBMISSION TYPE:	INITIAL REVIEW—RESPONSE TO MODIFICATIONS
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	June 28, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE:	June 28, 2017
REVIEW TYPE:	EXPEDITED
REVIEW CATEGORIES:	7

Thank you for your submission of your **Response to Modification**s for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

APPENDIX B

Sam Houston
S T A T E   U N I V E R S I T Y
A Member of The Texas State University System

Institutional Review Board
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DATE: October 6, 2016

TO: Sally Berkowitz [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. George Moore]

FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: *Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Teachers' Perceptions Regarding How They Engage Students Who Have Learning Disabilities in Ways that Improve Reading Performance [T/D]*

PROTOCOL #: 2016-06-29148

SUBMISSION TYPE: AMENDMENT

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: October 6, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: June 28, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED

REVIEW CATEGORIES: 7

Thank you for your submission of your **Amendment** for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

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appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. **Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 28, 2017. When you have completed the project, a Final Report must be submitted to ORSP in order to close the project file.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or irb@shsu.edu. Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges
IRB Chair, PHSC
PHSC-IRB

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

APPENDIX C

Dear Principal:

I am working on the dissertation phase of my doctoral degree. I am conducting a research study to determine successful interventions for increasing the reading skills of third, fourth, and fifth grade students who have been diagnosed with a learning disability in reading. I would like to request the participation of teachers on your campus in my study, "Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Teachers' Perceptions Regarding How They Engage Students Who Have Learning Disabilities in Ways That Improve Reading Performance."

For my study, I would like to interview third, fourth, and fifth grade general education teachers at your campus who meet the following criteria:

-Currently work at schools which have met the standard for the Reading/ELA STAAR assessment for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 school years.

-Currently work at schools which have at least 2 self-contained special education classes which provide services for students in grades 3 through 5, or STAAR level grades.

-Have at least 3 years of experience teaching students who have been identified and are being served under the special education department as a child with a learning disability in reading.

I have identified 4 schools in HISD, including your campus, which met the standards for the state accountability in Reading STAAR, and also have at least 2 self-contained special education classes. I request permission to conduct this study with third grade teachers at your school as part of my study.

Sincerely,

Sally Berkowitz
Sam Houston State University doctoral student

APPENDIX D

Dear Third, Fourth, or Fifth Grade Teacher:

I am working on the dissertation phase of my doctoral degree. I am conducting a research study to determine successful interventions for increasing the reading skills of third grade students who have been diagnosed with a learning disability in reading. As the last phase of my program, I would like to invite you to participate in my study, "Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Teachers' Perceptions Regarding How They Engage Students Who Have Learning Disabilities in Ways That Improve Reading Performance."

You have been selected to participate in my study because you meet the criteria I have set:

-Currently work at schools which have met the standard for the Reading/ELA STAAR assessment for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 school years.

-Currently work at schools which have at least 2 self-contained special education classes which provide services for students in grades 3 through 5, or STAAR level grades.

-Have at least 3 years of experience teaching students who have been identified and are being served under the special education department as a child with a learning disability in reading.

I have identified 4 schools in HISD, including your campus, which met the standards for the state accountability in Reading STAAR, and also have at least 2 self-contained special education classes.

Please complete and return the accompanying questionnaire and return to me in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope. If you agree to participate in my study, I will contact you soon to conduct a face-to-face interview.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sally Berkowitz
Sam Houston State University doctoral student

APPENDIX E

Teacher Engagement Questionnaire (Pre-Screen)

Please answer each of the following questions as completely as possible regarding your most common methods of engaging students with learning disabilities.

Please check the following that most closely applies:

1. Total years of teaching experience:

▫	5-10
▫	11-15
▫	15-20
▫	20 or more

2. Years of experience teaching elementary school:

▫	0-5
▫	6-10
▫	11-15
▫	15-20
▫	20 or more

---

3. Years of experience at current elementary school:

▫	0-5
▫	6-10
▫	11-15
▫	15-20
▫	20 or more

---

4. Years of experience teaching students with learning disabilities:

▫	0-5
▫	6-10
▫	11-15
▫	15-20
▫	20 or more

---

5. Would you be interested in participating in a research study that would help determine successful techniques for teaching students with learning disabilities to improve their reading test scores?

▫ Yes, count me in!

▫ No, thank you!

6. Would you be willing to participate in a teacher questionnaire and an interview? (You will be compensated for your time.)

▢ Yes, count me in!
▢ No, thank you!

7. If yes for #5 and #6, what is the best way for me to get in touch with you?
▢   e-mail

_____

▢ telephone

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions

Introduction

Tell me about some of your positive experiences in working with students with LD.

Motivation

How do you use incentives to encourage the students in your class?

How do you encourage your students to continue at a task even when it is difficult?

How do you encourage your students who have been identified as having LD in reading to increase their reading skills?

How do you use information about the individual interests and strengths of your students to motivate them?

Strategies

Describe the strategies you use to motivate students with LD to become engaged in reading.

Describe the instructional strategies you use to help students with LD to become more successful in reading.

Collaboration

How do you collaborate with the special education resource teacher at your school to ensure success for your students with LD?

Describe some of the ways that you work with the parents of your students with LD to increase student success.

Success in reading

How do you determine that your students with LD have been successful?

Tell me about any frustrations you may have experienced when providing for the needs of students with LD while providing for the instruction of your students without special needs.

Concluding the interview

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your techniques and strategies in working with students with LD?

VITA

Sally Greenberg Berkowitz

EDUCATION

Doctorate of Educational Leadership, May 2017
Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
Dissertation: Third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers' descriptions of methods used to improve the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities

Master of Education (December 1981) in Elementary Counseling & Guidance, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches, Louisiana.

Bachelor of Arts (December 1978) in Elementary Education (Special Education for Emotionally Disturbed), Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe, Louisiana.

PUBLICATIONS

Wilson, J. L., Berkowitz, S., Bullock, C., Cockrell, C., Rodriguez, L. M. & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. 2012. Online instructional materials for students with disabilities: Does it work? *International Journal of Education, 4*(3).

PRESENTATION AT PROFESSIONAL MEETING

Wilson, J. L., Berkowitz, S., Bullock, C., Cockrell, C., Rodriguez, L. M. & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2012, February). Online instructional materials for students with disabilities: Does it work? Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Educational Leadership Doctoral Scholarship, College of Education, Sam Houston State University, May, 2012.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Houston Counselors Association