Strategies to support general education teachers serving students with mild to moderate disabilities

Bruce La Monte Baker

California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes

Recommended Citation

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. Unless otherwise indicated, this project was conducted as practicum not subject to IRB review but conducted in keeping with applicable regulatory guidance for training purposes. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.
Strategies to Support General Education Teachers Serving Students

With Mild to Moderate Disabilities

By

Bruce La Monte Baker

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

College of Professional Studies

School of Education

California State University at Monterey Bay

May 2010

C. 2010 by Bruce Baker. All Rights Reserved.
STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS SERVING STUDENTS WITH MILD TO MODERATE DISABILITIES

By

Bruce La Monte Baker

Graduate Advisory Committee:

Dr. Irene Nares-Guzicki, Advisor 5-3-10

Dr. Dorothy Lloyd, Capstone Advisor 5/2/10
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank my family Jennifer, Corinna, McEwen, and Montgomery for their love and support. I would like to thank the many gifted and talented Professors at CSUMB. My journey into Special Education began with Dr. Denti at the Level I program, Dr. Josh Harrower through Level II, Dr. Lloyd in the MAE Masters program and my advisor Dr. Irene Nares-Guzicki. I have achieved new unimaginable goals with my professors continued support.

Each person has given me support in a clear and eloquent environment to help voice my ideas and have shown me how excellence in education is believing in a changing world. I feel their leadership has given me the chance to see how their teachings can help me better express my ideas through collaboration in education and in finding new opportunities to learn. My journey has been filled with much patience, support, help, love and has inspired me to be the best of what we all can be with an open and positive mind.
Abstract

This action thesis project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree at California State University, Monterey Bay. The purpose of this action research project, “Effective Strategies To Use In The Classroom,” was to bring together my high school’s general educators and special education staff to work together through collaboration to better serve the development and learning needs of students with learning disabilities. It examines the effectiveness of researched based instructional modifications and strategies to improve collaboration between general educators and special education teachers working as a team in support of the special needs student in the mainstream class setting.

This action research project is a summary of this collaboration as a special education teacher with the focus on weekly analysis of student observations in the mainstream classroom. The collaboration team worked together to support special education students in a general education classroom setting. The weekly observations were analyzed by the volunteers and the researcher. The results revealed that the modifications by the teacher could support students to be active learners and engaged in the teacher made lesson plans. The “Identification, Modifications and Strategies For Students With Disabilities” booklet supported the teachers collaboration needs. The impact of this action research project improved the collaborative efforts of the general and special educators, by the implementation of the handbook so to serve all students.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Action Thesis Signature Page........................................................................................................ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..................................................................................................................iii

Abstract........................................................................................................................................iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS................................................................................................................v

CHAPTER I:  INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................................1
  
  Statement of the Problem............................................................................................................3
  
  Purpose of the Study..................................................................................................................5
  
  Research Questions....................................................................................................................6
  
  Definition of Terms...................................................................................................................7

CHAPTER II:  LITERATURE REVIEW..........................................................................................14
  
  The Need For Accommodations...............................................................................................14
  
  Effective Strategies In Building Learning Skills For Student With Disabilities...19
  
  Need for Effective Collaboration............................................................................................26
  
  Summary...................................................................................................................................29

CHAPTER III:  METHODOLOGY.................................................................................................30
  
  Setting......................................................................................................................................30
  
  Participants and Selection Process..........................................................................................31
  
  Teacher Interviews and Surveys..............................................................................................32
  
  Handbook.................................................................................................................................33
Procedure........................................................................................................34
Observations.................................................................................................35
Data Collection...........................................................................................37
Data Analysis...............................................................................................38

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION...................................................39
Research Question I.....................................................................................39
Research Question II...................................................................................43

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY...............................................................................45

REFERENCES..............................................................................................50
APPENDICES...............................................................................................54
APPENDIX A  Teacher Input Survey.............................................................55
APPENDIX B  Action Research Project Handbook......................................57
CHAPTER I

Introduction

Increasing numbers of special education students are being placed in least restrictive environments, a provision under federal law that entitles each student to an educational setting most like those for peers without disabilities provided the student can be successful with appropriate supports. (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). Least restrictive environments are stipulated under The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and are federally funded to assist school boards to guarantee and ensure that all students with special learning needs have access to fair and appropriate education programs. While middle and high school special education students receive fewer least restrictive accommodations than students in special education elementary schools (Thurlow, 1998), the number is increasing.

IDEA has categorized thirteen different disabilities that qualify for special education services. (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). They are:

1. Autism
2. Dead-blindness
3. Deafness
4. Emotional disturbance
5. Hearing impairment
6. Mental retardation
7. Multiple disabilities
8. Orthopedic impairment (Physical)
9. Other Health impairment
10. Specific learning disability
11. Speech or language impairment
12. Traumatic brain injury
13. Visual impairment including blindness
The Federal and State regulations outline the eligibility criteria for all students needing special education services. Assessments are given and must demonstrate that a student's impairment is interfering with educational performance and requires special services. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) team of professionals and parents uses these assessment reports to make the actual determination for eligibility of special education services. In order for students to receive the fair and appropriate education they are entitled to, there needs to be effective collaboration between special educators who specialize in the law, disabilities, modifications and available supports with general educators who specialize in the curriculum, assessment and creation of the least restrictive environments (LRE). Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, explains: “A local school district shall place a student with a disability in the regular education environment unless it is demonstrated that the education of the student in the regular environment with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily". (Wright & Wright, 2007, p.267).

Cramer, (2006), states collaboration rests on the ability to accurately assess the demands of a situation, develop appropriate expectations, and initiate actions that will enable collaboration to occur. When this takes place, both students and their teachers benefit. Collaboration remains at the core of IDEA 2004.
Statement of the Problem

From experience, the statement often heard from general education teachers is "I don't know what to do with him? He just isn't trying." As a special educator, I asked these teachers what methods they are currently using in class? They shrug their shoulders and some say, "I use the same methods I use with my regular students." A few teachers asked, "What are some effective modification strategies I can use to better serve my special education student?" Over the years, colleagues have asked, "Is there a handbook that can teach me how to support special education students learning?" There are many factors that have created this confusion and frustration. IDEA, LRE, and Response to Intervention (RtI) have placed more children with special needs in general education classrooms. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and IDEA hold all teachers accountable to students with specific learning disabilities, or any other disabilities.

In 2001, NCLB (Public Law 107-110) was introduced on a broad spectrum to all participating educators. Signed into law in 2002, NCLB is assessment and standards based, and increases accountability. NCLB is the single most influential piece of federal education legislation in American history, an important and controversial act. (Hess, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that teachers hired to teach in Title I schools on or after July 1, 2002, and all teachers by July 1, 2006, be "highly qualified" or NCLB compliant in NCLB core academic subject areas.
Effective January 1, 2005, additions to Title 5 Sections 80089.3, and 80089.4 allowed the Commission to issue Introductory and Specific Subject Matter Authorizations as another option to meet this requirement. NCLB seeks to ensure that all students are proficient in math, reading, and science. The law does not identify specific methods on how to best serve the special education student nor by identifying strategies and modifications for general education classroom settings. (Hess, Petrilli, & Lang, 2006).

Response to Intervention (RtI) is an integrated approach to service delivery that encompasses general, remedial, and special education through a multi-tiered service delivery model. RtI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to all student needs and using the learning rate and level of performance over time to make important educational decisions. RtI practices are proactive, incorporating both prevention and intervention and are effective at all levels from early childhood through high school. (Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P.L., & Young, C.L., 2003).

As a special educator, it is my belief that special education teachers can bridge the general education teacher’s frustration through effective communication and collaboration. In addition, many special education students lack the tools and confidence to communicate effectively their learning disabilities with teachers, staff, and parents. Many general education teachers also lack the knowledge of how to adapt or modify instruction to best support the special education students learning development.
To provide special education students with classroom environments that ensure their success, special educators must work with others for whom special education is their secondary, rather than primary focus. (Cramer, 2006). In addition, the general education teachers must have support materials for modifying instruction for special education students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research project was first: to give special education students the needed support in the general education classroom by opening the lines of communication with the general education teacher, special education student, and the special education teacher; second: to collaborate effectively with the general education instructor on how to use intervention techniques from suggested ideas for appropriate communication, modifications, and adaptations for students who have special needs; and third: to pilot a self-authored handbook on the identifications, modifications and use of effective strategies with general education teachers and their special education students. One targeted goal was to enlighten general education teachers' and lessen their frustration with the special education students who need the most understanding, the best communication, and effective teaching practices possible. As a researcher, a goal was made to gather research based information and create an observation tool to align better communication between the general educator and the special education teacher, and facilitate special education teachers in establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with their colleagues through collaboration. My aim was to provide the best learning environment for students with special needs.
Research Questions

This research project addressed these questions:

1) How does collaboration and the use of a created handbook on modifications and strategies for students with special needs support the high school general education teachers and identified special education students in their classrooms?

2) What are some generalizations about collaboration and the use of the created special education handbook for future use in supporting general education teachers who have to instruct students with disabilities in their classrooms?
Definitions of Terms

**Autism:** A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. (Byrnes, M., 2008).

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder:** Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD or ADHD) is a neurobehavioral developmental disorder. It is the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric disorder in children affecting about 3 to 5% of children globally with symptoms starting before seven years of age. It is characterized by a persistent pattern of impulsiveness and inattention, with or without a component of hyperactivity. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Collaboration:** To work together to serve students with or at risk of behavioral, emotional and a learning disability. (Cramer, 2006).

**Deaf-blindness:** Means concomitant hearing and visual impairments. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Deafness:** A hearing impairment that interferes a child’s processing linguistic information through hearing. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Emotional Disturbance:** Significant problems in the social-emotional area to a degree that learning is negatively affected. (Bursuck, 2006).
**Emotionally Disturbed:** an inability to learn, which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors. For the purpose of this study emotional disturbance has the same meaning as stated above and includes students that are wards of the state, suffer from some type of psychological disorder, and have been expelled from regular education classes due to conduct. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Full inclusion:** The practice of educating students with special needs in regular classes for all or nearly all of the day instead of in special education classes. Advocates of inclusion believe that students with special needs "belong" to the regular classroom. Consequently, special education services are delivered within the normal classroom. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Hearing Impairment:** A partial or complete loss of hearing. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Individualized Education Plan:** In the United States an Individualized Education Plan is commonly referred to as an IEP, is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004, IDEA). In the US, the IDEA requires public schools to develop an IEP for every student with a disability who is found to meet the federal and state requirements for special education. The IEP must be designed to provide the child with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The IEP refers both to the educational program to be provided to a child with a disability and to the written document that describes that educational program. Key considerations in developing an IEP include
assessing students in all areas related to the suspected disability (ies), considering access to the general curriculum, considering how the disability affects the student’s learning, developing goals and objectives that make the biggest difference for the student, and ultimately choosing a placement in the least restrictive environment. (Bursuck, 2006).

Integration: Sensory Integration Dysfunction (SID, also called sensory processing disorder) is a neurological disorder causing difficulties with processing information from the five senses (vision, auditory, touch, olfaction, and taste), the sense of movement (vestibular system, and/or the positional sense (proprioception). For those with SID, sensory information is sensed, but perceived abnormally. (Bursuck, 2006).

Interventions: To modify the outcome or course of action, especially of a condition or process to improve functioning. (Bursuck, 2006).

Learning Disability: A disorder related to processing information that leads to difficulties in reading, writing, and computing; the most common disability, accounting for half of all students receiving special education. Alternative term known as: Specific Learning Disability. (Bursuck, 2006).

Least Restrictive Environment: (LRE) Requirement in federal law that children with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with non-disabled peers and that special education pupils are not removed from regular classes unless, even

**Mainstreaming:** Mainstreaming refers to placement of a student with disabilities into ongoing activities of regular classrooms so that the student receives education with non-disabled peers — even if special education staff must provide supplementary resource services. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Mental Retardation:** Significant limitations in cognitive ability and adaptive behavior; this disability occurs in a range of severity. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Modifications:** The making of a limited change in teaching education in inclusive classroom settings. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Multiple Disabilities:** The simultaneous presence of two or more disabilities such that none can be identified as the primary disability; the most common example is the occurrence of mental retardation and physical disabilities. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Orthopedic Impairment:** A significant physical limitation that impairs the ability to move or to complete motor activities. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease,
(e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Other Health Impairment:** A disease or health disorder negatively affects learning; examples include cancer, sickle-cell anemia, and diabetes. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Presentation:** For the purpose of this study, the presentation of materials and ideas to be used for the project. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Pre-interview:** For the purpose of this study, the questioning of a person to gather information regarding the subject and pupil. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Post-interview:** For the purpose of this study, the questioning of a person to gather information regarding the subject and pupil. (Bursuck, 2006).

**Regular Education Initiative:** REI focuses on services for children with academic difficulties. The movement focused on ways special educators and general educators could jointly provide services to students with disabilities and promoted placement of students in the general education classroom. The initiative created controversy and turned national attention to collaboration. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).
Response to Intervention: current research has focused on a treatment-oriented diagnostic process known as response to intervention (RTI). Researcher recommendations for implementing such a model include early screening for all students, placing those students who are having difficulty into research-based early intervention programs, rather than waiting until they meet diagnostic criterion. Their performance can be closely monitored to determine whether increasingly intense intervention results in adequate progress. Those who respond will not require further intervention. Those who do not respond adequately to regular classroom instruction (often called "Tier 1 instruction") and a more intensive intervention (often called "Tier 2" intervention) are considered "non-responders." These students can then be referred for further assistance through special education, in which case they are often identified with a learning disability. Some models of RTI include a third tier of intervention before a child is identified as having a learning disability. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Specific Learning Disability: A disorder in on or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. (Feigin, 2009).
Speech or Language Disability: A disorder related to accurately producing the sounds of language or meaningfully using language to communicate. (Bursuck, 2006).

Strategies: A careful plan or method towards a goal; An adaptation that appears to serve an important function in achieving success. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Traumatic Brain Injury: A medical condition denoting a serious brain injury that occurs as a result of accident or injury; the impact of this disability varies widely but may affect learning, behavior, social skills, and language. (Bursuck, 2006).
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter provides research-based evidence that supports the need of accommodations for special education students and how collaboration is a vital tool between the general educator and the special education teacher in a mainstreamed environment. It is presented in three sections: 1) The need for accommodations. 2) Effective strategies in building learning skills for students with disabilities and skills to support the general educator to instruct the special education student. 3) Need for effective collaboration.

The Need For Accommodations

Students may best be served with teacher support to develop their knowledge and guidance towards best practice. Student confidence level may rise with teacher commitment to scaffold their learning by being effectively engaged in their learning process. Students learn well with a complex and colorful world of experiences in early instruction and active participation that will serve them well as they eventually take responsibility for guiding their academic process and progress in middle and high school.

A number of learning challenges face student’s development with learning instructional methods to gain confidence to promote their development of specific skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will enable one to be academically responsible. Students may lack the skills to identify the need for learning, the respect for purposes, values, and principles through no fault of their own.
If one has not been taught or exposed to a new learning skill, then one cannot be expected to be accountable for the proper response.

Strategies for the learning and memory function include focusing within the function to reinforce what is to be learned; foster it being stored in memory; and provide sufficient organizational aids so as to access or retrieve from memory what was learned. (Hayden, 2006).

Accountability may be directly related to environment, one’s path of learning and teacher-led instruction. (Good, Simmons & Smith, 1996). Prior knowledge may be expected of one’s oral response or active participation between people. A teacher may expect a student to read a passage from a textbook and link the material to one’s own prior knowledge. This process is called *transfer* and represents one of the most powerful principles of learning. (Sousa, 2001). However, this assumption may create pitfalls in the acquisition of learning and transitioning with new or old material. When the reader returns to the text, the previously read material has faded and the child must start again from the beginning. (Sousa, 2004).

There are a variety of ways in how we process and acquire new information. These differences within learning can effect whether or not a person learns what we are teaching, whether or not she will be able to retrieve from memory what has been learned, or whether or not the format of evaluation favors his own particular variation within learning. Children who have difficulties learning to read often experience long-term academic problems. Learners who still cannot read at the end of first grade are likely to remain poor readers in the future. (Good, Simmons & Smith, 1998).
Learning disabilities are conditions that cause a discrepancy between potential and actual levels of academic performance as predicted by the person's intellectual abilities. Learning disabilities involve impairments or difficulties in concentration or attention, language development, or visual and aural information processing. Diagnosis includes cognitive, educational, speech and language, medical, and psychological evaluations. Treatment consists primarily of educational management and sometimes medical, behavioral, and psychological therapy. (Beers, & Porter, 2006).

Specific learning disabilities affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements, or focus attention on a task. These disabilities include problems in reading, mathematics, spelling, written expression or handwriting, and understanding or using verbal and nonverbal language. Students with positive progress in academic learning and behavior may flourish in their acquisition of learning skills. “Positive behavior support is best served by creating a student-centered behavior plan. Eventually, the consumer of a program makes the final decision about whether a program is effective.” (Kroeger, Phillips, Wolf, 1978, p.11).

Collaboration alone is insufficient for substantial paradigm shifts to take place. Major changes emerge from the availability and use of new resources (e.g., Web-based portfolios; Cramer, 2000) and a commitment to institutional change. The changes in the lives of people with disabilities have moved the issue of collaboration from an optional extra to a crucial part of the delivery of services to people with disabilities and their families. (Cramer, 2006).
In another study, the authors investigated students with disabilities in middle schools and high schools receiving fewer accommodations than students with disabilities in elementary schools. (Thurlow, 1998). The study defines accommodations as “Changes in materials or procedures that provide access to instruction and assessments for students with learning disabilities. They are designed to enable students with disabilities to learn without the impediment of their disabilities, and to show their knowledge and skills rather than the effects of their disabilities.” (Thurlow, M., 2002, p. 16). The author cites the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 1997, accommodations (and modifications) for legal considerations. In addition, the author states the language of IDEA does not indicate that the number of students with accommodations will change as the students age. This was highlighted in a table depicting usage of assessment results administered to elementary, middle school, and high school pupils, from various states, tested in writing, reading, math, health, language, science and social studies (Thompson & Thurlow, 1999). In 2002, Thurlow furthered the assessment accommodations issue by researching the data and revealed that those students in the elementary grades receive more accommodations at an early age if the disability was identified, modified and if appropriate strategies were used by educators. It also reflected the middle and high school level students were not using the accommodations and that the downward trend is seen in 95% of the possible comparisons for those upper age groups. (Thurlow, 2002).
Thurlow (2002) asks the question "Is there any reason to believe that students with disabilities who are in the upper grade levels have less need for accommodations?" The data from the study also shows dropout students may be in need of accommodations more than those students enrolled, which may not reflect the true number of those needing accommodations. Thurlow gives no solutions to the questions.

Much of the accommodation information gathered is from tests at the State level. The survey reflects that teachers from various grade levels may have different ideas of the support students need and fostering of specific accommodations. Thurlow states, "The grades in which students with disabilities are involved in transition planning are the same grades in which we see declining numbers of students using accommodations." (Thurlow, 2002, p. 16).

Thurlow's information is not clear as to what is the best practice and approach to help accommodate students in need of special education instruction and how to align assessments with instruction accommodations. However, Thurlow is concerned that the support for transitioning students from elementary grades to middle school and high school is vital to learning and a lack of accommodations may be because the transition plans are not built into their educational pathways. The study does not give enough information as to what are the best accommodations to serve the needs of students in transition.
Effective Strategies in Building Learning Skills for Students with Disabilities

The modifications for students may be few or many and one possible link may be to examine the type of text used in the student's teacher-led instruction. Students reaching the secondary level of education are often administered instruction with a textbook. What modifications have been placed to help the student learn the usage of text and materials set forth in the lesson plan?

A study titled Two History Teachers (Harniss, Caros, Gersten, 2007), involved the use of text, how it was administered at the middle school secondary level, and the successes and failures of the study for those students with disabilities receiving accommodations as they transition to middle school. Two important questions were addressed. What quality of instruction the teacher is teaching to the transitioning student along with proper delivery? What behavior modifications have been passed along as knowledge to the next teacher of instruction for that student?

The problem under investigation was if teachers with history texts assume students have the proper tools for learning and background knowledge. Some teachers may assume that students may be receptive learners. The authors of the study questioned whether or not the students were able to access the content of the text material. The authors also wanted to know if the text clearly taught connections and relationships of the concepts.
The author observed two middle schools. The teachers involved in the study administered textbooks to students with either emotional disturbance (ED) and/or learning disabilities (LD). The materials were a "traditional textbook" and an "experimental text." A special education teacher participated in each classroom's daily lesson plan. Each student was given his or her own copy of the experimental or comparison U.S. History text. In both conditions, teachers' instructional and behavioral approaches were monitored but not controlled.

The study measured oral reading fluency and content acquisition. Observational data was collected for two months and absenteeism affected the data. Content acquisition measure covered both the experimental and traditional texts. The data analysis reflected different findings for each classroom based on varying conditions. The students with disabilities (LD) in the experimental class were better able to access history knowledge due to the curricular design principles, compared to the comparison group, which included all the students with ED.

Though teachers varied the teaching lesson with both conditions, the experimental students were given more time to work independently. The comparison group received more teacher contact direct instruction and less independent work time. Text is important, however, so is the ongoing support in administrating the text with relevant independent practice and consistent follow up of a student's progress towards understanding and retaining the learned material. The comparison group students were often found to be more off task during teacher direct instruction than the experimental group. According to the authors, the types of questions were not clearly linked to what students needed to learn.
The senior authors concluded that the experimental group was able to work more actively and independently because the instruction was structured and clear. The students often practiced and reviewed the concepts learned independently. The comparison group students were given activities that were inappropriately distributed and were asked to supply information that had never been taught, which led to frustration and failure.

The empirical study showed strength in the experimental group because they used skills learned to become better independent learners. However, of the two groups using various texts, the outcome for the students in the comparison group were not fully supported. As an experiment, the comparison group suffered in not gaining the learning tools to become better-educated students, (Harniss, Caros, Gersten, 2007).

Identifying students with undeveloped reading skills needs to be recognized at an early age. The academia of special education supports using successful methodologies for instructors to focus on the prevention of reading disabilities. Therefore, we need to support students literacy with quality textbooks, vocabulary instruction, scaffolding and relevant independent practice. (Harniss, Caros, Gersten, 2007).

During the past 25 years, there has been considerable research on literacy and on instructional activities that promote comprehension of text, as well as on activities for developing students’ writing. Studies have identified important component abilities for reading and writing that need to be addressed, instructional strategies that improve comprehension and writing, and instructional models that teachers can adopt for daily classroom instruction. (Pearson, 1992).
Others studies have identified important research-based “core” comprehension strategies as including: using prior knowledge to make connections to self, the world, other texts; and self-questioning the text to clarify ideas. (Pearson, 1992).

Currently the Department of Education, in the state of California, has placed strong importance on the accountability for students to pass the High School Exit Exam known as CAHSEE. Special Education students are not exempt from taking and passing the CAHSEE in order to receive a High School Diploma. (Becker, Wise & Watters, 2008).

The California Department of Education shows the Assembly Bill 1379 (Brownley) – California High School Exit Exam, found on the website www.2cde.ca.gov, and states a measure passed in September 2007, for that one case only. The AB 1379 would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), in consultation with the Secretary for Education and the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel, to identify alternative criteria and measures by which high school pupils, who are regarded as proficient but unable to pass the high school exit examination, to demonstrate their competence and receive a high school diploma. The SPI was required to report findings and make recommendations for the development of a multiple measures approach to the Legislature.

The AB 1379 does not state which alternative criteria will be identified or the measures for those high school pupils that are regarded as non-proficient and for those unable to pass the high school exit exam. This apparently leaves the criteria open to be researched for alternative assessments to demonstrate student competence.
Special education students with disabilities may face many challenges with obstacles preventing proper engagement in their learning process. How can teachers and staff identify students with learning disabilities? Teachers and staff need the knowledge, skills, and tools to be able to identify the learning disability of the child and use strategies to help the student cope and learn.

A child with learning disabilities may be confronted on how to cope with their own attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and the teacher of the student may be researching which best practice to use for the student with learning disabilities. According to the article “What is ADHD?” (Tynan, 2005), children with ADHD act without thinking, are hyperactive, and have trouble focusing. They may understand what is expected of them but have trouble following through because they cannot sit still, pay attention, or attend to details.

How does one help students with ADHD? If a student has disruptive behavior, a teacher may need to structure the environment by beginning class consistently on time, help the student keep a notebook to generate thoughts on paper, allow for writing skills to improve and provide quiet time. Also, allow for additional time on tests and alternative assignments and homework with parents involvement. (Tynan, 2005).

The author concluded that the classroom should be kept tidy and with minimum distractions and give the student preferred seating to obtain the teacher's attention. Teachers should also instruct the student, study skills and organizational skills to minimize distractions and provide opportunities to participate in cooperative group settings. Children have the right to a public education and special need services according to IDEA and the Section 504.
The article "Auditory Processing Disorder in Children" from www.ldonline.org has many cases supporting research related to learning disabilities. The auditory processing disorder in children is defined as a term "What happens when your brain recognizes and interprets the sounds around you." According to the website children with Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) do not recognize the subtle differences of sound in words and how to decipher what is clear or loud. APD is also known as central auditory processing disorder (CAPD). Children may hear and pass a hearing test, however they may have difficulty expressing sounds in speech and language. Cognitive neuroscientists are studying how the brain recognizes sound and interprets cognitive assembly of thought comprehension with normal and disordered systems.

What is available to treat auditory disabilities? If a student does not process well and needs assistance then a teacher may use active listening skills to assist the learning and retention of knowledge to help the pupil understand the passage or message delivered. Also, use of visual aids, drawings, graphs and photos may guide their learning. Teachers should avoid using the auditory modality only during tests and when appropriate should provide a quiet classroom.

The Learning Disabilities Association of America (2007), states, "Learning disabilities are neurologically-based processing problems. These processing problems can interfere with learning basic reading skills, math and writing. They can also interfere with higher level skills such as organization, time planning, and abstract reasoning."
The specific processing problem may be directly related to input, organization, memory, and output. Students may struggle with identifying shapes, focusing on the same line when reading, coordination with body and hand movements, and eye-hand coordination in catching a ball.

If they have a short attention span for paper and pencil tasks then a teacher or aid should help with note taking, give oral tests, and practice listening skills to help with motor and language disability. The Learning Disabilities website also cites information dealing with sequential memory and how it refers to the ability to recall stimuli in order of observation, rote memory dealing with habit pattern, working short term memory and long term memory.

A general strategy to use with students having low-test scores, who often misplaced things and for those with a short attention span is to teach and re-teach fundamentals to help guide their learning. Suggestions that may help their retention are to increase the amount of time on an activity, summarize the lesson before transitioning to the next step, teach study skill strategies and simplify instructions. A receptive language disorder is explained as “The child has difficulties with understanding what is said to them. The symptoms vary between individuals but, generally, problems with language comprehension usually begin before the age of four years.” (Dorsa, 2008, p.1) The child may interpret a response as being vague or not understood and he or she may be thought of as misunderstanding a message. However, the child may be slower in processing the information and need more time to acquire what is being taught, asked or spoken. Symptoms may be interpreted as low language skills; the inability to understand a story read to them or seems withdrawn and has a lack of interest.
How does one help a child with receptive language disabilities? A teacher, staff member or parent may find it helpful to slow down when speaking, asks the student to repeat directions, uses listening skills as practice and use tri-modal instruction (visual-kinesthetic-auditory).

Many children have learning disabilities in expressive language-disorders of communication and may struggle with receptive language as well. (Logsdon, 2007) The author defines expressive language disorder as a “learning disability affecting communication of thoughts using spoken and sometimes basic written language and expressive written language.” Treatment strategies focus on language therapy to develop the important concepts necessary to communicate. Suggested treatments to help a student with expressive language are practice speaking one-on-one, encourage participation in social situations, teach vocabulary, peer tutoring and share experiences with students and encourage them to share their thoughts.

Need for Effective Collaboration

In another study by Cramer, (2006), she cites “The goal of collaboration is to create a climate of heightened professionalism between professionals, with an indirect impact on student outcomes. So that the students who are served by the professionals can achieve their highest potential.” (Idol & West, 1991, p.72) In 1986, The Holmes Group published Tomorrow’s Teachers and challenged educators to reconsider teacher preparation programs.
The report highlighted the need for more integration of research into teaching practices; encouraged partnerships between classroom teachers, administrators, and teacher educators; and recommended that several principles be followed. Among the principles were reciprocity, or mutual exchange and benefit between research and practice, and experimentation, or willingness to try new forms of practice and structure. Implicit in the notion of abiding by these principles was the commitment to collaboration among professionals. (Cramer, 2006).

The report, titled *A Time for Results*, was the blueprint for the Regular Education Initiative (REI). (Cramer, p. 2006). The Regular Initiative was a movement that focused on ways special educators and general educators could jointly provide services to students with disabilities and promoted placement of students in the general education classroom. The initiative created lots of controversy and turned national attention to collaboration. Some special educators viewed the REI positively, while others became concerned that the REI was a cover-up for diluting services to students with disabilities. (Cramer, 2006). Cramer's (2006) research shows that REI necessitates effective collaboration.

Simpson and Myles (1990) expressed the concern shared by many general educators at the time: "Many general educators feel imposed on by mainstreaming, considering themselves unprepared to teach students with disabilities, and are put upon by mainstreaming practices." (p.4). The REI was the first national push in the direction of collaboration between general educators, special educators, and staff working with students in schools. (Cramer, 2006).
In addition, Simpson & Myles (1996), went on to describe the need to support the discussion, because “a supportive general educational environment for students with disabilities is best developed by combining information with discussion opportunities” (p.5).

As IDEA 2004 strives to improve educational success for children with disabilities, it asserts that success can only be achieved in an environment that supports high expectations for success, increased parent participation, support of the regular curriculum with special education and related services when required, and increased efforts to reduce mislabeling and high drop out rates of minority students with disabilities. (Cramer, 2006).

The authors concluded by recommending “a multifaceted system that takes into consideration shared input, responsibility, and decision making between general and special educators” (Simpson and Myles, 1990, p. 8).

Additionally, Cramer, (2006), outlines a few key points in developing an effective collaboration strategy between special educators and regular educators. She suggests using clarifying questions to give and get information effectively. Expectations should be clearly stated and aligned by all participating parties. The teachers should maintain flexibility and take the time getting to know teaching partners. Finally, Cramer notes that clear role descriptions level the playing field and create greater satisfaction. (Cramer, 2006).
Summary

The understanding of student disabilities is an ongoing process and each lesson is susceptible to a new exposure of identifying the need for teacher-led modifications and strategies. Without the belief in finding a way to communicate the teacher-student system would not be well supported. The collaboration process may be improved with ongoing care, cognitive thought and understanding of a person's abilities in order to help them grasp skills and language to become lifelong learners.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

This project was a self-study of teaching practices and collaboration at a local high school. The purposes of this research study were 1) to determine how collaboration and the uses of a handbook, created for use in this study, on modifications and strategies for use with special needs students support the high school general education teachers and identified special education students in their classrooms; and 2) to identify generalizations for effective collaboration and future use of the handbook in supporting general education teachers who instruct students with disabilities in their classrooms; and 3) to pilot a self-authored handbook on the identifications, modifications and use of effective strategies with general education teachers and their special education students.

Setting

This study took place at a 10 year-old local high school in central California that serves over one thousand ninth through twelfth grade students. The school demographics have remained consistent. As of 2008, the school demographic configuration was approximately 92 percent Hispanic 4 percent White, 1 percent Black, or African American, 1 percent Native American, 1 percent Asian, and 1 percent Pacific Islanders respectively. Approximately 93 percent of the teachers have a credential and 7 percent are on an Emergency Credential Waiver. A large portion of the student body at the high school receives free and reduced lunch under Title I. 98 percent of the students at the school are English Language Learners. The school has consistently missed the state’s Academic Performance Index (API).
Participants and Selection Process

The three anonymous special education students with active IEP’s volunteered and were designated as student A, B and C. They were selected from the special education department and are enrolled in courses taught by the participating general education teachers at the high school. Each observed special education student (one from each subject) has a specific learning disability; however, neither of the students observed were enrolled in a special education class.

The three general education teachers volunteered to participate in the project and help find strategies and modifications to help their students learn. They also indicated they were interested in collaboration. The three anonymous teachers were designated as X, Y and Z.

Teacher Interviews and Surveys

The teacher participants were interviewed and asked to complete a teacher input survey. The survey asked the general education teacher to answer general questions regarding the student’s current learning difficulties, describe any behavior problems, detail which interventions they have tried, and what questions they have. The teacher input survey was completed each week by myself, the researcher, and was used as a pre-meeting topic with the general educators. As a special educator and the researcher, I met for one hour weekly with each of the three teachers to review the survey content.
The general education teacher and I discussed the observed student learning difficulties and results weekly in a post-meeting.

The survey addressed these topics:

1. What learning difficulties is the student exhibiting?

2. Please describe if there are any behavior problems?

3. What interventions have your tried with the student?

4. Intervention results.

5. Common behaviors to work on.

6. What questions do you have?

7. New suggestions.

**Handbook**

Based on a review of the literature and observation process, I created a handbook that teaches various devised researched methods of effective communication and intervention strategies to support the special education teacher, general education teacher, and the special education student. The development for the written text of the handbook was acquired from courses taken in behavior management, reading and writing seminars attended, literature from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Response to Intervention (RTI), behavior modifications, a course on How To Develop A Compliant and Useful IEP, California Resource Specialists & Special Education Teachers (CARS), IDEA, Law 504, English Language Development, Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment (BTSA), Instructional Framework, Public Law 94-142 Education Interventions, Peer-Mediated Teaching and Students With Disabilities; conferences tied
to the Special Education Local Plan Area of Monterey County (SELPA), university courses, texts, journals, and periodicals.

The handbook, created by the researcher, was at times a work in progress from our collaboration as to what would best help the general educator and myself (as a special educator) support the student's learning. The goal was to help increase the likelihood that each student would receive the necessary academic support to facilitate his/her success in learning. The emphasis being on inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classrooms.

Collaboration:

The general educator and myself as the special education teacher, developed a relationship based on trust, respect, and support for each other on how to carry out the learning strategies to support the student. Cooperative teaching methods were used in my educational approach about special education in order for general and special educators to work in a co-active plan with heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings. The cooperative procedures, as suggested by Cramer, were used. such as: clarifying questions, aligned expectations, flexibility, and clear roles. (Cramer, 2006).
The general educators used the handbook weekly with my direction as a guide to help direct an academic approach using instructional methods to support the student learning in conjunction with the student IEP. Each week we identified areas of concern and needs to be addressed and discussed in our meetings. The handbook details more than one approach for each student's special education needs.

**Procedure**

The research project was conducted in the general educators classroom in the areas of social sciences and English. There were 28 students in social studies classroom and 35 students in the English classroom. Class instruction was forty-seven minutes for each subject.

Most students with disabilities were not receiving support that would allow them to be successful in school because their general educator may have been unaware of their disability. Given that the teachers in the selected classes did not know which teaching strategies were most effective with each student, the collaboration across the curriculum was a priority in connecting with the student, the teachers and implementing a strategy most supportive of the student with disabilities. I generated interest by verbally asking each selected general educator to participate in my project.
Observations:

Collaboration meetings were held between participating teachers to discuss the following: Identifying researched based strategies, a teacher made handbook, and answering pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire topics related to identifying modification-teaching strategies to support student learning. Three general education teachers volunteered as participants and I collected the data. The meetings were held weekly for an hour or more in the participating teacher classroom. We discussed the lack of collaboration support in the classroom for the identified students with disabilities, and how our collaboration strategies could possible assist in implementing a strategy to best support the student’s learning needs in the general education classroom.

Each teacher verbally stated their concerns for their student and welcomed agreed upon intervention strategies. Each week, we would share out the progress or problems in regards to each observed students learning disability. Each participating teacher wrote their answers to each of these questions in private. All teachers’ survey’s were addressed in a follow up meeting.

The procedures used for the research project were supported by my background knowledge gained from seminars at work, district workshops, professional development, books, university course work, and research based material from periodicals, magazines, library archives, and the internet. Ten years ago my decision to become a history teacher led me down a path of start collecting educational resources and literature on my journey towards a master’s degree in special education.
Data Collection

Each student’s Individualized Education Plan was discussed between the general education teacher and myself as the case carrier and the researcher. Data was collected from meetings, survey questions, meeting notes, and observations. Classroom data was collected during each forty-eight minute class session. The data collected in the general education classroom was used to identify the specific learning disability in accordance with the Individualized Education Plan. The general educator and I used a pre-chosen teaching strategy prior to each observation by choosing an instructional method strategy identified with each student’s IEP.

After each observed class, I noted the information in my field journal. The general educator and I discussed our collected data in a post-meeting: the student’s learning progress using the field notes, the selected strategy and a post-survey questionnaire. Over two hours of observations notes were reviewed each week for each student observed in each general educator’s classroom. The notes were created to help support findings in the data collection and data analysis. We discussed the results of each student’s specific learning disability, and what modifications worked best to help the student learn. We reviewed the teacher’s expectations in regards to the student and set attainable goals for the student to achieve.
Data Analysis

The project research thesis data analyzed and used in this project focused on collaboration between the general education teacher and myself, as the special education teacher, the use of the handbook, and observations of participating students during prep time at work. To improve student learning, I investigated strategies and practices that support modifications of teaching lessons for the special education student in a classroom setting. The information was field-tested weekly along with the general educator's input. We applied research based teaching strategies taken from the teacher made handbook.

Each week, as the researcher, I would review the findings and analyze the data notes taken, the student IEP specific learning disabilities, discuss teacher goals and data at meetings with colleagues, discuss their teaching styles, discuss modifications, analyze data survey's, our results and transcribe the information. The student work was examined with respect to their learning style, specific learning disability, and interaction during each session. The student disability, behaviors and interaction were also analyzed, reviewed and shared with the student to determine which modification(s) would best be suited to guide the student's learning.
The final formal observations were discussed with the general educator to determine which changes were best suited for each student. The changes were added to my weekly log notes and became the basis for my evaluation criteria and how best to modify the procedures used in the project. Lastly, suggestions were discussed on the future use of the handbook.
CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this research project was first: to give special education students the needed support in the general education classroom by opening the lines of communication with the general education teacher, special education student, and the special education teacher; second: to collaborate effectively with the general education instructor on how to use intervention techniques from suggested ideas for appropriate communication, modifications, and adaptations for students who have special needs; and third: to pilot a self-authored handbook on the identifications, modifications and use of effective strategies with general education teachers and their special education students.

The procedures used to reach this data was an interview questionnaire answered by three general educators and over a six week period weekly classroom observations in the three English and Social Science general education classrooms of nine students with an IEP. All interviews were conducted in the researcher’s classroom, after school for one hour, face-to-face with participants writing their answers to each question in a quiet, well lit classroom. Weekly observation took place in each of the three general educators classrooms by the researcher.

Research Question I

How does collaboration and the use of a created handbook on modifications and strategies for students with special needs support the high school general education teachers and identified special education students in their classrooms?
The collaboration between the general educator and myself, the special education teacher, with the use of the handbook, facilitated necessary accommodations for the learner with special needs. The general educators, students and myself were pleased with the accommodations made, participation and the collaboration process using the handbook.

The first general education participant, Teacher X collaborated with myself using the handbook to observe Student A, an identified student in special education. After observing Student A the teacher stated, “She doesn’t participate in class, is shy, and has no behavior problems.” Due to lack of class participation, Teacher X used an intervention strategy found in the handbook under Expressive Language Disability. She found this strategy to be constructive and helpful in supporting her students learning, including student A. The strategy involved using a “Study Buddy” with the student.

Thurlow, (2002), stressed that students in the upper grade levels need accommodations. Student A was paired up with a fellow student each day for a brief period during reading. Teacher X stated the findings were useful to help Student A. Student A’s higher achievement test score reflected retention of knowledge. Student A expressed to his teacher that he felt comfortable learning with a partner, was more focused on the goal using the “study buddy” strategy, and now participates more in class.

The second general education teacher participant, Teacher Y worked with an identified student in special education, student B. Teacher Y stated her Student B gets distracted by other student’s conversation and often gets frustrated and gives up when he does not comprehend the lesson material.
Student B also has trouble writing and has a short attention span. Teacher Y and I collaborated and read Student B’s current and prior IEP’s. The IEP and psychoeducational report stated the student has a sensory motor skills disability. Teacher Y and I perused the handbook and found under the Receptive Language Disability section that his poor sensory motor skills may be aggravated by his desk location in the classroom. It was also noted that it would be best to provide him with short simple instructions.

Teacher Y moved Student B closer to the front of the classroom and provided him with an outline of the daily lesson plan with short simple notes. Upon her next observation, Teacher Y noticed a significant improvement when engaging Student B with a call and response activity to check for understanding. Teacher Y provided extra time for Student B to complete his next class quiz and noticed his score improved from an 85% to 92%.

The third general education teacher participant Teacher Z, observed Student C and found the student to have difficulty with writing and often misspells words. He also has trouble memorizing material. Teacher Z observations speculated that if Student C was allowed to use the teacher notes during her lectures and on his tests that it would perhaps help in his retention of the content of the lesson. During our collaboration regarding Student C, we identified from his IEP that Student C has a disability in cognition, including association, conceptualization and/or visualization expression. He has a significant discrepancy in basic reading, reading comprehension, and written expression. According to the handbook, students with his disabilities learn best when: a) vocabulary is pre-taught or student is shown where to find all vocabulary words prior to
assigning a chapter to read; b) student use notes when reading the chapter, and c) student is given extra time when taking a test.

The handbook also suggests that if a student is having trouble with writing the student should be given mini-lessons on note taking skills; be given short simple instructions; and have instructions be repeated or paraphrased when not understood.

After my second collaboration meeting with Teacher Z, we agreed to make modifications to her teachings of Student C and noticed his auditory processing improved along with his cognitive memory. She felt his processing of information (metacognition) showed improvement in his active listening skills and participation in choral review. The collaboration was successful in proactively aligning forces for a common purpose: to help the learner with special needs succeed in a regular education classroom.

One advantage of collaboration is that it guides the team to share the burden with problems using effective decision-making, complementary experience, and provide for a wider skill base. Another person brings a set of skills, knowledge and experience. A partnership can look at problems from various angles to achieve better creative solutions and a new perspective with mutual support. However, the cons or disadvantages may be having less autonomy, not having your personal decision agreed upon, or having different decisions make about the future of the student needs. (Cramer, 2000).

Fortunately, the three teachers involved in this project and I worked well with an eagerness to find solutions through use of identifying, collaborating and modifying to reach a common goal to benefit the students in special education. The collaboration project generated more proactive conversations about the students. The general educators
asked specific questions and together we invested in the education of the student. We look forward to more collaboration in the future.

**Research Question II:**

What are some generalizations about collaboration and the use of the created special education handbook for future use in supporting general education teachers who have to instruct students with disabilities in their classrooms?

In answering the second research question all the teachers participants provided suggestions. Teacher X stated she is worried how Student A, being so shy, will do with future class presentations. For future implications, changes will be made in the handbook to address and answer Teacher X concerns. Teacher Y would like to see a power point presentation for our next staff development day. Teacher Z would like to help produce the handbook as a supplemental handbook for all general and special education teaching staff members.

During our post-collaboration meeting, Teacher Y noted that Student B has also become more involved in class participation by asking questions and by raising his hand to volunteer responses to questions. Teacher Y also addressed the second research question by asking, “Is there a way to improve a student’s handwriting once they are in their teenage years? As a researcher and special educator, I will follow up on this question with Teacher Y in the near future.
The implications of the findings from this action research project were positive. Future use of this handbook can be used to better support teachers who want to collaborate effectively and advocate for their students. With the use of the handbook, the collaboration team will also embrace working with other professionals and paraprofessionals in their school district and community. In addition, teachers will continue to communicate, share collaboration ideas with the parents of incoming freshman special education students and family members. Furthermore, the participating teachers will continue to seek out resources in their community to help support student services. These findings support Cramer’s (2006) research, that collaboration is a key that will help unlock many doors.
CHAPTER V

Summary

This research study had three purposes. The purpose of this research project was first: to give special education students the needed support in the general education classroom by opening the lines of communication with the general education teacher, special education student, and the special education teacher; second: to collaborate effectively with the general education instructor on how to use intervention techniques from suggested ideas for appropriate communication, modifications, and adaptations for students who have special needs; and third: to pilot a self-authored handbook on the identifications, modifications and use of effective strategies with general education teachers and their special education students. An ultimate goal was to support general education teachers when teaching special education students in their classrooms.

The participants in this study were high school special education students, high school general educators in English and Social Studies, and myself, the researcher and credentialed special education teacher. The volunteered colleagues for the research study involved three school district English and Social Studies teachers, who had three students with IEP’s in each classroom. The special educations teacher’s role was to collaborate with the general educators and have an open mind to help students achieve their IEP goals and activities through teaching modifications. As a special education teacher at the high school, my duties included collaborating with general educators several times a week to work with students on their IEP goals,
learning development and knowledge acquisition. However, one of the problems was that the school departments were not collaborating on a consistent basis. Many colleagues expressed a need for help from Special Education teachers for themselves and all education departments across the curriculum. The need for collaboration at the school was often spoken in conversation at staff development meetings. One of the purposes of this project was to develop a partnership with teachers in my school who taught students identified in special education programs.

Each volunteer teacher saw the identified students at least once a day in each of their classrooms. The consensus among the teachers was communication was needed about student’s needs and services and how best to serve these needs. The procedures within the study included collecting data to obtain information from the participating teachers and students. Data for this study was collected through discussion at meetings. The participating general educators were asked to complete a questionnaire on the topic of identifying learning disabilities of their students and which strategies and modifications would help improve their students learning modalities for future learning. The questionnaires by the three general educators were completed in a timely manner. The questionnaire (see Appendix A), titled: Teacher Input Survey, asked four questions.

1) What learning difficulties is the student exhibiting?
2) Please describe if there are any behavior problems.
3) What interventions have your tried with the student?
4) What questions do you have?
Each week I met informally with the participating general education teachers in their classroom or mine to collaborate on the survey data and address any concerns. Each teacher brought individually collected archival data notes. Respectfully each teacher spoke without interruption about their concerns for each identified student selected in the study and how to best serve the student’s needs. At the end of each meeting, the participating teacher was given another copy of the questionnaire to complete on another student with an IEP. This allowed for each participating teacher to confidently fill out their responses to the questionnaire and provide more detailed information to each question.

At the second meeting each participating teacher met with me individually to discuss the questionnaire, ideas, and concerns and how to implement new strategies from the handbook that would best serve their students' needs. These procedures were repeated for six weeks and allowed for members of each collaboration team to implement the strategies and determine if the modifications were in fact working successfully or not.

During our seventh week of meetings, we reviewed our results and finalized which outcomes best served the student and which collaboration methods, when practiced by the student, would work best in other areas of study and which modifications should be added to the student IEP. This information also helped determine which modifications would be best to add to the handbook.

The final research step was to gather all the research-based information, questionnaires, notes and experience-based learning into a data folder from which I would choose what methods worked best to be added to the handbook, (see Appendix B), and others to discard as strategies tried, however, not fostered as successful outcomes.
The results of the project, and subsequent discussions that have taken place since, have led to further collaboration among general and special educators. The participating staff has requested a copy of the handbook for each department in the school and one permanent copy placed in the library. Staff department chairs have requested for the department staff and Aides to be educated using the handbook.

The implications of the findings from this action research project were all positive. In summary, the piloting of the handbook was an initial study of how a project can help general educators teaching special education students in an academic setting. Special education teaching and teaching in general can be challenging, especially when multiple modifications may be needed to support learning using various methodologies. As a result, our staff is united and became a stronger team of teachers; a team whose collaboration experience in using the handbook ideas is dedicated to helping students acquire and build upon the skills necessary to be productive self-confident students. The collaboration teamwork will further become a stronger network of support with help from the new participants, staff volunteers, community and parents to follow through on helping their children and the teachers involved.

Although the research project findings provided positive results and support for our students' learning disabilities, additional research is recommended. The implications of the findings for further research include 1) acknowledging incoming students into the programs, by sharing the IEP goals with general educators; 2) training teachers, staff and
parents, with information from the handbook; and 3) special educators provide "coaching
time" for general educators who need the support to implement the new strategies. The
future of the handbook is to focus on providing an educational format using the handbook
as an ongoing and ever-changing living text. Participants should keep an open mind
using the handbook in collaboration of learning and teaching.

To further this work, it would be beneficial to print multiple copies of this
handbook and circulate among the school district departments and community schools.
The participating schools using the handbook would best be served training for a few
hours and acclimating themselves with the materials to determine how best to serve their
population of students. Once established, educators, parents and students would
hopefully begin to see positive new changes, and stronger communication and
collaboration among themselves for the success of our students.
References


California Department of Education: Assembly Bill 1379 – California High School Exit Exam. Retrieved from the website www.2cde.ca.gov


Harniss, M., Caros, Gersten, (2007). Two History Teachers:

Impact of the design of U.S. history textbooks on content acquisition and academic engagement of special education students: an experimental investigation. *Journal of Learning Disabilities.* 40, 100-111.


Sheridan Press


www.learningdisabilities.about.com


Receptive Language Disorder. Retrieved December 15, 2007, from the website

www.disabilityonline.vic.gov.au


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

TEACHER INPUT SURVEY
The teacher data will be collected from the following survey:

Teacher Input Survey

Teacher Name ___________________________ Data ___________________________

Student Name ___________________________

What learning difficulties is the student exhibiting?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Please describe if there are any behavior problems?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

What interventions have you tried with the student?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

What questions do you have?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT HANDBOOK
Identification, Modifications And Strategies

For Students With Disabilities
COMMON BEHAVIORS RELATED TO LEARNING DISABILITIES

May include the following:

1. Low test scores
2. Difficulty discriminating size, shape and color
3. Reversals in writing and reading
4. Clumsy/awkward
5. Hyperactivity
6. Poor Visual-Motor coordination
7. Difficulty copying material
8. Slower than slow
9. Poor organizational skills
10. Easily confused by directions
11. Disorganized
12. Poor Short-Term or Long-Term Memory
13. Obsessive/Compulsive behaviors
14. Easily and Often Frustrated
15. Poor social skills/judgment/inappropriate behavior
16. History of slow development or motor-speech skills
17. Easily led by peers
18. Overly Distractible/Difficulty staying on task
19. Makes many poor decisions
20. Difficulty with Time, Sequencing, Prioritizing

• When considering these behaviors, it is important to keep in mind that:

1. All of us may have two or three of these symptoms to some degree.
2. No one will have all of these symptoms.
3. What is important is that a student has behaviors to the extent that it seriously impedes their academic progress.
ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPER-ACTIVITY

Disruptive behavior
Fidgets/squirms
Easily distracted
Often interrupts (rude)
Difficulty finishing work
Cannot sustain attention
Excessive talking
Moves about classroom
Generally awkward
Socially inept/no friends
Poor usage of time
Often misplaces things

AUDITORY DISABILITY

Poor hearing
Unclear speech
Mispronounces words
Immature sentences
Noise bothers them
Can't repeat directions
Gives very short answers
Poor listening skills
Poor oral review
Poor class participation
Doesn't follow directions
Easily becomes confused

VISUAL PERCEPTION DISABILITY

Don't remember things seen
Poor paper & pencil tasks
Loses place while reading
Speak better than write
Many errors in copying
Poor note taking
Spelling contains reversals
Omits or skips questions
Written work poorly organized
Poor mapping & labeling
Draws and graphs poorly
Poor oral reading
EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE DISABILITY

Immature sentences
Poor class participation
Stammers, pauses and/or stutters
Seems shy and withdrawn
Better-written communication
Avoids eye contact
Limited to short responses
Choppy, abrupt speech
Exhibits passive helplessness
Refuses to do oral assignments

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE DISABILITY

Immature sentences
Poor listening skills
Poor note taking
Seems shy and withdrawn
Short attention span
 Doesn't understand question
Low vocabulary skills
Doesn't follow directions
Fails to "get started"
Needs directions over and over
Doesn't understand written directions

SHORT/LONG-TERM MEMORY

Short attention span
Poor test scores
Low persistence level
Often misplaces things
Appears disorganized
Poor problem solving
Limited prior knowledge
Forgets yesterday's work
Difficulty with multiplying and dividing numbers
Low confidence
ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPER-ACTIVITY

Disruptive behavior
Fidgets/squirms
Easily distracted
Often interrupts (rude)
Difficulty finishing work
Cannot sustain attention
Excessive talking
Moves about classroom
Generally awkward
Socially inept/no friends
Poor usage of time
Often misplaces things

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY

1. Begin class immediately. Use bell-to-bell instruction.
2. Ask students to keep a notebook
3. Minimize distractions - Keep environment safe and tidy
4. Monitor independent practice
5. Give student very, very little "free time"
6. Give preferential seating - student has your attention
7. Short assignments - assist with transitions
8. Allow them to stand and have some movement
9. Using listening skills and provide rewards and incentives
10. Give additional time for tests (after school, at lunch, tomorrow)
11. Keep an orderly and structured classroom
12. Monitor attention span. Ask for their attention (Practice)
13. Allow for alternative assignments (home study with parent)
14. Teach study skills and organizational skills
15. Have them participate in cooperative study groups
AUDITORY DISABILITY

1. Student does not hear well.
2. Student has expressive speech problems and often mumbles. slurs words.
3. Student mispronounces words.
4. Student says overly simple sentences.
5. Student bothered by classroom noise.
6. Student cannot repeat oral directions.
7. Student gives many one-word answers.
8. Student has poor listening skills.
9. Student performs poorly during oral review.
10. Student says "What?" and "Huh?"
11. Student has poor class participation.
12. Student does not follow verbal directions.
13. Student becomes confused when given verbal directions.

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS WITH AUDITORY DISABILITIES

1. Rule out physical (hearing) problems.
2. Actively practice listening skills.
3. Use photos and other visual aids.
4. Incorporate cooperative learning.
5. Assist the student during transitions.
6. Demand attention of the student. Wait until they are listening.
7. Use demonstrations and have them nearby the student.
8. Provide an outline.
9. Move them to the front.
10. Use drawings and graphs.
11. Avoid usage of auditory skills during testing.
12. Encourage student participation in choral review.
13. Check for understanding and following directions.
14. Use a video camera.
15. Provide a "quiet" classroom when appropriate.
VISUAL PERCEPTION DISABILITY

Short attention span for paper and pencil tasks
Do they need glasses? Do they squint or hold paper too close?
Does the student lose their place while reading?
Student cannot write as well as they can speak
Poor note taking ability
Have reversals in spelling
Hands in work with omissions because they didn't see them
Written work is poorly organized
Poor mapping and labeling ability
Draws, graphs and/or illustrates poorly
Reads poorly -especially orally
Doesn't like paper/pencil work
**Writes slowly when asked to write**
Poor formation of letters
Difficulty remembering things they see

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS WITH VISUAL PERCEPTION

1. Practice observing (film)
2. Color code chapter and/or units
3. Practice mapping and labeling
4. Provide examples of good work
5. Have peer help with note taking
6. Use large print in small amounts on overhead
7. Practice drawing in detail
8. Provide a written review of test material
9. Give some oral tests
10. Provide preferential seating
11. Give assignments verbally -then repeat them
12. Use a tape recorder
13. Practice listening skills
14. Use tri-modal instruction (Visual-Touch Memory)
15. Videotape them -then they can watch themselves on film
16. Have them tell what is missing from a picture
RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE DISABILITY

1. Poor listening skills
2. Tends to isolate themselves
3. Short attention span when asked to listen
4. Poor note taking ability
5. Doesn't answer the questions as they are asked
6. Very poor at writing dictations
7. Low vocabulary scores
8. Doesn't follow directions
9. Doesn't "get started" like other students
10. Speaks in sentences that are not age appropriate
11. Often needs directions repeated

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS WITH RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE DISABILITIES

1. Slow down and/or speak up
2. Ask them to paraphrase what they just heard (Practice)
3. Ask student to repeat directions
4. Use preferential seating and demand their attention
5. Allow them to whisper "questions and answers" to a study buddy
6. Practice note taking skills
7. Give short simple instructions
8. Limit noise or distractions
9. Use listening skills as practice
10. Shorten teacher presentation and lengthen activities
11. Use tri-modal instruction
12. Demand class participation
13. Read to the student -then ask for an oral report
EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE DISABILITY

- Students may be ESL or hearing impaired. When in doubt, please refer student for hearing and speech (LAS) testing.

1. Student pauses, stammers or stutters.
2. Seems to be shy.
3. Speaks in poorly structured sentences.
4. Student is substantially better at written communication.
5. Poor eye contact; withdrawn.
6. Limits the length of their responses.
7. Poor class participation.
8. Short abrupt expression.
10. Refuses assignments such as speeches.

HOW TO HELP A STUDENT WITH EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE DISABILITY

1. Practice speaking one-on-one.
2. Encourage participation.
3. Use choral review.
4. Teach vocabulary.
5. Model sentence syntax.
6. Have student whisper answers.
7. Develop a "study buddy."
8. Use pictures as stimulants.
9. Teach them to observe and report.
10. Share experiences with student and encourage them to share theirs.
11. Work on sentence completion exercises.
12. Begin participation with small co-op learning groups.
13. Ask them to make a drawing, graph and then explain it.
14. Hold discussions about interesting current events.
15. Student dictates into a tape recorder.
SHORT AND LONG TERM MEMORY DISABILITY

1. Poor test scores.
2. Low persistence level.
3. Often misplaces things.
4. Appears disorganized.
5. Short attention span.
6. Poor problem solving.
7. Limited prior knowledge.
8. Forgets yesterday's work.
9. Difficulty with multiplication and division.
10. Low confidence and high frustration.

HOW TO HELP A STUDENT WITH MEMORY DISABILITIES

1. Teach and re-teach
2. Review and re-call
3. Reproduce from memory a drawing they made yesterday
4. Use games like concentration
5. Reduce the amount to memorize into groups of five or less items
6. Simplify instructions
7. Allow time to memorize during class time (practice)
8. Provide a simple outline of test material
9. Increase the amount of activities
10. Expect or require one-on-one or after school help
11. Teach study skill strategies
12. Be sure to summarize your lesson
13. Use photos for visual memory
14. Color code chapters, units and/or vocabulary
15. Show work well done
RESEARCH BASED EFFECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES

1. Find a way to model everything.
2. Use pictures and photos and other visual aids.
3. Show students work well done.
4. Increase and vary activities - shorten direct instruction.
5. Provide outlines, webs, advance organizers, and teacher's notes.
6. Check for understanding (Praise, prompt and leave).
7. Encourage and reward questions.
8. Repeat instructions/directions - then write them and have the students repeat them.
9. Daily review of key or core concepts.
10. Everyone participates every day.
11. Stimulate attention with a variety of materials.
12. Use prior knowledge as much as possible.
13. Teachers often go too fast - slow down.
15. Give alternative assignments, extra credit, and alternative evaluation when needed.
16. We hold class - we teach individuals.
17. Require a notebook/binder/portfolio/journal.
18. List goals and assignments on the board each day.
19. Provide quiet study time and give one-on-one assistance.
20. Examine antecedents of any undesirable outcomes.
22. Keep trying cooperative learning along with study buddies, and whispering skills.
23. Teach students how to take notes. Give examples of your abbreviations.
24. Over-plan. Work bell to bell. Little or no "free time."
25. Summarize each lesson (last few minutes of class). Closure.
BEST PRACTICES

1. As a teacher your #1 job is to help students learn.

2. Teachers do everything they can to simplify and speed up the learning process.

3. Provide a student-centered education where the student is encouraged to "perform", "star" and "show their stuff."

4. Every student should have the opportunity to excel.

5. Teachers turn learning into a series of easily attained goals.

6. We learn by doing. Provide appropriate activities.

7. Use encouragement and avoid direct criticism.

8. Evaluation is a multi-faceted on-going process that involves and respects the views of others.

9. Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise.

10. Often teachers and students need more time to reflect, think, and consider.

11. Don’t be misled. Supply the learning to suit the student.

12. "Busy work" is boring. So is being predictable. Create variety.

13. Never give up on a student. It’s your job to find another way.

14. We function best as a team. We are in this together. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

15. Students learn when they want to learn. Genuine caring is the bridge to learning.


17. Communication is the “key” to successful instruction.

18. Shared Resources will dramatically enhance education they want to learn. Genuine caring is the bridge to learning.