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INSTRUCTIONAL DISABILITY: VOICES OF THE
RESOURCE SPECIALISTS ON THE DESIGN OF
THE RESOURCE SUPPORT PROGRAM

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Christy Vasquez Martinez

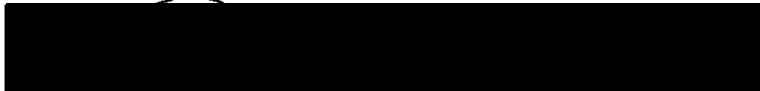
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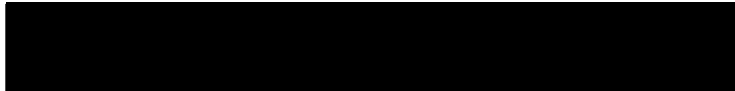
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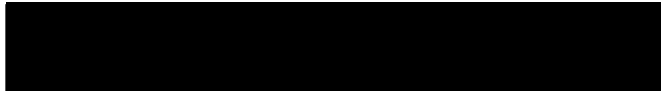
by
Christy Vasquez Martinez
June 2013

Approved by:


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ABSTRACT

No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disability Education Act have established rights for students with a learning disability; however, there is something unexplained that has not been accounted for in educational research that allows learning disabled students to struggle, underperform, and drop out at the level they are today. Research studies have identified concerns for students with a learning disability including low performance on standardized tests in reading and language arts, high dropout rates, and high representation of those incarcerated within the juvenile and prison systems. Even with support in the resource support program with a resource specialist, students with a learning disability are struggling to acquire proficient reading skills and perform at the same academic level as their general education peers. Through qualitative descriptive research, resource specialists shared their experiences in designing and planning support in addition to the details about the materials and strategies used when teaching learning disabled students. Findings in this study reveal the factors that influence the resource specialist's design of the resource support program. The specialists voiced the

obstacles they face when planning instruction for their students and how support is altered in order to meet the needs of the general education teachers and administration over that of the student with a learning disability.

Recommendations for practice include requiring understanding of special education on the part of the school site administrator; make available appropriate support materials; and re-evaluating how equal access to curriculum is designed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This accomplishment would not have been possible without the tremendous love and support of many people in my life. I am indebted to all of you and offer deep love and appreciation for your role.

My mentors nurtured my passion for education by setting an example of what great leadership can do. I am lucky for the ways you have shared your passion, taken me under your wing, and made this level of education a dream I could reach.

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our family your number one priority. You stayed at home making sure Lisa, Diana, Gina, and I were up and ready for school, and you were always there waiting for us with hugs and kisses when the school day was over. You got us through homework time, prepared dinner nightly, and tucked us into our beds with "carinos." Now as a teacher, and mother of my own girls, I am in more awe of you today than I have ever been. You are the most amazing woman I know. I love you! Dad, you were my first and loudest supporter in life. Ever since I can remember, you believed in me. Something amazing happens to a little girl when her dad looks her in the eyes and tells her she can do whatever she puts her mind to. I believe that today more than ever, yet I am realistic because of your constant reminders that accomplishments do not come easy and, "The most difficult things in life bring the most satisfaction." Our relationship is unique and through our connection, I have been able to set my sights on absolutely anything knowing you would be there to give advice and be the first to shower with me love and excitement when my journey was over. I love you with all my heart!

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laughed, cried, and then laughed some more. Our bond is unique. I thank you for always believing in me whenever I set out for a new journey. This particular journey called for extra times of support and advice. Not only were you there for me during these past three years, but you helped in various ways with my husband and girls while I was at school or living behind my computer. I love you sisters!

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always in my corner supporting my choices and reminding me why I chose them. You gave advice, brought me back to reality when I needed the help, and continuously pushed me to strive for more. I love you with all my heart and hope to have the opportunity to give back to you the dream-support you have given to me. I love you Roy!

I would like to end by dedicating my dissertation to the most amazing little girls I know, my daughters, Liliana Taylor and Ava Christy. Girls, my hope is that this dissertation is a reminder of the power and importance of education, in addition to a symbol of determination. Even as little girls, I already see your love and passion for life and I pray that you embrace that passion and go with it.

Liliana, you mean the world to me. You are caring, sensitive, inquisitive, and smart. I love the way you care about others feelings and the silliness inside you that makes your face light up. Those moments warm my heart and I look forward to watching you grow and pave your way in life. Go for it all sweetheart . . . it can be done. I love you!

Ava, you are the light in my day and stars in my night. You are determined, good-humored, and bright. I love

your fun-loving ways and how you light up a room. You make people smile with your sense of humor and silly faces. You have a determination about you that I know will take you where you want to go. Do not let that go Sweetie—I believe in you! I love you!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
CST	California State Test
CST	Child Study Team
EAHCA	Education for All Handicapped Children's Act
EHA	Education for Handicapped Act
ELA	English Language Arts
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
PL 94-142	Public Law 94-142
RSP Teacher	Resource Specialist or Resource Teacher
RSP	Resource Support Program
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
SST	Student Study Team

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States has undergone evolutionary change in student population, teaching practices and strategies, state and federal standards, and accountability from elementary levels through higher education. A constant within this evolution is the purpose and intent of public education. Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, and Thomas (2009) state legislative action "is charged with providing a uniform, thorough and efficient, or adequate system of public education" (p. 2) and all fifty states are required to educate students and to ensure an educated citizenry.

The promise to educate all children includes teaching children of many different cultures, religious backgrounds, language, race, creed, and disability. In 1990 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted to protect students with disabilities. The law mandated learning disabled students receive Free Appropriate Public Education (F.A.P.E.). Various types of special education settings have been established in public schools, based on student need in order to support an

appropriate education. Some of these settings include general education with the resource support program (RSP), special day class (SDC), and the severely handicapped classroom (SH). This study focuses on one of these settings, the resource support program. Those served in this setting include students with specific learning disabilities (LD) in the general education classroom receiving academic support through the resource support program (RSP).

Currently the resource support program (RSP) is the most commonly used placement of least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with a learning disability. The majority of LD students in public education are spending most of their day in the general education classroom (National Center for Educational statistics, 2010) receiving the resource model support from a resource specialist. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protects learning disabled children and ensures that they have an equal opportunity to acquire an education and learn state standards with accommodations/modifications as specified in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

While students with learning disabilities are in the general education setting and receiving support in the RSP

room, it is important to recognize that these students spend most of their day facing academic struggle. Students with learning disabilities have many difficulties in school because their disability affects academic performance. "One area that is particularly hindered by learning disabilities is reading skills. Students with a LD may not respond to the same type of reading instruction and practice as general education students" (Sze, 2000, p. 142). Special education students are reading two-to-three years below grade level and often never learn how to read. This reality is the catalyst of extreme frustration for students, parents, and educators. The Inland Empire Report, created by the Public Policy Institute of California and funded by the James Irvine Foundation, projected that by 2015 only 29% of the general population will have received a high school diploma (Johnson, Reid, & Hayes, 2008, p. vii) and current statistics provided by the California Department of Education (2011a) revealed that 24.7% of students in special education dropped out of school. Conclusions from these studies strongly suggest that even though the design of support for special education students has evolved, current educational practices are not appropriately meeting

their needs including those receiving special education services struggling with learning disabilities.

In an attempt to increase accountability and raise student success rates, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated all school districts employ "highly qualified" teachers to teach in both general and special education classes. Special education teachers are required to have research-based, educational knowledge and certification in how to teach students with special needs. According to the California Department of Education (2011b), the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act aligned "highly qualified" requirements for special educators with the same requirements for general education teacher-requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act.

The description of a highly qualified teacher includes resource specialists working with students with learning disabilities and demonstrates that special education students are receiving education from teachers trained and qualified. Yet, academic growth and reading achievement for LD students continues to decline. Arguably, it is time educators take a closer look at the current practices and planning decisions taking place for LD students under the

RSP model. Furthermore, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of support and instruction of LD students in the form of individualized planning.

All decisions made by the Department of Education through IDEA and NCLB directly affect special education students. The intentions of federal mandates are to protect special education students and ensure equal access; however, learning disabled students are at a disadvantage because of some of the decision-making. "The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has had profound implications for teachers of young learners across the nation, especially those with special needs" (Whitfield, 2005, p. 45). Special Education teachers, specifically resource specialists are limited by the curriculum, or lack of curriculum, used in the resource support program. The NCLB Act requires schools to use "scientifically based research to inform their classroom practice" (McMurrer, 2007, p. 2). On November 5, 2008, the California State Board of Education adopted a small selection of acceptable materials for Reading and Language Arts instruction. McMurrer further explains that the current adoption does not fully support student-needs in special education. One problem with adopted core curriculum textbooks is reading

level. The readability level of core language arts and math textbooks is too difficult for the LD student reading below grade level. Learning disabled students reading two-to-three years below grade level cannot access the reading and learning process in the same manner as their non-disabled peers because the materials are written at a level of frustration. For any student to have access to learning, reading levels need to be appropriate (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Iaquinta, 2006; Kim, 2008; Massengill, 2004; Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005). Reading material with less than 93% known is referred to in education as the frustration level because it is too difficult to enable student understanding. This level causes discouragement and frustration for the student. Reading instruction given at a child's individual instructional level, according to reading research, supported reading and reading fluency. (Burns, 2002; Roberts & Shapiro, 1996; Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro & Ager, 1992). In order for a resource specialist to teach students to read, in addition to teaching grade level standards, the RSP teacher must have the opportunity to utilize any reading materials that meet a student's instructional level of reading (Applegate, Applegate, & Turner, 2010; Kersten & Pardo, 2007). Such reading material

choices need to include culturally appropriate text. Research in reading acquisition details the importance of student-connection to text because students connect to learning through culture, language, and family (Ebe, A. E., 2012; Meachan, S., 2001). Demographic statistics in California report that 59.8% of students identified with a specific learning disability are Hispanic (CDOEa, 2011). With Hispanic students representing the majority of the student population in California schools, and in special education, textbooks need to be representative of the population. California students, specifically those in the Inland Empire, a large area of Southern California, do not have an equal opportunity to connect to the literature within the choices of California's adopted curriculum. Without cultural connections and level appropriateness, students are less likely to utilize background knowledge that supports learning (Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Meier, 2003).

Consequently, students, parents, teachers, educational leaders, and communities are facing a major issue. Special education students receiving resource support services in California are not reaching proficient levels in English Language Arts and mathematics, and are not proficiently learning how to read. (Applegate, Applegate, & Turner,

2010; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Kersten & Pardo, 2007; Meier, 2003) In 2011, only 8% of eleventh grade students with a disability scored proficient on the California State Test in English Language Arts, and 43% of disabled students scored far below basic (CDOEa, 2011). Such shocking results expose conditions where in what is currently taking place in the name of instruction for learning disabled students, as dictated by NCLB and IDEA, is not working. Education is faced with a time of extreme need to step back and analyze the issues taking place for students with a learning disability. Additionally, a time in education has come where all need to be reminded that the federal government has made a promise to educate all students. Furthermore, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act states students with an identified disability shall be provided the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education and entitled to modifications and accommodations necessary to access that education (Salend 1999: Yell, 1988). Is it not appropriate, then, to ask if all students have access to this kind of education? What about students receiving extra support under the current conditions of the resource support model? Are these students receiving an appropriate

education? Is the promise of educational success made to these students being kept?

Statement of the Problem

Education is faced with serious concerns for learning disabled students that needs to be addressed. First, outcomes on high-stakes standardized assessments for students in special education has not met the proficiency levels set forth by NCLB. Additionally, dropout rates for LD students remain high. In fact, during the 2010-2011 school year 24.7% of special education students in California dropped out of school. Furthermore, individuals with a LD are ending up in the juvenile corrections and prison systems. In California the inmate population contains an average of 50% diagnosed with a learning disability (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005). With such shocking realities for students with a learning disability, educational failure and school dropout rates of special education students is a societal concern. This puts focus back on the delivery of educational services for these students. Since the RSP model is the most common program placement for students with a learning

disability, the role of the resource specialist and how support is given to the LD student needs reexamination.

Purpose of the Study

There are large achievement gaps between students with learning disabilities when compared to their same-age peers without a disability which creates concern for how LD students are accessing education. Educational settings such as the resource support program are in place and taught by highly qualified resource specialists, yet the gap continues to exist and is growing. Gloeckler & Daggett (2004) describe the gap when they warn that education today must avoid the possibility of students with disabilities once again being set aside from the world of high expectations and rigorous curricula that must be available to all students if they are to be competitive, independent, and capable of participating fully in this complex world in which we live. (p. 4)

Even with support models put in place for learning disabled students, such as the resource support program taught by resource specialist, students continue to struggle academically. There is a need to look closely at how individualized instruction is taking place. There is a

need for better understanding of what is taking place in regards to planning, instruction and meeting individualized needs for LD students (Gloeckler & Daggett, 2004). The No Child Left behind Act of 2001 has adversely affected resource specialists today. As "the evolution of accountability for education programs for students with disabilities has slowly inched its way . . . NCLB has presented an unprecedented dilemma for special education programs" (p. 1). The reality is that resource specialists have pressure in planning and supporting students with learning disabilities from many directions. The pressure stems from federal guidelines mandating IEPs that in fact many not allow for true individualized planning.

The objective of this research study is to examine the various contextual factors that influence the instructional decisions made by the resource specialist and how that guides planning for instruction. Additionally, the research provides a description of the material and strategies used currently by the resource specialist when supporting learning disabled students.

Research Questions

Qualitative research is guided by research questions to understand the meaning of situations and accounts of experiences that enable the researcher to discover unexpected influences and phenomena, generating new grounded theories (Maxwell, 2005). This study proposes a narrative inquiry of resource specialists teaching students who have been identified with a learning disabilities. The following research questions will be examined in order to predict and explain the various factors that play a role in the RSP teacher's planning and instruction.

1. What contextual factors inform and influence the resource specialist in the planning and delivery of service to learning disabled students from the perspective of the resource specialist?
2. What materials and strategies do resource specialists use in the resource support classroom for students with learning disabilities from the perspective of the resource specialist?

Theoretical Underpinnings: Descriptive Research

A qualitative research design allowed the researcher to make sense of experiences and narratives and the ways in

which they intersect (Glesne, 2011). Thus, the study utilized descriptive research methods to answer the research questions guiding this study. This type of research involved identifying characteristics of the phenomenon of resource specialists' planning and the possible correlations around the contextual factors that influence the planning and instruction of students with learning disabilities. A small sample size provided an in-depth examination of participants in qualitative research designs (Maxwell, 1996).

Assumptions

There are several assumptions included in this study. It is assumed that resource specialists are directed by the school district to accommodate and modify curriculum using California state adopted textbooks, Open Court or Houghton Mifflin, in English Language Arts. Another assumption in this research study is that resource specialists are required to adhere to the school site design of resource support, as push-in, pull-out or a combination of the two, as set forth by the administration on site. Additionally it is presumed that this study would assist in answering questions as to why learning disabled students continue to

struggle even with special education support; and lastly, it is assumed that this study will support change in the design of the resource support program.

Limitations

First, the researcher used a snowball sampling technique that may create limitations in the generalizability to the overall population. This technique is described in more detail in chapter three. Though these resource specialists represent a diverse special education teacher population, they may not match similar populations in surrounding school districts. Additionally, the generalizability of the influences that affect the resource specialist's planning and instruction of learning disabled students that emerged may have been restricted by the questions asked within the interview and the willingness of the resource specialists to share their story. Nevertheless, the information provided through the resource specialists' voices may help identify the struggles resource specialists face in appropriately meeting a student's IEP and program failures caused by contextual factors that need to be addressed. It may provide a framework for improvements in the resource program design

and the flexibility needed in the materials and strategies a resource specialist is approved to use in meeting the needs of learning disabled students.

Delimitations

This study did not ask nor answered the research question, "Is the resource specialist adhering to legal requirements of the learning disabled student's IEP?" This study did not explore the quality of instruction given by the resource support teacher. Additionally, this research did not examine the relationships of variables known to impact student success such as student-teacher connectedness and collaboration between the general and special education educator. As a result, this study is strictly explored the various influences on decision-making when planning instruction for the learning disabled students and materials and strategies used by the resource support teacher.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Special Education History and Law

Special education and the support provided for disabled children comes from a history of stories discovered, revealed, and told over decades. Many of the stories unveil a dim reality of fate for disabled individuals (Department of Education, 2010). The stories are now the vehicle for on-going reform in special education. Students with disabilities have been promised that education is attainable. The United States Department of Education declares it's mission is to support achievement for all and to better train students for competition in society (Department of Education, 2010).

Witherell and Noddings write, "working case by case, we can build an impressive argument that something is wrong" (p. 80) and by doing so, we move people into action. Historically, that is the case for students with disabilities. In the 1960s and 1970s national attention began to focus on the educational system's failure to provide equal access to all students (U.S. Department of

Education, 2000). A population of people with mental retardation, mental illnesses, and significant disabilities were placed in a setting that did not meet their needs, socially or academically (Department of Education, 2000). During this period, landmark decisions increased educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Court decisions began to bring action. The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth (1971) and Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972) gave legal responsibility of educating children with disabilities to every state and locality. Investigation during this time revealed that close to 200,000 individuals with moderate/severe disabilities were placed in restrictive settings with minimal amounts of food, clothing, and shelter (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Educators across the nation began to realize the promise of student achievement and the attainment of skills needed in life in order to be successful was not being fulfilled for students with disabilities.

Public Law 94-142

President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicap Children's Act (EAHCA) in 1975 as Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142). The rights of all children are included in the

14th Amendment to the United States Constitution. Public Law 94-142 promised a free, appropriate public education to all children with a disability in the United States. Federal law in the United States defines "disability" in its December 2010 report titled; *"Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment."* The definition is as follows:

Section 1401 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (Act or IDEA) defines a -child with a disability as a child with mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to as -emotional disturbance), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairment, or specific learning disability, deaf blindness or multiple disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

(California Department of Education, 2011)

Children from the ages 3 to 21 years are protected under PL 94-142. In addition, the Education for the

Handicapped Act (EHA) amendment in 1986 provides protection for children from birth. Mandated services and programs are available for early interventions. Such early intervention programs are in place to provide early support to disabled children in order to foster academic and social difficulties that lie ahead. The passage of EAHCA (PL 94-142) recognized a right, supported by the constitution, to an education for all students with disabilities (Salend, 1999; Yell, 1998). The law requires (a) a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), (b) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), (c) based on an IEP.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act

In 1997, the 1983 Amendments of Education for the Handicapped Act (EHA) (PL 98-199) and the 1990 Amendment to EHA (PL 101-476) changed their name to what is now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and IDEA Amendments of 1997. At this time through the signing of EAHCA, students with disabilities were now receiving the public education promised. As education continued to evolve, better practices were taking place, progress monitoring developed, standards were created and policies were being enacted. Students with disabilities were a part of public education; however, these students were now

being excluded from educational reform and mainstream initiatives. Furthermore, as new standards and requirements for teaching and learning were developed by policy makers the needs of students with disabilities were disregarded (Kochlar, West, & Taymans, 2000). For example,

inaccurate tests led to inappropriately labeling and ineffectively educating most children with disabilities . . . and resources were not available to enable children with significant disabilities to live at home and receive an education at neighborhood schools in their community. (Department of Education, 2000, p. 2)

In addition, some students with disabilities were given little exposure to the same curriculum and content their same-age peers, without a disability, were learning (Maccini & Gagnon, 2002). Since these students were not being held to the same educational standards as their peers, the exclusion of students with disabilities from mainstream educational reforms was another form of inequality. To add to further inequality, it was also revealed that teachers were not being held to the same accountability levels for teaching students with disabilities and furthermore, students with disabilities were not a part of many accountability measures

taking place in the school system (Thurlow, House, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000).

On January 8, 2002, President Bush mandated increased accountability for all students with the signing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This federal mandate of No Child Left Behind had an impact on educational decisions made in classrooms of both the general and special education settings. The stated purpose of increased accountability was to ensure that all children had a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. It also purposed that the achievement gap between students who were disadvantaged, had disabilities, or represented diverse cultural, or ethnic groups and their peers would close by attaining a level of proficiency on high stakes tests. In order to meet the proficiency standards set by NCLB various provisions were mandated. These mandates included Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which required all students to make adequate yearly progress towards the goal of proficiency on state tests creating statewide assessments for all students, including those with disabilities. In order to hold schools accountable for student performance highly qualified teachers with credentials including content area certifications and special education certification for

those teaching in special education classrooms were expected to be found in every classroom, general and special education; and scientifically based instruction was required to be used in every classroom. This included instruction to be used in scientifically based research involving rigorous, systematic, and objective methods (Granger, 2008; Purcell, East, & Rude, 2005; Yell, Drasgow, & Lowrey, 2006).

With the establishment of No Child Left Behind, its creators put forward that the high standards and accountability measures for students, general and special education, would positively impact student achievement and academic gains would take place in public schools (Gloeckler, L., & Daggett, W., 2004; Sze, S., 2010; Whitfield, P., 2005). However, the results of academic achievement scores from 2002 to current have not met the adequate yearly progress expected. In fact, nationally "more than eight million students in grades 4-12 read below grade level" (Hart & Risley, 2011, p. 1).

Educational Support Today

Decades of struggles, changes, mandates and law for students who have difficulty learning in school has brought about a monitoring system that attempts to support all

struggling students. General education students who struggle to meet standards set at grade level go through a monitoring process by a team of educators and parents/guardians, usually referred to as the Student Study Team (SST) or Child Study Team (CST).

The student study team discusses possible reasons why a general education student is struggling and ways in which the student can be better supported by educational staff and parents. General education students struggling in school are not necessarily dealing with an undiagnosed disability. Students may need interventions to support learning which can include more time to acquire skills, afterschool programs, tutoring, and/or reteaching of academic content (Algozzine, B., Christenson, S., & Yssedyke, J., 1982). If a student continues to struggle in meeting standards, and after careful monitoring of student progress over time, the student study team reconvenes with a school psychologist to determine if further assessments should take place. Such assessments may reveal detailed reasons as to why a student is struggling, or the possibility of a learning disability.

As a result of educational struggles endured by many over the decades, the process of identifying students with disabilities and then delivering services has been

mainstreamed to ensure appropriate and equal access. This mainstreamed process starts with a protocol that begins the evaluation of a student.

Evaluation Procedures

The determination for a student's eligibility for special education services is made by a group of qualified professionals. The group consists of the student's general education teacher, the school principal, and a special educator who understands and is educated in the special education (NICHY, 2010c).

After assessments have been administered and analyzed, an initial meeting takes place where the results of assessments are disclosed to determine whether the student has been identified with a specific learning disability. Qualification for a learning disability is based on guidelines established by the federal government.

Identification of a Specific Learning Disability

In order to find a specific learning disability a student must demonstrate a lack of achievement in meeting state standards in one or more of eight different

categories. The different categories includes oral expression, listening, writing, reading, and math.

Students struggling to meet standards in any of these academic areas may have a specific learning disability. The Individuals with Disability Education Act's Definition of Specific Learning Disability, according to the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY; 2010b) is

a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (para. 20)

If it has been determined that a student is struggling because of an identified specific learning disability, an Individual Education Program team steps in to take over the procedures of transitioning a student from general education to special education and an IEP is created. As stated by the Department of Education's Special Education Department, an individualized education program (IEP) is a document for a

child with a disability that is written and revised during an IEP meeting with the team participants.

Through the reauthorization of IDEA in June of 1997, states are required to create performance goals aligned to state standards, similar to their peers without disabilities which are included in the IEP. The IEP includes present academic levels, measurable goals, assessment accommodations, description of services provided, and any accommodations/ modifications the child is entitled to receive.

It is important to note the process involved in developing, reviewing, altering, and updating any portions/details of the IEP. Procedural safeguards for the parent or guardian, as guaranteed by federal law through IDEA, are in place. Portions of those safeguards include Informed Consent.

Program Design for Students With a Learning Disability

When special education services begin for a student with a learning disability, the IEP is developed by a team of school personnel and the child's parent(s), who all make up the IEP team. The reauthorization of IDEA in June 1997 required the IEP to include performance goals aligned to state standards, similar to their peers without

disabilities. As stated by the Department of Education's Special Education Department, "the term individualized education program or IEP means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting." To reiterate, the IEP includes the components shown in Figure 1.

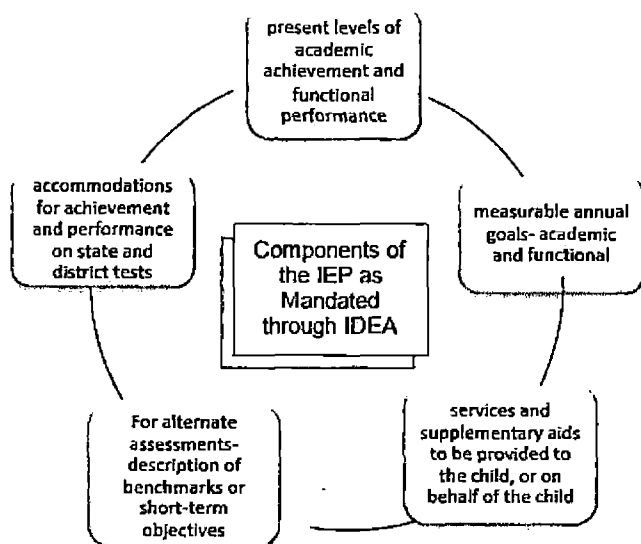


Figure 1. Components of the IEP mandated through IDEA (Department of Education, 2004; NICHCY, 2010a).

In addition to the IEP including details of student performance and goals, the IEP includes a plan of placement to support student success. This placement plan is referred to as the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE

placement consideration is defined by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2010a):

Least restrictive environment or LRE as it is more commonly called, is one of several vital components in the development of a child's IEP and plays a critical role, influencing where a child spends his or her time at school, how services are provided, and the relationships the child develops within the school and community. Indeed, LRE is a foundational element in building an appropriate IEP that can improve outcomes for a child—in school and in life. (para. 1)

For students with learning disabilities, the IEP team must consider all accommodations needed for a student with a disability to participate in general education setting.

Placement options discussed during the student's IEP meeting to determine the appropriate level of service. Students of any disability may receive support in any placement option that is appropriate for meeting student need. The placement option continuum is in place as a means to support the disabled student in a setting that fosters the most success. The continuum also supports the importance of the least restrictive environment for each child with a disability. The most common placement options for a student with a

learning disability are inclusion and the resource support program. Figure 2 details the design of each option.

Inclusion	Resource Room
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream placement in the GE classroom • Student with same age peers • Class taught by GE teacher 100% of the time • Special Education teacher assists in adjusting curriculum for LD student • Keeps student in the mainstream of school life with higher achieving peers • May not provide the intensive individualized help the LD student needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student receives intensive help to keep up with grade level work • Receives one-to-one and small group support from RSP teacher • Techniques used that are more efficient for LD students • Student spends most of the day (at least 80%) in the GE classroom • Lacks routine and structure of a self-contained classroom

Figure 2. Details the support provided in the inclusion and resource support model (Jenkins & Mayhall, 1976; National Center for Educational statistics, 2010; NICHCY, 2010a).

Common Placement Options for Students With a Learning Disability

Currently the resource support program (RSP) is the most commonly used placement of least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with learning disabilities. According to the National Department of Education, 2,476,000 students in America's schools are identified to have a specific learning disability. In fact, fifty percent of all disabilities in children ages 6-21 are determined to be specific learning disabilities (Zirkel, 2006). The majority

of these students are enrolled in public education in the general education setting, spending most of their school day, at least 80%, in the general education class (National Center for Educational statistics, 2010) receiving the resource model support from a resource specialist.

Another common placement of support for students with learning disabilities is within the inclusion model. The inclusion model of support is thought, by many parents and educators, to be the most appropriate model for learning disabled students. It has been advocated that students should not be separated from the general education classroom for any support and that the general education setting is superior in educational appropriateness over the pull-out model of the resource program (Vaugh & Klinger, 1998; Hallahan, Kaffmana, & Lloyd, 1996).

Both the resource support program with a resource specialist and the inclusion model provide necessary support for learning disabled students. However, both models continue to fail in achieving student academic, behavioral, and social achievement as intended (Jenkins & Mayhall, 1976; Moody & Vaughn, 2000; Vaughn, Moody, & Schumm, 1998; Kaufmann & Pullen, 1996; Mason, Thorman, O'Connell, & Behramann, 2004; Bentum & Aaron, 2003; Swanson & Vaughn,

2008). Teachers, parents, and students are aware that a road of continuous and difficult struggles lies ahead in the learning disabled student's educational career even with the current placement options established for support:

Statistics gleaned from a number of states over time reveal that less than one-third of learning-disabled students can be expected to pass high school expectancy exams. . . . clever teachers and caring parents work together during the IEP process to help these children move toward specifically tailored goals . . . many special education teachers and administrators agree that the experience can be damaging to children's self-concept and motivation to succeed. (Meek, 2006, p. 295)

Thus far, the history and evolution of special education has been presented. In this process, it is apparent that though many positive changes have taken place for student with disabilities, education continues to face the need for evolution in the support and success of students with disabilities. In an attempt to better understand the most common placement options for LD students, it is important to understand the background and intention of both models.

Resource Support Program Model

The resource support program became the prominent model of educational support for students with learning disabilities in the 1970s (Jenkins & Mayhall, 1976). During that time, studies reported that the then popular placement of self-contained classrooms for mildly handicapped children did not achieve better results academically and socially when compared to achievement in the regular, or general education, classroom (Meyerowitz, 1967; Carroll, 1967). The self-contained classrooms of the 1940s and 1950s grouped children of comparable ability, decreasing unfair demands on them and allowed teachers to teach to students with more severe and limited ability ranges (Cegelka & Tyler, 1970). Research conducted reported student success in the self-contained classrooms was mediocre and did not reflect greater social adjustment for children (Cegelka & Tyler, 1970; Carroll, 1967; Meyerowitz, 1967).

As evidence emerged showing mediocre results for students in the self-contained setting, the resource support model for students was developed. The philosophy for this model was to place students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom with their peers in order to more effectively support progress academically and socially.

Research conducted in an experimental resource room program with 69 children, reported social growth and academic gains in reading and math were significant.

This study reported that the resource program better supported academic and social growth over self-contained classrooms for students with mild disabilities such as a specific learning disability (Glavin, Quay, Annesley, & Werry, 1971; Walker 1974). These results provided justification for providing a new model of support. It was then that the resource support program was put in place as a placement option of least restrictive environment for students with mild disabilities, such as specific learning disabilities. The design was meant to provide the student and general education teacher with various degrees of support. Jenkins and Mayhall (1976), writing for the development of a teacher resource program, framed the resource teacher's role as: (a) service on core school tasks; (b) close cooperation with child's classroom teacher; (c) one-to-one instruction; (d) direct and daily measurement of student progress; and (e) daily instruction where direct services are required (p. 21). Figure 3 provides a description of the ways the resource specialist supported the LD student and general education teacher.

Various Degrees of Support from the RSP Teacher	
Service on Core School Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade level standard- classroom work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignments • Tests • Homework
Close Cooperation with GE Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation/Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson Planning • Accommodation • Modifications
One-to-One Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push-In or Pull-Out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP teacher works with student in the GE classroom • RSP teacher pulls student out of GE to work in the resource classroom
Measurement of Student Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily progress monitoring by the GE and RSP teacher (formal and informal) • Formal assessments of student performance on standard curriculum, IEP goals, state tests
Daily Instruction Where Direct Services are Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services From Various Other Providers (as stated in the IEP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource Specialist • Speech and Language Pathologist • Counselors • Occupational/ Physical Therapy

Figure 3. Degrees of support from the resource specialist (NICHCY, 2010a).

The description of resource teacher support originally designed is very similar today. Resource teachers continue to provide support for both the student and the general education teacher. The amount of time a student spends with the resource teacher is dependent upon the severity of a student's disability, and the amount of academic and or behavioral support the student needs in order to access the general education curriculum. When a student's academic success, behaviors, or social interactions increases or

improves in the resource room setting, it is assumed that the student will transfer those improvements into the general education classroom. Glomb and Morgan(1991) describe the resource program, as reported by Harris and Schultz (1986), as "an optimum balance of services provided directly to handicapped students by the resource teacher, and indirect services provided through the resource teacher's consultation with their regular classroom teachers" (p. 221). Currently the resource teacher provides this support by working on a balance of standard appropriate work for the student to improve performance on goals established on the IEP, and by supporting grade level curriculum taught in the general education classroom.

As established, the resource support model is meant to support student success for those with mild disabilities such as a learning disability; however, research over the years on the resource support program is not showing the positive results aimed for in the development of this model. In fact, students working in the resource room are not transferring successes in the RSP room to the general education classroom. There has been increasing concern as to why student success is not transferring from special education to general education (Anderson-Inman, 1981; Bentum

& Aaron, 2003; King-Sears, 2008; Moody & Vaughn, 2000). Current concerns include reports that show wide variety of RSP model designs, with many inconsistencies across them. Resource room instruction consists of instruction that is "very different in content and format than that found in most regular classrooms. The curriculum focus is different and instructional materials are often different" (Anderson-Inman, 1986, p.563). Bentum & Aaron (2003) disclose that students "who are instructed in the resource rooms, fail to make significant gains in the areas of word recognition, reading comprehension, spelling, and measured intelligence (IQ)" (p. 379). Bentum & Aaron (2003) suggest the reasons for the lack of academic reading gains are, 1) the wide range of levels of students which result in low amounts individualized attention, and 2) unclear use of teaching methods utilized by most of the resource teachers. They further suggest students with learning disabilities who are pulled-out of the general education classroom for extra support need their time in the RSP classroom to be of academic quality and individualized instruction. Current conditions of high number of students served and variety of teaching strategies used are some of the reasons named that interfere with academic success.

Inclusion

Similarly, to the resource room model, the inclusion model currently is a placement option on the continuum of educational placement for students with a specific learning disability. The make-up of the inclusion model today began in the 1930s. In the 1930s through the 1950s it was reported that students with mild-moderate disabilities in self-contained classrooms were not excelling socially, academically, and behaviorally because of the separation from their same-age, general education peers (Moody & Vaughn, 2000). The philosophy behind the inclusion model comes from this historical finding concluding disabled students should be taught with children who are in the general education setting, or non-disabled. The research around inclusion decades ago stands as grounds for the inclusion model today (Hart, J. & Whalon, K., 2011; Strieker, T., Logan, K., Kuhel, K., 2012).

Continuing into the twenty first century, inclusion advocates believe that all students in special education should receive their education services in the general education classroom (Ji-Ryun, K., 2011; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). The inclusion model is a placement believed to support students in achieving academic success in the

general education classroom by requiring the availability of all supports to the student. In the inclusion setting, the student's necessary support services go into the general education classroom, eliminating the student's removal from class. The benefit to such placement is that the student does not miss instruction and practice taking place in the general education classroom, removing the dismissal of the student having to keep up with his peers.

Inclusion practices require the general education teacher to plan appropriately for students with disabilities and to seek out or maintain a working relationship with specialist such as the resource specialist for specialized support in planning. Current research on the effectiveness of the inclusion model reveal that there is a divide between what research says about collaboration between the general education teacher and the specialist and what actually happens in schools (Gable, Monsert, & Tonelson, 2004; Pugac & Lawrence, 1989). Inclusion is meant to encourage a partnership with general education and special education; however, general education teachers are over-whelmed with class size, student-ability variation, and accountability measures. In fact, Schumm & Vaughn (1992) found that general education "teachers believe that the mainstreamed students

should adapt to the curriculum and, thus, special planning and adaptations on the part of teachers are unnecessary" (p. 94). General education teachers make instructional decisions based on the academic levels of the group and not based on the individual students within the classroom (Borko, Shavelson, & Stern, 1981). Therefore, the intentions of the inclusion model have not been met by special and general educators.

Even with a history of landmark changes for equality for special education students, those with learning disabilities still must face a detrimental reality. At present, even with the resource support and inclusion models as a placement option, students are not meeting levels of proficiency on accountability measures as mandated by NCLB. In 2010 44% of special education students scored basic or lower on the California State Test in English Language Arts. Additionally, graduation rates in the 2009-2010 school year for students in special education are shockingly at 56.7% (California Department of Education, 2011). Placement options and support for students with specific learning disabilities have come a long way in educational history, yet still have far to go. The question we need to ask is "Where are we continuing to go wrong?"

Sharing the Responsibility

With the inclusion and resource support model, general education teachers and special education teachers share the responsibility of providing support and accommodations mandated in an IEP. With high stakes standards and testing as the current focus for educators, there is disconnect taking place between the general education teacher and resource specialist in how to best meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. Although students with disabilities are expected to be able to participate in the general education curriculum and standardized assessments, oftentimes focusing on high-stakes testing gets in the way of the teachers opportunities to work with students individually and to help support the student in meeting the IEP goals. (Mason, Thormann, O'Connell, Behrmann, 2004). The general education teacher and RSP teacher are both legally required to meet the student's IEP goals however, "findings from reports indicate that general education and special education stakeholders do not have a shared understanding of the concepts of access, participation, and progress in the general curriculum" (Mason et al., 2004, p. 215). The general educator's focus for all students in the classroom is to meet grade level state standards and to teach those

standards based on appropriate pacing in order to prepare students for high-stakes test at the end of the school year.

Another reality that general educators recognize is that

the majority of students within schools do not have disabilities...[and] under continuing pressure to raise student achievement, express frustration over the legal requirements and the amount of time that is consumed in coordinating activities for students with disabilities.

(p. 216)

Planning appropriate lessons to support students on an IEP can be quite difficult and time consuming for the general education teacher. Reteaching and extra time to understand content is not a luxury students have in a reality of time constraints for state testing. Realism in the face of teachers when considering state test results is that:

These students- dare I even say? - will in all probability never come close to meeting the stringent standards on which NCLB exams are based . . . the current exams are simply too densely written, too long in duration, and too difficult in terms of readability and required level of conceptual understanding to warrant their indiscriminate administration, even with

such common accommodations as extra time and extra breaks. (Meek, 2006, p. 295).

This review of the literature on special education shows decades of evolution in the design of special education in the United States for students with mild disabilities such as a learning disability. Through historical events and landmark cases, the resource support program today is the most commonly used setting for students with a learning disability. At the same time, the research shows that even with supports such as an IEP that include accommodations and modifications for student support, the resource support model, as well as the inclusion model of support, is not successfully meeting the learning disabled student's needs. Currently, the nation is faced with academic discrepancy between the general education population and students with a learning disability. Additionally, the literature reveals that learning disabled students are dropping out of high school at a high rate and are increasingly being incarcerated. Historically the resource support program was established as a setting for students with mild disabilities to access the general education curriculum. Today, through the review of literature, is it apparent that continued change in the

design of support in the resource support program for students with learning disabilities needs to take place in public education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Currently the resource specialist program (RSP) is the most commonly used placement of least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with learning disabilities. According to the National Department of Education, 2,476,000 students in America's schools are identified to have a specific learning disability. Fifty percent of all disabilities in children ages 6- 21 are determined to be specific learning disabilities (Zirkel, 2006). The majority of these students are enrolled in public education in the general education setting, spending most of their school day, at least 80%, in the general education class (National Center for Educational statistics, 2010) receiving the resource model support from a resource specialist.

Though most learning disabled students are receiving support from a resource specialist, the reality is that resource specialists have pressure in planning and supporting students with learning disabilities from many directions. First, the RSP teacher's job is to meet student need and adhere to the IEP. At the same time, there is

pressure for students in the special education setting to be prepared for high-stakes accountability measures set forth by the federal government through NCLB. In this reality, the resource specialist's planning is altered from meeting student need to adhering to the hierarchal demands of all those who are held accountable for student performance. Therefore, education today is faced with questions regarding the role of the resource specialist and how support is given to the learning disabled student. Planning, support, and instruction greatly vary for students depending upon the needs that must be met, not only for the special education student but also for the general education teacher.

The objective of this research study is to look at what contextual factors influence the instructional decisions made by the resource specialist and how that guides planning for instruction. Additionally, the research will provide a description of the materials and strategies used currently by the resource specialist when supporting the learning disabled students.

Research Design

Support model details of the 21st century resource support program for learning disabled students are limited in current educational research. In order to gain a better understanding of how resource specialists support LD students, a qualitative design was necessary. The qualitative research design allows the researcher to make sense of experiences and narratives and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 2011). Through face-to-face interviews, the researcher is able to establish a rapport with participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). As the literature revealed, today even with RSP support, students with learning disabilities are struggling academically and socially. Through this qualitative descriptive research design, the study set out to discover why that is. Thus, this study utilized descriptive research methods to answer the research questions guiding this study. The value of this design is that at the root of in-depth interviewing is the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of their own experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Currently education research has not described, in detail, the ways in which the resource specialist is providing support to students. Additionally documentation

as to why instructional decisions are made in the resource support classroom is absent from educational research. This descriptive research involved identifying characteristics of the phenomenon of resource specialists' planning and the possible correlations around the contextual factors that influence the planning and instruction of students with learning disabilities. A small sample size provided an in-depth examination of participants in qualitative research designs (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Maxwell, 1996). With this small sample, the researcher was able to determine, through the voices of the resource support specialists, how the educational system today influences the model of support in the RSP setting for students with learning disabilities. Within this research, the construction of knowledge was based on many different views, meanings, and discourses all of which were received, respected, and valued. Additionally, an interpretivist stance guided this study. Using this research approach revealed many levels of phenomena in public general and special education revealing discussion for future change for improved ways of serving children with learning disabilities.

Participants and Procedures for Data Collection

The participants of this study were credentialed special education teachers holding a mild/moderate credential teaching at the elementary level as a resource specialist with students with an identified specific learning disability in the Inland Empire, an area encompassing the counties of Riverside and San Bernardino in southern California.

Participant Criteria

Participants include adult teachers who were 21 years of age and over. This age criterion was necessary since teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree to become a credentialed teacher. Teachers who fit this criterion of holding a bachelor's degree are typically over the age of 20. Additionally, the participants of this study were credentialed special education teachers holding a mild/moderate credential teaching at the elementary level as a resource specialist with students with an identified specific learning disability. Resource specialists teach at various public elementary schools located throughout the Inland Empire. This participant criterion had been established since the Inland Empire, a large area of

Southern California, has a high percentage of students with specific learning disabilities and a high percentage of resource specialist to support the students.

According to the National Department of Education, 2,476,000 students in America's schools are identified to have a specific learning disability. Fifty percent of all disabilities in children ages 6- 21 are determined to be specific learning disabilities (Zirkel, 2006). The majority of these students are enrolled in public education in the general education setting, spending most of their school day, at least 80%, in the general education class (National Center for Educational statistics, 2010) receiving the resource model support from a resource specialist. Additionally, the National Center for Educational Statistics' National Assessment of Educational Progress specified that 28 percent of nation's special education eighth-grade students cannot read (King, 2005). The data suggests that there is disparity taking place in the support provided by resource specialists and there is a need for research to describe the resource specialists' account of what is taking place in planning and instruction. Participants holding a mild/moderate special education credential teaching at the elementary level as a

resource specialist with students with an identified specific learning disability were selected for this study. Interviews took place outside of the participant's contract hours of teaching and did not take place on a school site or within any school district.

Initial participants in this study were recruited by direct contact through the use of the on-line social networks, Facebook and Twitter, which described the study and purpose, then solicited volunteers interested in participating in the research (See Appendix A). Research indicates that the use of online resources provides opportunities to substantially enhance the development of more participatory research (Seymour, 2001; Clarke, 2001). After the initial recruitment, snowball sampling techniques followed. Recruitment of this kind is valuable for studies where the participants required make up a rather thin subgroup of the general population (Patrick, Pruchno & Rose, 1998). This type of sampling technique works like a chain referral in which the researcher asks for assistance from the current participants to help identify other participants that fit the participant criteria. The researcher recruited additional potential participants through the current participants collegiate relationships

and referrals from the participants. Each participant was given a recruitment flyer (See Appendix B) to give to a possible participant referral. The researcher did not actively recruit participants directly from any elementary school site or school district in the Inland Empire.

Instrumentation

Each participant signed an informed consent (See Appendix C) form and completed a demographic survey (See Appendix D). Face-to-face participant interviews were the primary sources of data collection. Pre-established questions (See Appendix E) guided the interactions between the researcher and participant. Questions were reformed and added during this process, thus this study used a semi-structured interviewing approach (Glesne, 2011).

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. The study was conducted during a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location between the researcher and participants. Interviews were held at times that did not conflict with the participants contracted teaching hours. Interviews were held at a mutually agreed upon location. Each interview did not exceed 60 minutes.

During the face-to-face interviews, the researcher took detailed field notes. Participants were informed of the researcher's purpose in writing during the interviews.

Immediately following the interview, reflective field notes were taken by the researcher in order for the researcher to better understand the participant's positionality in the research and inquiry. (Bogdan, 1998).

Member checking strategies were used to allow the researcher to check, refine and generate new interpretations of the data by conducting follow up interviews with participants. The participants had more of a participatory role in the data analysis, thus the essence of the participant's meanings were articulated accurately in describing their professional persistence and motivations (Bryant & Charmz, 2010).

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts and field note data were uploaded into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program that provided a systematic approach to data analysis. The software permitted a highly organized, case-by-case analysis of participants. Open coding was initially employed allowing for a systematic categorization of the data to compare and contrast individual cases. Deductive

and inductive data analysis techniques were employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Running code lists were created to employ categorizing and contextualizing analytical strategies (Maxwell, 1996).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides detailed description of the various contextual factors that influence the design of resource support for students with a learning disability. Additionally, this chapter describes the planning and delivery of RSP service by the resource specialist and how that planning and delivery is influenced. Finally, a detailed description of the materials and strategies used currently by the resource specialists is presented.

Sample Demographics

The participants of this study were credentialed special education teachers holding a mild/moderate credential teaching at the elementary level as a resource specialist with students who have an identified specific learning disability in the Inland Empire. The Inland Empire is an area encompassing the counties of Riverside and San Bernardino in southern California. A total of ten resource specialists in the Inland Empire participated in the face-to-face interviews, completing both the informed consent

and demographic forms. Table 1 summarizes complete demographics of the study participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Frequency
Age	
30-39	3
40-49	5
50-59	1
60+	1
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian	1
Hispanic	3
White	6
Highest level of Education	
Bachelor's Degree	3
Master's Degree	7
Credential's Held	
Special Education	10
Multiple Subject	6
Single Subject	1
Reading Specialist	1
Administrative	1
Years as a RSP Teacher	
1-5	3
6-10	4
11-20	3
Number of Students on Caseload	
25-30	8
Fewer than 25	2
Number of Student with a LD	
10-15	2
16-20	4
21-25	2
26-30	1

Note. N = 10.

Reliability

In this study, the data collection technique employed was semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to learn about the resource specialists' experiences through their voices. Particular attention was given to the contextual factors that influence the design of the RSP program and how those factors influence the planning and instruction of service to students with a learning disability. Additionally, the interviews were conducted to discover the materials and strategies used by the resource specialist. This technique included coding data first using emic codes to ensure openness to the content. Additionally, this technique included memoing throughout the analysis in order to capture how my interpretation and participants' interpretations were changing, and drawing on various factors to better inform and expand my understanding (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, a running code list was created and transferred to several tables arranged by theme. Through analytical strategies of categorizing and contextualizing the codes were then organized (Maxwell, 2005). Additionally, the codes were grouped according to theme and various codes revealed were compared within and

between the categorized codes. The interview data was analyzed and reduced through the contextualizing process by identifying relationships within the interviews.

Finally, Maxwell's (2005) validity check guidelines were followed to minimize validity threats and increase credibility of my conclusion. All interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word and descriptive validity checks were employed.

Design Details for the Resource Support Model

In this study, research findings revealed that there is variation in the current service delivery design of "resource support." The different designs of service delivery include (a) pull out services, (b) push in services, and (c) a combination of pull out and push in services. Figure 4 provides description of each type of service delivery as described by the resource specialists' in this study.

Study results show that nine of the ten resource specialists' design of support includes pulling students out of the general education classroom and into a different setting (the RSP classroom). Five of those nine RSP teachers provide pull⁶ out services only whereas four of the nine provide a combination of pull out and push in

Pull Out

- Student is "pulled out" of the GE classroom for a service session
- Student works with RSP teacher or instructional assistant in the RSP classroom
- Academic support is given using grade level classwork that needs to be completed
- RSP teacher teaches student at his/her instructional level for individualized support
- RSP room is less distracting than the GE classroom (fewer students)
- RSP teachers uses a variety of strategies and accommodations that differ from the GE teacher
- RSP classroom allows for slower pacing than the GE classroom can offer, allowing the student more time to process and demonstrate understanding

Push In

- Student stays in the GE classroom
- RSP teacher or instructional assistant goes into the GE classroom to work with student
- RSP teacher or aide and student work on the same work the GE class is working on
- RSP teacher provides accommodations
- RSP teacher works with the student at his/her desk or at a table in the classroom

Combination

- RSP teacher pulls student out of the classroom and goes into the GE classroom to provide support (following the details listed above)

Figure 4. Description of the three types of RSP service. Data based on research findings from this study.

services. One RSP teacher does not pull students out of the GE classroom, providing push in services only.

Factors That Influence the Resource Support Design

"It's a hard balance because you have what the teachers' want, what our principal wants, and what I think they need" (Specialist J, personal communication, October 25, 2012). In this study, at least half of the resource specialists interviewed distinguished similar factors that influence the design of resource support and the way in which RSP service is delivered to students with a learning disability. The themes that are revealed in this study, and detailed below, are shown in Figure 5.

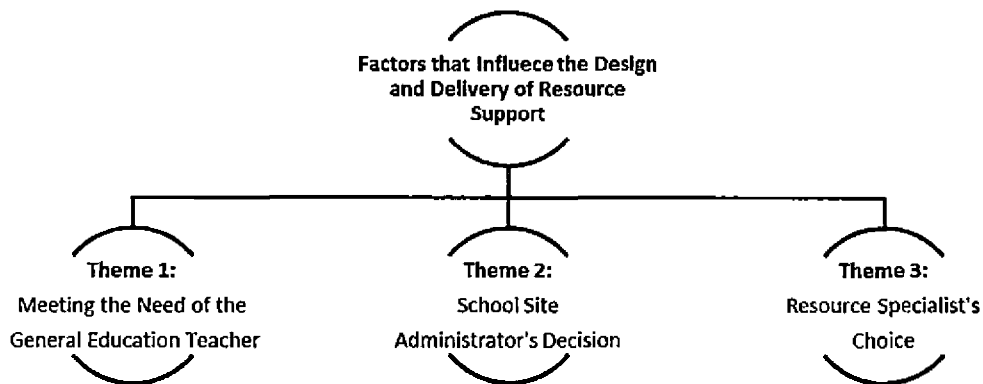


Figure 5. Three themes discovered in the design and delivery of the RSP model. Themes based on findings from this research study.

Interestingly, the three recurring themes revealed were voiced across at least 50% of the resource specialist interviewed. These themes were discovered after conducting

in-depth, cross-case analyses of the resource specialists' experiences. Specific examples, using the resource specialist voice, are presented below.

Theme 1: Meeting the Need of the General Education Teacher. According to the resource specialists, the design of RSP support is significantly factored around the need of the general education teacher who has the LD student in the classroom. This theme emerged from eight of the ten specialists' voices. For example, Specialist A, who has been teaching students in special education for 15 years, shares how the delivery design is influenced:

It was based on the adult's [GE teacher] need for pull out . . . maybe the kid really didn't need to be pulled out and just needed to be worked in the classroom because that particular teacher didn't want anybody in their classroom. (Specialist A, personal communication, June 26, 2012)

Specialist A's experience is profound because it illuminates the ways in which the general education teacher prefers to not have another teacher working in the classroom. Specialist A is respecting the GE teacher's preference of having students taken out of the classroom for service and the need of the LD student is altered.

Specialist A's experience reveals the power in how the general education teacher's need takes precedent over the student and how that plays a significant role in the design of support the learning disabled student receives.

Similarly, Specialist B, a resource specialist with seven years of experience in special education in addition to experience as a general education teacher, discusses how she makes decisions on the design of support given to the students on her caseload: "It depends on the teachers that you're working with that year because each year it could be a different teacher . . . it depends on the teachers. It depends on the pressure, the dynamics of that school site" (Specialist B, personal communication, June 26, 2012).

Specialist B's description of how she makes design choices is particularly telling. She stresses that the design varies each year with the change of teachers she works with and the pressure they are under. Specialist B is in a position of changing the design of service delivery yearly, primarily based on the need of the teachers she is working with instead of the need of the LD students on her caseload.

Another resource specialist also explains how the design of resource support is dependent upon the need of

the general education teachers. Specialist E, a resource teacher who holds a Master's Degree in Education in addition to a special education credential, explains how from the start of the school year she designs RSP support around what the GE teachers want for RSP service of the LD student(s):

I try to talk with the teachers. Usually the first week; what works for them . . . they're like yeah take them out. I have six kids in one [GE teacher's class] and those kids are very needy so it gives them [GE teacher] a little break when we pull them out so they're able to do more teaching. (Specialist E, personal communication, August 14, 2012)

Specialist E details how she asks the general education teachers at the start of the year how they would like RSP service to take place. She is sympathetic to the teachers she is working with who have expressed that they need to have a break away from the learning disabled students in their classroom. There is pressure for the resource specialist to take the LD students out of the general education classroom for pull out services. This pressure has an effect on the design of service this specialist gives to her students.

Additionally, design decisions based on general education teacher need is detailed by Specialist F, who has been a RSP teacher for two years and holds a Multiple Subjects Credential along with a Special Education Credential. In deciding the RSP delivery design she states:

Yes, they [GE teachers] definitely do have a say in that. A lot of them want the kids out of their classroom. They struggle to pay attention in the larger group settings and they're disruptive in the classroom. Most of the teachers are like "get them out of my class." (Specialist F Interview, personal communication, August 2, 2012)

Resource Specialist F's interview clearly describes how pulling students out of the classroom for their RSP support is preferred by the general education teachers because of the students' struggles and behavior. The voices of the resource specialists illuminate how the general education teachers prefer to have the special education student out of the classroom and how that shapes the design of the resource support delivery.

These research findings around the factors involved in the planning and delivery of resource services coincide with educational research in the differences in priorities

between the general education teacher and special education teachers. For the general education teacher, planning appropriate lessons to support students on an IEP can be quite difficult and time consuming. It is difficult for the GE teacher because the

majority of students within schools do not have disabilities . . . [and] under continuing pressure to raise student achievement, [teachers] express frustration over the legal requirements and the amount of time that is consumed in coordinating activities for students with disabilities. (Mason, Thormann, O'Connell, & Behrmann, 2004 p. 216)

The specialists' reflections support current educational research findings of the struggles students with learning disabilities face in education, even with an IEP.

Theme 2: School Site Administrator's Decision. Another common theme discovered in how the design of the resource program is determined is "administrative decision." Across the samples, resource specialists state that their school site administrator decides the service delivery design of pull out, push in, or a combination of the two. In addition, the RSP teacher is then expected to follow through with that design.

Specialist D, a teacher of 20 years in both the special education and general education classroom, shares her experiences with a specific administrator:

Well I don't know how it's going to be this year because we have a new principal, but the principal I had before, he had an intervention where there were aides that pulled kids out. He wanted the RSP time to coincide with that so the teachers would have a block of time where the really low kids and the RSP were gone. (Specialist D, personal communication, August 3, 2012)

Specialist D's reflection exhibits the powerful effect the school site administrator can have on the design of the resource support program. For Specialist D, the administrator made the decision that students would be pulled out of the classroom during a designated block of time for intervention and support services in the school day. Again, this is an example of how design decisions are based on factors other than student need.

Another resource specialist, Specialist G who was a general education teacher before a Special Education teacher and holds an administrative credential in addition to a special education credential, explains how the school

site administrator made the decision about the design of her RSP services:

The design of the resource program at my school was already designed by the administration when I started working there. I've been at this school site for three years. . . . the administration had already said that there would be push in and pull out time for all, for the resource teacher to go into the general education classroom . . . if I wanted to change the design that would not be an option. (Specialist G, personal communication, October 5, 2012)

Specialist G's experience exposes the way in which administration makes an executive decision over that of the teacher who specializes in working with students with disabilities. Specialist G realizes the nature of the relationship between herself and the administration because of the hierarchy involved at the site level. She is not in the position to go against administrative decisions. This experience sheds light on the power that leaders have in making decisions, even if the decisions are not based on the need of the student receiving resource support services.

Similarly, Specialist I, a resource teacher with ten years of experience in teaching students with a learning disability, shares her experience in having the school site administrator make the decision about the design of her RSP services:

Actually our former administrator was always telling me what the schedule was going to be. It was very difficult sometimes because she had this schedule where it was scheduled out. . . . however, the only problem is if there was only one hour of time, she wanted speech and APE [adaptive physical education] to take from that time as well. . . . it was like she was micromanaging and wouldn't allow us to be free.

(Specialist I, personal communication, October 25, 2012)

Specialist I's connection between administrative decision and lack of freedom is particularly telling, especially when she weaves in that it feels like the administrator is micromanaging her and the decisions to design the resource support program. She details the difficulty involved in the time constraint in providing services to students who are in need of other support services such as speech and language and adaptive physical education. Specialist I's

experience touches upon the difficulty other support providers' face when trying to provide services to a student in special education. The students are legally entitled to the services offered under Free Appropriate Public Education in order to have equal access to learning.

Theme 3: The Resource Specialist's Choice. The interviews also presented another theme in how the service delivery model is decided. This theme includes the details of how the service delivery model is chosen by the resource specialist. For example, Resource Specialist B, a RSP teacher of seven years, shares how she began making changes to the resource support design.

As time went on and I became more familiar with the system as it was when I stepped into it, I began changing it and trying different things. Every year it seems like I'm constantly changing it, trying to improve it. (Specialist B, personal communication, June 26, 2012)

This specialist details that after some time passed and she became comfortable with the system she was able to make changes to the design of the RSP program. In order for program planning to occur, the resource specialist needs to get to know the students, teachers, and the students' IEP.

This information guides planning and this teacher shared how she was able to make changes based on her expertise. Specialist B's experiences show the power in the RSP teacher having the ability to make expert decision in order to create a better program for supporting students with a learning disability.

Similarly, another resource support specialist discusses her experience in making decisions about the design and delivery of the resource support program. Specialist C has had experience in education teaching both in the general education classroom and the resource support program: "Last year, actually, I sat down with the principal before the school year started in the summer time and I said this is what I want" (Specialist C, personal communication, June 28, 2012). This specialist was able to sit with her school site principal and state how the design would work best. A resource specialist's responsibility is to meet the needs of the special education students in the way in which is it detailed on the IEP. This specialist shared her unique story of sitting down with the principal to state how the RSP design at their school site needs to run in order to meet student need.

Specialist H, a special education teacher in RSP for sixteen years, explains how she is able to create the RSP model design at her school site: "Most of these teachers I've known for most of my teaching career . . . we've kind of evolved with the times of our interpretation of it" (personal communication, October 25, 2012). Specialist H shares that many of the teachers she works with know her because they have worked together for so long. Since the general education teachers know this specialist, they have faith in her decision making and design decisions, allowing her the freedom to make choices in the design. This type of relationship building and understanding of the role of the RSP teacher is important in allowing the specialist to make the decisions about how to meet the needs of the learning disabled student.

Interestingly, Resource Specialist I also discussed how the resource support design model at the school site is decided by the RSP teacher.

I worked it out with the teachers. I would always meet with them and say when are you directly teaching this or that and work around when they were doing that so we didn't pull them from their explicit teaching.

(Specialist I, personal communication, October 25, 2012)

Specialist I talks with the general education teachers to figure out what time certain subjects are being taught. This information allows this specialist to create a schedule of service that will best meet the need of the students by eliminating pull out during direct instruction. This type of planning is an example of how to best meet the need of the students receiving resource support.

Materials and Strategies Used by the Resource Specialist

As described in the above section, the RSP model of support today differs depending on the needs of the site administrator, general education teacher, and resource specialist. This variation, based on the results of this study, is also found in the types of materials and strategies used in the resource support program. For the purpose of this study, the two terms, materials and strategies are defined as:

- Materials- items used in order to teach the subject areas of math, reading, and writing
- Strategies- methods, materials, accommodations, modifications to support the teaching of math, reading, and writing

Through this descriptive study, the resource specialists' provided information about the various types of materials and strategies used to support students with a learning disability. Below, Figures 6 and 7 provide a list of the of the most common materials and strategies used based on the resource specialists' interviews.

Materials
• Houghton-Mifflin ELA Series*
• Houghton-Mifflin Universal Access*
• Step Up to Writing*
• Core Math curriculum
• Read Naturally
• Sight Word lists (district or Dolch)

Figure 6. Most common materials used by the resource specialist. *District adopted core curriculum. Information based on research findings.

Materials

The descriptive collection of materials, through the voices of the resource specialists, reveals a shocking reality around the use of the Houghton Mifflin series for English Language Arts in public school in the Inland Empire. It is important to keep in mind that based on the mandates of NCLB and IDEA all students on an IEP must have equal access to state standard curriculum with the use of

Strategies
• Leveled books
• Manipulatives
• Touch Math
• Graphic Organizers
• Thinking Maps
• White boards
• Repetition of Instruction/Practice
• Educational Games
• Highlighters

Figure 7. Most common strategies used by the resource specialist. Information based on research findings.

research based and the state adopted language arts and math curriculum (Department of Education, 2004; McMurrer, 2007; NICHCY, 2010b). Therefore, in naming materials, all resource specialists' listed their school districts core curriculum for English Language Arts in addition to other materials.

Houghton-Mifflin

Interestingly, the core curriculum of Houghton-Mifflin for English Language Arts, though listed as a material utilized, was not voiced as the material the RSP teacher prefers to use in order to support their students with a learning disability. Various shocking reasons are detailed

by the RSP teacher as to why they prefer not to use HM materials regularly, or at all.

Well, we use the Houghton Mifflin for reading only because we can't afford to replace it. Is it a good program? No. Do the district and the school think it's a good program? No, but that's what we have . . . I'm supposed to use what the district has adopted.

Houghton Mifflin is one of them. (Specialist B, personal communication, June 26, 2012)

Another resource specialist, in response to the use of the adopted core curriculum stated, "I think we're supposed to use the UA [Universal Access] materials [HM] . . . I use it because I know they need access to their core not because I like it" (Specialist A, personal communication, June 26, 2012).

One resource specialist spoke about limited time for using the core English Language Arts curriculum by stating, "for every grade level I have the extra support [HM Universal Access] . . . If I have time, which is very rarely . . . we'll use the level readers that go with them" (Specialist C, personal communication, June 28, 2012).

Specialist F also had the following to say about district mandated curriculum:

I understand now that my responsibilities are to implement the curriculum the district has purchased and expects us to use, like our universal access curriculum [HM]. . . . Most people don't know about it. It's all the stuff I learned when I was at another school just by digging and being nosy-posy and being new and finding all these things available.

(Specialist F, personal communication, October 2, 2012)

Finally, one specialist expressed how core curriculum is used in the resource support program primarily because it is the only material available.

It's all core curriculum. . . . It is just so fast paced. We definitely use their [HM] text books and things like that. I don't have any other resources. These little guys sometimes are just drowning, it's sad to say. (Specialist E, personal communication, August 14, 2012)

The voices of the resource specialists' above detail concerning realities around the use of the state and district adopted core curriculum of Houghton Mifflin. Realities shared by the RSP teachers regarding why they use

the HM materials and what they do not like about it include:

- RSP teachers use the core curriculum only because it is required, not because it is appropriate for the student
- HM materials are too fast paced
- HM materials are used because it is the only available resource
- HM curriculum can't be replaced so they have to use it

These honest feelings and description of the use a California adopted English Language Arts curriculum is concerning when learning disabled students are described as "just drowning" (Specialist E, personal communication, August 14, 2012) even with the support of research-based materials. More appropriately put, "I feel that if the child is given the regular curriculum . . . and they're bombing, something is wrong" (Specialist B, personal communication, June 26, 2012).

Read Naturally

Another interesting description of materials used by the RSP teacher was found in the program Read Naturally. This study discovered that six out of the ten resource

specialist participants use the Read Naturally program to provide support in reading for their students with a learning disability. This research-based program is fluency-focused and incorporates the strategy of teacher modeling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring to maximize reading proficiency. Of the six RSP teachers who use Read Naturally, only two disclosed that it was provided by their school site or district whereas four of the six paid for the program out of their own pocket.

This use of the Read Naturally program was a telling discovery. On November 5, 2008, California's State Board of Education adopted instructional materials approved for use in K-8 schools. Read Naturally is not on that list. However, some schools and the majority of resource specialists in this study support using Read Naturally to help struggling readers with a learning disability. Additionally, some resource specialists find the program so good that they spent their own money to purchase it for their RSP classroom.

Strategies

The final component discussed in the findings from this research study is the strategies used by the resource

specialist to teach students with a learning disability. Again, strategies in this study include teaching methods, materials other than core curriculum, accommodations, and modifications to support the teaching of math, reading, and writing.

Repetitive Teaching

One of the most powerful strategies discussed in this study is the use of repetitive teaching because of the need for students with a learning disability to learn, practice, and have time to process what has been taught. Students with a learning disability suffer from various processing deficits such as visual and auditory processing disorders. The IEP incorporates various supports that a student benefits from for academic success. These may include "extra time to complete work" and "frequent checks for understanding." The resource specialists describe repetitive teaching as constant reteaching of a skill or concept that has been taught. This constant reteaching, or repetitive teaching, includes reviewing lessons and skills over a number of days and/or repetitive practice of isolated skills and standards in order to give the LD student time to process, understand, and learn. The pace of the general education curriculum is very fast and demanding

for students struggling with a disability. This is why the specialists find it essential to provide the strategy of repetitive teaching to LD students. With pacing guides to abide by in the general education classroom, GE teachers do not have the luxury of providing the repetitive teaching strategy. The use of repetitive teaching is a strategy used by a majority of the specialists who participated in this study providing pull out services in the RSP classroom. The participants described how and why they believe that repetitive teaching is a valuable strategy for the student. For instance, Specialist E explained, "We do a lot of repetitive teaching. We try to give them some frontloading if we can. 'Okay now this is what we're going to do tomorrow. You get to get a head start.' And things like that" (personal communication, August 14, 2014). Specialist C mentioned that "it's just a lot of repetition, learning the vocabulary and building background" (personal communication, June 28, 2012). Specialist E also discussed the idea of repetition: "I don't know how many times I've gone over the sight words but it's like daily, especially for them. We'll do flash cards, we'll do memory games and we'll do puzzles with them" (personal communication, August 14, 2012). In general the need for repetition with basic

skills was a common theme in the specialists' responses; two more examples come from Specialists B and E:

I find that a lot of RSP kids need not to learn three skills in one day and then learn three each day and then get tested on Friday like you would in regular ed. What they need is maybe weeks of practice.

(Specialist B, personal communication, June 26, 2012)

I do wish though we had a little more time to do remedial stuff. I think that would be ideal because they're really not going back to learn the basics that they missed out on. If we were able to do that, I think that would really be beneficial for the kids.

(Specialist E, personal communication, August 14, 2012)

Other Strategies

Through this descriptive study, other strategies were named and described by the resource specialists as beneficial ways to support student learning. For example, the specialists named manipulatives and highlighters as hands-on visual supports they provide in their RSP classrooms.

I like to use a lot of manipulatives and I like to use a variety of leveled books because I'm trying to find materials at the child's level (Specialist B, p. 15).

I do a lot of manipulatives, especially for the little guys in reading. . . . It really works. It really helps them. (Specialist E, personal communication, August 14, 2012)

When talking about useful strategies for students with a learning disability, Specialist F said, "Those are things I've expressed to teachers that those children would benefit from, especially a highlighter. A highlighter is the simplest tool . . . It helps the word on the page stand out as opposed to underlining" (personal communication, August 2, 2012). Another participant, Specialist H, shared, "Those kinds of instructional practices and strategies our kids need to learn are becoming more and more prominent . . . the first thing they'll say is 'Can I use a highlighter?'" (personal communication, October 25, 2012).

The various strategies described in this study are available to most teachers, general and special education, in most public school districts. None of the strategies detailed are new to the field of education or unheard of by educators. Instead, this research study gave the resource

specialists the opportunity to share different, accessible, strategies they use that are most effective when supporting students with a learning disability. Many of the strategies, such as manipulatives and highlighters, as voiced above by the RSP teachers, to other strategies described in the interviews like white boards, graphic organizers, games, and leveled books (see Table 3) are extremely helpful for students struggling in school due to a learning disability. Oftentimes, as shared by the RSP teachers, general education teachers ask for accommodations and strategies to use in the classroom with their students. Through descriptive research, this study has detailed what resource specialists today find most helpful.

Summary

The results of this study reveal that resource specialist today are faced with making design and instructional decisions for the resource support program around more than just the need of students with a learning disability on an IEP. Several contextual factors influence how the delivery of service happens for LD students, such as meeting the need of the general education teacher, school site administrative decisions, and resource

specialist's choice. Additionally, because of such factors, there is great variation in the least restrictive environment of the resource support model offered on an IEP. This design, though similar to its original design of resource support as described by Jenkins & Mayhall (1976) and the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2010a), is not structured on the need of the student with a learning disability who is entitled to special education support. Students receiving special education services are entitled to the five components of the IEP as described by the Department of Education (2004) and NICHCY (2010b). Figure 8 displays the five components of the IEP with emphasis on services to be provided to the child and accommodations for achievement.

A variation in RSP delivery is expected when based on the need of the individual student. This study reveals that resource specialists today are in a position of trying to balance meeting the needs of more than just the LD student. That balance, as depicted in Figure 9, includes trying to meet the needs of the general education teacher and administration at the school site at the cost of student success.

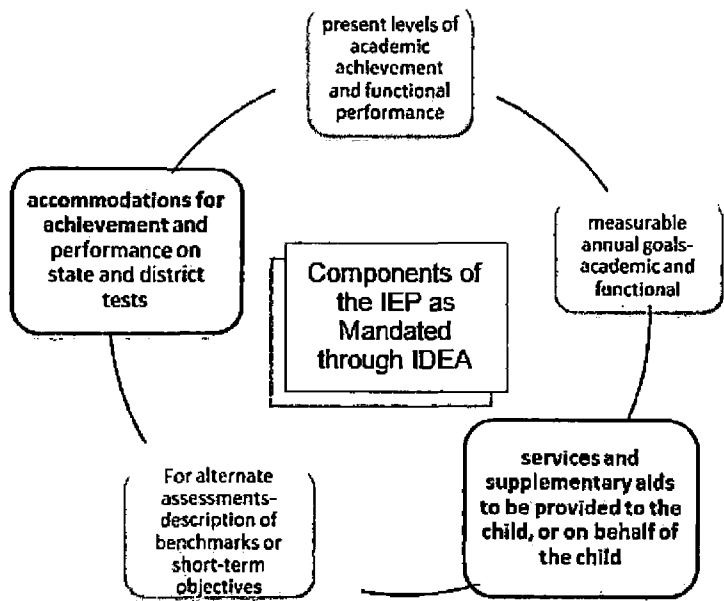


Figure 8. Components of the IEP mandated through IDEA with an emphasis on services and accommodations (Department of Education, 2004; NICHCY, 2010c).

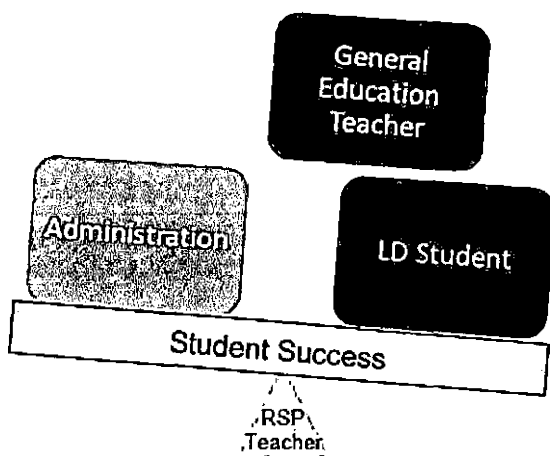


Figure 9. Depiction of the resource specialist's attempt to foster student success while balancing other factors.

Finally, this study detailed the various materials and strategies resource specialists are using with students struggling with a learning disability. The results of the strategies detailed in this study are profound. Profound in the fact that the strategies listed, such as highlighters, graphic organizers, and white boards are tools available to most schools and teachers in public education. This information is useful for all educators including general education teachers who are also responsible for providing accommodations and modifications to students with a learning disability.

In response to materials revealed, the materials described bring about a question that educators, researchers, and policy-makers need to consider. Are resource specialists equipped with appropriately leveled materials to instruct students struggling with a learning disability? This question is especially important for the discussion of the state adopted core curriculum of Houghton Mifflin. Many of the resource specialists voiced their concerns with the Houghton Mifflin curriculum they are required to use. This is concurrent with the educational research showing that current curriculum adoptions do not fully support student-need in special education (McMurrer,

2007). McMurrer's research defines reading level as one of the problems with adopted core curriculum. This is also suggested in this descriptive study with resource specialist using Houghton Mifflin only because it is required of them and/or is the only materials they have access to. Additionally, resource specialists are resorting to using materials that are not provided by their school or district and spending their own money to do so.

In voicing concerns around materials available for supporting student need, the resource specialists also demonstrated their understanding of current reading research. Learning disabled students struggling in reading cannot access the reading and learning process in the same manner as their non-disabled peers because the materials are written at a level of frustration (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Iaquinta, 2006; Kim, 2008; Massengill, 2004; Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005). With this understanding in reading research, other materials and strategies in reading must be accessible to resource specialists. For example, leveled text, guided reading, and Read Naturally are among the materials and strategies, based on the results of this study, suggested for approval and then should then be provided by the state, districts, and school

sites. With the use of such materials and strategies, students with a learning disability will not be inappropriately challenged with instruction due to materials that are written at the frustration level. At a level of frustration, reading is considered too difficult to facilitate student understanding and results in discouragement. For these reasons, additional materials should be approved and provided for instruction of students receiving resource support by a resource specialist. Some of these resources include:

- Leveled Books with Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Levels
 - National Geographic Leveled books
 - Reading A-Z leveled books by Learning A-Z
- Read Naturally by Read Naturally Incorporated
- Lakeshore Learning Games by Lakeshore Learning Materials

On a final note, this descriptive research study provides possible answers as to why students with learning disabilities are struggling to perform academically at the same level as their general education peers. Furthermore, the results may lead educators into the direction of understanding why LD students continually struggle to learn

how to read, drop out of school, and represent a high population of incarcerated teenagers and adults. There is no question; there is a system in place to support students with learning disabilities. This is apparent in the stories revealed in historical research and policy that led to the laws of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, mandates set forth by No Child Left Behind, and the implementation of the five components of the IEP. We are at a time in education where a description of resource support today is necessary to better understand why learning disabled students are struggling at the level they are in the 21st century, even with such support.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

There are a number of lessons learned from this research study. First, through qualitative research, we learn the power in the resource specialists' voices. The ways in which the specialists detail and describe their experiences in trying to meet the needs of students with a learning disability at an elementary school site are unique. The voice of the resource specialist today in RSP design and delivery is missing from current educational research. Therefore, the detail provided in each interview from this study can offer the educational community, including policymakers, reformers, and researchers, a glimpse into special education. Future studies that utilize the resource specialist's experiences and perspectives can provide opportunities to better support students in special education by continually advancing the design and delivery of service through policy change. This advance in service, if policy-makers hear the resource specialist's voice, can

also improve the materials and strategies available to support students with a learning disability.

Secondly, through the design of descriptive research methods, the phenomenon of the resource support program and the struggles to produce positive academic outcomes for LD students is clarified. Resource specialists detailed the pressures put on them to meet more than just the need of the student on an IEP. The specialist today is continually attempting to balance the pressures of producing academic success for students while accommodating the general education teachers and administrators at the same time. This balancing act results in student-need being sacrificed while hierarchical demands take precedent. Perhaps studying the roles between the RSP teacher and general education teacher, as well as between the RSP teacher and administration, can help the educational community understand how this pressure to meet everyone's needs is ultimately altering the quality of educational support provided to the LD student.

Implications

The way in which the design of the resource support program is altered based on the needs of more than just the

student with a learning disability has practical implications for the educational community. Students with a learning disability have continually struggled to perform at the same level as their general education peers. While policy changes have taken place to better support LD students, the performance gap for these students continues to widen. This research study indicates that perhaps policy-makers are looking in the wrong direction or not looking hard enough. The entire educational community, stake-holders, and policymakers must begin to look at the questions that need to be asked:

- Do school site administrators understand special education enough to support decisions made by the resource specialist over that of administration and general education teachers?
- Are RSP teachers supported in the same manner that general education teachers are in regards to availability of research-based instructional materials that are level appropriate for students with a LD?
- Are the current required state adopted materials meeting the needs of all students represented in the nation's public schools?

- Does "equal access to curriculum" align with the requirements to use the "same curriculum"?
- Are students on an IEP receiving the individualization promised for educational success?

If we start with these questions and allow ourselves to face current setbacks of special education services today for LD students, we can honor the road that was paved through the journeys taken in the past to fight for educational equality for special education students. Doing so will avoid a future of revealing more stories chronicling the dim reality and fate of disabled individuals (Department of Education, 2010).

Limitations

Findings from this study must be framed within the limitations of the research design and execution of the study. First, the researcher used a convenience sample which may restrict the generalizability of the results to the general population. Resource specialists in this study were selected and recruited from the Inland Empire, an area encompassing the counties of Riverside and San Bernardino in southern California. Though these RSP teachers represent a diverse special education teacher population, they may

not match similar populations in surrounding school districts. Second, these resource specialists were recruited through the use of on-line social networks, and then solicited volunteers interested in participating in the research. Because recruitment through social networks is relatively new, further research is needed to learn if this method excludes a subset of participants who could contribute in a different way resulting in different findings. Though there are some limitations to this study, the information provided may help the educational community, stake-holders, and policymakers to identify reasons for the continued academic struggles of students with a learning disability. It may provide a framework for future change in the design and delivery of RSP support for students with a learning disability, as well as, start a movement to improve the materials and strategies available for the resource specialist to use in the resource support classroom.

Recommendations

There is a considerable amount to be learned from this study and there are many actions that can and should be taken in reaction to what I have learned from what the

resource specialists shared. The recommendations below reflect what became evident through the resource specialists' discussions. Because of this, the value of these findings is found not in the just the knowledge, but in what takes place to respond to the findings. The recommendations for future action are relevant to educators, administrators, school districts, universities, and policymakers at the state and national level.

Educate School Site Administrators

Prior to becoming an administrator, principals and assistant principals should have in-depth knowledge and understanding of special education. To date, the University of California and California State University's Educational Administration credentials do not include coursework specific to special education. Each system's administrative programs minimally touch on special education in coursework such as Educational Policy and Legal Aspect of Education. Additionally, special education experience is not required in order to obtain an administrative credential in California.

Communicate to Policy Makers

The resource specialists in this study painted a vivid picture of the realities they face daily in an attempt to

teach the LD student how to read while required to use state standard adopted curriculum. If the role of the resource specialist is to support the student's individual needs then policy makers need to be aware of the challenges involved in doing so with limited, inappropriately leveled, materials. Students identified with a learning disability are performing at least two years below grade level. With this understanding of student- limitations, materials need to foster student success which will increase motivation and self-esteem, followed by academic growth (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Martin, 2009).

Examine the Choices Available for State-Adopted Materials

This study, in addition to revealing the level inappropriateness of current instructional materials, finds the cultural appropriateness of instructional materials needs to be examined. Without cultural connections and level appropriateness, students are less likely to utilize background knowledge that supports learning (Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Meier, 2003). This cannot be ignored when demographic statistics in California report that 59.8% of students identified with a specific learning disability are Hispanic (CDOEa, 2011).

Challenge Policy Makers

With the revelation of inequalities in education for special education student in the 1970's, educators and policy maker fought to ensure special education students would no longer be victims of educational discrimination (U.S. Department of Education, 2000; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). It is time to re-evaluate whether or not the battle for "equal access to curriculum" was accomplished in a manner that truly ensures equality. Does required access to the precise same textbooks as general education students ensure equal opportunities for learning? Standardized test scores, reading levels, dropout rates, and graduation rates for today's students struggling with a learning disability do not reflect success in this level of "equality." The educational community, as well as policy makers, needs to re-evaluate ways in which LD students can receive equal access to education that ensures equal levels of success.

Investigate Resource Specialist Support

This research study reveals that resource specialists today are struggling to meet the need of LD students at their school site. Through the voices of the specialists', it has been exposed that there is a struggle to get the support needed to sufficiently meet the need of the student

and only the student. Further investigation must take place as to why school site administrators are making design decisions of the RSP program. Through investigation, pilot programs could take place where resource specialists, rather than school administrators, are responsible for RSP program design. In addition, more detailed research is needed as to why the general education teacher pressure the resource specialist in regards to service delivery of LD student and the design of the RSP model.

In conclusion, we need to communicate the importance of the resource specialist's role in more aspects of education. Resource specialists hold a specialized credential that allows them to maintain the role of teaching and supporting students who are found to have a learning disability. The coursework and field experience required to obtain a mild/moderate special education credential does not mirror any components of the multiple subjects credential required to teach general education or the administrative credential necessary to become a site administrator at the elementary level. With this reality, the role of the resource specialist should be viewed by administration and general education teachers as a specialist who is trained to (a) meet the needs of students

with a learning disability, (b) develop a service design and delivery to best meet those needs, and (c) utilize any appropriate material and strategies necessary to teach students struggling with a learning disability.

A future that incorporates needed reforms as suggested in the findings of this study can bring about equal opportunities to learning disabled students, not just for academic success in the beginning stages of education but throughout their educational career leading to involvement in higher education and positive participation in and contribution to society.

APPENDIX A
ONLINE RESEARCH RECRUITMENT FLYER



College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

Online Research Recruitment Flyer
Attention: Elementary RSP Teachers

Participants are needed for research on understanding the various materials and strategies used in the resource support classroom for students with learning disabilities from the perspective of the resource specialist. Furthermore, the study's objective is to gain an understanding of the contextual factors that influence the resource specialist's planning and instruction of learning disabled students.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to: (1) complete a demographic survey, (2) participate in a face to face interview with the researcher that will be audiotaped, (3) optionally provide a contact email address for a possible follow up interview. You may possibly be asked to participate in a second interview at a later date. Each interview will be conducted in approximately 60 minutes. Participants have the choice to be audiotaped or not, and to discontinue the taping and/or the interview at any time.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card.
For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Christy Martinez, M.A.
Resource Specialist
Doctoral Student
CSUSB Educational Leadership
at (909) 319-4723 or
Email: 002466593@covote.csusb.edu

Dr. Bonnie Piller, Ed.D
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APPENDIX B
RESEARCH RECRUITMENT FLYER



College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

**Research Recruitment Flyer
Attention: Elementary RSP Teachers**

Participants are needed for research on understanding the various materials and strategies used in the resource support classroom for students with learning disabilities from the perspective of the resource specialist. Furthermore, the study's objective is to gain an understanding of the contextual factors that influence the resource specialist's planning and instruction of learning disabled students.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to: (1) complete a demographic survey, (2) participate in a face to face interview with the researcher that will be audiotaped, (3) optionally provide a contact email address for a possible follow up interview. You may possibly be asked to participate in a second interview at a later date. Each interview will be conducted in approximately 60 minutes. Participants have the choice to be audiotaped or not, and to discontinue the taping and/or the interview at any time.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card.
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APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM



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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of the study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to examine the materials and strategies used in the Resource Support Program with students with learning disabilities and to understand the various factors that influence the Resource Specialist in the planning and instruction of learning disabled students. This study is being conducted by Christy Martinez under the supervision of Dr. Bonnie Piller, Director of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino on _____ Date

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study in which you are being asked to participate seeks to contribute knowledge learned through examination of the resource specialist's personal narratives of the factors that influence planning, instruction, and support of students with learning disabilities.

DESCRIPTION: Data collection will consist of a demographic survey, a face to face interview with the researcher, with a possible second interview, and field notes. The demographic survey includes an option to provide a contact email address. The contact email address will be used only in the event of scheduling a second interview. You will be asked to complete a nine question demographic survey and participate in a face to face interview with the researcher, and a possible second interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will consist of questions related to the literature on program placement and design for students with learning disabilities in the resource support program. The researcher may also write notes in a journal during the interview as part of the data collection.

DURATION: The demographic survey will take no more than five minutes to complete. Each face to face interview with the researcher will be approximately 60 minutes in length.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary. It is not expected that you will experience any discomfort while filling out the demographic survey or participating in the interview. You will have the choice to be audiotaped or not, and to discontinue the audiotaping at any time. While taking the survey you have the option to cease participation at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits. Providing a contact email address is optional and will be used only to schedule a possible follow up interview.

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CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants have a right to privacy and all information identifying participants will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of participants. The researcher will not ask the participants to disclose their school district of employment. The participant will be given the option to provide a contact email address in order to schedule a possible second interview. Contact information will be used only in the event of scheduling a follow up interview. At no time will the participant's contact information be made available to any third party. The confidentiality of the participant's information will be maintained by storing demographic information, interview transcripts, audio recordings and researcher's field notes in a locked filing cabinet or password protected computer located in the researcher's office located at CSUSB in the College of Education for a period of three (3) years. All data collected will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

AUDIO: I understand that I have a choice in the audio recording of the face to face interviews and can discontinue the audiotaping at any time. Initials _____

AGE: I am over the age of 21 years old. Initials _____

CONTACT INFORMATION: I understand that providing a contact email address is optional and will be used only to schedule a follow up interview. Initials _____

BENEFITS: The benefits of participating in this study will include:
By participating you will help in increasing the knowledge/literature within the field of special education.

INCENTIVES: You will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card at the conclusion of the face to face interview.

RISKS: The possible risks of participating in this study may include:
(1) Your personal reflections associated with working experiences that may have been uncomfortable experiences could be considered a risk.
(2) Some of the interview questions might evoke in you mild to moderate negative feelings related to educating students.

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CONTACT: If you have any questions about the research and research participant's rights, you may contact Dr. Bonnie Piller, bpiller@csusb.edu or call (909) 537-5651. You may also contact Christy Martinez, 002466593@coyote.csusb.edu or call (909) 319-4723.

RESULTS: The results of this study will be available by June 2013. The results will be presented during a public defense and a bound copy of the dissertation will be available in the California State University San Bernardino Phau Library located at 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino CA 92407.

CONSENT: I understand that I am participating in a research study and the research has been explained to me so that I understand my role as a participant in the study. I understand that I may stop participating at any time without any consequences.

Thank you for your assistance.

Signature _____ Date _____

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APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY



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DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

- 1. Gender: ___ Male ___ Female
2. Age: ___
3. Race/Ethnicity: ___
4. Highest level of education earned: ___
5. Are you currently employed as a full time teacher? ___ yes ___ no
6. What type of credential(s) do you hold? (Check all that apply)
___ Multiple Subject
___ Single Subject *Subject Area(s) ___
___ Special Education *What type(s): ___
___ Other ___
7. How long have you been a resource specialist? ___
8. Have you ever taught as a general education teacher? ___
a. If yes, what grade level(s)/ subject(s) ___
9. What grade level is your current caseload? (Check only one)
___ K-2 ___ 4-6
___ K-3 ___ K-6
___ 3-6 ___ Other ___

Interview Questions

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Developed by Christy Vasquez Martinez.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

First Interview

1. Tell me a little about your current position.
 - a. Why have you chosen to be a special education teacher.
2. Can you describe the look/design of the resource program at your school (i.e. push in-pull out)?
3. How has the design of the resource program been decided? By you, the general education teachers, administration, district, anyone else? Explain.
4. How would you characterize the quality of your resource support program for students with learning disabilities (LD)?
5. Can you share your thoughts on how well this design meets the needs of learning disabled students?
6. Describe the educational goals for your students day-to-day in RSP? Is it to get through daily grade level standards, provide instructional level support, foster success for the years to come, other? Explain.
7. Can you share what you take into consideration when planning instruction for your learning disabled students? Individualized Education Plan, grade level standards, student's instructional level, other?
8. How would you describe the learning disabled student's ability to learn grade level standards and to demonstrate learning of the general education curriculum on a day-to-day basis?
9. What is your preference in the level of autonomy you have in deciding to support Individualized Educational Plan goals over state standard goals and vice versa?
10. Describe the materials you use in the resource support classroom for students with learning disabilities?
11. Describe the strategies you use in the resource support classroom for students with learning disabilities?
12. How do you refer to your resource support classroom? As RSP, Resource, Learning Center, Resource Room, other?
13. Are there any other factors that influence your planning and instruction of learning disabled students that you would like to share?

Second Interview

1. Since our first interview, are there any other factors that influence your planning and

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instruction of learning disabled students that you would like to share?

2. Since our first interview, did you have any other thoughts or feelings about your role as a resource specialist that you would like to share?

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Developed by Christy Vasquez Martinez.

APPENDIX F
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



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CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants have a right to privacy and all information identifying participants will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of participants. The researcher will not ask the participants to disclose their school district of employment. The participant will be given the option to provide a contact email address in order to schedule a possible second interview. Contact information will be used only in the event of scheduling a follow up interview. At no time will the participant's contact information be made available to any third party. The confidentiality of the participant's information will be maintained by storing demographic information, interview transcripts, audio recordings and researcher's field notes in a locked filing cabinet or password protected computer located in the researcher's office located at CSUSB in the College of Education for a period of three (3) years. All data collected will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

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AGE: I am over the age of 21 years old. Initials _____

CONTACT INFORMATION: I understand that providing a contact email address is optional and will be used only to schedule a follow up interview. Initials _____

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By participating you will help in increasing the knowledge/literature within the field of special education.

INCENTIVES: You will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card at the conclusion of the face to face interview.

RISKS: The possible risks of participating in this study may include:
(1) Your personal reflections associated with working experiences that may have been uncomfortable experiences could be considered a risk.
(2) Some of the interview questions might evoke in you mild to moderate negative feelings related to educating students.

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CONTACT: If you have any questions about the research and research participant's rights, you may contact Dr. Bonnie Piller, bpiller@csusb.edu or call (909) 537-5651. You may also contact Christy Martinez, 002466593@coyote.csusb.edu or call (909) 319-4723.

RESULTS: The results of this study will be available by June 2013. The results will be presented during a public defense and a bound copy of the dissertation will be available in the California State University San Bernardino Phau Library located at 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino CA 92407.

CONSENT: I understand that I am participating in a research study and the research has been explained to me so that I understand my role as a participant in the study. I understand that I may stop participating at any time without any consequences.

Thank you for your assistance.

Signature _____ Date _____

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