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Debbie Keiley

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**A CASE STUDY USING LITERACY ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIOS WITH
STUDENTS IDENTIFIED WITH DISABILITIES**

By

Debbie A. Keiley

B.S., Special Education, University of Central Florida, 1996
M.A., Elementary Education, University of New Mexico, 2002

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Special Education**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2011

Dedication

It gives me great pleasure to dedicate this work to the many students I have had the pleasure teaching. Through my dedication to each student's dreams of feeling successful when learning how to read, I was able to help students fulfill those dreams and truly believe that they could become better readers. As an educator, my students helped me gain a better understanding of how learning differently can be a struggle. As one student so eloquently stated, "Welcome to my world!" I watched as students began to take those emotional risks trying to read that passage in a book they had always wanted to read and the memories of their faces lighting up with excitement continue to light up my life and warm my heart everyday.

To Camille, my teaching assistant, who is not only a wonderful and devoted mother of four children but also an amazing and gifted educator. While I conducted research in the classroom, her assistance, advice, and continuous emotional support allowed this work to be completed. During this process we have both been become close friends. Bendice a mi familia!

To my amazing daughters, Stacy and Jessica, who also chose to become teachers. Both of my daughters work with those precious emergent readers that are just beginning to understand the concept of word and the power of understanding what another person has written. They too continue to enjoy the smiles on each student's face after experiencing success while sometimes wiping away the tears of frustration when a student struggles to decipher a new word.

To my son, Corey, who has struggled with reading and writing while at the same time when the angels were creating him, they made sure that he had that gifted analytical brain

that would allow him to become a highly recognized problem solver in our world of ever changing technology. What a deeply compassionate man you have become – always striving to make another person’s day just a little better.

To my son’s devoted life partner, Crystal, who has given me many opportunities to laugh, showed me how important it was to help others, shared her compassion toward being a loving and supportive mother to beautiful Keiley girls, and was always willing to just listen when I needed another woman to work through my many life obstacles.

To my beautiful grandchildren, Mikayla, Jack, Kennedy, Alan, Keiley, Lily, and Ryian Grayce (who will soon be born and I will meet for the first time in December). I continue to be so blessed with compassionate and brilliant grandsons that when given a chance, will create some amazing things giving the most highly acclaimed techno wizards of this century a run for their money! Strong, athletic, compassionate, and determination are only some of the words that describe our beautiful granddaughters. Keiley woman will certainly be a force to deal with in the future.

Most importantly I dedicate this work to the love of my life and my best friend, Denis. You never quit believing in me even when I frequently doubted myself. Coming home from class through snowstorms in the canyon, you were always waiting for my safe arrival with a smile on your face. Through the long and seemingly almost never ending writing sessions, you brought me a cup of hot tea and kissed me on the cheek. Although we moved across the country, spent the winter living in a small RV while our home was being built, survived the Alabama 2010 tornadoes and power outage – you made sure that I kept writing because you knew how important it was for me to finish this dissertation and share the stories of each student’s journey of learning how to become better readers and writers.

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The support of many professionals within the field have not only provided me with many hours of inspiration but the expertise that I needed to improve my teaching skills when working with students identified with disabilities, but also how to use my skills to further advance the field of education. First, I would like to acknowledge Professor Ruth Luckasson for your inspiring dedication toward advocating for individuals identified with disabilities. Your professionalism and expertise in the field inspires me to continue your legacy.

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attitudes toward reading. You introduced the idea that attitudes are learned and develop over time as the results of cultural forces and our own daily experience with reading. I would like to also acknowledge Dr. Tom Keyes who was my most inspiring Teacher Enhancement Program (TEP) professor. I learned that teaching and assessing for understanding are indeed the foundations of our professional craft!

Many many thanks goes to Dr. Susan R. Copeland for her amazing strength and patience working with me through the entire dissertation process. Although, I kept saying that I was running out of words to write, you patiently convinced me to write the next section because it was important to share the results with others in the field. I greatly admire your professionalism and expertise in the world of special education.

As McKenna and Stahl (2009) wrote and I strived to remember each and every day when working with students who struggle to read that our attitudes toward reading is shaped by each and every reading experience; by our beliefs about what will happen when we open a book; and by our beliefs about how those we hold in high regard both parents and teachers feel about reading. Every time a teacher prepares to read a book, he or she should remember that the more positive the experience becomes, the more likely each child will become a lifelong reader. This dissertation embodies my recognition of the many professionals, my colleagues and loved ones, and the students and their parents who trusted me to teach their children how to read.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study, using a qualitative research design, was to examine the process of using literacy assessment portfolios (LAPs) within a cross-categorical special education classroom to investigate whether or not using LAPs would provide distinct information about the literacy development of two students identified with specific learning disabilities and one student identified with autism. It also investigated whether or not the information obtained from the LAPs would impact the teacher-investigator's instructional decision-making and whether or not using LAPs would influence parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy development. The outcomes of this case study showed that student reading skills improved, their attitudes toward academic reading improved, there was an increased awareness of their reading/writing needs and behavior, and students self-evaluated their own progress while demonstrating increased confidence. The outcomes for parents showed that parents not only wanted to be involved in their children's progress, but that their expectations of what their children could achieve changed after the LAP process began. Parents also recognized changes in their children's

motivation, self-awareness, and self-efficacy. Finally, this case study demonstrated that the outcomes after implementing LAPs in the classroom helped the teacher gain a deeper understanding of the students as learners, provided a better understanding of the importance of ongoing dialogue, and gave the teacher the opportunity to observe the power of reflection.

Keywords: disability, literacy assessment portfolios, motivation, student-led conferences

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Academic researchers continue to reveal in literature that a teacher's skill is more important than any one reading methodology, and that teachers should focus their efforts on determining what aspects of a reading program are most effective for each individual child identified with a disability (Allington, 2012; Harris & Sipay, 1990; Heilman, Blair & Rupley, 1998). For example, Jeanne Chall (1967) located fewer than 100 studies examining reading interventions spanning over 70 years of research and found that for every approach to reading she uncovered as being effective, the same approach was shown as less effective in other studies. Bond and Dykstra (1967) discovered that children read by a variety of methods and materials and that "no one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method", (p. 75). Heilman, Blair and Rupley (1998) shared that the teacher was the key variable in whether or not a child was successful in learning how to reading and further elaborated that by "knowing when to modify an approach, combine approaches, or use a different approach to meet students' needs, the teacher is a major factor in determining the success of a reading approach" (p. 323). In fact, in another large study conducted 45 years ago, Bond and Dyskstra (1967) came to the conclusion that "Future research might well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than methods and materials" (p. 123).

These findings strongly suggest that special educators, who individualize and modify curriculum to meet the needs of their students identified with disabilities, must understand and continue to learn a full range of reading instructional practices because there continues to be, as revealed by Chall in 1967, no single approach to teaching reading that is successful with all

children. Yet, the past two decades of legislative changes (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997; NCLB, 2001) have encouraged many states to adopt a single commercial reading program, emphasizing that the program be used *with fidelity* in hopes of raising students' standardized test scores (Allington, 2012). The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 (P. L. 105-17) that required all states include students identified with disabilities in both state and local assessments with accommodations or include them in alternate assessments for students with severe disabilities when determined by an IEP committee. Such legislative changes in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 provided a provision for access to the general education curriculum. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (P. L. 107-110) further clarified this obligation by requiring states to design and implement academic content assessments for students in math, reading and language arts, social studies, and science. It can now be said that many educators did not initially realize that the provisions of including all students identified with disabilities in state assessment systems would have such an impact on curriculum.

Since the legislative purpose of mandated standardized assessment was to assess progress within the state academic standards, this meant that special educators had to recognize that while their students identified with disabilities “continue to need some separate, distinguishable goals (e.g., therapy goals, life skills), they also need goals that are aligned with the same academic content as their typical peers” (Browder & Spooner, 2006, p. 4). Although, in the past, special educators looked to the IEP as the central curriculum contract between special and general education, they can no longer claim that the curriculum is the IEP (Pugach & Warger, 2001).

Literacy and Individuals Identified with Disabilities

It is important to remember that teaching reading, writing, and spelling may be a new activity for some special educators because they may have underestimated their students' academic potential. Although the potential of some students identified with more severe disabilities to learn these skills continues to be unknown (Browder & Spooner, 2006), it is important to note that research has solidly documented that students with intellectual disability can learn to read and write (Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell & Algozzine, 2006; Katims, 2000; Kliever, 1998; Kliever & Biklen, 2001; Mirenda, 2003).

When working with students identified with disabilities, it is important to understand that although a student may have a severe disability that does not mean that student will never demonstrate skills that can be directly related to literacy. Mirenda (2003) provided an example of an individual who has a severe disability demonstrating behaviors more associated with early print awareness rather than just a form of self-stimulation. The following vignette is a conversation between a parent of a 6-year-old student and that student's kindergarten teacher, demonstrates this phenomenon:

Why is Stanley sitting over there stacking blocks instead of listening to the story?" I asked. This was my second visit to Stanley's kindergarten, and I was still trying to understand the classroom expectations and rules. "Oh, he can't sit still during story time and he doesn't seem to understand the stories, anyway." His teacher replied. "We decided he would benefit more from one-on-one instruction to improve his fine motor skills" "But I just saw him yesterday looking at a book about fire trucks for more than 10 minutes at recess. He seemed really interested in that." I countered. "Oh, well, yes, he has this thing

about truck books, but all he really does is ‘stim’ on the pictures. We try to discourage him from that,” she explained, “He’s not really a reader. (Mirenda, p. 276)

Whether or not students identified with disabilities may or may not need functional skill instruction (i.e., daily living skills), reading must also be an instructional priority (Downing, 2005). Educational systems have either denied access to literacy instruction in some way or another or provided instruction that was ineffective (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991). Unfortunately, not being able to read can affect both economic security and the general well being of an individual (Downing, 2005; Snell, 2006). Now that special educators are required to take a serious look at curriculum and ask questions about what their students are learning, a method such as using a classroom-based portfolio may be beneficial when planning classroom instruction and incorporating aspects of a school’s reading program that are most effective for each individual student. This form of assessment may provide a more holistic picture of each student’s academic progress containing work samples that are representative of student achievement at different points in time (Downing, 2005). For students identified with a disability, work samples could include samples of the student’s signature, a sample schedule that the student reads, or a book list that student has read or had read to them during the school year. Using collected student artifacts, ongoing performance data, and examining both formal and informal assessments might provide multiple pieces of evidence that would give more timely results to accompany the students’ standardized assessment results.

History of Literacy Instruction for Students Identified with Disabilities

There are important lessons that can be learned by examining the history of literacy instruction individuals identified with disabilities. Katims (2000) presented an overview of key landmarks pertaining to the literacy instruction for individuals with intellectual disability during

the last two hundred years. He placed the historical efforts into two categories. The first category involves reductionist interventions that include decontextualized, highly sequenced and hierarchical drill and practice instruction that taught isolated skills such as alphabet knowledge, individual letter sounds, and word decoding skills. The second category involves literacy interventions that are integrated and contextualized, taking a more constructivist approach to instruction. This category includes combined reading and writing methods, using connected texts, language experience, and other language-based approaches that are more contextually oriented and use more semantically rich methods.

Reductionist model of instructional methods. An interesting story relayed by Katims (2000) that within the more skills-based literacy instruction used around the 1800s, Jean Marc-Gaspard Itard used the association method with physiological stimulation when working with an individual with intellectual disability as diagnosed by Philippe Pinel. Using Juan Pablo Bonet's earlier work teaching students identified with disabilities in Spain, Itard used a multisensory kinesthetic tracing technique and systematic and direct instruction. He used this as the foundation of his instructional procedures to study a feral child named Victor. Our present knowledge of Itard's methods comes from a series of reports that he transmitted to the French Ministry of the Interior and from his brief text, *I'enfant sauvage*, that was translated by George and Muriel Humphrey (1962) as *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (Itard, 1932). Itard hypothesized that Victor's behavior was arrested from social and educational neglect and, therefore, he acquired idiocy through the isolation (Winzer, 1993). Philippe Pinel was thought to have felt differently and maintained that Victor had been thrown in the woods because he already had intellectual disability. His feelings were that intellectual disability resulted from hereditary influences and that such neurological damage was irreversible (Winzer). Itard disregarded these arguments and

worked on socialization, sensory stimulation, concept development, speech, and transfer of learning. After instruction, Victor was able to recognize the entire alphabet and many words. He was able to use his own writing to express his needs and desires (Winzer). In the four years that Itard worked with Victor, the boy progressed in the areas of touch and taste but in the areas of vision and hearing he was far less successful. Itard mourned his work as a failure because he felt that Victor was never fully restored to society (Winzer, 1993).

In 1837, Edouard Onesimus Seguin continued the work of his mentor, Itard, by using additional techniques such as matching wooden cut-out letters to alphabet cards and teaching sight words with Victor (Katims, 2000). In 1839, the phosphorus alphabet was used by John Jakob Guggenbuhl, a Swiss physician, who was the founder and director of Abendberg, “the first institution for people with mental retardation on the European continent” (Katims, p. 4). Using a phosphorus clay pencil and the ringing of a Chinese gong each morning, radiant letters of the Swiss alphabet were printed on a blackboard in a darkened room (Katims, 2000). Even today, classroom teachers use multicolored alphabet letters, finger tracing, computer animated programs, flashcards, and overhead projectors to improve instruction.

As early as 1931, the phonics approach began to emerge and educators realized the importance of using systematic phonics instruction with students who have intellectual disability (Katims, 2000). Samuel Kirk, who introduced the term *learning disabilities*, applied a “multisensory, alphabetic tracing method as an instructional practice for teaching reading to students with mild or moderate mental retardation” (Katims, 2000, p. 5). This led to manual tracing using a multisensory approach and then three years later to the creation of a systematic and sequential reading approach developed by Kirk, his wife, Winifred, and Thorleif Hegge (Katims, 2000). Interestingly enough, in 1967, a young Englishman with Down Syndrome, Nigel

Hunt, published a book called *The World of Nigel: The Diary of a Mongoloid Youth*, where he described how his mother used an oral phonetic spelling technique, plastic letters and then a simple reader that helped him learn how to read and write. Hunt wrote, “mothers such as Grace are few and far between. One must not only have unbounded patience and a single-minded devotion to the task at hand; one must also have faith that a goal will be reached” (Hunt, p. 26). This seems to be his eloquent way of reminding us, the readers, how his mother’s high expectations helped him learn how to read and write.

In 1960, the first documented attempt to use a form of technology with students who were identified as having intellectual disability to teach literacy was the Wyckoff Filmtutor, an automated, programmed teaching machine (Katims, 2000). This early form of technology helped teach letters and sight words. According to Katims after a student pressed a correct answer on a typewriter, an 8mm filmstrip in a projector would start. This was a promising new way to teach sight words. More unique techniques shared by Katims were used throughout the 60s such as the Progressive Choice Method (a program for teaching word decoding skills), the Initial Teaching Alphabet (a simplified reading program using lower case letters attaching one sound to each letter), the Computer Assisted Instruction (first documented computer program used in teaching students with intellectual disability to read), the Words in Color Approach (uses distinct colors for phonemes, digraphs, and diphthongs), the cognitive-behavioral approach (teaching comprehension strategies such as self-questioning and self-recording), and the Ball, Stick, and Bird Method where these three basic forms (ball is a circle, stick is a stick, and bird is an angle) were used to teach the recognition of letters in the alphabet. Today, a program like *Handwriting Without Tears* (Owens, 2004) uses two sizes of sticks and two sizes of half circles to teach children how to develop capital letters.

Constructivist model of instructional approaches. Influenced by Seguin's ideas, Maria Montessori (1870-1951) developed a reading and writing approach using more integrated and contextualized literacy instruction (Katims, 2000). When she began to work with children who had intellectual disability, she established an environment where children in Italy were "free to use materials of their own choice and at their own pace" (Winzer, 1993, p. 216). She designed a system of teaching students with intellectual disability to read and write through the use of short connected texts, sentence strips, words cards, and the use of a multisensory approach (Katims, 2000; Winzer, 1993). It is important to note the Montessori approach was that both reading and writing was taught simultaneously, which differed from other approaches during the time.

According to Katims (2000), later in the 1970s the language experience approach emerged. Educators used flip charts to teach phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Students shared a common experience (e.g., visiting the zoo). They discussed their shared experience while the teacher wrote down on the flipchart what the students said. This was found to be very motivating for the students because the story was constructed using the students' speaking vocabulary. Katims reported that unlike others who used the language experience approach, Heber stressed the "teaching of specific word decoding skills within the context of students' dictated writings (Katims, 2000, p. 7). He continued to share that "students with mild mental retardation were also immersed in literacy-rich environments by caregivers that read storybooks to them regularly" (p. 7).

Immersion in a literacy-rich environment is another effective strategy for literacy learning. Dorothy Butler documented one example of the results from being immersed into a literacy-rich environment in 1979. She studied the literacy immersion of her young granddaughter who had intellectual, physical, sensory, developmentally delayed, and learning

and health disabilities. Dorothy Butler wrote *Cushla and Her Books* (1979) sharing the extensive story of her granddaughter's reaction and relationships with books as early as three months old through almost 4 years old. Her story illustrated how through continuous exposure to a natural and literature-rich environment, a child with severe disabilities was able to follow a story line, identify the main characters within the story, and understand the actions that took place within the story (Katims, 2000, p. 6). Butler wrote in her final remarks pertaining to the power of books:

Seven years ago, before Cushla was born, I would have laid claim to a deep faith in the power of books to enrich children's lives. By comparison with my present conviction, this faith was a shallow thing. I know now what print and picture have to offer a child who is cut off from the world, for whatever reason. But I know that there must be another human being, prepared to intercede, before anything can happen. (p. 107)

Another example of how early literacy immersion has been successful with students identified with disabilities is that of David, a young boy with Down's syndrome who learned how to read at a very young age. Graaf (1993) wrote about how parents of the boy, using the ideas of Greg Doman (1964), began to realize just how much reading could help promote their son's speech development. The actual method the parents used was "taken together in four basic steps, that had to be applied to pictures first and to whole words later on: 'matching', 'selecting', 'naming', and 'comprehending'" (Graaf, p. 87, 1993). David was able to match and select the words but failed to name the cards initially. The parents introduced David to his first personal reading book that consisted of a large ring binder having the picture of the person or an object with a corresponding word card on every page. All of the pictures were covered by a piece of paper encouraging David to first recognize the word and then be reinforced by uncovering the word's matching picture. At the age of four and a half, he was able to speak about 70 words and

could read most of them (Graaf). He was even able to read them when combined to make little sentences. David continued to make progress that inspired his parents to write the following:

If even we, as inexperienced parents with their first child, not hindered by any professional knowledge and against all emphatic recommendations, have been able to reach the foregoing results, then with the proper support, in the future many children with Down's syndrome should be able to reach the same reading proficiency earlier or a higher proficiency at the same age as our David has now. (Graaf, p. 90)

The unnamed authors of the first textbook on intellectual disability recommended the use of more holistic and contextualized literacy approaches for students who have intellectual disability who based their conclusions on the research of Katims (2000) that was successfully conducted with students who had learning disabilities. This idea was somewhat of a landmark in the area of literacy instruction since students identified with disabilities were presumed by many to be incapable of engaging in literature rich learning processes. In the past practitioners seemed to “de-emphasize literacy learning and concentrate more heavily on social, personal, and vocational related curriculum domains for students with intellectual disability (Katims, p. 9). In fact, Allington (1983) found that students identified with disabilities rarely experienced meaning-focused interactions when working with books as he had witnessed general education students experiencing in their classroom environments because reading instruction in the special education environments was focused on learning isolated words. Allington concluded that instructional time was quite often spent working alone on isolated word and letter-sound worksheets focused around outdated and ineffective remedial strategies.

Legislative Landmarks

Influenced both by research, integration, and then inclusion, beliefs about curriculum for students identified with a disability have greatly changed over the last 50 years. Before the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P. L. 94-142) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, students identified with disabilities were considered to be fortunate to receive their education in school programs situated in church basements and private or institutionalized settings (Snell, 2006). “IDEA 1997 is historically tied to the first piece of legislation in 1975 that addressed educating all children with disabilities (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975; P. L. 94-142)”(Browder & Spooner, 2006, p. xvii).

However, in most cases, their education was separate from their peers without disabilities, and they were often warehoused in special wings or basements of whatever schools they attended, regardless of their age and size (Browder & Spooner). Fortunately, efforts to teach functional and meaningful skills and to respect the student’s chronological age began to emerge. Browder and Spooner reported that integration was defined as mixing students identified with disabilities with their peers during non-academic times such as lunch, music. This eventually led to inclusion that refers to students as full time members of a general education classroom rather than just visitors (Browder & Spooner). While many people still hold stereotypes and assumptions about teaching individuals identified with disabilities meaningful academics, I strongly believe those assumptions need to be challenged and fully examined given that NCLB and then Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 as amended in 1996 and then reiterated in 2004; now requires states to provide access to the general education curriculum for all students including those with disabilities.

As discussed earlier, “No Child Left Behind affects all students in general education programs and students identified with disabilities who attend special education programs for part or all of their instruction” (Yell et al., 2006, p. 32). NCLB Act of 2001 (PL 107-110) which is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P. L. 89-10) directly impacted students identified with disabilities by expanding testing requirements to include *all* students to assess progress, making sure accountability was placed on school districts to show adequate yearly progress for *all* students, and mandating that instruction that has been research based be implemented for *all* students. Wright et al. (2006) explained that NCLB was an attempt to impede low expectations and insufficient focus on applying replicable research on proven methods of teaching and learning for children with disabilities (Section 1400(c)(4)). Despite the sweeping nature of NCLB, the aspect of this law that has the greatest impact on our schools is the accountability provisions. This accountability mechanism of NCLB is adequate yearly progress (Yell et al.). In essence, lawmakers passed legislation to ensure that all students would make progress on academic content standards that had been set by each state.

NCLB requires that all students, including those identified with disabilities, must be included in state and district educational assessments because legislators evidently believed that such assessments serve as the best direct indicator of what the students have learned through their instruction (Yell et al., 2006). The intent for including these test results from students identified with disabilities and other diverse groups of students with those of the entire student population was to protect such students from being excluded and to ensure that the schools receive credit for the progress of all students (Yell et al.). These researchers also shared that “if the standardized assessment is not appropriate for the student, even with accommodations, their progress must be measured using an alternate assessment” (p. 34). Alternate assessments can be

used when they are based on alternate achievement standards, but they must align to grade-level content standards. This means that “whereas the overall expectations (i.e., achievement standards) may describe student skills that are significantly below grade level or clearly differentiated in achievement, the assessment should include math and reading content that aligns with the standards, curriculum activities, and materials that are used by same-age/grade peers” (Kearns, Burdge, Clayton, Denham, & Kleinert, 2006, p. 278).

The legislative mandates discussed above require special education teachers to focus on helping their students work toward proficiency on mandated standardized tests which would also help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of NCLB (Yell et al., 2006, p. 37). To provide effective instruction, teachers need to conduct relevant and meaningful assessments and tie those results into strategies research has demonstrated to be effective. Finally, “teachers need to collect meaningful data on their students’ progress to ensure that their instructional programs are working and to make accurate decisions regarding when programmatic changes must be made” (Yell et al., p. 38).

One meaningful way to monitor progress and gain information to plan appropriate instruction may be in the form of a classroom-based portfolio assessment. Some believe that a portfolio could be a useful tool for students identified with a disability because “they allow for the collection and communication of authentic data across a variety of skill areas and settings” (Carothers & Taylor, 2003, p. 121). These researchers argue that classroom-based portfolios could simplify communication by “enabling all participants in the student’s life to assist in the student’s development” (p. 122). Carothers and Taylor go on to explain that portfolios could provide a variety of information topics that would be collected in one place, and also that “portfolios can make it easy to notice when new skills are emerging” (p. 122). This would be

especially important when working with students whose reading development takes a flat and longer trajectory than a single year in a classroom and therefore would help teachers better understand the entirety of a student's development when those portfolios were developed and enhanced over a student's time in school.

Because many students identified with a disability make progress in small steps, using a classroom-based assessment portfolio might be an effective means of measuring these students' progress that would complement the required standardized assessments. The required standardized assessment to evaluate Adequate Yearly Progress does not provide sufficient information to guide instruction. Such information needs to be collected and used on a more frequent and regular basis in order to make accurate decisions regarding when curriculum modifications must be made.

A systematic collection of ongoing performance data measuring acquisition and generalizations of specific skills can be accommodated within a classroom-based assessment portfolio, with the immediate results available to guide classroom instructional changes if needed. In fact, a classroom-based literacy assessment portfolio can "accommodate a variety of student demonstration techniques including systematic instructional data collection systems, student work samples, and video or audio taped performance events" (Kearns et al., 2006, p. 292). A question that has not been fully examined is whether or not classroom-based portfolio assessment can provide students identified with a disability the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned within the context of daily instruction aligned with grade-level content standards.

Background of the Problem

Deficit vs. ability models. One of the greatest challenges that many educators have faced in the past 25 years is how to effectively assess students with diverse abilities. History has shown us that special education assessment teams have relied almost exclusively on the use of standardized tests (Soodak & Parke, 2003). “At the time when the field was characterized as one of deficit, these tests were used to determine the extent and type of deficiencies present in students who were referred to special education” (Soodak & Parke, p. 223). A movement toward more meaningful assessment information led to a performance based approach (i.e., authentic assessment). This approach focused more on what students can do rather than on what students cannot do. Soodak and Parke wrote that “focusing on ability rather than disability has created the need for methods and materials that display skills rather than document deficiency” (p. 223).

Soodak and Parke (2003) identified several factors in special education that are involved in the movement toward more authentic types of assessment. One factor involves the state and federal laws that regular special education services when legislators’ work to find the best way to assure a *free and appropriate* education for students identified with disabilities. Specifically, P. L. 94-142 established the six principles for special education service delivery and indirectly impact assessment procedures. These principles include such as zero reject, nondiscriminatory assessment, individualized education programs, least restrictive environment, due process, and parental participation. Soodak and Parke also noted that although P. L. 94-142 “provides guidelines for conducting fair and unbiased student evaluations, it does not mandate the types of assessment measures that should be used in determining eligibility, developing instructional plan, or monitoring student progress” (p. 223).

For the purpose of this study, the question that still remains is whether or not such a “one-shot” testing approach provides enough information for special educators to make instructional changes that would facilitate the progress of identified with disabilities. Using classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios might add another dimension to the holistic picture of the progress made or not made toward grade-level content standards by students identified with disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

Meaningful assessment and instruction. When students’ current knowledge and skill do not match the instructional program they are participating in, students quite often fail to learn (Allington, 2012). Teachers must make informed decisions about the instructional methods they use and be able and willing to modify or change those methods if student data do not demonstrate progress. Teachers should be able to develop and conduct relevant and meaningful assessments that will determine instructional interventions that are appropriate for that student. For example, if data indicate that a student is having difficulty learning key concepts or skills in the general curriculum, modifications to the curriculum or in the teacher’s instructional strategies should be put in place based on the student’s educational needs as shown in assessment. This would provide the foundation for meaningful instruction.

I proposed to monitor progress of students identified with disabilities in the area of literacy development using a classroom-based portfolio assessment. This type of assessment has several potential benefits in that this data may help the teacher: (a) guide and modify instruction, (b) inform his or her decisions on curriculum changes, (c) contribute to future IEPs and reevaluation data, (d) provide data to share with students with the potential of increasing their motivation, (e) provide student progress information to parents and other education professionals

to encourage collaboration on literacy progress, and (f) hold high expectations about his or her students.

Purpose of Study

In order for classroom-based portfolio assessments to be useful in a special education environment, more research needs to be done (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2002, p.19). Since qualitative studies in the form of case studies typically focus on small samples or on individuals, they can be especially valuable in helping teachers understand how particular programs or approaches affect individuals who may not represent the mainstream or average student.

I proposed to conduct a case study to examine the process of using classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios to document the progress of three fourth and fifth grade student-participants identified with a disability. This study took place in a cross-categorical special education classroom. This study is based on the premise that using a form of an alternative assessment (i.e., classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios) combined with information from formal and informal assessments and continuous observational notes would provide a more comprehensive and holistic collection of information about students' progress and instructional needs. Doing a case study in this area could add to the special education literature by examining how classroom-based portfolios could enable student participants identified with a disability to demonstrate what they are learning within the context of daily instruction aligned with grade-level content standards. Another aspect of this case study that has the potential to impact the field of special education is through a comprehensive analysis of my daily teaching reflection notes discussing why curriculum and instructional decisions were made for individual student participants. Finally, parents' involvement in their child's education has been considered to have potential for benefiting a child's academic performance (Wiener & Cohen, 1997). Using

classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios in my classroom could inform parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy.

Questions Addressed

By implementing portfolios within an elementary school special education classroom as a method to document progress in literacy skills for students identified with a disability, I hoped to effectively answer the following questions within this study: (a) do classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios provide distinct information about the literacy development of students identified with a disability, and if so, in what ways; (b) does information obtained from classroom-based literacy portfolios impact my (as the teacher-participant) instructional decision-making and if so, in what ways; (c) does the use of classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios influence parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy and if so, in what ways.

Background of Using Portfolios

Portfolios have been utilized since the 1950s or earlier. For example, parents often collected items for memory boxes full of their children's spelling test results, report, cards, and the important plaster hand imprint plates given on various holidays (Herbert, 2001). Parents selected each item and placed it in the memory box. Each item represented a new skill that was learned or milestone that was achieved. Looking back at those memory boxes, each item seemed to form a part of the identity of a child and the milestones accomplished during that childhood.

Using portfolios in the classroom can also be an instrument or memory box that would allow "all children to be successful in organizing the story of their own learning" (Hebert, 2001, p. 63). Other types of classroom-based portfolios include those that are showcase, reflective, goal-based, development portfolios, or proficiency portfolios. Smith, Brewer and Heffner (2003)

wrote that portfolios can be used as a showcase that holds art samples and work that the child has participated in during the school year including anecdotal records pertaining to factors that encourage or discourage a particular student (e.g., types of praise, marking papers). Smith et al., also shared that a classroom-based portfolio could be used as a reflective tool that would be able to demonstrate a specific dimension of learning (e.g., numeracy) or a goal-based portfolio that could assess IEP objectives (e.g., letter recognition). Barrett (2003) described another type of classroom-based portfolios such as developmental portfolios designed to demonstrate student improvement and growth while including student work samples and student self-reflection. She continues to share that proficiency portfolios hold collections of evidence that demonstrate competence and/or mastery of a particular content area which would include standardized test score results.

Uses for portfolios. There have been many working definitions of the term portfolio. Some describe a portfolio as a collection of work samples while others describe a portfolio assessment as individual collections of daily drawings, photographs, writing samples, audiotapes, video recordings, and other materials that provide visual and/or auditory documentation of a child's strengths (Carpenter & Ray, 1995; Smith et al., 2003). Benson and Smith (1998) emphasize that portfolio assessment involves "assessing children's processes of learning as well as the products they create" (p. 174). Herman and Winters (1994) noted the following:

Well-designed portfolios represent important, contextualized learning that requires complex thinking and expressive skills. Traditional tests have been criticized as being insensitive to local curriculum and instruction, and assessing not only student achievement but aptitude. Portfolios are being heralded as vehicles that provide a more equitable and sensitive portrait of what students know and are able to do. Portfolios

encourage teachers and schools to focus on important student outcomes, provide parents and the community with credible evidence of student achievement, and inform policy and practice at every level of the educational system. (p. 48)

Educators have utilized portfolios in a variety of ways as a means of authentic assessment. For example, Gronlund and Engel (2001) used a *Focused Portfolio* process by asking teachers to authentically assess children by carefully observing their everyday interactions within the classroom. Working primarily with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in child care centers, the researchers wanted to use a portfolio system to document and track each child's ongoing developmental milestones, such as thinking, reasoning, and problem solving; emotional and social competency; language and communication; and gross- and fine-motor development. Staff members reflected in their written observations discussing the developmental milestones that children were making. This type of structured observed was very effective in documenting the children's progress.

Another way that classroom-based portfolios were used as a means of authentic assessment was when Cooper and Brown (1992) demonstrated that portfolios could be a valuable source for summative evaluation by teacher and student. By the end of the grading periods, they provided an accurate measure of what the students had accomplished. Cooper and Brown also pointed out that the portfolio has the potential for formative assessments in that when "students make tentative selections for portfolios and especially when they compile interim portfolios, evaluate them, and reflect on what they notice, they can reinforce their own learning processes and set goals for future learning" (Cooper & Brown, p. 45).

Calling for a need for more holistic assessment strategies that were more responsive to the needs of students with behavior disorders and learning disabilities, Swicegood (1994) pointed

out “professional educators must move away from evaluative practices that exhibit static, one-shot, product-oriented dimensions” (p. 8). He argued that evaluation should be ongoing and dynamic, casting a qualitative light not only what that student knows and can do but how he or she does it and what they think about. Finally, he wrote that it is also important to know from what language and cultural background the child is processing the new information and experiences. In conclusion, Swicegood envisioned that “teachers who face the challenge of preparing students with learning disabilities or emotional or behavioral disorders must adopt new methods and conceptual schemes for student assessment” (p. 12). He shared that using student portfolios in placement and instructional planning contexts, as well as letting it help design IEP goals and objectives, can add both depth and breath to the entire intervention process.

Defining a purpose for a classroom-based portfolio. One of the most important steps in using classroom-based portfolios is defining the purpose for which it will be used. It is important to determine whether the classroom-based portfolio will be a reflection tool, an evaluation tool, a documentation tool to show student growth over time, or just a mechanism to show student work. Experts have pointed out that there are usually two basic reasons for doing portfolios – assessment and instruction (Arter, Spandell & Culham, 1995). These researchers continued by writing “assessment uses relate to keeping track of what students know and can do. Instructional uses relate to promoting learning – students learn something from assembling a portfolio” (p. 2).

Classroom-based portfolios with assessment designated as their purpose tend to be more structured (i.e., uniformity of included items), have performance criteria allowing for evaluation of student work to monitor student growth, use self-reflection techniques to gain insight about student achievement, and require more time for teacher to manage (Arter et al., 1995). These researchers further elaborated that classroom-based portfolios used for instructional purposes

tend to belong more to the student, be less structured, have a performance criteria for use by student (i.e., self-reflection), treat the act of student self-reflection as an essential part of learning, and require more time on the part of students to manage. Finally, Arter et al. pointed out that “once the purpose is clear, questions about what goes in, who decides, uses of criteria, and how self-reflection is used are much easier and more logical” (p. 5). When classroom-based portfolios are used for assessment, teachers could collect multiple samples of student work over time giving them a “broader, more in-depth look at what students know and can do; base assessment on more ‘authentic’ work; have a supplement or alternative to report and standardized tests, and have a better way to communicate student progress to parents” (Arter et al., p. 2). For the purpose of instruction, the process of developing a classroom-based portfolio can help student’s develop self-reflection skills, use critical thinking skills, have a better understanding of the progress they make, and to take responsibility for their learning.

Types of portfolio content. Once the purpose has been decided, it will guide what type of content or student work goes into the classroom-based portfolio. There are essential elements that a classroom-based portfolio should contain such as a cover letter that would include something about the author of the portfolio and a summary letter focused on personal progress made during the year (Kemp & Temperoff, 1998). These researchers advise a table of contents with numbered pages and core entries that students need to include. Dates need to be placed on all the entries to monitor growth over time and both writing drafts and final copies need to be included. Finally, Kemp and Temperoff suggest the students reflect on the progress of their classroom-based portfolio artifact by answering the following questions: (a) “What did I learn from it, (b) What did I do well, (c) Why (based on the agreed teacher-student assessment criteria)

did I choose this item, (d) What do I want to improve in the item, (e) How do I feel about my performance, and (f) What were the problem areas” (p.4).

Finally, Gelfer and Perkins (1998) wrote, “portfolios represent the students’ social, cognitive, emotional, creative, and physical performance and development pertinent to the learning activities the student experienced in the educational setting” (p. 45). Gelfer and Perkins go on to list content that might be included such as current IEPs and lists of student objectives, audiotapes of students reading, reading lists and reviews, student observations that would include anecdotal observation records, checklists (e.g., developmental, criterion referenced, behavior), and primary language samples.

Developing a process Review of the professional literature on classroom-based portfolios revealed that experts in this area consistently recommend that teachers need to establish a system (i.e., process) for “deciding how and when they and their students will place items in the portfolio” (Gelfer & Perkins, 1998, p. 46). Many teachers believe that what goes into the classroom-based portfolio should be shared by the student, the teacher and the parents. Krest (1990) shared that in a portfolio writing project, once the high school students realized that not every piece of writing they composed was graded, they used their papers to find ideas they would normally not write about if they thought the paper would be graded. In fact, the teacher in that portfolio writing project wrote that their portfolio became “a living, breathing documentation not only of how a student interprets and applies another’s remarks, including mine, but also of how the student struggles with ideas and works to communicate in writing” (Krest, p. 30).

Some guidelines offered through the literature suggest that a teacher have classroom-based portfolio conferences with students at least once a month depending on what is needed.

This will give a student the opportunity to share their understanding of a concept while giving the teacher an indicator and opportunity to instruct the student on that concept if it is not clearly understood by the student. The conferences can be another good opportunity to discuss a student's performance that could help in lesson plan development. "The objectives of the portfolio conference are to (a) identify areas that need improvement, (b) provide suggestions for growth, (c) acknowledge successful individual growth and development, (d) demonstrate the potential of the students work, and (e) help students design a plan of action to build skills and creativity" (Gelfer & Perkins, 1998, p. 46).

Finally, Kemp and Toperoff (1998) reminded us "reflection and self-assessment do not come naturally to people who have had little practice in it, and requires learner training" (p.7). They encourage their readers to ask the student questions such as "What did I learn from this activity?" and "How would I improve this?" A teacher can start with more structured reflection activities, have the students practice with a peer, and then slowly work into oral reflections with the teacher. Kemp and Toperoff also reminded their readers that "this is training in a life-skill, and is well worth the time and effort spent in class" (p.7).

Evaluating the product. A classroom-based portfolio can be used as an evaluation tool documenting academic and developmental growth. Tests made by the teachers, criterion-referenced tests, and standardized test results can all be used to demonstrate student performance. Various reading skill tests for phonemic awareness assessment can be included as well as reading fluency measures, comprehension quick checks, and miscue analysis. Self and peer-assessment can also be used as a tool for formative evaluation. Another idea is to have the student write a letter about the classroom-based portfolio giving feedback on what improvements they would make. Although "teachers already have busy schedules, the portfolio assessment

approach provides flexibility, collaboration, and documentation of the students' progress and can be beneficial to the teacher, parents, and the child" (Gelfer & Perkins, 1998, p. 46).

Benefits and Challenges of Using Classroom-based Portfolios

There are many potential benefits to using classroom-based assessment portfolios in the classroom. In fact, many benefits have already been pointed out. Kemp and Toperoff (1998) share that portfolio assessments help "match assessment to teaching, have clear goals, and gives an in depth profile of the learners abilities" (p. 2). A wide range of skills can also be demonstrated such as growth (i.e., efforts to improve and develop over time), and awareness of ones own learning (i.e., self-assessments, reflections). Portfolio assessment also caters to different learning styles and the expression of different strengths, develops social skill development (e.g., assessing work in peers or groups), can improve motivation for learning (e.g., students have the mechanism to prove achievement), a tool for demonstrating learning all in one package, and provides the opportunity for student-teacher conferences (i.e., promotes goal-setting) (Kemp & Toperoff, p.3).

Benson and Smith (1998) point out that portfolios offer children unique opportunities such as shared decision-making and control in learning; examination of individual work and growth; active participation in the literacy and learning process; reflection on student strengths as well as weaknesses; engagement in student's own personal story of how learning ideas takes place; self-assessment of ongoing growth; greater responsibility for learning; and improved skills in an authentic setting (Bensen & Smith). In the beginning of their study, Benson and Smith point out that the power of the portfolio is to "communicate with families, the improvement of students' abilities to self-assess and set goals, and the usefulness of portfolios in guiding teachers instructional decisions" (p. 173).

The literature has also pointed out areas of challenge when it comes to implementing portfolios within the classroom. Teachers have expressed their concerns about lack of time to prepare and implement student portfolios (Thompson & Baumgartner, 2008). For example, it is likely that assessment portfolios require a lot of work and time to develop, but in a time when data-collection is required, it may be a needed tool. Another challenge in using portfolios is that since the portfolios contain a variety of artifacts, they can be messy and sometimes hard to store. Sometimes portfolios are nothing but a collection of stuff with no real direction. Portfolio assessment can be initiated without a clear purpose that lacks set standards or criteria. The flexibility and nonstandard format of portfolio assessment can be a disadvantage if the assessment purpose is not determined ahead of time.

Using Portfolios in Special Education. Unfortunately, people identified with disabilities have been and often continue to be represented in terms of their needs, deficiencies, or inabilities rather than their strength areas. Simply, what students identified with disabilities cannot do is emphasized to a much larger degree over what they can do. This may be why some teachers are relying less on norm-referenced, standardized tests and using alternative types of data collection to get more authentic assessment of their students' progress toward goals. Portfolios have the potential to give teachers a way to collect and present a variety of performance data communicating a rich and comprehensive portrayal of their students' accomplishments. As pointed out by Carpenter and Ray (1995) "portfolios can be particularly effective in establishing authentic assessment procedures in special education" (p. 4). Both researchers go on to explain that portfolios can be used to document eligibility, help teachers plan instruction, become a system to monitor program toward IEP goals and objectives, and a way to communicate the students' progress based more on the students' strengths.

In essence, this requires that schools provide more effective instruction by providing early intervention for those students who are having difficulty with learning how to read and gives states the option of using a Response to Intervention method which requires data collection and documentation on how a student responds to intensive reading instruction before they are referred for a special education evaluation (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Portfolio data could greatly contribute to such judgments by showing growth patterns over time, areas of reading deficits, response to interventions that were used, and even providing an insight into a student's own perceptions of his or her achievements (Carpenter & Ray, 1995). Finally, quite often other forms of assessment focus more on students' deficits whereas portfolios can show students what they can do and how well they can accomplish that skill.

Another positive benefit of using portfolios in special education is that portfolios do not compare children to other children but rather they provide a comprehensive view of individual children within the context of the school program (Appl, 2000). In fact, Campbell, Milbourne, and Silverman (2001) pointed out that portfolios might be a means to create more positive teacher attitudes toward students identified with disabilities. Campbell et al. showed that the perceptions of some educators of an individual student's disability or needs might function more as a barrier to successful inclusion within the school environment. Other benefits that Appl (2000) points out is that teachers using portfolios would be able to more effectively integrate assessment and instruction and that this process would give a wealth of information during annual IEP meetings, improve communication with parents and motivate children to safely learn how to evaluate their own work without fear of criticism or "being different". The power of classroom-based portfolios used as teaching tools continues to be explored in classrooms across the country (Cooper & Brown, 1992; Dudley, 2001).

Definitions

Since this study involved working with students identified with a range of disabilities and focused on the area of literacy, it was necessary to include six important definitions for the following terms: (a) child with a disability, (b) severe disabilities, (c) autism, (d) specific learning disability, (e) speech or language impairment, (f) literacy, (g) standardized assessment, (h) alternative assessment, and (i) portfolio assessment.

Child with a disability. For the purpose of this dissertation, I define the term *child with a disability* using the following definition taken from the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (§ 300.8) (a) (1):

The term ‘child with a disability’ means a child evaluated in accordance with §§ 300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as ‘emotional disturbance’), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

Severe disabilities. I define the term *severe disabilities* using the definition from TASH, an organization supporting the equity, opportunity and inclusion for people with disabilities defines the condition of severe disabilities, with regard to necessary support:

These people include individuals of all ages who require extensive ongoing support in more than one major life activity in order to participate in integrated community settings and to enjoy a quality of life that is available to citizens with fewer or no disabilities.

Support may be required for life activities such as mobility, communication, self-care,

and learning as necessary for independent living, employment, and self-sufficiency.

(Adopted by TASH, December, 1985, revised November, 1986; reprinted in Meyer, Peck, & Brown, 1991, p. 19)

Autism. I define the term *autism* using the following definition taken from the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (§ 300.8) (c) (1) (i):

Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

Specific learning disability. I define the general term for *specific learning disability* using the following definition taken from the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (§ 300.8) (10) (i):

Specific learning disability means 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.

Speech or language impairment. I define the term for *speech or language impairment* using the following definition taken from the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (§ 300.8) (11):

Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Literacy. Since this research project will be focused primarily in the area of literacy development for individuals identified with a disability, for the purpose of this dissertation, I define the term *literacy* using the following definition taken from Harris and Hodges (1995):

[The] minimal ability to read and write in a designated language, as well as a mindset or way of thinking about the use of reading and writing in everyday life. It differs from simple reading and writing in its assumption of an understanding of the appropriate uses of these abilities within a print-based society. Literacy, therefore, requires an active, autonomous engagement with print and stresses the role of the individual in generating as well as receiving and assigning independent interpretations to messages. (Harris & Hodges, p. 142)

Forms of Assessment

Finally, this research will investigate how literacy portfolios can be used to assess and guide literacy development of students identified a disability. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define the terms (a) standardized assessment and (b) portfolio assessment using definitions taken from Downing (2005) as follows:

Standardized assessment. Norm-referenced tests that compare individual performance with the overall group tested (Harris & Hodges, p. 137).

Alternative assessment. The use of means of assessment other than standardized tests to achieve 'direct' and 'authentic' assessment of student performance on important tasks (Harris & Hodges, p. 137)

Portfolio assessment. A form of alternative assessment that is highly individualized and reflects the progress of individual students through selection of representative samples of work (e.g., written sample of a book report, videotaped lesson of a task being performed, math homework sheet) (Harris & Hodges, p. 137).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that I adopted to this study comes from a constructivist model where a learner can actively construct meaning placing the learner as an integral part of the learning process. Constructivism is a theory that is based on observation and scientific study on how people learn (Cohen & Wiener, 2003; Marlowe & Page, 2005). Simply put, people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world by experiencing the activities that take place around them and reflecting on those experiences. In a classroom, the constructivist view of learning usually means encouraging students to use more active techniques such as experimenting and or real-world problem solving to create more knowledge. They are then encouraged to reflect and talk about what they are doing and how their personal understanding is changing. A teacher's role would be to help students continue assessing how the activity is helping them gain understanding. Simply put, the students learn how to learn.

Looking through the window of a more constructivist classroom you would find a curriculum that is emphasizing big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts (Cohen & Wiener, 2003). Learning would be interactive, building on what the student or students already know. Teachers would have a dialogue with students, in essence, helping the students construct their own knowledge. The teacher's role would be interactive rooted more in the area of negotiation (Cohen & Wiener). Assessment would include student work, observations, checklists, as well as tests. The process would be as important as the product.

Knowledge would be seen as dynamic and fluid while students would work primarily in groups or as individuals (Cohen & Wiener).

Marlowe and Page (2005) wrote, “research in pedagogy long ago established that ongoing, formative assessments by teachers provide the richest, most accurate, most authentic, and most useful educational information” (p. 51). Both authors give a good example of how making judgments about a student’s progress on the basis of a one-shot summative evaluation can indeed be inaccurate by sharing the following vignette: “Oh, I thought Johnny was a good reader because he summarizes what he reads so eloquently, reads for pleasure, and get excited by books. But since he did poorly on the statewide exam, I guess I was wrong” (p. 51). In a constructivist classroom, teachers help students learn how to measure their own progress. Marlow and Page shared that “assessment does not bring an end to learning; it provides information about how to continue with respect to learning and curriculum requirements” (p. 51). Both authors point out that traditional assessment formats such as multiple-choice examines that students can quickly recall the information. This type of assessment would be detrimental for students identified with disabilities and not good measures of what students can do or of what they understand. For example, when you want to test a student’s knowledge of how to use correct writing conventions, instead of having them take a multiple-choice test picking out which sentence is correct, it might be more conducive to ask each student to write two sentences using two rules of capitalization and then orally explain to the teacher how they came up with the two rules.

Marlowe and Page (2005) remind us that we need to “create assessment instruments that do more than merely tap a student’s recall or recognition skills” (p. 53). By this, both authors share a list noting that we must reframe assessment so that: “(a) it is, as much as possible, a

continuous process that is part of instruction and not separate from it; (b) it connects directly to learning and is introduced before or simultaneously with material; (c) it requires students to do more than simply remember (e.g., requires students to develop mathematical formulas, produce exhibitions, write essays, create a sculpture, write poetry, create a musical score, develop and participate in debates, or create and conduct experiments); and (d) students questions, at least in part, drive the process” (p. 53). Such student’s work can be easily added to a classroom-based portfolio using pictures and actual work artifacts. Students can demonstrate what they have learned from reading a particular book and giving a presentation (e.g., author’s chair). The most important factor in constructivist type classroom is that assessment is a continuous process not separated from instruction. Such a classroom would allow students identified with disabilities to remain interested and engaged in learning by giving them the opportunity to discover, create, and problem solve. I believe that classroom-based portfolios used within a constructivist classroom is something that might greatly benefit students identified with a disability in that both learning and assessment could be closely tied together giving everyone a more holistic picture of the student’s progress.

Major theorists involved in constructivism. As a philosophy of learning, constructivism began during the age known as the Enlightenment with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1927). Marlowe and Page (2005) wrote that Rousseau “believed that the classical education of his time, which consisted of reading and memorizing, prevented students from being active, which in turn caused them to be passive, destructive, deceitful, selfish, and stupid” (p. 10). Both authors continued by writing that Rousseau “argued that this education was boring and beyond the child’s comprehension, and that it taught students “to believe much and know little” (p. 10). Both authors go on to say that Rousseau believed that students learn through their

senses, their experience, and through activity. “It is the child’s interaction with the environment – his experiences – that correct and modify these ideas and that results in true learning” (Marlow & Page, p. 11).

The two main contemporaries to further develop the idea of constructivism when applied to the classroom environment and childhood development were John Dewey and Jean Piaget. When John Dewey opened his laboratory school in Chicago in 1896, he had already objected to the content and method of his own classical education because it did not involve problem solving or reflective thinking (Marlow & Page, 2005, p. 11). Dewey advocated that education depended greatly on action. “He believed that because students need to interact with their environment in order to think, every student should be engaged in activity around a project (Dewey, 1933; Marlow & Page). Dewey postulated that students cannot learn by means of rote memorization – that they can only learn through “directed living”. Implication of Dewey’s theory is that student must be engaged in meaningful activities that would help them apply the concepts they were trying to learn. The project needs to fit around the “student’s interest, involve the student actively, have intrinsic worth, present problems that would lead to new questions and inquiry, and involve considerable time span (Dewey, Marlow & Page). A graduate student of Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick also “believed that projects should be the center of the curriculum because they would increase student motivation and involvement, turn boring schoolwork into meaningful activity, and at the same time increase student knowledge and skill” (Marlow & Page, p. 12).

Jean Piaget, a Swiss biologist and psychologist was also interested in how humans adapted to the environment and went on to expand Dewey’s argument “against traditional education with his claim that the traditional instructional method of *teacher telling* students

required that the teacher and the student (listener) have mutual communication frameworks but that this was not realistic” (Marlow & Page, 2005, p. 12). He went on to argue that the student heard only what that student perceived which might not be the same thing the teacher was saying. In essence, what the teacher had taught might not be what the students had learned (Marlow & Page).

One of Piaget’s contributions to the direction and understanding of constructivism were his two ideas about how people learn (i.e. schemata and learning). He gave us the “term *schemata* that refers to knowledge structures or constructs and ways of perceiving, understanding, and thinking about the world” (Marlow & Page, 2005, p. 12). These authors go on to explain that “according to Piaget, learners construct their own knowledge schemes in relation to, and filtered through, previous and current experiences: (p. 12). Piaget also described mental development (i.e., learning) as a process of equilibrium in response to external stimuli. Marlow and Page further explain when “in the interaction with the environment, he (Piaget) theorized, the student assimilates complementary components of the external world into his existing cognitive structures (schemata); if new experiences do not fit the existing knowledge structures or schemes, the student will change or alter those structures to accommodate the new information” (p. 12). Therefore, Piaget argued that the process of maintaining equilibrium – construction and reconstruction of knowledge – in relation to the environment is what creates cognitive growth (Labinowicz, 1980). In Piaget’s view, in order for knowledge to truly be meaningful - students need to construct it themselves.

Finally, a psychologist that worked with Piaget named Jerome Bruner who was one of the group of American scholars was involved in rewriting math, science, and social studies curricula as a result from the education debate that occurred after the launching of Sputnik (Marlow &

Page, 2005, p. 12). Similar to Dewey and Kilpatrick, Bruner (1971) claimed that teaching of information out of context results in rote nonsense because the delivered content is not connected to or associated with student action, and students do not form the necessary cognitive connections to understand the material (Bruner). Simply, discovery is the core of Bruner's theory while through this discovery comes increased intellectual ability that includes the ability to solve problems (Marlow & Page).

Constructivism and using portfolios. According to Cohen and Wiener (2003), constructivism is based on a more holistic approach to learning; it "accommodates diverse learning styles without sacrificing the richness associated with higher-level learning" rather than the traditional reductionist approach (p. 226). It also leads to educational practices that consider many factors that promote learning such as cultural, environmental, and social. As Cohen and Wiener so eloquently phrased it, "the overriding question therefore changes from "What is wrong with the student?" to "Why is the student not learning?" (p. 226). The portfolio process fits within a constructivist framework because the process recognizes that children's active participation is necessary for their construction of knowledge. Portfolio assessment allows holistic measure of progress rather than the student's ability to complete discrete tasks. Participating in a portfolio process not only provides what the child is doing but how and why they are doing it. Finally, teachers can communicate to students that what they do is important when they show them that saving and examining their work is important, a key element of the portfolio process.

As a special education teacher, the initial model of teaching I followed focused on linking assessment and instructional practices based on individual student weaknesses or deficits known as the diagnostic-prescriptive model. The areas of deficits were then linked to educational goals

in the student's IEP and the skills that needed to be strengthened became the individualized curriculum. The teaching method involved "breaking down, or task analyzing, the targeted skill into its component parts and teaching each discrete unit using drill and practice" (Soodak & Parke, 2003, p. 226). My experience has been that basing instruction primarily on an individual student's deficits only results in a splintered curriculum. I have found that teaching isolated skills through drill and practice hindered my students from connecting and integrating new knowledge with the knowledge that was previously learned. The isolated skills remained isolated in the context in which it was learned.

After experiencing the diagnostic-prescriptive model of teaching, I found that when teaching literacy skills it became more important to employ a more holistic orientation looking at integrated literacy instruction techniques where language learning is viewed as a natural process that incorporates all modes of communication. I found that providing a real purpose for reading, writing, and speaking motivated my students in a way that I found was missing when I used a more diagnostic-prescriptive model of teaching. With a more holistic approach to teaching, getting the right answer was de-emphasized while comprehension gained more importance. It became obvious that this reduced stress on my students who, unfortunately, were accustomed to failure. Soodak and Parke (2003) make a case that "teachers who use holistic instruction can accommodate greater diversity than teachers who promote discrete skill instruction, because the emphasis is on forming a community of learners – a must in the inclusive classroom; both the goals and the methods encourage interaction and acceptance" (p. 227).

When it pertains to the construction of knowledge, I lean toward believing that "each of us constructs our own meaning and learning about issues, problems, and topics" because none of us have had the exact same experiences as another person (Marlowe & Page, 2005, p. 8). These

authors go on to explain that this prior experience, knowledge, and learning affect the construction of our knowledge by using the following example:

Let's assume students are reading a story about a cat. Each student comes to class with a different understanding of the concept "cat". One student might be thinking cats are warm and cuddly; another might be thinking about how a cat's scratch can hurt. Given the mean and past experiences each student has in relation to cats, the story itself takes on a different understanding for each student." (Marlowe & Page, p.8)

Marlow and Page further explain that since individuals devise their own meanings and understandings of issues, concepts, and problems – "emphasis in a constructivist classroom is not on transmitting information but on promoting learning through student intellectual activity such as questioning, investigating, problem generating, and problem solving" (p. 8). Boldly, Marlow and Page wrote that students identified with disabilities are in far more urgent need of constructivist approaches within the classroom yet they are less likely to receive these approaches.

Importance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons. First, the use of portfolios in the classroom has not been fully explored with students identified with a disability (Campbell et al., 2001; Ezell et al., 1999; Rhine & Smith, 2001; Thompson & Baumgartner, 2005). School districts tend to use a standards-based report card, and many of our students identified with a disability are performing academically below their grade-level peers so the report card shows only this. Having another more holistic, dynamic, multidimensional assessment approach to show progress toward a student's IEP goals and progress toward standards would be very beneficial. It is interesting that students identified with disabilities need Individualized Education Plans yet they

have to take a standardized assessment to measure their progress. Literature has revealed that better teaching decisions have been made based on the student's performance with increased flexibility and individualization and that students had taken a more active role in their literacy development through reflection that may promote self-confidence and mastery of communication skills. Literature has also revealed that parents had left parent-teacher conferences with more detailed information on the literacy progress of their child and were given the opportunity to contribute to how their family and culture participate in the literacy development of their children. Finally, literature has demonstrated that classroom-based portfolios act as a more detailed and complex tool to share student progress with general education teachers. However, few peer-reviewed studies have been completed in the area of using classroom-based portfolios. The question also remains as to whether or not such a tool would be beneficial when working with students identified with a disability.

Since legislation has placed the current national focus on improving reading instruction for all of our students including those identified with a disability as well as, access to the general curriculum mandated regardless of the environment, combined with the NCLB requirement that all students participate in standardized assessment to determine the progress that students are making toward state standards - there still are questions that remain unanswered. Would the use of classroom-based portfolios show details in the area of progress that standardized assessments have missed? Combined with the results of the standardized assessment, would using classroom-based portfolios give educators a more holistic picture of what a student identified with a disability is capable of achieving working toward the standards within the general curriculum? In the area of instruction, would classroom-based portfolios impact a teacher's decision making when planning and then delivering instruction? If the classroom-based portfolio provided more

details of a student's progress, would it enhance the student's instructional opportunities? This study will explore the answers to these questions.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study took place in a small classroom environment where students leave their general education classrooms to receive individualized and/or small group instruction. The students were identified through diagnostic testing to have a disability. The reading levels of the students were between two to four years below their grade level peers. This study was limited to students identified with disabilities that receive their special education services and specialized instruction within a segregated learning environment. Instruction was based upon their Individual Education Program goals and objectives pertaining to reading, writing, and math content areas.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Some have claimed December 9, 2003 as an historic day for students identified with mild, moderate or severe disabilities due to the new requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (PL 107-110). Spooner and Browder (2006) stated that for the first time, “federal policy set the expectation that students with significant cognitive disabilities should be expected to show progress on state standards in reading, math, and science” (p. 4). Both authors further elaborated that dependent upon how the various states respond to the provisions of NCLB, December 9, 2003, could be viewed as the day when students identified with disabilities were given access to the curriculum during a major school reform movement in this country (Spooner & Browder, p. 4). NCLB not only requires a statewide accountability system that is based on providing challenging standards in reading, science, and mathematics; it also requires that there is annual testing in grades 3-8, as well as annual statewide progress objectives that ensure that *all* groups meet proficiency within 12 years. In earlier legislation of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (PL 105-17), access to the general education curriculum was required. The NCLB legislation makes requirements more specific. “Access means more than being exposed to content such as reading and mathematics – access means academic progress” (Spooner & Browder, p. 1). At first the large-scale assessments seemed to bypass students identified with disabilities producing a focus on school accountability. One of the drawbacks of keeping students identified with disabilities from taking large-scale assessments could be a noted increase in the rate of referrals to special education and rates of retention that could be assumed as a direct consequence for allowing such an exemption

(Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1992). Such findings lead us to the 1997 Amendments to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 that required states to include students identified with disabilities in state and local assessments with accommodations. In Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, the language about who will participate in assessments was changed. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 Section 1412C (16)(A) states the following:

All children with disabilities are included in all general state and district-wide assessment programs, including assessments described under section 6311 of this title, with appropriate accommodations and alternate assessments where necessary and as indicated in their respective individualized education programs.

Assessment of students identified with disabilities. Students identified with disabilities must participate in the standardized assessment for that state and must also show adequate yearly progress as per NCLB. In effect, teachers are now challenged to develop a system that will not only show how progress is being made, but to also use interventions and instruction techniques that are research-based (20 U.S.C. § 6368). Teachers must also make individualized modifications to the general curriculum focused on preparing students to complete a high stakes test that will determine if that student has made adequate yearly progress. Unfortunately, taking a mandated standardized assessment on a yearly basis is not useful or sufficient for a teacher who needs to plan instruction and closely monitor progress especially when working with students identified with disabilities. Since the results from standardized assessments are not normally available in a timely fashion, the effectiveness of linking these test results to instructional needs is greatly diminished.

Along with taking standardized assessments, students identified with disabilities may be better served with additional evaluations of progress that also include forms of assessment that attend to their individual needs as well as their accomplishments. Standardized measures used to assess students' yearly progress could be complemented with other indicators from alternative assessments such as portfolios. These could include observations, demonstrations and individual and/or group performance focused on showcasing the students' abilities, talents, interests, and potentials (Cohen & Wiener, 2003). Also, such additional evaluations of progress would allow for more immediate feedback for the teacher to adjust individualized instruction. "Using the combination of both traditional and non-traditional assessment enables educational programmes to make their evaluations practical, viable, and accurate" (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002, p. 281).

Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) explain that portfolios can be a powerful tool and have the potential to reveal a lot about the student. In fact, they state that portfolios "can become a window into the students' heads, a means for both staff and students to understand the education process at the level of the individual learner" (Paulson et al., p. 61). Their widely cited definition for a portfolio is as follows:

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection. (p. 60)

Paulson et al. further clarify that portfolios can become an intersection of both instruction and assessment because they can serve both purposes and together they provide more information than when separately administered. Although portfolios have been widely used, different notions pertaining to purpose, type, and format have confronted their definition.

Literacy Portfolios. After reviewing the literature, Wiener and Cohen (1997) shared a few essential features of literacy portfolios. First, the products placed in the student portfolio should reflect the student's ownership and reflection. Second, there should be established criteria for the collection not just a random accumulation of items. This criterion for the portfolio collection should be established as the results of collaboration between the student and the teacher. Included items should reflect a range of the student's abilities and growth of the student's accomplishments. The student's work should present a chronological development over time to document the student's progress with literacy documenting the student's ability to use reading and writing for learning in a variety of meaningful ways. Wiener and Cohen also strongly recommend that student work should reflect authentic classrooms activities not just constructed for the portfolio. Third, portfolios should contain communications between students, between the students and the teacher, and between the students and their families. Finally, portfolios often contain teacher-completed checklists, anecdotal observations and informal assessments such as miscue analysis, running records.

When discussing the advantages of using literacy portfolios, Wiener and Cohen (1997) wrote that portfolios promote accountability by fulfilling district and state mandates for literacy evaluation. Portfolios can be a feasible means of documenting literacy improvement while providing helpful information about the processes and products that are outcomes of literacy instruction. Using a variety of assessment formats such as the use of writing samples, performance events, and portfolios along with norm-referenced (i.e., percentile ranks) and criterion-referenced (i.e., mastery-level) tests would give us a more holistic picture of a student's literacy progress.

Another advantage of literacy portfolios Wiener and Cohen (1997) discussed is that portfolios improve the quality of teaching. Both authors shared that a “major benefit of the portfolio process is its ability to merge instruction with assessment and thereby improving teaching” (p.7). Through the process of using portfolios in the classroom teachers observe the students, meet with students and discuss their individual progress, and then use the collected data to make informed instructional decisions such as what skills need reinforcement, what skills have been acquired, what is the student now ready to attempt, what materials worked or did not work, what motivates the student, and how best to proceed and succeed with each individual student (Wiener & Cohen, p. 7).

The next advantage that Wiener and Cohen (1997) discussed relevant to this review of literature is that “portfolios enhance many partnerships including collaboration between families and school, between teachers, as well as between teachers and administrators” (p. 9). Portfolios can provide a meaningful opportunity for parents to become more involved in their children’s literacy growth through an ongoing dialogue with both their children and the teacher with the portfolio serving as the centerpiece for the discussion. When working with students identified with disabilities, portfolios can be an important tool in educational decision making during the diagnosis process, program placement, monitoring a child’s progress, or creating an individual educational plan by examining actual work products that would provide a better insight into the student’s capability and performance (Wiener & Cohen, p. 11).

After that Wiener and Cohen (1997) pointed out the advantage of portfolios increasing our knowledge of each student as well as students’ increase of self-knowledge. Both authors pointed out that using self-reflection provides a format for collaborative, thoughtful dialogue between the student and the teacher that in essence creates more instructional opportunities. This

lead to the final advantage Wiener and Cohen pointed out which was that portfolios improve the quality of teaching. Using portfolios in the classroom environment gives the teachers the ability to merge instruction with assessment that would thereby improve teaching. Using the classroom data taken from teacher observations would help teachers do the following: (a) make informed instructional decisions, (b) provide the knowledge of what skills need reinforcement, what skills have been acquired, and what skills a student is ready to attempt, (c) what curriculum materials would work, and (d) what types of information motivate the student in order to provide successful instruction to meet each individual students' needs.

The purpose of this literature review was to examine studies that focused on the use of portfolios in classroom environments as a means of student evaluation. In particular, I examined studies with respect to the following: (a) how portfolios were used as forms of evaluation and progress monitoring; (b) how information obtained through portfolio assessments guided teachers' curriculum and instruction planning and implementation; and (c) how teachers utilized the information within the portfolios as a communication tool between school and home and as a means of collaboration between school staff members.

Methods

Literature search procedures

Electronic searches Using a variety of electronic databases such as Education Research Complete, ERIC, First Search and EBSCO, I conducted a computer search of the literature using combinations of several keywords. These included the terms *portfolio, literacy portfolios, reading portfolios, writing portfolio, performance portfolios, literacy, reading, writing, assessment, progress, alternative assessment, and diagnostic assessment*. Because there are so few studies examining portfolio use with students identified with disabilities, I did not limit my

search solely to studies including participants with disabilities. Overall, there were 30 separate searches in the above database systems. Of the studies generated from this search, titles and abstracts were reviewed to see if the study met the inclusion criteria for this review. Studies were included in this review if they: (a) were written in English, (b) employed either qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods to examine the use of portfolios in classrooms, (c) were published in a peer-reviewed journal through 2008 or were a masters thesis or dissertation, (d) pertained to the use of portfolios within the area of literacy development or the use of portfolios with students identified with disabilities, and (e) were conducted in a pre-school through 12th grade classroom environment. Twenty-four studies potentially met the inclusion criteria. I then obtained the full-length articles to further examine each article for possible inclusion in the literature review. After a detailed review, I found that seven studies met the inclusion criteria.

Hand searches In addition to the electronic searches, I conducted a search of references of each study that met the inclusion criteria to determine if references were made in that source to other potentially eligible articles, theses, or dissertations that had not already been obtained or reviewed. I then obtained these sources and reviewed them for possible inclusion in the review. Using these procedures, one additional study was identified as meeting the inclusion criteria was included and this resulted in eight studies as per Table 1.

Results of search. Table 1 lists the eight research studies that met the search criteria for this literature review. The table lists studies, the purpose of the study, the participants involved, the methodology and the studies' results. Of the 8 studies, 7 studies included students identified disabilities or were designated "at risk" (Benson & Smith, 1998; Campbell et al., 2001; Ezell, Klein & Ezell-Powell, 1999; Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 2000; Karoly & Franklin, 1996; Rhine & Smith, 2001; Thompson & Baumgartner, 2008).

Participants and settings. Participants in the reviewed studies included teachers, school psychologists, childcare staff members, students identified with and without disabilities, and parents. Most of the studies included in my review took place in classroom environments but one took place in a childcare center. The grade levels of students in these studies varied from pre-school through high school. The studies examined using portfolios to evaluate literacy learning activities such as student writing, spelling, behavior changes when taking assessments related to literacy, self-determination skills, language acquisition, teachers' perceptions of the time commitment required within everyday classroom routines to implement portfolios, what students identified with disabilities reported and reflected when using portfolios, and attitudes and perspectives of childcare staff toward children's abilities to learn.

Portfolios as a measure of student progress. Seven studies used portfolios as a form of assessment to monitor students' progress (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002; Benson & Smith, 1998; Campbell et al., 2001; Ezell et al., 1999; Karoly & Franklin, 1996; Rhine & Smith, 2001; and Thompson & Baumgartner, 2008). Karoly and Franklin compared the results of standardized assessments of a 10 year-old African American student enrolled in special education to the student's portfolio assessments. Standard psychometric instruments were initially used to both diagnose and place this student in a self-contained behavior adjustment class for students with severe behavior problems. After the associate psychologist found a discrepancy between the standardized assessments and recent teacher observations, she suggested that a portfolio to assess and monitor the student's progress be implemented. The results gathered from the portfolio were then compared with the standardized assessment data taken from the *Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery* previously administered.

The student's portfolio consisted of three notebooks of documents and several projects that he designed and built. Upon examining the contents of his portfolios, Karoly and Franklin (1996) found evidence of a strong progression of skill development within the student's written compositions. Karoly and Franklin found that his writing skills, as revealed in the portfolio, were in direct contrast to the writing samples found in his past standardized assessment. After examining earlier writing samples that were also provided in the portfolio, it became "obvious that his writing skills had evolved from constructing simple, ungrammatical sentences to composing more elaborate and descriptive sentences with correct usage and then to organizing ideas with the same topic into paragraphs" (Karoly & Franklin, p. 183).

Although the standardized assessments described the student's frequent fantasizing as pathological (Karoly & Franklin, 1996), the portfolio assessment revealed that such behaviors were actually an asset for him in the classroom. When interviewed, his teachers stated that the student frequently daydreamed aloud before his writing assignments. Karoly and Franklin shared that this behavior was merely his unique style of organizing his composition and his personal style of coping with the demands involved in attending school rather than a maladaptive behavior. Comparing standardized and portfolio assessments also revealed that although his teachers regarded the student's writing skills to be above grade level showing that he was capable of producing creative and high-quality work, formal assessment (i.e., *Woodcock-Johnson*) scored his writing as average to below average.

Karoly and Franklin's (1996) research showed that the portfolio assessment could shed light on the academic and personal strengths of a student that were missed or misinterpreted in the standardized psychometric assessment. "The discrepancy between the student's performance on the psychometric tests and his accomplishments in the classroom were largely the result of the

social embeddedness of the tasks” (p. 185). This student needed to see the assignment task as reflecting his membership in the general education classroom and as part of an integrated whole rather than just an isolated skill. The portfolio showed that this student performed his work on a higher level when he could see that his work had a purpose or he was producing a product. One example of this was when this student was given a worksheet with fact drills. He could not see an immediate goal or outcome for this assignment other than just doing the same skill (i.e., fact drills) over and over. In this assessment situation his motivation was greatly diminished. Such behavior could not be identified by a psychoeducational assessment because this testing format was limited to sampling of isolated skills in a single evaluation and did not address contextual issues.

Karoly and Franklin (1996) highlighted the importance of individualizing assessments so that they show a more holistic picture of an individual student. Both researchers concluded that all students should have their formal assessments augmented by some type of portfolio or performance-based evaluation. By doing this, the performance-based, contextual assessments can highlight the academic and personal strengths of a student rather than having the strengths overlooked or in this case, judged as pathological when viewed exclusively through the lens of a traditional psychometric measure (Karoly & Franklin).

Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) explored how portfolios could be a complementary approach for reviewing student language development and academic success. These researchers studied its use with two groups of 30 female Iranian high school students. In particular, they examined whether portfolio assessment contributed to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners’ academic achievement and to the learners’ feelings of responsibility towards monitoring their progress. These researchers also wanted to determine if using the combination

of traditional teacher-made assessment and non-traditional assessment (i.e., portfolios) would make students' evaluations more practical, viable, and accurate. Barootchi and Keshavarz examined the relationship between conclusions that were derived using portfolio information and conclusions based more on what they called "objective data" from the teacher-made achievement test. Their analysis showed that the portfolio assessment scores correlated significantly with those of the teacher-made tests (Barootchi & Keshavarz, p. 284).

In addition, Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) found a significant difference in mean achievement scores between students in the portfolio assessment group and those in the control group. These findings showed that portfolio assessment did contribute to the EFL learners' achievement because the portfolio assessment provided feedback to both the teachers and the students. As part of the portfolio process, students were asked to reflect on their needs, goals, weaknesses, and strengths in language learning. The student reflections provided feedback to the teachers "enabling them to be more aware of their students' interest, needs, potentials and abilities and to monitor their methodologies" (Barootchi & Keshavarz, p. 285). In essence, through the student reflections embedded in the portfolio process, there were positive effects on the teacher's instruction making assessment and instruction more closely interrelated. The researchers also suggested that the students were encouraged by the teacher's reflection to become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses that directly impacted the students' learning and attitudes. This study showed that using non-traditional assessments (i.e., portfolios) in conjunction with more traditional teacher-made assessments allowed for more practical, viable, and accurate evaluations of student performance. Not only did the findings indicate that portfolio assessment contributed to the EFL learners' achievement but also contributed to the students' feelings of responsibility toward monitoring their own progress.

Rhine and Smith (2001) compared student behavior while taking state mandated testing with student behavior while using authentic assessment tools (i.e., portfolios). In order for the researchers to examine any differences in students' behavior during testing situations, both the standardized and performance tests were administered and students' behaviors observed. Using anecdotal reports these researchers concluded that the performance assessment of reading comprehension (i.e., portfolios) provided immediate feedback on how a student's fluency, sight word knowledge, and comprehension were improving while the results of the standardized assessment were not immediately available to guide instruction. The researchers found that implementing a variety of authentic assessments in the two first grade classrooms studied was very helpful to gain information about their students' progress and examine the learning that was taking place within the classrooms. Combining tools such as observation and assessment rubrics gave the teachers immediate skill-focused feedback, and using portfolios also provided examples of student artifacts showing a progression of progress. The combination of authentic assessments and the state mandated assessments gave a better, more holistic picture of each student's ongoing progress.

Ezell, Klein & Ezell-Powell (1999) conducted a study to learn about using portfolio assessment with individuals who have intellectual disabilities. Ezell et al. found within their analysis of surveys, interviews, and observations that portfolios positively effected student outcomes. Within the domain of student outcomes two themes emerged, self-determination and student learning. The self-determination theme brought up issues concerning the increase in students' self-esteem, self-advocacy, goal setting, control, ownership of learning, student empowerment, making decisions and choices, and student self-reflection and self-assessment. Through portfolio assessment, one student was helped in the area of goal setting to write a

sentence using her vocabulary words. In the area of self-advocacy, secondary students were observed documenting specific employment skills in their portfolios. Students also appeared to be eager to share their accomplishments and were more willing to strive for better quality of work when using portfolios. Through portfolio assessment, teachers found that student communication skills were greatly enhanced. Students were more excited to share their accomplishments with their peers, other teachers, and with their parents during conferences. This type of practice also increased students' verbal skills.

Teachers reported that their students became more autonomous and “they contributed [*sic*] this to the students taking more ownership in their learning due to their involvement in the portfolio assessment process” (Ezell et al., 1999, p. 459). Teachers began to share that through the continuous practice of setting goals, making decisions and choices through the process of self-reflection and self-assessment, their students demonstrated more control of their learning. Commenting on her child's increase in self-esteem, one parent commented “My child has become a different person since doing her portfolio. She is on cloud nine and I have never seen her think so highly of herself and her capabilities as she does this year” (Ezell et al., p. 459). Finally, both teachers and parents reported that students experienced a feeling of empowerment directly pertaining to their involvement in the portfolio assessment process. One student even stated that “I did this today. Tomorrow I'm going to learn more. Will you be back to see me?” (Ezell et al., p. 459). The theme of self-determination signified that using portfolios empowered students who have intellectual disabilities to strive to learn and improve the quality of their work both in the areas of academics and job performance. Teachers stated that portfolio assessment gave these students the opportunity to practice setting goals and making decisions, which is a necessary and important life skill.

The next theme Ezell et al. (1999) noted within the student outcome domain was student learning. Issues that concerned emphasizing abilities rather than disabilities, success rates and student interests, motivation, and deficits generally characterized by intellectual disabilities such as poor memory and poor memory began to emerge. Ezell and colleagues pointed out that the portfolio assessment process provided the opportunity to focus on abilities rather than disabilities. One teacher shared that students learned more when they had an interest in what they were learning. The portfolio process of sharing their portfolios with different audiences (e.g., peers) provided many opportunities for each student to practice the content material in a different format. This allowed students the opportunity to feel more in charge of their learning. Some of the other teachers concluded “that portfolio assessment also provided another way for their students to repeat classroom material to enhance short-term memory” (Ezell et al., p. 460). In essence, students were engaged in repeating the same material without consciously being aware of it.

Campbell et al. (2001) explored the impact of a specifically designed professional development activity (i.e., structured written portfolio project) on the attitudes and perspectives of childcare staff toward the children they worked with, including some children with disabilities. In the beginning of the project, caregivers were asked to “think of a child who has special needs or disabilities or for whom you have special concerns” and then write a one-page pre-story about that child (Campbell et al., p.154). Each project involved meetings with the parents, who completed forms about their child, and sessions for taking pictures of the child. Researchers also worked with the parents on how to promote learning and learning in different places. At the end of the portfolio project, each caregiver was asked to write a post-story of the

child they had worked with during the project. Caregivers then shared the child's portfolios during the final class session and later with the child's parent.

The process of developing the portfolio changed the caregivers' perspective of the children from a seemingly negative opinion focused more on the children's deficits to a more positive opinion that actually noted the progress the children were making (Campbell et al., 2001). For example, one caregiver shared in her post-story that the 3-year-old child she was working with had learned how to identify letters, shapes, his name, and how to write it by himself. This caregiver shared that the childcare center positively contributed to this child's growth and development. Researchers shared that the small number of strengths-based statements included in the pre-stories of participants suggested that the caregivers were not likely to view the children with a more strength-based perspective when the children are known or believed to have special needs and behavior concerns. "When teachers view disability or 'different' behavior as something that cannot be influenced, they are likely to see themselves as unable to support the child in the childcare setting" (Campbell et al., p.159). This view could greatly impede recognition of progress a child was making and in some ways, prevent progress altogether when expectations for progress are low.

Campbell et al. (2001) showed that when teachers view disability as something that cannot be influenced, they might see themselves as incapable of supporting that particular child. Such primary focus on a child's disability could greatly impact that child's opportunities to learn. The 'All About Me' portfolios used in this study were "designed to provide a context that could be used by the participants to construct strength-based beliefs and perspectives about children with disabilities, or special needs" (Campbell et al., p. 159). This project also provided a process

where the caregivers were better able to measure the children's progress rather than focusing a majority of their time on each child's deficits.

In the Thompson and Baumgartner (2008) study, the student portfolios served more as a depository of exemplary works rather than the portfolio as a reflective vehicle. This was an exploratory qualitative case study with eight students in an elementary school classroom. The student participants had been identified with a disability or labeled at-risk. Most of the students were in grade 3, with 1 in grade 2, and 1 in grade 4. The purpose of this study was to explore the use of portfolios in a classroom from the perspectives of the students and the teacher. The sources of data that was kept was a research journal that was maintained by the teacher (second author of the study), semi-structured interviews conducted by the teaching assistants that were tape-recorded and professionally transcribed, and classroom observations maintaining notes of each visit once or twice a week conducted by first author of the study. The results of this study found that portfolios in a classroom can be time-consuming and laborious. When the students were asked what they found was most difficult about their portfolios none of them mentioned the workload or amount of time. However, the teacher wrote, "portfolios ... seemed to be extremely time-consuming" (Thompson & Baumgartner, p. 161). The researchers speculated that by "inadvertently placing too much emphasis on portfolio appearance – on creating objets d'art, rather than portfolio function may be the unexpected reason that accounted for the excessive time" that was required when implementing the portfolios (Thompson & Baumgartner, p. 161).

The teaching assistants also interviewed the students about the portfolios. It was found that the students' exercised choice, displayed pride and ownership over their portfolios, and worked hard on certain projects that would go into their portfolios (Thompson & Baumgartner, 2008). The students became aware of their own academic improvements such as looking words

up in the dictionary and writing complete sentences. The portfolios also gave the teacher the opportunity to see the progress the students were making or not making. The researchers shared that it would be a good idea to introduce portfolios earlier in the year and interview students more frequently. Thompson and Baumgartner speculated that such changes would help the students become more familiar with using portfolios and allow them to practice structured reflectivity. This was also mentioned in the Benson and Smith (1998) study when the teachers stated that it was necessary to teach students how to self-assess their literacy skills giving the teachers an increased awareness of each student's individual literacy growth.

Portfolio assessment and instructional planning. Seven studies examined instructional changes that teachers made as a result of student assessment data from portfolios (Bartoochi & Keshavarz, 2002; Benson & Smith, 1998; Campbell et al., 2001; Ezell et al., 1999; Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 2000; Karoly & Franklin, 1996; Thompson & Baumgartner, 2008). Working with four first grade teachers who responded to questions regarding their experiences using student portfolios in their classrooms, Benson and Smith found that teachers perceived that the data retrieved from student portfolios did change their classroom instruction. The researchers documented the instructional changes that took place in every classroom using observations. “Three primary changes were documented in teacher instruction and curriculum which included more emphasis on writing and the writing process, more collaboration with students one-on-one, and a greater awareness of gaps in skills in all areas” (Benson & Smith, p. 178).

Based on the portfolio data, the four teachers in Benson and Smith's study (1998) incorporated more creative writing opportunities for their students in their classrooms and found them spending more time directly teaching the writing process. One teacher stated, “I've noticed from the portfolios that we have done so much pattern writing and very little creative writing. I

think I need to emphasize “fun” writing for a while” (Benson & Smith, p. 178). After the researchers asked teachers what items in the portfolios were most helpful, the teachers shared that student writing samples were most helpful in pinpointing student progress on basic skills such as spelling applications. Researchers also observed that teachers not only reported spending more time teaching the writing process, but that more evidence of children’s writings also began to appear hanging both in the classrooms and hallways. In fact, after comparing portfolios completed in December with May portfolios, the researchers found that in the May portfolios there were three times more stories written by students.

Another area of instructional change noted in the Benson and Smith (1998) study was the value teachers placed on individual instruction. Teachers shared that both the portfolio centers and the individual conferences positively affected their relationships with the students. One teacher remarked, “Because of the portfolio, children have taken more pride in their work. I have realized even more the incredible power that one-on-one has with students. Even though there is little time for this, I will make sure conferencing with my students and one-on-one instruction is a priority in my classroom” (Benson & Smith, p. 179).

Teachers in the Benson and Smith (1998) study also used data taken from portfolios to help guide their future skill lessons. For example, when the students selected their finished work samples to place in their portfolios, the teachers used those examples to identify “holes” in their students’ skill developments. “These ‘holes’ were later emphasized through formal lessons, guided activities, and even center activities” (Benson & Smith, p. 179). Thompson and Baumgartner (2008) found similar results in their exploration of portfolio use in elementary school classrooms.

The purpose of the Thompson and Baumgartner (2008) study was to explore the use of portfolios in an elementary school classroom from the perspectives of both students identified with disabilities and the teacher. The teacher maintained a research journal through the data collection period. She noted that the daily feedback provided by the student portfolios changed how she instructed a writing assignment. For example, the teacher noted in her journal on April 19, 2005 that “more skills review and teaching is required in this area” (Thompson & Baumgartner, p. 155) discussing how her students needed more instruction on how to look words up in the dictionary. Thus, the student portfolios served not only as a record of student achievement and progress but allowed the teacher to shape her instruction and curriculum both on a daily and weekly basis.

The benefit of making instructional changes based upon the needs of an individual student was also highlighted in the Karoly and Franklin (1996) study. Based on the student work that was placed in the portfolio, teachers saw how well the target student was able to compose written assignments. It helped them recognize that although this student tended to daydream aloud before starting a writing assignment, his final written assignments were well done. Rather than looking at this behavior as a pathological deficit as shown by traditional assessments, teachers expressed that it was simply this student’s unique style of organizing a task and outlining his composition. As a result of allowing this student the space and opportunity to work through his unique brainstorming style, he was able to compose creative and above-average writing assignments. The portfolio was also a tool to help the teachers recognize that this student had difficulty sitting still and concentrating for more than 15 minutes. Based on this recognition, they adapted their teaching environment by making sure the student knew he would be given extra time to complete the task if he so chose, although he preferred to take the test “like

everyone else.” This study provided clear evidence that all three teachers in the study built in opportunities for the student to move around the classroom during their class periods and gave him choices when it came to planning work for him. Implementing opportunities for him to move and planning work for him that would include choices were two instructional changes the teachers made to accommodate him. Since the findings of this study indicated that the student needed to see the task as reflecting his membership in a regular classroom and as part of a large integrated whole rather than an isolated drill, teachers planned their curriculum to include models and illustrations greatly accommodating the talents of this student.

The teachers interviewed by Karoly and Franklin (1996) believed that both the movement and the power this student was given to make some decisions helped him become more invested in his schoolwork. The evidence of this became apparent through the increasingly more sophisticated quality of written compositions and projects that he created. For example, his portfolio included several constructed items such as a wooden stool and a pyramid. The student was required to make many math computations and illustrate using diagrams for both projects. All of his computations were done by hand and placed next to each illustration that was drawn to scale. He even took on a project during his free time working with a small battery-operated racecar where his written description included a discussion on electromagnetic principles. His teacher commented that this student effectively taught the children about the concept of electromagnetism more effectively than she had attempted to do on an earlier occasion.

Using portfolio assessment also provided an opportunity for teachers participating in the Ezell et al. (1999) study of portfolio use with students with intellectual disabilities to focus on what their students could do. Focusing more on their students’ abilities rather than their disabilities was one of the major reasons why the teachers reported that using portfolio

assessment with students who have intellectual disabilities was important. Ezell et al. shared that students seemed to be more motivated to learn when their successful contributions were highlighted. Teachers shared that they learned more about individual students' interests than they thought was possible, and they used the students' interests to help guide their instruction. In fact, one teacher stated that the students "learn more if it is something that is of interest to them" (Ezell et al., p. 460).

Ezell et al., (1999) also found that using portfolios increased the students' expressive language skills. This increase in students' verbal skills encouraged teachers to make changes in their literacy instruction and curriculum to increase opportunities for students to practice those skills. Teachers planned to include more peer sharing and peer assessment procedures in the near future to allow their students more time to practice. One teacher shared that he was going to encourage his students to include samples in their portfolios from events they participated in outside of the school environment. He shared that this would give his students more opportunities to verbally explain why such samples should be included, again further enhancing their expressive language skills.

Although Campbell et al., (2001) did not specifically explore how portfolios guided and directed literacy curriculum, they did examine how portfolios changed the perspectives of caregivers. These changed perspectives directly impacted the instruction many individual students received because instruction then began to be based on what that student could do rather than focused only on behavior difficulties or academic deficits influenced by students disabilities. This study demonstrated that attitudes and perspectives previously identified as barriers to successful inclusion of young children with disabilities in community-based settings could be changed by requiring caregivers to implement portfolio projects for individual students.

The researchers pointed out that the impact of practitioners' attitudes and beliefs about their relationships with children and families should not be underestimated. Such beliefs can directly influence practitioners' relationships with children and their views of the child's development, performance, and success. Simply engaging in the process of developing individual portfolios helped caregivers see the "whole child" they were working with rather than only looking at the difficult behavior or deficits based on disability labels.

Comparing pre- and post- comments shared by caregivers, Campbell et al. (2001) noticed numerous changes in how caregivers described the children they worked with. For example, a caregiver wrote in her pre-story that the child she was working with was a child with special needs in the area of social-emotional needs. Her description of the child seemed to be an acceptance of his behavior because he had a label of special needs. Her post-story described the same student as a student who was playing well with others and sharing blocks and trucks when other children ask him. There was no mention of his being a child with special needs. The researchers found that there were a number of pre-stories that represented children negatively, in terms of what the child wasn't doing rather than what the child could do.

Campbell et al. (2001) related that one caregiver, in her pre-story, described a child as "energetic, aggressive, and alert." She shared how this child did things to get attention, like snatching toys from other children and looking for a caregiver's reaction. After doing the portfolio project, the caregiver described the child's behavior quite differently by saying that the child was very bright, always wanting to learn more. Although the behavior may not have completely changed, the child's reason for continuing the behavior may have changed. If the caregiver directly working with the student was looking more for positive attributes and beginning to focus more on the whole child, it could be possible that the child no longer needed

negative attention from the caregiver. This is especially true since the portfolio projects structured the caregiver's observations of children so that they "needed to objectively observe behavior and development with a focus on areas such as children's preferences, accomplishments, and learning needs" (Campbell et al., p. 158).

Within the student portfolios used in the Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) study, teachers received feedback from the students about what the students thought about their needs, goals, weaknesses, and strengths in language learning that impacted instruction. These student reflections enabled teachers to be more aware of their students' interests, needs, potentials and abilities as well as monitoring their own teaching methodologies. The researchers shared that they believed the portfolios had "positive effects on instruction, made assessment and instruction more closely interrelated and may effect changes in the nature of teacher-student interactions" (Barootchi & Keshavarz, p. 285). These researchers also wrote that students in the portfolio group seemed to be encouraged by their teacher's reflections because they became more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses that impacted their learning and attitudes. The researchers wrote "portfolio assessment is used as an integral part of learning as it provides the students with opportunities to overcome their weaknesses. It forms not a final exam, but a learning experience that is part of the ongoing course and serves as a guide to the student as well as the teacher" (Barootchi & Keshavarz, p. 286).

Hall and Hewitt-Gervais (2000) interviewed 26 elementary school teachers from Florida about changes they had observed in their teaching since implementing a portfolio system in their classrooms. Sixty-four percent of the teachers reported that portfolios had a positive effect on their teaching. Some teachers reported that portfolios helped them see areas of weaknesses that students had through the students' portfolio work samples. This helped the teachers make

instructional planning changes such as re-teaching in small groups or on an individual basis. This study also found that teachers reported using portfolios in the process of deriving grades for report cards and progress reports.

Portfolios used as a home-school communication tool. Seven studies discussed how portfolios were used as a way to increase communication during parent/teacher conferences or meetings, between colleagues working with the same student, and between the students and the teacher (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002; Benson & Smith, 1998; Campbell et al., 2001; Ezell et al., 1999; Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 2000; Karoly & Franklin, 1996; and Rhine & Smith, 2001). In their study, Ezell et al. examined using portfolios with individuals with intellectual disabilities and found a theme of parent communication. Teachers in this study shared that their conferences with parents were better facilitated when portfolio assessment was used. The students' portfolios provided a visual representation for parents of what the teachers were saying. Portfolios also provided evidence of the student's academic growth or lack of growth. One example of this was clear when one parent commented that, "My son's portfolio tells me much more information than the results of some test. I can see what my son is doing and not have to determine what the letter grades represent", (Ezell, et al., p. 458). Again, another parent commented "I don't care if I never get another letter grade for my child. I just want to know what he's accomplishing and what he's not", (Ezell, et al., p. 458). Another parent of a secondary student stated "I am better equipped to help my child with his homework because I keep up with the portfolio conferences and I know exactly what he needs help with", (Ezell et al., p. 458). Comments such as these provide evidence of how a student's portfolio may help parents better understand the progress their child is making.

Also both parents and teachers in the Ezell et al. (1999) reported that when using portfolios, students appeared to be more motivated to attend school and learn. The students seemed eager to select pieces to go into their portfolios and to share the portfolios with their peers and people outside of the classroom setting. Parent and teacher conferences became something that one parent described as an exciting activity for her daughter. She described the positive change she saw in her daughter's behavior toward school and shared that she hoped her daughter's next teacher would use portfolios too.

Campbell et al. (2001) designed one component of their portfolio project study so that the participating caregivers would need to interact with the children's families in order to gather information required to develop portfolios of the pre-school aged children with whom they were working. Caregivers were asked to complete pre- and post- stories about the children. It was found that most of the pre-stories did not mention the children's families but due to the portfolio project components, the post-stories stage of the study many of the children's families were mentioned. For example, in a pre-story a caregiver wrote that a child "has a health problem and is always sick. She only had six teeth up until last week; her mother says she is cutting her back teeth all at the same time. She is a very picky eater and very small for her age" (Campbell et al., p. 159). The post-story described the child as coming "from a loving family, her mother is very interested in her daughter's welfare and education. She is always willing to continue to review her activities at home. Sierra can do all the motions during circle time, she loves to dance, sing, and ride the bikes" (Campbell et al., p. 159). The overall portfolio project included the following activities that involved parent participation: (a) inviting the parent of the child they were going to work with to help them with the project; (b) meeting the parent and giving and reviewing the "All About Me" form; (c) talking with the parent and together completing the "How We Promote

Learning” worksheet; (d) meeting with the parent and together completing the “Learning in Different Places” worksheet; and (e) sharing the finished story portfolio with the child’s parent. The research showed that both parent and caregiver collaboration and the “family focused” structure of the portfolio helped participants construct strengths-based beliefs and perspectives about children with disabilities or special needs.

Karoly and Franklin (1996) made no mention of communication between school and home related to portfolio use. However, using a portfolio assessment did increase communication between the general education teachers, the special education teacher, and the associate psychologist. Both the teachers and the psychologist evaluated the portfolio. Such communication greatly impacted the education this student received. Without collaboration and regular communication created through the portfolio process, the student’s unique style of writing (e.g., daydreaming aloud), his physical need to move around, and the incredible expansion of his projects using models and drawings may never have been discovered and communicated between the staff involved.

Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) also did not mention communication between school and home associated with portfolio use; however, they did focus on how student reflections explaining how a piece of their work was their best provided feedback between students and their teachers. This feedback allowed assessment and instruction to become more closely interrelated and may have affected changes in the nature of teacher-student interactions in that each student would also receive feedback teachers to become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. The student reflections provided feedback to teachers, enabling them to be more aware of each “student’s interest, needs, potentials and abilities and to monitor their

methodologies” (Barootchi & Keshavarz, p. 285). This communication exchange seemed to benefit the students compared to the other group within the study that did not use portfolios.

Hall and Hewitt-Gervais (2000) also found that in the “area of communication with parents, students, and other teachers, portfolios were seen as having considerable impact” (p. 223). Teachers reported that portfolios became a centerpiece for their parent-teacher conferences. Showing samples of a student’s work gave parents an effective, concrete way to see their child’s progress. Like the Karoly and Franklin (1996) study, Hall and Hewitt-Gervais found that portfolios also impacted the communication between teachers within their multiage-team environment. “Primary teachers reported sharing information in the students’ portfolios with other teachers and reading specialists with greater frequency than intermediate teachers” (Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, p. 220).

Benson and Smith (1998) concluded that portfolio use communicated progress effectively to parents of first grade students in their study. The teachers shared that portfolios represented documentation of student growth, development, and an effective communication tool. Even though parents preferred grades in the beginning, the teachers continued to focus on ways to incorporate the student portfolios when talking to parents. One teacher reported that the best part of the process of using student portfolios during a parent-teacher conference was that she “could show mastery of skills in the context of meaningful writing, rather than some isolated drill sheet” (Benson & Smith, p. 176). Examples of the students’ work were also a good way to show how the work fell within the criteria of specific grades that were given. Essentially, the researchers shared that after “sharing the portfolio, teachers in the study felt that parents’ awareness level of their child’s literacy, specifically writing development, was increased; relevant skill strengths

and weaknesses were conveyed; and overall communication and rapport with parents were enhanced” (Benson & Smith, p. 176).

Two parents in a study conducted by Ezell et al. (1999) commented on how the portfolio assessment process had increased their personal self-esteem and positive perspective toward their children who had intellectual disabilities. The following quote from a parent revealed this changed perspective when looking at her child’s progress:

My own self-esteem has increased because I feel better about what my child can do. For years, I have been focusing on all the things that my child couldn’t do. Now I focus on all the things my child can do. It has totally changed my perspective on my child’s learning. (Ezell et al., p. 458)

As in the Ezell et al. (1999) study, the parents in the Rhine and Smith (2001) study responded positively to a survey about whether or not the authentic assessments including portfolios were more beneficial in informing them of their child’s progress standardized testing because the results were not immediately available. These parents shared that the combination of assessment tools gave them the most information about their child’s progress and the progression of work their child had demonstrated.

Discussion

To date, few studies have examined the phenomena of using literacy portfolios as a form of evaluation and progress monitoring, how the information obtained through this type of assessment can guide a teacher’s curriculum and instruction planning and implementation, or how teachers have utilized the information within portfolios as a communication tool between school and home or as a means of collaboration between school staff. There are even fewer studies examining these aspects of portfolio assessment with students identified with disabilities.

Only three studies were found that involved working with students identified with disabilities in this review (Ezell et al., 1999; Karoly & Franklin, 1996; Thompson & Baumgartner, 2008). This lack of research is disappointing since Wiener and Cohen (1997) wrote that one major advantage of using portfolios in the classroom is that portfolios increase our knowledge about each student and increases each student's self-knowledge. This individualized knowledge is especially crucial when designing effective instruction for students identified with disabilities.

Findings from the reviewed studies indicated that teachers in these studies made decisions to develop strategies to support students based on information contained in students' portfolios strategies as changing teaching methods by modeling the process of writing; creating a Portfolio Center for independent practice; having students' videotape themselves sharing their portfolios to reinforce self assessment skills; and allowing frequent movement opportunities and individual coping behavior during instruction.

Student portfolios also proved to be a useful tool for meeting and explaining to parents and colleagues the attainment of IEP goals and documenting each student's skill development. For example, one student's portfolio allowed teachers and social workers to see the strengths of the student they were working with when examining his completed projects (Karoly & Franklin, 1996). His work examples provided concrete evidence of the progression of his writing skill development. Interestingly, two studies found that combining standardized assessments such as the *Woodcock-Johnson* in the Karoly and Franklin study or teacher-made tests in the Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) study with portfolio assessments provided their educational programs with ongoing measurement of student growth even if that data from the portfolio directly conflicted with their standardized assessment results.

Wiener and Cohen (1997) wrote that one major advantage of using portfolios in the classroom is their ability to merge both instruction and assessment, which would improve teaching. A teacher's ongoing involvement in evaluation is fundamental when it comes to the relationship between assessment and instruction. When teachers observe students and meet with them to discuss their work, they receive important information about that student's progress. Analysis of the studies reviewed in this paper made it very apparent that instructional changes were made when portfolio assessment was used.

Most of the studies reviewed revealed that the immediate and ongoing awareness of a student's strengths and weaknesses was an important result of using portfolios as a method of assessment. In fact, study findings seemed to support Wiener and Cohen's (1997) assertion that the entire portfolio process provides "harmony between how to assess and how to instruct, regardless of the wide range of differences between students" (p. 7). This ongoing awareness was also apparent when students in the reviewed studies were working on their own self-assessment skills, either to learn how to produce their best writing work artifacts, their progress toward learning English, or the progress they were making on IEP goals (i.e., communication skills, self-esteem, self-determination skills).

Focusing on portfolio assessment and instructional planning, teachers in the reviewed studies perceived that the data they retrieved from the portfolios encouraged them to make instructional changes that included developing individualized assignments based on the needs of the students they were working with as well as planning more time for one-on-one instruction. The data from portfolios also gave teachers a greater awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses as well as the students' interests, needs, potentials, abilities, and what interests them. After gathering evidence of student learning, a teacher was able to help students practice the

techniques of reflection that lead to students developing learning goals and throughout the year redefining those goals. The data that was collected helped teachers to make changes in both present and future lessons.

Another advantage of using portfolios found across several studies was that they can enhance partnerships including collaboration between families and school and between teachers and other staff members. Education is a partnership and communication is an important component necessary for a successful partnership. Therefore, it is important to involve parents in the educational process pertaining to their child. Focusing on the portfolio used as a home-school communication tool, the studies that were reviewed revealed that the portfolios provided a meaningful opportunity for parents to become more involved in their child's academic growth through ongoing communication using the portfolio as a visual representation of their child's progress. Study findings revealed that teacher and parent conferences were better facilitated when using portfolios because the student work samples showed both the progress and the lack of progress. One parent stated that her son's portfolio provided more information than the results of a test, helping this parent feel that she was better equipped and more motivated to help her son in the future (Ezell, et al., 1999). Parents of first graders in another study stated that portfolios showed their child's abilities to use language skills (i.e., writing conventions) within a completed writing assignment more effectively than isolated language skill sheets had shown. Teachers shared that the student work samples were a beneficial way to show how they assigned grades when talking to parents. Generally, parents and others whose comments were shared in the reviewed studies revealed that portfolios helped motivate their children and provided them with a concrete way to see their child's progress.

Two studies (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002; Karoly & Franklin, 1996) that did not discuss communication between home and school but communication was still a key factor in the successful implementation of student portfolios within these studies. Communication between the general and special education teachers, and the associate psychologist was a necessary component of implementing a portfolio for a student as an alternative method to show progress. Without the collaboration and regular communication created through the portfolio process, this student's unique learning characteristics and academic progress may never have been discovered. Barootchi and Keshavarz did not mention communication between home and school, but did focus on communication between the students and the teacher. This communication enabled teachers to be aware of the student's interest, needs, potentials, and abilities thus also monitoring their own teaching methodologies.

Another theme found in this review pertained to student empowerment. Awareness of what type of work individual students found they could accomplish and learning how to pick their best work to be placed in their portfolios seemed to highly motivate students. One study, for example, Ezell et al. (1999) showed that when working with students who have intellectual disabilities, student motivation appeared to be the driving force behind the successful implementation of the portfolios. Student portfolios became a prized possession showing how well a student was learning including integral parts of self-determination skills. Another study Benson & Smith (1998) showed how students learned the process of looking back on what one had done and asking what, why, and how learning had taken place. This led to students developing learning goals and the continual refinement of those goals enable them to make informed decisions about their own learning.

Future Implications

For students identified with disabilities to be successful in accessing the general education curriculum, curricular and instructional modifications are not the only things that are necessary. Changes in the way we monitor progress of students identified with disabilities must also be implemented. Assessment of these students must focus on recognizing students' accomplishments and skills and understanding how students construct knowledge. Simply, there is no one right answer or correct way of demonstrating knowledge. Wiener and Cohen (1997) shared that the "flexibility in assessment formats provided in portfolio assessment promotes accommodation and acceptance of an individual's unique learning style" (p. 284). Portfolio assessment can facilitate access to the general curriculum by providing flexibility and encouraging teachers, whether they are general or special educators, to look at the development and growth of students as indicated by the student work provided in their portfolio. Few studies have been completed regarding the use of portfolios with students identified with disabilities. I believe it is important to explore what unique and different information literacy assessment portfolios could provide, how the information obtained from literacy assessment portfolios impact my instructional decision-making, and how using literacy assessment portfolios influence parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy. There is still much that can be learned about using portfolios to assess student's progress and enhance instruction. As Wiener and Cohen eloquently shared:

Experience has taught that every year that a teacher uses portfolios to document and assess students brings new learning about portfolios and usually a new portfolio design. In essence, classroom portfolios become a mirror of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. As teachers examine this mirror, they discover areas that need

major changes or minor refinements. The teacher then becomes, like the student who produced the portfolio, a true learner. (p. 256)

Chapter 3

Methodology

This dissertation, a case study, examined the process of using literacy assessment portfolios within a cross-categorical special education classroom to investigate the following questions: (a) do classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios provide distinct information about the literacy development of students identified with a disability, and if so, in what ways; (b) does information obtained from classroom-based literacy portfolios impact my (as the teacher-participant) instructional decision-making and if so, in what ways; (c) does the use of classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios influence parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy and if so, in what ways. In this chapter I will review the qualitative research paradigm using naturalistic inquiry, as well as its application in this particular case study that will include the selection of research participants, the types of data collected and procedures used to do this, and the data analysis techniques utilized.

Research Paradigm and Design

Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that “naturalistic inquiry is defined not at the level of *method* but at the level of *paradigm*” (p. 250). They further elaborated that it is not necessary that naturalistic inquiry be conducted by qualitative methods entirely. This is relevant to this study because some quantitative measures (e.g., reading levels) were gathered as another way to show progress in the area of literacy. Yet clearly, if the inquirer does not adopt the axioms of the naturalistic paradigm it cannot be a naturalistic inquiry. Comparing the positivist paradigm with the naturalist paradigm, Lincoln and Guba defined five axioms concerning the nature of reality, the relationship of knower to the known, the possibility of causal linkages, and the roles of values.

The first axiom explains that there are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied holistically where each inquiry raises more questions than answers, although some understanding can be achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). The idea of multiple constructed realities is very compatible in a special education classroom environment where instruction must be constructed and implemented to accommodate the individual needs of student-participants receiving such services. My experience throughout this study has shown that instruction often raised more questions than it answered even though some understanding was achieved.

The second axiom with a naturalistic epistemology states that the inquirer and the object of inquiry interact and influence each other, so they are inseparable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This assumption makes naturalistic inquiry a good fit for teachers studying their own classrooms. I found that in my research environment (i.e., self-contained special education classroom) the interaction between the student-participants and the teacher, myself as the teacher-participant, was constant and this interaction not only influenced each of us but also could not be eliminated from the research equation. Lincoln and Guba reminded us that Aristotle's thoughts would continue to play out in Western thinking for nearly two thousand years when Aristotle said that anytime humans intervened, they change the reality of the context (p. 92).

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) third axiom speaks to the issue of generalization in that the aim of inquiry is that knowledge can only be described ideographically as a working hypothesis that describes an individual cases (ideograph) rather than as the positivist version whose aim is to develop a nomothetic body (group-based) of knowledge in the form of generalizations that are *true* and will pertain to any place and any time. Individual behaviors are so intimately bound to particular times and contexts and can be said to be socially constructed within that time and context. After implementing this case study in my special education classroom I found that the

student-participants' behaviors were impossible to accurately generalize in a rationalistic, propositional or law-like manner (i.e., one attached to scientific discourse). Knowing this I understood that if I wanted to derive naturalistic generalizations, I would need to provide my readers with information using thick description in the form in which the readers might experience a natural classroom environment.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the fourth axiom that addresses the possibility of causal linkages explaining that all entities simultaneously shape each other (social construction) thereby making it impossible to distinguish the causes from the effects. This is in direct conflict with the positivist epistemology that posits that most actions can be explained as the result of a cause that precedes the effect temporally or simultaneously. During this case study, I was aware that developing a portfolio may produce a desired outcome and it may be possible to come to an understanding of why it produced the desired outcome, but there is no assurance that this will be the case.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recognize within naturalistic inquiry defines inquiry as value-bound (fifth axiom) in at least five ways. First, inquiries are influenced by inquirer values. Second, inquiry is influenced by the choice of the paradigm that guides the investigation. Third, inquiry is influenced by the choice of the substantive theory utilized to guide the collection and analysis of data and interpretation. Fourth, inquiry is influenced by the values that inherent in the context. Fifth, inquiry is either value-resonant (reinforcing and congruent) or value-dissonant (conflicting). Within my study, values did play a significant part of this inquiry, requiring me to make every effort to expose and explain them while taking them into account on a continuous basis. Simply, inquiry is value bound. It can be influenced by the values of the inquirer, by the

axioms or assumptions that have been described, the methodological paradigm that support the inquiry, and of course, the values that characterize the surrounding conditions of the inquiry.

When implementing a naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recalled four assumptions in order to support this inquiry. The first presumption was that the level of paradigm defines naturalistic inquiry not the methodology. Second, using naturalistic inquiry means there is heavy reliance on the human as instrument, meaning the human will be the major form of data collection. Third, as the inquirer, I made a serious attempt to develop my initial design statement for this naturalistic inquiry. Finally, since I conducted this naturalistic inquiry in my classroom where I have taught for four continuous years, I made every effort to become thoroughly acquainted with my field site.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward as a basis of argument that trustworthiness of a research study is important when one evaluates its worth and this can be established by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addressing confidence in the *truth* of this study's findings (credibility) techniques such as prolonged engagement provided the development of rapport and trust, persistent observation provided the depth, triangulation using multiple data sources helped to produce understanding, and member checks were implemented as a technique to establish the validity of the accounts that were described. When addressing whether the findings have applicability in other contexts (transferability) a detailed account of the field experiences using thick description was used as a way of achieving a type of external validity. Next, when showing that the findings in this study were consistent and could be repeated (dependability) inquiry audits (i.e., detailed conversations from other educators and staff members) were used to foster accuracy or validity of this case study. Finally, when showing the extent to which the findings of this case study were shaped by

the participants and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (confirmability), multiple sources of data were used to produce understanding (triangulation) and a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of this case study through the reporting of fits findings (audit trail).

Within this naturalistic framework, I used this case study research design to examine the process of using LAPs with students identified with disabilities. This qualitative approach helped answer questions about the nature of phenomena (i.e., literacy assessment portfolios) as one way to document student-participants' progress for the purpose of interpreting and understanding that phenomena from the participants' points of view. Since case study research is neither new nor essentially qualitative or more of a choice of what is to be studied rather than a methodological choice, my research goal and research questions were most suitable for a case study design. Merriam (1998) wrote that case studies could be particularly useful for studying a process, program, or individual in an in-depth, holistic way that allows for deep understanding. She also wrote that when using a case study design the "interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variables, in discovery rather than confirmation" (Merriam, p. 19).

Creswell (1998) wrote "a case study is an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 59). The bounded system to understand could be an activity, event, process, or individuals. In this study, the bounded system was confined to a self-contained special education classroom that was bounded by time in this study beginning in December and ending in May of one school year. Further, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them" (p. 2). This study attempted to

interpret the phenomena of using literacy assessment portfolios in a self-contained special education classroom using thick description pertaining whether or not classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios provided distinct information about the literacy development of students identified with disabilities, and if so, in what ways; did information that was obtained from classroom-based literacy portfolios impact my (as the teacher-participant) instructional decision-making and if so, in what ways; and whether or not the use of classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios influenced parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy and if so, in what ways.

Description of Methodology

Both Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) identified at least six sources of evidence in naturalistic case studies that reflect what researchers have implemented: (a) documents, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observation, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts. First, they describe *documents* as letters, administrative documents, and agendas. In the interest of triangulation of evidence, documents such as these could serve to corroborate the evidence from other sources and make inferences about events that occurred. Since this study took place in a special education classroom, each student participant had an updated Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Each student participant had a working file that included the current IEP, diagnostic testing results, medical information, and documents pertaining to any change with that particular student participant's progress or amount of service. Second, *archival records* can be records and survey data. I was careful to verify that the records were accurate. In this study, I used IEP working files that were small depositories of student participant work samples, classroom assessments, and past IEPs. It also included brief summaries of student-participants' health issues and parent-participants concerns and

preferences. More historical information pertaining to the student-participant's educational history was also included taken from each student-participant's confidential file that is stored under lock and key in most school sites.

Third, *interviews* can be an important source of case study information. There are several forms of interviews. Interviews can be open-ended (i.e., respondents are asked to comment about certain events providing insight or solutions), focused (i.e., the respondent is interviewed for a short period of time answering a set of questions), or structured (i.e., where questions are detailed and developed in advance similar to a survey). I conducted two focused interviews with each participating parent. Each interview consisted of four questions and was conducted with each participating parent at the beginning of the study (i.e., December) and when the study was completed (i.e., May). We also conducted a student-led conference with parents during the month of March so students could share their progress using their literacy assignment portfolios with their parents and added time in the final interview in May so students to complete another student-led conference for the end of the year.

Fourth, *direct observation* occurs during a case study as informal data collection activities as well as formal protocols to measure and record behaviors. As the teacher-participant I was the researcher within the events that was studied. I collected both informal and formal sources of evidence through diagnostic testing, interest inventories, reading attitude surveys, parent-participant questionnaires, reading and writing conference notes, and by reflecting in a teacher journal on a regular basis what I had observed in my classroom related to literacy assessment progress and any instructional decisions I made.

Fifth, *physical artifacts* include daily student participant work and writing process projects (e.g., expository, narrative, persuasive) developed during this study. As Winton Tellis

(1997) points out “the perspective of the researcher can be broadened as a result of the discovery” (p. 8). Within this study, student-participants were taught how to pick out samples of their own work that show progress, and they were asked to comment on how they constructed this work, what they liked about it, what they would change about it, and whether or not they would want to try this type of assignment again (e.g., writing process, reading response).

Setting of this study. This study took place in a local elementary school with approximately 514 students. Of these students 2.9% were African-American, 2.9% were Asian-Pacific, 66.3% were Caucasian, 23.9% were Hispanic, and 3.9% were Native American, based on the local school districts demographics for the year of 2006/2007. This elementary school was located in a middle class socioeconomic area. Three Caucasian students identified with a disability participated in this study. One of the student-participants’ was a male in the fourth grade and two were females in the fifth grade. This study took place in my cross-categorical self-contained education classroom.

This study began in December and ended in May, which was 6 months of a 10-month full traditional school year with approximately 182 days. The setting was a portable classroom located on the west side of the school. There were two tables (i.e., kidney-shaped, octagon-shaped) for student-participants and two desks used by my educational assistant and myself. Student work was displayed on several walls along with one installed white board. I had two primary areas set up in my classroom that included one area for literacy instruction and one area for math instruction. There was an independent reading area with a small couch and several bookcases full of books, which include chapter books, early readers, and picture books. I had a reading instruction area for guided reading and writing groups with storage for instructional materials including a stand-alone white board for reading and writing strategy instruction. For

larger group instruction, I had a shared reading area with a colorful director's chair and an end table with a basket full of picture books and the most recent chapter book that was read aloud on a daily basis. Since I incorporated technology within my literacy instruction, I had a mini computer lab with two computers, a shared printer, and a laptop hooked up to a projector for both projected books and fluency drills.

Selection of participants. Within a naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that “when the instrument is a human being, we mean that the human-as-instrument is inclined toward methods that are extensions of normal human activities: looking, listening, speaking, reading, and the like” (p.199). Lincoln and Guba further explained that humans tend to want to interview, observe, and sift through documents while taking into account even nonverbal language situations. In this naturalistic inquiry, the participants were three student-participants, four parent-participants, and a teacher participant. The most appropriate sampling strategy for this case study was purposeful sampling that was “based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select the sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The criteria for inclusion in this study as a student- participant were the following: Each student-participant: (a) was identified with a disability, (b) received literacy instruction in my special education classroom, (c) was in the fourth or fifth grade, (d) had given his or her written assent to participate in this case study, (d) had a signed parent consent for participation in the study, and (e) required academic support in the area of literacy development.

Since this study was designed to gather a large amount of data pertaining to each student-participant's individual literacy development, I decided to pick a small sample to make sure that I was fulfilling the requirement of this study and also completing my responsibilities as a teacher

within this classroom. After I had received both university and school district approval for this study, I sent out a letter explaining the details of my study (e.g., purpose, procedures, confidentiality) to each parent whose child meet the criteria. The first three students whose parents provided consent and who themselves gave assent became the student and parent-participants. In order to insure that all student-participants and non-student-participants received equitable educational experiences, I implemented the literacy assessment portfolios procedures in my classroom for all students on my caseload but only used the more in depth methods of inquiry (i.e., reflective teaching journal, data collection pertaining to study) with specified student-participants (and only used data from the three student-participants). Each group of participants contributed to this study by completing a variety of items for analysis within the time frame of collection set up within the study (Table 2).

Student-participants I recruited three student-participants. Each student-participant met the criteria as stated above and was asked to develop a Literacy Assessment Portfolio (LAP) with the following eight sections: (a) introduction letter; (b) student written reflections; (c) a reading log; (d) student work samples with attached comment sheets each student completed; (e) informal reading assessments; (f) informal writing assessments; (g) a Family Sharing Response section; and (h) a section for Reflections of Integrated learning of Teacher student Exchange (WRITE) Conferencing guides, Quarterly Assessment Summaries and Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers.

Parent-participants I recruited four parent-participants. Three were mothers of student-participants and one was a father of one of the participants. The criteria for participation as a parent-participant was that their child met the above criteria and that they had given consent to participate in the study. Data were collected in three ways. First, each parent-participant engaged

in two audiotaped formal interviews (i.e., initial and final) and completed two parent-participant questionnaires pertaining to their child's feelings about school, special needs, and the family's language and literacy practices. Second, parent-participants participated in parent/student-led LAP conferences (which they allowed me to audiotape as a way of taking notes) during the school year where we discussed their child's progress. It is important to note that the final formal interview took place during the second student-led LAP conference at the end of the school year due to parental convenience. I used both the district's Standards-based Progress Reports as well as their child's LAP to discuss each child's progress so during the sharing of the LAP the conferences transformed into parent/student-led conferences with the student-participants sharing their accomplishments with their parents. Finally, at the end of each conference, I asked each parent-participant to write comments pertaining to their child's progress that was stored within the Family Sharing Response section in their child's LAP.

Teacher-participant. Finally, as the teacher-participant, I maintained a reflective teaching journal that contained entries describing what I saw in the classroom that was related to literacy assessment, the progress students were making, and my instructional decision-making as the year progressed. I also developed a data system using FileMaker Pro 10 where I included work samples from students categorized in three separate areas as follows: (a) reading; (b) writing; and (c) word study.

Based on the ethics of research involving human subjects, I followed the principles of respect of persons, beneficence and justice. Since the participants are minors, I took special precautions to protect them from risk. Upon receiving the informed consent from the parents and/or guardians, I obtained each student's assent because minors cannot legally give consent. The informed assent and consent forms informed each individual about what would occur during

the research study and the intended use of the research data I collected. I made sure each individual involved in this study received an explanation of the tests and the experimental procedures that were used. I did inform them that they could withdraw from participation at any time, and that their requests to do so would be honored.

Data Collection and Recording

In this study I used a variety of data obtained through formal and informal assessments as well as my reflective teaching journal. I used both qualitative (i.e., interviews and reflective teaching journal) and quantitative (i.e., diagnostic testing results, fluency rates) forms of data. The data collection items have been separated into three categories (e.g., student-participants, parent-participants, and teacher-participant) to make clear what data was collected, from whom, and when.

The use of literacy assessment portfolios (LAP) was the centerpiece of my data collection efforts. It is defined as a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in the area of literacy development. Wiener and Cohen (1997) pointed out the importance of making sure that each portfolio has a clear purpose. The first purpose was to provide my student-participants with opportunities for realistic and authentic assessment of their literacy by observing them during reading and writing. The second purpose was to collect actual student-participant work samples and have each student-participant evaluate his or her work sample before placing that sample into his or her portfolio. The third purpose was to create a collaborative relationship between the teacher-participant and student-participant so that instructional goals were appropriate and relevant to actual student needs and interests. The fourth purpose was to create opportunities through portfolio conferencing for direct one-on-one instruction to maximize the quality of teaching through individualized group instruction. The

fifth purpose was to assist each student in developing metacognitive and self-reflective reading and writing skills. Finally, the sixth purpose was to share information about the student-participant's actual reading and writing strategies with other members of the instructional team including the parent-participants, general education teacher, and related service personnel.

Student-participant data collection. Wiener and Cohen (1997) state “the portfolio process gives the teacher a portrait of or window into the interests, abilities, goals, learning strategies, and outcomes of individual students” (p. 6). Since one of my research questions was to investigate what distinct information literacy assessment portfolios might provide about students' literacy development, I gathered data for analysis by gathering background information on each student-participant, conducting formal assessments (e.g., DRA2), and creating an Individual Student File for each student-participant.

Individual student file. Each student-participant had a file that I kept in a locked filing cabinet. The contents of the file included background information taken from the student-participant's IEP that will provide some baseline information about the student-participant's literacy abilities, and interests. Each file contained formal assessments for reading (i.e., DRA2, QRI-5) and two parent questionnaires (i.e., Getting to Know Your Child, Getting to Know your Child's Language and Literacy Practices) taken from Owocki and Goodman (2002, p. 97-98). Table 2 lists, describes, and gives the time frame of collection for the items that were stored in the student files. The questionnaires (Appendix E & F) contained each parent's written response to questions about children's academic and medical needs, as well as information about their child's language and literacy practices such as their favorite book.

Background data information. I summarized this information taken from the student-participant's IEP by typing it into a computer file. The summary included the student-

participant's exceptionality, initial testing results in the area of reading and writing, brief history from initial IEP to present IEP, parent-participant contact information, medical information, and strengths and weaknesses shared within the IEPs. This information was gathered in order to fully understand the student-participants I worked with during this study.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the background information was in the form of anecdotal notes. Information was reviewed from the teacher's working file and the student's confidential file. I took notes on the most significant data pertaining to the student's academics, diagnostic information, and any strengths or needs that were noted in the files. I verified the data with other documents (i.e., dates, results) and summarized the information in the form of anecdotal notes. The analysis of the data taken from the background data information is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant.

Formal assessment. I administered several reading diagnostic assessments to obtain information about each student-participant's reading level, fluency, decoding, and comprehension skills. I administered the Direct Reading Assessment (DRA2) and the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5) two to three times during the school year for each student-participant. The DRA2 provided scores given in reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. The student-participant was asked to begin retelling the story that he or she had read starting at the beginning and then asked both a reflection and a connection question. A DRA2 detailed continuum form was then completed to obtain scores in the above areas (e.g., reading engagement) and a reading level. The QRI-5 began with concept questions assessing whether the reading sample material was familiar or unfamiliar and allowed the student-participant to make a prediction about what the story would be about. The student-participant read a passage and the total number of miscues and the number of meaning-change miscues will

be recorded, as well as the fluency rate. The student-participant then retold the story and answer both implicit and explicit questions. The results of this assessment determined whether the student-participant was in the independent, instructional or frustration range after reading the assigned text.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the formal assessments was in the form of reading levels, fluency rates, decoding skills, and comprehension skills that had been mastered. Information was reviewed from the teacher's working file, the student's cumulative file, and the student's confidential file. I took notes on the most significant data pertaining to the student's academics, diagnostic information, and any strengths or needs in the areas of reading or writing. I verified the data with other documents (i.e., dates, results) and summarized the information in the form of anecdotal notes. The results of the analysis of the data taken from the formal assessments are discussed in the results section for each student-participant.

Parent questionnaires. I asked each parent-participant to complete two questionnaires in the beginning of this study during the month of December. The two questionnaires were titled "Getting to Know Your Child" and "Getting to Know your Child's Language and Literacy Practices" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 97-98). The questionnaires (Appendix E & F) contain questions about children's academic and medical needs, as well as information about their child's language and literacy practices such as their favorite book. I asked each parent-participant to provide as much detail as they could about their child. As Owocki and Goodman wrote, "given that language use differs from child to child, it makes sense to tailor evaluation to connect with individual children's strengths" (p. 17). The completed questionnaires provided me with information pertaining to the student-participants, such as their cultural experiences, and gave me

insight into their ways of speaking, knowing, and thinking. My goal of gaining insight about each child's language learning was completed.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the parent questionnaires were in the form of written answers to the questions within the questionnaires completed by the parent- participants about their child. Information was highlighted from the completed responses on the parent questionnaires. I took notes on the most significant data and I verified by going over the parent responses for a second time. I then summarized the information in the form of anecdotal notes. The results of analysis of the data taken from the parent questionnaires are discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant.

Literacy Assessment Portfolio. Each student Literacy Assessment Portfolio was a large 3 inch binder with eight sections as follows: (a) a section with an introduction letter written by the student-participant introducing the purpose the LAP and its table of contents; (b) a section for written reflections by the student-participants describing how they felt as a reader and writer and what goals and expectations they have for themselves; (c) a section with a reading log that contains a list of all the books the student-participant had read or books that had been read to them during the school year; (d) a section for student-participant's work containing actual work products on which student-participants had attached comment sheets to each work sample; (e) a section for informal reading assessments that included bi-weekly fiction and nonfiction reading conferences with two comprehension assessments (i.e., multiple-choice test, retelling rubric) and a one-minute reading analysis. Also within this section were two completed interest inventories and two completed Reading Attitude Surveys; (f) a section for informal writing assessments that included bi-weekly fiction and nonfiction Writing Conference for Reading Responses, two Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventories, and the results of the three required

Writing/Presentation projects (i.e., informational report, fairy tale, and mini science experiment) where each student-participant provided a copy of their project and/or a picture of the poster board with a writing rubric and a presentation rubric attached; (g) a section for a Family Sharing Response where parents made about their child's LAP were stored; and (h) a section for all Written Reflections of Integrated learning of Teacher student Exchange (WRITE) Conferencing guides. These forms comprised of information from a conference focused on the evaluation of the student-participant's LAP. Also within this section were the Quarterly Assessment Summaries and Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers were stored. The checklist helped me insure that each portfolio showed evidence of literacy development, student-participant work that shows progress, raw data and summarizing data, a consistent purpose, a collection of student-participant work throughout the year, evidence of student-participant's self-reflection, shows evidence of student-participant's self-assessment. Table 3 lists, describes, and gives the time frame of collection for the items that were stored in each student LAP.

LAP introduction letter. After instruction, each student-participant was instructed to write or dictate to the teacher-participant a statement describing the purpose of the LAP and how it was organized into eight sections generating a table of contents. Student-participants were asked to date each entry so that they can compare their work from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year.

Data analysis. The student-participant completed their LAP Introduction letters in the beginning of the year and during the Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher student Exchange (WRITE) conferences I reviewed them with each student-participant. After each WRITE conference I reviewed my notes making sure they were complete and then verified that the information I took was correct by going over my WRITE conference notes for a second

time. I summarized the information in the form of anecdotal notes. The analysis of any data taken from the student-participant's introduction letter is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conference.

Student LAP reflection. In this section of the LAP, student-participants were asked to write or dictate some information about what were their interests and attitudes in the area of literacy, along with their expectations for that school year. I reviewed this section with each student-participant during the Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher student Exchange (WRITE) conference that was set up to review the details of the student-participant's LAP and prepare student-participants for the parent/student-led LAP conferences.

Data analysis. After each WRITE conference I reviewed my notes making sure they were complete and then verified that the information I took was correct by going over my WRITE conference notes for a second time. I summarized the information in the form of anecdotal notes. The analysis of this data is discussed in Chapter Four of each student-participant within Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conference.

Reading log. In this section of each student-participant's LAP, the student-participants kept track of the books they read and the books that were read to them. This list included the type of reading (e.g., fiction, nonfiction), the date, the title of the book, and the author of the book. Student-participants also kept a Reading Counts Chart that was placed next to the reading log in their LAPS that kept track of the number of books under each category (e.g., Land of Enchantment, Newbery, Biography). This sheet also served as a visual reminder so when they completed a certain number of books, they would earn a t-shirt from our librarian.

Data analysis. The data were gathered from the Reading Logs of each student-participant and the Reading Counts Chart as anecdotal notes describing the total number of books read for the year. I reviewed the data on the Reading Logs (i.e., number of books read, types of books) and the Reading Counts Chart. I summarized the information taken from both documents and verified that it was correct. The analysis of this data is discussed in Chapter Four of each student-participant within Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conference.

Student work samples Every Wednesday, we worked on the LAPs as a class. Students would pick out work samples they wanted to include in their LAPS and complete Student Work Sample Comment Sheets (Appendix K) by answering the following questions: (a) how I did this piece; (b) what I like about it; (c) what I wish I could change about it; and (d) do I want to try this again? After they completed the comment sheet, they attached it to their work and turned it in for evaluation.

Data analysis. As the student completed their Student Work Sample Comment Sheet and attached it to their student work sample, I verified that all the questions had been completed by the student and wrote a summary in the form of anecdotal notes. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes. The results of the analysis of this data are discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conference.

Writing presentation project conferences Each student-participant was required to complete three major Writing/Presentation projects across the school year. These projects gave me the opportunity to evaluate their use of a four-step writing process (i.e., graphic organizer,

written rough draft, final written product, and presentation) as well as, their ability to present the information to a small group of peers. Each student-participant used a writing rubric and a presentation rubric to guide them when completing each project. In a group setting, I instructed students on how to use a rubric and why it was important for them to strive for the most points. This was ongoing instruction. During each Writing Conference, a form was completed (Appendix M), using dictation from the student-participant, answering such questions as what he or she liked about the writing project, what sources or books he or she used for inspiration, did he or she use his or her best handwriting skills and check for spelling, capitals and end points, what he or she thinks would make their writing project better, what types of props did he or she use during the presentation, what type of help he or she will need to improve their writing skills, and what he or she thinks was the best thing or things about his or her writing project and presentation.

I then completed the writing rubric and the presentation rubric for each project. The Writing Project Rubric (Appendix M- page 2) assessed the student-participants' writing skills using a scale from 1 to 4 in the categories of sentence fluency, grammar and spelling conventions, penmanship, organization, and voice. The Writing Project Presentation Rubric (Appendix M-page 3) assessed the student-participants' presentation using a scale from 1 to 4 in the categories of preparedness, comprehension of topic, used complete sentences when answering questions, stayed on topic, volume, and enthusiasm. The Presentation Rubric assessed the student-participants' presentation of their project in front of their peers that sometimes included a visual aid they have created.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the Writing Presentation Project Conferences was collected in the form of anecdotal notes and was placed in the Quarterly Assessment Summary

completed two times during the study. I made anecdotal notes on the Writing Project rubrics (i.e., writing & presentation rubrics). I also verified that my anecdotal notes were correct by going through the information on more time. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes. The results of the analysis of this data are discussed in the Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Informal Writing Assessments.

Informal assessments for reading and writing. During the period of this study I sent home with each student-participant either a fiction or nonfiction book every two weeks taking into account the student's interests and reading level. Each student-participant was asked to read the book at home for two weeks. With the book I also sent home worksheets that related to the book to give each student added practice; they had one week to complete and return these sheets. The number of worksheets assigned was individualized for each student; I also made a many modifications to the sheets. At times, I rewrote the directions and cut down the number of practice items I wanted them to complete. During the first week with their new book, I also made sure there was time during the school day given for students to read their book silently in class and with either myself or my educational assistant.

At the end of the second week, I conducted either a Reading Conference for Fiction (Appendix G), or a Reading Conference for Nonfiction (Appendix H). During each type of conference I completed a Reading Analysis (Appendix I) with each student-participant. After we had discussed questions on each conference sheet pertaining to the type of book (i.e., fiction, nonfiction), each student-participant was asked to pick out a section of the read the book and read aloud with me while I conducted a reading analysis. The reading analysis helped me note what type of cueing system they used most often, the number of repetitions they made, and how

often they used punctuation during the reading. I also calculated the fluency rate and how the student-participant correctly used retelling skills, using a scale from outstanding to inadequate based on a percentage scale. During this time I alternated my time with each student having some of them read their book silently in class preparing to take their comprehension test or complete their written response to an extended question that pertained to the book they had read. I decided to use the extended response because most of my students had a great deal of difficulty answering the question in a written form. Later that afternoon or the next day, the student-participant and I sat down in the classroom and completed a two-page Writing Conference for Reading Response Sheet (Appendix J). Prior to the actual conference, I completed the teacher-participant's evaluation page assessing the student-participant's writing stage (i.e., emergent, beginning, early developing, developing, and fluent), assess their use of language mechanics, and making comments and instructional need statements pertaining to that particular writing assignment.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the bi-weekly reading and Writing Conference for Reading Responses was placed in the Quarterly Assessment Summary that was completed two times during the study. I made anecdotal notes on the informal assessments for both reading and writing. I then verified that the data taken (e.g., fluency rates) were correct. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes. The analysis of the reading conference data is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Informal Reading Assessments. The analysis of the writing conference data is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Informal Writing Assessments.

Interest inventory. I administered the Interest Inventory (Appendix C) with each student-participant one-on-one, and had the student-participants dictate their answers. This inventory seeks to find out if the student likes to read, how often they read, what types of books they are interested in reading, their favorite book and author, books and magazines they like to read, and why they choose certain books (e.g., size, cover). This information gave me some guidance when I picked chapter books to read aloud, and when I selected reading instructional level books for each student-participant to take home in their homework packets. I administered this tool both at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year to see if the student-participant's interests had changed.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the Interest Inventory was in the form of dictated answers given by the student-participants from questions within this inventory. I made anecdotal notes on the student's Interest Inventories and asked each student for more information if I needed it. I then verified that the data taken were correct. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes. This data was placed in the Quarterly Assessment Summary was completed two times during the study. The analysis of the Interest Inventory data is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Informal Reading Assessments.

Reading attitude survey. I administered the Elementary School Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix D) two times a year (i.e., December, May) to a small group or one-on-one depending on each student-participant's individual needs. This assessment provided a quick snapshot of a student-participant's attitudes toward reading. It consisted of 20 questions and can be administered to the whole class in about 10 minutes. Each item presents a brief and simple

statement about reading and was followed by four pictures of Garfield. The four Garfield characters show different emotional stances such as the happiest Garfield, a slightly smiling Garfield, a mildly upset Garfield, and a very upset Garfield. Student-participants circle the picture that best represents their answer to each question.

Data analysis. This survey was scored by counting the points assigned to each picture. Points range from 4 for the happiest Garfield to 1. I added up the total points scored for the 10 questions concerning recreational reading, and the 10 questions that pertain to academic reading. This provided a raw score for each category (i.e., recreational, academic). Then both categories were added together to get a full-scale raw score. I then converted the raw scores into percentile ranks for the appropriate grade level by using Table 1 in McKenna and Kear (1990). These data were placed in the Quarterly Assessment Summary that was completed two times during the study. I made anecdotal notes on this survey if I observed a behavior I needed to note (e.g., level of cooperation at time of facilitation) and I then verified that the data taken (e.g., raw scores) were correct. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes. The outcomes of the analysis of the Reading Attitude Survey are discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Informal Reading Assessments.

Family sharing response. This section was stored in the LAP. A detailed description and data analysis has been described within the Parent-participant Data Collection that follows.

WRITE conferences for LAP. A conference is the "teacher's way of taking the pulse of the class, the individual student, and the success of various instructional strategies" (Wiener & Cohen, 1997). I held two Literacy Assessment Portfolio conferences using the WRITE Conference Guide (Appendix N) with the student-participants during the months of March and

May. During each conference I asked student-participants the following 10 questions: (a) what was your best work and what makes it so, (b) how does this compare with last month's best work or other work you did not include, (c) after reviewing your journal responses and story maps, what comments can you make about your reading, (d) what are your reading goals for the next month, (e) what would you like to improve in your writing, (f) how can I, the teacher, help you, (g) since the last conference, what book do you want to discuss because it was "so good", "so bad", or "so special in some way", (h) what are you most pleased about with regard to your learning, (i) what ideas have you been thinking about, or what piece of information have you learned that you want to discuss at the LAP conference, and (j) what would you particularly like to share with your family? There was also an area for comments pertaining to the student-participant's Introduction Letter, the student-participant's Student Reflections, the student-participant's reading log, and the Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers (see Appendix O) that was primarily used for ensure all components are present in each portfolio.

My purpose for having the conferences was to guide curricular decisions and determine effective teaching and learning strategies. I wanted to evaluate if each student-participant was actively learning, what evidence of this we saw in their portfolios, and how student-participants reflected on their strengths and weaknesses. Also, I wanted to know if my student-participants developed learning goals by recognizing what they had or had not achieved.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the WRITE conferences for LAP were in the form of anecdotal notes on the most significant data and I verified by going over the student dictated for a second time. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum

changes. The analysis of the WRITE conferences for the LAP is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant within Results from Informal Reading Assessments.

Quarterly assessment summary. I summarized information that was stored in the individual student-participant's Individual Student File (i.e., background information, formal assessments, informal assessments) using the Quarterly Assessment Summary form. This Quarterly Assessment Summary (Appendix P) was completed in March and May.

Data analysis. The data gathered from the Quarterly Assessment Summaries was in the form of anecdotal notes. I then verified that the data taken was correct by going through the student's LAP and Student Individual File. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes. The analysis for the Quarterly Assessment Summaries is discussed in Chapter Four for each student-participant.

Portfolio assessment criteria checklist for teachers. In order to make sure there was a distinction between a portfolio that was just a depository of student-participant's work and a portfolio process for assessment purposes as I purposed in my study, I used The Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers (PACCT). This tool was validated by surveyed experts in the field within a study completed by Ezell and Klein (2002). I used this checklist (Appendix O) to document evidence of each criterion item on this checklist. Each item was given a check mark if that item had been included in the LAP. This checklist was used both in March and May of the school year.

Data analysis. This was a simple checklist used as a form of quality assurance that all student-participant literacy assessment portfolios show evidence of the 14 portfolio components required in each LAP. The data gathered from the Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for

Teachers was placed in the WRITE Conference Guide. The analysis of the data taken from formal assessments is discussed in Chapter Four within Results of Written Reflections of Integrated learning from Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conferences.

Parent-participant data collection. Wiener and Cohen (1997) wrote “the portfolio concept provides a meaningful opportunity for parents to become more involved in their children’s literacy growth through a dialogue with both their children and the teacher using the portfolio as a centerpiece” (p. 9). Since one of my research questions was to find out if and how the use of classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios influenced parents’ understanding of their child’s progress and skills in the area of literacy, I found it beneficial to gather data for analysis through two structured interviews, two parent/student-led conferences, and other communications both within their child’s LAP (i.e., Family Sharing Response), and through home and school correspondence.

Interviews I asked that each parent-participant to participate in two interviews during the beginning of this study (i.e., December) and toward the end of this study (i.e., May). I used an interview protocol that had four open-ended questions pertaining to the kinds of information parent-participants have received in the past about their child’s literacy development, how they felt about the information they received, what information they would like to receive, and how they would like to receive that information. During each interview with parent-participants, I explained the purpose of the study, the amount of time that would be needed to complete the interview, and I offered to provide a copy of the transcribed interview after I have transcribed them. I used the Interview Protocol for both the pre- and post- interviews (Appendices A & B).

Data analysis. See Parent/student-led LAP conferences section below for data analysis.

Parent/student-led LAP conferences The parent/student-led conferences were held two times during the school year (i.e., March, May), and they were audiotaped and then transcribed as a way to take notes. Parents agreed to be audiotaped at the time of each conference. The last student-led parent teacher conference followed immediately after the final conference due to parental schedule conveniences. The centerpiece of these conferences was the student's LAP. After going over the district's Standards Based Progress Report that showed progress toward mastery of the grade level standards I then watched as each student-participant reviewed the LAP with each of their parents. I then shared the results of the formal and informal assessments with the parents. I followed the same procedures to protect privacy and confidentiality as I described within the *Interviews* section prior to this section.

Data analysis. I audiotaped the interviews and the parent/student-led conferences using an Olympus WS-210 Digital Voice Recorder purchased at Radio Shack, model number WS-210, and catalog number 55031944. After the interview and parent/student-led conference had taken place, I transferred the audio files to my MacBook Pro computer and placed the files on my Simple Tech external hard drive for storage. This hard drive was locked in a file cabinet in my home office for safekeeping when I was not using it. During both the interviews and the parent/student-led conferences, I took notes and recorded those notes into typewritten form with title, date, participant(s) using pseudonyms involved, the location where each event (i.e., interviews, parent/student-led conferences) was held, and the times in which each event took place. I transcribed all my recordings verbatim to preserve non-speed verbalizations (e.g., umm, aahh), verbal contractions (e.g., gonna), and strong emotion within a statement (using parenthesis). I told the parent-participants that all of the interview and parent/student-led

conference transcripts and the audiotapes were stored in my locked filing cabinet in my home office and the audiotapes will be destroyed after the study was completed.

I used thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The thematic analysis consisted of several steps. Analysis of the parent-participant data consisted of first transcribing the audiotapes of interviews and parent/student-led LAP conferences, resulting in nine transcripts. I then used thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The thematic analysis consisted of several steps. I first searched across the data set (i.e., transcripts of interviews, parent/student-led LAP conferences, family sharing responses, and ongoing written communication with parent-participants) and found repeated patterns of meaning from the data I extracted. In step two of the analysis, I coded interesting features of the data in a systematic method across the entire data set and collated data relevant to each code. I then collated the codes into potential themes in step three.

Family sharing responses Within each student's LAP there was a section for Family Sharing Responses. Weiner and Cohen (1997) recommended including written feedback from home as an important addition to the LAP because it shows parental interest and concern about their child's progress. This section held a couple of lined 8 X 10 pieces of paper with an instruction sheet that asked parent-participants to date and sign the notes that they wrote reflecting on their student's progress. I reminded parents to complete the sheets at the end of the conference; some of the parents wanted to take a sheet home and return the completed sheet the next day. This type of data collection was completed parent/student-led parent conferences which occurred two times during the study (i.e., March, May).

Data analysis. The data gathered from Family sharing responses in each student LAP was in the form of anecdotal notes. I then verified that the data correct by going over the notes for a second time. I also commented in my teacher's reflective journal about some of the results I observed if I felt that information was significant enough to consider instructional or curriculum changes.

Teacher-participant data collection. Wiener and Cohen (1997) wrote, "as teachers observe children and meet with them to discuss and reflect on their work, they receive valuable information about how each child is progressing" (p. 7). Since one of the research questions of this study was to explore how the information obtained from literacy assessment portfolios impacted my instructional decision-making, I gathered data for analysis using a reflective teaching journal. In this journal, I reflected periodically on what I saw in the classroom related to literacy assessment, including the progress student-participants were making and my reflections pertaining to the instructional decisions that were made during the school year.

Reflective teaching journal. Not surprisingly, John Dewey (1933) believed that there are three key attitudes that are necessary for teachers to be reflective: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. One form of self-directed professional inquiry that is also a vehicle for understanding yourself as a teacher is a reflective teaching journal. It offers a place for teachers to explore both the planning and outcomes of curricular and instructional activities in the classroom. Most of all, a reflective teaching journal can be a place to pursue those nagging questions or issues that a teacher faces on a daily basis. It can be a place to record honest perceptions of and reactions to classroom situations. I believe that engaging in reflective teaching did involve the examination of my motivation, my thinking, and my practice.

Data analysis. I created a two-column table in a Word document on my computer that included the date of my daily reflection, a written description of relevant documents and questions that came up during instruction that I collected. Periodically, I reread the typed written journal and handwritten notes, answered any questions I had posed, and wrote notes within the typed form. The reflective teaching journal was focused on the progress student-participants were making in the class and any discussions during meetings, and parent-participant conferences that occurred pertaining to student-participants.

I used thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The thematic analysis consisted of several steps. I began analysis of the data collected from my reflective teaching journal by identifying, analyzing, and then reporting patterns (themes) within the data. I searched across my data set (i.e., reflective teaching journal) and found repeated patterns of meaning from the data I extracted. In phase 2 of the analysis, I coded interesting features of the data in a systematic method across the entire data set and collated the data relevant to each code. I then collated the codes into potential themes in phase 3. Next, I reviewed the themes and generated a thematic table defining and naming themes (phase 4).

Data processing and analysis. Some might ask what is important about well-collected qualitative data. One feature is that it “focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural setting, so we can have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Since the data in this case study were collected in close proximity to a specific situation (i.e., my special education classroom), it was locally grounded. This was important because what was learned in this study has the potential of helping other special education teachers communicate the progress of their students in the area of literacy development in an alternative fashion.

Another feature of qualitative data is the richness and holism provided through the “thick descriptions” of data. Such descriptions could help other special education teachers identify and possibly implement some of what they have read. Since qualitative data is well suited for locating the meanings people place on processes and connecting such meanings to the social world around them, this case study provided a well documented process of using literacy assessment portfolios in a special education classroom while looking through the lens of a teachers’ decision making processes when making curriculum and teaching decisions.

In case studies, communicating understanding is the goal of data analysis. In this case study, data were derived from interviews, questionnaires, diagnostic assessments, writing and reading conference notes, and field notes in the form of a reflective teaching journal. Since there was a tremendous amount of data, my biggest challenge was to make sense out of the data that I had collected. This was why I paid particular attention to data management. Data analysis started by bringing all the data together in a well-organized fashion so the information could be easily retrievable. I used FileMaker Pro 10 to set up my research database. This allowed me to organize all the data collecting items and use it as a resource tool when searching for student work samples. This database allowed me to quickly retrieve electronic copies of student work to show parents during conferences, search for reading analysis results (e.g., fluency rates, retelling scores), search for and compare comprehension and retelling scores, and review student reading goals. During analysis, I was able to verify scores and self-assessment answers students had dictated.

Trustworthiness In naturalistic inquiry, trustworthiness is established through the use of techniques that “provide truth value through credibility, applicability through transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability” (Erlandson, Harris,

Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 132). The meaning of trustworthiness is how a researcher can persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of a study are worth acknowledging (credibility). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that activities that make it more likely to have credible findings and interpretations produced will be through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Since this case study took place during an entire school year, prolonged engagement was evident giving me the opportunity to build trust: “If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). It required me to identify characteristics or elements during my research that were most relevant to the problem and focus on them in detail. The third technique for improving the probability that my findings and interpretations would be found credible was through the use of triangulation. I had multiple data collection methods and data sources in my case study that provided collaborative evidence for the validity of my qualitative research findings.

To facilitate transferability of findings to other similar classrooms, I used thick descriptions and purposive sampling in this case study to demonstrate transferability for application in other similar contexts (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p.241). Data and processes were reported using thick descriptive detail to allow judgments about transferability. The descriptive details of the classroom environment and the activities that took place “created in the reader’s mind may be remarkably close to that which would be gained by direct experience” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 33).

Since the foundation of transferability is through thick description of the sending context, purposive sampling was necessary due to the relevance to the research questions in this case study. Purposive sampling was also used because it was “based on the assumption that the

researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select the sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Participants were chosen for their relevance to the research questions using classroom-based portfolios with students identified with disabilities. The first three student-participants that met the criteria for inclusion in this study whose parents provided consent and who themselves give assent became student and parent participants.

To facilitate dependability showing that the findings of this study were consistent and could be repeated to other similar studies, a dependability audit was conducted by providing an audit trail. This was done through a great deal of documentation such as interview and conference notes, student reflections and work samples, parent transcribed dialogue and questionnaire responses, and the reflective teaching journal. Dependability was also demonstrated through the dense description of my research methods and through triangulation by checking the consistency of the findings generated by the various data collection methods used in this case study.

Finally, as the naturalistic researcher I realize that “objectivity is an illusion and that no methodology can be totally separated from those who have created and selected it (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 34). I did not attempt to ensure that my observations were free from contamination (i.e., biases) by myself as the researcher. I trust in the confirmability of my data because that data “can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corroborating wholes in both explicit and implicit” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). This confirmability was communicated through an audit trail using various documents accumulated during this case study (e.g., quarterly assessment summary). Erlandson et al., (1993) wrote that, “an adequate trail should be left to enable the auditor to determine if the

conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be traced to their sources and if they are supported by the inquiry”(p. 35).

Again, the goal of my data analysis in this case study is to communicate an understanding of how using literacy assessment portfolios with students identified with disabilities enable them to demonstrate what they are learning, how using literacy assessment portfolios inform the parents’ understanding of their children’s progress in the area of literacy development, and if such a process makes an impact on a teacher’s instructional decision making. By using techniques to establish trustworthiness (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability), as the teacher-researcher in this case study, I will persuade my audience (including self) that the findings of this study found through data analysis are indeed worth acknowledging.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate if using a form of an alternative assessment (i.e., a classroom-based literacy assessment portfolio) would provide a comprehensive and holistic collection of information pertaining to the literacy development of students identified with disabilities. The overall objectives of the research were to add to special education literature by examining how and if classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios could enable student-participants to demonstrate what they were learning within the context of daily instruction aligned with grade-level content standards and document progress. This study may also have the potential to impact to the field of special education through the examination of how and if using classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios could inform parents' understanding of their children's progress and skills in the area of literacy and finally, its potential to help teachers learn to use assessment information to guide their instructional decisions.

This research utilized a case study design within the naturalistic paradigm to examine using classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios (LAPs) with students identified with a disability. Three students and their parents (four parent participants) participated in this study during the entire process that took place in my cross-categorical special education classroom where I served students with all exceptionalities. I was the investigator and teacher-participant who conducted all the procedures and maintained all data that was collected throughout the study's time frame (i.e., December through May). To protect and preserve the confidentiality of the participants within this study, I will discuss the results of my data analysis using pseudonyms assigned to each student-participant (i.e., Karl, Mary, and Cate) and pseudonyms assigned to parent-participants (i.e., Karl's mother, Mary's mother, Cate's mother, and Cate's father). In this

chapter, I will discuss the results of data analysis for the data collected for each of the three groups of participants (i.e., student-participants, parent-participants, and teacher-participant).

Within the student-participant section I will discuss for each of the three student-participants: (a) relevant background information; (b) results from formal reading assessments; (c) results from informal reading assessments; (d) results from informal writing assessments; and (e) results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conferences.

Within the parent-participant section I will present the thematic analysis from two transcribed audiotaped interviews with each parent (i.e., initial and final) (see Appendix A and B for a list of interview questions), two transcribed parent/student-led LAP conferences with each parent, notes written by each parent and placed in the Family Sharing Response section of their child's LAP.

Within the teacher-participant section I will report thematic analysis outcomes from a reflective teaching journal that I kept throughout this study. Within both the parent-participant and the teacher-participant sections, I will report the results of the thematic analysis of the data listed above; I used this method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (i.e., themes, subthemes) within the data. I will discuss the themes that emerged and provide representative pieces of raw data (i.e., transcribed parent interviews and parent/student-led LAP conferences, reflective teaching journal entries) to illustrate themes.

Student-Participants

Each student-participant's story involved using a literacy assessment portfolio while completing a variety of assignments outlined within the framework of this study with the objective of how and if classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios could enable student-participants to demonstrate what they were learning within the context of daily instruction aligned with grade-level content standards and document progress. In the following sections, I

discuss the following categories of data for each student-participant that were stored in individual student files to protect their privacy: (a) students' background/literacy history, (b) information shared by parents in the questionnaires titled *Getting to Know Your Child* and *Getting to Know your Child's Language and Literacy Practices*, and (c) results of students' formal reading assessments (i.e., 2 and QRI-5). I also discuss the remaining data that were stored in each individual student LAP as follows: (a) results of their informal reading assessments (i.e., Interest Inventory, Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, and bi-weekly reading conferences); (b) results of their informal writing assessments (i.e., spelling intervention, bi-weekly Writing Conference for Reading Responses, and writing project conferences); and (c) results from their completed LAPs using the Written Reflections of Integrated Learning for Teacher-Student Exchange WRITE conferences.

Student-participant Karl

Background. At the time of this study, Karl was an 11-year-old fourth grade male student who had recently moved with his family to our local school district from another state. He had attended a self-contained special education classroom for 22.5 hours per week. With a history of essential tremors and a diagnosis of craniosynostosis (i.e., premature closing of the cranial sutures), Karl was assessed by the local school district at 3 years of age and found to be eligible for the Severely Speech Impaired Program. The educational records of Karl were very scarce making the information pertaining to the type of assessments used by the local school district unavailable during the time of this study. He was placed in a Pre-K special education classroom where he received academic interventions, speech and occupational therapy services. On a December, 2002 evaluation using *the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test*, Karl obtained a Verbal Comprehension standard score of 69, a Nonverbal Reasoning/Visualization standard

score of 96, and a Test Composite standard score of 84. It was recommended that the Nonverbal Reasoning/Visualization standard score of 96 be used for any educational decisions as the best representation of Karl's present level of cognitive functioning.

Later in December of 2005, Karl was given the *Preschool Language Scales-Fourth Edition (PLS-4)* where he obtained a Total Language score of 50, an Auditory Comprehension score of 53, and an Expressive Communication score of 53. These scores are indicative of a severe language deficit so he was subsequently identified as having severe speech impairment. His records reflect that in spite of receiving early speech therapy, occupational therapy, and academic interventions in preschool programs, he was retained in kindergarten. It was also noted that he continued to have difficulty with seizures and sleep apnea. In April of 2009, Karl was tested using *Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence* where he received a full-scale intelligence quotient of 70 with a verbal of 74 and a performance of 70. During the same timeframe he was administered the *Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement*, where he scored 56 in reading comprehension and 55 in broad written language which qualified him as having a specific learning disability. Karl's records revealed that intensive speech, occupational, and academic interventions continued through the first, second, and third grades. It was also noted throughout his records that he was easily distracted and had a short attention span.

Karl's mother completed two parent questionnaires requesting information about Karl such as health, interests, activities after school and describing Karl's language and literacy activities. She wrote that Karl had some trouble dealing with bullies in his neighborhood but loved school, especially when he was given the opportunity to express himself. One of the goals that Karl's mother shared was that she wished Karl could complete his homework on his own. I tried to make sure we gave Karl enough support by going over the homework that was sent home

with him making sure he fully understood how to complete the work. When completing an item on the questionnaire that asked about her child's self-concept and whether or not that she believed in her child's capabilities, Karl's mother wrote, "Sometimes. Most times he is very lazy. He prefers others to do it." Karl's mother also shared that Karl talks about many subjects and loves to cook and play computer games. She shared that Karl does read books at home. The information obtained from the questionnaires became very important when working with Karl in the classroom. I modified his homework, gave him plenty of time to express himself through project presentations, and closely monitored his peer relationships especially on the playground.

What did not show up in Karl's written records were his incredible personality, sweet temperament, compassion, and his enthusiasm to learn how to read. My first introduction to Karl was when he walked into the classroom with his Spiderman backpack, his Cub Scout shirt, a pair of shorts, and a big smile. He immediately came to me and handed me a dandelion that he had picked on his way to school and gave me a big hug. The next day, Karl came into the room very excited and dropped his seemingly very heavy backpack on the floor. He said that he brought something for the class and began pulling out six 4 -inch diameter round rocks and laid them out on our entry table. He told us that we needed rocks, and I turned to my educational assistant and said, "Ms. Camille, we now have rocks!" Karl settled into his new desk that day feeling like he was now a true member of our class.

Results from formal reading assessments. It was noted in Karl's records that he did not complete the full year of third grade due to an interstate relocation. Karl came into my classroom at the beginning of the fourth grade diagnosed as having a specific learning disability as well as severe speech/language impairment. At the end of his third grade year Karl's reading had been assessed using the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA2); his level at that time was 8.

During the beginning of his fourth grade year I administered the DRA2 level 8 again checking to see if any regression of skills had occurred over the summer break. On this assessment he scored, using the DRA2 Continuum, at the independent level for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. Karl read 97% of the words in the assessment passage accurately, making only three miscues. He used good intonation skills while reading orally and was enthusiastic when making a connection with the story he had read by relating the story line to having a pet he had at home. These DRA2 scores demonstrated no regression of reading skills in the areas that were assessed in third grade.

In the month of January, I had Karl read a DRA2 level 10 book on which he scored at the independent level for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. His fluency rate dropped to 33 correct words per minute while his reading accuracy rate was 100% with no miscues putting him in the advanced category as per DRA2. These results showed that Karl was at the first grade reading level, moving toward a second grade reading level.

In March, I had Karl read a *Qualitative Reading Inventory 5* (QRI-5) Examiner Word List to estimate a starting point for passage administration. Initially, Karl was asked to read the first grade word list. He scored at the instructional level (correctly identifying 85% of the words). The second grade list was administered and he reached the frustration level (correctly identifying only 60% of the words). I decided to give Karl a second grade narrative reading passage based on his DRA2 test results in January and my observations of Karl's reading patterns. I made this decision because he seemed to read more fluently when given a passage of connected text requiring use of context clues rather than correctly identifying words on an isolated word list and this would be typical of most readers who benefit from having the context of story aid word recognition (Leslie & Calhoun, 1995). Using both QRI-5 and DRA2 testing materials gave me

the opportunity to compare Karl's comprehension on passages that have picture cues (i.e., DRA2) to passages without picture cues (i.e., QRI-5) to get a more accurate determination of his reading level. When reading the second grade narrative passage, Karl made six miscues but scored within the instructional level by correctly answering 6 out of 8 comprehension questions. His fluency rate was 61 words correct per minute (WCPM). I continued literacy instruction using second grade materials.

In April, I administered the QRI-5 Examiner Word List to Karl and he scored at the instructional level for the second grade (correctly identified 70% of the words on the list). I then administered the third grade list; he reached frustration, correctly identifying 35% of the words. I noticed that Karl was in a bit of a hurry because he seemed to respond with, "don't know" more than usual. Again, after observing Karl successfully work with second grade reading materials, I decided to give Karl a third grade narrative reading passage. When reading the third grade passage, Karl made 11 miscues (i.e., missed the words "Italy", "Cuba", "eagerly") but scored within the instructional level by correctly answering 7 out of 8 comprehension questions. His fluency rate was 45 WCPM, but I noticed that he kept losing his place when reading. Again, he displayed that "hurry up and get done" behavior. This result (from the QRI-5 Assessment) placed him in the instructional level for the third grade.

Although Karl was very motivated to use third grade reading materials, I decided in May to administer his final DRA2 for the year at level 28 where he scored at the independent level for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. His word identification accuracy level was 98 % (i.e., independent level based on 3 to 4 miscues) but his oral reading rate was 37 WCPM placing him in the DRA2 intervention range for level 28. Karl ended the school year reading within the third grade reading level.

Results from informal reading assessments. I gave Karl an Interest Inventory (Appendix C) during December and then again in the month of May to determine the types of literacy materials and activities he enjoyed. There were notable changes in some of his dictated answers between these administrations. Initially his favorite books were comic books and large picture books. His focus seemed to change to small chapter books such as the *Magic Tree House* series once he was introduced and encouraged to read them in class. Karl was also given the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (Appendix D) discussed in McKenna and Kear (1990). In the December survey he scored in the 11th percentile (i.e., very upset Garfield) toward the recreational reading category and 58th percentile (i.e., close to slightly smiling Garfield) toward the academic reading category. In his May survey he scored in the 11th percentile (i.e., very upset Garfield) toward the recreational reading category and the 70th percentile (i.e., slightly smiling Garfield) toward the academic reading category. In essence, he demonstrated some improvement in his attitude toward reading in the academic reading category but no change in his recreational reading attitude.

In January, I began to send home on a bi-weekly basis books downloaded from a website paid for by our school's library (readinga-z.com). After using formal assessments, I found books on the website in each student's independent reading level or lower to prevent frustration. When selecting books, I also took into account the information taken from student Interest Inventories (i.e., favorite types of books) and tried to give each student an opportunity to choose the book they wanted to read for the next conference cycle. I alternated between fiction and nonfiction books to give each student the opportunity to practice reading both genres. The first week, each student was asked to read their book on a nightly basis and complete the practice sheets to be turned in for grading within a week. The next week I gave students an extended response

question that pertained to their book and asked them to complete a written response (i.e., extended response question) and return their completed writing within the next week. I also had copies of the same books in class so students could practice reading their book after their class assignments were completed. At the end of the second week, I had each student read his or her book one more time and then take a multiple-choice test. They were allowed to use their book as a reference while they were taking the test. The following Wednesday (normally a scheduled short day during the week) was set aside for bi-weekly conferences and mini skill lessons. During the conferences each student in class had a reading and then a writing conference with the teacher, going over the book, the practice sheets, and the extended response questions.

Karl's first bi-weekly book was *The Magic Bike* at DRA2 level 16. During the conference, Karl was asked: (a) to orally answer comprehension questions taken from the Reading Conference: Fiction form (Appendix G), (b) to select a portion of his book to read aloud for one minute while I conducted a reading analysis, and (c) to retell the story while I scored key elements (i.e., setting, main characters) and used prompts (i.e., how does the story begin) taken from a Fiction or Nonfiction Retelling Scoring Form (see Appendices P & Q) provided by readinga-z.com to assess comprehension and prompt him as needed within both genres. Initially, Karl was asked to name the title and the author of the book he had read. He stated that the book was easy and correctly described the setting, the main character, and three telling details about the story. When asked what was the main problem in the book, he did not understand the problem in the story so we discussed what happened in the book and found the problem together. He was then ready to explain to me how the problem was solved and described his favorite part of the book. He said it surprised him that the character won the prize. He rated the book "fantastic" and picked another book to read from the list of books in his reading level for a

nonfiction book. Karl received an advanced score of 100% on his comprehension test and a score of 81% on the Fiction Retelling Scoring form (see Appendix P) for his retelling of the story.

When he read the passage he selected from his book, his fluency rate for the one-minute reading was 73 WCPM making no miscues. He used pictures to help him when he encountered troublesome words in the passage and relied on the graphophonic cueing system (i.e., identifying unknown words by relating speech sounds to letters or letter patterns) most often when reading. All of the eight reading conference sheets across the year showed that Karl relied on the graphophonic cueing system. Reflecting on the data from his assessments, I realized that one reason for his reliance on this system was that most of my instructional methods focused on graphophonic activities such as words sorts, word families, and the multisensory reading program we used.

The next five reading conferences consisted of two fiction books and three nonfiction books all at DRA2 level 18. He read the two fiction books with the fluency rates of 68 WCPM and 80 WCPM, respectively. Every other week he read three nonfiction books with the fluency rates of 88 WCPM, 43 WCPM, and 62 WCPM. Comprehension was examined during the five bi-weekly reading conferences using a Retelling Rubric for comprehension and a multiple-choice test for comprehension. The nonfiction comprehension tests were read aloud to Karl. He dictated his answers to the questions; his scores were 43%, 100%, and 86%. However, his retelling scores for these books were 71%, 52%, and 38%, respectively. It is interesting to note that after reading the book titled *Firefighters*, Karl had trouble explaining how the information was organized in the book (receiving a developing score of 52% for retelling), yet he received an advanced score on his comprehension test, correctly answering 100% of the questions. This was also true for the book titled *Ocean Animals* where Karl seemed to really not understand the facts in this book

(received a developing score of 38% in retelling) yet, he received a proficient score of 86% on his comprehension test. Again, this could be because Karl was having trouble explaining how the information was organized in this type of genre (i.e., nonfiction). Therefore, when comparing Karl's comprehension scores based on retelling versus a written test format, no consistent pattern was discovered.

The last two books that Karl picked were a fiction book titled *Goldilocks and the Other Three Bears* that was at DRA2 level 16 and a nonfiction book titled *Magnetism* at a DRA2 level 38. It needs to be noted at this time that I decided to allow our students to pick the last book of the year without adult input. In most situations, the students picked a book far above their independent reading level but on a topic of high interest for them. We decided to provide as much support as possible and to communicate with parents that although the books their children were bringing home were difficult, they really wanted to read them. Karl's retelling scores for both books was 71% correct for retelling while his scores on the comprehension questions were 60% and 30% respectively. Although the last book that Karl picked was difficult for him to read, we celebrated his willingness to take a risk and practice reading a book that interested him.

Results from informal writing assessments. As an informal assessment to support writing I used the *Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory Feature Guide* (see Appendix S) by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston (2008). Results from this assessment allowed me to identify the spelling stage students were currently performing in and then to use word sorts as a way to reinforce further spelling instruction. Karl correctly spelled 0 out of 25 words on the initial Spelling Inventory given in December. He used all of the consonants correctly and 2 out of 5 short vowels correctly. He correctly used the digraphs /sh/ and /ch/ but missed /wh/. He also used /tr/, /pl/, /dr/, and /br/ correctly but missed /mp/ and /fl/ blends. Karl correctly used 21

spelling feature points out of 62. The results placed him in the Letter Name-Alphabetic spelling stage. He took this assessment again during the month of May and correctly spelled 5 out of 25 words. He correctly used all of his consonants, short vowels, digraphs, and blends. Karl correctly used 31 feature points out of 62. These results placed him in the Within Word Pattern stage indicating some improvement in the area of spelling.

On a bi-weekly basis, I used the Writing Conference for Reading Response (Appendix J) forms to when evaluating each student's extended response question that pertained to the book they had read for two weeks (see section above). During seven of the eight Writing Conference for Reading Responses held across the year, Karl stated that he used his spelling dictionary (i.e., a dictionary he created during the year) on the extended response questions he was asked to write. When asked if he used his best handwriting skills during the Writing Conference for Reading Responses, he stated during 6 out of 8 conferences that he did use his best handwriting skills. Finally, when he was asked if he checked his writing for capitals and end points, he answered "yes" 5 out of 8 times. I also evaluated Karl's writing stage during each conference (Appendix J). Karl scored in the beginning writing stages during 4 out of 8 conferences. He scored in the early developing stage during 3 out of 8 conferences and in the developing writing stage in 1 out of 8 conferences. Karl's self-selected writing goals changed across the year from a theme of taking more time (e.g., "I want to go slow and take my sweet time.") to a goals focused more on making changes to his written work by correcting it (e.g., "I want to look at the piece and figure out how to fix it."). The type of help he asked for ranged from reminding him to think more and do his best to getting more time and helping him spell *words*.

Karl showed very little improvement across the year in the area of using more details when answering extended responses questions. When it became apparent that this was true for all

of my students, I developed our three writing projects to introduce the art of using details when writing an informational report, a creative story, and doing a mini science experiment.

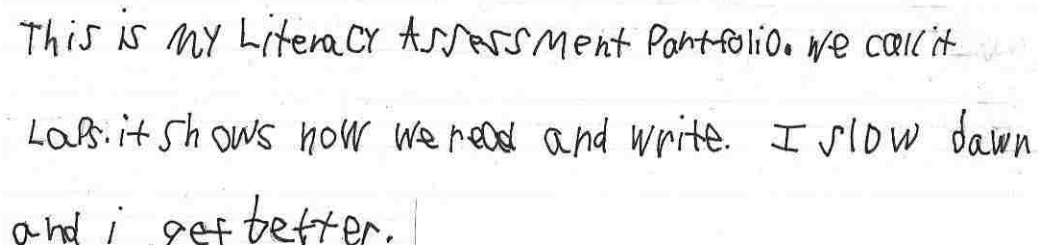
For the first writing project in February, I began by using a journal of pictures and words comparing each student with Martin Luther King, Jr. It was a six-sheet report, including the title sheet. The second sheet compared the student's family with Dr. King's family through illustrations. The third sheet gathered facts about student (e.g., their birth date, their parents' and siblings' names). The fourth sheet discussed how Dr. King celebrated his birthdays and then required each student to write four sentences about their own birthday celebrations. The fifth sheet described how Dr. King loved to hear music, to sing, and learning new things. Each student was required to write six sentences writing about what they loved doing. The sixth sheet shared information about the types of books Dr. King liked to read and then asked students to draw four books they liked reading that included placing the title and author in each drawing. I shared information about Dr. King with the class by reading aloud reference books and storybooks about him every day during the project. Students placed all of their completed sheets on a large poster board and presented their individual project in front of their peers, describing how they completed the project and what they had learned. Karl earned a proficient score on the writing rubric and an advanced score on the presentation of his project.

In April, the second writing project was to create a fairy tale story by completing four paragraphs answering the following prompts or directions: (a) Begin by using "Once upon a time, then write about the characters and setting in details. You must have at least four characters in the story; (b) Tell the reader about a problem that had occurred in your story; (c) How was the problem solved in your story; and (d) The last paragraph needs to describe what is going on by using details how your story ends. To prepare students, I read multiple fairy tales, and we

analyzed each story for the nice characters and the bad characters. We also discussed the setting and the ending of each story focusing on details that were presented in each book. Next, I modeled using the what, when, where, why, and how chart encouraging each student to use this format to bring more details to their own stories. On the writing rubric for this project, Karl obtained a nearly proficient score and on the presentation rubric he obtained an advanced score.

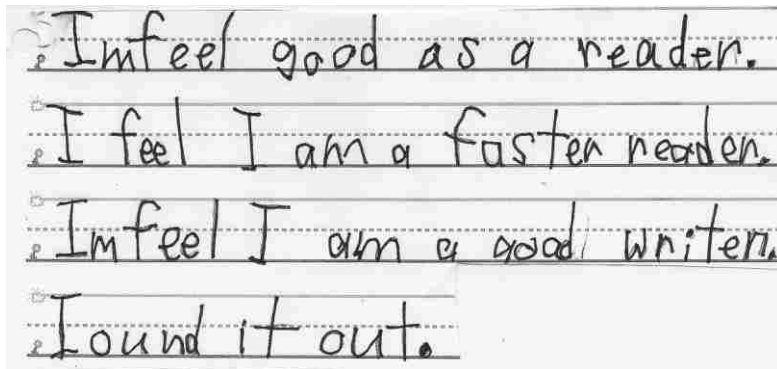
For the third writing project in May, we completed a mini-science experiment learning about the types of clouds and then demonstrated making a cloud in a jar. Students were required to observe the experiment and then write an answer for the following prompts: (a) what we did; (b) what we saw; and (c) what we learned. On this project, Karl obtained a nearly proficient score on the writing rubric and an advanced score on the presentation rubric.

Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conferences. During class time students were encouraged to work on organizing their Literacy Assessment Portfolios (LAPs) and reflecting on the work samples they wanted to include. This was also a way to prepare students for their up-coming WRITE conferences that eventually led to student-led parent/teacher conferences. Karl loved going through his Literacy Assessment Portfolio during our conferences. Karl wrote his LAP Introduction letter stating the following:



This is my Literacy Assessment Portfolio. We call it LAPs. it shows how we read and write. I slow down and i get better.

As can be seen from Karl's May Student LAP Reflection, he wrote more about how he felt as a reader and writer:



As a class, we had spent a lot of time discussing strategies we could use to check our work, goals we could set and achieve, and how it was important to make improvements in our work completion. It was interesting to see that as the year progressed and Karl had opportunities to reflect on his work and place selected pieces in his LAP, he was starting to understand that faster reading was a goal he needed to accomplish. I feel that Karl's final sentence, "I ound [sic] it out" to be very important. It took Karl most of the year to realize that he could improve his reading and writing by practicing and using a variety of strategies to help himself. This allowed him to truly take ownership of his work. Clearly, using his LAP to store his work and then reflect on the progress he had made helped him gain the confidence he needed to improve his reading and writing.

Since he was a new student in the school, this was the first time Karl had worked on reading books for our school's Reading Counts library program. The chart in his LAP helped him focus on the books he needed to complete in order to work toward earning that prized school t-shirt. He completed his reading log showing all the books he read during our bi-weekly conference cycles and when these were added to the books on his chart, it showed that he had read a total of 31 books, passing comprehension tests for each book. Karl's mother was very impressed with the number of books Karl had read and even more pleased that he had

accomplished the Land of Enchantment, the Newbery, and the biography genres, winning a school t-shirt and a variety certificates and party participation (i.e., cake and ice cream for each genre) to celebrate of his accomplishments with other students at our school.

Karl had great difficulty completing the Student's Work Sample Comments for LAP sheets which asked students to answer the following four questions in reference to a piece of work they put into their LAPs: (a) how I did this piece; (b) what I like about it; (c) what I wish I could change about it; and (d) do I want to try this again. He did successfully complete 46 pieces of work to add to his LAP, but it was a long and hard learning process for him. He was so used to just filling in the blanks on assignments, turning them in, and forgetting about them that asking him to reflect on the process of developing his work and evaluating its quality was difficult. In the LAP process (i.e., the focus on gathering information), he turned the LAP in to me, and I evaluated it and placed a 1, 2, 3, or 4 criteria level on each work sample. I used my school district's curriculum-based measure criteria to assign a score: (a) 4 for 90% accuracy or higher for advanced; (b) 3 for 80% to 89% accuracy for proficient; (c) 2 for 70% to 79% accuracy for nearing proficient; and (d) 1 for below 70% accuracy for beginning steps.

The scoring system described above gave the students some feedback on the accuracy of their work. However, I was most interested in examining what they perceived they had learned when reflecting on their work (e. g., were they becoming more aware of problem areas in their work, or were they able to recognize strategies they could use to improve their work). In his reflections, Karl's comments included many reminders to himself such as "I will read the instructions", "I will change my headwiting [*sic*]", "I want to be neater", "I wish I got 100%", and "I with I could spell better." As the year progressed, I noticed that he was focused on getting a better grade and began to take papers back and redo them instead of just turning the work in.

The LAP student work reflections seemed to have awakened Karl's desire to improve and increased his self-awareness of his work. This was also apparent in the comments he made when he dictated his answers during the WRITE conferences that pertained to his LAP. During the April WRITE conference Karl stated his best work was when he got 100% and could correctly identify what he did to receive that grade. He was also able to compare the work sample he included in his LAP with another work sample that he did not choose to include. He said, "I didn't wrote on the lines" which I found to be the first time he made the connection that the lower score he had earned was due to not following directions. We then reviewed the reading conferences and skill analysis together and Karl stated, "I feel proud of me." When asked about his reading goal, he stated, "I will read faster." Finally, I asked him about a writing goal and he stated, "I want to take my time and fix my mistakes."

During his May WRITE conference Karl seemed to have a lot more to say than in previous conferences. When asked what was his best work he noted that, "Fairy Tale book because I can make it my own." When comparing his present best work with other work he did not include in his portfolio he said, "I improved my handwriting, reading skills." After reviewing the reading conferences we had since the last WRITE conference, he stated "I am proud of myself for all the books I read. I read 46 books" while he was looking at his Reading Counts Chart in his LAP. I asked him what his reading goals were for the summer and he said, "I will try to get books. I like to read." But when I asked him about how he would improve his writing he answered, "Well, I truk [tried] to take my sweet time." Finally, when I asked him what he was most pleased with in regard to his learning he said, "I like my reading skills and stuff I do."

Student-Participant Mary

Background. At the time of this study, Mary was an 11-year old fifth grade female student who received intensive special education services beginning in kindergarten. She attended a self-contained special education classroom for 21.25 hours per week. With a history of severe expressive and receptive language difficulties stemming from a serious and complicated birth, Mary was identified around 4 years of age with a severe speech and language impairment. Later she was also diagnosed with a specific learning disability. In September of 2002, Mary was given the *Preschool Language Scales- Fourth Edition (PLS-4)* where she obtained a Total Language score of 53, an Auditory Comprehension score of 50, and an Expressive Communication score of 50. She received intensive services in the areas of speech and language therapy and academic interventions throughout kindergarten. In September of 2005, Mary was given the *Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence*, and she scored 70 for verbal, a 74 for performance and a full scale intelligence quotient of 74. At that time, she was also given the *Woodcock-Johnson II Test of Achievement* where she scored 58 in reading comprehension and 54 in broad written language. It was at this time that she was diagnosed as having a specific learning disability. She took the *Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Cognitive Abilities* in September of 2005 that resulted in composite scores for processing speed of 61, short-term memory of 45, and general intellectual ability of 61.

In the area of receptive communication, Mary was slow in processing information needing frequent repetitions with multiple exposures and opportunities to practice successfully. During the time in which the study was implemented, Mary became very aware of needing enough processing time to make sure that she understood what was being requested or the information she had heard orally. She worked hard to develop strategies to be more proactive in

asking questions if she did not fully understand something said to or requested of her. In the area of expressive communication Mary did not always express her ideas clearly and continues to be very self-conscious when she speaks. She had difficulty with word structure and continues to work on her ability to recognize when she says something that doesn't make sense or doesn't sound right. These difficulties have greatly impacted both her reading and writing performances. Her speech production difficulties greatly interfered with her ability to produce fluent reading. She continues to wear glasses and it was noted in her records that she continues to experience some hearing difficulties.

Mary's mother completed two parent questionnaires sharing information about her daughter and her daughter's language and literacy practices. I found the parent questionnaires to be very beneficial especially when planning academic activities. I learned that Mary loved to be recognized when she did things well in school and seemed to be very social. Her mother stated that she wanted Mary to continue making progress in reading, math, and speech. I learned that Mary felt self-confident sometimes but other times she was aware of her limitations. I also learned that she had trouble focusing on things she is not interested in pursuing and had a lot of trouble with memorization of math facts and spelling words. Mary's mother also reported that Mary read at home; this included small chapter books, the newspaper, and the computer. I found out that she likes to draw and write stories at home about her dog.

Although Mary's mother shared many of Mary's strengths in the parent questionnaires, what did not show up in academic records were Mary's outgoing personality, her amazing compassion when helping others, and her determination to improve in all academic areas. She had kept a positive spirit although communicating was sometimes difficult and embarrassing for her when she participated with her peers. She had also made great strides in becoming a strong

self-advocate insisting that others treat her fairly and give her the same opportunities even when reading out loud in front of her peers. She knew that she had to take her time and that she would make a mistake or two, but she never gives up. As her teacher, the best way to describe her was that she lights up a room with her positive attitude, her willingness to help others, and her amazing bubbly personality.

Results from formal reading assessments. At the end of Mary's fourth grade year it was noted in her records that she read on the DRA2 level 20. In September, at the beginning of Mary's fifth grade year, I had her read a different book (within the DRA2 level 20) from the one used in the prior assessment to assess whether or not any regression of reading skills had occurred over the summer break. On this assessment she scored at the independent level (using the DRA2 Continuum) for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. Mary read this narrative passage with only 1 miscue (she achieved 99% accuracy) placing her in the advanced range. Yet her fluency rate was 49 WCPM, placing her within the intervention range as per DRA2 Continuum guidelines. During her retelling of the story details, she stumbled and got confused so she asked to look at the book. Just holding the book seemed to help her regain her confidence. The scores indicated that as a fifth grader, Mary within the proficient range for the second grade.

In January, I had Mary read another book at DRA2 level 24. I found that she was again very concerned about decoding and pronouncing her words correctly, so I spent a great deal of time reassuring her. She only made 1 miscue (scored 99% accuracy) placing her again in the advanced range as per DRA2 Continuum. Yet, her fluency rate was 61 WCPM, scoring within the DRA2 instructional range (i.e., 60-69 WCPM). She was able to retell the activities that occurred in the story with a great deal more confidence than she had on the previous assessment.

She scored at the independent level for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension.

In April, I decided to have Mary read a story using QRI-5. I had Mary read from the QRI-5 Examiner Word Lists to help me estimate a starting point for passage administration. Initially, Mary was asked to read the first grade list. She successfully identified 100% of the word list. I assessed her using the second grade list where she scored a 95%. Next, she correctly identified 85 % of the third grade list, and then 70% of the fourth grade list. Based on these results, I decided to give her a level 3 narrative written passage. While reading the third grade narrative written passage, she made 1 miscue and scored within the instructional level by correctly answering 7 out of 8 comprehension questions. Her fluency rate was 79 WCPM. Later in April, I gave her a QRI-5 level 4 expository passage to read. She made 7 miscues and had difficulty retelling the sequence of the story but correctly answered 6 out of 8 comprehension questions. Her fluency rate was 45 WCPM. Finally, in May, I gave her a DRA at level 38. She had 3 miscues with a fluency rate of 50 WCPM. She scored in the independent level for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. This placed her in the proficient range of the third grade.

Building self-confidence was key when working with Mary. Her participation the previous year in a formal multisensory reading program that was administered with little flexibility created a great deal of anxiety toward making mistakes in sounding out words. Across the year of the study, Mary gained a year in her reading level, as per formal assessments (i.e., DRA2), but several years in confidence.

Results from informal reading assessments. Mary was given an Interest Inventory (Appendix C) in December, and she checked “no” when asked if she liked to read. She said, “I

don't read for fun. It's hard to pronounce words." She also marked that she liked to read softcover books because it was "easier to read. Becus [because] I love pepode [People] magazines." There were notable changes when she completed the Interest Inventory in May. She marked that she liked to read, and marked she liked to read everyday. She also marked many more choices when it came to the types of books she liked to read.

Mary was also given the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix D) twice during the study. In the December survey she scored in the 18th percentile (i.e., mildly upset Garfield) toward the recreational reading category and 21st percentile (i.e., very upset Garfield toward the academic reading category. In her May survey she scored in the 99th percentile (i.e., above the happiest Garfield) toward the recreational category and 95th percentile (i.e., above the happiest Garfield) toward the academic reading category. The survey results show that in the beginning of Mary's fifth grade year her attitude toward recreational reading was at the *mildly upset Garfield* but moved toward the *happiest Garfield* by the end of the year. The same was true for her attitude toward academic reading. It needs to be noted that Mary's overall reading program changed from a multisensory reading program provided in a separate classroom when she was in the fourth grade to a more balanced literacy approach in the fifth grade. This more balanced approach combined a multisensory reading program, a phonetically based spelling program based on word sorts, connected reading and writing assignments, and provided reading and writing in one classroom rather than requiring her to leave her classroom for reading instruction.

Mary also completed eight reading conferences. The first six books she read were both fiction and nonfiction at DRA2 level 28. During her conferences, I asked her several comprehension questions using the conference forms, completed a reading analysis, and checked her comprehension by having her retell the story with directed prompts and complete a multiple-

choice written test. I read the nonfiction multiple-choice comprehension tests to her out loud, and she dictated her answers. She read three fiction books with fluency rates of 98 WCPM with 98% accuracy, 71 WCPM with 100% accuracy, and 57 WCPM with 100% accuracy. She also read three nonfiction books with fluency rates of 64 WCPM with 100% accuracy, 33 WCPM with 89% accuracy, and 50 WCPM with 94% accuracy. Because Mary had more difficulty with nonfiction (i.e., expository) books because they presented increased vocabulary word challenges and because of her insecurity about making mistakes when reading aloud, her fluency rates substantially decreased when reading this genre. Mary's comprehension scores based on retelling the story and her comprehension scores on multiple-choice tests ranged from nearing proficient to advanced showing no differences between her ability to retell the events of a book or answer comprehension questions about the book. She did have a score of 67% (i.e., developing) for her comprehension for her retelling score on one of the nonfiction books. It is interesting to note that on the last two books Mary read, both at a DRA2 level 34 she scored higher on retelling (with scores of 71% and 81%) than on answering comprehension questions (with scores of 67% and 58%).

Results from informal writing assessments. I also used the *Word Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory Feature Guide* by Bear et al. (2008) to assess Mary's spelling skills in December. Results from Mary's assessment showed that she correctly spelled 5 of 25 spelling words given. She used all of the consonants, short vowels correctly. She correctly used /sh/, /wh/, /ch digraphs correctly but missed one digraph. She also used /pl/ and /dr/ correctly but missed /mp/, /fl/, /tr/, /br/, and /sp/ blends. She used long vowels /a-e/ and /i-e/ but missed the /oa/, /ai/, and /igh/ long vowels. Mary correctly used 30 spelling feature points out of 62 possible. These results placed her in the early range of Within Word Pattern spelling stage. She took this

same assessment at the end of the school year in May and correctly spelled 13 words out of 25 words. The results showed that she used consonants, short vowels, digraphs, blends, and all but /oa/ blend correctly. She correctly used /oi/, /ew/, and /ar/ vowels correctly as well as the /ving/ inflected ending. Mary correctly used 43 spelling feature points out of 62 that placed her in the late range of Within Word Pattern. She made strong progress across the year although using some of the short vowel word sorts were challenging for her. I found that her speech and language impairment greatly impacted her ability to sort certain words. As a result, I embedded extra practice at home and school that seemed to help.

There were eight Writing Conference for Reading Responses, and Mary said that she used her personal dictionary every time she completed the assignments. When asked what liked about writing extended responses for each book, she answered “It isn’t perfect but good”, “I can read it”, “It is neat”, “Good handwriting”, “I answered the question”, “It’s not sloppy”, “I learned to answer the question”, and “I didn’t give up.”

The Writing Conference for Reading Responses showed that Mary struggled to use sufficient details when answering the written extended response for each book. During 7 out of 8 Writing Conference for Reading Responses Mary stated that she did use good handwriting skills and could explain why one writing response was sloppy and how it was hard to read. When asked what would make her writing better, she answered “Checking my work and reading it to myself”, “Could add more details”, “Take my time”, “I can write more”, and “I can be neater, lots of erasing”, and “If I followed the directions.” It appeared at the time that Mary was just repeating what I had stressed over and over during instruction time, but upon reflection, I realized that she was reminding herself what she needed to do before she turned assignments in. I noticed the same thing when I reviewed her writing goals. For writing goals she stated, “Check

my work by looking at it, read it to myself and getting help”, “I want to write an half of page”, “I want to get better at spelling”, “Write with no mistakes”, “I want to write longer responses”, “I want to write in cursive”, and “Get better at writing using complete sentences.”

The Teacher’s Evaluation section (i.e., page 2) of the Writing Conference for Reading Responses had the writing stages broken down into emergent, beginning, early developing, developing, and fluent. Mary scored in the beginning stage when assessed during 2 out of 8 conferences. This meant that her sentences were generally abrupt and somewhat choppy in thought; spelling and grammar errors were frequent; and her written responses lacked a concluding sentence. However, she did score in the early developing stage during 5 out of 8 conferences (i.e., she repeated the same sentence pattern and many times added unnecessary ideas or details when addressing the question). Mary did have one extended written response that scored in the developing stage. In this response her writing flowed, and she had a few grammar or spelling errors.

I made notes on Mary’s conferences stressing that she needed to use her spelling dictionary, practice reading the writing assignment out loud with the mirror I provided, write with more details that she could pull out of the story, slow down, and practice understanding what the writing prompt was asking. These were all areas for which I needed to develop mini lesson plans to reteach the skills so I began making a list on the board for the students to look over before they turned in the assignments (and to remind me to begin the mini lessons). I found that over time, Mary made progress in writing responses to the extended response questions especially in the area of being aware of what steps or strategies she could take to help her obtain a better score. Closer to the end of the year, Mary and I talked about her writing by comparing it to driving a car. I told her that someday, she would have to take the wheel of the car (i.e., control

of her writing) and drive (i.e., write) it herself without so much help from others. Although taking control of her writing continued to be quite a challenge for Mary, she understood why it was important and I began to see her actively spend more time checking over her written work before she turned it in for me to correct. Sometimes she would finish quickly, and I would always ask if she “needed more time”; that became a verbal cue reminding her to recheck before she turned work in. I made sure that when she did take the time to recheck her work, I made sure that I graded her work as soon as possible (giving her feedback) because in most cases her work began to show improvement. I wanted to reinforce her new work habits so eventually they would become automatic.

The first writing project pertaining to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (see writing project description in Karl’s section) was a fun project for Mary to complete. When asked what she liked about the project, she answered “It was colorful – we did it in pieces.” When I asked what she would do differently to make her project better the next time, she answered, “Write more stuff and details.” When I asked what she thought was the best thing about her writing and the presentation she made, she said, “I didn’t read it, I just talked.”

Mary earned an advanced score on the writing and a proficient score on the presentation of her first writing project. She was very confident speaking in front of our small class. Earlier in the school year, Mary had said she felt uncomfortable when speaking in front of any size group. She was always afraid of pronouncing words incorrectly. Over the course of the year, I worked on building her confidence in her small reading group. She could see that “even the teacher” makes mistakes when reading aloud.

The second writing project was designed for the students to write a fairy tale with four paragraphs (as outlined previously in Karl’s section). The writing conference sheet was

completed, and Mary stated that what she liked most about this project was “I liked that I could talk about my teachers.” She and a few other students chose to use the teachers’ names when developing characters in their stories. Before students began writing their stories, I introduced mini lessons that included reading the books and talking about various fairy tales like Rumpelstiltskin and Hansel and Gretel. In each story, I outlined the characters and setting, the details, and the problem in the story and how it was solved. This was an effective way to have each student begin his or her story and it was especially helpful for Mary. She completed her story focusing on each key component and commented after her story was completed, “I would need to do more details” when asked how she could make her story better. When asked what she thought was the best thing about this project, she said, “I did really good at talking I’m shy because people look at me.” Mary received a proficient score on her writing rubric and an advanced score on her presentation rubric for this project. Mary used a lot of expression when sharing her fairy tale with the class. It was probably the best presentation she gave all year.

The third writing project centered on learning about different types of clouds. When I asked Mary what she liked most about this writing project she said, “I liked doing the experiment and seeing what it would do.” She said, “I would do more to have a better grade.” She also said that the best thing about this project was that she, “got to explain what happened.” Mary received a nearing proficient score both in the written portion and the presentation portion of this project.

Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) conferences. Just like Karl, I spent a lot of class time preparing Mary for her up-coming WRITE conference that eventually lead to her student-led parent/teacher

conferences. Mary really enjoyed sharing her LAP with her peers in class. She wrote the following LAP Introduction letter that was placed in her LAP:

4/13/05/10
This is my Literacy Assessment Portfolio. We call it our Laps. It shows how we read and write. I want to read I got to read everyday and writing. SO I could be in my class. It is good to go in my class

She had a goal to spend more time in her general education classroom, and we frequently discussed how working hard to improve her reading and writing would allow her to meet that goal. In fact, Mary could see that her goal of more time in general education was met when we finished her transition to middle school IEP. Mary seemed empowered when reviewing her work and talking about the progress she had made during the year. She wrote a wonderful passage in March in her Student LAP reflection about her reading and writing that best describes how she had gained confidence in her abilities:

01/15/10
When I read I wish I could be better at reading. When I read I feel calm to read. When I read I use my dictionary. When I read a book I feel personal. When I read I feel good. When I read I feel confident. When I read I feel that I can read to myself. I want to read faster. I sometimes sound out words. When I read I think the book is like a movie. When I read I feel like the book opens up in my mind. When I read to someone they say that you're good at reading. I write good. When I write I use my dictionary. I want to be faster at my writing. I can write by myself. I am confident about my work

Mary was also very proud of her Reading Counts chart that was placed in her LAP. It showed how many books she needed to read in the Land of Enchantment, the Newbery, and the biography genres. This chart, showing how a student could progress toward earning a school t-shirt, was very motivating for Mary. In fact, it was so motivating that she came into our class one day insisting that I give her friend from recess a copy of the graph so her friend could use it, too, and win a school t-shirt. Mary ended the year having read 40 books that she wrote down in her reading log. She was very proud of this when sharing with her mother during our later combined parent/student-led LAP conferences.

Like Karl, Mary was also very slow when completing the Student's Word Sample Comment sheets for the LAP. She wanted to make sure she included in her LAP only the work that had the best evaluations. It was hard to convince her to reflect on a variety of her work that had earned both low and high scores. We had many discussions about the lessons that we could learn from our mistakes, but her confidence was still quite fragile. One of her biggest challenges when completing these sheets was responding to the question, "How I did this piece." Like many of the other students, having to explain what the directions asked them to do was a bothersome but necessary skill to be reinforced. Mary actually did quite well with summarizing the directions when I taught her how she could reread the directions, use some of the key words in the directions, and explain in her own words.

In March we had our first WRITE Conference where we examined the contents of Mary's LAP. Each conference sheet had 10 questions pertaining to the work Mary had completed and included in her LAP. Starting with the first question, I asked her what was her best work, and she pulled out an example she had done as homework and said, "I got a four and it was neat." Next, I asked her to compare the example work she had just commented on to

another example of her work she had also completed as homework but which had a lower score. She looked at both examples and said, “I knew more about the book and my sentences were longer.” (Both examples of her work were homework connected to the books she was assigned to read on a bi-weekly basis.) Mary was correct in her self-assessment because her sentences in the example she was commenting about were more complex and more of her words were used. This was a skill we had been working on because I told her that fifth graders write longer sentences using more than five words.

The next question on the WRITE conferencing guide (Appendix M) directed Mary to review a recent reading analysis scoring sheet on an oral reading assessment and state how she felt about her reading skills. She then stated, “I think I’m getting better.” We talked about how she was making improvements in her reading, and I then asked her what her reading goal or goals might be for next month. Mary said, “I want to read faster, fluently at third grade.” This comment demonstrated that Mary was beginning to understand what the word “fluently” actually meant. This was likely because our mini lessons consisted of fluency drills that she found quite challenging. I realized then that Mary and I were beginning to talk about her reading behaviors in a way that made her more comfortable. Instead of discussing how she could “fix” her reading and read like her general education peers, we tended to discuss her reading behaviors as if reading was a sport she was learning and getting better at it everyday. This approach seemed to ease her concerns and her frustration. I approached writing the same way when working with Mary. When I asked her the next question on the WRITE conferencing guide pertaining to how she would improve her writing she said, “keep my sentences long but not too much.” This statement came from a conversation with Mary about her tendency to write long, run-on sentences. I had told her that she wrote the longest sentences of any student I had ever had

before. So when the next question asked how a teacher could help her, Mary smiled and said, “Tell me and remind me to not write too long of sentences.” Mary answered the next question stating that “I’m doing my work faster and reading better” and this was something she wanted to share with her mother at our next conference.

Mary’s second WRITE conference was held in May. During this conference Mary seemed much more relaxed and willing to share her thoughts than in prior conferences. Mary stated that the fairy tale writing project was her best work because “It was big and a lot of work.” When she compared the fairy tale writing project with another writing sample from the prior month, she said, “This one is better. I did it by myself and made it up by myself.” I noticed her previous focus on what the teacher could do was slowly changing to more talk about what she could do to help herself. She stated, “I feel I can read things more by myself. At first I wasn’t good but books I read helped. I still need to work on words. I do not know. Read more books.” When I asked how she could improve her own writing she responded by saying “making complete sentences, periods, reading it, and knowing the words.” But most importantly, Mary answered that the thing she was most pleased about regarding her own learning was “I think you help me to see I can get it the next time if I didn’t get it at first.” Finally, when I asked her what ideas she was thinking about and would want to discuss in the parent/student-led LAP conference she said, “Show my mom, look mom I really did good this school year.”

Student-Participant Cate

Background. At the time of this study, Cate was an 11-year old female student who joined our class at the beginning of her fifth grade year. She had been diagnosed with autism within the last two years and had attended our elementary school since the first grade in self-contained special education classrooms. In prior years, it was noted in many of Cate’s IEPs that

she had experienced a great deal of frustration in school. She had acted out her frustration with verbal and physical aggression towards others. This included screaming, tantrum-like behavior, refusal to complete work or stay on task, ignoring requests from adults when she did not want to stop what she was doing or thinking about, pushing adults or students out of the way when they tried to block her from completing a task she wanted to do.

In the fourth grade, Cate was placed in a self-contained classroom full time with occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, social work, and adapted physical education as related services. She had a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) targeted on the behavior of following directions (i.e., compliance). The committee at that time felt that her inability to follow directions was a skill deficit with a presumed function of seeking adult attention and/or time to process information. They used an intervention strategy in which the adult would point to an activity on a visual schedule that was taped to Cate's desk to prompt her to begin the activity. Staff members had implemented this intervention without having a verbal exchange with Cate. Simply, staff members were instructed not to give verbal directions to Cate, just point to the item on her visual schedule representing the activity she was to do. The plan used stickers as the method of reinforcement each time Cate complied with the intervention. It was during this year in the fourth grade, that physical management (i.e., physical restraint) had to be used as per the BIP for the safety of Cate and/or others on an average of 2 to 3 times per week. The forms used to document incidents of physical restraint also documented that Cate's aggressive behavior occurred when an adult refused to speak with Cate but just pointed to the visual schedule chart. This intervention was not modified in any way during that academic year (i.e., fourth grade).

Cate's mother also shared information about her daughter when completing the parent questionnaires. She wrote that Cate was becoming more aware of things that were going on

around her and that she seemed to really enjoy reading but expressed negative feelings about math. When asked what your child does well, Cate's mother wrote, "Help others" and we found that to be true as the year progressed. She also wrote that she wanted Cate to move up a grade level for her goal for Cate this year and responded with the words "very solid" when asked about Cate's self-concept. I also found it interesting that Cate's mother wanted us to know about Cate was that she was that "We have a very strong unit!" I also learned that Cate loves to care for and talk about animals and her most visited place for a family vacation was Las Vegas as shown in a later writing project Cate would complete.

What did not show up in Cate's school records was her amazing personality, her ability to add pertinent information to conversations when given a chance, and her love of wearing soft thick socks and rubbing them on the carpet while she completed her work. Cate had a strong love for animals and sharing information about those animals with others. She blossomed when given a space in the classroom to decorate and store her school materials so she could complete her classroom assignments. She loved having a the same class schedule that everyone uses (i.e., the one on the board) and volunteered to be that student who was responsible for making sure the teacher kept it up-to-date. She loved meeting new friends who were also fifth grade students on the playground and being included when playing kickball. She used but didn't always know how to ask for a space in the classroom where she could go and relax if and when she got stressed during class.

As Cate's fifth grade special education teacher, I was handed a large envelope with all the stickers, visual schedules, stimulus materials that she could touch (i.e., sensory materials) if she needed them. I told my educational assistant that we would observe Cate in class for two weeks and only then would we open up the large envelope and see if we needed anything in it to help

Cate. My first encounter with Cate was when I opened up a yogurt and some of the yogurt spilled on my shirt. I looked at Cate as she was leaving the classroom for lunch and she turned to me and said, “Welcome to my world.” I knew then that I would never need to open that envelope, never need to address the Behavior Intervention Plan, and Cate would never need to be physically restrained once in the fifth grade. Fortunately I can say that I was right.

Results from formal reading assessments. At the end of her fourth grade year it was noted in Cate’s records that her reading level, using a DRA2 was at level 24. Her records noted that Wilson Reading and guided reading were used with her during the fourth grade as per her reading placement card for the local school district. Cate came into my classroom as a fifth grader. She let us know right away that she only read books about animals and that she did not like math.

It took a month at the beginning of her fifth grade year to finally win Cate’s trust enough to assess her reading level. After observing her read, I decided to assess her using DRA2 level 28. I found her to be very distracted with the classroom activities and the pictures in the book she was reading. She made 7 miscues saying “ruffed” for the word “ruffled”, saying “his” for the word “her”, saying “ticki” for the word “tickled”, and saying “peaked” for the word “poked.” I began to question whether her mistakes were due to her inability to recognize the words or her lack of attention to details. I also noticed that she tended to read a passage with the book close to her face, but when I asked her mother about possible vision difficulties, I was reassured that Cate’s vision was normal. Her scores on this assessment placed her at the independent level for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. Her fluency rate was 28 WCPM (i.e., DRA2 intervention range as per DRA2 Continuum guidelines), yet her she consistently used longer phrasing and correct expression and punctuation. Thus, her oral reading fluency

score was at the independent level for the third grade. She dictated the answers to the comprehension questions and demonstrated that she fully understood what she had read.

In January I assessed Cate at DRA2 level 30. She made 17 miscues with no apparent patterns. She wanted to skip words and did not want to sound out any of the words. She scored at the instructional level for reading engagement and oral reading fluency. However, she scored at the independent level, as per DRA2 Continuum guidelines, for comprehension. She dictated the answers to the comprehension questions and was given thirty minutes to complete the assessment. I allowed her to use the book when answering the comprehension assessment questions, but she did not seem to really need it. She answered each comprehension question correctly using good supporting details.

In March, I decided to use the QRI-5 to assess Cate's reading skills because there were very few pictures in this assessment so visual cues could not be used to determine what the passage was about. Of course, I talked up the new test and told Cate how much she was going to love the stories. Motivation was a powerful tool with Cate. I gave her the word list for the first grade on which she correctly identified 90% of the words, placing her in the independent reading level for that grade; the word list for the second grade on which she correctly identified 75% of the words on the list placing her in the instructional level for that grade; and finally the word list for the third grade on which she correctly identified 45% of the words placing her in the frustration level for that grade. Since she had been successful with the DRA2 level 30, I decided to give her a narrative passage for level three using a QRI-5 story. The name of the story was "The Trip to the Zoo", a subject Cate seemed excited about. She made three miscues for the words "traced", "acted" and "noticed." I did make a mental note and later journal entry about inflected endings and how important a mini lesson would be for all of the students on this skill.

Cate did exceptionally well with the retelling of this story giving detail after detail. She also correctly answered all of the eight comprehension questions, placing her in the independent stage for comprehension for level three that is third grade equivalent. This test was so successful that I decided to talk her into reading another story called “The Busy Beaver” that was at level 4. I knew that she loved stories about animals.

Around this time, I noticed that Cate was placing her eyes closer to the papers she was working with. I asked her parents again about possible vision problems. Cate had recently had an eye examination but passed with flying colors. However, we agreed that since the font size for QRI-5 stories was small, I would increase the font of the story she would read to determine if it made a difference in Cate’s reading outcomes. I had Cate read an expository passage that I knew would be more difficult at level four. I increased the font size by 140% using a photocopier; using the increased font size seemed to help her read in what appeared to be a more relaxed state (i.e., good posture for reading and not bringing the paper within inches of her face). She made 13 miscues so she scored in the instructional level for total accuracy. It did take her over 11 minutes to read the passage of 281 words, placing her fluency rate at 24 WCPM for the fourth grade. She needed many prompts to retell the story such as “give me more details” but she answered all the comprehension questions correctly. That score placed her at the fourth grade reading level for this expository passage using the QRI-5 assessment.

Results from informal reading assessments. Cate was asked to complete an Interest Inventory (Appendix C) in December. In places where I needed more information or clarification of her answers, I discussed the results with her. When asked if she liked to read she answered, “sometimes, I do and sometimes I don’t.” She marked that she loved books about animals like horses, kittens, and dogs. She also marked that she liked books with pictures. When I asked why

she said, “helps me see what’s happening.” She also marked that she liked books about dinosaurs. She liked to read “Bisquit books” and fashion magazines. She marked that she liked soft cover books and when I asked her why, she said, “I like how they feel.”

In May I gave Cate the Interest Inventory again, and she marked “yes” when asked if she liked to read. She marked that she liked to read everyday and her favorite books were about animals, funny books, books with pictures, and books about dinosaurs. She also liked soft cover books, and when I asked if she had anything else to say she said, “No, I’m good.” I also had Cate complete an Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix D) where in December she scored in the 87th percentile (i.e., happiest Garfield) in recreational reading and in the 71st percentile (i.e., happiest Garfield) in academic reading. When taking this same survey in May, Cate scored in the 91st percentile (i.e., happiest Garfield) in recreational reading and in the 98th percentile (i.e., happiest Garfield) in academic reading. In essence her attitude toward reading both recreational and academic texts improved.

Cate completed eight bi-weekly reading conferences across the school year, alternating books from fiction and nonfiction genres. The first book she read was called *Dogs at Work* at a DRA2 level 24. She loves animals, especially dogs, so this was a good choice to start the year. During our first bi-weekly conference I asked her if she picked this book from the book list at her reading level, and she said, “Yes, because I love dogs.” She felt the book was a little challenging and stated that the setting was “inside, outside” and really couldn’t contribute any other details. When I asked her about the main character and at least three details about the story, Cate went into great detail describing how dogs help people with seizures, save lives, and help the police. Her favorite part of the story was when she read about lifeguard dogs; when I asked her why it

was her favorite part she said, “It looks like my dog.” The part that surprised her was about insect dogs. She asked me, “Do they eat them?”

Cate’s self-selected reading goal at this point was “read the book without mistakes.” I made a note that Cate loved to thumb through the book staring at the pictures and sharing the information she read by just looking at the pictures. During our reading analysis for this initial bi-weekly conference I wrote down that when Cate encountered unknown words she used pictures and brought in prior knowledge to help her make sense of what she was reading. She seldom self-corrected, made repetitions, or used punctuation to guide her oral reading. Her fluency rate was 16 WCPM yet her story comprehension retelling score was 76% correct. During the retelling, Cate thumbed through the book and shared a lot of details about what she had read and also contributed novel information she had learned about dogs in the past. It was clear from this assessment that Cate’s ability to retell story events and details was a strong skill for her. This finding was confirmed when she received a 60% accuracy score on her written multiple-choice comprehension test.

Retelling, however, proved to be a stronger skill for Cate than answering comprehension questions on assessments for the last seven books she read. Her comprehension retelling scores were 75%, 90%, 71%, 86%, 62%, 71%, and 71% for these books. Her scores on comprehension questions for the last six books were 60%, 20%, 40%, 20%, 50%, 42%, and 58%, respectively. Cate read the remaining seven books at DRA2 level 28 and DRA2 level 30, yet she never obtained a score on comprehension questions for these books above beginning steps. I made sure that we read aloud all eight of her comprehension tests and allowed her to dictate her responses, but this modification made no real impact on her scores. Cate’s oral reading accuracy rates were 84%, 97%, 98%, 91%, 91%, 93%, 98%, and 92% yet her fluency rates were 16 WCPM, 36

WCPM, 57 WCPM, 21 WCPM, 31 WCPM, 42 WCPM, 37 WCPM, and 46 WCPM, respectively.

Results from informal writing assessments. In November I assessed Cate's spelling skills using the *Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory Feature Guide* (see Appendix R). I had her write down the 25 words I dictated giving her only 12 words before a break and then finishing the assessment. (I knew after working with her for several months that a break was necessary.) The results showed that she correctly used consonants except for the consonant /n/. She identified short vowels except /i/ and missed digraph /wh/. Assessment results showed that she could use the blends /tr/, /pl/, and /dr/ but missed /mp/, /fl/, /br/, and /sp/. She did identify the long vowel /oa/ but missed the remaining long vowels. These assessment results placed her in the Letter-Name-Alphabetic spelling stage as per this program's criteria, and I began instruction using that level word sorts for her to practice. Later, in May of that school year, I gave Cate the same assessment that found that she could correctly use consonants in both initial and final positions, her short vowels, digraphs, and blends. These results demonstrated that she progressed toward the Within Word Pattern spelling stage, indicating that she had made good progress in spelling skills. There was also evidence of this progress in her daily written work and extended written responses.

I conducted eight Writing Conference for Reading Responses (see previous section under Karl that describe these.) Cate said during 5 out of 8 Writing Conference for Reading Responses that she used her personal dictionary when working on writing assignments. Using her personal dictionary was a strategy that Cate seemed to want to avoid, but which easily allowed her to find the spelling of a word when she did use it. During the school year, I set up a variety of incentives

every time she used the dictionary, such as stickers from a sea life book or five-minute breaks. However, she continued to try to avoid using the dictionary throughout the year.

I asked Cate what she liked about her writing piece in her first bi-weekly conference; she stated “People can read it”, I don’t like it.” I didn’t reach my goal to spell things right”, “That I got some of it right”, and “I used good handwriting.” Sometimes Cate took the grading very personally, especially when she decided to copy from the book rather than writing her own response, and I drew a sad face on her page. She stated, “I don’t like it. It has a frown on it.”

Cate fully understood that she needed to use her personal spelling dictionary, her best handwriting skills, and capitals and end-points when she wrote. The Writing Conference for Reading Responses seemed to reinforce these important skills, and as the school year progressed, I could see her checking classwork, reminding herself out loud that she needed to do them. When I asked her what type of help she needed to improve her writing, she stated, “You are already helping me write better”, “I don’t need any help”, and finally “I need more time.”

Cate did not like to write, and I could feel her anxiety during most of our Writing Conference for Reading Responses. In my teacher evaluations, Cate scored in the Beginning Stage four times during our Writing Conference for Reading Responses, the Early Developing Stage three times, and the Emergent Stage one time. Her sentences tended to be abrupt and choppy. She used the same sentence patterns with basic grammar and word usage errors. It was a challenge to keep her writing focused on answering the question. We spent a lot of time talking about the extended response questions she was assigned and developed a word bank using her assigned books as references so she could compose sentences with the words and ideas we talked about. I began to see some progress, but writing continued to be quite a challenge for Cate. She

had so many ideas that she wanted to share so I had her use dictation allowing her to easily express her ideas, especially on the three writing projects I had scheduled.

We began our first writing project in February. For this project, I had students compare their lives with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in such areas as family, birthday celebrations, favorite books, and what they were good at doing as outlined previously in Karl's section. This was an ideal project for students like Cate because there were a variety of activities that included some drawing and a limited amount of formal writing. I insisted that Cate take her time in completing the project, and I had her do a rough draft for the paragraph she wrote about a birthday celebration she had. When she did this, her writing showed improvement.

When we completed the student self-evaluation portion of the Writing Conference for Writing Project (see Appendix L), Cate was asked what she liked about this writing project. She said, "I liked it. I like talking about my family." She could name the two books that were read to the class that pertained to Dr. King and stated that she used her best handwriting skills. She also said that she checked her final draft for spelling, capitals, and end points, something that took her some time. I had her look for each category separately in her final draft and then make the changes to her draft copy. When she copied her corrected draft, I had her highlight each sentence after she copied it so she could keep track of what she had already corrected. This process gave her a much-needed change of pace. She told me during the conference that she "liked writing in little pieces." She received an 85% (i.e., proficient) score on her writing rubric and a 90% (i.e., advanced) score on her presentation rubric. When asked what she learned during her presentation she shared that "I good at playing games, reading, and learning new things."

We begin our second writing project in April, developing a fairy tale (see writing project description in Karl's section). In preparation, several books were read aloud to the students

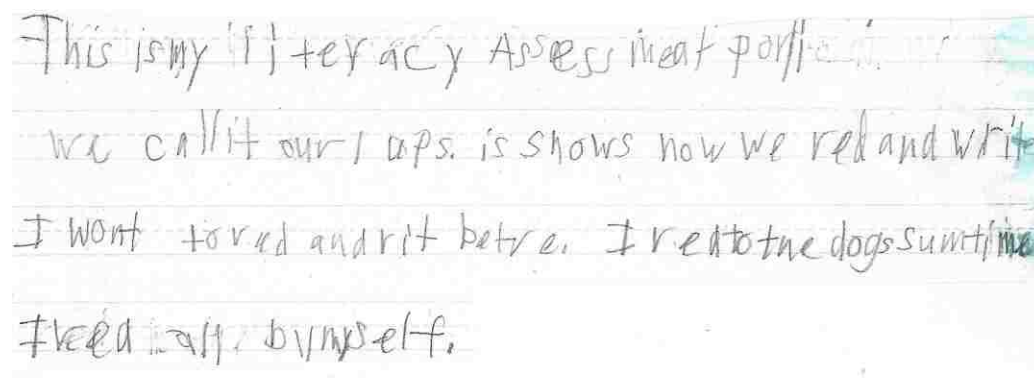
followed by a discussion pertaining to characters, setting, problem within the story, how the problem was solved, and how the story used details. Cate had taken a yearly family trip to Las Vegas where she took numerous pictures of herself and a stuffed duck I had in my classroom named Gus. Cate became instantly attached to Gus, and this stuffed duck became a mascot for the class. Cate wanted to use some of the pictures she had taken with Gus and write them into the events of her fairy tale. Her fairy tale was titled [*Cate*] and *Gus's Great Adventure*. She worked on this fairy tale harder during class than any other assignment she was ever given during the year. She wrote with a lot of details about Las Vegas such as “it is dirty there and smells like trash and perfume” and “Hotels and restaurants are everywhere. Games are in some hotel.” When I asked her during the conference what she liked best about the writing project she said, “I got to make up my own story.” Cate wrote a creative story and received a score of 80% (i.e., proficient) on her writing rubric. Both Cate and Gus presented the project, standing on a podium in front of the class. Cate had the biggest smile during her presentation and was so proud of her story. She read it to the class and even added more Las Vegas details as she presented. She received a score of 83% (i.e., proficient) on her presentation rubric because she did have some difficulty answering questions with complete sentences and her voice volume was low.

Cate's final writing project involved a mini-science project pertaining to the types of clouds (see writing project description in Karl's section). I read a story about clouds with the class, and we observed the type of clouds we had in the sky outside of our classroom. Unfortunately, we had a perfect blue sky with the absence of clouds that day. Yet Cate surprised me a few days later during our daily walk to the lunchroom. She looked up at the sky and was able to describe the clouds that she saw. Cate loved performing the mini-science project in which we made a cloud in a jar but the written portion of the assignment was difficult for her because

she just did not want to do the assignment. After a great deal of coaxing, Cate turned in her written portion and received a score of 60% (i.e., beginning steps) on her writing rubric. For the presentation, I had each student tell me what happened during the experiment portion of the project, making sure to include many details and to tell me what they had learned about clouds. Of course, Cate excelled in the oral presentation obtaining a score of 90% (i.e., advanced) on the presentation rubric.

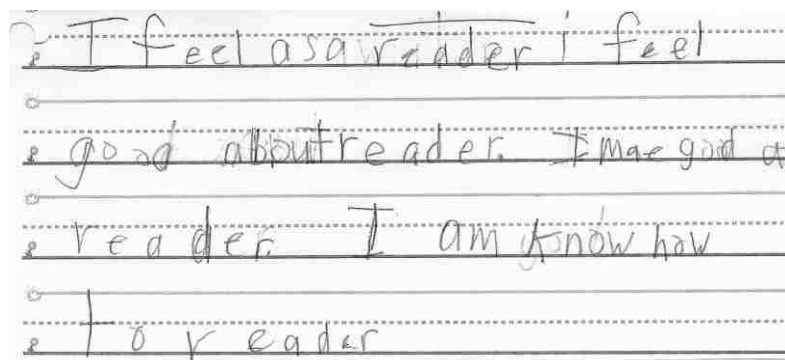
Results from Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student

Exchange (WRITE) conferences. I found myself spending a little more time trying to prepare Cate for her up-coming WRITE conference that would eventually led to her student-led parent/teacher conference because Cate seemed to hate going back and reviewing her completed work. Cate was also very proud of her LAP and loved working with a peer group organizing the LAP but clearly did not enjoy the reflection of work samples she needed to place in the LAP. In November she wrote her LAP Introduction letter, but she was not happy to have to write anything that day. She did keep her words between the lines but refused to use her personal dictionary to correct the spelling in her letter as follows:



This is my literacy Assessment portfolio
 we call it our LAP. it shows how we read and write
 I want to read and write better. I read to the dogs sometimes
 I feed all by myself.

In the above letter, she did use ending points in her sentences but struggled with spelling and some spacing between words. Changes in the same assignment (i.e., her Student LAP reflection letter) can be seen in her May entry:



Cate was very proud of herself for reading 46 books during the year as shown on her Reading Counts Chart. She earned a t-shirt from our school's librarian for reading the required books (i.e., three for Land of Enchantment, five for Newbery, and six for the biography genre) and taking comprehension tests on the computer. I supplied a lot of intervention and accommodations for her but made sure she worked hard to earn the t-shirt like all of her general education peers. Each grade level had books they were required to read in order to earn t-shirts so I modified for each student dependent up on their needs such as reading it aloud and even providing it in audiotaped form when and if it was available. I spent a lot of time reading books out loud with our students and having them take notes, complete mini-book reports, or even drawing illustrations of some of the more difficult books that were required on the fifth grade reading list. Their opportunity to enjoy a required book was just modified.

Cate spent a great deal of time reflecting on her work samples for the LAP. She wrote simple sentences answering the questions of how she completed the pieces, what she liked about the pieces, and how she would change the pieces if she were to redo them. In her first WRITE conference, Cate said that her reading goal was "I want to be good at reading" and her writing

goal was “write nicer.” When I asked her what she was most pleased about regarding her learning, she stated, “I know more words.” When working with Cate it does not take very long to know that she has a big heart and loves her family. When I asked her what she would share with her family she said, “a hug.”

I completed Cate’s final WRITE conference in May. She felt her best work was her Betsy Ross book because she said, “I colored her face blue.” When I asked her to tell me if she thought her work had gotten better or worse, she said, “Before my work wasn’t neat, now I’m in the fifth grade and it’s neater.” After I had reviewed her reading analysis sheets for several books she had read, I asked her how she felt about reading and she said, “I feel good. I read books to the dog when the powers out.” We had had a big storm the night before so she remembered it. When I asked her about her reading goal for the summer she said, “I’m gonna read to the dogs and quit biting my skin.” Although Cate tends to be silly sometimes, she is very aware of how and what strategies she can use (i.e., personal dictionary, writing checklist) to improve her work. There was never a day Cate did not teach me a new lesson and give me another reason to smile.

Parent-Participants

The data collected involving each parent-participant consisted of (a) one audiotaped initial interview (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions), (b) one parent/student-led LAP conference in March that was audiotaped and transcribed, (c) one parent/student-led LAP conference in May combined with the final interview that was audiotaped and transcribed, and (d) notes written by parents which they placed in the Family Sharing Response section of their child’s LAP after each parent/student-led LAP conference. I also asked parents to complete two questionnaires and I used the questionnaire data to help me gather more background information

for each student-participant. The information taken from the questionnaires was reported within each student-participant background section.

Analysis of the parent-participant data consisted of first transcribing the audiotapes of interviews and parent/student-led LAP conferences, resulting in nine transcripts. I then used thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The thematic analysis consisted of several steps. I first searched across the data set (i.e., transcripts of interviews, parent/student-led LAP conferences, family sharing responses, and ongoing written communication with parent-participants) and found repeated patterns of meaning from the data I extracted. In step two of the analysis, I coded interesting features of the data in a systematic method across the entire data set and collated data relevant to each code. I then collated the codes into potential themes in step three. Next, I reviewed the themes and generated a thematic table defining and naming themes and subthemes (step four). Two broad thematic areas emerged from the analysis as follows: (a) frustration; and (b) change. The subthemes that emerged under the theme of frustration were parents': (a) frustration about the lack of communication regarding their child's progress; (b) frustration with the methods by which progress information was shared; and (c) suggested methods for sharing progress. The subthemes that emerged under the theme of change were: (a) changes in parents' expectations of their children; and (b) parents' perception of changes in their children. Within this last subtheme (i.e., parents' perceptions of changes they recognized in their children) were: (a) increased motivation; and (b) increased self-awareness and self-efficacy. The themes and subthemes are described in the following sections.

Frustration. All of the parent-participants expressed frustration about the manner in which they were provided information or not provided information about the academic progress

of their children during prior school years. Further analysis revealed two subthemes within this broader area. The first subtheme related to parents' frustration with the limited communication schools provided in prior years about how their child was progressing, and the second subtheme was related to the frustration parents experienced due to the types of literacy assessments or measures (e.g., standards-based assessments) teachers used to share the children's progress with them.

Frustration about lack of communication about their child's progress. During the initial interviews, all of the parent-participants in this study expressed frustration about not receiving more details from the school about their child's literacy progress. The information provided by the schools was often in the form of standards-based report card reporting system (i.e., 1 for beginning steps, 2 for nearing proficient) and scores on standards-based assessments, usually at the end of each year. These summative forms of assessment only showed that the children were performing below standards or below average, but didn't provide specific information about the children's performance in each component area of reading. Parents seemed to want additional formative assessment information about their child's progress in acquiring literacy skills that provided information about the children's strengths and weaknesses. For example, Karl's mother responded to my interview question related to the types of information she had received in the past about Karl's reading and writing by sharing, "...um I'm not really sure because the teachers really kept me in the dark quite a bit" (In 01: 28-29). This mother felt it was important for her to make sure her son was progressing in reading. Since information about his progress in this area apparently was not readily available during school conferences, she took it upon herself to monitor home reading activities. Doing so helped her gain the progress

information she needed. She described what she did at home to try to understand how he was progressing in literacy:

But what I did was I always tried to read to him and he reads see we also have him on the computer he reads the computer by himself ah very seldom he'll ask me what this or that says cause he normally has a general meaning understanding what the meaning is. So that's pretty much how I judge how he's progressing. (In 01: 31-35).

Other parent interviews revealed that Karl's mother was not the only parent trying to monitor their child's reading progress by helping her/him at home rather than depending on the information the child's school had shared. Cate's mother, for example, shared her experience by saying, "...I mean I know you know I sit down with her and look and you know I've used a lot of different aids with her to help with her reading and um you know it's just ah a struggle a very big struggle" (In 03: 35-37). Even when progress information on Cate's reading was shared within the school environment, Cate's mother was frustrated because she wanted to fully understand the details of Cate's progress and the school personnel only gave her general statements like "She's progressing" when discussing Cate's reading skills. She shared that the school conferences were, "Pretty disappointing you know cause I mean there's really no database, no charts, there's nothing I mean all they do is tell you she's making progress" (In 03: 33-34).

Mary's mother shared how she learned how to ask the right questions of school personnel in seeking information on Mary's reading skills. She stated, "...there was some frustration um early on um especially um I've adjusted I've gotten used to you know asking more questions" (In 02: 46-47). Cate's mother stated that due to the lack of information pertaining to her child's reading progress being provided from schools, she had sought support outside of the school

environment. Cate had received before and/or after school tutoring in the area of reading for the last three years. Her mother stated, "...I mostly went out in the resources of people that I've contacted and asked them what they used um I can't really say I've gotten much from the school" (In 03: 40-42).

Both Karl and Cate's mothers became frustrated during their initial interviews when we were discussing each child's progress in prior school years. Karl's mother felt she had understood very little about the details of her son's progress in prior school years and shared, "Well I know he is still behind" (In 01:103). When I asked Cate's mother the same question, she responded by saying, "I would love to um but you know that's a wall. You know you can ask until you are blue in the face and they're not gonna change. And you're not gonna get the information unless they want to" (In 03: 84-86). This comment led the analysis toward a second subtheme within frustration: parents concerns about how the information was shared.

Frustration with the methods used to share the children's progress. All parent-participants expressed frustration about how information pertaining to the progress of their child was shared with them. Specifically, they found the types of formats schools used to document progress not to be helpful. For example, these included the standards-based report card scoring system (i.e., 1 for beginning steps, 2 for nearing proficient) used on standards-based report cards or the variety of ways to write assessment results (i.e., using Wilson sub-steps or using Spire levels) on IEPs. Parents shared their frustrations toward the types of formats that had been shared such as when Karl's mother was talking about the standards-based report cards, "...To me a grade doesn't mean anything. What matters to me is that he's learning something throughout the school year. That's the bottom line. To me a number or a grade, it means nothing for him, it is how he is ah taking in all this information and is he going to process it" (In. 01: 106-109).

Clearly, Karl's mother wanted to see information that showed Karl was making progress, such as his work samples, rather than a scoring system that compared her son to his grade level peers. Since Karl was reading below grade level, we were limited to a beginning step score on the standards-based report card that did not show any growth. That is, the school district required us to only assign a '1' because the students were not reading at grade level. Therefore, the children's scores never changed. Mary's mother shared similar frustration directed toward standards-based report cards by sharing, "...I would like to see both her personal progress and then also where she fits in with the standards" (In 02: 34-35). Taking it a step further, Cate's mother stated that she felt important information could have been helpful when making academic decisions:

Well, I think if we had a little bit more of a head start about what the problems were in her reading and writing that we could have addressed it a lot sooner than what we are now. A lot of valuable time has kind of been wasted I feel so you know we're on the backstroke." (In 03: 46-49)

Unfortunately, when Cate's mother used the word "backstroke", she was referring to the fact and she feels Cate was actually regressing in the area of reading. Cate's mother seemed to get more frustrated during the interview when asked about her daughter's progress compared with her general education peers. She stated, "Oh she's not even close. I mean she's a fifth grader; we're still at the second grade reading level. We're not even close. And we've been at the second grade reading level for well three years so I would like to see a little progress you know" (In 03: 52-54).

When Karl's mother was asked during the initial interview what types of information she might want to receive about Karl's progress, she gave an answer more directed toward the manner in which progress was shared by stating:

Um pretty much not what he can't do but what he can do. I know not everybody can do stuff, I just want to know what he's capable of doing. To me that's more important.

Because to me "can't" you know isn't in the vocabulary in this family. We all have to have an "I can do it" attitude without that there is no growth. So I know he's gonna learn something and that's when I know he is learning (In 01: 117-122).

Suggested methods for sharing progress During the initial interviews, all of the parent-participants made suggestions about how frequently they would like to have progress information reported to them and ways they would like to see information about their children's progress presented to them. These included a variety of mediums that would provide both specific information about a child's progress on a particular skill and broader information about how the child learned best. Suggestions included, learning style information, personal progress reports focused on what their child could accomplish, work samples illustrating their child's progress, visual graphs showing growth (e.g., changes in reading levels). While still rather frustrated, Cate's mother stated how often she would like to get information about her child's progress:

Maybe once a week just send home a little something and say you know we jumped up to this or we did this you know we learned this word this week. You know um you know she hasn't had any spelling lists for three years (In 03: 101-104).

Mary's mother felt that information on learning styles (i.e., how her child learned best) might be useful when she shared that, "...knowing about her learning style is very helpful and ah

somewhere around I guess it was third grade or so I think we really started to pick up on um you know we had sort of a grasp on it but she's kinds changed over the years too" (In 02: 61-64). She continued by saying, "...I think knowing how she learns best is helpful" (In 02: 66). Mary's mother also wanted additional information to compare her daughter's progress with her peers, her personal progress, work samples, and even a graph showing reading progress from kindergarten through the 5th grade. She stated:

I would like to know where she falls in line with her peers and standards but then also to her personal progress from where she's at the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Um I would like to be able to see that growth and I know it is slow growth but (In 02: 88-91).

She continued her thoughts about work samples that might illustrate Mary's progress:

I think um I would like to see her work examples um, and if there's a way to gauge her progress her own personal progress on a measurement scale like you know the standards based grading system you know (In 02: 104-106).

Finally, I noticed that Cate's mother paused a few minutes after I asked her what type of information would she would like to receive. It appeared as if she did not expect a question like this would be asked. She thought about Cate's struggles in the area of writing and she shared:

Well, now her writing is a whole another issue um they told us she would never write because of her hands. So you know any progress in that I feel is huge because I was expecting nothing so yeah so I'm really excited about seeing anything and any improvement in that (In 03: 75-78).

Change. It was after the first parent/student-led LAP conference when I noticed a new theme emerge during my analysis of parent transcripts. My analysis revealed that parental

responses began to focus less on frustration and more on change. Change was revealed in two areas: (a) changes in parent expectations; and (b) changes that parents saw in their children (i.e., increased motivation, self-awareness, and self-efficacy). Analysis of parents' comments revealed that, as a result of participating in the LAP process with their children, parents began to recognize positive changes in their children's literacy development. This in turn created changes in the parents' expectations of their children. The LAP materials and activities provided parents with evidence of steady progress in their children's literacy skills and knowledge. The parents began to recognize that their children were capable of learning more than the parents had imagined and this increased their expectations of what the children could accomplish in the future. It also helped parents understand better how to support their children's reading progress.

Change in parents' expectations of their children. All parent-participants expressed that their expectations of their child's ability to make academic progress in the area of literacy changed as a result of participating in the parent/student-led LAP conferences with their children. They began to see that their child's actual literacy development was beyond their initial expectations. Mary's mother, who had been relatively quiet during school conferences in years prior to this study, appeared to be the most vocal when it came to sharing her thoughts during her daughter's first parent/student-led LAP conference. She shared her enthusiasm about the amount of Mary's work presented in the LAP during the parent student-led LAP conference by stating, "Tons of work" (In 19:77); "You wrote all that!" (In 19: 155); "You've been busy you did a lot of work" (In 19: 271); "46 books wow that's a lot (In 21: 61); and "More so than last year than any other year" (In 19: 319). She also recognized that Mary's spelling skills had increased, stating, "Yes, her spelling has gotten so much better" (In 19: 370). During the final parent/student-led LAP conference while we were completing the final interview, I explained the

progress in reading levels that Mary had made during the year. I pulled out the graph depicting Mary's gains in reading level that Mary's mother had requested earlier during the initial interview. On the graph, I had charted Mary's reading levels for the last four years. I predicted that, based on the progress she had already made, I could see her reading at least at the fifth grade reading level upon high school graduation. Her mother stated, "That's huge. We had testing on her when she was in kindergarten and they thought that would not be the case. Her, with the memory, it is so hard for her to grasp it and then to hold it" (In 19: 468-470). Mary's mother's voice cracked with emotion after her daughter completed her LAP presentation. She shared:

I know that her own personal progress is moving forward. She is still making progress at her level. I can see that now you know more so with the forms that, you know, or just looking more so at the report card or standardized based scores (In 19: 405-408).

Emotion did not only show up in Mary's mother during the parent/student-led LAP conference. Cate's father was also emotional and expressed relief when he saw the progress results during the last parent/student-led LAP conference and final interview. He shared his thoughts about the portfolio process:

I would say we've got detailed content that allowed us to not only see where she's at but measure her improvements um you know and that too you've been able to pinpoint um the deficiency as simple as speeding up her reading and some of those sight words (In 21: 687-690).

Karl's mother was very impressed with the reading conference materials that included the results of comprehension tests, the expanded written response, the reading analysis, and the retelling rubric. After reviewing the multiple-choice comprehension assessments that Karl had

placed in his LAP, she shared, "...that's a good thing because you want to make sure that he comprehends what he's reading (In 17: 478-479). The reading conferences were set up in a question and answer format. For example, I asked the questions that were on the reading conference form, and I wrote down Karl's dictated answers on the form. Karl's mother seemed very pleased with the idea that I took the time to sit down and discuss with Karl his progress. She stated, "...you never stop learning and you can tell because if you listen to kids you learn a whole bunch so much more you really do" (In 17: 565-567).

Cate's father also noted Cate's increased progress in the area of comprehension by sharing, "Yeah I gotta say this past few months really she's its been leaps and bounds the way she's comprehending and articulating things" (In 15: 330-331).

Finally, Mary's mother seemed pleased because Mary began to share how she learned best when talking about her reading during the parent/student-led LAP conference. Mary's mother, who had wanted more information about Mary's learning style commented, "I guess I learned more about her learning style I would say" (In 19: 434).

Clearly, parents began to recognize that their children were capable of learning more than the parents had imagined and this increased their expectations of what the children could accomplish in the future after participating in the LAP process. Interestingly, Cate's father, in describing the LAP process as a method to demonstrate a child's literacy development, compared it to his job as a stockbroker. He shared, "our marketing effort crunching numbers and continuing to do these uh campaigns crunching numbers to get that proven method for that predictable results and it's and it's almost the same" (In 15: 495-498). He continued to say after his daughter's LAP presentation, "...I mean you're taking these different methods to get a predictable results out of these kids and not only that you're bringing them out so they can

explain how and why” (In 15: 498-500). Cate’s father’s enthusiasm during the parent/student-led LAP conference only continued when he shared, “We’ve got a proven method for more predictable results” (In 21: 694).

Changes parents saw in their children. Another subtheme that emerged from analysis of parent interviews and parent/student-led LAP conferences related to parents’ perceptions of changes within their children. One change that parents mentioned noticing was an increase in their children’s motivation when engaging in literacy activities and in learning in general. Parents perceived that after participating in the LAP process, their children were more motivated to participate in reading and writing activities. When describing the changes they observed in their children, parents used interest, pride, driven, achieve, ambition, and even incentive. In essence, based on their child’s enthusiasm when sharing their LAPs with them, parents perceived that their children seemed more motivated to learn. For example, it became clear that Cate was very enthusiastic when showing her parents the work she had accomplished and the scores she worked hard to achieve. She was very interested in sharing her accomplishments with her mother and that is when Cate’s mother shared, “I think her interest too is a lot of that too. I wouldn’t doubt that she’s just gotta absorb it more” (In 15: 360-361). It is important to note that Cate had a rather rough year before she came into my classroom. Past school conferences involved very little about her academic progress and more about Cate’s negative behavior choices. Cate’s involvement in these school conferences consisted of her sitting next to her parents not saying anything. In contrast, Cate arrived at both parent/student-led LAP conferences feeling confident because she understood that she would share her LAP with her parents, read a document that she picked out, and talk about how her work was progressing.

During that same parent/student-led LAP conference, Cate's father also shared that after participating in the LAP process he noticed something new about his daughter. He stated, "She's driven, nothing will stop her" (In 21: 790). He seemed happy after seeing an example of his daughter's determination to improve her work by showing him one of her work examples where she improved her score on an extended response question from a low score to a higher score by correcting her work and adding a few more sentences. He said, "She sets her mind to it, she can achieve whatever she wants" (In 21:741).

Karl's mother also noticed a change in her son's motivation to learn after experiencing the LAP process. She shared, "He has that ambition to expand his mind" (In 22: 469); "...he's more interested now in the world" (In 22: 483); and "...he does this, that, and the other thing cause he wants to learn" (In 22: 520-521). She also shared that her son seemed not only motivated to learn but as she stated, "You guys gave him the incentive to learn on his own" (In 22: 476-477). Karl's mother also perceived that he gained the confidence to ask questions as demonstrated when she said, "...you know all he does is ask questions and the basic question why this is happening and what's that, you know how does it work?" (In 22: 479-481). Finally, she enthusiastically shared, "...you know in order to reach a great goal you have to have little steps and little steps are motivation. And motivation you know its unlimited it really is once you get started you want to do more" (In 01: 133-135).

Another change that parents perceived through the parent/student-led LAP conference process was that their children were becoming more aware of their own learning and that they began displaying increased self-efficacy (i.e., belief in their own competence). In regards to increased self-awareness, Cate's father felt strongly that this change in his daughter was the result of using the LAP; he stated, "I mean you're taking these different methods to get a

predictable result out of these kids and not only that you're bringing them out so they can explain how and why" (In 15: 498-500). His daughter had presented her LAP during the last conference explaining how she created different work samples and what she had learned in the process. This was a big change for Cate compared to the first parent/student-led LAP conference. Since the first conference Cate was more familiar with how to present her LAP because she had practiced presenting it with a peer in class. She seemed to understand that she could improve her work samples by using various support strategies (i.e., personal dictionary) and then could show her parents the improved scores she had achieved. Before participating in the LAP process, I do not believe Cate fully understood that she was in control of her own learning. The LAP process provided her with many opportunities to practice, reflect, and observe that her efforts did indeed result in improved literacy products. As Cate's father enthusiastically shared, "All the independence and measure of achievement um and they've got their own reward because they earned it and they see it" (In 15: 505-506) and "She's becoming aware of who she is and I'm really proud of her" (In 15: 519-520). Her mother shared her enthusiasm by tearfully stating, "There is pride" (In 21: 286).

Karl's mother also commented about her son's increased confidence and awareness of his work when stating, "He wants to learn and knows what's going on" (In 22: 224). When discussing the process of her daughter's reading with Mary's mother, we began to explore the idea of Mary seeing herself as a reader and writer. Mary's mother responded by saying, "Absolutely, I think she is starting to, she is beginning, yeah" (In 19: 410) and finally she said, "She is taking ownership for sure (In 19: 416). Mary's mother felt that the LAP helped Mary become more aware of her learning and stated:

...I think it is good for her to have that as a tool so that she can like say reflect on you know where where she is, at what she needs help in, what she's doing well, what she's not. It helps build her confidence. I think it's a good tool to have. I think ah she has really come a long way in confidence building with her reading just going back and critiquing it (In 19: 420-425).

Finally, Cate's mother shared, "That is really big that she understands the difference in grading." For this particular student, this was a profound accomplishment for this year. Last year, she had difficulty completing most of her work and this year she wanted a higher score and insisted on fixing some of her work to achieve that goal. Cate demonstrated a strong sense of self-efficacy by viewing her assignments as a task that can be mastered rather than only as a challenging problem too difficult to complete like she approached her assignments last year. Again, analysis of these comments revealed that, as a result of participating in the LAP process with their children, parents began to recognize positive changes in their children's literacy development. (i.e., increased motivation and increased self-awareness and self-efficacy). This in turn created changes in the parents' expectations of their children.

Teacher-Participant

I collected data throughout the study by maintaining a two-column reflective teaching journal and creating a database system using FileMaker Pro 10 where I collected the students work samples placed in their LAPs. My objective for creating a database system was to keep track of student work and assessment results and to be able to sort them for ongoing analysis throughout the study. The reflective teaching journal was implemented with the objective of documenting my teaching experiences during the year that I implemented the portfolio assessment study, my thoughts, questions that arose as the year progressed, ideas about adjusting

future lessons based on what I was observing the students do, and conclusions involved with student literacy instruction and assessment.

Reflective teaching journal. I used thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. I began analysis of the data collected from my reflective teaching journal by identifying, analyzing, and then reporting patterns (themes) within the data. I searched across my data set (i.e., reflective teaching journal) and found repeated patterns of meaning from the data I extracted. In phase 2 of the analysis, I coded interesting features of the data in a systematic method across the entire data set and collated the data relevant to each code. I then collated the codes into potential themes in phase 3. Next, I reviewed the themes and generated a thematic table defining and naming themes (phase 4). One broad thematic area, discovery, emerged from the analysis. Within the theme of discovery I found the following subthemes emerged: (a) knowledge about my students (about their attitudes toward reading, their learning strengths, and their particular interest areas); (b) the importance of ongoing dialogue for student progress; and (c) the power of reflection.

Discovery. I found the theme of discovery began within my first journal entry on December 17, 2009 and it appeared primarily in the beginning and end of the study. In the journal, I first began to discuss the information I discovered by reading the Interest Inventories and the Elementary Reading Attitude Surveys that each student had completed. I summarized the information the forms provided about each student on the left column and developed questions on the right column to be addressed during that particular reflection session or at a later time. Later I printed out the reflection journal pages and place them in a binder to take home, read, and add pencil notes. By going back through the reflections, I began a journey of discovery and found the knowledge I gained about the student-participants informed my instructional practices,

helped me develop lesson enhancements (i.e., using creative visual prompts) and curriculum support modifications (i.e., current events activity). It is also important to note that the time involved in keeping a reflective teaching journal within the LAP process was an acceptable cost for the improved outcomes.

Greater knowledge about my students. The LAP process provided many opportunities to learn more about my students in ways that positively affected the literacy instruction I provided them. I found that the more I learned about their attitudes toward reading, their learning characteristics, and their interests, the better I could individualize instruction for them. In the following section, I will discuss the three main areas of knowledge I gained about the students and how this affected my instructional planning and implementation. First, through the process of gathering information about the three student-participants' reading and writing skills I learned a great deal about how the students felt about (perceived) reading. As a teacher, I have always believed that attitudes toward reading are learned and develop over time. In the area of reading those day-by-day experiences with books can determine whether or not a child will become a lifelong reader. In fact, McKenna and Stahl (2009) wrote that attitudes toward reading are shaped by the following: (a) each and every reading experience; (b) our beliefs about what will happen when we open a book; and (c) our beliefs about how those we hold in high regard feel about reading" (p. 204) and that these influences can be changed with teaching interventions. In the beginning of the study, my journal entries were full of statements that described my student's feelings toward reading such as, "He [Karl] seems to enjoy the closeness with his mother when they read together" (Entry 12/17/09), and "Cate felt that she sometimes likes to read. She said, "sometimes I do and sometimes I don't" (Entry: 12/17/09) when discussing Cate in my journal. I also wrote when referring to Cate that, "Reading depends on how she feels at the time (Entry:

12/17/09) and then, “Sometimes it appeared that reading was just too tedious for her. It tended to make her frustrated” (Entry 1/7/09).

Through the LAP process, I discovered that “Mary felt that reading was not fun because it was hard for her to pronounce the words” (Entry: 12/17/09). When she read aloud, her oral flow was choppy and her demeanor was withdrawn and reluctant. I also wrote, referring to Mary, that I was “Not sure that she sees reading as an essential skill in life (i.e., for pleasure, daily living)” (Entry: 12/17/09). Reading seemed to be such a negative experience for Mary, something only associated with school, which she quite often complained about it. She did not make the connection that reading was a necessary life skill (e.g., useful for getting a driver’s license, latest fashion advice). I knew that I had a challenge to provide reading activities that would be high interest for her with up-to-date information about the world. I wanted to capture her attention and provide her with the experience that reading informational text could actually be fun. Fortunately, since *Scholastic News* was delivered to our classroom on a weekly basis, it provided me with a wonderful resource that gave me materials to teach mini lessons or in Mary’s case, helped her prepare for an assignment she was required to turn in during her general education social studies class.

In Mary’s general education social studies class she was required to present a Current Events short paper on an article that she had read for class credit. I asked her general education teacher if Mary could use a current event outline that I modified responding in writing to questions using the 5 W’s (i.e., who, what, when, where and why) format. I retyped the form and added a brief explanation to each question so Mary would be able to answer the 5 W questions independently. This small modification provided Mary with clear directions and a one-page summary of the article. She was then given the opportunity to present her outline on Wednesdays

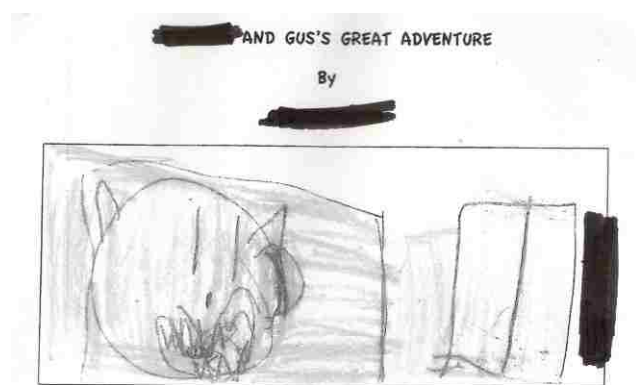
to our small class giving her practice before her Friday presentation during her social studies class. This small modification to a general education assignment became an activity of choice for students in my classroom who were required to work on something when they finished an assignment early.

When I also noticed that reading aloud, a typical elementary school activity, presented an emotional risk for Mary and Karl that seemed to greatly affect their performance and their feelings about reading. I wrote in the journal, “Mary and Karl both read very slowly but mainly due to speech difficulties. They do not want to mispronounce the words although they both seemed to have decoded the words correctly” (Entry: 1/8/09). Being able to present their work, using the portfolio process, within our small class became a way for both Mary and Karl to practice their reading aloud skills and build up their confidence.

A second area in which the LAP process helped me gain a deeper understanding of my students was gaining insight into how my students learned best. This knowledge allowed me to capitalize on their strengths when designing instruction. For example, I observed through working with the LAP process that Karl was a visual learner. I wrote, “He seems to relate more to pictures and videos. Could this mean that words have been so hard to remember because he needs a visual cue?” (Entry: 12/17/09). This observation helped me to recognize that planning lessons to improve his reading and writing would be greatly enhanced if visuals were provided to help him to grasp a new concept. This observation about the usefulness of visual supports extended to the other students, as well. I found that ordering *Scholastic News* for my entire class was one of the best teaching investments I made during the year. This resource provided short and interesting articles with a lot of pictures as I described above when discussing Mary. I was able to conduct mini lessons with the students using Venn Diagrams and comparison T-charts to

help them comprehend the information. I also used this new knowledge about the importance of visual support when developing a grading chart for the students to use in evaluating their progress. It showed a mountain climber climbing up the mountain to achieve a score of 4 (i.e., advanced). Students could use the chart to compare a score they received on an assignment to the chart. Both Karl and Cate greatly benefited from this poster and referred to it often when they wanted to recheck classroom work before turning it in for grading.

A third area of discovery about students that I made through the LAP process that continued to benefit my instructional planning was gaining insight into their particular interests. I wrote this referring to my student Cate: “It is interesting that she relates strongly to books that have to do with animals” (Entry: 12/17/09). I put this knowledge to work by finding bi-weekly books for her to read within her reading level that focused on animals. I also thought it would be a unique motivational tool that I could use for her when we started our fairy tale writing project as I will explain next. I found out that Cate’s family frequently went to Las Vegas for short vacations and Cate really enjoyed the trips. Just before this year’s trip, Cate had asked if she could take Gus (i.e., a stuffed duck that had a baseball hat with the duck’s name Gus printed on it) with her on her trip. Cate was the caregiver of Gus and just having him sit on her desk seemed to motivate her to work. I consulted with Cate’s mother and asked that she take some pictures of Cate with Gus in Las Vegas. My idea was that Cate could then write a story when she returned. This proved to be a highly effective way to motivate Cate to write a fairy tale and then present it to our class later in the year. After many rough drafts and assisted typing modifications see example below:



Once upon a time, there was a girl named ██████████ who had a blue dress on and who liked dolphins. ██████████ had a duck named Gus. Gus has a hat that says "Gus" on it. ██████████ liked to go swimming with Gus. This story takes places in Las Vegas. It is dirty there and smells like trash and perfume. There are crazy people everywhere. It's hot there sometimes. Hotels and restaurants are everywhere. Games are in some hotels. The Bellagio is a hotel with dancing water.

Importance of ongoing dialog for student progress. I began to discover other important changes occurring in my classroom after I implemented the LAP process. Analysis of my journal revealed that one of the most critical things I discovered was the positive effect of ongoing dialog between teacher and students on students' progress in acquiring literacy skills. I wrote, "The LAPs seem to be that ongoing dialogue between the student, the teacher, and the parents talking about progress – not just a singular event with no immediate feedback" (Entry 4/12/10). In essence, we were discussing progress that was or was not being made, and I was making adjustments in my instructional methods when needed. This process compares to that more typically found in schools where students take standardized assessments for a week and then wait months for the results, means that this assessment information cannot be used to guide daily instruction.

I found that the discussion format embedded within many of the activities of the LAP process, such as bi-weekly conferences encouraged ongoing communication between students, parents, and all the adults working in the classroom environment. Conversations were taking place in a continuous cycle throughout each day of the week between the students and the teacher focused on LAP activities. These discussions concentrated on improving student work that would be graded and then placed in student LAPs. In my reflective teaching journal I wrote that, “I have spent a lot of time during student reading and writing conferences talking with them about the different aspects of their reading. Could this have made a difference? (Entry: 4/27/10). It seemed the students responded well to feedback that helped them think through how they completed their work, rather than just assigning a grade to it. Erickson, Hatch, and Clendon (2010) refer to this as providing informative feedback because “it focuses on understanding how the student accomplished the task rather than on the final results of completing the task” (p. 13). I believe that through these ongoing dialogs; the learning focus of the classroom began to change from the emphasis on instruction more focused on having students complete their work to instruction focused more on discussing what learning tools were used by students to improve their completed work.

This continuous cycle of ongoing dialog clearly started to impact the learning environment. Students were actively and regularly using strategies I taught them to help them check their own work, such as using their personal dictionaries, asking adults for help, finding spelling of words using various Internet websites (e.g., dictionary.com), and using writing checklists. An added element of excitement became evident in the classroom when the emphasis was placed more on how the students completed the work and what they had accomplished. I wrote, “... amazing – we are working past the morning recess bell” (Entry: 1/22/10). This entry

was written after we began using Write Rights on a daily basis. I used Write Rights taken from a companion website writinga-z.com which were short grammar practice sheets at the beginning of each day. Each student in my classroom began their day by writing down the daily activities in their individual student agendas following by this quick grammar activity. Each sheet was glued into individual student spiral notebooks. Student's completed their assigned Write Right that was checked by myself for accuracy while at the same time having mini conferences with each student reinforcing what they had learned and how they could find help if the teacher was with another student using a variety of strategies (i.e., class grammar reference book, dictionary, writing checklist). I wanted students to find ways to help themselves, which I believed, was another step toward understanding themselves as learners.

These changes in the classroom also impacted my teaching practices. I found that I had to make sure that I graded the Write Right sheets and returned them to each student by the end of the day. It became very important to the students to compare their score with the mountain climber poster (i.e., 4 for an advanced score at the top of the mountain) as discussed earlier. Through this process, I began to see students wanting to improve their work. Similarly to the parents' perceptions discussed in the prior section, I was seeing the students' motivation to engage in literacy increasing and seeing them demonstrate an increased sense of self-efficacy. I wrote in my journal the following long entry:

“My students never seem to take ownership of their own learning. It's like they go to school and complete their work but for some reason they feel they have no control on how the work turns out. They measure their own performance on whether or not the “blanks are filled in” or doing the required “number of sentences” – then they turn it in and forget it. They generally felt they had no control of the work they completed – they

couldn't improve it – they couldn't change their grade or score. Using the LAPs seemed to change their perspective. I began to notice that my students seemed to be more motivated when they looked at the work they had completed, the scores they received, and I worked with them to look back at similar work samples so they could see the difference (i.e., improvement). Our discussions are amazing. We discussed ways they could improve their work and strategies they could use everyday. I was hoping for habits to be formed. I was hoping to see them hesitate before they turned in their work trying to recheck using strategies (i.e., writing checklist, spelling dictionaries). But the reflection part on evaluating their work was a BIG struggle” (Entry: 4/15/10).

Power of reflection. Using the LAPs in the classroom directly impacted my instructional decision-making. This process, combined with my teaching journal helped me reflect on a continuously basis on what I was seeing in the classroom and helped me focus more on individual student's reading and writing needs. I found that many times I wrote reflection entries that focused on ways I could enhance, change, or explore methods to teach my students specific skills during the year based on what I'd observed during LAP activities. For example, early in the study I wrote, “Maybe this is a good lesson idea – to show how important reading can be” (Entry: 12/17/09) after I found that many of my students had negative feelings toward the act of reading and never seemed to understand why it was important. Another example was written after a multisensory reading lesson when I wrote, “I wonder if having the students concentrate on the spelling of words that we use for the key phonogram of the lesson would help them? I want to make sure they can apply the new words in their writing” (Entry: 1/6/10).

It was clear, as reflected by my teaching journal, that I was concerned that skills I was teaching needed to be practiced in other aspects of literacy, such as writing. I wrote, “The

phoneme drills are not being applied outside of the drill cycle. I want them to apply the isolated skills when reading and writing sentences. With a stronger focus on skill application using strategies and instruction – will I see improvement?” (Entry: 1/12/09).

Based on the LAP activities (e.g., reading conferences) I also found myself searching for new ways to measure comprehension. I added new retelling rubrics after I wrote, “I wanted to add two forms for retelling both with fiction and nonfiction books. I like the scoring chart, the area for comments, and the level categories of skills, developing, and needs work.” (Entry: 2/1/10).

Everything we did in the classroom centered on the LAP activities, and I adjusted my instruction to meet the needs of students as these became apparent through the various LAP activities. For example, after a Writing Conference with a student I wrote, “I decided to change a portion of the form (Appendix J) to reflect the extended response portion of the reading comprehension test that is connected with the book they are assigned. This will make a little more sense for the students in this study and help me determine if they understood the book they read” (Entry 2/2/10).

I continued my teaching journey throughout the study to find ways to teach students, too, how to reflect on the work they had accomplished. Using a reflective teaching journal provided a way to examine my teaching practice and the decisions I made. I discovered that it was also important that my students develop the ability to reflect: that they were able to identify what they had learned about their learning, and how this information and insight might help them beyond the classroom environment. I knew that in order for them to take full ownership of their own learning through reflection and the goal setting we did during the reading and writing conferences, I needed to teach the art of reflection. This became one of my biggest teaching

challenges. The LAP process provided repeated opportunities for both my students and myself to practice reflection, as I describe below.

Toward the end of the school year and the study, we began to spend more time in class having the students complete the Student Work Sample Comments for LAP (Appendix K). This form was designed to prompt students to reflect on their literacy assignments. This was quite a challenge because after implementing Literacy Assessment Portfolios, it became crystal clear that my students did not understand, relate to, or like to participate in the art of written reflection. Yet, learning about their own learning (i.e., strengths, areas of weakness) was an important goal for my students, one that could facilitate their learning beyond my classroom to future educational situations. My reflective journal entries began to focus more and more on ways to teach students how to reflect on the work they had completed using a variety of strategies and instructional lessons. My first journal reflection brainstorming ways to support students when completing the three questions on the Student Work Sample Comments for LAP was as follows:

“We have witnessed a lot of learned helplessness – when I ask the students to respond to “how I did this piece” – I want them to read the instructions and use some of the words used in the instructions like *define* or *explain* to help them write up what they had to do. On the question, “what I like about it” – they seem to have an easier time answering it in writing. When trying to answer – “what I wish I could change about it” – it seems to be the toughest one to answer. We have to make time to explain how to answer the questions.” (Entry: 3/24/10).

I knew that I needed to find some strategies that would help my students reflect on their work and complete their Student Work Sample Comments for LAP. One thing I had noticed was that students were struggling to find words to use when completing the form, and I wrote in the

journal that, “I decided to make a regular strategy of using a post-it note to provide words that we talk about as a word bank they can use when writing a story or a response. It worked very well. In fact, it seemed to open up the world for them.” (Entry: 3/25/10). It seemed that my students needed a word bank (i.e., list of words) that they could use to construct sentences when answering a question about their work.

I determined that my students needed some additional help in learning self-reflection. After consulting colleagues and professional materials, I found a graphic organizer called a Y chart that seemed as if it might be an effective tool to aid my students’ reflection on their work. I wrote in my journal, “I may use a graphic organizer called a Y chart. I will use it to help my students brainstorm their ideas around three dimensions: what a particular topic or situation *looks like*, *sounds like*, and *feels like* with the goal of facilitating critical thinking and problem solving. Would this work or is it too complicated?” (Entry: 4/23/10). I decided to first make a lesson plan focused on using a Y chart to explore the idea of the art of active listening as a way to teach use of the chart. I also involved our speech and language therapist to help facilitate the lesson. My lesson became quite interesting because students loved to act out the behavior of ‘active listening’. The next day we had a lesson about the purpose of reflection. I wrote, “I wanted to help my students understand the purpose of reflection by linking it to planning and/or goal setting. I gave each student a Y chart and had them answer the following three questions: (a) how was this lesson done, (b) what did you like about it, (c) what changes would you suggest for future lessons.” (Entry: 4/24/10). We read a *Scholastic News* article about tornadoes and then completed a Y chart together on the whiteboard. Each student copied the completed chart and placed it in their LAPs. Students seemed to appreciate having the opportunity to reflect on a lesson facilitated by the teacher. I found that they shared good input on how I could improve the

lesson. One of the students asked that we get some books from the library about tornadoes. We posted the Y Chart about active listening on the bulletin board so I could refer to it when students were completing their Student Work Sample Comments (Appendix K) attached to each one of their work samples they placed in their LAPs. Students never had a chance during the rest of this year to develop Y charts independently.

Reviewing my journal entries clearly illustrated that early in the study my students appeared to have many negative feelings toward reading and did not seem to see themselves as having any agency. That is, they didn't seem to understand that their efforts could make a difference in the outcome of their literacy products. I found this emotional response and the students' motivation and ability to sustain their effort began to change over the course of the study, commenting in my journal after reviewing a writing project that was placed in a student's LAP, "I have noticed that the students really strive to improve their grades based on the beginning steps through advanced scoring criteria. They have asked to redo work or correct it for a better grade" (Entry: 2/23/10). I reflected, in a journal entry in April, that the student's emotional response to reading and writing had begun to change. They seemed to have acquired a new sense of confidence in their own abilities to improve their literacy skills:

This is the first year I have used the reading and writing conference format on a bi-weekly basis with the LAPs. I have noticed throughout this process that all of my students have greatly benefited from the one-on-one support and the discussion portion of the conferences. Reading seems to have become something the students feel they could fix by just working on different strategies. This changed reading from being "something I can't do" to "something I can fix." It was not a personal thing to feel bad about anymore

because they could see their improvement and discuss things they could do to improve their reading and writing skills. (Entry: 4/12/10).

Literacy Assessment Portfolio student database. This database system was developed to set up a way to analyze information taken from each student's LAP, such as bi-weekly reading and Writing Conference for Reading Responses, informal reading assessments (i.e., retelling rubric, multiple-choice test, reading analysis), and writing project conferences with both writing and presentation rubric results. I set it up to key in each student's name, the date of the work to be examined, the month the work was completed, the area of literacy (i.e., reading, writing, word study), the assignment (i.e., nonfiction and fiction conferences, written book response conference, homework, writing prompt, spelling sort, Write Rights, the score that was obtained on the student work, the proficiency rating (i.e., beginning steps, nearly proficient, proficient, advanced), and a comment area. Then I set up index tabs with more detailed information pertaining to the various assignments as well as a scanned in copy of the student's work. This system allowed me to sort scores, reading or writing goals, and scores on the reading analysis. It proved to be a useful tool by allowing me to show parents their child's scores related to various assessments and work samples. Although it was not fully implemented during the study, I used it as a source to review data to find areas of strengths as well as areas of weakness. It also gave me another resource to pull information from in order to add to a student's IEP and/or complete student progress reports. It was readily available when making instructional decisions as to whether or not continue a strategy or to pinpoint skill deficiencies and develop mini lessons to reteach skills that needed reinforcement. My educational assistant also used the database system to determine the title of books each student had already read to prepare materials for the next bi-weekly reading cycle and to find comprehension scores of prior testing.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study was designed on the premise that using an alternative assessment (i.e., classroom-based literacy assessment portfolios) combined with information from formal and informal assessments could provide more comprehensive information about students' literacy progress than using only standards based assessments. Legislative mandates that have taken place within this decade have increased pressure on special education teachers to focus their instruction on helping their students work toward proficiency on standardized tests. It remains very important that teachers conduct relevant and meaningful assessments of students' progress and use those results to select evidence-based strategies to meet individual students' needs. Yell et al. (2006), for example, reminded us that, "teachers need to collect meaningful data on their students' progress to ensure that their instructional programs are working and to make accurate decisions regarding when programmatic changes must be made" (p. 38). Standardized test scores and curriculum-based measurement scores used on report cards are information typically provided to characterize students' achievement. However, special educators continue to face the challenge of communicating the results of these scores, which are statistics-based and difficult for parents to understand. Their child's individual progress is often hidden in numerical data that compares their child's progress with that of his or her general education peers.

In contrast to standards-based assessment, classroom-based portfolios could prove to be a useful tool to document the academic progress of students identified with disabilities and to provide teachers with the information they need to plan and implement effective instruction. Quite often when working with students identified with disabilities progress is made in small incremental steps. Frequently, we repeat steps and use multiple strategies and modifications to

support those steps. Carothers and Taylor (2003) stated that a portfolio could be a useful tool for students identified with disabilities because “they allow for the collection and communication of authentic data across a variety of skill areas and settings” while suggesting that portfolios could help recognize the new skills that emerge (p. 122). Standardized assessments generally do not provide sufficient information to guide day-to-day instruction. Portfolios could help enhance a teacher’s ability to recognize when new skills are emerging and this could be quite beneficial to planning and providing instruction. Data need to be collected and used on a more frequent basis in order to make accurate and timely decisions regarding curriculum modifications. Using a portfolio could provide an effective tool for measuring a student’s progress that would complement the required standardized assessments while also providing parents with the information needed to help their children be more successful.

Based on a case study design within the naturalistic paradigm, this study captured the experiences of three students, their parents, and a special education teacher when the process of using a literacy assessment portfolio was implemented in the students’ special education classroom. In the following sections I will discuss what these experiences revealed by discussing the major findings from the study and implications for practice and future research.

Discussion of Findings

When striving to use assessment to guide instruction, teachers have used portfolios in their classrooms in hopes of documenting and assessing their students’ progress. Experts in portfolio assessment have written that classroom portfolios can be “a mirror of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices” (Wiener & Cohen, 1994, p. 256). By continuously examining this mirror, teachers can discover ways to change their instruction and refine their assessment practices building individualized curriculums for their students. The outcomes of this

case study using Literacy Assessment Portfolios (LAPs) with students identified with disabilities included the following positive results for students: (a) their reading skills improved; (b) their attitudes toward academic reading improved; (c) they became aware of their own reading/writing needs and behaviors; (d) they self-evaluated their own progress; and (e) they demonstrated increased confidence in their reading abilities, as evidenced in their literacy goals (i.e., self-efficacy).

Outcomes for students The first positive outcome for participating students was that their formal reading assessment data demonstrated clearly that their reading skills improved during the school year after implementing Literacy Assessment Portfolios (LAPs). This was an increase in reading skills improvement from prior years for both Mary and Cate. Although I cannot say definitively that the process of using LAPs caused this improvement in reading skills, this process appeared to positively impact student achievement. Specifically, each participating student made substantial gains in reading levels across the year not only quantitatively but qualitatively through measures of attitude and parent observations. Karl worked his way up from a first grade reading level to reading third grade level books. Mary also gained a year in reading level, as per the results of her formal assessments, moving from a second grade reading level to within the proficient range for the third grade after the LAP process (i.e., the focus on gathering information) was implemented. Cate's formal reading assessments also showed improvement; she gained over a year improvement in her reading skills.

A second positive outcome was improvement in all three students' attitudes toward academic reading as demonstrated by their responses on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. Two of the students showed improvement in their attitudes toward recreational reading; one student scored in the 11th percentile for both December and May assessments (so showed no

improvement in attitude in this area). However, this same student went from the 58th percentile to the 70th percentile in his attitude rating toward academic reading.

This positive change in attitude was also found within the students' LAP reflection letters. Karl had initially written a statement in the beginning of the year describing his reading skills when he wrote, "I slow down and I get better." This changed in his later LAP reflection letter when he wrote, "Im [*sic*] feel good as a reader. I feel I am a faster reader." This was the same for Mary when she wrote a short reflection about the LAP: "It shows how we read and write" but her feelings about reading changed as shown in her May reflection when she wrote, "When I read a book I feel personal. When I read I feel good. When I read I feel confident." This was clearly not the insecure reader I observed when Mary started the school year. Cate demonstrated the same type of changes in her attitudes toward reading. She wrote in the beginning of the year, "I wont to rad and rit betre" meaning "I want to read and write better." She later wrote in her May reflection, "I feel as a reader I feel good about reader." Again, I cannot definitely say that the implementation of LAPs was the deciding factor for this change in the students' feelings about reading and writing, but students' attitudes toward both were clearly more positive after participating in the LAP process.

A third positive outcome observed was that students became more aware of their own reading/writing needs and behaviors. During the initial assessment cycle, students exhibited reading behaviors such as a lack of confidence, at times quite debilitating concerns about pronouncing words incorrectly, selectively skipping words when reading aloud, and completing assignments without meaningful participation. Using LAPs in the classroom appeared to have made some positive changes in their reading and writing behaviors. During the LAP final assessment cycle, behaviors were noted that demonstrated increased confidence, more

willingness to take risks when selecting books to read, and even an awareness that they needed to improve their fluency. Karl was clearly inspired to read more difficult books, as shown in his last bi-weekly book selection when he wanted to learn about magnetism. His book selection happened to be a year higher than his independent reading level and in a more challenging genre (i.e., nonfiction).

The LAP process gave students the opportunity to review and evaluate their work, allowing them to see the progress they were making. Karl also began to understand through this process that faster reading was a goal he needed to accomplish, and he was able to tell his mother what he was doing to improve his fluency. Mary also showed an increase in her confidence about reading as illustrated when she brought a friend into our classroom asking that I give a Reading Counts chart to her friend. She wanted her friend to read the required books to win a t-shirt from the librarian just like she was accomplishing.

Cate also showed more confidence after working with the LAP process. When Cate began to reflect on her work samples for the LAP, she demonstrated that she understood how to improve her skills, such as when she stated, “I want to be good at reading”, “write nicer”, and when she was very pleased with a work sample, she stated, “I know more words.” This was a big step for Cate because just the year before she was not given the opportunity to evaluate her own work and discuss things she needed to do to improve her work. When I asked Cate if she thought her work had gotten better or worse, she said, “Before my work wasn’t neat, now I’m in the fifth grade and it’s neater.”

A fourth positive outcome observed was that students actively participated in the LAP process by self-evaluating their own progress. This may indeed be the most important outcome because once a student learns how to control his or her own learning process they do not have to

be *pushed* to learn. That empowerment creates a strong desire to learn. The LAP process allowed students to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses while also encouraging them to develop some abilities needed to become more independent and self-directed learners. After initially observing the students' work behavior I wrote in my reflective teaching journal, "They generally felt they had no control of the work they completed – they couldn't improve it – they couldn't change their grade or score." However, this sense of helplessness changed when students began to develop their own LAPs. Doing so required each student to become a decision maker by selecting pieces of their work to include in their LAPs and self-evaluating each piece they selected. Assessment was no longer limited to grades or the red marks their teacher placed on their papers. Going through this process, students began to recognize their own academic successes and skill areas where they could improve. This finding supports that of Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) who found that portfolio assessment contributed to EFL learners' achievement and also contributed to the EFL students' feelings of responsibility toward monitoring their progress. Benson and Smith (1998) also found that after using portfolio assessments in their first grade classroom with students without disabilities, students were able to self-assess their own literacy skills, also giving teachers an increased awareness of each student's literacy growth.

The LAP process allowed also Cate to express herself in a comfortable way and to assess her own learning and growth as a learner. During the first LAP conference with parents, Cate was asked to evaluate an assignment that was placed in her LAP. She noticed that it was a writing assignment where she had chosen to copy words from a book rather than using her own words, resulting in a lower grade. Cate shared her disappointment by saying, "I don't like it. It has a frown on it." Although at times it seemed as though Cate tried everything to avoid completing an assignment, toward the end of the year she clearly wanted to receive good grades

on the work she had completed. Cate's mother also noticed this change in Cate's motivation to obtain a better grade after Cate had shared some of her completed work with her mother during a LAP conference. Cate's mother stated, "That is really big that she understands the difference in grading." This was certainly a profound change for Cate because just the year before she had a great deal of difficulty completing most of her work. This year she not only wanted a higher score but also insisted on fixing some of her work to achieve that goal.

When Karl began to judge the quality of his work (i.e., self-evaluation) he appeared to become intrinsically motivated to complete his work and to also use a variety of strategies (i.e., writing checklists, personal dictionary) to improve the quality of his work before he turned the work in for grading. After participating in the bi-weekly reading and Writing Conference for Reading Responses which became a continuous re-teaching exercise to remind students to use strategies that could improve the quality of their work, Karl began taking more time before he turned in his work for grading. This result of improving his work became a sense of pride for him that is similar to Thompson and Baumgartner (2008) findings. In their study working with students who were identified with disabilities or recognized as at-risk, they reported from that teachers perceived that, "students worked harder on certain portfolio assignments and actively chose particular artifacts"(p. 162).

As discussed earlier, participating in the bi-weekly reading and Writing Conference for Reading Responses also became re-teaching exercises that reminded Mary to use strategies to help her improve her work and to then practice the art of evaluation through reflection. During a writing conference when she was evaluating an assignment she had turned in, Mary clearly articulated ways she could improve her work by sharing these statements, "I can write more", "Checking my work and reading it to myself", and "Could add more details." In essence, Mary

became aware of both her strengths and weaknesses as a learner. She learned how to evaluate her work and then use a variety of strategies to make her own improvements. Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) also found that using non-traditional assessments (i.e., portfolios) in conjunction with more traditional teacher-made assessments allowed for more practical and accurate evaluations of student performance. Not only did these findings indicate that portfolio assessment contributed to the EFL learners' achievement, but it also contributed to the students' feelings of responsibility toward monitoring their own progress (Barootchi & Keshavarz). Similarly, the ongoing Writing Conference for Reading Responses embedded within the LAP process gave Mary options and the confidence that she could improve her work while monitoring her own progress.

Wiener and Cohen (1994) asserted that, "Rarely are unsuccessful readers and writers motivated to improve; rarely, if ever, do poor-achieving students think of literacy development as being a high personal priority or any benefit in their lives" (p. 8). For Cate, her own literacy development became a higher priority when she could see a writing project that she could not only relate to but also feel she could successfully accomplish. Clearly, Cate did not like to write and became a master in the art of avoidance. Although she fully understood that she needed to use strategies (i.e., personal dictionary, best handwriting skills), the idea of placing her creative thoughts into written form overwhelmed her. I used word banks on post-it notes and extensive dictations to help her get excited about a writing assignment, but it was always a struggle for her to write. This changed for Cate when our class began a fairy tale writing project. You could see that Cate seemed to learn more when she was interested in what she was learning.

Ezell, Klein & Ezell-Powell (1999) working with students with intellectual disability (ID) also found that portfolios positively affected student outcomes. Students in this study learned

more when they had an interest in what they were learning. In Cate's case, the fairy tale writing project was the one assignment on which she truly worked hard using all the strategies available, completed the assignment, and felt that she had accomplished something big. When I asked her during the conference what she liked best about the writing project she said, "I got to make up my own story." One big factor for Cate's enthusiasm was also that the setting of her fairy tale was Las Vegas, a place where her family vacationed yearly. Cate found purpose in writing her fairy tale project rather than just completing an isolated skill that she felt had no immediate outcome. Similarly, Karoly and Franklin (1996) found when using a portfolio process with a student diagnosed with severe behavior problems that he performed his work at a higher level when he could see that his work had a purpose or he was producing a product

Many students never develop an attitude that they are responsible for their own learning (i.e., take ownership of their learning) although they acknowledge that they have to complete the work tasks (Wiener & Cohen, 1994). This observation may explain why many of my students frequently completed assignments by quickly filling in the blanks and turning them in for grading without giving the task a second thought. However, when working through the LAP process, students in this study were challenged to reflect on the work samples that they had quickly completed and so began to realize that they could improve the quality of their work by using a variety of strategies and/or simply taking more time. This certainly seemed to encourage students to take more control of their learning.

A final positive outcome seen for participating students was that by participating in the LAP process, students increased their confidence toward reading and writing which became evident in the students' goals. Experiencing the LAP process seemed to help students understand that they could attain their goals of becoming better readers and writers (i.e., increased their self-

efficacy). Karl's goals, for example, began to change from focusing on something simple and concrete (e.g., Karl's goal to take more time to complete his tasks) to goals focused on more complex processes (e.g., Karl's goal to learn to make changes to his work to improve its quality). Mary wanted to spend more time in general education and understood that she needed to work hard improving her reading and writing to do so. During her transition IEP into middle school, Mary attained her goal and wrote her final sentence in her May LAP reflection, "I am confident about my work." Confidence was Mary's biggest accomplishment. She could now see her accomplishments and took control of her learning.

It became clear that Cate's biggest motivator was attending parent/student-led LAP conferences with her parents. This finding supports that of Ezell et al. (1999) that when using portfolios as a form of assessment, students with ID appeared to be eager to share their accomplishments with their peers and others outside the classroom and were more willing to strive for better quality of work. In the current study, Cate knew that during the parent/student-led LAP conferences she would have to read a work sample of her choice in front of her parents and talk about how she improved her work. Cate attended her first LAP conference determined to show her parents how she improved her work. Her father seemed happy after Cate showed him one of her work samples where she improved her score by correcting her work and adding a few more sentences. Cate's father stated, "She set her mind to it, she can achieve whatever she wants."

This case study demonstrated that the LAP process can awaken the students' desires to improve their literacy skills and increased their confidence about becoming better readers and writers. It is also possible that the process allowed students to see each other's progress – to see how their peers succeeded. Although it may not be as influential as actual experience, witnessing

their peers succeed may have created a vicarious experience for each student, increasing their belief that they, too, could make progress (i.e., if they can do it, I can do it as well). This finding is similar to that of Ezell et al. (1999) who noted that through the continuous practice of setting goals, making decisions and choices through the process of self-reflection and self-assessment, students demonstrated more control of their learning.

Outcomes for parents. Through qualitative analysis of parent interviews, three positive outcomes for parents emerged: (a) parents not only wanted to better understand their child's progress in the area of literacy development, they were willing to provide home and private tutoring; (b) parents' expectations of what their children could achieve changed after the LAPs process began; and (c) parents perceived changes in their children's motivation, self-awareness, and self-efficacy.

In the initial interviews parents expressed their frustration toward the limited communication they felt schools had provided in prior years in reference to how their children were progressing. When the schools shared progress, parents felt the methods used were both limited and confusing (e.g., the scoring systems used). Methods shared were commonly summative forms of assessment that showed their children performing below standards or below average. This finding was similar to that of Ezell et al. (1999). These researchers found that parents of children with ID in their study wanted useful information about their child's progress shared with them and did not think that formal assessments such as tests accomplished that goal. Similar parental concern was affirmed in this study when the interviews revealed that parents clearly wanted more specific information about their children's performance in each component of literacy development. As one parent in this study revealed, "...I know not everybody can do stuff, I just want to know what he's capable of doing." Parents not only wanted to receive

information about their child's learning style, detailed progress reports, work samples to compare progress, and visual graphs showing growth, they wanted to support the educational progress of their children even if that support involved hiring private tutors or spending more time at home reading with their children. Clearly, parents in this study wanted to understand the progress their children were making and to be involved when it came to helping their children make progress.

Another positive outcome found in this study was that parents' expectations of their children began to change after the LAP process began. After having experienced a LAP conference with their children, parents began to share during conferences how their children's literacy progress was beyond their initial expectations. They observed the type of activities and the amount of work their children had accomplished during the year. The parents suggested that the most profound change in their expectations occurred during the parent/student-led LAP conferences when they witnessed their children explain how they had completed their work and the progress they were making. One student's mother stated, "I know that her own personal progress is moving forward," while another student's father shared, "I would say we've got detailed content that allowed us to not only see where she's at but measure her improvements."

Parents also shared their enthusiasm about the amount of student work the LAP contained, the enthusiasm they witnessed in their children, and how much progress their children were making. The participating students seemed eager to select their work samples to go into their LAPs and then share their accomplishments with their parents during the parent/student-led LAP conferences. This eagerness was also found in Ezell et al.'s (1999) study. These researchers stated that parent and teacher conferences became something that one parent described as an exciting activity for her daughter.

During the parent/student-led LAP conferences in this study, parents made comments such as, “You wrote all that,” “You’ve been busy you did a lot of work,” and “More so than last year than any other year.” One father even shared after seeing the increased progress his daughter made in the area of reading comprehension, “Yeah I gotta say this past few months really she’s it’s been leaps and bounds the way she’s comprehending and articulating things.”

Comments such as those above clearly reflect a change in parents’ perceptions of their children, moving from primarily seeing the children’s problem areas to recognizing their strengths. This change in perception was also noted by Campbell et al. (2001). When working with a *family focused* portfolio, caregivers in their study were required to collaborate with parents before they developed their post-story describing a student in the daycare facility. Researchers found that “caregivers included a significantly higher total number of strength-based themes in their post-stories than in their pre-stories” (p. 159). The caregivers’ perceptions about disability, general descriptions of the child, context of the child’s behavior, and changes in the child’s learning and performance changed as demonstrated in more strength-based statements in the post-stories than in their pre-stories. Using the portfolios seemed to help the children’s caregivers increase their expectations for the children they were working with in a daycare environment. Parents in the current study also began to recognize that their children were capable of learning more than the parents had imagined. This gave the parents hope, and this hope seemed to increase their expectations of what the children could accomplish in the future after participating in the LAP process.

A third positive outcome found in this study was that parents began to see changes in their children’s motivation toward learning which led to evidence of their children believing in their own competence (i.e., self-efficacy). During the parent/student-led LAP conferences,

parents used many words to describe their children's behavior after experiencing a LAP conference, such as pride, driven, ambition, and interested. One parent, for example, felt that the LAP process gave her son the incentive to learn on his own: "...all he does is ask questions and the basic question why this is happening and what's that, you know how does it work?" This parent also shared, "...to reach a great goal you have to have little steps and little steps are motivation." Students were motivated to show their parents the work they had completed. Ezell et al. (1999) also found that parents perceived that their children left portfolio conferences fully motivated to improve their work and to practice for the next portfolio conference. These researchers reported that after using portfolios, students in their study appeared to be more motivated to learn.

Cate provides an example of this increased motivation and confidence. She arrived at both parent/student-led LAP conferences feeling confident because it was clear that she understood she would share her LAP with her parents, read a document that she picked out, and talk about how her work was progressing. In fact, Cate's father noticed something new about his daughter and shared, "She's driven, nothing will stop her." The parent/student-led LAP conferences allowed Cate to actively participate by sharing her progress using her LAP as her documentation to show her parents what she had achieved. This study showed that parents not only witnessed their children's increased confidence but also their children's feelings about learning took a further step toward believing in their own competence (i.e., self-efficacy). This increased motivation and self-efficacy parents witnessed in their children's behavior impacted parents' expectations of their children in a positive way. Clearly, the process of using LAPs in the classroom not only increased the parents' understanding of their child's progress and skills in the area of literacy but it also invited them to actively participate in this process.

Outcomes for the teacher. As part of this study I implemented a reflective teaching journal with the objective of documenting my teaching experiences during the year. My goal was to discuss any instructional adjustments that were necessary to insure individual student progress in the area of literacy development. A prominent theme of discovery regarding the information revealed during the LAP process informed my instructional practice, supported by the development of lesson enhancements (e.g., using creative visual prompts) and curriculum support modifications (e.g., current events activity). The following outcomes resulted from using the LAP process (i.e., the focus on gathering student information) and its influence on my teaching decisions by: (a) helping me gain a deeper understanding of my students as learners (i.e., their attitudes toward reading, how the students learned, their reading interests); (b) providing a better understanding of the importance of ongoing dialogue; and (c) allowing me to observe the power of reflection.

The first outcome from using the LAP process was its influence on my teaching decisions by helping me gain a deeper understanding of my students as learners. I found that the organization of the LAP process provided a structured plan that proved to be very beneficial because the information helped to develop individualized instruction within the first week of school. By using information provided by parents who completed questionnaires focused on their children's literacy development and reading level information taken from the initial formal reading assessment (i.e., DRA2) instruction was quickly focused on student progress. The results of informal reading assessments (i.e., Interest Inventories) and informal writing (i.e., Spelling Inventories) were also taken during the first week of school. The LAP process provided a strong foundation for developing the learning environment and gave me insight to better understand my

students as learners in the key areas of attitudes toward reading, how the students learn, and their reading interests.

One key area of information obtained dealt with how the students perceived reading. This information focused more on the affective factors that influence students' attitudes toward reading. McKenna and Stahl (2009) wrote that our attitudes toward reading are shaped by the following; (a) each and every reading experience; (b) our beliefs about what will happen when we open a book; and (c) our beliefs about how those we hold in high regard feel about reading (p. 204). As the LAP process unfolded, the knowledge of how my students perceived reading (e.g., apprehensive to take risks) helped me to remember the factors that shape attitudes toward reading when both developing reading lessons and delivering the instruction.

The second key area of information was gathered through the bi-weekly reading and Writing Conference for Reading Responses embedded within the LAP process. The conference questions promoted discussion between the students and me. Through this discussion about how they (the students) would develop goals to improve their reading and writing skills, it provided insight into how the students learn. One example of this occurred when Karl and Cate shared that it was easier for them to understand the story they were reading when it had pictures for them to see.

Students felt comfortable with the routine set up in the bi-weekly reading and Writing Conference for Reading Responses and were more willing to share information through that discussion format. I learned that my students were having difficulty understanding how nonfiction books were organized and that one of my students really did not understand how to tell the difference between some short vowels when she completed sorting words by short vowel sound. Discussions with the students embedded within the LAP process during bi-weekly

conferences helped me gain a deeper understanding of how students learned and that information allowed me to make instructional changes based on the needs of a student.

Karoly and Franklin (1996) also found information obtained from portfolios useful in working with a student identified as having a behavior disorder. They noted that using information provided from a portfolio created a fresh analysis of the student's behavior. This new perspective resulted from the discussions that took place between the student's teachers and social worker when they reviewed that student's portfolio and shared their observations. They made modifications to this student's instructional environment by giving him more opportunities for movement during their class periods and allowing him to make some choices when he planned his work. The researchers found that the work this student placed in his portfolio helped his teachers see how well the student was able to compose written assignments, skills (e.g., his unique skill of organizing a task) that may have been overlooked. Karoly and Franklin found that performance-based assessments (i.e., portfolios) highlighted both the "academic and personal strengths of students – strengths that may be overlooked or even judged pathological when viewed exclusively through the lens of traditional psychometric measures" (p. 186).

Teachers in Benson and Smith's (1998) study also used data taken from portfolios to help guide their future skill lessons for elementary school students. In this study, researchers worked with four first grade teachers who found that using portfolios in their classrooms provided pertinent information about their students that encouraged the teachers to make changes to their instructional practices (e.g., providing guided and center activities). Also revealed by the teachers in this study was the theme of communication and awareness that kept occurring after implementing portfolios in their classrooms. Daily feedback in the form of discussions with the students when working with portfolios also changed how a teacher working with eight

elementary school students identified with disabilities in the Thompson and Baumgartner (2008) study instructed a writing assignment.

This theme of communication through discussion also emerged in Ezell et al.'s (1999) study when individual student communication emerged as a result of surveys, interviews, and observations. When working with students identified with ID," the teachers expressed that students were more excited to share their accomplishments and even more willing to collaborate" when they were working with portfolios (p. 458). Discussion within the process of working with portfolios allowed the teachers in the Ezell et al.'s study to also make instructional changes based on their increased understanding of their students as learners. Clearly, the LAP process embedded with that continuous communication element provided me the time to assess realistic and meaningful daily literacy tasks, provided ongoing and multiple opportunities for observation and assessment, and informed my instruction and curriculum placing the children at the center of the educational process.

The third key area of information that was gathered when working through the LAP process was the increased knowledge about my students' interests in the area of literacy. This knowledge was used to make instructional changes to lessons, such as the changes that motivated Cate to write a fairy tale and present her story to our class. Through my ongoing discussions with Cate about things she would like to write about she shared that she loved going to Las Vegas with her family. After working with Cate's mother, we soon had pictures of Cate with our classroom's stuffed duck named Gus at various sites in Las Vegas giving Cate the visual prompts she needed to write a fairy tale. For the first time, Cate had her motivation to write. The increased knowledge pertaining to student interests that arose from the portfolio process was also found by Ezell et al. (1999). Teachers in that study felt that portfolios helped them identify

student interests. Teachers indicated that they used their students' interests to help guide their instruction. Ezell et al. shared that one teacher commented, "They learn more if it is something that is of interest to them" (p. 460).

The second outcome resulting from using the LAP process was the increased understanding of the importance of ongoing dialogue. The constant input of information provided through also ongoing conversations driven by the LAP process became a continuous opportunity to evaluate student progress and make instructional changes. As the teacher, I was able to make changes and adjustments to the instruction making sure they mastered key elements of literacy. This finding aligns with those from prior research on portfolios. The caregivers in Campbell et al.'s (2001) study, working with young children in a daycare facility, revealed that engaging in the process of developing individual portfolios helped caregivers see the "whole child" they worked with rather than only looking at the child's difficult behavior or deficits based on disability labels. This change in perspective was also noted in the Karoly and Franklin (1996) study. These researchers found traditional assessment results of their participant with a behavior disorder to be in direct conflict with his portfolio assessment results.

I found that the ongoing dialogue with students that was a part of the LAP process began to focus more on helping students think through how they completed their work using strategies and tools they could use to improve their work, rather than just reacting to the grade that was placed on the assignment. It was what the students had learned that began to influence my teaching decisions, not the score they received on the assignment. Erickson, Hatch, and Clendon (2010) refer to this as providing informative feedback because "it focuses on understanding how the student accomplished the task rather than on the final results of completing the task" (p. 13). This changed my priority in grading to make sure I provided immediate feedback so students

could review their work, discuss how they could improve that work, and then strive to do a better job on the next daily assignment.

The quality of the participating students' work improved because they had they knew what they could do to improve the next assignment (e.g., ask for help, use personal dictionary). Students were beginning to not only understand themselves as learners; they were taking ownership in their learning. Ezell et al. (1999) also found that the teachers in their study indicated that they noticed this increase in the pride their students took when completing their academic work. They indicated that their "students appeared to be more eager to share their accomplishments and were more willing to strive for better quality of work" (p. 459). In fact, all of the teachers in the Ezell et al. study "reported that they had noticed their students becoming more autonomous" (p. 459). Similar to the findings in this case study, Ezell et al. found that teachers attributed students taking ownership for their learning to the students' involvement in the portfolio assessment process. Benson and Smith (1998) also found that teachers in their study felt that using portfolios enabled their first grade students to become more articulate about themselves as learners.

Another benefit of the ongoing dialogue created within the LAP process was that conversations were concentrated on improving instruction. The students in this case study began to positively respond to my feedback during the discussions that helped them think through how they completed their work. During the conversations, students began to understand the various parts of literacy learning correctly using words like fluency and comprehension to describe their improvement. When they began writing reflections on their graded assignments and felt they could improve that assignment, students were encouraged to take the opportunity to make those improvements. During the time of this study there were only a few instances where students

wanted to redo an assignment, but this approach seemed to nudge them toward taking steps toward ownership of their learning. Students were beginning explore the idea of self-evaluation. Similarly, Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) found that using portfolios with female high school students in an English as a foreign language program (EFL) was an integral part of the students' learning. The portfolios provided the high school students with opportunities to be aware of and overcome their academically based weaknesses through self-evaluation of their work.

Simply, through the LAP process, students in my classroom began to focus on how they completed an assignment rather than just focusing on the final results of the completed assignment. Ezell et al. (1999) found that teachers in their study reported that using portfolios with their students with ID was important because portfolios focused more on their students' abilities rather than their disabilities. This finding was also revealed in the current study because the LAP process not only focused on gathering student information but also on recognizing student progress.

The third outcome resulting from using the LAP process was my observation of the power of reflection. In this study, the LAP process, combined with my reflective teaching journal, helped me continually analyze my teaching strengths and decisions I made regarding my instruction. Ways of enhancing, changing, or even exploring methods to teach students' specific skills was addressed in lessons and even changed if needed. Lessons that emphasized the importance of reading by linking it with everyday activities (e.g., getting a license to drive, reading a menu) were evaluated and implemented. Ways to link the core reading program's words to a writing activity to help students generalize using the words they had worked on was explored. My teaching methods were challenged to find new ways to measure comprehension skills and in preparation for the mandated standardized testing my focus on writing instruction

changed by having the students write extended writing responses when completing the LAP bi-weekly writing activity so they would have the needed practice. The power of reflection was revealed throughout my reflective teaching journal, increasing my awareness to make important instructional changes as the year progressed, but my biggest teaching challenge became evident when my students began to complete their written reflections of the work samples they placed in their LAPs.

Data revealed that student reflections began to change from expressing negative feelings toward reading and writing when looking at their work as “something I can’t do” to more positive feelings when looking at their work as “something I can fix”. As written in my reflective teaching journal, the process of teaching students how to reflect on the work they had already completed became quite a challenge. I knew that it was an important skill for students to learn in order to effectively assess their own work. After lessons were gathered and then implemented, students began to strive to improve their grades by either redoing their work or correcting it but I cannot say the instructional changes I made in teaching students how to use reflection as a method of self-assessment directly impacted this change in their behavior.

Implications for Practice

As Howard Gardner (1984) shared, “Only if we expand and reformulate our view of what counts as human intellect will we be able to devise more appropriate ways of assessing it and more effective ways of educating it” (p. 4). With public education shifting to a standards or outcomes based system holding both students and teachers responsible for learning it would seem that it is essential to include them in the assessment process. The findings in this study suggest that using literacy assessment portfolios with students identified with disabilities allowed student involvement in the assessment process of their own work and resulted in their motivation

to learn. Through the process of self-assessing their progress such action resulted in them taking more and more ownership of their learning. Their involvement within the assessment process with a focus of gathering evidence of their accomplishments, allowed them to learn how to think about their learning and how to self-assess clearly, key components of metacognition (Davies and Le Mahieu, 2003).

One implication for practice emerging from the study findings is to consider use of alternative assessments. This study revealed that using alternative assessments (i.e., classroom-based portfolios) in conjunction with standardized assessments could yield a more balanced presentation of what students can do and could allow comparison of how the two assessment approaches compared to each other. Given the discussions about the limitations of standardized assessments and their potentially negative influence on the instructional process, it would seem to be more appropriate to promote the use of portfolios to supplement information about a student's progress rather to rely solely on information gathered from standardized assessments. This later information provides little that is helpful to improve teaching.

It is also concerning that one of the unintended consequences of standardized testing is an increasing lack of focus on the individual student. Combining both portfolio and standardized assessments allows more individualized achievement to be acknowledged. Using the LAP process in classrooms may give educators a more holistic snapshot of student progress allowing them to better pinpoint skill re-teaching opportunities that were demonstrated in this case study.

Keeping in mind that research has thus far not shown that one single approach to teaching reading is successful with all children (Chall, 1967), using the LAP process may insure that a more individualized curriculum could be implemented that provides the necessary skill development some students may need to find academic success. Educators should consider

organizing their instruction using the LAP process that would allow for the incorporation of mandated reading programs as well as supplementing that instruction using other researched methods. This method could help customize instruction to provide the needed individualized approach to teaching students identified with disabilities how to read and write. Clearly, as was demonstrated in this study, classroom-based portfolios (i.e., the LAP) provided multiple ways of assessing students' learning over time and provided needed skill development that allowed myself, as the teacher, to take the opportunity to bring the focus on the "individual" back into the assessment process.

A second implication for practice arising from the study findings is the incorporation of opportunities for students to reflect on and self-evaluate their work. Students in this study became aware of the quality of their work and began to use self-directed skills to actively apply strategies to improve their performance. Educators should consider providing many opportunities across the school year for students to discuss selected work products with the teacher and each other. As in this study, this may require careful scaffolding on the part of the teacher to support this emerging self-reflection, but the result will be a deeper understanding of their strengths and areas for growth in relation to their literacy skills.

A final implication for practice was found in the results of this case study that suggest using literacy assessment portfolios with its structured system of gathering information about student progress, positively affected instruction. This was because the LAP's primary focus always came back to how to support student learning. Implementing the LAP process not only helped inform instruction and curriculum, it placed students at the center of the educational process. It allowed the student, parent, and teacher the opportunity to evaluate the student's strengths and weaknesses with its ongoing opportunities for observation, assessment, and then

reflection. A partnership of collaboration began to appear between students, their parents, and myself, as the teacher focused on student progress. The continuous conversation format embedded in the LAP process by using the LAP process promoted this partnership. Students were given a voice to explain how and what they were doing. Parents witnessed their children demonstrating the progress they were making by using the LAP as evidence of their accomplishments. As the teacher in this study, I was given the opportunity to work through the LAP process watching my students take this ownership with their attitudes toward reading and writing changing from initial negative feelings toward a concentrated effort toward improving their work.

Most importantly, the LAP process seemed to change the perspectives of the students, the parents, and the teacher. The LAPs reinforced the idea that academic deficits could be changed, and we had the evidence to prove it - leaving everyone involved in this process feeling they had participated in that accomplishment. This implies that being involved in the LAP process used as both a learning and assessment tool provided students identified with disabilities with the opportunity to experience successful learning.

Implications for Future Research

Since there are a limited number of peer-reviewed research studies pertaining to using portfolio assessment in a special education classroom, more extensive and ongoing research needs to occur as a critical component in the process toward validation. In this case study it was shown that using portfolio assessment in the classroom was more than just a procedure for collecting samples of student work. Instead, the process yielded important information about students that facilitated improved instruction. Studies further exploring the use of portfolios in

special education classrooms should focus on other academic areas besides literacy (e.g., mathematics, daily living skills). Doing so could be quite beneficial to improve student learning.

Research exploring the time required to implement portfolios in the classroom and conduct portfolio conferences would also be quite beneficial. Ezell et al., (1990) and Hall and Hewitt-Garvis (2000) both reported that teachers expressed concerns that using classroom-based portfolios was time-consuming. All of Ezell's (1999) teachers, for example, expressed that portfolios involved extra time for conferences and the overall organizational tasks. Hall and Hewitt-Garvis reported that 64% of the fifth grade teachers who participated in their study spoke of time restraints in applying portfolios in the classroom. Research that would explore methods to reduce the time needed to implement portfolios in the classroom could provide important information that might lead to greater use of these assessment approaches.

Developing a longitudinal study that followed students across several grades would be useful to find if using portfolios could help acquire a better understanding of students' learning and achievement trends. Such research could provide a glimpse into what learning looks like when reviewing student work samples and whether or not student interest when working with portfolios fades over time. It might be beneficial to see if students continue to develop abilities toward becoming more independent and self-directed learners across a longer period of time.

Studies that include students identified with disabilities designed to explore if using portfolios might impact the expectations of teachers, related service staff members, and general educators would also be useful (e.g., similar to Campbell et al. (2001)'s study in a childcare setting). If such a study showed that the expectations of general educators toward students identified with disabilities improved after working with them in a portfolio process, what type of impact might that have on their willingness to provide inclusive education? Would general

educators feel more confident when modifying work when working with students identified with disabilities? Could educational teams be developed to discuss ways to increase student learning after using the information provided in a student's classroom-based portfolio? Finally, when using classroom-based portfolios over several years continue to raise students' expectations toward learning?

A study exploring if using classroom-based portfolios with students identified with a disability could further enhance communication among teachers; students and parents could also provide information useful for instruction. For example, could using classroom-based portfolios impact parent involvement in the school setting? Could this increase in communication about student strengths and weaknesses continue to impact student learning? Could classroom-based portfolios be used as a transition tool communicating student progress from year to year, school to school while using student work samples as evidence of student progress?

Finally, with the recent moves requiring schools to adopt comprehensive district-wide reading programs, studies using portfolios could help educators identify and even determine effectiveness of that reading program when working with specific populations of students. Such studies could explore the effectiveness of learning strategies/interventions used within that adopted reading program. Effectiveness of such programs could also be examined by focusing on how and if using an adopted reading program combined with classroom-based portfolios encourages students to become independent readers. Research questions might include: could using classroom-based portfolios give special educators the opportunity to not only implement district mandated reading programs but also incorporate other aspects of literacy development (e.g., sight word development, spelling) providing a more holistic and individualized curriculum for students?

Limitations

This case study has some limitations that must be considered in weighing its findings. Since the data in this case study were collected in my special education classroom with myself in the role as the teacher-participant and observer, it may be that my personal involvement in the study distorted the way I perceived the events and situations that were described. There is also a recognized bias based on my teacher/student working relationship that could distort my observations. As the researcher in this case study my challenge involved my critical self-scrutiny or active reflexivity. In my attempts to be neutral, objective, and detached, I found myself frequently questioning my role as the researcher in this study and how this role impacted the knowledge and evidence revealed in the study.

Related to the issue of time management, within this case study, the WRITE conferences were designed to review a student's LAP with the student in preparation of parent/student-led LAP conferences. It might have been more efficient if these conferences were also focused on teaching students how to complete their Student Work Sample Comment Sheets. Clearly, the art of reflection was quite a challenge to teach. Finally, this case study required a lot of time to prepare documents (i.e., student reading materials, informal assessment materials). Early preparation was the key to successful implementation.

Conclusions

This case study revealed that student learning improved when students were actively involved in the classroom assessment process using classroom-based portfolios. It was also revealed that students' involvement increased their motivation to learn. Through the continuous opportunities for observation and assessment, students were able to adjust their learning behaviors and therefore improve their academic performance. In essence, students learned how

to learn. This also seemed to impact their quality of work and change their expectations of their own performance. Having the opportunity to share their progress with others gave them a sense of purpose and even a sense of responsibility to not only complete their work but also check their work for mistakes before turning it in for evaluation.

Also revealed in this case study was that parents began to better understand what their children were learning. They began to appreciate instructional approaches that were used and supported those approaches at home. When compared to prior experiences of using standardized assessment results, classroom-based portfolios provided parents with a more complete snapshot of their children's growth and deeper understanding of their child's strengths and areas for improvement. This process of using classroom-based portfolios seemed to encourage the involvement of parents as members of the learning community with the constant exchange of ideas and information they could use to better support their children's learning.

Finally, this case study allowed me, as the teacher, to better understand my students as learners by working through the LAP process. Discussions within the classroom focused on student progress and how this progress could be improved. I learned what "evidence of learning" looked like by reviewing student work samples over time. The process of using classroom-based portfolios created a much needed and positive partnership between the student, the parents, and the teacher with one goal: student progress toward academic achievement. "Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand" (Chinese proverb).

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Table 1: Research Matrix for Review of Literature

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
Barootchi, N. K., Keshavarz, M. H. (2002)	To establish whether portfolio assessment contributes to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' achievement and their feeling of responsibility towards monitoring their progress and whether or not there is a correlation between portfolio assessment scores and those of teacher-made tests.	60 Iranian 16-year-old female high-school sophomores.	Portfolio assessment evaluated by a grading checklist, achievement test, satisfaction questionnaire designed to retrieve the attitude of participants towards their learning experiences within these classes.	Group design of 2 groups (experimental and control).	Showed correlation between the teacher-made achievement tests scores and portfolio assessment scores ($t=3.47$). The experimental group student mean achievement test scores were significantly higher than those of the control group.
Benson, T. R. & Smith, L. J. (1998)	To describe teachers' experiences as they attempted to implement portfolio assessment in a first grade setting: To investigate ways teachers utilized portfolios in their classrooms.	Four teachers with 1 st grade classrooms.	Anecdotal records from workshops	Qualitative Descriptive Study	Portfolios helped communicate progress more effectively with parent and increase student awareness of their child's literacy development and their child's self-assessment skills. Portfolios encouraged teacher's to make changes to their instructional practices.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
Campbell, P. H. Milbourne, S. A. & Silverman, C. (2001)	To explore the impact of a specifically designed professional development activity on the attitudes and perspectives of childcare providers.	65 urban, infant toddler childcare staff members.	Ratings of pre- and post- project stories. Quality ratings of portfolios (i.e., 1 for outstanding, 2 for good, 3 for reasonable, and 4 for less than reasonable.	Pre- and post-project scores. Thematic analysis of stories.	Significant difference (t=6.217, p=0.00) between total numbers of strengths- based themes between pre-and post-scores. There were significant changes for the themes of disability, general, and context. There was no significant correlation between the quality ratings and the amount of change in pre- and post- story scores. Qualitative results showed that post-story reflected a greater sense of competence on the part of caregivers. Caregivers also placed more emphasis on the “whole child” rather than just development or behavior. Portfolio project increased the caregiver’s involvement with families.
Ezell, D., Klein, C. E. & Ezell-Powell, S. (1999)	To analyze the possible role that portfolios may play in the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities.	The number of student participants was not noted in study.	Surveys with demographic and open-ended questions. Interviews of	Qualitative – Constant comparison method for data analysis.	Portfolios enhanced student’s expressive language skills. Teacher conferences were enhanced by providing a

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
		Student participants were identified with intellectual disabilities. There were 27 teacher participants and 5 parent participants.	teachers pertaining to their use of portfolios. Informal observations noting portfolio implementation within classrooms.		visual representation (i.e., portfolios) and were useful tools for meeting and explaining the attainment of IEP goals. Portfolios helped increase self-esteem, self-advocacy and goal setting skills, in making decision and choices and in student self-reflection and self-assessment. Teachers found that it took a lot of time to plan, spend time explaining to student and parents of the portfolio process. All teachers shared that using portfolios involved a lot of time keeping records of the student's work and prompt student's to chart their academic growth.
Hall, B. W. & Hewitt-Gervais, C. M. (2000)	To examine the instructional, learning, and assessment roles of student portfolios within elementary classrooms.	Teachers in 13 schools, constituting a representative sample of the 26 elementary schools in a	Teacher survey questionnaire with categorical response options (yes or no) and multipoint scales, interview questions with	Quantitative: two-factor multivariate analysis of variance (Manovas).	Statistically significant relation between teaching, level of teachers, and content of the performance portfolios.($p < .0354$). 78% of items were

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
		midsize Florida school district.	probing areas such as criteria for includes of materials in portfolios, role of portfolios is grading, impact on student's self-evaluation, work habits, motivation, and academic performance. Also impact on teacher's planning and delivery, and impact on teacher's communication and interaction with parents.		written work. There was no significant effect found for classroom environment. There was a significant relationship between teaching level and access to performance portfolios, ratings on the importance of portfolio purposes, ratings of the importance of performance portfolios, and ratings of the importance of working portfolios for the specific classroom functions, frequency of use, and the importance of selected elements for evaluating portfolios. Data gathered from interviews, when asked whether the use of portfolios has impacted their students' skills in self-reflection – 59% of the interviewees responded affirmatively. In the area of communications with parents, students, and other teachers – 89% of

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
Karoly, J. C. & Franklin, C. (1996)	To demonstrate how portfolio assessment can improve the strengths-based assessment of a child's academic competencies using a case study conducted by	A 10 year old African American male special education student initially	Three 90-minute observations and three interviews. Portfolios consisted of three notebooks of documents with student work	Case Study	the interviewees spoke of the value of portfolios in parent conferencing and related activities with parents. 59% spoke approvingly of portfolios when used in parent-teacher communication. 66% of the interviewees expressed the belief that portfolios helped in the area of communication with other teachers. 64% of teachers reported that portfolios had a positive effect on their teaching. 59% reported an impact of portfolios on their student assessment techniques while 70% reported using portfolios in the process of deriving grades for report cards and progress cards. Student identified with behavior disorder. Student's frequent fantasizing – regarded as pathological in the traditional assessment – was regarded as an asset

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
	an associate psychologist.	diagnosed by another school district as having dysthymia and overanxious disorder. Two teacher participants and social worker were involved.	samples. Woodcock-Johnson Battery and portfolio assessment.		for him in the classroom. Such behavior seemed to be the student's unusual way of daydreaming for a written assignment. Portfolio assessment uncovered that all three teachers had built in opportunities for the student for movement during their class periods and some choices about planning his work to insure his academic success. There were direct conflicts with results of standardized assessments and portfolio results.
Rhine, S. & Smith, E. (2001)	To develop assessment tools that were authentic such as portfolios to be used in the classroom	Two first grade classrooms for 18 weeks.	Surveys, interviews, performance assessment (e.g. portfolios), rubrics, checklists, informal observations, test observations.	Action Research	Performance assessments (e.g. portfolios) showed fewer instances of anxious behaviors. Academic information about the child was provided for teachers immediately following the performance assessment. Most parents indicated that the authentic assessments

Study	Purpose	Participants	Measures	Design	Results
Thompson, S. & Baumgartner, L. (2008)	To explore the use of portfolios in an elementary classroom from the dual perspectives of the students with disabilities and of the teacher.	Eight student participants in the 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4 th grade. One teacher participant who was the second author of study. There were two teaching assistants who facilitated the interviews.	Research journal completed by teacher, semi-structured interviews with individual students that are tape-recorded and professionally transcribed.	Qualitative exploratory case study.	<p>were either very beneficial or somewhat beneficial in helping them learn about their child's academic progress.</p> <p>It was found that portfolios are time-consuming but researchers shared they had inadvertently placed too much emphasis on portfolio appearance rather than portfolio function. Students reported feelings of satisfaction regarding their portfolios even in areas they found challenging (i.e., writing and comprehension skills). Students had trouble reflecting on the learning activities. Recommended future research focused on teaching metacognition within the portfolios for students with disabilities.</p>

Table 2: Data Stored in Individual Student Files

Type of Item/Category	Description	Time Frame of Collection
Background Information	Taken from student participant's IEP	December
	Parent Questionnaires: Getting to Know Your Child, Getting to Know Your Child's Language and Literacy Practices	December
Formal Reading Assessments	Direct Reading Assessment – DRA2	Two to three times
	Qualitative Reading Inventory – QRI-5	One to two times

Table 3: Data Stored in Student Literacy Assessment Portfolio (LAP)

Type of Item/Category	Description	Time Frame of Collection
LAP Introduction letter	Student composed letter introducing purpose of LAP (i.e., date entries and compare) and table of contents	Completed in December
Student LAP Reflection	Student composed a written piece describing their interests and attitude and their expectation for the school year in the area of literacy.	Reviewed December, May
Reading Log	Logging type of book (i.e., fiction, nonfiction), date read, title of book, and the author of the book. Also there was a Reading Counts graph with three genres (i.e., Land of Enchantment, Newbery, Biography) and stickers toward earning a t-shirt.	Ongoing from December through May
Student Work Samples	Student Comment Sheets attached an example of their work in the area of literacy.	Added to LAP on a weekly basis starting in December through May
Informal Reading Assessments	Bi-weekly fiction and nonfiction reading sheets with comprehension assessments (i.e., retelling rubric, multiple-choice test) and reading analysis.	Bi-weekly starting in January through the end of the year
	Interest Inventory	January, May
	Reading Attitude Survey	January, May

Type of Item/Category	Description	Time Frame of Collection
Informal Writing Assessments	Bi-weekly Writing Conference for Reading Responses after students responded in writing to an extended response question related to the book assigned (i.e., fiction, nonfiction)	Bi-weekly starting in January through the end of the year
	Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory Feature Guide	Two times
	Writing Project Conferences completed after each writing project (i.e., informational report, fairy tale, and science experiment). Each project includes a writing rubric and a presentation rubric.	March, April, May
Family Sharing Response	A section of the LAP that parents constructed, dated, and signed notes reflecting their child's progress as seen in the LAP.	March, May
WRITE Conferences for LAP	Written Reflections of Integrated learning for Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) Conferencing Guide were completed with each student-participant after reviewing their work in LAP, bi-weekly reading/ Writing Conference for Reading Responses that apply and contents in LAP (i.e., LAP Introduction Letter, Student	Before student-led parent/teacher conferences

Type of Item/Category	Description	Time Frame of Collection
Quarterly Assessment Summary	LAP Reflections, Student Reading Log (i.e., # of book read, book club status). A summary of student background information, formal assessments, informal assessments.	March, May
Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers	Used as a form to check quality assurance making sure that the portfolio focused on the process of assessment rather than just a depository of student work.	January, April, May

Table 4: Additional Types of Data Collected

Type of Item/Category	Description	Time Frame of Collection
A reflective teaching journal completed by teacher-participant	The objective was to focus on what the teacher-participant saw in the classroom that was related to literacy, the progress students were making, and the instructional decisions that were made as the year progressed.	December through May
Initial and Final structured interviews with parent-participants.	Interviews have protocols to follow with 4 questions. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the teacher-participant.	December and May
Parent/student-led LAP Conferences during Parent Teacher conference cycle	Focused on the progress of individual students using both the LAP and the Standardized Based Progress Report. Parents gave oral permission for conferences to be audiotaped as a way to support note taking by the teacher-participant.	Parent/student-led LAP Conference #1 March Parent/student-led LAP Conference #2 May – this was combined with final parent interview
Database File developed using FileMaker Pro 10	Set up within three areas of literacy (i.e., reading, writing, word study) and had assignments such as fiction & nonfiction book conferences, written extended response question conferences, homework, writing prompts, spelling sorts, writing rights, and decoding sheets. They were student work samples scanned into files.	Ongoing throughout year.

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Appendix A

Initial Interview Protocol: Parent Participant

Opening Statement: First, I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As I explained to you before you gave your permission to participate, I am conducting a research project focused on how Literacy Assessment Portfolios can be used to assess and guide literacy development of students with mild, moderate or severe disabilities. As a parent participant in this study, the information you provide through this interview is valuable. Within this research, you will be identified with a pseudonym so your true identity will never be revealed. The notes from this study, audio-recording tapes, and transcripts of this interview will be locked in my office and used as part of my data analysis. Remember that you are free to withdraw your participation in this research at any time. I will publish the results from this research as part of my dissertation. Do you have any questions or comments so far?

- 1.) What kind of information have you received in the past about your child's literacy development and skills?

- 2.) Tell me how you felt about this? What did you learn from this information?

- 3.) What would you like to have learned about your child?

- 4.) What kind of information would you liked to have received? How would you have liked to receive this information?

Thank you again, for participating in this discussion. Do you have any remaining questions that I can answer?

Appendix B

Final Interview Protocol: Parent Participant

Opening Statement: First, I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As I explained to you before you gave your permission to participate, I am conducting a research project focused on how Literacy Assessment Portfolios can be used to assess and guide literacy development of students with mild, moderate or severe disabilities. As a parent participant in this study, the information you provide through this interview is valuable. Within this research, you will be identified with a pseudonym so your true identity will never be revealed. The notes from this study, audio-recording tapes, and transcripts of this interview will be locked in my office and used as part of my data analysis. Remember that you are free to withdraw your participation in this research at any time. I will publish the results from this research as part of my dissertation. Do you have any questions or comments so far?

- 1.) What kind of information have you received this year about your child's literacy development and skills?

- 2.) Tell me how you felt about this? What did you learn from this information?

- 3.) What would you like to have learned this year about your child?

- 4.) What kind of information would you liked to have received? How would you have liked to receive this information?

Thank you again, for participating in this discussion. Do you have any remaining questions that I can answer?

Appendix C

Interest Inventory

Name _____ Date _____ Grade _____

1. Do you like to read? ___ YES ___ SOMETIMES ___ NO

2. How often do you read for pleasure or how often does someone read to you?
 ___ everyday ___ several times a week ___ a few times a week ___ seldom
 ___ never

3. What kind of books do you like to read? (check as many as they pick)
 ___ animal ___ science ___ true stories ___ make-believe stories
 ___ people ___ science fiction ___ mysteries ___ poetry
 ___ funny ___ series ___ myths ___ folktales ___ plays
 ___ jokes ___ books with pictures ___ books without pictures
 ___ chapter books ___ sports ___ dinosaurs ___ comic books

4. Who is your favorite author? _____

5. What is your favorite book? _____

6. What book would you like to read? _____

7. What magazines would you like to read? _____

8. Which do you like best? ___ hardcover books ___ softcover books
 Why? _____

9. What helps you choose a book to read? _____

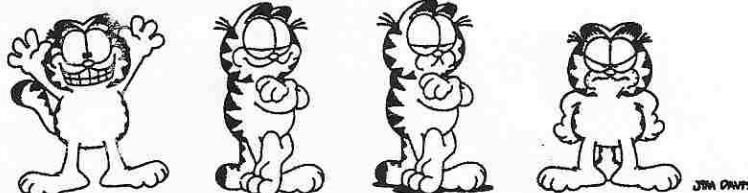
10. Would you like to say anything else about the types of books you like to read?

Appendix D

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

School _____ Grade _____ Name _____

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?



2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?



3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?







4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?







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5. How do you feel about spending free time reading?





6. How do you feel about starting a new book?

7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

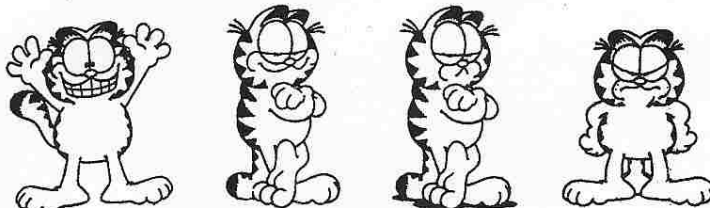
   

8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?

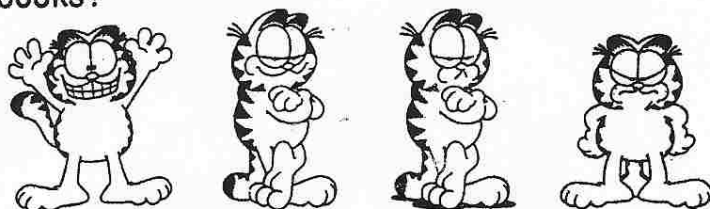
   

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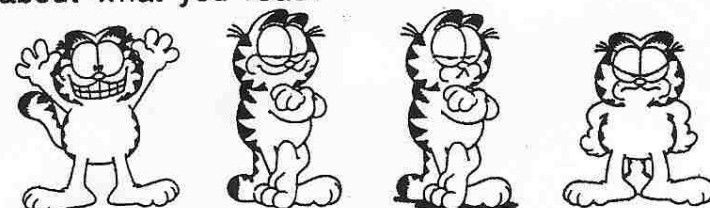
9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?



10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?



11. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?

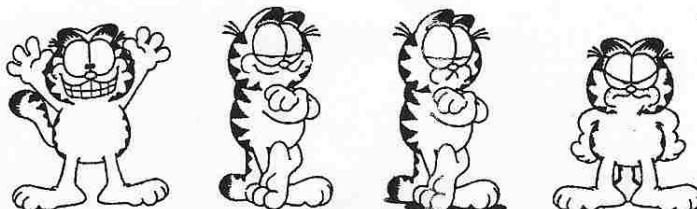


12. How do you feel about doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?



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13. How do you feel about reading in school?



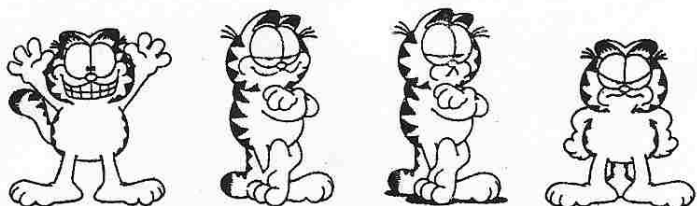
14. How do you feel about reading your school books?



15. How do you feel about learning from a book?

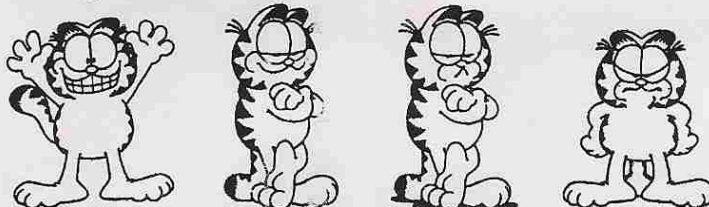


16. How do you feel when it's time for reading class?



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17. How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?



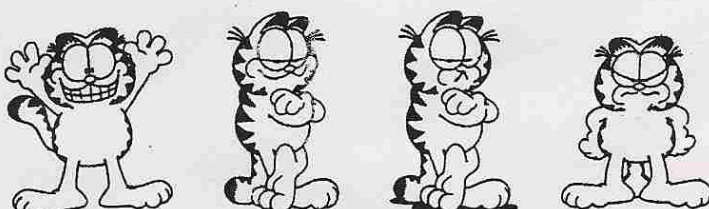
18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?



19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?



20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?



Appendix D – p. 6

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey scoring sheet

Student name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Administration date _____

Scoring guide

4 points	Happiest Garfield
3 points	Slightly smiling Garfield
2 points	Mildly upset Garfield
1 point	Very upset Garfield

Recreational reading

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Raw score: _____

Academic reading

11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Raw score: _____

Full scale raw score (Recreational + Academic): _____

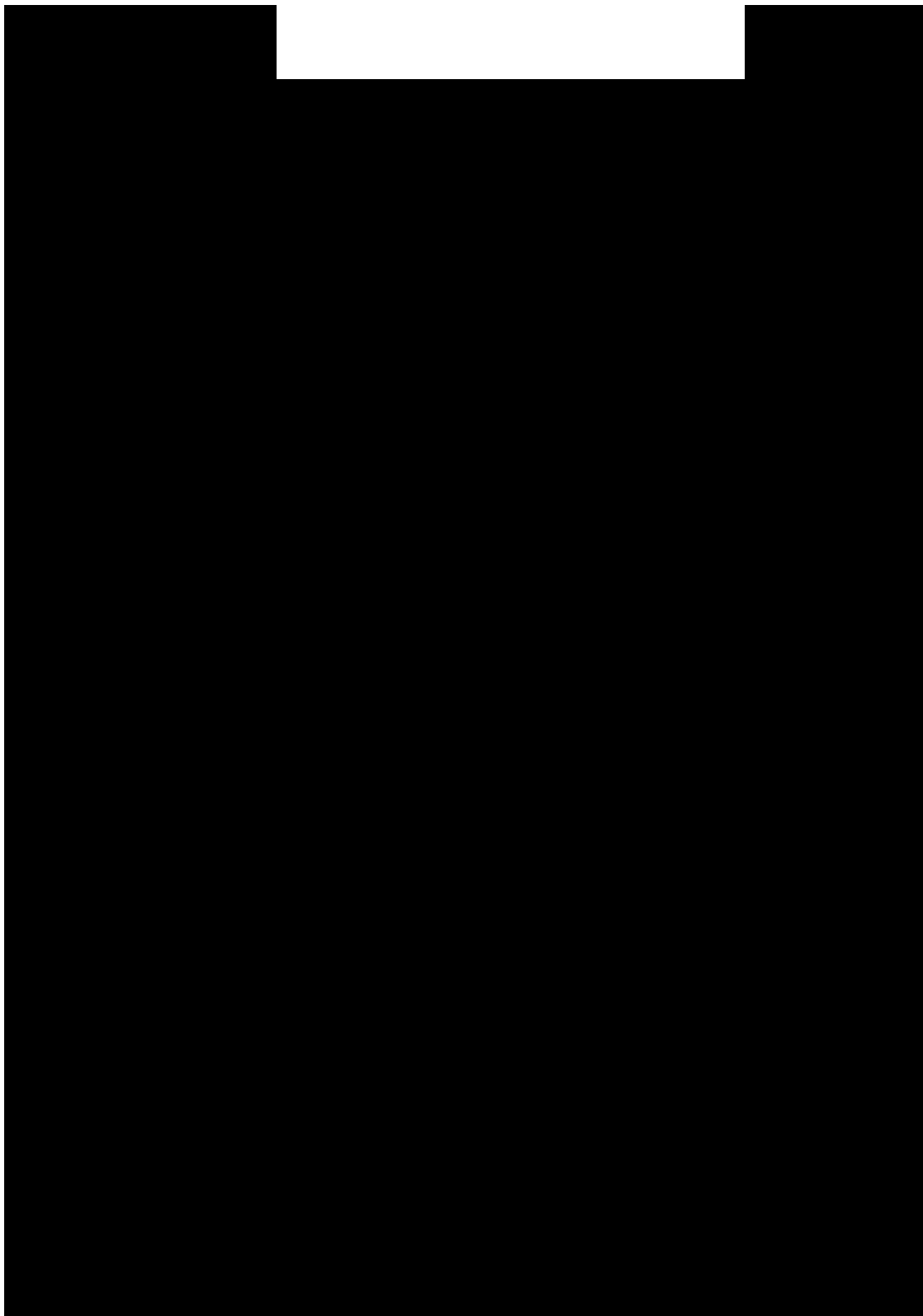
Percentile ranks Recreational

Academic

Full scale

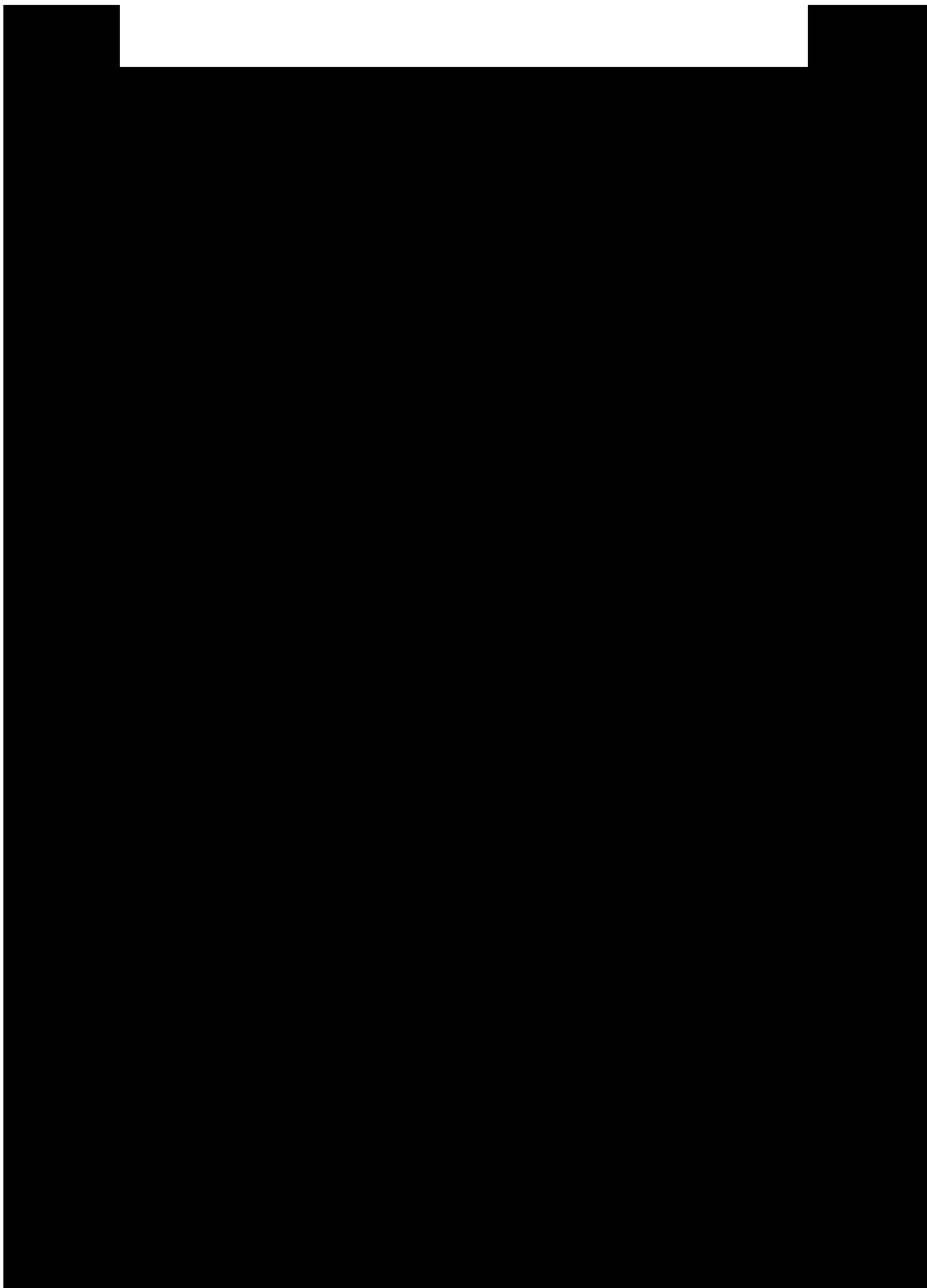
Appendix E

Getting to Know Your Child



Appendix F

Getting to Know Your Child's Language and Literacy Practices



Appendix G**Reading Conference: Fiction**

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of the Book: _____ Reading a-z LEVEL: _____

Author: _____

Directions:

Put a check if the student can answer the following questions:

- _____ 1. How did you decide to pick this book to read?
- _____ 2. Was this book *easy*, *just right*, or *challenging* for you to read?
- _____ 3. Describe the setting in the story.
- _____ 4. Describe the main character, and give at least three telling details.
- _____ 5. What do you think was the main problem in the story?
- _____ 6. How was the problem solved?
- _____ 7. What was your favorite part of this book?
- _____ 8. Did anything surprise you in the story?
- _____ 9. How would you rate this book? *OK GOOD VERY GOOD FANTASTIC*
- _____ 10. What book will you choose to read next? Title: _____
- _____ 11. What reading goal would you like to make when reading a book that is fiction for the next conference?



Appendix H**Reading Conference: Nonfiction**

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of the Book: _____ Reading a-z LEVEL: _____

Author: _____

Directions:

Put a check if the student can answer the following questions:

- _____ 1. How did you decide to put this book to read?
- _____ 2. What did you like best about this book?
- _____ 3. Tell about four (4) new things you learned.
- _____ 4. What did you notice about the illustrations?
- _____ 5. Would you like to write a special report on this topic in Writer's Workshop?
- _____ 6. What book will you choose to read next?

Book Title: _____

- _____ 7. What reading goals would you like to make for this type of book?
- _____
- _____
- _____



Appendix I
Reading Analysis

DRA Level: _____

Grade Level: _____

- 1.) What did the reader do when unknown words were encountered
(check all that apply).

Made an attempt in these ways:

used meaning cues used structure cues
 used letter/sound cues made repeated tries
 used pictures skipped it and read on
 used memory looked at another source

- 2.) Which cue system did the reader use most often?

- 3.) How often did the reader attempt to self-correct when meaning was not maintained?
(Circle one): *always frequently sometimes seldom never*

- 4.) How often did the reader make repetitions?

(Circle one): *always frequently sometimes seldom never*

- 5.) Did the reader read fluently?

(Circle one): *always frequently sometimes seldom never*

- 6.) Did the reader attend to punctuation?

(Circle one): *always frequently sometimes seldom never*

FLUENCY:

Total words read: _____, # of errors: _____

Total words read - # of errors = # of correct words: _____

Accuracy %: # of correct words/# of words = _____ X 100 = _____ (fluency rate)

COMPREHENSION: *RETELLING WHAT WAS READ (Circle one)*

Outstanding (>50%) Adequate (25%-50%) Inadequate (>25%)

COMMENTS:

Appendix J

Writing Conference For Reading Response

Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of book student read: _____

The student was given three questions to answer in their Reading Response:

- 1.) What connections to you make with the book (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world)?
- 2.) Which character would you like to be in the book? Why?
- 3.) What did you learn after reading the book?

Student's Self-Evaluation (dictated by student):

What do you like about this writing piece?

Did you use your personal Spelling Dictionary or other spelling source?

Did you use your best handwriting skills? _____

Did you check your writing piece for capitals and end points? _____

What would make your writing better?

What type of help do you need to improve in the area of writing?

What writing GOALS you like to make?



Appendix J – p. 2

Teacher's Evaluation:

Writing Stages:

- _____ Emergent: scribbles, recognizes letters and letter names, writes random letters or numbers or copies randomly, displays some knowledge of letter sounds.
- _____ Beginning: sentences are abrupt and choppy, spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors are frequent, components such as title is limited or absent, lack of conclusion.
- _____ Early Developing: repeats sentence patterns, basic grammar and word usage, sentences lack uniformity and complexity, unnecessary ideas and details.
- _____ Developing: writing flows but lacks sentence variation, spelling, grammar, and punctuation generally accurate with few errors, format generally neat, has introduction but it is brief.
- _____ Fluent: writes with a purpose, varies writing, spells most words correctly, usually uses correct capitalization and punctuation, writing flows, organized in a meaningful and an effective way.

Language Mechanics:

- _____ Capitalizes the first word in a sentence
- _____ Capitalizes the word "I"
- _____ Capitalizes names
- _____ Includes correct end punctuation (?.)
- _____ Uses legible handwriting - _____

COMMENTS:

INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS:



Appendix K**Student's Work Sample Comments for LAP**

STUDENT NAME: _____ DATE: _____

WORK SAMPLE: _____

How I did this piece:

What I like about it:

What I wish I could change about it:



Appendix L

Writing Conference for Writing Project #___With Rubrics

Name _____ Date _____

TITLE OF WRITING
PROJECT: _____

Student's Self-Evaluation (dictated by student):

What do you like about this writing project:

What book(s) did you use as sources or inspiration?

Did you use your best handwriting skills? _____

Did you check your writing projects for spelling, capitals, and end points? _____

What do you think would make your writing project better?

What type of props (e.g. posters, items for demonstration) did you use for your presentation?

What type of help do you need to your writing skills?

What do you think is the best thing(s) about your writing project and your presentation?

Appendix L – p. 2

WRITING PROJECT RUBRIC

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Sentence fluency	Every paragraph has sentences that vary in length	Almost all paragraphs have sentences that vary in length	Some sentences vary in length	Sentences rarely vary in length
Grammar & Spelling Conventions	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content
Penmanship	Paper is neatly written or typed with no distracting corrections	Paper is neatly written or typed with 1 or 2 distracting corrections (e.g., messy writing)	The writing is generally readable, but the reader has to exert quite a bit of effort to figure out some of the words	Many words are unreadable OR there are several distracting corrections
Organization	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented/introduced sometimes makes the writing less interesting	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader	Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized
Voice	The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience. The author has taken the ideas and made them “his own”	The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but there is some lack of ownership of the topic	The writer relates some of his own knowledge or experience, but it adds nothing to the discussion of the topic	The writer has not tried to transform the information in a personal way. The ideas and the way they are expressed seem to belong to someone else.

TOTAL SCORE: _____

COMMENTS:

Appendix L – p. 3

WRITING PROJECT PRESENTATION RUBRIC

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Preparedness	Student is completely prepared and has obviously rehearsed	Student seems pretty prepared but might have needed a couple more rehearsals	The student is somewhat prepared, but it is clear that rehearsal was lacking	Student does not seem at all prepared to present
Comprehension of topic	Student is able to accurately answer almost all questions posed by classmates about the topic	Student is able to accurately answer most questions posed by classmates about the topic	Student is able to accurately answer a few questions posed by classmates about the topic	Student is unable to accurately answer questions posed by classmates about the topic
Uses complete sentences when answering questions	Always (99-100% of time) speaks in complete sentences	Mostly (80-98%) speaks in complete sentences	Sometimes (70-80%) speaks in complete sentences	Rarely speaks in complete sentences
Stays on topic	Stays on topic all (100%) of the time	Stays on topic most (99-90%) of the time	Stays on topic some (89%-75%) of the time	It was hard to tell what the topic was
Volume	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members throughout the presentation	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members at least 90% of the time	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members at least 80% of the time	Volume often too soft to be heard by all audience members
Enthusiasm	Facial expressions and body language generate a strong interest and enthusiasm about the topic in others	Facial expressions and body language sometimes generate a strong interest and enthusiasm about the topic in others	Facial expressions and body language are used to try to generate enthusiasm, but seem somewhat awkward	Very little use of facial expressions or body language. Did not generate much interest in topic being presented

TOTAL SCORE: _____

COMMENTS:

Appendix M**Written Reflections of Integrated learning for
Teacher-Student Exchange (WRITE) Conferencing Guide**

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

1.) What is your best work? What makes it so? _____

2.) How does this compare with last month's best work or other work you did not include? _____

3.) After reviewing your Reading Conference/Skill Analysis and your comprehension tests, how do you feel about your reading skills? _____

4.) What are your reading goals for the next month? Is there a strategy you would like to work on? _____

5.) What would you like to improve in your writing? Are you using your writing resources (e.g., personal dictionary, writing checklist)? _____

6.) How can I, the teacher, help you? _____

7.) Since the last conference, what book do you want to discuss because it was (a) so good, (b) so bad, or © so special in some way? _____

8.) What are you most pleased about with regard to your learning? _____

Appendix M – p. 2

9.) What ideas have you been thinking about, or what piece of information have you learned that you want to discuss at the LAP conference?

10.) What would you particularly like to share with your family?

Introduction Letter: _____

Student Reflections: _____

Reading Log: _____

of books read: _____ Book Club Status: _____

Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers: _____



Appendix N

Portfolio Assessment Criteria Checklist for Teachers

Portfolio Components	1st	2nd	3rd	Comments
Shows evidence of literacy development				
Shows students involvement in selection of pieces of work demonstrating learning				
Shows raw data and summarizing data				
Shows no conflict in purposes within the portfolio				
Shows a collection of student work samples throughout school year				
Shows evidence of student involvement in the self-reflection process				
Includes contents different from the cumulative folder				
Includes contents generated from multiple procedures				
Contains the teacher's own instructional reflections				
Shows evidence of teacher and student collaboratively setting goals				
Shows evidence of student-teacher conferences pertaining to portfolio				
Shows student involvement in self-assessment process				
Shows evidence of tasks that were performed in authentic contexts				
Shows that portfolio included a mutually agreed upon criteria for evaluation				

Modified checklist from Ezell, Klein, Ezell-Powell (1999). Empowering students with mental retardation through portfolio assessment: A tool for fostering self-determination skills, *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Development Disabilities*, 34(4), 453-463.

Appendix O

Quarterly Assessment Summary

Background Information:

Document used for Information	What I learned...
IEP Review Date: Reevaluation Date:	
Working File:	
Cum File:	

Formal Assessments:

DRA (Attach DRA2 Continuum)	QRI (Attach QRI Assessment)
Date: _____ Level: _____ Grade: _____	Date: _____ Level: _____ Grade: _____
Reading Engagement score: _____	Total Miscues: _____
Oral Reading score: _____	Total Meaning-Change Miscues: _____
Comprehension score: _____	Accuracy level: _____
Reading Engagement: Score: _____ Level: _____	Acceptability level: _____ -----
Oral Reading Fluency: Score: _____ Level: _____	Comprehension questions: # correct explicit: _____ # correct implicit: _____ Total correct: _____
Comprehension: Score: _____ Level: _____	Comprehension Level: _____ independent _____ instructional _____ frustration
TOTAL: Score: _____ Level: _____	
Comments:	Comments:

Appendix O – p. 2

Informal Assessments:

DOCUMENT	WHAT I LEARNED.....
Interest Inventory	
Elementary Reading Attitude Survey	
Parent Questionnaire: Getting to Know Your Child	
Parent Questionnaire: Getting to Know Your Child's Language and Literacy Practices	
Reading Conferences:	Date: _____ Type of Book: _____
Writing Conference for Reading Response:	

Appendix P

Fiction Retelling Scoring Form

Fiction Retelling Scoring Form

Student's Name _____ Date _____
 Book Title _____ Score _____

Rubric for Scoring Individual Story Elements	
Complete, detailed	3 points
Partial	2 points
Fragmentary (sketchy)	1 point
Inaccurate or not included	0 points

Key Elements	Prompts	0	1	2	3
Beginning	How does the story begin?				
Setting	Where does the story occur?				
Characters	Who are the main characters? Which was most important? Why?				
Problem	What is one important problem in the story?				
Sequence	What important things happened in the story? What was the order of events?				
Resolution	How is the problem solved? How does the story end?				
Level of prompting: high (1), medium (2), none (3)					

Total points				
--------------	--	--	--	--

Observer Comments:

Interpreting the Point Totals	
Level	Total Points
Skilled	15-21
Developing	8-14
Needs work	0-7

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Appendix Q

Nonfiction Retelling Scoring Form

Nonfiction Retelling Scoring Form

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____ Score _____

Rubric for Scoring Individual Story Elements

Complete, detailed	3 points
Partial	2 points
Fragmentary (sketchy)	1 point
Inaccurate or not included	0 points

Key Elements	Prompts	0	1	2	3
Topic (understands the topic)	What is this book about?				
Main idea(s)	What are the main ideas of the book (sections)?				
Details (recalls details linked to main idea)	Name the supporting details of each main idea.				
Organization (knows how the book is organized)	How is the information in the book organized? (e.g., chronological, classification, randomly)				
Command of Vocabulary (uses key vocabulary from story)	What are some of the key terms presented in the book?				
Accuracy (retells facts accurately)	N/A				
Level of prompting: high (1), medium (2), none (3)					

Total points

Observer Comments:

Interpreting the Point Totals

Level	Total Points
Skilled	15-21
Developing	8-14
Needs work	0-7

Appendix R

Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory Feature Guide

Student's Name _____ Teacher _____ Date _____

Words Spelled Correctly: / 25 Feature Points: / 62 Total: / 87 Spelling Stage: _____

SPELLING STAGES →	LETTER NAME-ALPHABETIC			WITHIN WORD PATTERNS			SYLLABLES AND AFFIXES			RELATIONAL RELATIONS			
	OMISSIVE SILENT	EARLY	FEATURE POINTS	EARLY	EARLY	FEATURE POINTS	EARLY	EARLY	FEATURE POINTS	EARLY	EARLY	FEATURE POINTS	
Features →	Components Initial	Final	Short Vowels	Digraphs	Blends	Long Vowels	Other Vowels	Inflected Endings	Hyphal Junctures	Unaccented Final Syllables	Harder Softness	Base or Base	Words Spelled Correctly
1. bed	b	d	e										
2. ship		p	i	sh									
3. when		w	e	wh									
4. jump	j		u		mp								
5. float	f		i		ft	oa							
6. train	r	n			tr	ai							
7. place	p		a		pl	ai							
8. drive		v			dr	i							
9. bright					br	igh							
10. shopping								ping					
11. spell					sp		ai						
12. sewing							er	ing					
13. chewed							ew	ed					
14. carries							ar	ies					
15. marched							ar	ed					
16. shovelf							ow						
17. bottle													
18. light													
19. noon													
20. cellar													
21. pleasure													
22. fortunate													
23. confident													
24. civility													
25. opposition													
Totals	17	15	16	17	15	17	15	15	15	15	15	15	121