

The T/TAC Telegram

Volume 8, Issue 3, February/March 2004

Northwestern
Consortium



T/TAC

Linking People & Resources

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This newsletter is a collaborative effort by the Northwestern Consortium of the Training & Technical Assistance Centers (T/TACs), which includes James Madison University, co-directed by Cheryl Henderson and Melinda Bright, and George Mason University, directed by Michael Behrmann.

Placement, editing, and graphic design of the T/TAC Telegram by Allison Toguchi and Kieno Simeon

Universal Design Can Help All Students

By Beth Casper, PACER Center

To accommodate Sam in chemistry class, the science teacher labeled all of the equipment for a lab and wrote clear directions on how to use the equipment for each student. Because of Sam's learning disabilities, the instructions helped Sam keep track of the different flasks of material and the order for performing the experiment. Sam wasn't the only one who benefited from this simple accommodation; Sam's classmates understood the experiment better, too.

Sam's science teacher was using "universal design." It is an increasingly popular approach that makes it easier for teachers to accommodate different learning styles. Universal design means that environments and curricula are designed, right from the start, to be flexible and capable of being customized for students with differing abilities. Alternatives are built into the curriculum instead of developed or added on by teachers after students falter. The approach allows students with widely varying abilities to learn and succeed without placing an extra burden on teachers to adapt or create new materials for their students.

Students with disabilities—whether sensory, physical, emotional, or cognitive—may need alternative ways of accessing and processing information. Universal design helps each student to participate and succeed even when a teacher is less familiar with the individual needs of every student.

"Universal design requires a commitment to think differently," said Chuck Hitchcock, director of the National Center on Assessing the General Curriculum and chief education technology officer at Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). "We need to develop new approaches and demand accessible and supportive curricula from publishers and from those who are responsible for aligning the district curriculum with state standards."

In the education setting, teachers have access to computers, software, assistive technology, and other tools that can adapt the curriculum to suit a child's learning style. Physical accommodations and instructional strategies can also be designed universally. For example, all students benefit if every student has a clear line of sight to the teacher and chalkboard or dry-erase board; equipment used for learning is easily adapted for left- or right-handed use; and materials have clearly labeled instructions with symbols as well as words.

Universal design can also be as simple as pairing a shy student with one who is gregarious for a class presentation, offering study guides to those students who have trouble grasping the important points, writing outlines for the day's instruction for students who are easily distracted, and making sure that long-term projects incorporate individual skills.

"A wide variety of assistive technologies work hand-in-hand with accessible tools and content to provide access and support to learners with a wide range of sensory, physical, and cognitive disabilities," Chuck Hitchcock said. "Assistive technologies can help to reduce the barriers that stand in the way of progress, and universal design will ensure that there are fewer barriers to confront in the first place."

For more information, read "Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age" at <www.cast.org/tes> and visit the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (NCAC) at <www.cast.org/ncac>.

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For Your Information/ Celebration

John A. Toscano, Executive Director of Commonwealth Autism Service [formerly The Autism Program of Virginia, TAP-VA] announced that they have selected the T/TACs to receive an award at their Annual Awards Dinner (held in conjunction with their Annual Conference) on Friday, March 5th at The Sheraton Park South in Richmond. He further stated:

"As you are well aware various T-TACs have enthusiastically joined with us in co-sponsoring educational programs during this past year. Additionally T-TAC members have played vital roles in moving the Virginia Autism Council forward. Because of this record of collaboration we want to recognize their efforts by awarding the Professional Collaboration Award to the system."

Sharon Siler also deserves a celebration for her leadership with the T/TAC autism staff for contributions to this state council as she passes-on her baton to Susan Meslang.

T/TACs Receive Materials for Working with Children Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Debbie Pfeiffer, Ed.D.

Between March 2002 and June 2003, close to 600 professionals from every region of Virginia attended PREP Project workshops. These individuals attended one of the 20 four-hour awareness level trainings and/or the five three-day trainings designed to increase competencies for "Working with Infants and Children Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Their Families." Early interventionists, early childhood special educators, regular and special educators, day care providers, health professionals, administrators, speech and language pathologists, and audiologists were among the professionals represented at these trainings. The project was funded by the Virginia Departments of Health; Education; Deaf and Hard of Hearing; and Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (Part C).

Many participants expressed the need for a PREP training in their school division. If you are interested in sponsoring a four-hour awareness level training or a three-day intermediate level training, please contact your T/TAC or Debbie Pfeiffer at <dlpfeiffer@vcu.edu>. There was also a great deal of interest in borrowing the videotapes and books used in the PREP trainings. We are happy to inform you that each regional T/TAC now has the following resources available for you to borrow:

Videotapes



Teaching the Kids with High-Tech Ears: Meeting the Unique Needs of Students with Cochlear Implants in the Real World of Public Education.

Communication Choices. Explains the various communication options through families who have chosen that option.

The Nonhearing World: Understanding Hearing Loss. Explains sound, hearing, hearing loss, and the relationship between listening to speech and different kinds of hearing loss.

Families With Deaf Children. Designed for parents whose child has just been diagnosed with a significant hearing loss; other parents talk about their experiences.

Pediatric Hearing Assessment. Segments used show Auditory Brainstem Evoked Response and Otoacoustic Emissions testing being conducted on babies.

Extend-Ear Behind the Ear FM Hearing System. Dr. Mark Ross, Audiologist, explains how an FM system improves the signal to noise ratio and a simulation is provided.



Curricula or Texts

*SKI*HI Curriculum* for home-based, early intervention with deaf and hard of hearing infants & toddlers.

INSITE Curriculum for home-based, early intervention with multidisabled, sensory impaired, or dual sensory impaired children.

Sign Language for the Family: A Total Communication Picture Reference Book.

Developing Cognition in Young Children Who are Deaf

Access for All: Integrating Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing Preschoolers by Solit, Taylor, and Bednarczyk

IDEA Advocacy for Children Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: A Question and Answer Book for Professionals and Parents by Poitras Tucker

Cochlear Implants: A Handbook by Poitras Tucker

Virginia Transition Outcomes Project Update

Sally L. Chappel, M.Ed., Region 5 T/TAC, and Ashley Foulk, M.A. & Allison Walker, M.Ed., Region 4 T/TAC

The Virginia Transition Outcomes Project (VTOP) continues to grow and is beginning to achieve results. In October, school district teams were added to the existing Cohort I. This group has been provided training on a result driven model for transition services that is consistent with IDEA transition requirements and will improve graduation rates and post-school outcomes of students with disabilities. Dr. Ed O'Leary has been instrumental in bringing his knowledge and process to achieve this goal in Virginia. The main purpose of the project is to collect data from student files, review the data, and complete an action plan to ensure that the IEPs comply with IDEA and in turn provide effective transition services to youth with disabilities. The Virginia Transition Outcomes Project is unique because it allows schools to decide if and when to participate. Once they choose to participate, the schools are provided support by their regional T/TAC. Many districts are eager to be involved with the project since it gives the schools the ability to closely analyze current transition practices and services and then to accurately address changes to future transition practices and services within their district. Furthermore, team members are given the opportunity to learn about the current best practices in the field of transition.

Allison Walker, T/TAC at GMU, has been working closely with David Williams, Transition Coordinator for Prince William County. David was able to bring together a team that focused on improving transition services in their county for students with disabilities. The collaboration between team members increased the understanding of the components that should be included in an effective transition plan. This further allowed them to identify new strategies that will increase the usefulness of these plans.

Ashley Foulk, T/TAC at GMU, has been working with Ralph Reese, Director of Special Education for Page County. With a team of teachers, special educators and transition coordinators, the initial review of student files for Page County High School and Luray High School was completed during November 2003. During this initial review, the enthusiasm for the project was evident on each of the team members faces. While there were many questions, each member of the review team began to understand the changes that would need to be made for future IEPs in the area of transition services.

Sally Chappel, T/TAC at JMU, has been supporting three school teams in Augusta County. Rachel Potter, Augusta County facilitator, leads the project, assisted by Tammy Sours who is also an Augusta County facilitator. Using an evaluation tool, the two high school teams and one middle school team have successfully reviewed student files for current eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders. Prior to the review, the teams met to identify and reach consensus about the expectations they had for what effective and quality transition services should be in Augusta County. The teams are enthusiastically waiting for the report out meeting so they can identify goals for their action plan.

At this stage, VTOP has already achieved some outcomes. The team members in all three counties were able to understand the importance of clearly defining a student's interests, preferences, and needs when devising the transition plan. It also provided the opportunity for the teams to recognize that these characteristics should serve as the basis for students to work toward when identifying and achieving their post-secondary goals. Additionally, these teams are eager to hear and discuss the results at the report out meeting. This report will give anyone who is involved in the transition process at these schools the chance to focus not only on how to improve transition services, but will also provide the opportunity to recognize the areas of strength. Each school can maximize these areas, with the support of the IEP teams to offer the optimal level of transition services to students with disabilities.



School Safety Spotlight: Be a Discerning Reader

Tony Tallent, M.Ed., Region 5 T/TAC

"Don't believe everything you hear or read." We preach that statement to our students in various social studies, English, and government classes throughout their academic career, citing instances of propaganda, political mud slinging, and the like. However, we as educators must practice what we preach when we are confronted with various information sources detailing the alarming rise in the instances of school violence and school shootings that happen across the nation. On Tuesday, October 21, 2003 *The USA Today* published an article entitled, "Troubling Days at U.S. Schools," in which the author highlighted recent "School-related violent deaths in the fall" of the 2003 school year. *USA Today* writer Greg Toppo chronologically analyzes 18 accounts of school-related violence that ended in students or young adults (one instance occurred between two men in their

twenties after a high school football game) being killed "at the hands of classmates, strangers, and even parents in big cities and small towns" from August to early October. It is only during the detailed description of how these students lost their lives that the reader becomes aware that in only two instances does the loss of life occur on school grounds and during the times at which schools are in session. Thus, the meteoric rise in the number of school-related incidents is never directly related to the students' school environments, school policy, or the staff handling of situations that arose. There is never an accusation that schools are not safe and that students are at risk when they attend schools.

What we, as passive receivers of information, must understand is that the media's ability to report of instances of school violence has expanded exponentially over the past 10 years while society's abhorrence to such acts has rightfully remained high. Since the first broadcasts of The Cable News Network (CNN) in 1994 and similar news agencies that followed, we have had direct access to reports of violent incidents across the region, country, and on an international level. Detailed information about violent acts that 10 years ago took up to a week to travel from a local front page to a short column in the national news section of a paper across the country is now available over every cable and satellite system as soon as the first camera or reporter with a cell phone arrives on the scene. This fact of the rapidly advancing digital age means that we are bombarded by preliminary accounts and video images that have not been filtered by anything other than the screen on our television or speaker on our radio.

Appropriate responses to the questions that arise from the community about school safety reside in effective school-wide discipline programs, solid crisis management plans, and informed staff members (including support staff such as administrative secretaries, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, custodial staff, etc.) regarding school policy on violence issues. Also, building principals need to access data about their individual school and school system, providing access to parents and key stakeholders in the community. This data is collected on a daily basis in the form of office referrals and suspension/expulsion reports. Using these data indicators school officials can either verify a safe school environment or pinpoint information that will lead to an improvement in the overall safety of the school. Research based programs based on school-wide discipline and data collection are available from the Training/Technical Assistance Centers or can be researched at <www.pbis.org>.



Smoothing the Way for Transition from Early Intervention (Part C) to Early Childhood Special Education (Part B)

Phyllis Mondak, Specialist at the Virginia Department of Education

Late summer saw the release of the *Early Childhood Transition From Part C Early Intervention To Part B Special Education And Other Services For Young Children With Disabilities* document. This is a technical assistance document to provide information, timelines, and suggestions for early intervention staff and early childhood special education staff in order to provide a transition that meets required timelines, is coordinated between agencies, and most importantly, is smooth for children and families.

The document includes sections on regulations, the transition process, and additional resource information. In the Regulations, Policies and Procedures section, federal regulations relevant to transition are quoted, as are Commonwealth of Virginia Policies and Procedures for the Implementation of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2000. Virginia's early intervention infrastructure and how that relates to service provision is also briefly described.

The transition section reviews the process for a child and family to exit Part C. This section compares Part C and Part B eligibility criteria, types of services, cost of services, and family involvement. There is a chart on pages 13-14 of the document comparing the programs' similarities and differences. Of particular note is the fact that eligibility determination for Part B is made by each locality. This is particularly challenging when one local early intervention system serves multiple local school districts.

Specific transition events and timelines are also highlighted in this section. A timeline for children exiting Part C at age two and at age three can be found on page 31. All children in Part C have a transition plan and a transition conference as part of their IFSP. The transition conference may be held in conjunction with an initial Child Study committee meeting for a child referred to the local school system for Part B Services. Communication, meeting coordination, and information sharing between agencies for this transition are described. A chart on page 23 lists the responsibilities of personnel from Part C and Part B involved in transition. Information about developing IEPs is also included.

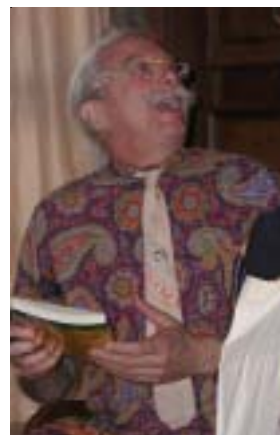
The document also provides information about planning for children not eligible for Part B services. Some children who receive Part C services meet their outcomes and require no further services. In addition, other children may still require supports and services but not meet Part B eligibility criteria, and in some cases parents may choose not to enroll their child in Part B. There are also guides for children moving into and out of the area (region or

state). Since Virginia accepts two year olds into Part B services, families may have a choice of Part C or Part B when moving here from out of state.

The resources at the end of the document include information about two state level Interagency Agreements, frequently asked transition questions, references, definitions for Part C and Part B, and a sample completed Transition Planning page (page 7 of the statewide IFSP form).

The document can be accessed through the VDOE website at <www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sped/earlychildhoodtransitiondoc.pdf>. It has also been disseminated to all special education directors, Local Interagency Coordinating Councils, and ECSE teachers. Workshops concerning the document will be offered at the state CEC conference in February and at the state early childhood conference in July. If you have questions about the document you can contact your special education director, regional T/TAC, Part C consultants – Beth Tolley, Bev Crouse, or Karen Durst <<http://www.infantva.org/PartCStaffList.htm>>, or Phyllis Mondak at VDOE <pmondak@mail.vak12ed.edu>.

DCDT International Conference
Sally L. Chappel, M.Ed., Conference
Co-Chair



The 12th International Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition Conference was co-sponsored by the T/TACs at GMU, JMU, VCU, W&M, and Radford. The Virginia Department of Education was instrumental in providing both in-kind and financial support to this outstanding event. Held in October at the Historic Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center, over 950 people attended the three-day conference. The theme, "A Season of Change for Transition," adequately described the essence of the conference.

Dr. Patch Adams shared a self-reflecting and thought provoking keynote address about caring not only for one's self and the persons with whom one works and plays, but also caring and thinking about change for the nation and world. Through the sharing of her personal experiences, Joyanne Cobb, the luncheon speaker, presented a message about how to support and provide good, seamless transition services to youth.

A variety of sessions were provided by over 225 presenters that addressed adult service options, behavior, career/technical education, empowering students and families, instructional strategies, legislative reform, model programs, personnel preparation and training, postsecondary education, school to career/employment, and technology. Throughout the hallways and pre-function areas exhibitors offered products and information to the conference attendees. Other activities included a President's reception featuring foods from the regions of Virginia and music preformed by *Nothin' Fancy*, and a trip to Mountain Lake Resort in the Blue Ridge Mountains.



Reading with Colors

Brenda M. Brady, M.Ed, Region 5 T/TAC

Colored overlays or lenses are not a new assistive technology item, but their widespread use for reading difficulties and learning disabilities has made them a new topic for discussion. Over 15 years ago, Helen L. Irlen was working under a federal research grant to help children and adults with reading and learning disabilities when she discovered improvements in reading ability using colored filters. These filters are lightly tinted plastic sheets with a matte finish to prevent glare when they are placed over a reading selection. Through the use of colored lenses in glasses or the colored acetate sheets, children and adults were able to read more fluently and with fewer errors. After continued research, Ms Irlen patented the Irlen filters and diagnostic method used to determine the best color for each individual. While careful screening for the correct color for each individual is needed, research has not determined one specific color as the best for everyone; it varies from blue, red, or yellow to the spectrum between these basic colors. However, Onion Mountain Technologies has completed some data research that does tie a color to a certain type of disability (Sweeney).

Through Ms Irlen's work, a condition called the Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS) was not only identified but co-named the Irlen Syndrome. Helen Irlen defines it as "a perceptual dysfunction associated with the brain's ability to accurately process visual information. Looking through color may correct this difficulty by altering the timing by which the visual information is received and processed" (Henson-Parker). Alone, SSS is not a learning difficulty, but it is a condition that can accompany many learning problems such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, and others.

There are five basic factors that are commonly experienced and serve as indicators for Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome. A person with SSS can experience any or all of these factors: light sensitivity, inadequate background accommodation, poor print resolution, restricted span of recognition, and lack of sustained attention. An explanation of these factors is available in the book, *Reading By The Colors* by Helen Irlen. This book, as well as her website, <www.irlen.com>, gives some insight into the world that many of us do not really understand.

Examples of letters and words moving and blurry, and jumbled writing are visually described.

Many companies are now providing overlays for use with SSS. These low tech assistive technology tools are easy to use, inexpensive, and can be adapted into glasses or computer monitor screen overlays.

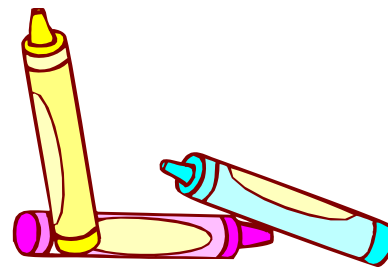
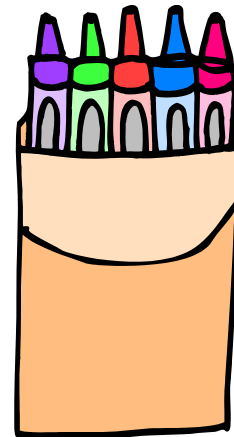
These low tech overlays provide one more tool to anyone who has reading or learning disabilities. There are many factors that can be attributable to reading difficulties; if a simple colored overlay can make a difference, it may well be worth the time and investment.

References:

Henson-Parker, D. (n.d.). *See it right*. Retrieved January 6, 2004 from www.seeitright.com

Irlen, H. L. (1991). *Reading by the colors: Overcoming dyslexia and other reading disabilities through the Irlen method*. Garden City Park, NY: Avery Publishing Group.

Sweeney, J. P. (n.d.). *Color and technology: Using color on and off the computer with students with disabilities*. Retrieved December 16, 2003 from <http://www.onionmountaintech.com/OMAT.php>





CONFERENCES

45th Annual Virginia Council for Exceptional Children Conference **Building Bridges to Success: Students, Families, and Educators**

When: February 19-21, 2004

Where: Charlottesville Holiday Inn

Sponsor: Virginia Council for Exceptional Children

Contact: For further information contact Debora Bays at dbays@radford.edu or call (540) 831-5190.

Virginia Council for Learning Disabilities Annual Spring Symposium. Meeting the Future: Enhancing Student Performance

When: February 28, 2004

Where: Ramada Inn 1776, Williamsburg

Sponsor: Virginia Council for Learning Disabilities

Contact: Paula Spady at pshiker@aol.com or www.vclld.org

Commonwealth Autism Services-Virginia Third Annual Conference. On Common Ground: Collaboration and Partnerships on Behalf of Those with Autism Whose Lives We Share

When: March 4-6, 2004

Where: Sheraton Park South, Richmond

Sponsor: Commonwealth Autism Services-Virginia

Contact: 1-800-649-8481 or www.autismva.org

Children Together Annual Conference. Building Inclusive Classrooms: A Conference for Parents and Educators.

When: March 11, 2004 (4:00-7:00 p.m.)

Contact: Sissy Walker at 703-307-4161

Children Together Annual Conference. Transforming Aggressive Behavior (Presented by Dr. Becky Bailey)

When: March 12, 2004 (9:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.)

Contact: Sissy Walker at 703-307-4161

Learning Disabilities Association of America 41st Annual International Conference. At the Crossroads: Challenges and Choices.

When: March 17-20, 2004

Where: Atlanta, GA

Sponsor: Learning Disabilities Association of America

Contact: LDA at 412-341-1515

Council for Exceptional Children Annual Convention

When: April 14-17, 2004

Where: New Orleans, LA

Sponsor: Council for Exceptional Children

Contact: Visit www.cec.sped.org or call 1-888-CEC-SPED

Fifth Annual Content/Teaching Academies

When: June 21-25, 2004

Where: James Madison University, Harrisonburg

Contact: Visit <http://coe.jmu.edu/academy2003> or contact Tony Tallent, Region 5 T/TAC @JMU, 540-568-3147 or

tallente@jmu.edu

AT and Aug Com: Making the Connections

When: June 23-24, 2004

Where: Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke

Contact: Glenna Gustafson, T/TAC @VA Tech, 1-800-848-2714 or gsgustaf@vt.edu

Third Annual Access for All conference: Supporting Students with Moderate to Significant Disabilities.

When: June 28-29, 2004

Where: Holiday Inn Select, Lynchburg

Contact: Jane Todd at 540-231-2014 or janetodd@vt.edu or visit the website: www.conted.vt.edu/access4all

Shining Stars: Charting the Future for Today's Young Children. Virginia's Early Childhood Education Conferences

When: July 13, 2004

Where: Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke

When: July 15, 2004

Where: Holiday Inn West, Richmond

Contact: Cheryl Henderson at Region 5 T/TAC at hendercl@jmu.edu or Lynn Wiley at Region 4 T/TAC @ GMU at hwiley@gmu.edu

Date: December 8, 2003

U.S. Departments of Health & Human Services and Education Launch Research to Promote School Readiness Effort

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson recently announced a new five-year research initiative with the Department of Education to find the best ways to prepare preschool children for later success in school. In the initiative's first year, eight institutions across the country will receive \$7.4 million in research grants to test preschool curricula, Internet-based teacher training, and the importance of parental involvement for improving children's readiness to enter school. "This research will identify ways to help children get the most out of preschool so they can enter kindergarten ready to learn," Secretary Thompson said. "The strategies identified by these researchers will help identify effective pre-school curricula and teaching approaches. The research represents an important part of President Bush's early childhood education initiative."

The new research initiative grew out the 2001 White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development, which highlighted the need for better ways to help parents, teachers, and caregivers provide young children with the intellectual and social skills they need to succeed when they enter school. The first-year grant funding includes \$6.4 million from three HHS components -- the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the National Institutes of Health, the Administration for Children and Families, and the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services contributed \$1 million for first year.

The following are the eight research centers, the centers' lead investigators, and each center's primary research focus:

- o **Pennsylvania State University, Karen L. Bierman, Ph.D.**
This site will compare curricula now in use in many Head Start classrooms to curricula based on the latest scientific findings. In all, 320 children from 40 randomly selected classrooms will be studied to see if the new curricula improve language development and social and emotional skills.
- o **University of Pennsylvania, John W. Fantuzzo, Ph.D.**
This site will test curriculum for preschool children from low-income, urban families. The study will allow researchers to test the effectiveness of a new preschool curriculum focusing on reading, math, and the social and emotional needs of children.
- o **University of California, Los Angeles, Carollee Howes, Ph.D.**
This site will focus on the educational needs of Latino children and will compare three types of early childhood programs: Head Start, private non-profit preschools, and family day care networks. The study seeks to improve the interactions between children and their teachers and caregivers in order to better prepare them for school.

- o **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Janis B. Kupersmidt, Ph.D.**
This site will explore better ways of training preschool teachers in math and pre-literacy instruction. Participating teachers will receive training to help them meet children's needs in reading, math, and social and emotional skills.
- o **Indiana University, Samuel L. Odom, Ph.D.**
This site will study how poverty, disability, and minority status may influence children's ability to learn, and will involve 600 at-risk preschool children in five locations across the country.
- o **University of Virginia, Robert C. Pianta, Ph.D.**
This site will examine preschool teacher training and support through Internet-based technology. The training will focus on child literacy, language development and building social relationships. Four hundred classrooms will be involved.
- o **University of Chicago, C. Cybele Raver, Ph.D.**
This site will identify ways to decrease the risks posed by behavior problems among a group of low-income preschool-aged children. Approximately 640 children will be involved at eight Head Start sites in Chicago. Researchers will examine how training for teachers, the presence of teacher's aides, and access to mental health professionals can benefit young children's school readiness.
- o **University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.**
This study seeks to foster parental involvement in high-risk families. The goal of the study is to improve school readiness by improving interactions between parents and children in the home. The study will evaluate the overall benefits of a parent-focused intervention in both home and school environments.

Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <<http://www.hhs.gov/news>>.

The Challenges of Paraeducator Proximity to Students

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By Lynn Wiley, Ph.D.

Most people would agree that students act differently when adults are in close proximity to them. With respect to degree of proximity, there are even techniques that we use in the classroom to enhance student learning. For example, if we are helping a group of students and one student is off task and disturbing others, we can continue our work with the group, but move closer to that student. Often, just standing close will reduce the disruptive behavior and help that particular student focus on the appropriate task.

There are, however, challenges that exist for paraeducators. Researchers have identified problems with excessive proximity of paraeducators to students with disabilities (Giangreco, Edelman, Evans-Luiselli, and MacFarland, 1997). Among these problems are: separation from classmates, student dependence on adults, reduced student interaction with peers, limited instruction from licensed teachers, limited student opportunities to make choices, and disruption to classroom instruction. The chart on the following page highlights these challenges and presents examples of paraeducator behavior. The last column suggests ways these challenges can be addressed. You may recognize situations similar to what you experience in your classroom.

Creating a friendly and trusting relationship is important to your work with students with disabilities. There will be times when you need to be in close proximity to a student. On the other hand, you must know the effects of excessive proximity and work to prevent the problems that result from it. Consider how you would feel having someone right beside you all day every day.

Discuss the challenges of proximity with your supervising teacher. Together you may be able to come up with specific strategies and techniques to get around these challenges. Use the chart on the following page as a starting point for discussion. Perhaps the suggestions in the chart will help you brainstorm solutions that will work in your classroom. This chart is based on research done by Giangreco, Edelman, Evans-Luselli, and MacFarland (1997).



Challenge	Example of the Challenge	Example of a Solution to the Challenge
Separation from classmates	The paraeducator sits with the student in the back of the room or out in the hall during instruction time.	The student can sit next to a peer in the middle of a row. The paraeducator can sit next to the student if necessary.
Student dependence on adults	The paraeducator gathers and carries all of the student's materials to every class.	The student can use a list (either written or picture schedule) to help remember materials to bring to each class. If the student is physically unable to reach/gather his materials, peers can help the student gather and carry the materials.
Reduced student interaction with peers	The paraeducator sits between the student and his peers during lunch.	The paraeducator can supervise many students in the cafeteria without sitting at the student's table. If the paraeducator needs to sit beside the student, have a peer sit on the other side.
Limited instruction from licensed teachers	The paraeducator designs and implements the majority of the instruction for the student.	The team can implement collaborative teaching where the instruction can be delivered by the teacher while the paraeducator helps out through support strategies that have been determined at the team meeting.
Limited student opportunities to make choices	The paraeducator makes all the decisions for the student. This includes who the student works with, where and when the student moves in the classroom, what materials the student selects, etc.	The paraeducator allows the student to make his own choices throughout the day.
Disruption to classroom instruction	The paraeducator provides parallel instruction out loud to the student, often disturbing the other students in the classroom.	The teaching team can adapt the curriculum to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities. The teaching team can provide classroom opportunities for small-group work where all adults can supervise all students and learning outcomes are clear.

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Linking People and Resources