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ABSTRACT

This intrinsic case study looks closely at one pre-service teacher in an early field program as she addressed the complexities of supporting the literacy learning of a group of students in a class for learning disabled students and a group of students in a regular class setting. Data were collected through surveys, observation notes, dialogue journal entries, videotapes of lessons, and e-mail correspondence. The inquiry portrays the pre-service teacher as a reflective practitioner with high expectations for her students' success and a high level of control regarding her capabilities as a teacher. The research also illuminates the low self-esteem and inadequate reading and writing abilities of the students in the class for learning disabled students despite 2 years of systematic phonics instruction. Implications of the research relate directly to special education policies and practices and pre-service teacher programs. (Contains 61 references.) (SM)

# "The Only Difference I See is in Their Ability to Write": One Preservice Teacher's Thinking and Teaching Practices Offering Multiple Literacy Lessons to Students in Regular and Special Education



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## Abstract

This intrinsic case study looks closely at one preservice teacher in an early field program as she addressed the complexities of supporting the literacy learning of a group of students in a learning disabled class and a group of students in a regular class setting. Data were collected through surveys, observation notes, dialogue journal entries, video tapes of lessons, and e-mail correspondence. The inquiry portrays the preservice teacher as reflective practitioner with high expectations for her students' success and a high Locus of Control regarding her capabilities as a teacher. The research also illuminates the low self-esteem and inadequate reading and writing abilities of the students in the learning disabled class despite two years of systematic phonics instruction. Implications of the research relate directly to special education policies and practices and preservice teacher programs.

**"The Only Difference I See is in Their Ability to Write": One Preservice Teacher's Thinking and Teaching Practices Offering Multiple Literacy Lessons to Students in Regular and Special Education**

**Researchers' Question**: *"Ok, on the very first day you went to work with both groups, what were your expectations? Did you basically think you would be equally successful with both groups?*
**Alisha's Response**: *"I did, I think, and I still think that I'm going to be equally successful with them. I just have to do things a little bit differently with the learning disabled group."*
**Researchers' Question**: *"As of today, have you noted different characteristics ... academic and behavioral being displayed by the two groups of children?"*
**Alisha's Response**: *"They both have excellent behavior"*
**Researcher's Question**: *"In terms of being attentive?"*
**Alisha's Response**: *"They're very attentive."*
**Researcher's Question**: *"Wanting to do the work, looking to please, so to speak."*
**Alisha's Response**: *"Oh yeah. I've had some behavior problems with the third grade and I've had none whatsoever with the second grade."*
**Researcher's Comment**: *"And the second grade is the special education class."*

Considerable research has examined groups of preservice teachers in attempts to determine how early field experiences might impact their professional development. Many of these studies employ pre-and-post semester interviews, or end-of-term large data sweeps to capture preservice teachers' filtered reminiscences and recalled moments of reality rather than "documenting their life directly" (Jacobs, 1992, p. 312). Little research has selectively observed preservice teachers for an extended time span.[1] Therefore, "there are surprisingly few details about how individual preservice teachers learn to teach children to read in field settings" (Broaddus, 2000, p. 573).

This intrinsic case study takes an ethnological microanalysis stance (Erickson, 1992) to look closely at one preservice teacher as she participated in a semester-long, reading/ language arts early field program. Intrinsic case studies, frequently represented in qualitative research, seek to discover what is common and unusual

1. Some exemplary case studies have been published by Bullough, 1989; Knowles, 1988, 1992, and in the *Journal of Literacy Research, Themed Issue*, December, 2000.

within a particular setting (Stake, 2000). Systematic ethnographic microanalysis offers a holistic perspective of what is studied, and in part, consists of intensely observing individuals as they act, react, and try to make sense of their work in educational contexts (Erickson, 1992; Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2001). As modes of exploration, these two forms of research are time consuming and labor intensive because they require numerous personal interactions between researchers and study participants (see Erickson, 1992; Silverman, 2000).

## Rationale for the Inquiry

We employed an ethnographic approach in our inquiry in an attempt to provide a holistic view of the thinking, expectations, and teaching practices of Alisha, a third-year elementary education major, as she addressed the complexities of supporting the literacy learning of a group of students in a learning disabled special education class[2] and a group of students in a regular class setting.

Alisha's early field experiences (i.e., prior to student teaching), are worthy of study given the controversy that surrounds the identification and instruction of special education students with specific learning disabilities. For example, many researchers believe that current identification and assessment of students considered as learning disabled should be revised in order to align existing research with practice (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). In addition, scholars note that even though nearly 80

2. The term learning disabled refers to individuals with disorders "of one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written" (Lloyd, Forness, & Korvale, 1999, p. 1)

percent of students referred for possible placement in special education as learning disabled receive their referral because they have difficulty learning to read (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1999), data indicate there is little difference between these students and others in regular class settings who experience reading problems (Lyon et al., 2001). Specifically, few distinctions are observed between students in regular education who read below the 25th percentile on standardized tests, but do not qualify for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability, and students who receive special education services. Further, there are a number of students with significant reading difficulties who are not formally identified and served in any program beyond what is provided in their regular education classroom. Given these circumstances, Lyon et al., estimate that the number of students identified as poor readers and accommodated through special education or compensatory programs might be reduced by up to 20 percent through early identification and prevention programs. As Lyon et al., note, "the key is to enhance classroom instruction accompanied by targeted intervention programs for children who require more help" (pp. 279-281). This approach might result in the actual identification of a specific learning disability being reserved for students whose reading or other academic problems do not adequately respond to a variety of interventions that are presented to them in a regular classroom.

The implications of this perspective for undergraduate elementary education majors are noteworthy. As part of their course work, elementary education majors must learn how to offer effective reading lessons for all students in their classrooms. They also must learn how to modify or enhance instruction so that

students who are experiencing reading difficulties will achieve success. In addition, they must understand how to identify students whose reading problems are severe enough to warrant a special education referral. Since most students who are referred are placed in special education settings and remain in those settings throughout their school careers, it is important that students in need of special education placement are accurately identified (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, Smith, & Leal, 2002).

Two other important educational issues sparked our interest for the inquiry. Considerable research has studied the effects of teachers' expectations on students' learning (Cotten & Wikelund, 1997). Data from the well known Pygmalion study (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968) and other analogous research (e.g., Brattesani, Weinstein, & Marshall, 1984; Brophy & Evertson, 1976; Cohn & Kornelly, 1970; Cotten, 1989; Feldman & Theiss, 1982; Findley, & Good, 1982; Hillman, 1984; Marshall & Weinstein, 1985; Sebeson, 1970) suggest that teachers' expectations and perceptions regarding their students' academic abilities have the potential to reciprocally impact students' performance and achievement. As an elementary education major, Alisha's program of study did not include special education courses. While she had no qualified knowledge base related to teaching students who have been classified as having learning problems, she also had no preconceived notions about their abilities or limitations. Therefore, we were interested in knowing whether Alisha held different or similar expectations for her two groups of students' behavior and learning and if her expectations impacted her pedagogy. Finally, because the field program is literature-based,

and incorporates multiple literacies[3] we wanted to ascertain how students who are assessed as learning disabled respond when offered integrated lessons that place students at the center of instruction, situate phoneme awareness and phonics activities only within authentic reading events, and connect the literacies of print and the visual and communicative arts. Through our inquiry, we hoped to contribute information to the body of literature relevant to special education and preservice teacher development. Ultimately, we hoped to examine and improve our own practices.

## The Context for the Inquiry

The context for the inquiry was a small, K-3 school on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. There are two sections of special education students, and many of the K-three classes are structured to accommodate multiage interactions (i.e., a combination of first, second, and third grade students). Teachers of regular education students at Allen School (a pseudonym) promote student inquiry and, for the most part, offer holistic instruction. Students are encouraged to collaborate, voice their opinions, and discover answers to their questions through research initiatives. Dimensions of the adopted regular education curriculum include a reading/writing connection, theme teaching, emphasis on the visual and performing arts, and portfolio assessment. Students in special education settings receive more traditional lessons, including explicit instruction in phonics.

3. Multiple literacies is the extension of literacy beyond reading and writing to encompass all forms of communication, including computer technology, music, dance, and the visual and performing arts. "Rather than considering language as a series of isolated and fragmented skills, this new vision of literacy puts students at the center of the process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating messages" (Messaris, 1997, p. 1).

The Program Structure and the Preservice Teachers' Schedule and Lessons

The field program has existed for nine years. Although always student-centered and literature-based, during the past two years, the program's philosophy and concurrent pedagogy have evolved in response to new ideas about multiple literacies (see Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997, and Richards, Goldberg, & McKenna, accepted for publication, for a comprehensive description of multiple literacies).

The preservice teachers report to Allen School two mornings per week (two- and one-half hours each day) and receive six semester hours of credit. On Mondays, guided by the program supervisor, the preservice teachers teach two concurrent 75-minute lessons to two small groups of students (the same groups throughout the semester). On Wednesdays, the preservice teachers observe the program supervisor's demonstration lessons, participate in lectures and seminar discussions, and attend presentations offered by some of the master teachers at Allen School (e.g., portfolio assessment, themed teaching, creative bookmaking).

The preservice teachers link print-based activities with the visual and communicative arts. They also help the elementary students examine commercials and other popular media culture carefully and thoughtfully. In addition, following Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (1986), the preservice teachers collaborate with their students in presenting student-authored puppet shows, Readers Theatre presentations, and drama enactments. They work side-by-side with their students, scaffolding, modeling, and creating text-based murals, dances, books, and songs. In addition, with the preservice teachers' help, students

interpret data on computer web sites and CD ROM software, and visually represent facts and concepts by creating graphs and murals.

Instructional sessions typically include preservice teachers and their students journaling; reading; talking, and writing about books; planning, authoring, and editing stories and informational text; participating in literacy learning games devised by the preservice teachers and; engaging in reading comprehension and writing strategies.

## Alisha

Alisha was a nontraditional elementary education major ... a single parent in her mid twenties. Her grade point average was high. Her affective dimensions might be described as cheerful, compassionate, amiable, calm, composed, positive, reflective, and gentle.

Alisha had no prior teaching experiences. When she learned she would be teaching three - second grade special education students and four - third grade regular education students, she accepted her assignments graciously, and enthusiastically agreed to participate in the research project.

## Conceptual Frameworks for the Inquiry

Two literatures informed our inquiry: 1) tenets of sociocultural constructivism learning theory which situates individuals within a social context, posits that individuals construct knowledge in transaction with their environment, and suggests that language reveals individual's knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs

(Alvermann, 2000; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Richardson, 1997) and; 2) premises from social interactionism which point out that as human beings encounter problems that emerge through their circumstances, they move to resolve those problems through thoughtful reflection and action (Woods, 1992). We also were mindful of traditions from hermeneutics which "indicate that the same text can be read [and interpreted] in a number of ways" (Tappan & Brown, 1992, p. 186). In addition, strongly influenced by feminine perspectives and cautions regarding the transactional nature of ethnographic research, we acknowledged the challenges, limitations, and presumptuousness of describing others' behavior and representing others' points of view and realities mediated through our own experiences and perceptions (Behar, 1993; Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2001).

## Research Methodology

### Questions Guiding Our Research

In our inquiry we sought to answer the following questions:

1) What themes might be visible in the data that provide a window into Alisha's thinking, attitudes, and expectations regarding teaching students in a learning disabled special education class and students in a regular education class?

2) What teaching behaviors will Alisha exhibit with the two groups of students?

3) In what ways might Alisha adjust her plans for lessons, or alter her instruction to meet the learning needs of the two groups of students?

4) Will Alisha's initial thinking and expectations regarding the two groups of students change over the course of the semester?

5) How will Alisha's students respond to multiple literacy lessons?

## The Study

We collected data each week throughout the semester through researcher-devised surveys, dialogue journal entries, observation field notes, and video tapes of Alisha's lessons. Alisha's responses to the survey questions coupled with the video tapes of her lessons proved to be the most valuable data sources. We utilized Alisha's dialogue journal entries and our field notes to triangulate the data, a means of reducing ambiguity and the likelihood of misinterpretation, and "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning" (Stake, 2000, p. 443).

### Analyzing the Survey Responses and Video Tapes of Alisha's Lessons

We considered a number of possible approaches useful for analyzing the 24 transcribed pages of Alisha's survey responses and the video tapes. Extracting the encompassing themes as they appeared throughout the data seemed most straightforward and appropriate for pondering the research questions that steered our research. Thus, the nature and goals of our inquiry determined how we examined the transcripts and video tapes.

Following guidelines of content analysis, we conducted "a careful line-by-line reading of the text[s]" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780). We read and reread the

data, looking for distinct categories of meaning. As common patterns became evident, we made notes and underlined what we considered to be salient information (Gay, 1997). We resolved differences in our opinions regarding the data categories through discussion until we reached consensus.

Next, we categorized and labeled the themed topics that appeared across the two data sets (survey responses and video tapes of Alisha's teaching), cross-checking our impressions and understandings with Alisha's dialogue journal entries, and validating our impressions through numerous conversations with Alisha (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Erickson, 1993; Janesick, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Major Themes Emerging from the Inquiry

Analysis of the two main data sources revealed the following 17 themes:

1) Initially, Alisha experienced anxieties about teaching students with learning disabilities, but she quickly overcame her apprehensions ("I was nervous and scared. I didn't know. I felt ... this is exactly how I felt ... I felt like I didn't even know yet how to teach students who have, who are, so they say 'normal', or whatever, and I was ... I didn't know if I would hurt them. I didn't want to hurt them ... I didn't know how severe their disabilities would be. I didn't know if they had behavior problems and I didn't think I could handle that. But once I was in there I realized that I could").

2) Alisha recognized early in the semester that the students in the learning disabled class were apprehensive about their academic abilities and the possibility

of receiving poor grades ("They're frightened ...They're so afraid of making mistakes ... they don't want to take the risk. They think I'm going to grade them, or they think they'll be wrong...Like we had a dialogue journal ... and I just asked them, 'Could you please tell me about yourself and what you like to do?' And I read it to them. And I explained it to them. And then I asked them to write something, and they just sat there. And I was like, 'Well, let me help you.' And, I went around the room and the first little boy could talk and he can write, but he's afraid he's going to be wrong. That's what it is ... and they still don't understand that it's OK for them to write something and not be perfect").

3) At the beginning of the semester, Alisha held high expectations for both groups of students ("I'm going to be equally successful with them. I just have to do things a bit differently with the learning disabled group...they [students in both groups] can both think ... they both have wonderful thinking abilities. Actually, the students in the learning disabled class all seem to understand. They do really well. The students in the learning disabled class actually paid attention more and understood the [lesson about] parts of a story better than the third graders").

4) Alisha was concerned about the classroom setting in which the students with disabilities worked ("The special education room is a split room. They have to share it with gifted enrichment students. Students go in and out all day long ... that's not the best environment").

6) Early in the semester, Alisha recognized that the students in the learning disabled class believed they could not express themselves through writing ("And then I asked them to write something, and they, they just sat there ... and the first

little boy could talk and talk, and he told me everything that he wanted me to know. And I said, 'Let's write it.' And he said, 'I can't.' And I said, 'Justin, yes you can, I know you can do it.' And he's, he can write, but he's afraid it's going to be wrong.").

7) As the semester progressed, Alisha remained positive about her special education students' behavior ("They're very attentive ... Oh, I've had some problems with the third grade [regular education students], and none whatsoever with the second grade [special education students] ...They're wonderful").

8) Throughout the semester, Alisha continued to have high expectations for her special education students' success, and did not consider them less capable or different because of their disabilities ("So I'm not going to go in there saying, "Oh, well, they're disabled', you know. These kids can do it. They just do it differently. The main difference [between the two groups] is grade level. I think of the second graders as the little kids and the third graders as the big kids").

9) Alisha came to recognize that the students in the learning disabled class were more successful when she offered shorter lesson segments within the 75 minute teaching period in conjunction with direct teacher assistance (" I try to mix it up a little more with them ... I don't expect them to sit still and do one thing for a long period of time. I use the same concepts and the same ideas [with both groups of students]. While we're doing a [multiple literacy] project [with the students in the learning disabled class] I still try to link it [to print-based literacy] by asking them questions about the story that we read or asking them questions about things that we have gone over ... to let them have some freedom to do

something else at the same time. I use the same concepts and ideas [with both groups] ... the third graders are more independent. I can just give them a Prediction Log and they read it themselves and they answer it, or they predict. Whereas, the second graders, I have to take their dictation, but they still make a prediction").

10) Alisha exhibited a high internal Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966)[4] regarding her abilities to assist both groups of students ("I think I'm helping the children").

11) Alisha reflected considerably about her teaching ("I always reflect and I always pick apart more than anybody, I think ... the things I can do better and improve").

12) Alisha recognized that the students in the learning disabled class had received over two years of direct phonics instruction that did not appear to enhance their reading or writing. Yet, she had a strong hunch that additional phonics instruction might help her students ("They've been taught that [phonics]. They've no idea what to write ... I know they've been taught that and they try to sound things out ... but they don't know where to start except for very small, small words, like fat ... No one can read it [what the students write] ... it's just letters, it's B, C, F. But their spaces are grouped like [they are writing] words. I think they have a lot of work to do with phonics ... I think they've missed something ... they could do more if they had more of the basics").

4. The construct of internal Locus of Control refers to personal beliefs about one's abilities to impact the environment.

13) Alisha recognized that both groups of students were occasionally difficult to teach ("The second graders are more difficult to teach because I feel I have to present the concepts a little bit more to them. Does that make sense? A little bit, I have to go over things more and I have to reinforce it more. Sometimes I feel worn out [with the third graders] because they seem to have a lot more of, they've developed, developed more of a, I don't want to say personality. They've just developed more of an attitude of how they're going to treat people, and they're always talking and they always have something to say, and they have trouble raising their hands ... that's the honest answer").

14) Alisha recognized that all of her students were interested in multiple literacy lessons ("They're really interested in the lessons ... I'm going to do my drama presentation with the second graders because they just seem really interested in it when I mentioned it and they want to do it. They're already picking out what parts they want, and they don't argue over it, so I'm just letting them do it. I did murals with both groups. I felt they would have fun doing the mural and they learned more about the story").

15) Alisha recognized that the students in the learning disabled class were appropriately placed. However, she worried about their future learning opportunities ("Oh my goodness. I think they're appropriately placed. I think ... I can't say what's appropriate though. I don't have any experience to judge that. I know that some of them are a lot, are way behind other second graders and I feel that, that they need extra help in those areas. But ... if they're placed in special ed are they going to get forgotten and they're not going to be able to, are they just,

are people going to disregard them and think they're never going to learn? I mean, I really don't know how special education for them works ... their teacher made the comment that one of my students wasn't on the diploma track and I'm, I was thinking, 'He's in the second grade. How do you know if he's on the, I mean maybe I shouldn't have said that ...").

16) Alisha celebrated small academic successes of the students in the language disabled class ("I didn't know that he could write the date because he just copied last time. But he wrote it all by himself").

17) Alisha recognized that she needed to enhance the self esteem of the students in the learning disabled class because they sought approval and confirmation of their academic work ("Well, I tell them every time I go in that they've done a good job. I give them stickers every day. They get treats every time I go in. They get a lot of external rewards, but it's intrinsic too because I feel they want to make me say those things to them. They want me to approve of what they're doing. They just hunger for it. They just [say], 'Look at this, look at this. Is it good? And I'm like, 'Yes, it's good. It's beautiful!).

## Limitations of the Inquiry

As with all research efforts, limitations of the inquiry must be addressed. First, case studies are concerned with particulars in a given situation. They usually do not allow researchers to make broad generalizations or build scientific theory (Stake, 2000). This intrinsic case study was confined to examining one preservice teacher in a specific teaching context. Therefore, generalizations to

other preservice teachers and teaching circumstances are not possible. "Each case has important atypical features, happenings, relationships, and situations" (Stake, 2000, p. 435).

Second, "ethnography is open to critique" (Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2001, p. 158). "Conscientious ethnographers have...long been aware that in naturalistic settings, the interaction of researchers and subjects can change behaviors in ways that would not have occurred in the absence of such interaction" (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 676). In fact, "post modern critique calls attention to the researcher's presence" (Alvermann, 2000,p. 134). Our ongoing observations and the focus of our survey questions may have consciously and subconsciously influenced Alisha's thinking and instructional behaviors.

Third, scholars acknowledge the difficulty of separating the researcher from the researched (Alvermann, 2000). The possibility of observer bias "looms large in the thinking of both sociologists and anthropologists in the ethnographic tradition" (Werner & Schoeple, 1987, p. 259). Others may draw conclusions that differ from ours (see Tappan & Brown, 1992, for a discussion of hermeneutics).

Fourth, the program supervisor interacted often with Alisha and offered advice and suggestions regarding her lessons. In all probability, her interactions influenced Alisha's decisions and pedagogy.

## Discussion and Implications for Special Education and Preservice Teacher Development

Despite limitations associated with case studies and ethnological research methods, the inquiry contributes considerable insights into the thinking,

expectations, and teaching practices of one preservice teacher as she supported the literacy learning of students in special and regular education. The study also provides substantial information about three students in special education contexts. In addition, the research supports the value of collecting and analyzing narrative data. Further, the inquiry substantiates the efficacy of field experiences for preservice teachers and provides information useful for informing special education programs, and preservice teacher professional development.

Two particularly explicit and separate threads are woven throughout the data that merit discussion. These dramatically dichotomous components are Alisha's expectancies and pedagogy regarding the students in her learning disabled class and the contrasting perceptions and attitudes of her three students.

Alisha's responses to the survey questions and a perusal of the video tapes of her lessons offer a comprehensive portrait of her commendable attributes pertinent to teaching. Although highly anxious before her first teaching session, Alisha quickly assumed a positive stance ("I realized I could do it"). She held high expectations throughout the semester for her students' success and she displayed a high internal Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966) regarding her abilities to teach ("I'm going to be equally successful with them ... I think I'm helping the children"). Alisha also was concerned for her students' well-being ("That's not the best environment"), and she celebrated her students' small successes ("He wrote it all by himself"). Alisha was a thoughtful practitioner ("I always reflect..the things I can do better and improve"). In addition, she was an advocate for her students ("But ... if they're placed in special ed are they going to get

forgotten? ... are people going to disregard them?"). Further, Alisha structured her teaching practices to help insure that her students achieved success (" I have to go over things more and I have to reinforce it more"..."I have to take their dictation"..."I don't expect them to sit still and do one thing for a long period of time"). Alisha recognized her students' interests in multiple literacy lessons ("They're really interested in the lessons"). Yet, she also believed that additional instruction in phonics might help her students' reading and writing (" I think they have a lot of work to do with phonics ... I think they've missed something"). Alisha firmly believed in her students' capabilities and minimized their disabilities ("They're wonderful"... The students in the learning disabled class actually paid more attention and understood the parts of a story better than the third graders. .."I think of the second graders as the little kids and the third graders as the big kids"). Finally, she continually enhanced the self esteem of her students ("Well, I tell them every time that they've done a good job .. .and I'm like "Yes, it's good. It's beautiful"). Clearly, Alisha was an exceptionally admirable preservice teacher.

While the inquiry provides positive and inspiring information about Alisha's thinking, expectations, and teaching practices, in contrast, the study also offers some poignant and disheartening details about the perceptions and literacy abilities of the three students in Alisha's learning disabled class. Although only in second grade, the students were apprehensive about their academic abilities and the possibility of receiving poor grades ("They're frightened ...They're afraid of making mistakes"). They believed they could not write ("And he's, he can write,

but he's afraid it's going to be wrong"). Despite over two years of phonics instruction, their reading and writing abilities were minimal ("They've been taught that ... I know they've been taught that and they try to sound things out ... but they don't know where to start"). They also exhibited low self esteem and craved approval ("They want me to approve of what they're doing. They hunger for it. They just [say] 'Look at this, look at this. Is it good?"). On a more positive note, Alisha noted an improvement in her students' writing abilities ("He wrote it all by himself"). In addition, the students engaged wholeheartedly in multiple literacy lessons ("They're really interested in the lessons ... I'm going to do my drama presentation with the second graders because they just seem really interested in it when I mentioned it and they want to do it").

The idea that Alisha's robust expectations for her learning disabled students' success and her strong internal Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966) concerning her abilities to enhance their academic performance appear to have minimally impacted her students' self esteem is not surprising. Alisha worked with her students for only 75 minutes per week for one semester. In all probability, her students responded on the basis of their previous school experiences. Studies indicate that students are very much aware of teachers' differential treatment (Cooper & Good, 1983; Good, 1987). Indirect messages about students' capabilities can and do affect their self esteem and "younger children are more susceptible to expectancy effects than are older students" (Cotten & Wikelund, 1997, p. 9). Certainly, these three young students were well aware of their special education classification and placement (see Haring, Lovett, Haney, Algozzine,

Smith, & Clarke, 1992). In addition, the reciprocal link between teachers' expectancies about their students' academic potential, and students' "expectations, self esteem, and learning have been well established in the literature" (Cambourne, 2001, p. 785). Evidence indicates that "the majority of failed readers have low expectations of themselves as readers and writers [and]...that the origins of these low expectations can be traced back to classroom experiences that labeled them as failures or potential failures" (Cambourne, 2001, p. 785).

The idea that both groups of students responded positively to broadened conceptions of literacy is not unexpected. Students who participate in multiple literacy classrooms have heightened opportunities to become more motivated, actively engaged learners (Richards, Goldberg, & McKenna, accepted for publication). Students can tap into their multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), receive individualized instruction, collaborate in learning activities, and use alternative forms of communication, all of which promote students' success and motivation for learning (Richards, Goldberg, & McKenna, accepted for publication; Smagorinsky, 2000).

Certainly, the fact that the students in the learning disabled class had difficulties reading and writing despite ample phonics instruction is intriguing given the current emphasis on phonics in the United States and the recommendation of consistent, direct phonics instruction for students with learning disabilities (Executive Summary, Center for the Future of Children, 1996). While some experts wholeheartedly endorse the benefits of systematic phonics lessons (e.g., Adams, 1990; Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-

Zadeh, Shanahan 2001; Lyon, 1997), others emphatically argue against teaching phonics as a distinct subject (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1998; Cambourne, 2001; Coles, 2000; Goodman, 1998; Mathes & Torgesen, 2000; Richards, accepted for publication; Strauss, 2001). A possibility exists that teaching phonics lessons isolated from authentic linguistic contexts did not meet the immediate needs of these three students who had difficulties processing written language. Offering phonics instruction "as a separate subject, by pulling the grapho-phonic system free from the complex web of other linguistic systems [fragments language, and provides] only part of the information a learner needs to read or write effectively" (Cambourne, 2001, p. 785). Moreover, "younger students at risk for developing reading problems...have been found to exhibit excessive difficulty manipulating phonemes as words" (Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Shanahan, 2001, p. 262).

The implications of our conclusions relate directly to special education policies and practices. The discovery that the three students in Alisha's learning disabled class had on-going problems with reading and writing and persistent feelings of low self esteem raises questions as to whether special education "as practiced today is the most efficient and effective way to educate [all] students with special needs" (Executive Summary, Center for the Future of Children, 1996, p. 1). Since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997) mandates placing students with learning disabilities in the least restrictive environment, special education personnel might consider educating the majority of students with mild/ moderate disabilities in regular education classes. Placement in regular

education contexts would enable students with disabilities to think and work collaboratively with nondisabled peers, thereby bolstering their self esteem as learners. Implementation of this type of class environment mandates smaller class size, major changes in classroom instruction, support by inclusion specialists, and individualized help from expert teachers.

The research also speaks to preservice teacher development. Elementary education majors usually do not have opportunities to work directly with special education students. Yet, as classroom teachers, they must accept responsibility for identifying and referring students for possible special education placement. In addition, during their school careers, they will teach many students who have problems learning to read and write, but do not qualify for special education placement. Further, in keeping with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997), in all probability, they will work with students who are classified as having special needs, but receive instruction in regular, inclusive educational settings.

Clearly, teacher preparation programs must routinely provide opportunities for elementary education majors to work with students in special education contexts. Interacting closely with students with special needs has the capacity to sensitize future teachers about their expectations for all students' academic potential. Working directly with students in special classes along with a university supervisor also provides opportunities for elementary education majors to recognize how to adjust and tailor their lessons to meet students' individual learning differences. Toward that end, we plan to extend our field program's

activities to include time for all of our elementary education majors to work with students in special education classrooms. In addition, we plan to invite special education teachers and professors to share their experiences and expertise during our seminar discussions. Such interactions can help our elementary education majors gain up-to-date information regarding the identification, assessment, and teaching of students who require additional support and skilled instruction to optimize their academic progress.

Finally, we plan to share the results of this research with our prospective elementary education majors. Alisha's commendable attributes as a preservice teacher, and her experiences teaching a small group of students in a learning disabled class offer considerable insights for future teachers who, in all likelihood, throughout their school careers, will teach many students who require specialized interventions and gentle, compassionate nurturing in order to attain their full capabilities as learners.

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