An Examination of *Beginning Teacher Instruction* in Special Education: Instructional Reading Practices that Result in *Student Engagement*  

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Introduction

- Why is it important to understand how special education teachers, particularly beginners, engage high incidence students with disabilities in the reading process?
Active engagement in the learning process is correlated with higher achievement scores in general and special education.

Students with high incidence disabilities are more likely than their peers to be disengaged from the learning process.

Understanding how to better engage such students is essential to their progress in school.
What do we know about engaging teachers?

- In literacy, teachers who successfully engage students in learning are likely to employ more sophisticated pedagogy and cohesive, meaningful instruction than their less engaging peers.
- In inclusive classrooms, teachers who engage students with disabilities are more likely than their less engaging peers to employ direct, active instruction with a strong metacognitive component.
Why should we be concerned about beginning teachers?

- Beginning teachers often experience difficulties engaging students in instruction. Such teachers are often...
  - Too focused on learning curriculum and the mechanics of teaching and have difficulty adjusting to individual student needs
  - Struggling with classroom management routines
Moreover beginning special education teachers, despite having stronger classroom management and individualization skills than their general education counterparts, are more likely to struggle with creating a cohesive curriculum and extending student thinking.
However.

- Are some beginning special education teachers better positioned than others to engage students with disabilities in literacy instruction?
- If yes, what is it that these teachers do to better engage students with disabilities in literacy learning?
- And, how can we learn from their practice?
Purpose of Study

- To determine
  - How beginning special education teachers engage students in reading instruction
  - The degree to which they are effective in doing so
  - How more engaging teachers are distinguished from their less engaging peers
Method

- Participant Information
- Data Collection
- Teacher Selection
- Data Analysis
Participant Information

- 14 Beginning teachers from North Central FL schools
  - 13 Caucasian females; 1 African American male
  - Worked in urban/rural schools with moderate-high FRL percentage (40-92%)
  - Taught reading in resource rooms or inclusive settings (50-95 minutes a day)
  - Served 6-25 students with disabilities (mostly LD)
  - Used a variety of reading curricula (e.g., Reading Mastery, Hartcourt Trophies)
  - Held Master’s or Bachelor’s degree in Education (7 each)
  - 13 teachers held regular teacher certification in special education
Data Collection

- 43 reading lessons observed by 5 trained observers
- Extensive field notes and observation instrument used
- Interrater reliability (33% of observations): average 82% of agreement (59-96%)
Teacher Selection

- Using COPSSE Classroom Observation Instrument
- Considering the rates of the following items specifically related to SE (Coefficient $\alpha=.91$)
  - Organization of the lesson
  - Extent of student engagement
  - Fostering student motivation and engagement
  - Continuous and intensive instruction
- Cutoffs for the degree of engaging teachers (ratings of 1-4)
  - Above 3.5 : *Most* engaging
  - 3.5-3.0 : *Highly* engaging
  - 3.0-2.0 : *Moderately* engaging
  - Below 2.0 : *Low* engaging
## Engaging Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Reading Curriculum</th>
<th>Support System (e.g., coaching, supporting staff)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most engaging</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Structured - Eclectic (RM, Trophies, Guided Reading)</td>
<td>Formal/informal coaching Co-teaching Paraprofessional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highly engaging</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8-15</td>
<td>Structured (RM; Trophies+ Guided Reading)</td>
<td>Co-teaching (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderately engaging</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>6-22</td>
<td>Structured (RM, Trophies, etc)</td>
<td>Formal coaching (1) Co-teaching (1) Paraprofessional (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low engaging</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6-25</td>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Co-teaching (1) Paraprofessional (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

- **Constant Comparison Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998):** Undergoes continuous refinement through the data collection and data analysis process, continuously feeding back into the process of category coding.

- **Trustworthiness**
  - Triangulation: multiple observations and observers
  - Peer debriefing
  - Prolonged engagement
Most Engaging Teachers

<Insert a video clip of Kari’s instruction>
Most Engaging Teachers

- Student engagement: above 3.5 (4-highest)
- Well-coordinated reading instruction along with consistently strong student involvement
- Positive, respectful, friendly, and supportive environments
Highly Engaging Teachers

Insert a video clip of Julie’s instruction
Highly Engaging Teachers

- Student engagement: rate of 3.5-3
- Demonstrated all 4 elements of most engaging teachers
- Implemented motivation-related materials and practices (e.g., interesting stories, voting, student choices)
- Often struggled with developing cohesion in their practices (e.g., Guided Reading)
- Misused or insufficiently used effective strategies (e.g., scaffolding, student monitoring)
- Demonstrated less sophistication within instruction (vs. teachers’ strong areas of teaching reading)
Moderately Engaging Teachers

- Student engagement: rate of 3-2
- Accurately described typical BTs in special education
- Exhibited both strengths and weaknesses in motivating students to engage (limited knowledge about effective practices)
- Focused on delivering curriculum rather than coordinating instruction
- Struggled to respond to students’ academic and behavioral needs simultaneously
- Less sensitive to student autonomy
- Teachers with community capital: personally related to students
Low Engaging Teachers

- Student engagement: rate of below 2
- Infrequent use of effective practices in both academic learning and behavior management
- Lack of monitoring of student engagement and understanding → little or no individual assistance given to students
Discussion

- Student engagement can differ depending on how teachers provide reading instruction.
- Beginning special educators are located on the continuum of ability to engage students:
  - Many beginners provide glimpses of expertise, despite concerns ("Lost at Sea"; "Broken Promises")
- There are some factors mediating teacher practices:
  - Curricula (e.g., structured or non-structured; Guided Reading)
  - The number of students
  - Focus in teacher preparation (e.g., General vs. Special Education)
  - Work environments
Four essential components for student engagement

- Cohesion within reading instruction: teachers’ sense of mission along with knowledge about effective reading instruction that leads to student involvement and participation
- Simultaneous responsiveness to both academic and behavioral needs
- Nurturing and supportive relationships between teacher and students
- Autonomy support for student voluntary involvement

Requires the cohesive integration of all components

Similar to effective practices in reading instruction (e.g., Pressley et al., 1998)
Implications

- How do we best support beginning special education teachers to provide engaging reading instruction?
  - Help teachers understand when students are not engaged and what instructional or management issues might be contributing to the disengagement.
  - Provide coaching and induction to help beginners, especially moderately engaging teachers, build capacity for engaging practices.
  - Provide intensive formal and informal support for teachers at the low end of student engagement.
  - Guide most and highly engaging teachers to elaborate on instruction based on their needs (not sure what this means).
Implications (cont’)

- What do we do to best prepare student teachers to provide engaging reading lessons? (How can this question be recasted to connect back to coaching comments on previous slide?)
  - Provide concrete and practical information about what makes engaging instruction for students with disabilities
  - Help student teachers experience the potential of teacher practices that make a difference in student engagement and ultimately achievement
  - Discuss teachers’ role and practices in enhancing student engagement