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Editorial

Vera I. Daniels
Executive Editor

Joseph Kermit Haynes-Casino Rouge Endowed Professor

In this issue of the IJTL we present two articles on current topics in special education. The first article focuses on special education with emphasis on the preparation of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The second article focuses on special education with an emphasis on the development of social skills in children with autism.

In the first article, Diana Martinez Valle-Riestra, Monika Williams Shealey, and Elizabeth D. Cramer report on the results of a study using proven models of recruitment and retention for increasing the supply of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLD) and the methods they used to prepare them to effectively serve PK-12 students and their families. They also share preliminary data from their efforts to recruit and retain graduate students from CLD backgrounds for an advanced master's degree program in special education at an institution of higher education that serves a large Hispanic population, and the program of study used to prepare these candidates for effectively meeting the educational needs of CLD students.

In the second article, Pamela LePage and Susan Courey describe an intervention strategy for social skills development that has proven effective for developing social skills in children with autism spectrum disorders. They discuss the social skill differences between children with autism and their typically developing peers, the challenging these youngsters face, and share information on evidence-based social skills interventions. They also describe a video-based intervention strategy (filmmaking) that they use at their nonprofit community center for developing social skills in children with autism, share information on their challenges, the benefits they have observed, and some parental views of the program. In addition, they provide suggestions on ways teachers can incorporate filmmaking in their classroom.

This issue of the IJTL is one that extends to both PK-12 and higher education. As a group, these authors provide valuable, insightful, and useful information that embrace and contribute to effective teaching and learning.

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Purpose

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) - formerly the E-Journal of Teaching and Learning in Diverse Settings, is a scholarly triple-blind peer reviewed open access electronic refereed journal that is published three times each year by the College of Education at Southern University - Baton Rouge. Publication occurs in the Spring, Summer, and Fall.

The IJTL is designed to provide opportunities for divergent ideas, views, and opinions on various topics and issues from professionals in diverse disciplines and professional arenas. It strives to be highly interdisciplinary in content that is likely to be of interest to teachers, principals, other school administrators, policymakers, graduate and undergraduate students, researchers, and academicians.

Manuscripts that focus on special education, general education (including subject content areas), bilingual education, cultural and linguistic diversity, innovative methods in teaching, assessment, exemplary programs, technology (assistive and instructional), educational leadership and reform, public policy, current issues and practices, and research relevant to education are encouraged.

Manuscripts submitted to the IJTL should be interesting, innovative, informative, well documented, and have practical value that embrace and contribute to effective teaching and learning.

Call for Manuscripts

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) welcomes submissions that contributes to effective teaching and learning. It provides a forum for the dissemination of articles focused on a wide variety of topics and content subject areas.

The IJTL is comprised of four departments -- Feature Articles, Educational Tweets, Online Resources, and the Event Zone.

Feature Articles provide scholarly articles on important topics, theoretical perspectives, current issues, practices, strategies, and research related to teaching and learning in PK-12 and higher education settings. All manuscripts submitted to this department undergo a triple-blind peer review.

Manuscripts for feature articles may be submitted by faculty, graduate students (whose work is co-authored by faculty), school administrators, policymakers, researchers, classroom teachers, and other practicing educators on current and compelling educational topics, issues, practices, and concerns at all levels (PK-12 and higher education) from a wide range of disciplines.

Manuscripts that focus on special education, general education, bilingual education, cultural and linguistic diversity, innovative methods in teaching, assessment, exemplary programs, technology (assistive and instructional), educational leadership and reform, public policy, current practices and issues, and research relevant to education are encouraged. The manuscripts should be

interesting, informative, well documented, appeal to the IJTL diverse audience, and have practical value that embrace and contribute to effective teaching and learning.

Additionally, the manuscripts should be original, well written, and offer new knowledge or a new and insightful synthesis of existing knowledge that has significance or importance to education. They should also have a solid theoretical base and offer an appropriate blend of teaching and practice. The conclusion, summary, final thoughts, or implications should be supported by the evidence presented.

The complete review process for manuscripts submitted to this department may take up to three months. The author guidelines provide additional information on what you should know about the submission process.

Educational Tweets feature brief informative tidbits, views, and opinions on hot topics, current events/issues, educational policies, interesting readings, and other areas that impact education or inform teaching and learning. The information, views, and opinions tweeted in this department reflect those of the author.

Papers submitted to Educational Tweets are limited to 350 words and are generally solicited by the section editors. Persons interested in submitting a paper should make an inquiry. Include in the subject line "Educational Tweets".

Online Resources highlight Internet Websites that provide information on instructional resources for PK-12 classroom and preservice teachers as well as resources that may be of interest to school administrators and teacher education faculty in higher education. Resources featured in this department are generated by the section editors.

The Event Zone features educational events such as conferences, meetings, workshops, forums, professional development opportunities, and webinars sponsored by various agencies and organizations that embrace effective teaching and learning. Events featured in this department are generated by the section editors.

Submission Deadlines		
Spring 2012 (March/April)	Summer 2012 (July/August)	Fall 2012 (October/November)
Manuscript Deadline November 15, 2011	Manuscript Deadline February 15, 2012	Manuscript Deadline May 15, 2012

Author Guidelines

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) is a scholarly triple-blind peer reviewed open access electronic refereed journal that welcomes manuscripts from scholars, academicians, teachers, researchers, graduate students (whose work is co-authored by faculty), administrators, practitioners, and policymakers on a variety of topics and content areas as well as educational issues, evidence-based practices, and topics of educational significance.

Manuscripts submitted must be an original contribution. A cover letter must accompany the manuscript that provides assurances that the manuscript is an original work that has not been previously published (in whole or substantial part), or is being considered concurrently for publication by another publisher.

Manuscripts must be submitted electronically using word processing software. Acceptable formats include Microsoft Word (doc /docx) and Rich Text format (rtf).

Manuscripts should be formatted for printing on standard 8 x 11 inch paper with 1-inch margins, double spaced (including quotations and references), and prepared in Times New Roman 12-point font size. Titles, headings, and subheadings should be in upper and lower case fonts.

Manuscripts should not exceed 25 pages in length, including the title page, abstract, references, and tables or figures.

A separate cover sheet should provide the authors' full name, organization or institutional affiliation, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address; and the corresponding author should be identified. The authors' names should not appear on any other pages of the manuscript. It is the responsibility of the corresponding author to notify the corresponding editor of the IJTL of changes in address, organization, or institutional affiliation occurring during the review process.

An abstract (100 - 150 words) should be included that summarizes the content of the manuscript. Five or six key words should be placed below the abstract.

Tables and figures should be placed in a separate file, and need not be double-spaced. Tables should only be used when appropriate and should include only essential data. Figures should be camera ready. Indicate the location for tables and figures in the text in boldface, enclosed in brackets, on a separate line.

The author is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of all references. References should be double-spaced and follow the specifications of the 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. The author is also responsible for obtaining permission to use copyrighted material, if required.

Photos or artwork must be camera ready. The acceptable electronic format is jpeg that is at least 300 dpi. Authors should never assume that material downloaded or extracted from the Internet may be used without obtaining permission. It is the responsibility of the author to obtain permission, which should accompany the manuscript submission.

Submit completed manuscripts or inquiries to the editor at coeijt1@subr.edu. The IJTL is published by the College of Education under the auspices of the Executive Editor, Vera I. Daniels, Joseph Kermit Haynes-Casino Rouge Endowed Professor, Special Education Programs, Southern University and A & M College, P. O. Box 11298, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813. Telephone/Fax (225) 771-5810.

Review Process

Manuscripts submitted to the IJTL undergo a triple-blind peer review. All identifying information about the author is removed to ensure that the author's identity is not revealed.

Manuscripts received will be screened by the journal editors for conformity to the editorial guidelines, appropriateness of topic, and appropriateness for the journal readership. Manuscripts will also be assessed for content, relevance, accuracy, and usefulness to those in educational settings and stakeholders with an interest in educational policies and issues.

Appropriate manuscripts will be sent to peer reviewers. Poorly written or formatted manuscripts will not be sent out for peer review.

All manuscripts received by the IJTL are assigned an identification number. This number is used to track the manuscript during the review process.

Within two weeks of receipt of the manuscript, an e-mail is sent to the corresponding author acknowledging receipt of the manuscript with notification of the assigned identification number. The corresponding author may contact the journal corresponding editor at any time during the review process to obtain information about the status of their manuscript. Include in the subject line "Request for Manuscript Status Update (Manuscript #___)."

The manuscript review process is generally completed within three months. This process may be slightly longer during major academic breaks or holidays.

Peer reviewers make one of the following decisions concerning a manuscript: (a) accept for publication (b) accept for publication and request minor revisions, (c) consider for publication after major revisions with the stipulation for a second peer review, (d) reject with resubmission invited, or (e) reject and decline the opportunity to publish.

Authors of manuscripts that have been accepted for publication will be notified by e-mail through the corresponding author. In some instances, authors may be asked to make revisions and provide a final copy of the manuscript before it is forwarded for publication.

Manuscripts accepted for publication may be susceptible to further editing to improve the quality and readability of the manuscript without materially changing the meaning of the text. Before publication, the corresponding author will receive an edited copy of the manuscript to approve its content and answer any questions that may arise from the editing process.

The IJTL is always looking for peer reviewers to serve on its Board of Reviewers. If you are interested in being considered as a peer reviewer, click on the link [Peer Reviewer](#) to obtain an application. Please return the application by e-mail (coeijt1@subr.edu) or fax (225-771-5810).

Recruiting and Retaining Culturally Diverse Special Educators

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In light of the current challenges in addressing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, the persistent problems of disproportionality in special education, and the dismal post-school outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and those living in poverty, it is critical that successful models of teacher recruitment and retention are developed and implemented. In this article we review current literature on multicultural issues in special education that underscore the need for a more diverse teaching workforce and look at the recruitment trends described in the retention of teachers who are prepared to effectively serve PK-12 students and their families from diverse backgrounds. We also share preliminary data on our efforts to recruit and retain graduate students in an advanced special education program at a Hispanic-serving institution of higher education. To further guide the efforts of others, we provide recommendations for program development and future research.

Keywords: teacher recruitment and retention, multicultural issues, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, special education, teacher preparation

The growing diversity of America's public school students and the need to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds continue to remain one of the critical issues in the field of education (Ayalon, 2004; Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007; Villegas & Davis, 2007). The lack of ethnic diversity among the teaching workforce is exacerbated in urban and rural settings, and particularly in the field of special education (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Howard, 2003; Prater, 2005; Strosnider & Blanchett, 2003; Sundeen & Wienke, 2009; Tyler, Yzquierdo, Lopez-Reyna, & Flippin, 2004). The implications of failing to provide an ethnically diverse teaching workforce that is prepared to effectively meet the unique needs of ethnic minority students are far-reaching. In light of the current challenges in addressing the growing achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, the persistent problem of disproportionality in special education, and the dismal post-school outcomes for CLD students, particularly those with disabilities, it is critical that successful models of teacher recruitment and retention are developed and implemented, especially in high-need areas affected by a variety of risk factors.

Addressing Cultural Diversity in Special Education

There are a number of reasons why it is critically important to diversify the teaching workforce. The most important is the growing diversity of students in America's public schools and the evident population shifts in the number of school-age students speaking a language other than English (Brisk, Barnhardt, Herrera, & Rochon, 2002). Urban schools are characteristically diverse in their student populations, and according to Ornstein (1991), the majority of students served in the 25 largest school districts in the country are students of color. "The percentage of public schools where White students accounted for more than 50 percent of enrollment was lower in 2008–09 than in 1998–99 (63 vs. 72 percent). In contrast, the percentage of schools where Hispanic students accounted for more than 50 percent of enrollment was higher in 2008–09 than in 1998–99 (13 vs. 8 percent). In both years, the percentage of schools where Black students accounted for more than 50 percent of enrollment was approximately the same (11 percent)" (NCES, 2011, p. 84).

In 2006, in the area of special education, 39% of students (ages 6 through 21) were from CLD backgrounds. Yet, the 25th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) reported that 86% of special education teachers were White and female (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The disparities in the demographic representation of students and teachers is what some characterize as a cultural mismatch or disconnect between students from CLD backgrounds and their predominately White teachers (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Irvine & Armento, 2001).

A review of research on the recruitment and retention of CLD teachers emphasizes the need to ensure that CLD teachers are represented in the teaching ranks to serve as role models to all students because they have unique pedagogical contributions which have been captured in the literature on culturally responsive and relevant teaching (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Irvine, 1989, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ware, 2006). Also, because CLD teachers may be more committed to issues related to social justice and have experiences similar to their CLD students which can impact the teaching and learning process for these students (Haberman, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Tyler et al. (2004) synthesized research on teacher demographics and its impact on student outcomes and found that although many teacher education programs profess a commitment to diversity, structural barriers such as entrance and exit policies, institutional and state standardized assessments, and lack of culturally responsive content and programming contribute to difficulties in recruiting and retaining teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds. In addition, many faculty members in teacher education programs lack the knowledge and experience to embed the curriculum with the cultural competence skills necessary to effectively prepare culturally responsive future teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2005). The cultural mismatch between students and their teachers is also evident in higher education where about 88% of full-time teacher education faculty is White (Ambe, 2006). In the field of special education, where the problem of disproportionate representation frames many of the experiences of students and families from CLD backgrounds, faculty from diverse backgrounds may offer an alternate lens through which to address issues of racial and ethnic diversity.

Problems of disproportionality and the discrimination of students from CLD backgrounds have been studied from a number of vantage points (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Mercer, 1973; Patton, 1998). Although

referral to special education is a process which begins in general education, it has generally resulted in the overrepresentation of students from CLD backgrounds in certain special education programs (e.g., intellectually disabled) and the need for special educators in those settings that are willing and prepared to meet the personal, social, emotional, and academic needs of their students. Factors such as the impact of poverty on student development, ineffective or poor instruction in general education classrooms, racial/ethnic bias, and the cultural mismatch of students and their teachers have been posited as contributing factors in the persistence of disproportionate representation and discrimination (Blanchett, 2006; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry, Klingner, & Cramer, 2007; Manning & Gaudelli, 2006; McHatton, 2007; Wang, 2005). The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) most recent report on minority representation in special education highlights the growing prominence of poverty as a major contributing variable in the referral and placement of a large number of CLD students to special education programs (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Further, researchers have documented the underrepresentation of CLD students in programs for the gifted and talented using similar vantage points (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002).

Despite the influence of contextual variables such as race, culture, and socioeconomic status on the teaching and learning process, there has been a plethora of research documenting the powerful role of teachers in making the greatest difference in student achievement and positive outcomes, especially for students in high-need areas (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Good, 2001; Good & Brophy, 1994). Over the last decade, emphasis on teacher quality has grown in relevance as a result of increased attention to school reform initiatives, the implications of these broad-based initiatives on student achievement and overall family functioning, and mandated systems of accountability (Berliner, 2005; Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2003). In addition to examining the link between teacher quality and student achievement, a number of scholars have addressed the preparedness of special educators to work effectively with students from CLD backgrounds (Gay, 2002; Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002; Kea & Utley, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Still, there remains a great deal of work to be done in ensuring that special educators are able to understand the distinctiveness of cultural diversity and disability and the implications for student achievement, service delivery, and the impact of family involvement in the educational decision-making process (Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Seidl & Pugach, 1998).

Recruitment and Retention of Culturally Diverse Special Education Teachers

In recent years, much of the literature on teacher recruitment and retention has focused on the need to prepare “highly qualified” teachers as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB or Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA]) (Berry, 2004; Brownell et al., 2004; Jameson & Huefner, 2006), and more recently supported by recommendation of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) for a highly effective professional workforce as the reauthorization of ESEA is a priority. As a result, the field of special education has become entrenched in critical conversations about the changing roles of both general and special educators and the impact this is having on the placement and delivery of services to students with disabilities and their families (Cummings, Atkins, Allison, & Cole, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Pugach & Warger, 2001; Shealey, McHatton, & Farmer, 2009). Prior to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, defining “highly qualified” special educators had rarely been addressed in school reform initiatives or school-wide strategic plans. However, due to

the renewed calls for accountability at all systems levels and the prominence of high-stakes testing for all students, it is critical that special educators are effectively prepared to be content- and pedagogical-knowledge experts as well as advocates, change agents, and collaborative partners with general educators, families, and related service personnel.

What continues to be missing from the discourse on the preparation of special educators is a discussion of the implications of failing to effectively prepare professionals who place students' culture, values, and beliefs at the center of the teaching and learning process and understand that a student's culture can be used as a basis for teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Researchers have asserted that many students from CLD backgrounds living in poverty are most likely to be taught by an inexperienced teacher in a setting with limited resources and supports (Berry, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Howard, 2003). For these students, many of whom are at risk for placement in special education, the shortage of highly qualified and effective educators can have devastating implications for student achievement and related outcomes (Howard, 2003). Thus, it is incumbent upon special education teacher preparation programs to develop models of recruitment and retention that are responsive to the unique cultural needs and perspectives of diverse teacher candidates, as well as address the growing emphasis on accountability, data-based decision making, and assessment in the preparation of educators.

Research on preparing special education teachers from CLD backgrounds has traditionally focused on preparing these individuals to work in settings where CLD students and students living in poverty are the majority culture (Campbell-Whatley, 2003; Kea & Utley, 1998; Prater, 2005; Tyler et al., 2004). In preparation for these challenging settings, teacher preparation programs have developed specialized recruitment and retention strategies aimed at preparing teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work effectively with students and families from CLD populations. A review of literature on teacher preparation programs emphasizing the recruitment and retention of teachers from diverse backgrounds reveal strategies grounded in an understanding of the role of culture in teaching and learning (Campbell-Whatley, 2003; Kea & Utley, 1998; Patton, Williams, Floyd, & Cobb, 2003; Prater, 2005; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008; Tyler et al., 2004). These strategies may include making contact with potential candidates through other CLD students and alumni, faculty, professional colleagues, and community partners using what is referred to as the "word of mouth" process (Tyler et al., 2004; Villegas & Clewell, 1998). Thus, teachers from diverse backgrounds can serve as role models and cultural brokers for CLD students and their families. Accessing culture-specific groups in colleges and universities, college students in majors outside of education, and paraprofessionals may also yield a diverse and oftentimes non-traditional pool of candidates (Ayalon, 2004; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Sundeen & Wienke, 2009; Villegas & Davis, 2007).

Retention strategies developed in response to research documenting the needs of CLD college students address academic and financial needs, particularly for students who speak English as a second language and first-generation college students, as well as the importance of interpersonal support (Howard, 2003). Interpersonal support can be derived from consistent mentoring from CLD faculty in addition to support among students in the program and family. The cohort model is often cited in the literature as a successful approach in creating opportunities for students to develop relationships, which result in individual and group gains (Sundeen & Wienke, 2009; Tyler et al., 2004).

The Special Education Program Recruitment and Retention Design

Context

Florida has one of the largest and ethnically diverse populations in the Southeast: 22% (4,223,806) Hispanic; 16% (2,999,862) African American; and approximately 3% (454,821) Asian (Census Bureau, 2010). In addition, Florida ranked 5th among all U.S. states in immigrant population growth (Monarch Center, 2004); admitted over 59,000 new US immigrants in 1998 (Census Bureau, 2005); had a population increase of 23% since 2004; and ranked 7th in the nation for population increase over the decade (Census Bureau, 2005). The South Florida area, specifically Miami-Dade County, is the largest and most highly populated county in the State of Florida. Individuals who speak a language other than English comprise 68% of the county's population. The Miami-Dade County Public School System (M-DCPS) is the 4th largest school system in the U.S., serving Miami-Dade and the immediate area around the city. It has the largest student membership (PK through 12th) compared to other school districts in the State of Florida, with a student enrollment of 380,006 (as of July 2010) in which 91% of its students come from CLD backgrounds. M-DCPS is also the second largest minority-majority public school system in the country with 62% Hispanic, 26% African American, 9% White, Non-Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 2% from other minority groups.

Setting

This research study was conducted at a large public research university that prepares the majority of its teachers for instructional or administrative positions. The university is the top producer of Hispanic graduates in the U.S. at both the bachelor's and master's level, and the 3rd largest producer of minority graduates. The student body reflects diversity at all levels with 60% Hispanic, 17% White, Non-Hispanic, 12% Black, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 7% Other. And, the university serves a large percentage of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Nearly 50% of all undergraduate students receive financial aid and nearly 60% of these recipients come from families with annual household incomes under \$30,000.

Program Description

The curriculum for the advanced master's degree in special education is a 36 credit hour program with a variety of options for specialization tracks (e.g., early childhood special education [ECSE], autism spectrum disorder [ASD]). The coursework is comprised of a research core, advanced special education core, specialized courses, and a culminating project and presentation. The program was designed based on the learning principles of hands-on opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, evidence-based practices, active involvement through field-based experiences; ongoing consultation from faculty, mentors, consultants, and experts in the local community; and building on an already established knowledge base in special education.

Method

Participants

A total of 36 graduate students comprising 35 female (97%) and 1 male (3%) with an age range of 22-55 years (average age = 32.6 years) participated in this study. At the time of the study, students were in their second year of study in the program and expected to graduate during the 2010-2011 academic year. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the students were Hispanic. All of the students had a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) or Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in special education

from a locally accredited college or university. Also, all of the students were state certified in special education (ESE K-12). The majority (80%) was endorsed to teach English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Other areas of certification or endorsement reported were Elementary Education K-6, Reading, Math 5-9, and Middle Grades Integrated Curriculum 5-9. The undergraduate grade point average (GPA) for the group ranged from 3.00-4.00 (M=3.59). In Year 1 of their program, the GPA for the group ranged from 3.39-3.89 (M=3.50). In Year 2 (Fall 2010; Spring 2011), the GPA ranged from 3.53-3.90 (M=3.76). Table 1 shows a breakdown of the demographic characteristics of these students.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Graduate Students

Characteristics	Frequency		M
	n	%	
Gender			
Female	35	97	
Male	1	3	
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	24	66	
White	6	18	
Black	4	11	
Other	2	5	
Degree			
B.S.	34		
B.A.	2		
Areas of Certification/Endorsement			
ESE K-12	36	100	
Elementary Education (K-6)	12	33	
Reading	2	6	
Math 5-9	1	3	
Middle Grades Integrated Curriculum 5-9	1	3	
ESOL	29	80	
Grade Point Average (GPA)			
Undergraduate 3.00 - 4.00	36		3.59
Year 1 in Program 3.39 - 3.89	36		3.50
Year 2 in program 3.53 - 3.90	36		3.76

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment and retention strategies used in this study represent our attempt to provide a comprehensive framework for increasing the pool of qualified CLD applicants; and formalizing supports and resources identified as critical to the retention of graduate students that have the

necessary skills to serve students and families from diverse backgrounds. Salend, Whittaker, Duhaney, and Smith (2003) developed a framework for diversifying teacher education programs to successfully recruit and support graduate students from populations traditionally underrepresented into the field of special education. This framework was used to guide the recruitment and retention efforts in our advanced master's degree program. We implemented a comprehensive recruitment process by targeting activities at the national, state and community, university, and individual levels.

National level. At the national level, efforts were initiated through collaboration with the Monarch Center and the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt). These two federally funded technical assistance and dissemination projects support the needs of minority serving institutions and diverse communities by disseminating recruitment materials at national conferences in the areas of early childhood, special education, and teacher education; and by disseminating program information through a variety of listservs for professional organizations (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), CEC Division for Early Childhood).

State and community level. Recruitment activities at the state and community levels included the dissemination of flyers to local colleges and universities supporting teacher preparation programs in special education, electronic postings on local school district websites, and websites of public and private agencies in the community serving children with disabilities and their families. These efforts also included presentations at community meetings and personal communications with the directors of local agencies and organizations.

University level. Recruitment efforts at the university level included periodic presentations and the dissemination of recruitment materials in targeted undergraduate courses, faculty referrals, and electronic postings on the main College of Education and department websites.

Individual level. At the individual level, recruitment involved accessing potential graduate students. Activities at this level included dissemination of recruitment materials through personal contacts and increasing awareness of teacher preparation programs through referrals from leaders in the community and the local school district.

One key feature of the special education program is the presence of an established Special Education Advisory Board. This group is comprised of diverse and interdisciplinary faculty, educators, public school administrators, community agency representatives, and individuals with a disability or family members of an individual with a disability that serve on a voluntary basis to assist in the further development and evaluation of programs in special education. This board has been in existence approximately 11 years and typically meets twice each year (once a semester). The function of this board in relation to this project was to assist in recruitment efforts and offer feedback for program improvement.

As researchers, we were familiar with and understood the structural barriers documented in the literature that is prevalent in many institutions of higher education, and we were aware that these barriers contribute to the limited presence of students from diverse backgrounds in teacher

education programs. Specifically, we wanted to *broaden the admissions process* by including the traditional submittal of documents that demonstrate academic and professional competence (e.g., transcripts, teaching certification) in combination with an on-site entrance interview for the purpose of understanding the applicant's interest in further expanding their knowledge base in special education. Entrance interview questions (e.g., *Can you provide examples of teaching practices that you have found effective in teaching students with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds? Describe your skills in developing collaborative partnerships with others.*) were designed to tap into each applicant's knowledge of pedagogy, effective instructional practices, overall interest in the program, and knowledge of diverse students and families. A total of 67 interviews were conducted at initial recruitment, and 36 applicants were selected based on their interview scores.

Retention Plan

The recruitment and retention of graduate students from traditionally underrepresented groups was facilitated by *opportunities for mentoring, financial support, building community, engagement in meaningful and relevant field experiences, and professional development* (Cartledge, Gardner, & Tillman, 1995; Eberhard, Reinhardt-Mondragon, & Strottemyer, 2000; Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). We postulated that by responding to structural and attitudinal barriers inherent in institutions of higher education and providing culturally responsive retention strategies to address the unique needs of students from diverse backgrounds, teacher preparation programs will be better equipped to respond to the chronic shortage of teachers that are prepared to effectively work with students and families from CLD backgrounds.

Opportunities for mentoring. Programs that enlist professional development and mentoring achieve the greatest success, and empower and reduce the attrition rates of teachers (Eberhard, et al., 2000). Simply stated, effective mentoring programs provide support and alleviate attrition; and teachers supported with mentoring have higher job satisfaction, display greater commitment to their profession and students, and show less signs of stress and burnout.

Graduate students enrolled in the ASD track of the advanced master's degree program were assigned a mentor during their second year in the program. A total of 6 mentors currently working in the public school system were recruited, selected, and matched with a mentee in the program. These mentors were drawn from a pool of teachers (5 females, 1 male; comprising 3 Hispanic, 2 White, 1 Black) eligible to serve as mentors. All mentors had a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education or a related field, and 4 had a Master of Science degree in Special Education or Counseling. Each mentor met the selection criteria: (1) Florida's clinical supervision training requirements; (2) three or more years of successfully providing services to K-12 students with ASD (e.g., teacher, speech/language pathologist); (3) nationally board certified or evaluated highly by district administrators; (4) a family member of a child with ASD; and/or (5) an expert in the field of special education.

Mentors and mentees were matched on similar teaching and learning philosophies (e.g., whole group learning/instruction, behavior management, differentiated instruction) and professional interests or experiences. Key project personnel conducted an initial orientation with the mentors to discuss a shared vision, roles, expectations, and responsibilities. Also, two follow-up meetings were held with both mentors and mentees to establish structured opportunities and dialogue for

collaborative work (e.g., shared vision, diversity, and affiliations). To facilitate mentoring activities, mentees were asked to keep an online reflective journal using the framework proposed by Cooper and Larrivee (2006) to *engage* them in ongoing *reflection* during the mentoring process and *encourage dialogue* with their mentor. Guidelines for reflective journal entries included “open entries” where mentees had an opportunity to share any thought, anecdote, question, experience, or reaction they may have relative to serving PK-12 students with disabilities and their families as well as “structured entries” around targeted probes (e.g., turning points, peak experiences).

Financial support. Graduate students who were accepted into the advanced master’s degree program in the specialization tracks of ASD and ECSE received full financial support for in-state tuition based on 36 credit hours, and student incentives that covered the cost of books for an academic year and travel reimbursement for participation or presentation at a professional conference. These supports were made possible with federal funding, which allowed many CLD students who were previously unable to pursue the master’s degree due to the costs involved, to return to the university for an advanced degree.

Building community. To promote group cohesiveness, enhance learning opportunities, and increase diversity among graduate students, we formed student educational cohorts. Within a cohort educational model, students are grouped together and move along a pre-designed program of study (Barnett, Bascom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). Research on cohorts is framed around social cognition and Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development that supports the notion that a student learns more effectively when they have opportunities to share experiences, interact with others in the group, problem solve, and seek assistance from others (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2003; Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006). Moreover, this form of group cohesiveness, unity, and sense of community motivate students to perform at an optimal level throughout their program of study (Monteith, 2000; Ross et al., 2006).

Graduate students in the program formed both professional and personal bonds which became evident in the way they openly interacted in courses, shared their opinions and ideas, assisted and engaged in solving academic problems for each other, and arranged study groups to review assigned reading materials and assignments. During a debriefing session, a faculty member shared the following observation—“[graduate] students were eager to assist one another in and out of class and became a very close cohort throughout the semester.” Interestingly, during a debriefing session of the graduate students, it was commented that they were eager to learn, and their “participation level and motivation were high...and they openly shared their knowledge and experiences with fellow classmates.” In a course on diversity, the professor stated, “the [graduate] students were very respectful and were well-prepared by having read and completed assignments. Students were easy to engage in discussion and activities, and most were capable of graduate work.”

Engagement in meaningful and relevant field experiences. Providing well-designed and planned field-based experiences for graduate students was critical to ensuring that they acquired the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work and serve PK-12 students with disabilities and their families by taking into consideration cultural and community issues related to differing values and belief systems. For example, graduate students in the program worked on a project for

one semester that required them to select a family and engage in a variety of activities within the family's home and community settings (e.g., observation of a typical and daily family routine) or administer a series of assessment instruments in collaboration with other professionals. Below are some excerpts shared by graduate students during group debriefing sessions.

I feel more comfortable now about the proper guidelines and best practices that should be followed in order to keep the family involved and at the center of the assessment process...advocating for what should be done and how assessment should be handled when working with families.

The family project taught me the value of communication and really listening to what parents need and are concerned about.

I learned the need to establish solid and honest rapport with families, understanding the critical roles both fathers and mothers play in the assessment and evaluation process of a child with a disability, and most importantly I recognized the impact my own beliefs and perspectives can have on working with families.

These reflections suggest that students who are more prepared for and comfortable in their roles will be more likely to remain in these roles as teachers.

Professional development. A series of professional development seminars were designed as part of the advanced master's degree program in special education to ensure that graduate students extended their learning opportunities beyond the course level. These seminars were designed around topical issues not covered in depth in their program of study, which we considered critical to their preparation, ongoing professional development, and area of specialization (ECSE, ASD). The majority of seminars were designed and conducted by individuals in local community agencies (e.g., University of Miami/Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities Card (UM/NSU CARD), Early Steps, Parent to Parent of Miami, Inc.) that had expertise and hands-on experience working with a diverse population of children and students with disabilities and their families.

A total of 8 professional development seminars were offered (see Table 2), and an average of 18 students attended and participated in these seminars on a regular basis. At the conclusion of each seminar, graduate students were asked to complete an evaluation form by giving feedback on the usefulness and relevance of the seminar.

Evaluation data gathered across these seminars yielded an overall rating of “excellent” in response to presenters selected (94%), usefulness of topics offered (95%), and organization of the presentations (92%). The implication of these findings is that keeping teachers engaged in current practice in their field can empower them to remain in the field (Eberhard et al., 2000).

Table 2
Professional Development Seminars

Seminar	Description	Learning Objectives
Education Research (Part 1)	Learning to navigate the university library's research collection is essential for academic and professional success. This workshop will enable participants to develop the necessary research skills to locate, identify, select, and evaluate information in today's complex information environment. A brief overview of RefWorks , a Web-based tool that helps you to organize your references, insert citations in your assignments, and prepare bibliographies in APA format, will be provided.	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate the Library's webpage. • Access and use ERIC to retrieve journal articles/research studies. • Generate useful keywords and descriptors for searching. • Conduct an advanced search for relevant articles. • Identify a variety of articles appropriate to your topic. • Use ERIC database features to export, save, and email citations. • Access RefWorks and export ERIC citations to create a bibliography in APA format.
APA Writing (Part 2)	American Psychological Association (APA) Style is the writing format most commonly used in the social and behavioral sciences (e.g., psychology and education) to communicate research and information. APA Style provides guidelines to ensure that an author presents his or her writing/research in an organized, concise, and unbiased nature. APA Style citations allow readers to cross-reference and locate sources/publications cited by the author in his or her manuscript.	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become acquainted with APA Style (6th Edition) and its purpose in the writing process. • Understand the parts (e.g., title page, abstract, headings, subheadings) of a scholarly manuscript. • Understand the most common APA rules (e.g., formatting, running head). • Understand proper citation styles, including in-text and parenthetical author-date citations and construction of a reference page. • Analyze samples of papers written in APA Style and engage in hands-on writing activities.
Teachers as Advocates: A Collaborative Partnership	Advocacy is not an event; it is an ongoing collaborative process between teachers and families on a child's behalf. It requires creating a relationship built on trust, honesty, and respect. Establishing and maintaining positive collaborative relationships with families requires an understanding of the different roles that teachers play in a child's education and schooling.	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become aware of a family's rights and responsibilities under the law as well as the teacher's role. • Be able to identify the six (6) principles of IDEA (2004) outlining organizational system and program options. • Be able to further develop their collaboration skills in the IEP process.
Introduction to the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP)	Early Steps is Florida's early intervention system that offers services to infants and toddlers (birth to thirty-six months) with special needs and disabilities. The	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become familiar with the Early Steps process from referral to initial IFSP development. • Have the opportunity to observe the development of an IFSP.

Table 2. Professional Development Seminars (continued)

Seminar	Description	Learning Objectives
	<p>Individualized Family Support Plan sometimes referred to as the IFSP, identifies the specific concerns, priorities, and resources a family has about their child's development. This plan begins with building partnerships with the professionals who will provide services and supports based on the family's needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop outcome statements, timelines, and strategies on an IFSP to address specific developmental outcomes. • Become familiar with the rest of the Early Steps journey from initiation of services after the initial IFSP through Transition.
<p>Overview of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence in Young Children</p>	<p>There is a need to focus attention on increasing children's ability to follow directions, play cooperatively, solve social problems, and identify and regulate their emotions. Helping families understand the importance of nurturing social-emotional skills and providing them with the tools to do so is an important part of improving the abilities of young children. There is a need to improve the overall quality of early childhood programs, which includes ongoing support and training for staff to improve the skills needed to address challenging behaviors.</p>	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe an evidence-based framework for addressing social-emotional development and challenging behavior. • Be able to describe the relationship between environmental variables and children's challenging behaviors. • Be able to discuss why it is important to be intentional about teaching social-emotional skills. • Be able to identify the importance of teaching problem-solving and will be able to identify problem-solving steps. • Be able to identify the difference between Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) and traditional discipline approaches. • Be able to identify when individualized intensive interventions are needed.
<p>Leadership: Having a Voice</p>	<p>The ability to advocate entails leadership skills that extend throughout a teacher's career and throughout all aspects of their professional life. Leadership as a special education teacher is the ability to guide and direct students, families, and colleagues to advocate in the best interest of the students and their families.</p>	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain increased awareness of the teacher's role in advocating for students with disabilities and their families. • Gain an understanding of their attributes towards students with disabilities and how they may have a potential impact on promoting self-efficacy in their classroom and their advocacy efforts for the students. • Be able to identify the conflict resolution skills that will assist them in increasing support from administrators and other professionals in advocacy efforts.

Table 2. Professional Development Seminars (continued)

Seminar	Description	Learning Outcomes
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Clinical Randomized Control Trial (RCT) of a Joint Attention Intervention for Young Children with ASD	This seminar will discuss the research design and preliminary results of a randomized control trial (RCT) to evaluate the effectiveness of a joint attention intervention, targeting initiation of joint attention (pointing, showing, and gaze shifting) for children with ASD. Specifically, the presentation will highlight (a) the efficacy of the intervention procedures to improve the 3 targeted IJA behaviors, (b) preliminary data aimed at determining whether the intervention program is effective in improving IJA when compared with a control group, and (c) to determine if individual differences in pre-treatment child characteristics (e.g., social motivation) predict differential acquisition of IJA skills for children receiving the intervention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to identify leadership strategies that can be used in advocating for students with disabilities in the classroom and on an administrative level. <hr/> <p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain an understanding of the concept of joint attention and importance of joint attention for typical development. • Gain an understanding of joint attention deficits in children with ASD and the rationale for developing interventions targeting joint attention. • Gain an understanding of the rationale for utilizing various research designs (RCT and multiple baseline) to evaluate treatment effectiveness. • Gain an understanding of different standardized and behavioral assessments to measure joint attention skills in young children. • Gain an understanding of behavioral intervention strategies and their effectiveness in improving joint attention skills in children with ASD.
Role of Assessment in the Educational Planning of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	The assessment of students with ASD is complex because, while the core deficits of the disorder involve difficulty with social interactions and communication, the impact of those deficits commonly extends to other domains of functioning. The purpose of this seminar is to describe the role of assessment in educational planning, and to provide an overview of a range of assessment and evaluation tools.	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain an understanding of the importance of assessment and evaluation of students with ASD during educational planning. • Gain familiarity with a broad range of assessment tools appropriate for use with individuals with ASD. • Gain understanding about how to utilize assessment information to develop relevant teaching and instructional strategies.
Professionalism for Advanced Leaders in Special Education	The ability to present oneself as a professional becomes increasingly important as teachers advance in their professional life. It is critical that as advanced leaders, teachers know how to present themselves and their research in a positive light.	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain experience preparing a presentation of his/her research. • Practice skills for presenting information effectively. • Gain knowledge about professional organizations within special education.

Discussion, Recommendations, and Implications for Future Research

The changing landscape of America's public schools presents both opportunities and challenges in providing all students with equitable educational experiences that lead to positive outcomes. When documenting the educational outcomes for students from CLD backgrounds, researchers have found that many of these students have not received appropriate instruction in either a special or general education setting (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This is due in part to the rapidly changing student demographics and the need to recruit and retain highly qualified and effective teachers from backgrounds similar to the majority of the students.

In the field of special education, the disproportionate representation of children of color has plagued the field for over forty years. Researchers have examined the problem from a number of perspectives ranging from assessment bias and ineffective instruction to the role of poverty. High quality special educators committed to issues of equity and social justice, and knowledgeable about the role of culture in student performance are critical to the success of all PK-12 students, particularly those from CLD backgrounds.

Successful special education teacher preparation programs recruit teachers from diverse backgrounds, provide a curriculum that embraces culturally responsive and evidence-based practices, and implement strategies that contributes to retention efforts. The advanced master's degree program in special education that we discussed, and its design, build upon best practices and demonstrate promising practices in the areas of recruitment and retention of CLD teachers. The context in which the participating graduate students were prepared was rich with opportunities to develop cultural competence through coursework, diverse field experiences and projects, opportunities for professional development beyond the program of study, and interactions with mentors and local community experts serving diverse populations of children and students with disabilities and their families. The strengths of this program are documented by faculty and graduate students' anecdotal comments and by empirical data from graduate students' coursework and seminar evaluations.

From our experiences with this study, we established seven recommendations for program development—

1. Develop structures that facilitate ongoing dialogue between community constituents, teacher candidates, and faculty from various disciplines such as advisory boards and teacher education councils or committees.
2. Provide professional development for faculty in addressing the needs of teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds with an emphasis on the unique needs of candidates who may speak English as a second language.
3. Provide financial support and incentives for candidates confronted with economic challenges, and the growing number working full-time.
4. Increase the presence of faculty from diverse backgrounds and provide candidates with opportunities to experience other unique perspectives and commitment to diversity issues.

5. Develop and adopt a formal mechanism to support data collection and continuous program improvement and restructuring efforts.
6. Develop cohort structures for candidates to facilitate scheduling and consistency, as well as a system for internal support.
7. Provide ongoing professional development and implement a system for mentoring and induction opportunities.

Our study advances a number of avenues for promising lines of research on the recruitment and retention of diverse special educators, and the impact candidate diversity has on student outcomes. First, our study suggests that it is critical to examine the experiences of special education candidates from diverse backgrounds, particularly those in predominately White institutions. This research builds upon research previously conducted with graduate candidates from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds in other areas of education. It also underscores the need for culturally responsive programming that is grounded in the experiences of the candidates and racially and ethnically diverse faculty. Moreover, our study supports mechanisms such as mentoring, financial, and academic support.

The role of teacher quality on student outcomes as evidenced predominately by student achievement has also received a great deal of attention in recent years, thus advancing another critical area for future research. This research should focus on identifying the specific practices implemented by racially and ethnically diverse special educators and determining the extent to which these practices influence or impact student achievement, teacher-student engagement, and family-school collaboration in educational decision-making.

Final Thoughts

During this time of increased demands for accountability in teacher education as it relates to student outcomes in PK-12 settings, it is critical that special education teacher education programs respond by developing high quality programs grounded in an understanding of the role of culture in teaching and learning. The personnel preparation support provided through grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), has created countless opportunities for teacher education programs at minority-serving institutions. This funding not only provides a gateway for the development of highly effective and innovative programs that emphasize the key features highlighted in this master's degree program but also serves as a catalyst to creating meaningful partnerships with communities most in need of highly effective teachers.

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Filmmaking: A Video-Based Intervention for Developing Social Skills in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Video production can be easily used as a way to develop social skills in older children with higher-level autism and Asperger syndrome. The program described in this article is an inclusive program that employs a reverse inclusion strategy to teach social skills to children and adolescents with autism utilizing filmmaking. We discuss some of the social challenges faced by these children, the importance of addressing social skills, the program that we implement for developing social skills in children on the spectrum, and our experiences and observations with this program. We provide strategies that should be considered during filmmaking to help children on the spectrum develop social skills in integrated settings, share our perspectives of filmmaking, and our observations of the impact of filmmaking groups on learning.

Keywords: autism, autism spectrum disorders, Asperger syndrome, filmmaking, social skills development, social skills programs, video modeling

Filmmaking is an artistic way of helping children on the autism spectrum develop social skills. In this article, we describe how we use filmmaking as a reverse inclusion strategy to teach social skills to children and adolescents with autism. We start by discussing the social challenges faced by children and adolescents with autism, the importance of addressing social skills, and some of the barriers we faced as we addressed social skill differences in the design and implementation of our center's program, including the transfer of social skills and recruitment of typical peers. We also talk about the theoretical foundation that supports our center's activities and how our strategies are supported by research. Additionally, we provide suggestions on how teachers might set up video groups in their classrooms to support social skills development and inclusion. We discuss how our film groups helped children with autism and Asperger syndrome make friends and develop a sense of identity. And, we provide strategies on how to encourage social skills development when children are learning about filmmaking. It is hoped that the information we share will be useful for teachers working to develop integrated social experiences in their classrooms, schools that are developing naturalistic socialization programs for children with autism, nonprofits seeking to develop integrated out-of-school programs for children, parents, and adults on the autism spectrum who are seeking answers to questions on socialization services.

Social Challenges of Individuals with Autism

Difficulties with social skills are a defining characteristic of autism. Individuals with autism usually have problems interacting and communicating with people; and they are known to exhibit restricted, repetitive, or ritualistic behaviors, interests, and activities (Schall & McDonough, 2010). Challenges in the area of socialization persist for many individuals with autism regardless of cognitive or language ability (Carter, Davis, Klin, & Volkmar, 2005). These social challenges

also persist for adolescents with Asperger syndrome. It has been reported that adolescents with Asperger syndrome have fewer friends and more incidents of bullying (Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001). Thus, the social challenges experienced by students with autism and Asperger syndrome can shape their quality of life and future outcomes. It can also affect academic achievement and social adjustment for school-aged individuals. For adults on the spectrum, social challenges can affect underachievement in occupation, independent living, marriage, and friendships (Hendricks, 2010; Zercher, Li, Marquart, Sandal, & Brown, 2006; Howlin, 2000; Odom et al., 2006). Social skills do not come naturally to individuals with autism spectrum disorders. To master social skills, they must be taught the skills and given multiple opportunities to practice these skills again and again.

Social Skills Interventions

Research on social skills interventions describes an array of program models and services with varying results (Schreiber, 2011; Wilczynski & Pollack, 2009). According to Schreiber (2011), current research involving social skills interventions for school-aged children and teens with high functioning autism is still in its genesis. Most of the studies cited in Schreiber's literature review were case studies that contained small sample sizes. While single-subject designs with clinically significant outcomes may provide the first indication of efficacy in social skill intervention, it cannot be established without larger numbers. Only six studies had sample sizes of 25 or more, and only one study included effect sizes, which makes cross-study comparisons difficult. In addition, only seven of 38 studies included a control group, with only two of the seven using random assignment. Parents are often reluctant to give permission for their child to participate in a study if their child may be randomly assigned to a control group and excluded from a potentially helpful intervention. To address this issue, most studies that included a control group made use of a wait-list or delayed-treatment control group. Another difficulty in comparing interventions is the variety of social skills that were targeted, as well as outcome measures.

Two common challenges to the successful outcomes of most social skills interventions include generalizing and maintaining skills across environments and real-life situations (Rogers, 2000; Williams White, Keonig, & Scahill, 2007). This can be especially challenging when interventions fail to target meaningful skills taught in the context of natural settings (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Rogers, 2000; Williams White et al., 2007). To address this challenge, educators need to identify practices that foster generalization and maintenance such as outings to community settings, opportunities for families to practice skills or activities outside of the intervention, and regular meetings with families (Mackay, Knott, & Dunlop, 2007).

On the other hand, some educators suggest specific supports for successful social skills interventions that place careful attention on environmental factors such as teaching social skills instruction embedded within preferred activities through a familiar and predictable school and home or community setting that limits unpleasant sensory stimulation (Marans, Rubin, & Laurent, 2005). Other recommendations for improving social skills programs include matching strategies and tailoring programs to the individualized needs of the student (Bellini et al., 2007; Gresham et al., 2001).

Many social skills training models used with higher-functioning students with autism focus on social cognition or understanding the principles behind social behavior based on Theory of Mind.

In brief, Theory of Mind is the ability to reflect on the contents of one's own mind and understanding another person's mind, like developing empathy. Although research indicates that individuals with autism can improve performance on false belief tests or perspective taking tasks with training, these improvements often do not translate into progress in everyday interactions (Ozonoff & Miller, 1995).

Additionally, research suggests that caution should be taken with programs that focus on social weaknesses or challenges since negative self-evaluation can impact the anxiety levels of some individuals with autism (Mundy, Henderson, Inge, & Coman, 2007). Concerns about anxiety are especially noteworthy as individuals on the spectrum exhibit significantly higher levels of anxiety than neurotypical individuals or individuals with learning disabilities (Bellini, 2006). Cognitive-behavioral therapy augmented with social skills training in a group setting may be an effective way to reduce anxiety, foster friendships, and improve social and adaptive skill deficits of individuals with high functioning autism (Lopata, Thomeer, Volker, & Nida, 2006; White, Ollendick, Scahill, Oswald, & Albano, 2009). By addressing the socialization needs that are unique to autism (due to higher levels of physiological arousal and challenges) with cognitive-behavior therapy (e.g., self-regulation and relaxation strategies) that is augmented with social skills training, it can reduce social anxiety as well as emphasize the importance of group participation with peers (Bellini, 2006; Lopata, et al., 2006; White et al, 2009). However, for the social skills to be maintained and generalized, they must be practiced in a naturalistic environment.

Activities generated from special interests of individuals with autism may be an excellent vehicle for promoting teamwork, as well as providing opportunities for these individuals to interact with a diverse social group in a relatively predictable environment. In Schreiber's (2011) analysis of the literature on social skills development in children with autism, it was suggested that educators might find it effective to incorporate "social stories" or another strategy that taps into the high verbal skills of this group. In the case of a visually based intervention such as filmmaking using "video groups," the social stories would be written through a video script thereby creating positive social experiences that can potentially lead to increased motivation on the part of the child to initiate and engage in further social interactions.

While research indicates that social skills program models that use adults as partners experience challenges in generalizing skills to peer settings (Rogers, 2000), intervention models based on socialization within a natural peer setting also have challenges. Parent, family, and peer training can be essential in ensuring a holistic social skills application; and, adult scaffolding is one intervention that can be used to encourage socialization skills among these entities (Prendeville, Prelock, & Unwin, 2006). Adult scaffolding is an assisted learning experience designed to increase the participation of children with autism spectrum disorder in social interactions. When using adult scaffolding, the parent (or another adult) arranges social interactions, such as playdates or outings for children with high functioning autism. As the child becomes more socially proficient and assumes more responsibility for the interaction, there is a gradual fading of parent support.

One of the most common challenges to peer group intervention is reduced natural motivation for neurotypical peers to engage in social interactions with peers with autism (Stichter, Randolph, Gage, & Schmidt, 2007). While programs that promote autism awareness and how to interact

with individuals with autism spectrum disorders can contribute to fostering positive peer interactions and acceptance (National Research Council, 2001; Bellini, 2006), recruiting neurotypical peers to voluntarily participate in programs remains a challenge for community-based intervention programs.

Moreover, social skill programs in community settings that include neurotypical peers report having difficulty accessing appropriately matched peers. In addition, programs that include typically developing peers or peers with other types of disabilities face the challenge of locating research-based techniques and practices that are widely applicable to a diverse group of students. Stahmer (2007) noted several difficulties in applying research-based programs in community setting such as the lack of published manuals and guidelines on research-based programs, particularly, guidelines geared towards the implementation of programs in a community setting, and applicable information on the type and intensity of parent involvement and peer recruitment as part of the programs.

Background

The community-based program model that we describe in this article is one that we implement at the Autism Social Connection (ASC). The ASC is a nonprofit organization that was founded five years ago by a group of parents, professionals, college faculty, and community members. This center provides out-of-school programs for children with autism in the San Francisco Bay area.

Children on the spectrum that participate in programs at the ASC are described as mild to moderate in their disability. Technology at the center includes user-friendly computers, cameras, lighting, microphones, a projector, and tripod. The staff at the center is trained to orchestrate filmmaking activities to promote a cycle of interaction and approbation. The staff model social interactions for the children and elicit these interactions from them.

When children with autism first start at the ASC, they usually do not have many friends and do not know what it means to have lasting friendships. Through filmmaking, they learn in subtle ways what it means to have a friend and be a friend to another child.

The primary mission of the ASC is to encourage children and adults with autism who participate in filmmaking activities to develop their socialization skills and embrace their identities through creativity and collaboration. Programs at the center focus on social relationships, rather than “surface behaviors,” the child’s interest, and natural motivation.

Activities that we implement at the ASC (i.e., video, art, photography, and drama) lend themselves easily to embedding social skills training because typically developing children learn to appreciate the art skills and ideas of children on the spectrum as they develop confidence and share more ideas. As a result, this becomes an iterative process of creativity, interaction, approbation, and confidence building for children with autism and typically developing peers.

In this article, we focus on the ASC filmmaking groups for boys and girls with autism and Asperger syndrome between the ages of 10 and 18. Although the social groups for the filmmaking classes were established in a non-profit community center, the program that we use at the center can be easily transferred and implemented in a classroom setting or after-school program.

Student Recruitment

Our experience with student recruitment echoed Stahmer's (2007) findings as we worked to develop interventions based on shared experiences with typically developing peers. In the beginning stages of our program, we implemented Wolfberg's (1995) Integrated Playgroups Model, which focuses on building children's play interests and abilities in a natural setting. Although research suggests that this play-based intervention may improve social patterns and symbolic play (Wolfberg, 1995), the challenge of trying to recruit and assess typically developing peers from the community outweighed the advantages. Our center was unable to continue with this model because we could not implement Integrated Play Groups with fidelity. In addition to difficulty with peer recruitment, we found that children wanted more variety in the selection of toys and activities than the Wolfberg model allowed.

Video Modeling

Video modeling is an effective teaching method for promoting social, language, and play skills of children, adolescents, and adults with autism spectrum disorders (Bellini & Akullian, 2007; Ganz, Earles-Vollrath, & Cook, 2011; McCoy & Hermansen, 2007; National Autism Center, 2009; Wilczynski & Pollack, 2009). Video modeling involves the use videos to provide modeling of targeted social skills (Bellini & Akullian, 2007). Filmmaking is the type of video modeling that we implement in the ASC where children reflect on their social behaviors and then reenact what they determine to be sociable behavior, but not in the context of what they are doing wrong, rather in the context of what a scene should look like in a movie.

There are four basic steps that we use for implementing filmmaking with students with autism—(1) identifying the target behavior (i.e., the social skills deficits), (2) identifying the target skills (i.e., the skills to be learned or developed), (3) video production (i.e., developing the video script, identifying who will demonstrate the behavior, identifying the scenario to be videotaped, and setting up and videotaping the scene), and (4) implementing the video modeling intervention (i.e., watching the videos, summarizing what has been observed in the videos, and practicing the skill in differing contexts).

All of the social skills intervention strategies that we implement at the ASC are evidenced-based. The filmmaking programs are designed around video modeling strategies that are proven effective in teaching social, language, and play skills to individuals with autism (Bellini & Akullian, 2007; McCoy & Hermansen, 2007; National Autism Center, 2009; Wilczynski & Pollack, 2009). Video modeling is especially effective for individuals with autism because it is highly motivating and engaging, and it focuses attention directly on targeted actions or cues. In addition, video modeling relieves anxiety by removing individuals from the intensity and uncertainty of spontaneous social interactions (Charlop-Christy, Le, & Freeman, 2000). With video modeling, children can watch a person (or character) on video, discuss his or her social interactions, and talk about the nature of the relationship. Some programs have the children videotape their contrived or scripted social interactions and then talk about their actions. In these situations, caution should be taken when talking about social challenges with children on the spectrum so as not to make them feel ashamed, humiliated, or embarrassed about how they acted or who they are as individuals.

In 2009, the National Autism Center (NAC) published a document written by a panel of experts who rated interventions considered evidence-based, according to extensive research reviews. The

panel classified each intervention based on widely accepted experimental evidence standards and related outcomes to determine if an intervention is established, emerging, not established or harmful. They found modeling to be effective, and specifically stated that video modeling was effective for children ages 3-18 years. They also determined that naturalistic teaching strategies are effective for children from age 0 to 9 years. Additionally, peer-training interventions were deemed effective for children ages 3-14 years. The NAC categorized developmental relationship-based treatment as emerging. Thus, the theoretical foundation for the interventions developed and implemented by the center were strongly supported by research of the NAC for providing appropriate interventions to students with autism spectrum disorders.

The Teaching Environment

The teaching environment at the ASC is an inclusive setting. The social groups were comprised of children and adolescents with autism and Asperger syndrome, as well as typically developing peers. Occasionally, the ASC would offer social groups for participants from preschool through adult. For younger children, the center provided integrated playgroups and play-dates. For older children in upper elementary, middle, and high school, the ASC offered film, drama, art, photography, cooking, and movement groups depending on demand and needs identified by participating parents and advisory board members.

The staff at the ASC tries to bring children together based on special interests. Currently, the film groups are experiencing a high demand because many children with autism are interested in movies or movie making, and parents appreciate the development of filmmaking skills as well as social skills. Parents have reported that their children look forward to attending filmmaking groups. Adults with autism also enjoy filmmaking classes because these classes provide a venue for them to demonstrate talent, communicate and learn vocational skills, and improve their social abilities.

The Filmmaking Groups

Children with autism make up the majority of participants in film groups. Their families pay for the services, which are supplemented by grants and fundraising. Typical peers are volunteers that we recruit from private (mostly religious) schools to join children with autism in these reverse inclusion settings.



Figure 1. Setting Up Scene

The ASC works with approximately 20 to 25 children on the spectrum and 15 typically developing children at one time. The children range in age from 8 to 16 years. Children under eight are mostly involved in integrated playgroups, art, or music groups.

The ratio of boys to girls with autism who come to the ASC is about 4 to 1; the ratio of girls to boys without autism is approximately 2 to 1.

Because girls are more likely to volunteer as typically developing peers, it can pose a challenge for teachers since girls and boys usually want to do different things during their social time.



Figure 2. Shooting Scene

Although many of the children participating in the film groups have what we describe as a mild disability, two of the children with Asperger syndrome had a few academic challenges but their social challenges presented serious problems in school. For example, one child in elementary school who was fully integrated into general education kept up with his peers academically and acted fairly typical during classes, but at recess he preferred to sit by himself on the playing field, bang sticks on the ground and hum.

Since many children with autism have focused interests that can seem like obsessions, when they first come to the ASC they show little curiosity in other children's interests. As a result, many of these children were not in a general education setting even though most of them could keep up with their peers academically and had no other behavior problems. The teachers explained that a few of the children with autism experienced delays in receptive language processing (a few seconds), as well as speech and language. Some children had problems with pragmatic speech and could not carry on an extended conversation. Some had minor behavior problems, mostly anxiety-related, where they might engage in slightly disruptive social behaviors. Nonetheless, all of the children in the film groups were considered high functioning.

Implementing Filmmaking in the Classroom

Teachers can use a number of strategies to implement filmmaking in their classroom. However, we suggest using a peer-assisted learning strategy to create heterogeneous groups of children, including children on the spectrum. It is important to have children in a group with different functioning levels so that all high achievers do not end up in one group and low achievers in another. We suggest placing children in groups of six. Having a group of this size will allow children to act as crew and cast to produce a good video. Some children will be recording the video while others are acting.

Prior to filming, ask the children to write a script together. Initially, the children should be encouraged to write scripts about friendships. In this way, the teacher can talk naturally about social skills, making friends, and anti-bullying. Students could also be asked to start by brainstorming ideas for a story. Teach the children how to brainstorm by asking them to write any idea down, no matter how outrageous. Brainstorming encourages the sharing of ideas, and sometimes the most outrageous ideas can be the best. Also, brainstorming creates a ideal opportunity for children to get to know each other, learn to cooperate, talk with each other, laugh together, and allow each other to have the spotlight (when their ideas are accepted by the group) and have fun together. Alternatively, the teacher could ask the children to write a script at home

or in another class, such as social studies, to bring other content areas to the forefront of the process. Or, the teacher could place children in pairs and have each pair work on an idea and then come together as a group to share their ideas and formulate a decision about which script they want to work on together. Such an activity forces the group to learn to negotiate and to communicate openly and honestly. Also, the children can read each other's scripts and decide how they want to make the movie. In groups, children can negotiate script changes (e.g., cutting scenes, adding scenes, changing characters or names of characters) or changing the name of the video. All of these activities combine to create a process of story telling, writing, editing, and working with other children to create a workable script that requires a negotiated interaction.

In the next step, ask the children to set up scenes, select costumes, and construct the set. You could also have the children draw a storyboard and encourage them to write stories that do not require elaborate costumes or sets. The videos should be short and require just a few scenes to put together. Long videos take more time to edit and children can get bored if the video takes too long to make. Videos should also be short because scenes often need to be repeated over and over, and multiple shots can get tedious for some children. In addition, the script should be fairly simplistic, without a lot of elaborate dialog, especially if high quality sound equipment is not available. Because everyone needs to hear what the children are saying in the film, when sound is unclear everyone loses interest in the film and the filmmakers become very disappointed. To avoid low level or unclear sound, teachers should have students use microphones when possible.

As filmmaking continues, ask the children to take on a different role each time they meet for filmmaking. The children can, among themselves, negotiate who will take each acting role. In this way, each child will have an opportunity to have a special acting role in each production. However, it should be noted that each week the children should also take on a different role thereby having a chance to understand and practice each role. Typical roles for filmmaking include director, cameraman, lighting expert, the person who holds the boom, the person holding the slate, and the sound expert. The amount of communication and collaboration in the interaction of filmmaking is abundant.

During post-production, children can work in pairs to develop music and sound effects for their film, in addition to editing (e.g., scenes, titles, subtitles, transitions). At the ASC, the teachers work on editing with younger children. Younger children find editing challenging and sometimes boring because they are eager see the final product. Teachers might recruit parent volunteers to do the editing or help the children with the editing. It is also helpful if teachers work together on a weekly basis to edit some scenes of the children's work so that they can see the progress of their work from week to week. In doing so, the children can feel a sense of accomplishment and they can see themselves on video. A good time to talk about their short film and social skills is at the beginning of a class session when teachers show the children what they did the week before and help them plan for the day.

Teachers only need to know a little about specialized technology to implement a filmmaking project. At the ASC, we use a portable green screen or stand up lighting, but with today's less expensive high definition hand held cameras, iMovie, and other technology, filmmaking and movie making does not require as much skill or money as it once did. Teachers can paint a wall green or cover a wall with green paper to make a background for special effects or they can take

children outside to use natural light to make their movies. However, teachers need to know how to use basic movie making hardware and software applications. It would be ideal if teachers knew how to make graphics for movie titles, use a green screen for special effects, and access public domain music, even if they don't know how to use something like Garage Band to teach children how to compose music for their production.

Teachers who only use a video camera will probably experience difficulty if they have children point and click to make a movie. Children need to be taught the "how to" skills in filmmaking and they need to learn some basic movie making skills like when and how to capture close ups and wide angled scenes, and when and how to edit and merge those scenes together. Children will get bored, and the quality of the film will be poor, when teachers allow them to simply film scene after scene without using editing or special effects software.

During filmmaking, it is important that teachers keep in mind that adolescents and teenagers with autism need to stay with the same group for a long period of time (e.g., an entire school year) because it takes a longer time for these children to get to know other people. Therefore, allow extended time for them to connect with other children before deciding that the group composition is not working. Ideally, it would be beneficial if the groups could continue to work together for several years. However, teachers can change the schedule and have the children work together more often for a shorter amount of time. At the ASC children work together once a week for two hours, and most of them come to the center for many years.

Parent and Peer Involvement

Parent Involvement

Parental involvement in helping children with autism develop socialization skills is critical. One way teachers can bring together parents of children with autism and parents of typically developing peers is by having a movie premiere. At the ASC, parents always attend special movie showing events to support their children and the teacher. These events are successful because parents get to know each other, participate more in activities, and learn about autism. Some of the videos created by children at the ASC are published on [YouTube](#) and can be viewed by the children, family, and friends. Producing videos demonstrates to parents that children with autism can produce good work. Most of the videos on YouTube were created and produced by children from eight to twelve years old with varying abilities.

Thus, it is important for parents of typically developing children and children with autism to understand that an important goal of filmmaking is not only to help children with autism learn video production but also to help them learn about, engage with, and accept differences. At the ASC it is not unusual for some typically developing peers to volunteer for several years to get to know and feel connected to teens with autism in the film groups. In one instance, a typically developing teenager, who was shy when he came to the ASC in junior high, starred in his school play during his senior year of high school. His sister has moderate autism and was also given a role in the same play in high school, which was a great experience for both children. This typically developing boy pursued a major in theater in college, and he is not the only typically developing child at the Center who has pursued acting.

Peer Involvement

The goal of the filmmaking program for typically developing children is to develop awareness and understanding of children with autism in a different way—a way of acceptance and appreciation of human difference. Instead of seeing a child with autism as a bit odd and always in need of help, typical peers are given an opportunity to get to know that children with autism and learn that these children have good ideas and can come up with interesting names for films, write funny dialog, act without embarrassment, and produce music on computers. These children also have a keen sense of what a film should look like. This is what teens with autism need—their typical counterparts to accept them and appreciate them for who they are that day.

Continuing an ongoing conversation with typically developing peers is another important goal of the filmmaking program. For general education inclusion teachers contemplating a filmmaking project, emphasis needs to be placed on preparing typical students for what may happen and what outcomes are expected. They should be told that outcomes are not just films. There are also friendships that develop through the filmmaking process. Moreover, typical peers need to be told what should be accomplished and teachers should orchestrate the classroom activities so that children cannot act like their uninformed friends during lunch club and ignore their peers with autism during recess or gym. Although typically developing peers will often see themselves as helpers rather than peers, especially as they get older, the hope is that after time, the children will connect with autistic children and start appreciating differences so they can feel more comfortable about welcoming students with autism into their lives and culture. The conversations with typically developing peers should be ongoing, open, and honest.

Our Perspectives

In filmmaking groups, children are encouraged to write their own scripts and decide for themselves what kind of movie they want to make. Many of the films are about friendships. In creating these types of videos, the scripts articulate how friends talk to each other, and act around each other, often in humorous ways. Beyond video modeling, however, filmmaking helps the children at the ASC learn the social skills required to make a friend and keep a friend. Most importantly, children are learning what it means to be a friend to another person by actually making friends within the group.

The type of skills needed to make a friend and be a friend can only be learned experientially. Like swimming, a child can watch 100 videos on how to swim, but if he never gets in a pool of water, he will never learn to swim and be good at it. For the first time in their lives, many of these teenagers are developing real friendships from their experiences with filmmaking. They call each other to go to movies or get pizzas, and many of them had never asked another child or have never been asked to a social event.

To learn to be a friend, children with autism have to make friends and feel the connection. Through filmmaking, these children are learning how to care about another person and how it feels when another person cares about them. Whereas typical children experience events like learning that friends fight, make up, and then fight again, children with autism are unaware of such events or experiences.

Beyond the “honeymoon phase” of a friendship, it is almost impossible to have a connected relationship without getting angry with another person, especially when working on a project together. When we get angry, we communicate, forgive, and come back to the relationship. Children with autism are not accustomed to having people “come back to a relationship.” Through their past experiences, they have learned that if they expressed anger toward another child (one of their peers), that was usually the end of the relationship.

When children with autism express anger inappropriately or out of proportion to the magnitude of the situation, other children no longer want to be around them. In movie group, these interactions are controlled and facilitated by the instructors so that children learn how to deal with frustration and anger. In one instance, two teenage boys were angry at each other and called each other names. Both boys feared that the other would not like him anymore. But, with the subtle assistance of the instructor, both boys came back to the ASC the following week and apologized to each other. After a short period, the name-calling incident was forgotten and the boys were friends again, which is exactly what happens with typically developing children, but not usually with children with autism.

The teens in these groups are learning to say things like, *“I like you, I want to be your friend, but it bothers me what you are doing right now.”* They are also taught to accept each other’s differences and recognize that autism has many different ways of presenting itself. At times they will say, *“He acts that way because it is part of his autism.”* And, they might add, *“I don’t like that kind of autism.”* But, they learn to accept each other’s differences. They are learning important friendship skills in the context of making films with a facilitating instructor. It is important to recognize this does not happen in a few weeks. It takes children with autism much longer, typically years, to connect with other children than it does typically developing children.

Impact of Filmmaking Groups on Student Learning

Filmmaking (video) groups can have both expected and unexpected outcomes. We discuss three benefits of filmmaking that we observed at the ASC—confidence, identity exploration, and academic skills.

Confidence

Filmmaking with friends helps build confidence. Children with autism have various strengths and many of their strengths are found within their special interests. So, pairing them with typically developing peers who have similar interests gives them an edge. Their typically developing peers who have similar interests are amazed by what children on the spectrum know or do with their focused interest, which can change a typically developing child’s thinking regarding persons with autism.

This strategy can also help a child who does not do so well in other areas. For example, at the ASC a teacher was telling a parent that another child from the afternoon class was very excited about meeting her child from the morning class because her child was considered a legend from the videos he acted in over the course of the last two years. Often, when this particular child attended various functions at the ASC, other children would say, *“You are Tony, I recognize you from the Donut movies.”* These newer children joining the group all seemed amazed and

impressed. According to this parent, it was the first time her child had experienced other children being impressed by something he had done. Her child had developed a reputation of being successful and he felt good about something he had done. After years of being rejected by peers and being told he was behind in school, that new approbation from peers and instructors was a welcome change for this child. The children also like to show their videos publicly on a YouTube site to friends and family. Young children especially love to watch their videos. To see some examples go to: <http://www.youtube.com/user/AutComTV>.

Identity Awareness for Children with Autism

Although identity awareness is not a main focus of the ASC, identity exploration is encouraged when it appears that children are not working cooperatively together as a team. Identity exploration involves discussing what it is like to have autism or to feel different. Even typically developing pre-teens and adolescents can understand a discussion about feeling inadequate. We have observed that sometimes classroom teachers do not discuss sensitive topics such as this because they may not have the knowledge or vocabulary to make all children in the class feel comfortable. However, it is important for teachers to remember that “all” children need their identities validated, not ignored. Children with or without autism should not feel ashamed about who they are. If we are afraid to talk about autism, children may feel as though it is shameful or something to hide. Sometimes children on the spectrum pretend they are not autistic, or their parents do not want to burden their children with a label. Teachers need to be cognizant of where children and parents stand on discussing the autism diagnosis with their children and work to help families make decisions on how to deal with identity issues associated with autism and autism spectrum disorders.

For pre-teen and teenagers, teachers at the ASC have found that children without autism are much more understanding, and are interested in another child if they know that the child has autism or Asperger syndrome. On the other hand, many parents do not want to burden their child with a “label” or have someone accentuate their child’s differences. But, typically developing children like to understand where children’s differences come from and have a vocabulary to talk about and understand those differences. Oftentimes children with autism are relieved when they can be open about their autism and other children demonstrate acceptance and even curiosity about who they are. This is an area that teachers may consider further navigating with parents and children. Teachers at the ASC find that talking with the parents directly and understanding their perspectives on this issue is the best way to navigate the topic when considering socialization strategies, but allow parents and children to make their own decisions about identity issues.

Academic Skills

The new Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and the more broad College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards define the skills and conceptual understandings that students must demonstrate in grades 6 through 12 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The Standards for writing stipulate that students should strengthen their writing by planning, revising, editing, and trying new approaches. More specifically, the Writing Standards for grade 6 require “writing narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences” (W.6.3). In addition, the Standards require the use of technology to produce and publish writing (W.6.6).

Teachers can use film groups to not only help children learn to be social, but also to help them learn to write, communicate, and speak. Children with autism write their own scripts along side their peers. When children write scripts and produce them through filmmaking, it not only targets Standards, it also targets all of the areas that children with autism usually need to improve upon including imagination, communication, perspective taking, theory of mind, and writing. Writing scripts is a great way to motivate children who usually don't like to write stories in a more formal classroom setting where they are overwhelmed with thinking about different parts of a story, the characters, the plot, the scenes out of context.

Children with autism also have to learn more about using technology, which is often one of their strengths. In filmmaking, they are learning productive ways to use technology to improve writing and communication skills, and they have a chance to use humor and visual thinking in their writing, which highlights some of their strengths. They also "play" in age appropriate ways (with props and costumes) using imagination and storytelling. In addition, they practice their acting skills and use their memory to learn lines for their video. They also learn to articulate and communicate as well as learn to provide impromptu lines in front of a camera. This helps them develop public speaking skills, and to talk in front of groups of people.

Socialization Skills

The parents of children with autism praise the teachers at the ASC because their children are learning technology, acting, writing, public speaking, and important socialization skills. Below is one parent's comment from a center-based evaluation.

Jacob's (teacher) strategic use of technology to reach kids is truly innovative. Don (child) gets exposed to each job in a typical filmmaking process (script writing, acting, filming, editing, and sound production) and in the process engages with all of the other students in the class during the making of each film. He looks forward to seeing the other kids each week and collaborating on the projects.

There are several reasons why children with and without spectrum disorders can have an easier time interacting with each other in filmmaking groups. First, they are playing roles. No child is acting "normal" and they are playing a fictional character of their own making. Secondly, the types of activities involved in filmmaking make use of a child's strengths. Children with autism spectrum disorders are often less inhibited when it comes to acting. They can memorize lines and often act fairly well in these videos, which gives them the opportunity to experience success and a sense of pride in their accomplishments, while getting to know and learn how to be friends with other children. We observed that children on the spectrum liked to show their videos to various audiences and to talk about the process. They especially like to show their parents what they can do, and they demonstrate their skills to parents when teachers bring the children and their parents together for a movie premiere of each of their video sessions. In addition, the children invite family and friends to their film showing.

Parents at the ASC reported that the reason their children liked this socialization program and did not want to attend other social skills programs is because many of the more traditional programs focus too often on what children are doing wrong and how they need to change. The ASC filmmaking program emphasizes and accentuates their strengths. At the center, children without

autism learn along side children with autism as equals. Also, in other social skills programs, they felt that professionals did not pay enough attention to how typically developing children were treating children with autism in the context of inclusive settings, thereby putting all the burden on the children with autism to change.

Final Thoughts

Children on the spectrum face many challenges when it comes to socialization and the development of social skills. To help these children connect with their typically developing peers, we suggest that teachers use filmmaking. Filmmaking is an excellent method for teaching skills that can be easily used to accentuate the strengths, rather than weaknesses, of children with autism. This technique can allow children on the spectrum to have fun while making friends in a naturalistic and relaxed setting. Filmmaking can also easily engage the participation of peers, parents, and family in the learning process.

AUTHOR NOTES

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Educational Tweets

Brenda Townsend Walker

This Educational Tweet is written by Melanie Powell Rey. Melanie offers insight into two inspirational movies featuring individuals with Down Syndrome, a chromosomal disorder that causes intellectual disabilities. She considers these movies a “must see” that is well worth watching.

Lights, Camera, Action: Looking Through the Lens at the Lives of Individuals with Down Syndrome

“Monica & David” – *Monica & David* is a love story about a young couple with Down Syndrome who get married. This documentary, by filmmaker Alexandra Codina, portrays Monica and David’s courtship and married life together as they seek to establish their independence in society. It also reveals a perspective on what it is like to be a parent of someone with an intellectual disability. Monica and David’s wedding was attended by approximately 200 guests, however many of their friends that have Down Syndrome were not permitted to attend because their parents were worried they too might want to marry. Monica and David share the responsibilities of household chores and experience the normal disagreements that occur in relationships. The documentary also shows the limitations they experience as a result of their disability, which is evident when Monica becomes anxious by the lack of familiarity in her new environment when she moves from home to an apartment. This film won Best Documentary at the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival, and has received a number of other Best Documentary awards.

“The Memory Keeper’s Daughter” – *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter* is movie based on a New York Times Best Seller novel by Kim Edwards. In this movie, a father delivers his own twin babies. He separates his son from his twin sister at birth because he wants to prevent his wife and son from knowing that she was born with Down Syndrome. He informs his wife that the twin girl, Phoebe, died at birth. In the meantime, he gives the baby to a nurse with instructions to place her in a home where they take care of people with special needs. The nurse decides to keep the baby because she could not bear leaving her at the home. Throughout the years, both parents experience great pain and agony, but in different ways, by the loss. However, the father also experiences enormous guilt. As Phoebe is growing up, the nurse sends pictures to the father. The father looks at the pictures, locates the nurse and Phoebe, and observes Phoebe who is happy and well adjusted. As the father watches his son grow, he realizes he made the wrong decision. When Phoebe gets older, she embarks upon a loving relationship with Robert, a young man who also has Down Syndrome. The pain, agony, and guilt over his decision led to a difficult marriage that erupted into the family being torn apart. After his death, his wife and son find out that Phoebe is alive. They search for her, find her, and build a relationship with her.

AUTHOR NOTES

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Online Resources

Peggy Snowden ♦ Chauncey Carr-McElwee

Education.com - provides expert advice and information to parents on educational issues so that they can help their child reach their full educational potential and make learning a fun experience. The site offers thousands of fun and educational activities, and printables that parents can use at home for supplemental instruction; numerous current, credible and easy to read articles on topics dealing with education and parenting; fun and insightful videos with parenting advice and step-by-step activity instruction on a wide range of topics; qualitative and quantitative information on preschools, K-12 schools, and higher education institutions to help in making school decisions; and a questions blog to connect with other parents and leading experts on pertinent issues.

GrantsAlert.com – is a free grant listing and alerts service for those searching for education grants and other funding opportunities. The website provides organizations, teachers, school administrators, parents, and others access to up-to-date announcements of foundation, corporate, state, and federal education funding opportunities. It also provides a database of professional grant writers.

Discovery Education - provides a wide range of free digital classroom resources that can be used to complement and extend teaching and learning in grades K-12. Discovery education has resources for administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Among the resources are webinars, a New Teacher Survival Center, sample lesson plans for four core-curricular subject areas, homework help, motivational materials, and professional development resources.

Project Forum – shares information on emerging issues and critical topics in special education in an effort to facilitate improved services for children and youth with disabilities that will contribute to better results. Project Forum has a database of more than 100 reader-friendly documents relating to special education.

Teaching Channel – provides a showcase of free videos that feature inspiring and effective teaching practices in schools across America. These videos are arranged by subject area, grade and topic, and they provide a corresponding lesson idea and an aligned activity to supplement the lesson. This website shares videos of instructional practices, assessment, and parental engagement that features a teaching practice segment that can be used across grade levels and subject areas.

Thinkfinity – provides quick access to free lesson plans and a multitude of educational resources for educators. Through this website, educators have access to a variety of standards-based lesson plans in different subject content areas that are aligned to your state's standards for learning. There are also engaging interactive activities and games for K-12 students in the areas of math, language arts, reading, social studies, science, economics, geography, literature, and arts that parents and children can use at home. Additionally, there are a variety of professional development opportunities, including webinars, to assist educators, parents, and after-school practitioners supplement student learning. A blog and widget library on the website features numerous educational videos on topics of interest.

The Event Zone

Martha Jallim Hall ♦ Michael J. Maiorano

2012 ASTE International Conference

The Association for Science Teacher Education
January 4-7, 2012
Clearwater Beach, FL

13th International Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Developmental Disabilities

January 18-20, 2012
Miami Beach, FL

2012 ATE Annual Meeting

The Association of Teacher Educators
Creating a Global Community of Learners: Guiding the Future of Education
February 11-15, 2012
San Antonio, TX

National Association for Bilingual Education Conference (NABE)

Celebrating Our Multicultural Nation Through Bilingual Education
February 15-17, 2012
Dallas, Texas

ASA 2012 Conference on Statistical Practice

American Statistical Association
February 16 - 18, 2012
Orlando, FL

AAC&U Meeting

Association of American Colleges and Universities
General Education and Assessment: New Contexts, New Cultures
February 23-25, 2012
New Orleans, LA

2012 National Reading Recovery & K-6 Classroom Literacy Conference

Achieving Literacy Excellence in Challenging Times
February 4-7, 2012
Columbus, OH

NASP 2012 Annual Convention

National Association of School Psychologists
February 21-24, 2012
Philadelphia, PA

AAHPERD National Convention & Exposition

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
March 13-17, 2012
Boston, MA

2012 ASCD Annual Conference & Exhibit Show

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
March 24-26, 2012
Philadelphia, PA

ACA 2012 Conference & Exposition

American Counseling Association
March 21-25, 2011
San Francisco, CA

TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
A Declaration of Excellence
March 28-31, 2012
Philadelphia, PA

2012 Annual CEC Convention and Expo

Council for Exceptional Children
April 11-14, 2012
Denver, CO

National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing (NBASLH) Convention

April 19-22, 2012
Raleigh, NC

Free Webinars

Project Based Learning

December 7, 2011
5:45 p.m. Eastern

Positive Intelligence: How to Maximize Potential and Performance

January 18, 2012
10:00 a.m. - 1:00 a.m. Pacific

School Administrators and Teachers: Learning the Web-Based Support Tools of IEW

January 19, 2012
7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. Central