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Reading Instruction in Secondary Day Treatment and Residential Schools for Youth With Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

Kimber L. Wilkerson,¹ Joseph Calvin Gagnon,² Macid Ayhan Melekoglu,³ and Orhan Cakiroglu¹

Abstract

This study was designed to obtain the first national picture of the characteristics of special educators who provide reading or English instruction in secondary day treatment and residential schools for youth with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) as well as their approach to reading instruction. Also, information was collected concerning the characteristics of the students in their classes. A national random sample of 123 (35%) reading or English teachers responded to a mail and online survey. No statistically significant differences existed between respondent and nonrespondent schools. Results indicated that teachers commonly hold master's degrees and have an average of 9 years of teaching experience. Teachers reported using research-based instructional approaches but rarely integrate technology or peer tutoring into instruction. In many cases, teachers reported that students could not read well enough to gain basic information from text. Additional results and implications are discussed.

Keywords

reading, emotional disturbance, behavioral disorders, alternative settings

In the United States, approximately 12% of students are classified with a disability (Stizek et al., 2007). Of these students, about 8% have an emotional or behavioral disorder (EBD; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). At the secondary level, about 11% of students receiving special education services are labeled as having an EBD (Wagner, Cameto, & Guzman, 2003). However, a recent national study of secondary day treatment and residential (DTR) schools illustrates a significantly contrasting student population. Specifically, Gagnon, Van Loan, and Barber (in press) found that all secondary students in their national sample of DTR schools were reportedly classified with a disability. Of those youth, Gagnon et al. noted that about 70% had EBD and another 10% had a learning disability (LD).

Therapeutic day treatment programs emphasize education, in addition to supporting the mental health and behavioral needs of youth and their families (Armstrong, Grosser, & Palma, 1992). Residential schools are similar in therapeutic orientation, though these schools are designed to meet students' "social, emotional, and educational needs 24 hours per day" (Gagnon et al., in press). Youth are not necessarily classified with an EBD if they are enrolled in DTR schools; admission may be dependent on a youth

having a mental disorder, as defined by the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Underwood, Talbott, Mosholder, & von Dresner, 2008). However, although educational and psychiatric classifications vary, there is a clear overlap between youth disability classification and psychiatric diagnosis for youth in DTR schools.

Educating secondary youth in DTR schools may be complicated by the high percentage of youth with disabilities enrolled. In fact, Wagner and colleagues (2006) reported that an enrollment of a high percentage of students with an EBD in a school might adversely affect access to the general education curriculum, as many of these youth lag behind their peers in academics (Fessler, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1991; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003;

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U.S. Department of Education, 2006). For example, 77% of students with an EBD fail at least one course in high school (Wagner, 1995), and 64.6% exit school before receiving their high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In addition, Muscott (1997) noted that secondary students in residential schools, including those with EBD, develop poor work habits, which significantly affects their adult lives in terms of job placement.

Reading is a skill of utmost importance for secondary-age youth for academic and postschool success (Gagnon, Wehby, Strong, & Falk, 2006), particularly for youth in DTR schools. Researchers (Lembke, 2006) continue to emphasize that the poor reading skills of students with EBD may cause their problematic behaviors, or vice versa. For example, low reading scores are a predictor of students dropping out of school (Jolivet, Stichter, Nelson, Scott, & Liaupsin, 2000). In addition, research has linked illiteracy with a greater risk for criminal behavior and incarceration (Kutner et al., 2007; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Furthermore, students who do not have good reading skills are less likely to hold full-time jobs when they leave school (Kutner et al., 2007), and as a result their quality of life as adults may suffer.

Unfortunately, the National Center for Education Statistics (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005) has reported a national decline in secondary-level reading achievement. Concerns with student reading achievement are compounded by many secondary teachers' lack of expertise in teaching reading and the view of many secondary teachers that development of student literacy is not a major responsibility (Deshler, 2002; Parris & Block, 2007). For DTR schools, with their high enrollment of youth with EBD, that 58% of students with EBD are below grade level in reading is a serious concern (Greenbaum et al., 1996). A recent review of research (Trout et al., 2003) revealed that students with EBD were found to have academic deficits in 89% of the reading studies reviewed, underscoring the importance of fostering reading skills in DTR schools. More recently, Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, and Wehby (2008) reported that secondary students with EBD educated in self-contained settings posted mean *Woodcock-Johnson III* (WJIII) broad reading scores below the 25th percentile. Similarly, Lane, Carter, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006), in their descriptive study of secondary students with EBD and LD, reported that the students with EBD had a mean WJIII broad reading score approaching two standard deviations below the mean.

Although reading is an area of consistent concern for secondary students with EBD (Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004; Sutherland & Snyder, 2007), little attention has been paid to the reading instruction that this group of students receives (Levy & Chard, 2001; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002). The limited intervention research that exists in the area of reading instruction for secondary youth with EBD in alternative settings other than DTR schools shows

promise (e.g., Drakeford, 2002; Malmgren & Leone, 2000). However, studies focusing on other exclusionary settings also indicate that students may receive instruction that is not research based (Shores et al., 1993; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001; Wehby, 2003; Wehby, Symons, Canale, & Go, 1998; Wehby, Symons, & Shores, 1995). As such, it is important to examine the quality of instruction in secondary DTR school settings to know whether students with EBD served in these programs have access to the general education curriculum via empirically validated instruction.

Given the high percentage of youth with EBD in DTR schools and the poor academic and social outcomes of many students with EBD (Carson, Sitlington, & Frank, 1995; Gagnon et al., in press; Greenbaum et al., 1996; Malmgren, Edgar, & Neel, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2000; Wagner, 1995), we must begin to study how teachers and schools are handling federal mandates to provide quality education to students in these settings. Although the practices of general classroom teachers are well studied, teaching practices for students in DTR schools have not been extensively examined (Muscott, 1996). To ensure educational equity, access to the general education curriculum is vital for all students, including those in DTR schools. This national survey of special educators in secondary DTR schools was conducted to learn more about the reading instruction provided to students with EBD in alternative settings.

Method

Sample

Surveys were mailed to a national random sample of special education reading or English teachers in secondary private and public DTR schools for youth with EBD. Programs that were solely hospital programs were excluded. Because no national list of secondary DTR schools existed that met the criteria for inclusion in the study, a multistep process was followed to identify the sample. First, researchers purchased a commercial database from Market Data Retrieval (2002). Next, from the 1,204 schools identified as secondary DTR schools, the schools with incomplete information ($n = 50$) were deleted. Graduate assistants called all 1,154 schools from the universe to verify appropriateness for the study. A specific written protocol was followed for each call. A school was eligible for the sample if it satisfied three requirements: (a) it was a DTR facility for youth with EBD, (b) it was not solely a hospital program, and (c) it provided educational services for any of Grades 7 to 12. As a consequence of this screening process, 276 schools were deleted from the database. To obtain an adequate sample size and stay within budget, 400 schools were randomly selected from the total universe of 878 schools.

Table 1. Survey Questions Concerning Respondents, Students, and Schools

Respondent Characteristics	Student Characteristics	School Characteristics
Gender	Day treatment (<i>n</i>)	Type of services (i.e., day treatment, residential, combined)
Education certifications	Residential (<i>n</i>)	Organizational structure (i.e., public, private nonprofit, private for-profit)
Highest degree earned	Various disabilities (<i>n</i>)	Minutes per day students with EBD or LD spend in reading instruction
Total # of years as special educator	Average length of enrollment for day treatment students	
Total # of years as a reading or English teacher	Average length of enrollment for residential students	
Teaching capacity (e.g., full-time self-contained, full-time resource)	Ethnicity	
	Gender	
	Overall student reading performance	

Note: EBD = emotional or behavioral disorder; LD = learning disability.

A survey regarding teacher activities was mailed to the principal of each selected school. The principal was asked to pass the survey along to the first special education reading or English teacher in an alphabetized list of these teachers at the school. After the review of returned surveys and follow-up calls to surveyed schools, it emerged that 49 schools were inappropriately classified as a qualified school. Therefore, these 49 schools were excluded from the sample. As a result, the selected sample was composed of special education reading or English teachers at 351 schools.

Instrumentation

The selection of items for this national survey was based on (a) a review of the literature on effective instructional practices for students with EBD, (b) a review of the National Reading Panel's (2000) recommendations for effective reading instruction, (c) consideration of current educational reform, (d) discussion with four expert consultants in the field of special education, and (e) a teacher focus group. Information and feedback provided by experts and the focus group were used to construct and modify the survey as well as ensure construct validity. Our expert consultants reviewed several drafts of the survey, and focus groups reviewed the subsequent iteration. Feedback was solicited via a list of questions concerning survey layout, directions, question clarity, consistency between research and survey questions, importance of survey topics and specific questions, and recommendations for additional topics or survey questions (Krueger, 1998). The surveys were modified based on focus group and expert feedback.

The survey sections addressed (a) characteristics of teachers, students, and schools, (b) curricular policies, and (c) reading instructional practices. The instructional practices

about which teachers were queried were drawn primarily from the National Reading Panel (2000) report, which focused on methods and approaches to beginning reading instruction. Although the National Reading Panel considered kindergarten through third grade the primary age range for beginning reading instruction, the resulting recommendations have utility for all ages of beginning and struggling readers and represented the most comprehensive set of recommendations for beginning reading instruction at time of the survey's construction.

The 41 items on the survey related to four central topics: (a) teacher background information (e.g., years of teaching experience, type of reading or English courses currently teaching), (b) teacher confidence in ability to teach secondary reading or English, (c) instructional adaptations and assessment accommodations teachers use, and (d) instructional adaptations that teachers recommend to help students with EBD (see Tables 1 and 2). Survey items were in a multiple-choice and checklist format, with three questions including an *other* choice that required the respondent to write in an answer. Eight questions allowed for respondents to provide a number (e.g., "What is the total number of years you have worked as a special educator?"). The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Reliability of Data Entry

To address possible threats to reliability and enhance replicability of research findings, data collection procedures were closely monitored and recorded (Fink, 1995; Yin, 1994). Reliability checks were conducted on data entry for 30% of the surveys. Agreement was calculated by the following formula: number of agreements ÷ number of agreements and disagreements × 100. Reliability for the reading or

Table 2. Frequency of Teacher Use of Reading Instructional Strategies

Reading Instructional Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Always (Daily)		Often (2–4 per Week)		Sometimes (1–4 per Month)		Never	
			%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Pose comprehension questions to students as they read and provide immediate feedback	1.56	0.56	47.5	58	49.2	60	3.3	4	0.0	0
Provide vocabulary instruction	1.80	0.74	38.0	46	44.6	54	16.5	20	0.8	1
Provide repeated, guided oral reading	1.84	0.77	35.8	43	46.7	56	15.0	18	2.5	3
Use writing instruction to support reading instruction	1.88	0.75	32.2	39	50.4	61	14.9	18	2.5	3
Direct students to ask clarifying questions as they read	1.90	0.77	33.1	40	45.5	55	19.8	24	1.7	2
Teach to summarize readings	1.91	0.69	28.7	35	51.6	63	19.7	24	0.0	0
Teach students reading in small groups	1.93	0.98	42.1	51	32.2	39	16.5	20	9.1	11
Provide independent silent reading	1.95	0.86	35.5	43	37.2	45	24.0	29	3.3	4
Arrange for students to work individually during reading instruction	1.99	0.70	24.0	29	53.7	65	21.5	26	0.8	1
Directly teach study skills	2.01	0.67	21.3	26	57.4	70	20.5	25	0.8	1
Directly teach spelling skills to support reading instruction	2.18	0.88	26.7	32	32.5	39	36.7	44	4.2	5
Utilize sight word instruction	2.29	0.93	18.3	22	48.3	58	19.2	23	14.2	17
Directly teach text structure	2.36	0.83	15.7	19	39.7	48	38.0	46	6.6	8
Use cooperative learning strategies in reading	2.37	0.78	12.3	15	45.1	55	36.1	44	6.6	8
Directly teach phonemic awareness skills	2.48	0.86	11.7	14	41.7	50	34.2	41	12.5	15
Direct students to utilize background knowledge when reading (e.g., make comparisons between what they are reading and their own lives)	2.55	0.80	9.1	11	37.2	45	43.8	53	9.9	12
Use graphic and semantic organizers	2.57	0.83	9.8	12	35.2	43	42.6	52	12.3	15
Teach comparison skills	2.61	0.77	9.8	12	26.2	32	56.6	69	7.4	9
Arrange for students to work in tutoring pairs during reading instruction	2.76	0.82	4.2	5	35.8	43	40.0	48	20.0	24
Utilize systematic phonics instruction	2.78	0.92	6.8	8	35.0	41	31.6	37	26.5	31
Use computer software in vocabulary instruction	3.07	0.90	6.6	8	17.4	21	38.8	47	37.2	45
Utilize hypertext technology for reading instruction	3.39	0.77	1.7	2	12.6	15	30.3	36	55.5	66

Note: Responses coded 1 = *always*, 2 = *often*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *never*. Smaller means indicate more frequent use of the activity.

English teacher survey was 99.1% for the entry of data from the surveys. All issues of data entry reliability were addressed.

Survey Administration

Five survey mailings were completed. The first mailing included a separate cover letter for the teacher, a business reply return envelope, and a \$2.00 bill. The survey cover letter also included directions for completing the survey online. The Web-based survey was created by using Perseus SurveySolutions software. If a respondent preferred to complete the survey online, he or she could access the survey with a unique URL. Four additional mailings were completed (without \$2.00 bills) at approximately 3-week

intervals. Also, at the time of the second mailing, a graduate student assistant began contacting nonrespondents by phone to encourage them to complete the survey.

Respondents and Nonrespondents

A total of 123 (35%) reading or English teacher surveys were returned from the 351 qualified schools. Of the 123 surveys returned, 12 (9.8%) were submitted electronically. A comparison of respondents' and nonrespondents' schools was conducted using the sample of 351 qualified schools. Three variables were selected for the purpose of respondent versus nonrespondent comparison: (a) region (i.e., Midwest, Northeast, West, or South), (b) locale (i.e., rural, suburban,

or urban), and (c) enrollment range (i.e., 1–99, 100–199, 200–299, 300–499, or 500–999). Chi-square analysis (i.e., coefficient phi; $\alpha = .05$) of proportions of respondents versus nonrespondents on all three variables resulted in no significant difference between the groups. For enrollment range, cells were collapsed to ensure sufficient cell size (Norušis, 2007).

Data Analysis

The first author analyzed the data, and descriptive statistics were used to answer three research questions:

1. What are the descriptive characteristics of special education reading or English teachers who work in secondary DTR schools for students with EBD?
2. What are the characteristics of the school and student populations that these teachers serve?
3. What instructional practices do special education teachers provide to students in reading, and what is the basis of their pedagogical decisions?

Two issues concerning respondent information require notation. First, in some instances respondents did not answer every question on the survey. Therefore, some variation exists in the number of responses summarized for individual survey items. Also, three survey questions provided an opportunity for respondents to write in an *other* response. Consistent with researcher recommendations (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), analysis of open-ended responses was completed via a multistep process. First, open-ended responses for each question were independently categorized and coded by authors. Next, both the coding and categories were discussed and adjustments were made to both, as needed. Third, data were once again individually recoded. Finally, a discussion ensued to calculate the total number of responses per code and reliability. Reliability for coding of open-ended responses was 99.3%.

Results

Teacher Characteristics

Teachers responded to three questions concerning their characteristics (see Table 3). Of the respondents, 82.1% ($n = 101$) were female. Also, more than half of responding teachers held master's degrees (55.3%, $n = 68$). Information was also obtained from respondents regarding their total years of teaching. The mean total number of years that respondents had been employed as a special education teacher was 9.6 ($SD = 8.0$). The mean number of years that respondents had been teaching reading or English was very similar, that is,

Table 3. Responding Teacher Characteristics

Characteristic	%	<i>n</i>
Gender		
Male	17.9	22
Female	82.1	101
Highest level of education		
Bachelor's	43.1	53
Master's	55.3	68
Doctorate	1.6	2
Current teaching position		
Full-time self-contained teacher	73.0	89
Full-time resource teacher	4.9	6
Part-time resource or general education teacher	3.3	4
Team teach with a general educator	0.8	1
Other (e.g., reading specialist, remedial reading teacher, special education coteacher)	18.0	22

9.2 years ($SD = 7.8$). We also asked teachers to report their certification status. Respondents were allowed to choose *all that apply*. Of the respondents, 64 were certified as special education teachers of students with EBD or LD, 51 were special education teachers (general or cross-categorical), 34 were certified in elementary education, 22 were certified as general education reading or English teachers, 19 were certified in secondary education, 4 held administrative licenses, 2 held emergency certification, and 1 held a certification in Spanish. In addition, 4 teachers wrote in specific certifications labels for the *other* prompt that were not commonly held certification titles (e.g., state specific). In addition, 1 teacher reported not holding any certification. Respondents were also asked about their current teaching position. With regard to the current academic year at the time of the study, almost three fourths (73.0%, $n = 89$) were working as full-time teachers in self-contained special education classrooms.

School and Student Characteristics

Teachers were asked to provide information about their schools' characteristics, including school structure and population served. Of the respondents, 47 (38.2%) worked in public schools, 57 (46.3%) worked in private nonprofit schools, and 13 (10.6%) worked in private for-profit schools. Also, 3 (2.5%) respondents reported working in private schools, but they did not report whether the school was a profit or a nonprofit private school. In addition, 3 (2.5%) respondents reported working in schools that have a unique organizational structure or referred to a state-specific structure that could not be grouped in another category of response. In addition, information about the students served in the DTR schools represented in the survey was obtained. Teachers were asked to write in numbers of students

Table 4. Never Used Reading Instructional Strategies

Reading Instructional Strategy	%	Reason Why Not			
		Training (<i>n</i>)	Resources (<i>n</i>)	Student's Needs (<i>n</i>)	Views on Teaching (<i>n</i>)
Hypertext technology	55.5	27	33	6	1
Computer software for vocabulary instruction	37.2	4	30	4	1
Phonetic instruction	26.5	5	1	18	3
Arranging tutoring pairs	20.0	0	0	12	5
Sight word instruction	14.2	4	1	10	1
Phonemic awareness skill enhancement	12.5	2	2	10	1
Graphic and semantic organizers	12.3	3	2	5	0

Note: Of respondents, 10% or more reported never using reading instructional studies.

concerning gender, ethnicity, and disability classification. Across all of the schools represented there were 704 female students and 1,568 male students. The ethnic makeup of the total populations served was 1,222 Caucasian, 659 African American, 290 Hispanic, 83 Native American or American Indian, 83 Biracial, and 16 Asian or Pacific Islander. Respondents reported a total of 354 students with LD, 1,484 students with EBD, and 70 students with mental retardation. The mean number of students in each teacher's reading or English classes was 10.9 ($SD = 12.9$). In total, 46 teachers (37.4%) reported that 50% or more of the students with high-incidence disabilities on their caseload could not read well enough to gain basic information from text.

Teacher Use of Instructional Practices

Teachers reported on the reading instructional strategies that they were using in their classrooms and how frequently these strategies were used (see Table 2). The most frequently used strategy was asking comprehension questions during reading, with 96.7% ($n = 118$) of respondents indicating frequent use of this technique (i.e., 2 or more days per week). Vocabulary instruction and writing instruction to support reading were the second and third most frequently used strategies, with 82.6% ($n = 100$) of responding teachers reporting frequent usage for both. Repeated, guided oral reading was another popular reading instructional strategy, with 82.5% ($n = 99$) of responding teachers reporting frequent use. The fifth and sixth most frequently used strategies were teaching students to summarize readings and instructing students to ask clarifying questions, with 80.3% ($n = 98$) and 78.6% ($n = 95$) of responding teachers reporting frequent use, respectively.

Teachers also indicated reading instructional strategies that they never used. If a teacher reported *never* using one of the strategies noted on the survey, he or she was asked to provide the reason why not (see Table 4). The strategy respondents reported using the least was hypertext technology, which is defined in the National Reading Panel (2000)

report as "highlighted text that links to underlying definitions or supporting or related text, almost like an electronic footnote" (p. 18). Of all respondents, 55.5% indicated never using hypertext technology. In explanation of their disuse of this strategy, 91.0% ($n = 60$) of that subset of respondents reported that they needed more resources and training to use the strategy. Another seldom used strategy was using computer software to support vocabulary instruction, with 37.2% of respondents indicating that they never used this strategy. Of those who reported never using computer software to support vocabulary instruction, 67.7% ($n = 30$) reported that they needed more resources to be able to use this strategy. Another less frequently used strategy was phonetic instruction, with 26.5% ($n = 31$) of respondents reporting that they never used the strategy. Of those, the most frequently cited reason for not employing phonetic instruction was that the students did not need the strategy. With regard to pedagogical instructional arrangements, 20.0% ($n = 24$) of respondents reported never arranging students in tutoring pairs in their classrooms, with the majority of those not using the strategy reporting that they thought the students did not need peer tutoring or that they believed that arranging tutoring pairs was not a good teaching strategy.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to obtain information about DTR schools, the special educators who provide reading or English instruction in these schools, and the students they serve. An additional purpose was to obtain detailed information from those teachers regarding the provision of reading instruction. The results of our study revealed several points about the current milieu of reading instruction in alternative settings. First, pertaining to teacher characteristics, many special education reading or English teachers in alternative settings have substantial teaching experience and hold advanced degrees. Teacher respondents were fairly experienced (e.g., the mean number of years working as a special education teacher was 9.6) and well educated, with 56.9%

having a graduate degree in addition to certification. The current study supported Gagnon and Leone's (2006) findings that teachers in elementary DTR schools are well educated. At the same time, these teachers have much autonomy, with 73% working in self-contained settings within the DTR programs. This high level of teacher experience and training combined with the individual nature of their work and their relatively small class sizes bodes well for the potential of teachers in these settings to meet the marked instructional needs of the students they serve.

At the same time, we found that a majority of teachers in these alternative settings embrace effective strategies, including those aimed at improving comprehension skills, which are critical for competent reading. With regard to instructional choices to support comprehension, teachers in DTR schools report frequent use of several specific instructional approaches recommended by the National Reading Panel to improve and enhance comprehension. One effective approach for increasing the comprehension skills of adolescent readers is teaching them to understand and recognize text structures. Text structures are the semantic and syntactic ways that authors organize written information. Being familiar with text structures helps adolescents better understand what they are reading by providing them schema to draw on when processing new text. In our study, 55.4% of teachers reported that they teach text structures *often* or *always*.

In addition, 45% reported teaching students to use graphic and semantic organizers either *often* or *always*. Studies on the effectiveness of graphic organizers for adolescent readers show promise. However, some researchers have shown that teaching students to use graphic organizers can improve students' ability to recall information recorded on the organizer more than general comprehension (e.g., Vallecorsa & deBettencourt, 1997). Teachers' use of these instructional practices, and their effect on comprehension, should continue to be investigated.

Overall, the most frequently used (2–4 times per week or greater) instructional strategy reported was “posing comprehension questions to students as they read and providing them with immediate feedback,” with 96.7% reporting either frequent or daily use. Although comprehension strategies such as teaching students to pose questions as they read may be acquired informally, explicit teaching of how and when to apply comprehension strategies is highly effective in advancing students' reading comprehension abilities (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). An important next step in the research would be to learn more about the ways in which teachers employ these strategies by conducting observational and/or interview research.

Although it is heartening that teachers in DTR schools report frequent use of many effective research-based strategies, they are not likely to utilize technology-dependant

strategies in their reading classes. Strategies recommended as efficacious by the National Reading Panel, such as hypertext technology and using computer software to support vocabulary instruction, are used with less frequency in DTRs. Based on teacher responses, the reason behind this lack of use has more to do with inadequate technological resources than a lack of teacher training or general unwillingness to implement the strategy. Increased access to technology is a worthwhile pursuit for educators in DTR facilities, as we know that technology holds many benefits for students with disabilities as they access the general education curriculum (Blackhurst, 2005; Bryant, Bryant, & Raskind, 1998). Regarding recommended instruction for adolescents specifically, Biancarosa and Snow (2006), in their summary of recommendations for reading interventions commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation, also suggest the incorporation of a “technology component” (p. 27) as an instructional tool. Furthermore, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) promotes the development and use of technology for individuals with special needs in U.S. schools.

Another strategy that has a rich research base but is reportedly used infrequently or never by a large percentage of respondents is peer tutoring. This was also the only seldom-used strategy for which a sizable number of teachers (i.e., 20% reported *never* using) expressed a negative view of the technique. In considering this attitude, it is important to keep in mind that respondents' average class size was 10. In addition, these same teachers reported a high level of individualization in their approach to curriculum and instruction. It is possible that their negative view of the practicability and utility of peer tutoring is influenced by these contextual factors. However, this does not rule out the possibility of exploring the use of peer-mediated instruction in these settings in the future.

Finally, a large number of students in secondary DTRs do not possess basic reading skills needed for postschool success. In the current study, 37.4% of responding teachers indicated that more than half of their students with high-incidence disabilities did not read well enough to gain basic information from text. The fact that more than one third of teachers reported that a majority of their students with high-incidence disabilities read below a basic level underscores the need for continued attention to the beginning reading skills of adolescents in these alternative settings. Teachers in DTR schools need to encourage and teach the sophisticated literacy skills needed to meet the increasing literacy demands of many adult occupations (Barton, 1999). However, the fact that students in DTR schools are still struggling with basic reading skills is a signal to educators that our conception of reading instruction for students with disabilities in alternative settings must include instruction across the range of literacy skills—from decoding to nuanced comprehension.

Although the research base on effective reading instruction for adolescents with EBD is limited, we do know that use of explicit, systematic phonics instruction can significantly increase the reading performance of struggling adolescent readers in general (Shippen, Houchins, Steventon, & Sartor, 2005) as well as adolescents with LD (Calhoon, 2005; Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). Given the promise that phonics instruction holds for struggling adolescent readers, it is unfortunate that almost one third of all teachers responding to our survey indicated that they *never* use phonics instruction, with many of those respondents indicating that phonics instruction does not meet their students' needs. This finding reflects the larger issue that addressing basic literacy deficits is often viewed as the domain of elementary school teachers; secondary teachers are generally not trained or expected to be able to remediate serious gaps in reading achievement (Biancarosa, Palincsar, Deshler, & Nair, 2007). It is also important for researchers, administrators, and practitioners to focus on the research to practice gap specific to alternative settings. However, the critical need for professional development may be complicated by today's difficult economic environment, wherein two necessary components for effectiveness may be lacking: (a) ongoing and comprehensive professional development activities and (b) providing a knowledgeable support person who is readily available (Gersten & Dimino, 2001). Clearly, professional development and a willingness to assist secondary youth with literacy skills are critical to ultimately providing the supports necessary to allow youth with EBD in DTR schools to access the general education curriculum.

Limitations and Future Research

Three limitations with the current research should be acknowledged. First, the response rate of 35% was below the commonly accepted level of 50% for mail surveys (Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1989). However, it should also be noted that the study included a random sample of teachers. Moreover, no significant differences were noted across respondent and nonrespondent schools. The second limitation related to our use of the National Reading Panel (2000) report as justification for effective instructional practices about which to query teacher use. Although the report's recommendations are based on a comprehensive and thorough review of intervention literature, the bulk of the research reviewed was conducted with beginning readers in kindergarten through third grade. The extent to which the recommendations for effective beginning reading instruction in those early grades also apply to reading instruction in later grades is less established. In 2004, a report titled *Reading Next—A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) was published

that details additional recommendations made by a panel of five expert educational researchers specifically for adolescent reading instruction. Recommendations include such things as building motivation to read and including technology as both a "tool for and a topic of literacy instruction" (p. 4). In addition, some of the recommendations dovetail with those from the National Reading Panel report (e.g., incorporating writing into the teaching of reading, directly teaching comprehension strategies). We suggest that future research on the instructional practices of secondary teachers in DTR schools include gathering information on the additional recommendations made by the authors of the *Reading Next* report.

The third limitation relates to the reliance on teacher reports rather than direct observation of teacher instruction. Asking teachers to report on their classroom practices is a first step toward understanding the instruction provided to students in DTR schools. However, more information on specific strategy use is warranted. Future observational research is needed that triangulates information based on a combination of research methods, including observation, student and teacher interview, and document (e.g., lesson plan) review. In addition, a need exists for the validation of effective approaches to teaching reading to youth with disabilities within exclusionary settings, such as DTR schools. The high percentage of youth with disabilities, mental disorders, and involvement with outside agencies (e.g., foster care, juvenile corrections; see Gagnon & Leone, 2006; Greenbaum et al., 1996; Mattison, Spitznagel, & Felix, 1998; Oseroff, Oseroff, Westling, & Gessner, 1999) in DTR schools provides significant challenges to teachers and necessitates experimental and quasi-experimental research specifically in this school setting.

Conclusions

The emphasis on access to the general education curriculum within IDEA (2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) provides a significant challenge to teachers and students, particularly in exclusionary settings, such as DTR schools. Deshler and Hock (2007) noted that reading is the most common academic problem faced by secondary youth with disabilities and that such difficulties permeate every academic content area. Results of the current study highlight that more youth in DTR schools have difficulty with basic reading skills than youth in regular public schools. Teachers in these schools clearly have adequate education and experience. However, teacher reports indicate that several key components of effective reading instruction are lacking. If we are to provide the necessary supports to the highly vulnerable youth in DTR schools, we must first ensure that teachers are provided the materials and resources and professional

development opportunities to effectively instruct the youth in their charge.

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