



A publication of the DIVISION ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, a unit of the Council for Exceptional Children
Focusing on individuals with cognitive disabilities/mental retardation, autism, and related disabilities

Teachers' Corner

Beth Hair, Greensboro College



Emergent Literacy in Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Student and Teacher Outcomes

The term *emergent literacy* refers to the reading and writing behaviors of children that precede and develop into conventional literacy (Sulzby, 1989, as cited in Koppenhaver & Erickson, 2003). During this developmental period, young children learn about reading and writing through observing and participating in informal, naturally occurring literacy activities. Because they need this foundation of early literacy skills on which to build more conventional skills, adults must help children acquire such skills as early as possible (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). Children with disabilities are at greater risk for delays in emergent literacy development (Hetzroni, 2004; Light & Kent-Walsh, 2003; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and those with significant disabilities are often not provided the same number of opportunities for literacy development as their typically developing peers (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995; Erickson, Koppenhaver, Yoder, & Nance, 1997; Hetzroni, 2004; Light & Kent-Walsh, 2003). Recent emphasis on the rights of all students to access the general curriculum makes the development of literacy skills in students with significant disabilities important in teacher education and professional development.

Purpose and Research Questions. This qualitative study's purpose was to increase the use of literacy learning activities in classes for students with significant disabilities and to explore the effects of these activities on children's emergent literacy skills and behaviors. It extends current research in the area of specific literacy development activities used in the classroom. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Describe pre-intervention literacy activities in the classroom.
2. Describe the pre-intervention level of literacy skills demonstrated by students.
3. Describe the effects of the implementation of additional literacy activities on students and teachers.

Participants. Study participants consisted of special educators and students in self-contained classes for students with significant cognitive and/or physical disabilities in two public separate schools in the southeastern United States. Teacher participants were four Caucasian females ranging from 25 to 45 years of age, with 1 year to 8 years of experience. Student participants totaled 17: 3 girls and 14 boys ranging in age from 6 to 9 years, all of whom had developmental disabilities, including autism, severe mental disabilities, and physical disabilities.

Methodology. The researcher of this descriptive study used qualitative analysis procedures for cases composed of teacher volunteers and their students. Baseline data on students' pre-intervention literacy skill levels were obtained through structured teacher interviews, classroom observation, and document reviews (documents included evaluation reports, progress reports, and IEPs). The researcher suggested options of teacher-directed classroom literacy activities, and the teachers chose interventions to use in their classrooms. Specific activities suggested were determined by baseline data and included shared reading, independent (self-selected) reading, writing activities, and interaction with word activities. The teachers in the four cases discussed here chose predictable chart writing as the intervention, and the researcher and a graduate assistant conducted bi-weekly observations of their implementation. Predictable Chart Writing, a method of shared writing intended for kindergarten and first grade, was developed in 1979 by Patricia Cunningham. It allows all children to participate in language experience ac-

(continues on p. 4)

Inside this issue . . .

President's Message	2
Boston DDD Showcase Session	3
DDD at CEC 2009 Convention	3
CEC-DDD Practitioner/Student Awards	3
Proposal for CEC 2010	3
Division Name Change	4
Videos on Autism	5
Prism Series Publication	5
Diversity Issues	5
Membership/Unit Development News	6
Students' Corner	6
Book Review	7
Executive Director's Corner	8
Scenes from DDD at CEC	8
Editor's Note	8

President's Message

Dave Smith

Language matters. As I write this message, a controversy is raging over a film that was recently released. *Tropic Thunder* includes a character who is an actor cast in a role that portrays a person with an intellectual disability. The dialogue in the film includes language that a number of disability rights and advocacy groups have described as degrading. I will not repeat the terms that are central to the controversy and, as of this writing, I have not seen the film. I think, however, that a number of the issues that have been raised are important for DDD members to consider.

The groups that have protested against *Tropic Thunder* include The ARC and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). Timothy Shriver, chairman of the Special Olympics, was quoted in a number of news sources as saying that the film is "an unchecked assault on the humanity of people with intellectual disabilities." He was also quoted as saying that "it wasn't funny when Hollywood humiliated African Americans for a generation. It's never funny when good and decent human beings are humiliated. In fact it is dangerous and disgusting" (Dailynews.com, 2008).

I was encouraged by the controversy for two reasons. First, it has brought to the public's attention that derogatory language and unfortunate stereotypes are unacceptable to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and their advocates. Second, I was encouraged to find that people with other disabilities came to the defense of their colleagues with these disabilities. It has been observed that people with intellectual disabilities have at times not been embraced as part of the disabilities rights movement. Just a few years ago, in fact, Sarah Triano, a disabilities rights activist with the AAPD, stated that a person with a "cognitive disability" is likely to be "excluded or left out of the movement" (Triano & Obara, 2005). In the case of *Tropic Thunder*, however, the AAPD circulated a petition protesting against its language and portrayal of people

with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The petition included the following statement:

As people with disabilities, their families, and supporters, we affirm the value, equality, and dignity of every member of the cross-disability community, including those of us, our family members, and peers with intellectual disabilities. ... People with disabilities, and particularly people with intellectual disabilities have suffered ... civil and human rights violations throughout our country's history, including institutionalization, physical, sexual and emotional abuse ... state-sponsored sterilizations, denial of education, employment and health care, and targeted hate crimes. (American Association of People with Disabilities, 2008).

By the time this message is published in *DDD Express*, the controversy over *Tropic Thunder* is likely to have passed from public attention. I think, however, that there is every reason for the members of DDD to be encouraged by the concerns that have been expressed. Advocacy has long been an important role for our division. We know that the terms we use, whether they be *the autism spectrum* or *intellectual disabilities*, do make a difference in the understanding and treatment of the people we care deeply about. It is good to see that others are joining us in seeing that, indeed, language matters.



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Past Presidents of DDD: (row 1, l-r) C. Parrish, P. Perras, B. Gartin and R. Bartlett; (row 2, l-r) R. Stodden, D. Perner, T. Smith, P. Parette, S. Zucker, S. Sparks, and A. Berg

Great Attendance at Boston DDD Showcase Session

More than 200 conference participants were in attendance for the Boston DDD Showcase presentation, “Addressing Critical Issues for Teachers of Students with Developmental Disabilities.” Moderated by Bob Stodden, Chair of DDD’s Legislative Committee and Co-Chair of the Critical Issues Committee, the showcase session was well received by the audience and was followed by numerous questions for the panelists. Critical issues identified by teachers in the fields of autism and developmental disabilities were discussed. These included addressing grade-level content standards, assisting with student self-determination, and comparing nationwide alternate assessments (panel presentations are available at www.dddcec.org). The panel included Polly Parrish, Darlene Perner, Michael Wehmeyer, and Margo Izzo. The Showcase session was a premier event, but DDD sessions at the Boston conference totaled almost 70, and they covered a range of important topics of relevance to both practitioners



DDD Showcase Panel (l-r): **Bob Stodden**, Session Chair; **Margo Izzo**; **Michael Wehmeyer**; **Polly Parrish**; and **Darlene Perner**

and researchers in autism and other developmental disabilities. This was a record-breaking conference for DDD. Now we look forward to doing the same in Seattle!

DDD at CEC 2009 Convention

For the 2009 CEC convention in Seattle, DDD has many great presentations, poster sessions, and demonstrations scheduled that will cover a range of issues, including self-determination, technology, students with developmental disabilities and autism, and strategies for educating preschoolers, just to name a few. The DDD Showcase session at the 2009 Convention will

focus on evidence-based practices in the content areas for students with cognitive impairment and autism. Featured speakers will include **Diane Browder**, **Fred Spooner**, **Dianne Zager**, and **Leslie Broun**. Plan to attend the CEC Convention and DDD presentations. The **2009 CEC Convention and Expo** will be held **April 1st through the 4th** in Seattle, Washington.

CEC-DDD Practitioner and Student Awards

DDD offers two presentation awards—the **Herbert J. Prehm Student Presentation Award** and the **Practitioner Presentation Award**—annually at the DDD Business Meeting at the CEC Convention. These awards are given based on proposals submitted and accepted for inclusion in the CEC Convention program. The DDD President-Elect selects three student proposals and three practitioner proposals relative to the fields of autism and developmental disabilities. The selected proposals are sent to the DDD Awards Committee for consideration. Award recipients are contacted prior to the CEC Convention. For more information, contact Toni Merfeld, Awards Committee Chair (fullertjm@gmail.com).

Write a Proposal for CEC 2010 (Nashville, Tennessee)

Proposal deadlines will soon be announced for the 2010 Annual Convention and Expo of the CEC to be held in Music City U.S.A. in Nashville, Tennessee, on April 21st through the 24th. So, mark your calendars and continue to check the CEC and DDD websites for updated information on the due dates for proposals. Meanwhile, the DDD invites you to consider submitting a proposal to share your innovations and research in the areas of autism and developmental disabilities for the 2010 conference. Encourage your co-workers and graduate students to also submit their proposals. Remember, proposals accepted by DDD may be considered for CEC-DDD Practitioner and Student Awards.

(“Teachers’ Corner” continued from p. 1)

tivities, no matter their language ability level (Hall & Williams, 2001). (For more information on this method, see *Predictable Charts: Shared Writing for Kindergarten and First Grade*, by Dorothy Hall and Elaine Williams, 2001.) During the intervention phase, informal interviews were conducted weekly, and daily intervention continued from November through May.

Results. At the conclusion of the intervention phase, formal interviews were again conducted with the teachers. Themes identified through data analysis included effects of consistency and routine, student motivation and behavior, and teacher expectations. Teachers of the students with autism noted measurable gains in their students’ emergent literacy skills and attributed those gains to the predictable chart lessons implemented in the study. The other teachers noted some gains but were less certain of the connection to those specific lessons. All teachers reported feeling more confident about the need to include literacy activities in their daily routines.

Conclusions/Recommendations. All teacher participants were given Predictable Charts and a large chart tablet. No specific training on Predictable Charts was given other than receipt of the book. Each teacher was given flexibility on how to implement the strategy. Teachers were also allowed a modest sum of money to purchase additional literacy materials. Both teachers of students with autism chose to purchase computer software and materials for creating extension activities. While these teachers each developed highly structured activities using Predictable Charts, the specific activities they designed were unique to their classrooms and appropriate for their own students. Teachers of the students with significant cognitive and physical disabilities selected to purchase literacy posters, CDs of children’s songs, and a variety of materials that could be used for self-selected reading. One of the main differences in the way these teachers implemented the Predictable Chart strategy was that their students required much more assistive technology to be able to participate. It was exciting for the researcher to be able to observe as the students in all cases built new literacy skills and as the teachers also expanded their repertoires of literacy teaching skills!

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Division Name Change!

The Division on Developmental Disabilities focuses on the areas of intellectual disability, autism, and related developmental disabilities. Our commitment provides an important forum for professionals and other individuals to share evidence-based and promising practices in the field. Our members are educational professionals and leaders who provide tremendous contributions to the professional literature for research and service delivery.

While historically associated with the area of intellectual disability, the contemporary focus of the Division on Developmental Disabilities has broadened considerably. In this new century, the division has developed a much more expansive emphasis, one that specifically incorporates Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The alarming new prevalence rates for ASD have emphasized the need for our division to serve as a key resource for schools, teachers, related service providers, families, and other professionals in this area. Presently, individuals seeking information about ASD may not realize that it may be found within DDD.

As such, the Board of Directors of the division is proposing a division name change from the “Division on Developmental Disabilities” to the “**Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities.**” We believe that this proposed name change would better highlight our division’s strong focus on and commitment to autism while maintaining its historic emphasis on intellectual and related developmental disabilities.

Look for a ballot soon to vote on this important name change.

DDD Offers Two Outstanding DVDs on Autism!

DDD's first video offering, *Growing Up with Autism*, is now available in DVD format. The second video publication is *Look, I'm in College!* Both videos can be purchased through CEC Publications.

Look, I'm in College! follows Terence, Benny, Donald, and Rayquan, four New York City students, through an extraordinary experience. Working with a group of New York City educators and Pace University, these four African American young men from challenging backgrounds achieved a small miracle in the world of higher education: Each enrolled at Pace University ... and each was diagnosed with autism.

For students with autism spectrum disorders such as theirs, going to college has rarely been an option ... until now. Thanks to this program, public school students with autism and cognitive challenges from the borough of Manhattan now have the opportunity to attend college classes with their nondisabled peers. *Look, I'm in College!* introduces viewers to these four inspiring students and to the educators who made this dream a reality.



DDD Prism Series Publication

The Division on Developmental Disabilities is pleased to announce the publication of the sixth volume in the acclaimed DDD Prism series. *Embedded Instruction for Students with Developmental Disabilities in General Education Classes* presents an organized collection of peer-reviewed articles focusing on young people with intellectual disabilities as they prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and other life-long learning activities.

The overall intent is to provide the reader with a clear picture of the current status of diverse approaches that seek to prepare youth with intellectual disabilities for postsecondary education settings and help them transition to these settings. The articles have been organized to (a) provide the reader with an overview of postsecondary issues, (b) present a range of approaches and models currently being used by persons in the field, and (c) share current status data on contemporary service delivery programs and their impact upon the quality of post-school life for young persons with intellectual disabilities.

Divisions Meet on Diversity Issues

Rosa Lockwood, Co-Chair
DDD Diversity Committee



DDD's Diversity Committee facilitated a second Shared Agenda cross-division breakfast meeting with participating divisions at the CEC Convention in Boston on April 3, 2008. The objective of the second meeting was to move the shared agenda conversation to action. Participants included divisions committed to the initiative, CEC staff, and the Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD).

The meeting agenda covered three topics: where we started, where we were, and where we wanted to go. This opened a dis-

ussion opportunity for the group and led to several ideas for moving the initiative forward. A point expressed by one individual during the discussion became the collective view of all participants: **"Diversity has to be at the forefront of all activities within all divisions."** As an organization, CEC (and its divisions) has been and continues to be responsive to diversity issues, and this responsiveness is visible in many core activities across the membership. The question for this group is as follows: How to make this initiative a connected effort across CEC?

Shared Agenda participants have, as a follow-up task, to **determine/develop a mechanism to insure that diversity/diversity issues become front and center in the work of all divisions and CEC.** Participating divisions will receive additional information on the this task soon.

Search the Entire Archives of *Education and Training in Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities* at
<http://www.dddcec.org/search.htm>

Membership and Unit Development Committee News



Debora Wichmanowski
Chairperson

We are extremely proud to report that our DDD membership has continued to show an increase in new members, and we know that this positive growth pattern will only serve to make DDD a more vibrant organization. Whether it is our valued members who have served over the years, or our newest members (including our student members), together we will continue to make DDD an exciting and dynamic organization that meets the professional needs of its members in the classroom and in the areas of research and innovative teaching methods.

The biggest single factor in determining the success of any organization is the members of the organization. How the members work together to reach the common goal; how the members provide their time, their talents, and their treasures; and how the members seek continuous self-improvement all have tremendous impact on making the organization exemplary. As you consider your own membership in CEC and DDD, please take the time to consider becoming more involved. We need you!

- to recruit new members
- attend meetings and conferences at the local, state, national, and international levels
- to continue to stay current on the latest updates in developmental disabilities
- to communicate with us on how we are doing and what you need to be a better member

We hope to see as many of you as possible in Seattle at the 2009 CEC Convention. While travel may be difficult in these tough economic times, there is no better way to improve yourself and our organization than by attending this convention and the DDD sessions.

As always, if you have any ideas or suggestions for ways in which we can support you as a member in DDD, please let us know by emailing me (dwichman@pasco.k12.fl.us). I look forward to hearing from you and hope to see you in Seattle!

Students' Corner



Angi Stone-MacDonald
Student Governor

By the time you read this article, we will have had a fabulous conference in San Diego, from which we all came away with new ideas to work with students and were inspired by the work of others. If you were unable to join us, please try and come to Seattle for the CEC conference on April 1st through the 4th, 2009. Conferences are a great way to meet people and network with educators and researchers in your specialty area. Plus, many school districts send staff to the conference to recruit new graduates.

This year we are starting a new program to encourage membership in DDD for students. We will be holding a drawing for five students to win free membership in DDD/CEC for one year. To be eligible for this drawing, you need to be a current member of DDD and you need to be a student during the 2009–2010 school year. All current members as of January 1, 2009, are eligible, and names will be selected at random from the membership list for this drawing. After the drawing, I will contact you via email to let you know you have won and to verify that you will be a student during the following school year. This prize is valued at \$75. Please encourage your friends to join DDD now to be eligible. CEC and DDD membership has great benefits.

I want to remind all recent graduates about the CEC/DDD Student 2 Professional Transition Program. You can save money on your membership with this program. For the first 2 years as a professional, you can continue to pay the student rate for both CEC and DDD. This is a great deal and a great way to stay involved and informed about the latest research and innovations in special education. When you renew your membership, ask to participate in this program. It will be only \$75 for DDD and CEC. I want to encourage you to stay active in DDD.

Visit the official Web site of the Division
on Developmental Disabilities at
<http://www.dddcec.org/>

Book Review

Bakken, J. P., & Obiakor, F. E. (2008). *Transition planning for students with disabilities: What educators and service providers can do*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities: What Educators and Service Providers Can Do highlights the indispensable role that transition planning plays in ensuring that high school students with disabilities are well equipped and prepared for post-secondary adult life. The book focuses on various facets of transition planning for students with disabilities, from high school to postsecondary education and/or work. The authors use case studies to introduce each chapter, offering readers real-world examples.

Chapters 1 and 2 explain in a clear and precise manner the meaning of the federal requirements for transition planning and how these relate to students with disabilities. The authors discuss the various models and best practices for transition planning. Chapter 3 calls upon teachers and other individuals who are involved in transition planning to be cognizant of the cultural and familial backgrounds of students and the role they play in the success—or failure—of students in classrooms and the workplace.

In Chapter 4, the authors discuss the modifications and adaptations that are available for students with disabilities and offer examples of their use. They also demonstrate how training in low-tech and high-tech assistive technologies can enable persons with disabilities to succeed in postsecondary and/or work settings.

Chapter 5 emphasizes the importance of student involvement and encourages students and parents to play an active role in transition planning. Chapter 6 talks about the importance of family–school partnerships and provides strategies to promote parent involvement.

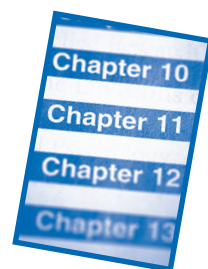
Chapter 7 describes the work and personal skills that students with disabilities need to possess to be “employment ready.” In Chapter 8, different models for teaching job-

seeking skills and employment skills, such as mentoring and supported employment, are discussed.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 underline the significance of teaching social, recreational, and independent living skills to high school students. The authors emphasize the need for direct instruction on these topics so that the student is adequately prepared to function successfully in post-secondary environments. The closing chapter clarifies the differences between high school and postsecondary education, and the authors inventory the challenges faced by students with disabilities in postsecondary settings. It also discusses the support services and accommodations available from adult service providers at the postsecondary level.

The strength of this book is the use of simple language and tables to highlight important information. It provides an excellent overview of the critical topics related to transition planning. However, a limitation of this approach is the lack of in-depth information in each chapter. Despite this limitation, teachers, service providers, and other individuals who work with students with disabilities would benefit from reading this book, as it offers practical strategies and tips that can be easily implemented in classrooms when planning for and providing transition services. It would also be helpful to parents of children with disabilities who wish to become better prepared for the transition process when their children will move to adult settings and service systems. The book is a helpful reference for those involved in any aspect of transition planning.

Reviewed by **Amrita Chaturvedi**
doctoral student
University of Arkansas–Fayetteville



Electronic Versions of *ETDD* and *Focus on Autism*

As one of your benefits of DDD membership, you are able to access the electronic versions of *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* and *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities* online. For access instructions, go to Publications (at <http://www.dddcec.org>).

Note from the Hammill Institute on Disabilities: New members/lapsed members cannot access the journal *Focus on*

Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities online until after they have received their first print copy of the journal. We currently receive DDD member lists quarterly; therefore, we do not get new member information until the following issue is released. If new members/lapsed members register for online access before we have their information, they will not be recognized as a member and will not receive online access.

Executive Director's Corner

Tom E. C. Smith

Constitution and By-Law Changes: You should be receiving, if you have not already received, a ballot requesting that you vote on a Constitution and By-laws change that would move the operating year for DDD to a calendar year. This is being requested primarily to have the DDD operating year coincide with the operating year of CEC. It will make things, such as our financial reporting period, much simpler. Currently, DDD operates from July 1 to June 30. This overlap of CEC's operating year means we are not in sync with our annual reporting requirements. If the membership approves the request, current officers would remain in office an extra 6 months (until December 31st, 2009, rather than June 30th, 2009). Once the



new operating year begins on January 1st, 2010, elections will be moved to the fall so that new officers can assume their offices on January 1st of each year. The board thinks this is a good change for our division, and we hope you support our motion.

Award Nominations: I would encourage all of you to take a moment and think about nominating someone for one of the DDD awards. Our recognition of Senator Kennedy in Boston was the first time we have given a legislative award in many years. It was a wonderful recognition of an individual who has done many wonderful things for children with disabilities. I urge each of you to consider nominating someone for all of our awards. Too many people do too much for our children for us not to recognize them. If you have any questions about our awards, please let me know.

Scenes From DDD at CEC



Emily Bouck, Bob Stodden, and Barbara Gartin discuss topics at the DDD Critical Issues Committee Meeting



Cindy Perras and Leslie Braun at the DDD Board of Directors Meeting



Special Interest Division members attending the DDD Shared Diversity Meeting at CEC

Editor's Note . . .

Darlene Perner

On behalf of DDD, I would like to thank our contributor to the *Teachers' Corner*, **Beth Hair**. Beth and her colleagues, **Colleen Watson** and **Katharine Wells**, were the 2008 recipients of the DDD Practitioner Presentation Award. The 11th International DDD Conference, 2008, was underway when this issue of *DDD Express* went to press; therefore, look for highlights from the San Diego conference in the Spring issue.



Plan ahead to attend the 2009 CEC Convention and Expo, which will be held April 1st through the 4th in Seattle. We hope to meet many DDD members there. If you have any questions, please contact me via email (dperner@bloomu.edu) or at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Department of Exceptionality Programs, 400 E. 2nd St., Bloomsburg, PA 17815. (Please notify CEC if you have a change of address.)