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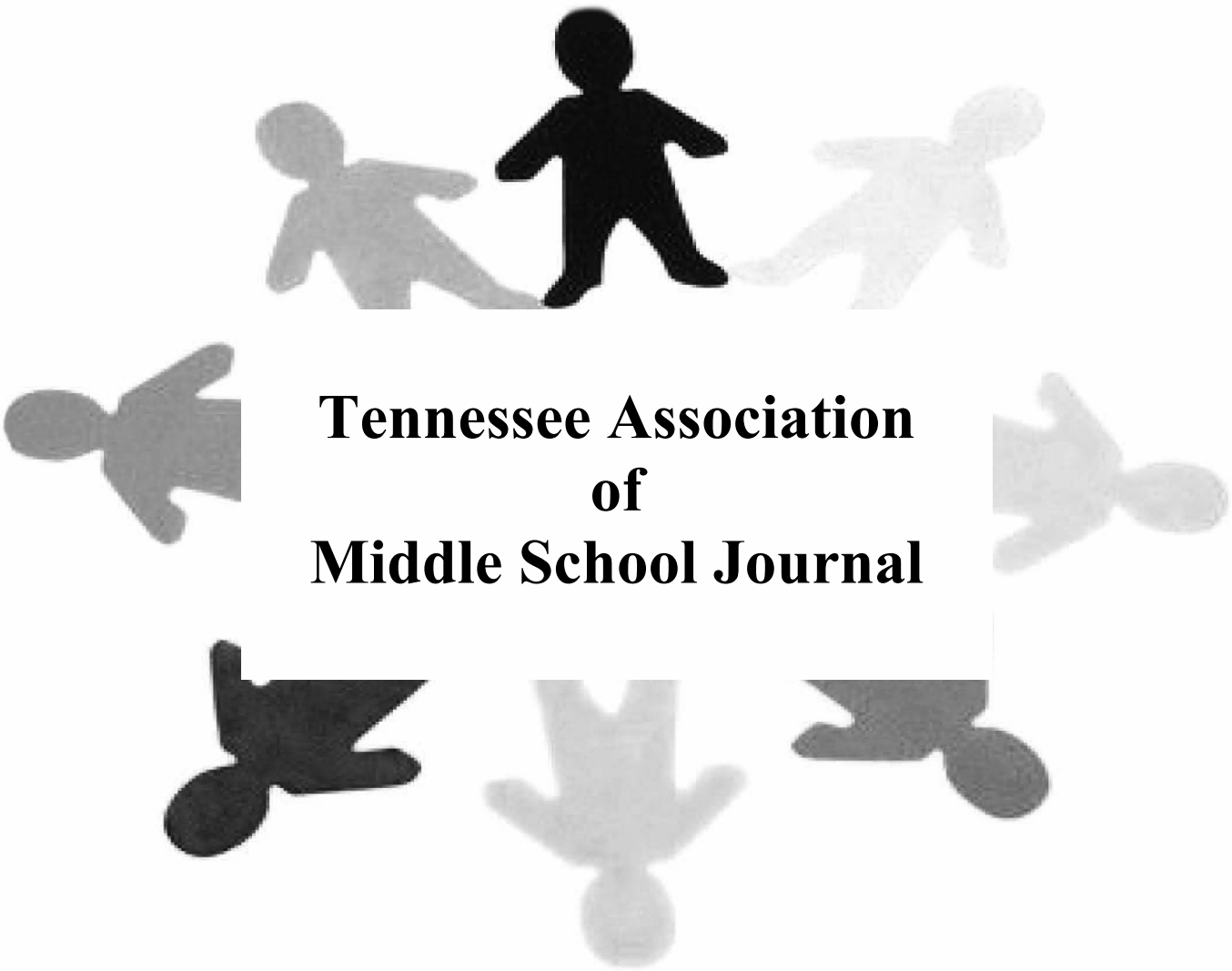

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Enrichment Opportunities for Middle School Science Teachers

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A teaching licensure is merely an entry ticket to the teaching profession. In other words, what is learned in college is not sufficient in itself to help a new teacher survive a thirty-year teaching career. Beginning middle school teachers realize that they have to continue learning in order to be successful in the classroom. Enrichment has many aspects. It may include learning about effective pedagogical trends in teaching science, managing a science laboratory efficiently, and integration of computer technology. "Enrichment opportunities rekindle teachers' passion for teaching science, boost their content knowledge, and help them learn new teaching skill" (Abdi, 2001, p. 44). Many of these goals can be achieved in workshops and seminars with minimal pressure and in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The purpose of this article is to explain the importance of continuing professional growth and development and the reason that teachers should seek such opportunities.

To prepare for multiple careers in an increasingly sophisticated and technologically complex society, American students are required to be scientifically literate, be well-informed about current environmental issues, and serve as active participants in a democratic society. Teachers have a major responsibility in producing such science-literate citizenry. But, are middle school teachers well-prepared to carry out this mission? Based on the author's experiences as a science education professor, an inservice teacher educator, and as a presenter at numerous summer workshops, it seems that many teachers are in dire need of ongoing enhancement in content and continuous enrichment in pedagogy. Clearly, short-term workshops and long-term summer institutes can provide opportunities for acquisition of new ideas that could reawaken teachers' passion for science teaching.

For instance, in my workshops I show teachers how to teach science for conceptual understanding and why to de-emphasize the verbatim definition of science words. Conceptual understanding of science concepts at a young age can be helpful in learning more advanced concepts later, such as those taught in a high school chemistry, physics, earth science, or biology class. One can hope that students who understand science will like science. We can also hope that upon entering college well-prepared students can eventually opt for careers in the sciences. Why do we need to encourage students to follow careers in science? According to a report published in *Los Angeles Times* in February 1990, the National Science Foundation has predicted that by the year 2010, the United States will face a shortage of 560,000 scientists and engineers.

Do middle school teachers need continuing science education? Is there a need for funding summer courses that will retrain middle school teachers in science? The answer to both questions is a resounding *yes*. Goldberg and Wagreich (1989) stated that "despite decades of talk about reform in science and mathematics education, much teaching (especially at the elementary level) still centers around drill and memorization" (p, 22). Therefore, it is recommended that in elementary and middle school science classrooms, emphasis on recall of facts, memorization of formulas, and definitions of scientific terms should be kept to a minimum. Students should learn science by doing science, which is, by performing science experiments in the classroom with their teacher's supervision and

direction. In addition, integration of mathematics and science at all levels is both important and necessary. Teachers ought to emphasize the logical interconnections and natural interrelationships between mathematics and science as opposed to fragmented and isolated instruction of each discipline. Again, many of these ideas can be learned through science seminars, workshops, institutes, or college courses.

Before It's too Late (2000), a report to the nation from the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century, states that "our students' performance in mathematics and science is unacceptable" (p. 10). The report strongly recommends that "the time to act is now" (p. 16). Moreover, *Project 2061: Science for All Americans* (1989) stresses the need for scientific literacy based on a premise that scientifically literate individuals can live productive lives, make sound environmental decisions, and make a positive contribution to their community and the planet earth, which is becoming increasingly fragile.

In the article "Why We Need To Understand Science," published in the September 1989 issue of *Parade* magazine, the late Carl Sagan wrote that "ignorance of science threatens our economic well-being, national security and the democratic process. We must do better" (p. 6). This statement has serious implications for the education community. Should we be concerned? Yes, indeed. The onus is on individual teachers to determine if they can fulfill their professional obligations adequately. Middle school teachers may pursue continuing science education to sharpen their skills in the areas in which that they have a deficit.

Regarding the importance of goals, Penick and Harris (2005) state that "effectiveness in teaching means having and achieving specific goals for students" (p. 4). Penick and Harris (2005) refer further to the survey of scientists, parents, administrators, and teachers carried out by Penick and Bonnstetter in 1993 regarding the goals these groups have "for K-12 students in science education. They wanted their students to

- become more creative,
- be effective communicators,
- use science to identify and solve problems,
- know how to learn science, and
- develop a positive attitude toward science" (p. 4).

To meet the needs of students in the science classroom, teachers must keep pace with the latest trend in science pedagogy through continuing education classes funded by the National Science Foundation, Department of Education, or other federal or state agencies, and sponsored by school systems, as well as by area universities and colleges.

I would like to encourage all middle school teachers to attend a summer course at least once every two years in order to acquire knowledge of science concepts and processes, gain confidence in using hands-on science instruction, and use networking for future acquisition of information and resources. I also encourage the sponsors to make follow-up contacts with participating teachers to assist them with implementation of newly-acquired skills and strategies.

According to Underhill, Abdi, and Peters (1994), to ensure success, a science summer institute should be directed toward enriching teachers to improve the scientific literacy of their students, helping teachers routinely integrate mathematics and science teaching and learning, and ultimately empowering them to train their colleagues. Moreover, each school system should send a science coordinator to the summer

workshop or the summer institute in order to establish systemic links in the school district. The coordinators should develop a first-hand knowledge of the goals and the mission of the program and should be expected to work closely with their respective teachers.

Participating in a summer workshop, institute, or college and university classes should be an ongoing objective for middle school science teachers. To compensate for their time, teachers should receive a stipend, science materials and equipment, travel expenses (if funds are available), and a certificate of professional growth and development. At each school district, special efforts should be made to identify and encourage the participation of historically underrepresented teachers. This will ensure cultural diversity in the classroom and will be representative of the true mosaic of America.

Conclusion

Learning for the sake of learning is fine, but not adequate. Middle school science teachers need to feel confident to show their students the relevance between what is learned in the classroom and the real-life application of the knowledge. Where can a middle school science teacher acquire such confidence? A workshop, a summer institute, or a university/college course may offer enrichment science education opportunities. Much can be gained with little investment of time.

Middle school science teachers have the ever-increasing responsibility of teaching interesting, practical, and relevant content and application to adolescents. One can hope that our science-literate youth will acquire the necessary skills to become life-long learners and productive individuals.

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Supporting Mid-south Middle School National Board Candidates: Their Quest for Certification

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Abstract

Teachers and school counselors seeking certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) submit four specific, written entries containing descriptions and analyses of their professional work and its effect on students to the NBPTS. Candidates document these entries with appropriate artifacts. Candidates also spend a day at an assessment center completing what are essentially on-demand writing exercises designed to assess basic content knowledge and cover the age and grade levels specified by the certificate.

How might a middle school teacher, librarian, or school counselor prepare to become certified by the NBPTS? Does any single type of support system exceed another in terms of helping candidates attain certification? What are teachers' perceptions of the certification process? Which entries are most difficult? This manuscript describes results from an initial study of Tennessee candidates in an attempt to begin to answer the above questions for local educators.

Introduction

The route to certification by National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) involves four very detailed portfolio entries documenting specific work by teachers, librarians, and school counselors with students, parents, or colleagues, analyzing student learning, and six assessment center exercises that are, in effect, on-demand writing events. The exercise directions may include a number of prompts and may require clear examples. Assessment center exercises do not consider professional textbooks or resources that candidates may acquire. Through their writing, candidates demonstrate content and pedagogical knowledge, ability to teach, and disposition to create a nurturing and healthy environment in which learning is likely to occur. Successful candidates place a strong emphasis on analysis and reflection about their work in their entries. The documented leadership activities demonstrate a candidate's commitment to the profession, contribute to children's achievement and highlight personal lifelong learning. In other words, it is rigorous professional development.

Candidates can take up to three years to become board certified. This challenging process requires a time and personal commitment unlike other professional development opportunities. Teachers begin by completing an online application form at the NBPTS website and submitting a portion of the application fee and a processing fee. At that point, they are on their own to follow all directions and guidelines regarding submission of portfolio entries and requesting an appointment time at the assessment center. Initiative and perseverance represent traits of successful middle school applicants.

Many candidates initially find the specificity of the portfolio directions (approximately 200-300 pages per certificate area) somewhat daunting. The directions for each of the four portfolio entries address 1) what the candidate needs to do to complete that particular entry, 2) the scoring rubric for that entry, 3) questions to answer in the written commentary for that specific entry, 4) choosing a topic for that entry, 5) format specifications, and 6) a template for the cover sheet. Candidates must clearly describe and then critically analyze both their teaching and its effect on student learning. The narrative must substantiate the assertions with evidence in the written text and/or the included artifacts. The portfolio specifications clearly define the maximum number of pages for the text and artifacts for each entry, and the writing must be

concise, while displaying deep introspection and scrutiny. The artifacts selected must compellingly and clearly confirm the written words.

Some graduate programs support candidates by aligning their standards to those of the NBPTS so students are better prepared to write and reflect, as they will need to do when completing their portfolio entries. Many applicants take the initiative to seek out nationally board certified teacher (NBCT) colleagues willing to guide them, or they find a partner candidate with whom to commiserate and share ideas. In some areas of the United States, additional support exists in the form of inservices designed and taught by NBCTs. A few school districts offer programs to strengthen the reflective writing skills of candidates; however, these are inconsistent in scope and/or implementation. This author found no published accounts of the results of these programs.

Representatives of 35 State Departments of Education and the District of Columbia signed the 2005-2010 National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification Interstate Contract (NASDTEC, 2006). This agreement offers nationally board certified applicants for open positions from these same states a, "reciprocal certification at the *highest level* [emphasis added] in a corresponding area if they already hold a valid license in that area" and, "comply with any other requirements of the receiving state regarding degrees, citizenship, moral, ethical, physical, and mental fitness," (NASDTEC, 2006; NBPTS, 2006). In other words, an NBCT with only a bachelors' degree moving into a state, with this agreement in place, *could* be offered a job at the highest salary ranking in the new state. This agreement offers middle school teachers and counselors a measure of security in our society where individual states set their own policies for salary scale issues and granting licensure. By their actions, officials of the NASDTEC Interstate Contract signatory U.S. states described above suggest that they believe NBCTs are decidedly qualified and effective teachers. Traditionally, states sharing borders might offer reciprocity to teachers from other states and grant a license with no, or a few credit hours at a local university or community college. Such widespread acceptance of credentials from other U.S. states was unheard of a decade or so ago. Unfortunately, Tennessee does not offer this support to incoming school personnel so other ways to encourage and support them must be found.

This manuscript describes a study the author conducted in an attempt to add to the dearth of published knowledge in three areas relative to candidate preparation; 1) What kind(s) of support did a group of Tennessee NBCTs utilize during or before their candidacy period? 2) What did they think about the process once they finished it? 3) Which of the four written entries proved difficult to complete and why? Since the assessment center exercises are on-demand writing exercises and most of the information about the content is privileged, the study focused only on teacher preparation for the four portfolio entries.

Literature

Sanders and Rivers (1996) note that students taught by ineffective teachers achieve at lower rates and with more harmful effects than those taught by effective teachers. Conversely, those taught by effective teachers progress at expected increments, and presumably make annual yearly progress (AYP) according to NCLB requirements. Researchers have begun to study the effects of NBCTs on student's education. Records from 600,000 Arizona students studied by Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, and Berliner (2004) indicated that students taught by NBCTs received higher scores on standardized tests than their counterparts taught by teachers who did not have national board certification. This finding echoes earlier research by the NBPTS (2001).

According to 2004 totals, there are 40,209 NBCTs in the United States and the District of Columbia (NBPTS, 2006). The United States and the District of Columbia has approximately 3.1 million teachers (NEA, 2004). Thus nationwide, only *one percent* of all employed teachers, librarians, and school counselors in the country are NBCTs. *Only 0.23% of teachers in Tennessee are NBCTs* (NEA, 2004; NBPTS, 2006).

The NBPTS (2006) website has links to the explanation of support offered to candidates by their respective state or the District of Columbia. A perusal of the websites indicates that this support is generally a few extra days off during the academic year to prepare, and/or package materials. A few states, or individual districts, offer additional monetary support. Furthermore, each state has federal money available for at least *some* of its teachers to help defray the $2,300 application fee. The federal government has spent over $300 million on projects connected with NBPTS (Goldhaber, D., Perry, D., & Anthony, E., 2004), however results remain unpublished.

Other types of assistance appear less frequently and *sometimes* relate specifically to portfolio preparation. Assorted provisions exist in some states/districts for teacher-to-teacher mentoring, writing seminars, money for supplies associated with the portfolio preparation, additional paid leave time, special events, or gifts. However, these provisions vary in amount and/or extent (i.e. the number of days, the sum of money available for supplies). Some districts of a given state may offer no guidance or support while teachers in other districts, of the same state, enjoy generous intrinsic and/or extrinsic support. For instance, the Memphis City School district pays NBCTs *up to $10K per year for each year of their certificate* while Shelby County gives NBCTs no extra salary compensation (NBPTS, 2006). A full investigation of the support offered by individual states is the subject of another manuscript.

Certification by the National Board is more robust than any other professional development opportunities a middle school teacher or counselor, might undertake (NBPTS, 2001). Effective teacher professional development must be ongoing, well grounded, and have clear connections between theory and best practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The nature of the portfolio's prompts requires a clear description of practice and an implied grasp of underlying pedagogical theory by the candidate. Research supports the creation of a professional portfolio as an authentic assessment tool (Deitz, 1996; Gellmen, 192-93; Lyons, 1998).

This process requires a commitment of time and energy that exceeds anything a local district generally offers in a single academic year of professional development meetings. Middle school teacher candidates can take up to three years and should plan to spend approximately 200-400 hours preparing their materials (NBPTS, 2006). Notably, *many* factors, including time spent, relevance to practice, availability of personnel to answer questions, or administrative support determine the effectiveness of a professional development experience (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wenglinsky, 2002). Nevertheless, attempting national board certification requires an extensive personal time commitment. Personal conversations with NBCTs at the NBPTS annual conference (Washington, DC in July 2005) revealed that the NBCTs thought they experienced tremendous personal and professional growth while preparing their NBPTS materials.

Reflection is an additional, and vital, part of all professional development exercises (Guskey, 2003). The ability to think about and scrutinize one's actions and their effect on student learning is imperative if the participant expects to gain from the experience. Schön (1987) discusses reflection that occurs concurrently with action and that occurs after the fact. Both assist school personnel in analyzing student progress and instructional techniques.

There was no research found which focused on the types of, or effectiveness, of any qualitative support mechanisms offered currently, or in the past, to national board candidates as they pursue certification.

Methodology

In May 2005, 175 surveys and self-addressed, stamped envelopes were mailed to local NBCTs and current candidates. These subjects taught in the same K-12 district of a large metropolitan area in Tennessee. Forty surveys returned with usable data, while fifteen came back marked undeliverable. This represents a 25% return with usable data.

The survey asked respondents what they thought about the certification process and offered several suggestions with an "other" option with additional space for a written answer, should the respondent choose to add comments (see Chart 1). The choices resulted from earlier, casual conversations with NBCTs and candidates. The survey also asked respondents about the support (excluding monetary) they sought during their candidacy period (see Chart 2). Again, the survey listed several selections as well as an "other" option with a space to elaborate. These choices derived from support avenues available to local school personnel during the past decade when some of the respondents became certified. The author notes that not all support options were available in all years. Additionally, the survey asked respondents which, if any, of the four portfolio pieces was most difficult to complete, and why the participant thought this was so. The survey also asked about the respondents' experiences at the Assessment center. Candidates must complete six on-demand writing exercises at an assessment center as well as the four written entries.

Chart 1

Perceptions of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards portfolio preparation. (Respondents marked more than one response)
98% It is a massive undertaking but one that is manageable.
48% I think it is easier if one is prepared for the writing, reflecting, and analyzing.
30% The directions are very precise; just follow them.
8% I should never have taken this on, but I will persevere.
0% The process is too difficult and I will not submit a portfolio.
0% Other?

Chart 2

Percentage of respondents who took advantage of each type of support. Respondents could mark more than one. (Respondents marked more than one response)			
38%	Professional development at the district office	18%	I did it completely on my own
48%	Course at XXX University	8%	Marked all four external support systems.
63%	Informal mentoring by a colleague	5%	Other
30%	Mentor provided by the local education association		

Study Participants

All of the survey recipients were from the same large urban school district. The survey did not ask for gender or ethnic information, but a subsequent study will include these attributes. School counselors can apply for certification by the national board, and were included in the mailing, however, none responded to the survey. The teachers and librarians who responded represented 14 different certificates from early childhood to secondary educators. NBPTS certificates can cover a wider range of ages than traditional teacher certification divisions, thus, it is difficult to tell which teachers were specifically middle school teachers. Because the survey asked for NBPTS certificate areas and not current teaching positions, it is likely that up to 23 of the forty taught in middle schools.

Demographically, the 40 respondents were 18 certified teachers, and 21 teachers who were either current candidates or retake candidates (those who resubmit at least one entry to the NBPTS in their attempt at certification). One candidate did not indicate a certificate area. One candidate noted that he chose to withdraw from the process before attaining certification (see Chart 3).

Chart 3

Total 40 respondents	
18 – Certified teachers 21 – Waiting for responses from NBPTS 1 – Withdrawn	19 – Former course enrollees 15 – Would have taken the course 5 – Would not have taken the course 1 – Did not answer the question

Results

Teachers' perceptions

A question asked about the certification process to determine the teacher's perceived need for support. Thirty-nine teachers (98%) indicated that the certification process required a tremendous amount of work, but was manageable. Additionally, 19 respondents (48%) added that it was helpful to be prepared for the writing, reflecting, and analyzing required by the specific portfolio prompts. Candidates spend 200-400 hours (NBPTS, 2006) preparing the four portfolio entries and studying for the assessment center exercises. The deep level of analysis enables teachers to understand and document how they meet the needs of their students, themselves as learners, and the community. A respondent suggested that future candidates should, "Study professional vocabulary and how they [NBPTS] want the responses to be written." The respondent speaks to the specificity of the directions for each of the portfolio entries.

The questionnaire asked about the four portfolio pieces to determine if the teacher needed specific support. When asked which of the four written portfolio pieces was most difficult to complete, 10 (25%) respondents said that Entry 4, describing their professional accomplishments regarding their students, the community, and themselves as learners, was the hardest to write. Respondents had varied reasons for their answers. Two respondents noted that community involvement in Entry 4 was difficult to accomplish in an inner city, urban environment with high

levels of transience and the low SES status of many of the families. Thus, writing became difficult for these two teachers because of the desire to focus *equally* on community involvement, the teacher as a learner, and their students' learning.

The directions for the first three entries contain many common characteristics, but the specifics vary somewhat according to the particular certificate. 19 (48%) of the respondents indicated that one or more of the first three were the hardest. All certificates contain the exact same set directions and requirements for Entry 4. It is of no significance here to break them down further other than to say each of the first three entries requires either samples of student work or videotaped evidence. Candidates collect student work or videotape a lesson and then analyze their teaching and student learning according to prompts presented in their particular entry directions.

One respondent indicated that all of the entries were equal in difficulty. The remaining respondents expressed no opinion for this question. A respondent spoke for herself, and perhaps others, when she noted that her, "…analytical writing needed work." Others cited the video requirement as the reason for the difficulty with particular entries. In our area, candidates must arrange their own videotaping and in come cases, must search for equipment. Still other respondents thought particular entries were hard because the directions were "unclear". A respondent noted that, "The process is fine but the tedious, burdening details are ridiculous!"

These quotes represent the variety of comments received from the teachers about the entries and highlight the varying perceptions of the portfolio by the teachers who responded to the survey and may imply there are many more perceptions out there that remain untapped. Teachers noted that the process, although meticulous, was manageable. The videos required as artifacts for particular entries and the need to document parent involvement created problems for some candidates due to forces beyond their control. Some problems faced by respondents included low parental involvement (parents' disinterest or fear of schools, work schedules, and lack of transportation), low student achievement, student attrition, and difficulties with procuring and operating the video equipment.

Support for the candidates

The scope of this document does not include any source of financial support that the teachers received. Federal money allotted to each state provides some financial support for candidates and the NBPTS website offers links for scholarships to help defray at least part of the $2,300 application fee.

The support areas listed as choices on the survey were academic and/or collegial in nature, and currently or previously available to candidates in our area. Including all choices was intentional because some teachers certified before others and not all forms of support were available in all years. The choices included a rigorous university graduate-level course, a series of professional development sessions led by district personnel, local education association provided mentors, colleagues, and included a place to list an "other." All of the respondents reported receiving support from at least one of the named sources.

Three respondents (0.08%) claimed they took advantage of support from all four listed categories. The common number of support resources was two, although the combinations varied. This suggests that teachers sought out assistance and guidance, from as many sources as needed, or desired, to complete the process. Factors that influenced their choices could have included personal or professional schedules, personalities, pre-existing friendships, communication patterns, or proximity to one another (i.e., being in the same building).

The qualitative support chosen varied among respondents. Of the 40 survey respondents, 25 (63%) looked informally to colleagues for support and twelve (30%) worked with the mentor provided by the local education association. Nineteen (48%) of the respondents took a course offered at a university that helped teachers think about and critically analyze teaching and learning while15 (38%) took advantage of the district's professional development support. One respondent mentioned perusing the national board website for helpful information.

According to casual conversations the author had with certified teachers at the 2005 NBPTS conference in Washington, D.C., mentoring of candidates by NBCTs, whether formally matched or informally decided between colleagues, is common. This support continues through certification, even if the candidate does not certify the first year. Since a three-year window exists, candidates can bank their scores, and resubmit entries as long as they are within the accepted time. A candidate must begin again if he or she fails to certify within the given window.

NBCT mentors must be careful about how much information they offer because existing ethical guidelines prevent NBCTs from sharing their entries or divulging specific details about the writing exercises at the assessment center (National Board, 2006). For that reason, NBCT mentors are generally limited to offering writing tips, revising and editing, helping with videotaping, or lending a friendly ear. The support from a mentor can be effective if both parties commit the time and energy required for reading, discussing, and refining the four written portfolio entries and preparing for the assessment center. The district, from which the study data came, offers formally assigned NBCTs mentors who receive stipends for guiding candidates. Candidates can contact a university professor for additional content reader support. This has proved beneficial for middle school teachers who need a reader familiar with particular content.

For candidates with access to a university course designed specifically to enhance the teacher's writing, analytical, and reflective skills, the formal support offered by the course instructors and mentors, and the informal support gained through discussion with colleagues, is invaluable. A course that exists at one university (*Foundations of NBPTS Candidates*) helps candidates sharpen their skills in these areas via class discussions at every meeting, in-class activities, several writing assignments, and peer editing.

The survey contained a brief description of the course offered at one university. It is interesting to note that 19 of the 21 respondents who did NOT take the course indicated that they would have, if it had been available to them or they knew about it. This suggests candidates' desire to reach out to available support. Nationally, the pass rate for first time candidates is 39% (personal email from Judy Volpe at the NBPTS headquarters).

Two respondents who pursued certification before the introduction of our university course noted the lack of feedback they received from their district's NBPTS professional development sessions. This may be due to a number of factors including, but not limited to, the respondents' ability to submit drafts in a timely manner, or student perceptions of the level of feedback received. At least one respondent visited a Yahoo Listserve and read several books that other contributors suggested. However, she did not note the names or effectiveness of any of the information gained or the materials suggested.

Conclusions

In some ways, the collegial support for national board certification available is similar to that offered to law school graduates seeking to pass the bar exam. Cabrera (2000) notes that current support for bar examinees in the United States involves several weeks' worth of intense

study generally occurring immediately after graduation from law school. If the new attorney has a job with a law firm already, he or she may receive paid time off from work to study, and perhaps obtain coaching by those who have already passed the exam. Unlike school professionals, this extended leave time occurs at the start of a career when a young attorney has not had a chance to prove him or herself to a firm yet, especially if the young attorney must retake the exam several times. The difference here is that lawyers *must* pass the exam to practice their craft professionally and national board certification is an *optional* endeavor that a teacher undertakes *after establishing his or her career*. The community support offered by both professions assists and encourages colleagues seeking official recognition.

The journey to become a NBCT is long and rigorous, but well worth the efforts in some districts. Once certified, a teacher or school counselor can, in some cases, expect to receive salary enhancements for up to ten years, gifts, celebratory dinners, university course credit, professional development credits, or exemptions from an annual evaluation by an administrator. Unfortunately, many districts provide nothing beyond a handshake (NBPTS, 2006). Motives for this lack of consistency may have to do with salary scales, tax bases, or other issues, and further research may illuminate possible reasons for the discrepancies. Understandably, states or districts with less desirable, or no, incentives produce fewer candidates and thus fewer NBCTs. This is an area for future research.

Of the 40 respondents who returned the author's surveys, only one said that he withdrew from the process at an early stage and another noted that she chose not to resubmit entries after not certifying the first time due to her inability to type. This represents a dropout rate in this sample of 0.05%, which validates the respondents' assertions that the certification process is manageable.

Since 1% of all US teachers, and only 0.23% of Tennessee teachers, librarians and school counselors are certified (NEA, 2005, NBPTS, 2006) to date, and we have data suggesting that students of certified teachers achieve at higher levels (Vandevoort, et. al. 2004), we should strive to put as many certified middle school teachers in as many classroom as possible.

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SELECTIVE HIRING PROCESSES

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A selective hiring process; who has the time? It is a fact that the single most important thing any educational leader can do is hire well. If you, as a leader, do not have a clear vision of where you want to take the school and have the ability to hire staff to carry out the mission of the school, it will be a difficult step to make change and positively affect student achievement.

This process is particularly difficult for middle level educators as few colleges or universities in New England have middle level preparation programs to adequately prepare middle level teachers. For teachers who have experience and may want to change positions, they may not have practiced their profession in a middle level school that promotes researched-based organization and instructional practices.

This challenge is exacerbated for Superintendents who want to hire middle level leaders to build or sustain quality middle level schools. Nationally, only a handful of higher education institutions prepare leaders for middle level. Far too often, superintendents and hiring committees take a compromise position and hire a person they think has leadership qualities but who may not understand, much less have the capacity to lead a middle level school with all the complexities inherent in such a position. Oftentimes these folks are effective assistant principals or principals from the elementary or high school levels who are seeking leadership positions and a position becomes available at the middle level.

Often superintendents and middle level leaders hire people who have the potential to be great middle level educators and enter into the process knowing that professional development dollars will need to be spent to have newer teachers learn the skills of teaching and working in a middle level school. Unfortunately, these well-intentioned action steps get lost in a transition process and/or a lack of funding to support this kind of "retraining." Therefore, establishing and fine-tuning a quality interview process is critical to selecting the right candidate. Several pieces of research point to suggested processes to decrease costly mistakes of hiring the wrong person.

Some of these helpful strategies are listed below:

- Write a targeted job description in an ad
- Canvas areas to develop possible candidates
- Send ads to a variety of media
- Conduct paper screening
- Review resumes quickly and determine yes, no, or maybe candidates. Narrow your interview pool
- Develop non-discriminatory interview questions and scoring techniques
- Establish/train interview committee. Clearly explain interview scoring techniques
- Ask interviewees to complete writing sample and describe quality lessons
- Narrow pool
- Check references – be certain to read between the lines
- Do background check/fingerprint

- Ask final two or three candidates to teach a lesson in an actual classroom of students using current curriculum
- Present an offer to the most qualified and send letter/call persons to gently reject other candidates
- Don't be afraid to re-open your search/do not settle for second best

(Rothman, 2004)

With respect to conducting a rigorous personnel interview, be certain to include tough questions that provide reliability establishing the fact that the candidate has the skills necessary to move the school forward. All too often interview committees focus on who the person knows or how personable the individual comes across. Additionally, include questions relating to the applicant's ability to communicate thoughts, set and accomplish goals, work as a team member, and possess all skills necessary for the job.

The fatal flaws of any hiring process are; poor recruitment and selection processes, low reliability to job match, high turnover, and high potential for grievances. "Credentials and years of work experience do not ensure success on the job," (HR Strategy, 2005). Experience and a quality resume may get someone in the door, but it does not mean the individual has the skills to move the organization ahead. It is up to the hiring committee to tease out the specific information from candidates that match the qualities the group is looking to bring to the job.

On a final note, it cannot be emphasized enough, a selective hiring process is the most important task any employer has at hand. One caution should be mentioned at this time; be aware the number of interviews and delays in the process can cause confusing and conflicting information that lead to the loss of quality candidates. To be certain that this doesn't happen, try not to interview every candidate that applies. Research has shown that 60% of the interviewees should not have been taken through the interview process. (HR Strategy, 2005)

It is the purpose of this article to provide salient points and strategies about a selective hiring process. While the problem of quality and qualified candidates runs deeper than the process, particularly for effective middle level educators, NELMS hopes to highlight a snapshot about the employment hiring process. Look for more information on www.Google/SelectiveHire.com.

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Students' Perceptions: Middle school students' motivation to learn and their perceived relationships with their teachers

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Introduction

Research validates that there is an effect on motivation due to the relationship that a student has with a teacher. This effect is defined as the positive or negative attitude that a teacher has, which in turns effects a student's achievement (Belmont & Skinner, 1993). This is one method of explaining what students attribute their failure or success. In one study researchers give reasons as to why students fare poorly in school, "Many children who fail in school have consistent negative interactions with their teachers. They are frequently in trouble—for not completing assignments or not paying attention, or for goofing off or acting out" (Stipek, 2002, p.151). Connell and Wellborn (1991) defined "relatedness" as the effect that student's relationships with teachers and peers have on motivation. Self determination theorists defined it as "the need to feel securely connected to people in the social context and to experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect" (p. 51). Furthermore, it has been said that girls tend to have a better relationship with teachers than boys due to the disruptive behaviors of boys (Stipek, 2002).

Belmont and Skinner (1993) demonstrated the positive effect of good relationships on student learning. Both teachers and students were given surveys and rated on their involvement with each other by measuring affection (how much they like, appreciate, and enjoy the person), their attunement (their understanding, sympathy, and knowledge about the person), and their dependability (their availability in case of need). These characteristics were directly related to the students' engagement in classroom activities. The sample consisted of 144 children and their 14 female teachers in upstate New York. Ninety-four percent of the students were Caucasian and the remaining 6% were African American. The most powerful impact on an individual student was the involvement of the teacher. "These findings indicate that teachers' liking for students is communicated to children and has pervasive effects on the way in which students experience their interactions with teachers" (Belmont & Skinner, 1993, p. 577). When students do not feel as though they are liked, it effects them in a negative way making them feel that the teacher is overly coercive.

Negative relationships with a teacher can cause some students to become less academically inclined than those who have good relationships with their teacher. In a study done by Murdock (1999), African American students who lived in a low-income background perceived their teachers as disinterested. The more the teachers were perceived as disinterested, the more the students became disengaged in learning. Davis, Davis, and Murphy (2002) completed a study entitled, "Relationships between middle school students and teachers: Views from the front of the classroom" where they answered several questions about how a teacher's relationship with a student in Middle School can affect a student's achievement. Middle school students are going through so many transitions in their lives due to adolescence development and good relationships help to foster a positive growth pattern. Students are transitioning from a self-contained

elementary setting to one that changes classes every hour. In this environment, students may seem to feel that their teachers are less friendly, caring, and supportive than their elementary teachers. Thus, resulting in a drop in their academic performance. On the other hand, "Middle school students who perceived a supportive relationship with their teacher felt more connected to and had positive affect for school, they tended to feel more competent and be more task focused in their pursuit of academic goals, and at the end of the year they tended to have higher GPAs" (p. 1).

African American Achievement

The underachievement of minorities in public education is still a challenging issue of today's society. "African Americans and Latinos are more likely to have lower GPAs, receive lower scores on standardized tests, and are more likely to drop out of college or to never bother attending college compared to Caucasian students" (Kuykendall, 1996, p.85). Reyna (2000) concludes that stereotypes of minorities are a key factor in their low performances. Teachers sometime have lower expectations for minority groups due to some past encounters with a specific student or groups of students.

Laar (2000) provides another variation to the achievement of African American Student's Achievement by saying that although they achieve lower than Caucasians they are usually found to have higher self-esteem; a paradoxical statement to Reyna's findings. There is a common assumption that African Americans are supposed to think less of themselves because of their lower academic achievement. Laar (2000) examines both internal and external attributions to prove her hypothesis. One external attribution is that African Americans may protect their self-esteem by predicting lower outcomes for themselves. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explain how complex it is to have academic success for it requires African American students to give up their social, cultural, and ethnic integrity in the pursuit of academic success. This perception of an academically successful African American student will sometimes negatively influence the achievement of the students.

Taylor (2003) completed research entitled *"Through the Eyes of Students,"* where she was concerned with how African American students felt towards their low academic performance. The researcher wanted to do more than lecture students about the importance of school, but ask them the right questions to get the right responses. "As a researcher, I wanted to engage African American students in powerful conversations around this issue, getting beyond the typical responses that educators have heard again and again: "School is boring" or "The work is too hard" (p. 72). This author challenged 300 students who were enrolled at a high school in Philadelphia to think with their hearts and minds towards the issue of underachievement in the African American community. The student responses were interesting as they held themselves, their peers, parents, and their environment accountable for their achievement; poverty was not as great of an issue, but was considered. Some of the reasons that they believed they were not achieving are as follows:

> Since we were born with boundaries set against us, some just choose to go along with the stereotype that we are less and that we don't count for anything. Some don't have the mindset to achieve and some just need motivation and guidance to help them (10^{th} grade student). We don't get much support from teachers. They

> just hand out the work and expect us to do it and learn without doing more teaching (11th grade student). It really starts at home. The parents don't get involved with what their kids are doing, like their homework and seeing about them in school (9th grade student). I think we score low because of our environment and our background. For example, I have lived around criminals and drug dealers my whole life. And that is what I thing my life is all about. (9th grade student). (p. 73)

The students were limited by their own personal experiences, however they were able to give good insight and even give suggestions to try and improve this issue.

Authors McCoy and Walker (1997) were concerned with the lagging academic achievement of minorities. "Despite years of "compensatory" education programs spawned by Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and the 1954 decision Brown v. Board of Education that affirmed that segregated schooling was detrimental to African Americans' achievement, the academic gap between them and white students in important subjects still exists" (p. 71). To lessen this problem, the researchers suggest that more reasons and solutions be explored; they feel that this topic has been overlooked. "Few studies have investigated African American students' beliefs and ideas about mathematics" (p. 71). A sample of 17 students was chosen, with differing levels of achievement, to participate in interviews concerning their academic achievement. Some students responded saying that they remain silent in class to avoid embarrassment and bringing attention to themselves. There were other students whose academic achievement depended on how much they felt their teacher cared about them. There was one particular student who said that he only performs well in his African American teacher class. "It is probable that since African American teachers can relate to the culture of African American students, many of these students feel more comfortable in an African American teacher's classroom" (p. 72). This study suggests that teachers do have a profound effect on the achievement of African American students.

Previous research has found a correlation between the achievement goal orientations of performance approach and performance avoidance and the relationship between teachers and students. The prevalent factor in all of the research is the race of the population being studied; most of the students were Caucasian. Most of these studies showed that a student's perception of their relationship with their teacher had a direct effect on their academic achievement. There has been little research done on other races and the constructs of Achievement goal orientation and a relationship with the teacher. There was very little research found on the achievement of African American middle school students as well.

Procedure

In this survey research, during the Spring 2005 semester, four classes of seventh grade students in an urban school in the Mid-South were conveniently selected to participate in this study.

Participants

Fifty-five students were chosen from a pool of 70. Only 55 were included because the others lacked the data needed for this research. Fifty-four percent of the subjects were

male and 45% were female. The ages ranged from 12 to 15: 23.6% were 12 years of age; 56.4% were 13 years of age; 18.2% were 14 years of age, and 1.8% were 15 years of age.

Instrumentation

All participants in this study completed a demographic questionnaire and the Belmont and Skinner's (1993) Students' Relationship with the Teacher Questionnaire (SRTQ). The demographic questionnaire asked for information concerning the participant's classification, sex, age, and academic achievements. The reliability coefficient of each instrument was measured using Cronbach Alpha. Each item on the surveys was scored using a Likert Scale.

Students' Relationship with the Teacher Questionnaire. Skinner and Belmont's (1993) Students' Relationship with the Teacher Questionnaire is an 11-item instrument measuring four components of relationships: Affection, Attunement, Positive Dependability, and Negative Dependability. Participants rate the degree to which each item applies to them on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all true (1)" to "very true (4)."

Academic Achievement. Academic achievement was measured by using the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Test from the participant's previous school year. The areas of the TCAP that were used were Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. The NCE (National Curve Equivalent) was used. "A standardized scale of scores developed by the U.S. Department of Education . Test takers scoring at the mean get an NCE of 50, person scoring in the 1st Percentile get a score of 1, and those in the 99th Percentile a score of 99. The standard deviation for the NCE is 21.06" (Vogt, 1999, p. 193). The score for each test ranges from 1 to 100.

Data Analysis Methods

In analyzing the data, descriptive statistics were calculated and reported for the demographic data. The standard deviation and means for all variables were computed . SPSS statistical software was used to analyze the data.

The following research question was answered:

What is the relationship between African American students' achievement goal orientation *(motivation to learn)* and their perception of the relationships with their teacher?

Results

Responses to the Achievement Goal Orientation survey showed different degrees of consistency: Mastery (.73), Performance Approach (.51), and Performance Avoidance (.54). All questions were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. The data were analyzed using SPSS. The level of significance for the coefficient is based upon the size of the sample; in this study the sample size is 55 participants. Its significance is then based on a 95% level of confidence value of $p \leq 05$.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Variables (n = 55)

Variables	*M*	*SD*
All Respondents		
1. TCAP Composite Score (NCE)	23.56	6.1400
3. Mastery Subscale	6.09	0.9139
4. Performance Approach Subscale	5.80	0.9070
5. Performance Avoidance Subscale	5.01	1.2803

The relationship between *negative* and *positive views of students' relationship with a teacher* and the three components of *achievement goal orientation* (AGO) all revealed small coefficients. Relative to negative views *of students' relationship with teachers*, the following correlations were obtained: *AGO-mastery* ($\underline{r}$ = .00); *AGO-performance approach* ($\underline{r}$ = -.21); and *AGO-performance avoidance;* ($\underline{r}$ = .06). This pattern of correlations denotes a positively directed "relationship" between the *mastery* and *performance avoidance* components of *achievement goal orientation* and *negative views of students' relationships with teachers*. A negatively directed "relationship" is observed for the *performance approach* component of *achievement goal orientation.* That is, higher scores on the *achievement goal orientation* components of *mastery* and *performance avoidance* are associated with higher scores relative to *negative views of a student's relationship with a teacher*, while higher scores on the *achievement goal orientation* component *performance approach* is associated with lower scores relative to *negative views of a student's relationship with a teacher*. The magnitude of each correlation coefficient, however, is small and statistically insignificant relative to the range of significance in this study (.266 at $p \leq .05$).

Relative to *positive views of a student's relationship with a teacher,* the following correlations were obtained: *AGO-mastery* ($\underline{r}$ = .30); *AGO-performance approach* ($\underline{r}$ = .25); and *AGO-performance avoidance* ($\underline{r}$ = .00). For all components of *achievement goal orientation*, the correlations indicate a positive direction, but each coefficient is small in magnitude and only one component, *AGO-mastery,* is statistically significant relative to the range of significance for this study (.266 at $p \leq .05$). In other words, higher scores relative to *positive views of a student's relationship with a teacher* are observed with higher scores in *achievement goal orientation*. There was a statistically significant correlation among the constructs of affection and mastery, attunement and mastery, and positive teacher items and mastery. The constructs affection and mastery are statistically significant at r=.27 at $p \leq .05$ (see figure 1). The constructs attunement and mastery are statistically significant at r=.26 at $p \leq .05$ (see figure 2). The constructs positive teacher

items and mastery are statistically significant at r= .30 at $p \leq .05$ (see figure 3). The small magnitudes of the coefficients for each bivariate pair—even the one showing significance—suggest little practical significance in terms of meaningful associations between the pairs.

The inter-correlations among all these variables are extremely small, so as to be rendered "zero correlation." This circumstance strongly suggests that a student's *view of the relationship with a teacher*, whether *negative or positive*, is completely independent of each component of *achievement goal orientation*, and thus, for this sample, has no meaningful association (see table 2).

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous researchers have found a correlation between the achievement goal orientations of performance approach and performance avoidance and the relationship between teachers and students. However, this study did not yield the same results. There were some correlations among all variables. However, the magnitude and direction of the coefficients were so small that they were seen as insignificant. Hence, there were no significant findings in this research, therefore showing that each of these variables are independent of each other.

Question 1 addressed the relationship between African American students' achievement goal orientation and their perception of the relationships with their teacher? The relationships between the teachers were broken down into two categories: Negative and Positive. Relative to the negative relationship with a teacher, there was a correlation between a student's relationship with a teacher and the mastery and performance avoidance orientations. This is to say that there were high scores on the negative view of a teacher and high scores on the two orientations: Mastery and performance avoidance. . *Thus, saying that if a child thinks that they have a negative relationship with their teacher, they are less likely to take the mastery approach to learning but take the performance avoidance route.* However the scores were so low that they were insignificant and thus rendering no correlation (.266 at $p \leq .05$) (see table 2).

There was, however, no correlation between a student's negative relationship with a teacher and the performance approach orientation. There were high scores for the performance approach orientation and low scores for the negative view of a teacher. As it relates to the positive relationship with a teacher, there were correlations between all orientations of Achievement Goal Orientation. There was a level of significance between a positive relationship with a teacher and the Mastery orientation of Achievement Goal Orientation. *Thus, saying that if a child thinks that they have a positive relationship with their teacher, they are more prone to take the mastery approach to learning.* These students try to actually understand a content area, rather than trying to look good by making good grades. Though the mastery orientation showed some significance, all of the other coefficients were so small in magnitude that they were rendered insignificant (.266 at $p \leq .05$).

Table 2

Intercorrelations among TCAP Achievement Composite, Aspects of Student/Teacher

Relationships and Dimensions of Goal Orientation
(n= 55)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(1) TCAP Composite	---	-.05	-.05	-.10	-.16	-.09	.10	-.07	-.11	-.17
(2) Affection	-.05	---	.45	.63	-.03	.27*	.22	.12	.77	-.22
(3) Attunement	-.05	.45	---	.50	-.02	.26	.23	-.01	.75	-.11
(4) Positive Dependability	-.10	.63	.50	---	-.09	.18	.18	-.05	.92	-.19
(5) Negative Dependability	-.16	-.03	-.02	-.09	---	.01	-.18	.07	-.07	.97
(6)Mastery Subscale	-.09	.27*	.26*	.18	.01	---	.51	.14	.30*	-.00
(7) Performance Approach Subscale	.10	.22	.23	.18	-.18	.51	---	.03	.25	-.21
(8) Performance Avoidance Subscale	-.07	.12	-.01	-.05	.07	.14	.03	---	.00	.06
(9) Positive Teacher Items	-.11	.77	.75	.92	-.07	.30*	.25	.00	---	-.18
(10) Negative Teacher Items	-.17	-.22	-.11	-.19	.97	-.00	-.21	.06	-.18	---

*$p \leq .05$,

In observing the subscales of the instruments, there was a correlation between mastery and affection and mastery and attunement. The relationship between mastery and affection denotes that when a child feels affection from their teacher, they tend to want to understand the content of the subject in depth. In addition, the relationship between mastery and attunement denotes that if a student feels like they positively attract their teacher's attention they feel more prone to understand the content of the subject in depth. In conclusion, middle school students' motivation to learn might be influenced by their perceived relationship with their teachers. Middle school teachers should focus on cultivating positive relationships with all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The correlations between the students' achievement goal orientation and their perception of the relationships with their teacher were both positive and negative among various constructs, but statistically insignificant. The constructs of affection, attunement, and positive teacher items correlated with mastery and were the only statistically significant constructs in this study. The correlation between the students' academic achievement and their perception of the relationships with their teacher were both positive and negative among various constructs, but statistically insignificant. Finally, the correlation between the students in this study academic achievement and achievement goal orientation were both positive and negative among various constructs, but statistically insignificant.

The prevalent factor in all of the research in this study's literature review is the race of the population being studied; most of the students were Caucasian. Most of these studies showed that a student's perception of their relationship with their teacher had a direct effect on their academic achievement. The participants in this study, however, were African American. Therefore, this was a limitation in this study. There has been little research done on the African American race and the constructs of Achievement goal orientation and a relationship with a teacher. There was very little research done on the achievement of African American middle school students as well. This study also implies that there may be other factors that motivate African American students to achieve. There needs to be more research done to help understand if these constructs work for a greater number of middle school African American students. More research is needed to determine the constructs by which African American students receive motivation to achieve. A future study may serve to pinpoint "motivational constructs and other outcomes of academic success such as engagement, self-regulation, study-skills, and achievement" specifically for African American students or other non-Caucasian students (Murphy et al., 2005). Furthermore, ways to optimize an African American student's motivation to learn and how to enhance a teacher's skills to better relate to this student should be researched. This type of research could open doors to enhancing the level of achievement for African American students.

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Students' Relationship with the Teacher Questionnaire

Read each statement carefully; then, respond using the following scale.

1=not at all true
2=not very true
3=sort of true
4=very true

Affection

_____ 1. My teacher likes me

_____ 2. My teacher really cares about me

_____ 3. My teacher does not seem to enjoy having me in class.

Attunement

_____4. My teacher spends time with me.

_____5. My teacher talks with me.

Dependability A

_____6. My teacher is always there for me.

_____7. I can count on my teacher to be there for me.

_____8. I can rely on my teacher to be there when I need him/her.

Dependability B

_____9. I cannot count on my teacher when I need him/her.

_____10. I cannot depend on my teacher for the important things.

_____11. My teacher is never there for me.

Achievement Goal Orientation

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the statements on the following pages you are to ask yourself: "How true is this statement of me?" Then indicate your response using the following scale:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Very true						**Not at all true**

1. It is important to me to do better than other students. __
2. My goal in class is to get better grades than others. __
3. I am striving to demonstrate my ability relative to others at this school. __
4. I am motivated by the thought of outperforming my peers. __
5. It is important o me to do well compared to others at this school. __
6. I want to do well in school to show my ability to my family, friends, teachers, or others. __
7. I want to learn as much as possible in school. __
8. It is important for me to understand the content of a course as thoroughly as possible. __
9. I hope to have gained a broader and deeper knowledge of the subject mater when I am finished with a class. __
10. I desire to completely master the material presented in my cases. __
11. In classes, I prefer course material that arouses my curiosity, even if it is difficult to learn. __
12. In classes, I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things. __
13. I often think to myself, "What if I do badly in a class?"__
14. I worry about the possibility of getting bad grades. __
15. My fear of performing poorly in classes is often what motivates me. __
16. I just want to avoid doing poorly in my classes. __
17. I'm afraid that if I ask my teacher a "dumb" question, they might not think I'm very smart. __
18. I wish my classes were not graded. __

Teaching task specific behaviors to an autistic middle school student

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research professional development plan was to identify a method that will help to increase the performance of a task specific behavior by an autistic student. Autistic students possess a social ineptness that can often interfere with their learning inside the educational environment. As a result, teachers are desperately seeking methods to help these students matriculate effectively in the academic classroom, more specifically, its social culture. One method that seems to increase task specific behaviors that contribute to a more socially acceptable norm has been one based on the principles of relationship development intervention (RDI) where parents and teachers use everyday occurrences to teach social skills. Also, modeling of desired social outcomes to the student, and successful repetition of these outcomes by the student, have the ability to modify behavior that might be otherwise deemed inappropriate.

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a disability once thought to only affect a few children, has had such an increase in diagnoses in the past few years that it has become the third most prevalent neurological disability among children. Originally diagnosed by Leo Kanner in the early 1940's, it was rarely identified and treated. In contemporary times, it is been found that approximately 1 out of 1000 children is affected by this neruodevelopmental disorder. (Ruble & Dalrymple, 2002) Nevertheless, this has not diluted its complexity as one of the few disorders that continues to baffle medical researchers and psychologists alike. There is no concrete cause or cure for the disorder; both remain a mystery. The frustration that is felt by those experts who continue to search for its origin, as well as, the solution to its debilitation spreads further than the confines of a laboratory. It is also experienced in the home where the autistic child resides. Parents of autistic children battle a disease that often occurs swiftly and unexpectedly, stealing the normality of their offspring. How does a parent cope with a disorder that seems to have no beginning or end?

There are a number of distinguishable characteristics that are common among children suffering from ASD. Over the years, researchers have offered a number of treatments and behavioral modification methods that attempt to help both parents and teachers in dealing with these distinguishable deficits. One of the most obvious, and one that is receiving a lot of attention by research specialists in the field, is social ineptness. Nevertheless, one must be reminded that ASD is a spectrum disorder. As a result, it is often difficult for neurological or educational researchers to design a treatment plan that will accommodate this particular deficit, or any other, that will accommodate all autistic children. It is unlikely to find two autistic children that are exactly alike in their inability to illustrate appropriate communication or acceptable social behavior. The spectrum spans from the truly severe to those sufferers of Asperger's syndrome, the mildest form of the disorder. As a result, behavioral modification plans must be individualized in order to provide some sort of effective treatment or training that will lead to the successful interaction of an autistic child with the world around him.

Being the parent of an autistic child has been one of the most wonderfully frustrating journeys of my life. My son, Torreey is a true a joy to behold. He has a phenomenal memory and an incredible ability to draw whatever he sees with the most extraordinary detail without tracing or without the object or movie frame being right in front of him. Moreover, as a high functioning autistic child, we feel lucky that Torreey is able to speak, write and has the capacity to learn. He can read on a fourth grade level, comprehend simple prose and solve simple mathematical problems. This may not seem very extraordinary to the average individual until you hear stories from other parents whose autistic children have never read book, or for that matter, ever held a pencil. Nonetheless, his need for routine can be frustrating. He must eat from the same blue plate and we must negotiate in order for him to give up the front seat of the car. He hears sounds that are beyond the normal range of human hearing and often your favorite songs on the radio are cut short because he cannot handle their frequency level. His random sounds and hand signs only make sense to him and his movements resemble a bull in a china shop, no consideration for space or stationary objects. In these cases, it is often difficult to be discreet with an eighth-grader who already possesses a 5'9'' frame and weighs 216 pounds. People and objects are perceived as mere obstacles that must be discarded in order for him get to the place he wants. Stares from strangers are not uncommon for parents of autistic children, but with a child the size of Torreey, stares have sometimes been accompanied by harsh attitudes and mean words. When we are in public places, he often runs away and his stubbornness to correct his behavior when you have asked often happens at the most inopportune time. I know that Torreey will face some hardships in his life, mostly for behaviors that he has no power to control, however, I will do whatever I can to make this life the best for him. Therefore, in addition to the instruction Torreey is receiving in school, medication he is prescribed, and treatment by his therapist, I feel that it is my responsibility as his parent to try and help Torreey function as normally as possible in a society that does not yet understand him. As Torreey grows older, his functional skills will become a greater component of his ability to adapt successfully in our world and I want to help him develop those skills.

The purpose of this study is to determine how I can aid in the development of the functional skills of an autistic student, like Torreey, by attempting to increase a specific interactive, task-specific behavior.

Literature Review

With the increase of autism cases among children that has emerged in recent years, and the ravenous mode in which parents and educators are seeking and gathering information regarding the disorder, the number of articles broaching this topic is massive. As a result, a specific aspect of the disorder must be identified in order to target those articles that will provide the most appropriate information to conduct a research study. The focus of this study involves the modification of a task specific behavior of an autistic student. As a result, the purpose of this literature review was to gain insight on two main areas: the most definitive characteristic of autism spectrum disorder, social inoperability, and a sample of the theories and methods that attempt to assess, restructure and modify the social behaviors of the autistic student to accommodate the norms of our society.

The Face of Autism

Children of autism, unlike children with Down's syndrome, do not possess particular physical characteristics that aid in identifying their neurological deficit. Moreover, unlike children who are deaf or have cerebral palsy, their disabilities are not immediately apparent. The face of autism does not give any obvious inclinations of the neurodevelopmental disorder that abounds. It is not until an autistic student begins to exhibit behavior that is unusual or that is atypical of what is considered socially acceptable, flailing their arms, repeating inane information, making loud inaudible sounds, or as one mother noticed of her son, "…walking around the perimeter of rooms, hugging the walls…" (Collins & Collins, 2001 p. 21). The face of autism is similar, if not identical, to any other face of an individual that is deemed normal by societal standards.

Autism spectrum disorder "…is characterized by a lack of social interest and interaction with the environment" (McGrath, Bosch, Sullivan & Fuqua, 2003, p. 47). These students have difficulty comprehending and interacting with their environment, including, but not limited to, human expression, actions and response to external stimuli. Nevertheless, autistic students possess a physical appearance and with those students existing in the high functioning realm of the disorder, might also share the language abilities of their peers. This has led to, however, according to Amy C. Laurent and Emily Rubin, autistic students being "…misperceived as having willful and defiant behavior problems…" (2004, p. 286) by choice, when it is actually their inability to respond appropriately to their surroundings including the objects and individuals there within.

Laurent and Rubin identified this phenomenon regarding the ability to emotionally respond and adapt to ones environment as emotional regulation. According to the authors, typical children gain the ability to "experience, recognize, express and regulate all emotions effectively…" (p. 286) to environmental stimulus. These children begin to learn how to perform this task as they mature and experience different conditions and changes in their environment, as well as, through observation of others within those surroundings. Moreover, typical students have the capacity to comprehend the rationale of the actions observed. Autistic children, on the other hand, do not possess this ability to discern the rationale behind the events, actions, and interaction of individuals in their environment. These students possess limited ability, according to the authors, involving appropriate emotional expression and the ability to inhibit inappropriate behaviors on their own.

Several articles reviewed support the continuing theme of social inoperability as the defining characteristic of the autistic student. Simon Baron-Cohen also had a name that he used to describe the social deficits of the autistic child – "mindblind" (1997, 62). He explained that these individuals are not able to grasp the concepts required to develop successful human relationships. Lynn Koegel and Claire LaZebnik, authors of *Overcoming Autism: Finding the Answers, Strategies and Hope that Can Transform a Child's Life* (as cited in USA Today, 2004) defined autism as a disorder that specifically affects the part of the brain that is responsible for "social interaction and communication skills" (2004, p. 15). Nevertheless, the authors contended, the social skills needed for autistic children to be successful in society can be learned.

Methods to Enhance Social Behavior

One of the most thorough articles among those reviewed regarding the social inoperability of the autistic student, authored by Laurent and Rubin, failed to offer any suggestions regarding methods or means of treating the social deficits these students possess. Nevertheless, a number of articles attempted to provide the answers that this article did not.

Frank J. Sansosti, Kelly A. Powell-Smith, and Donald Kincaid (2004) suggested that social stories would be an excellent mode of developing the social capabilities of students with autism spectrum disorder. Citing the increasing prevalence of the disorder in children, they argued that the need for educational practices that support the development or enhancement of functional skills and the long-term growth and maintenance of those skills learned. Sansosti and his colleagues promoted the use of social stories as an avenue to accomplish this objective. According to the authors, autistic students, " demonstrate significant difficulty identifying the behaviors, beliefs, and intentions of others" (Sansosti et. al., 2004, p. 195). As a result, the authors surmised that traditional teaching strategies used in the classroom, such as direct instruction, role-playing or cooperative learning may prove less beneficial in teaching appropriate social skills to a student with these deficits. Social stories illustrate the desired behavior outcome to be taught to the autistic student in the form of a written storyline and picture cues. Moreover, the social stories "…could be used to assist individuals with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] in interpreting and understanding challenging or confusing social situations" (Sansosti & et. al., 2004, p. 195). Students were even encouraged to help write the storyline in order to feel involved in the modification of their actions. The authors cited substantial percentages of success in the use of social stories to modify inappropriate behavior. Nevertheless, they did add the disclaimer that due to the use of other strategies with the social stories, they could not credit the social stories as the sole influence of the successful modification.

Researchers, Ann M. McGrath, Sebastien Bosch, Cristin L. Sullivan and R. Wayne Fuqua (2003) cited peer interaction as a mode of remedying the social inadequacies of autistic children. The authors surmised that without active social intervention, the inadequate social skills of an autistic child would "…become more debilitating" (McGrath, et. al., 2003, p. 47). In their study, an autistic child was observed in play with several peers of typical cognitive development. Post treatment results did show that the number of initiations between the peers and the autistic student did increase, as well as, the interaction between the autistic child and the student. Nevertheless, the authors could not specifically determine the cause of the increased interaction. They hope to address this later in future research.

A collaborative model between parents and teachers was another strategy that was identified during this literature review that offered an answer regarding how to increase the social interaction and display of effective social behavior by autistic children. Known as the Collaborative Model for Promoting Competence and Success (COMPASS), its goal, as documented by authors Lisa A. Ruble and Nancy J. Dalrymple (2002), "…is to provide indirect intervention to help students with autism achieve competence…" (p. 77) in their interactions with the environment. In their research, the authors emphasized an ideal that is imperative to the instruction of an autistic student. Autism is a spectrum disorder and as a result, treatment and instruction of an autistic student must be

individualized. The authors believed that the collaboration between the parent and the teachers of the student aid in achieving this goal. Moreover, the authors pointed out that this collaborative effort not only aids in increasing the level of social competence of the student, but also, increases the "families abilities to make choices, obtain a sense of empowerment, and identify feasible program options" (Ruble & Dalrymple, 2002, p. 77). Other benefits of this method cited by the author included the long-term goals of a COMPASS collaboration, as autism is a disability that spans a lifetime, as well as, its ability to focus on developing the functional skills of the student.

Dr. Steven R. Gutstein, (as cited by Kalb, 2005) whose theory on attacking the social incompetence of autistic children – relationship development intervention (RDI), focuses on the interplay between the autistic child and the parent. According to an article featured in Newsweek magazine, "parents learn how to use everyday events as teachable moments" (Kalb, 2005, p.53). The parent acts as a guide. Dr. Gutstein and his colleagues believe that these everyday endeavors, such as grocery shopping, give the autistic child the opportunity to adapt to and interact with the environment and make such activities less intimidating and overwhelming. Supporters, like Linda Andron-Ostrow, a clinical social worker, "likes the way RDI empowers parents and allows for creative thinking" (Kalb, 2005, p.53).

No matter what the method or mode suggested for implementation in the academic or functional skill curriculum of the autistic student, one continuing theme among the literature reviewed remains apparent. These methods are desperately needed. The phenomenal increase in the number of autism diagnoses is demanding that further research be conducted in order to find the most appropriate and beneficial treatment for the social inadequacies of the autistic child. For those methods that have been suggested, further research must be done or modifications must be made to accommodate the individual needs of each autistic student. In addition, educational researchers must be willing to continue to delve into the study of the psychological capacity, behavior, and social capabilities of the autistic student in order to continue developing novel and effective approaches of social communicative and behavioral instruction. As Emily Rubin and Laurie Lennon (2004) suggest, with the notable discrepancy "…between cognitive potential …adaptive functioning" (p. 271) and the social inadequacies of autistic children, further study and implementation of effective approaches would not only increase the social competence of these students, but also, enhance their learning capacity and cognitive skills.

Participant

The participant is a handsome, fourteen-year-old high functioning autistic student. He is 5'9" tall and weighs approximately 213 lbs. Like most autistic children, he does not possess any physical characteristics that elude to his disability. He is an eighth grade student at Dexter Middle School where he follows an expanded resource curriculum. Currently on a fourth grade reading level, the student is also able to do simple math including adding, subtracting, telling time and counting money. He currently receives speech therapy and is under evaluation for occupational therapy services. He is assigned a male assistant as he responds better to male voice commands. The male assistant helps him with both instructional goals and appropriate classroom behavior. The participant is currently under the care of a child behavioral specialist, psychiatrist and pediatrician.

The participant exhibits a number of characteristic behaviors representative of autistic students, including, but not limited to; rigidity and structural obsession, "scheming," or random hand and body movements, incomprehensible language and sounds, limited social competence, severe language delay, and spatial awareness. Nevertheless, as a high functioning autistic student, the participant has the ability to learn and respond to instructional directives, at times emotes and shows affection to others, at times acknowledges and attempts to interact with his surroundings and has the capacity to foster appropriate social skills if taught.

I chose to work with this student because he is about to embark on a high school matriculation where functional skills instruction will become an important component of his curriculum. Functional skills instruction gives students with disabilities the opportunity to foster independence and self-reliance as they move toward adulthood. Any exposure to situations and environments that allow the practice of these skills only help to enhance this type of instruction.

Method

The student and observer will visit a local grocery store each week. The student will be required to use the appropriate functional skills and social behavior that are needed to conduct the following goals that are conducive to this environment:

- composing a constructive shopping list. The list will include 6-10 items.
- gathering items on the list in an organized and socially appropriate manner.
- paying for shopping items using the correct denomination and number of bills or coins.

A behavioral checklist will be used each week to rate the performance of these goals by evaluating specific task behaviors. (Appendix A) The successful display of these specific behaviors will also merit success in meeting the overall goal, execution of a normal shopping excursion. Modifications will be continually made as needed throughout the study to produce favorable outcomes of these tasks.

Initially, the student will be motivated in performing acceptable behaviors by using the following:

- verbal instructions immediately prior to entering the grocery store, including a "play-by-play" format that will help to provide a mental picture of what to do while inside. For example, "When you go in, there will be a line of shopping carts, get one…Stay with your cart, etc."
- verbal prompts to help with the appropriate accomplishment of tasks
- praise for successful accomplishment of tasks
- redirection to modify inappropriate behavior

Findings and Analysis

Week 1: 2/24/05

This was our first weekly trip to the grocery store. I chose the Kroger store on the corner of Dexter Rd and Germantown Parkway, as it was the neighborhood store that the student was already familiar. Before we left the student and I composed a shopping list. He had no problem with this task. The student is very conscious of the usual items that are needed in the house, for example, milk, eggs, cereal, etc. Items that are not commonly bought or eaten/used on a regular basis were a little trickier. These items were

supplied by the teacher; for example, crackers and light bulbs; however, the student wrote down all items on the shopping list.

Before we entered the store, the following objectives were verbally explained to the student:

- Obtain a shopping cart.
- Stay with the cart at all times.
- Do not touch anyone in the store.
- Do not run off from the shopping cart or teacher.
- Pick up only those items on the list.

The student listened and nodded his head and said, "OK." to each objective. As we entered the store, he was running ahead of me. I had to catch up. I called his name a couple of times and he stopped with the cart. He waited on me until we entered the second set of doors to the store.

Although he grabbed the cart with no problem, staying with the cart was an issue. He kept leaving the cart to pick up his items, whether the item was just further down the aisle or on the next aisle over. He just left the cart and took off. I had to continually chase behind him and, believe me, that was not easy. Furthermore, I had to keep prompting him to push the cart, not pull it.

The student did not have a problem with sticking with only the items on the list. Also, because the student was somewhat familiar with the store, he did not have any problems finding certain items. For example, he knows exactly where his favorite cereal is and hones into that item without being inundated with the other brands present. Nevertheless, it was those items that were less familiar to him. It was not that he was overwhelmed by the choices, but he has no concept of "comparison" shopping. I did not think about this when composing his objectives. At this point, while he is living at home, price not be an issue, but what about when he has a specific budget. Will he be able to compare prices and choose the time that is least expensive? Is this above his realm of knowledge or skill? We will continue to work on this particular task, observing his actions concerning this particular objective. I showed him how to "cross off" one of the items on his list. He did this with every other item on the list without prompting.

Other objectives were prompted as they were encountered in the store. These include, but are not limited to:

- Ask for help from store personnel when an item cannot be found.

This was a bit of a challenge, however, I was not surprised. The essential disability of a child with autism falls within his/her social skills. The item at hand was the light bulbs. I took him to the customer service desk and prompted him on what to say. "Excuse me, where are the light bulbs?" He repeated my statement. The lady at the customer service desk, pointed her finger in the right direction and told him what aisle number to look on. Surprisingly, he kept eye contact and immediately ran to look for the aisle, moving in the direction the lady was pointing, without the cart! I ran behind him pushing the cart. When I caught up to him, I showed him the signs above each aisle showing the number. We counted to the correct aisle number and found the light bulbs. Now, which one do we choose? Do we like at price, wattage? These are not things that I thought about before composing the list. Should I just place items on his list that he is familiar?

After obtaining all items on the list, the student was to:

- Greet the cashier in the appropriate manner.

- Pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.

I prompted the student on what to say to the cashier, "Hello, I have my Kroger card." Student repeated my statement to the cashier. When it was time to pay, I did not think that we would have a lot of problems with this task as the student has been learning about money in his classes at school for some time. I pointed to the screen to show him his total He looked at the screen, but still attempted to give the cashier all the money he had. I stopped and asked him how much did he owe while pointing to the number on the screen. He told me the total with no problem. I asked him to count out his money. He then decided how much to give the cashier. He gave the correct amount. I was surprised and very pleased. At least is not one task that I would have to worry about.

The student was required to carry his bags directly to the car and load them into the trunk or back seat. He pushed the cart to the car, but had to prompt him to load the items into the car. Once he was prompted, he completed the task with no problems.

After this excursion, I realized the number of simple tasks that go into completing the more complex task of grocery shopping. It showed me that to a child with autism, each step involved in this type of activity is a challenge in itself and has to be learned. "How we take for granted the simple tasks that we as "normal" individuals are able to complete?" I thought. Staying with a cart makes no "sense" to a child with autism. Does it meet his/her immediate need? No, but maybe obtaining the items does. Which may explain why getting the items was not such a difficult assignment for the student. Nevertheless, I hope that as we move forward, some items on his behavior checklist will no longer present such a challenge; however I am beginning to realize that others will.

Already, we must add the following to his checklist.

- Student will wait quietly in the cashier line without running off/touching objects.
- Student will not run into anyone with the shopping cart

Week 2: 3/3/05

This week, we again composed a shopping list. This list did not have items that the student was not familiar, for example, soup, cheese, bread. Nevertheless, specific types of these items were noted: cream of mushroom soup, sharp cheddar cheese, and garlic bread. This was going to require the student to actually read the packaging and not just grab any cheese, any bread, any soup. On this trip to the grocery store, we had the same objectives (Refer to behavioral chart/previous entry) including those two added since the end of the last trip. Again, we had a verbal "conversation" regarding what was expected of him when we entered the store and throughout our shopping trip. This time, however, a reward was offered for completing each task. The student loves to look at the magazines and books in the store. So, I told him that if he would get a cart, stay with the cart, get all items on the list and not run away from the cart or me, he would be able to look at the books and magazines for five minutes. He said "OK."

The student obtained a cart with no problem. He still required some prompting to stay with the cart, but not as often as the previous trip. Also, he did not run as far away from it as before. He still wanted to pull the cart and when he did push, he was not always conscious of space. This is a deficit of this autistic child that has already been identified, spatial awareness. I continued to show him how to maneuver the cart around others without coming close to hitting/touching them. I took the direction well; however, it is a task that we will have to continue to work on.

Student Behavioral Checklist

Week: **2/24/05**

Behavior	Task successful	Task unsuccessful	Comments
Student will plan a constructive grocery list.	**(x)***		Had very few problems with this task. Student was able to name things needed with very little prompting.
Student will obtain a shopping cart upon entering the store.	**(x)**		Completed this task with minimal prompting, however, did run ahead of me into the store.
Student will stay with the cart the entire time while in the store.		**x**	This was one of the biggest obstacles during the entire trip. Student kept leaving the cart, wanted to pull the cart behind him instead of pushing it ahead of him.
Student will choose only those items on the list.	**x**		Completed the task, however, **keeping him on task** required a lot of prompting.
Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.		**x**	Student was prompted to ask a store employee for light bulbs. Student basically repeated the instructor's request.
Student will not run off during any time while in the store.		**x**	This was also a big issue. Had to constantly be reminded by the instructor to stay with the cart.
Student will not stop/grab/touch other shoppers.	**x**		Student did speak to other shoppers, but did not attempt to touch anyone.
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"	**(x)**		With prompting. Basically repeated the dialogue offered by the instructor.
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.	**(x)**		At first. student gave cashier all of the money, however, when asked to look at total and amount of money, gave the cashier the correct amount.
Student will carry his bags directly to the car and load them into the trunk or back seat.	**(x)**		Student ran off with cart. Instructor had to prompt him to look out for moving vehicles and to put bags into the trunk once we reached the car.

*** ()** = Parenthesis indicate **prompting** was required to complete task.

We again came to the part where I wanted him to ask for help. The student would rather try to walk around the entire store to look for it on his own than ask for help. He prompted him to ask a store employee about the location of the garlic bread. It did not go too well. I had to prompt him with exactly what to say. He repeated what I said, but did not keep eye contact with the employee. He was still looking for the bread himself. The employee did not help, he said, "What? What?" a couple of times. The student really lost interest after that. I finally pointed out the general vicinity of where the item was. He said, 'Oh, there it is!" and put it in the basket.

Another issue came up that I never though of – language. For example, we had spaghetti noodles on our list, but when he looked up to attempt to read the signs (with prompting), he could not associate the name on the list with the name on the sign – pasta. This never crossed my mind. He is going to look for exactly what is on his list. How do I teach him about these kinds of anomalies? Will it be possible? Or, will I have to remember what the store calls the item so that we can put that name on the list?

Again, pricing was an issue. He still does not seem to understand the concept of what is least expensive/cheaper? But, then again, I had to ask myself is this after we obtained all of the items, the student was allowed to go to the magazine/book rack. He was allowed to look around for 5-6 minutes. I then asked him to choose a cashier. We stayed in line; he was pretty patient. Nevertheless, when he came time to pay the bill, he had some problems. I was a little surprised since he did so well the last time. It did not help that I saw an acquaintance in the store. He was easily distracted. I finally, helped him count out the money and decided what to give the cashier. Taking the bags to the car and loading them was not a problem.

Student Behavioral Checklist

Week: **3/3/05**

Behavior	Task successful	Task unsuccessful	Comments
Student will plan a constructive grocery list.	**(x)**		Student and instructor planned grocery list.
Student will obtain a shopping cart upon entering the store.	**(x)**		Minor prompting.
Student will stay with the cart the entire time while in the store.	**(x)**		Still needed prompting. Still wants instructor to push basket. **Another issue emerged**: **Maneuvering**.
Student will choose only those items on the list.	**x**		Student did look at other items, but did not put any of them into the cart.
Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.		**x**	Still would rather look for an item on his own. Instructor prompted student to ask for garlic bread. Required a lot of prompting to do so.
Student will not run off during any time while in the store.	**(x)**		Did a better job of this, but reminders by the instructor were needed.

Week: **3/3/05**

Behavior	Task successful	Task unsuccessful	Comments
Student will not stop/grab/touch other shoppers.	**x**		Student did speak to other shoppers, but did not attempt to touch anyone.
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"	**x**		Student did say Hello. He saw person in front of him hand the cashier a Kroger card, so he did the same.
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.		**x**	Student really struggled this time with handing over the correct amount of money.
Student will carry his bags directly to the car and load them into the trunk or back seat.	**x**		Did a very good job without prompting.

Other emerging issues: Pricing or Selective Shopping – choosing items from many selections based on price.

Week 3: 3/11/04

During this trip, the student's father joined us. The father worked in the field of occupational therapy and is very knowledgeable about working with individuals with disabilities. I hoped that he could provide some insight or practical solutions to some of the issues we had encountered. By this trip, getting the cart, staying with the cart, and not running off, required little prompting, as well as, choosing only the items on the list and crossing items off the list were not either. The student was working hard in order to get his reward of going to the magazine/book rack. He only needed to be prompted 1-2 times to remain on task during the entire trip. The main issues during this trip were again, grocery store "language," reading the signs, asking for help, pricing, maneuvering the cart and using the correct amount of money to pay for the items.

On this trip, for unfamiliar items, we used brand names. This helped with choosing the item, but not so much, with locating the item using the signs. For example, the dust cleaner, Pledge, was easy to find once I pointed out what aisle it was on. It was too difficult for the student to determine which aisle the cleaner was on because "dust cleaner" or "Pledge" was not on the sign. I decided at that point, would the student ever be asked to buy an item like Pledge? Maybe, items like these did not need to be on his list. However, for those items like "popcorn" where the exact name appeared on the sign, the task would have been easier. Nevertheless, we did experience a challenge in him actually reading the sign. A couple of times, he said, "I don't wanny (want to)…" His father told me that when this occurs, continue to redirect his attention to the task at hand until he completes it. I redirected the student and he eventually read the items on the aisle sign. He determined what the aisle the popcorn was on and went charging down the aisle with the cart. We had to prompt him to be careful in order to prevent him from running into anyone or anything. When it came to choosing items based on pricing and not brand, we chose for the student. After talking with his father, we decided that this is maybe a task that will not be isolated and concentrated on alone at a later time. Also, there was no opportunity to verbally ask an employee for help.

Again, once the items were gathered, the student was allowed to go and peruse the magazine/book rack; however, the student's father was in a hurry, so time at the magazine rack had to be cut short, only about 2-3 minutes. We ran into a problem. The

student became difficult to deal with after that point. He did not want to go to the cash line. Once in the cash line, he began to whine about the magazine rack. His father told him to stop. This stopped the whining, but not the refusal to pay for the items or taking them to the car. The student had to be "encouraged" by his father to do both. He basically just gave the cashier all of his money without attempting to count it out. His father redirected him until he tried. He finally, pushed the cart with the bags to the car and put them in the trunk without prompting. I am guessing that he was upset because he did not feel that his reward was fulfilled.

Student Behavioral Checklist

Week: **3/10/05**

Behavior	Task successful	Task unsuccessful	Comments
*Student will plan a constructive grocery list.	**x**		Student completed task without prompting.
Student will obtain a shopping cart upon entering the store.	**(x)**		Student completed with minimal prompting.
Student will stay with the cart the entire time while in the store.	**(x)**		Student completed with minimal prompting.
Student will choose only those items on the list.	**x**		Student completed with minimal prompting.
Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.		**x**	Student still refuses to ask for help, would rather find item on his own. **Another issue emerged: Reading store signs in helping to locate items.**
Student will not run off during any time while in the store.	**x**		Student completed with minimal prompting.
Student will not stop/grab/touch other shoppers.	**x**		Student completed with no prompting.
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"	**(x)**		Still required prompting from instructor.
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.		**x**	Student really struggles with this task.
Student will carry his bags directly to the car and load them into the trunk or back seat.	**x**		Student completed with minimal prompting.
** Student will maneuver cart through aisles without any danger of contact with another shopper or object.		**x**	Student had to be constantly reminded on how to maneuver the cart **around** objects and people. To the student these things do not matter as long as he gets to the item he needs.

* Broken cells indicate mastered skills.
**Bold cells in table indicate emerging issues.

Week 4: 3/21/05

When the student and I composed this list for the trip, I made sure to add to the word chili, the words "canned meat" in parentheses, the name used by the grocery store. All other items were usual items. By this trip, we had mastered getting the cart, staying with the cart, not running off, gathering only listed items and crossing them off the list.

The main issues were again, using the aisle signs to find items, verbally asking for help, maneuvering the cart, and using the correct amount of money to pay for items. Moreover, yet another issue has become apparent, store organization. When the student looks for items, there is no method. He looks for the first item on the list, no matter where it is on the store. He does not think about approaching each aisle in some order and then matching items on his list to the aisle number. For example, instead of going all the way over to the other side of the store to get milk just because it is first on his list, he would save milk until he gets to that side of the store. Maybe, getting cereal first since it is closer to the door although further down on the list. We worked on this while trying to accomplish reading signs at the same time. We made some progress. He has to read each item. Then I would say, "Are any of those on your list? Look on your list." Slowly, and with consistent redirection, he would attempt to match the item to the name on the aisle sign. Usually, redirection was only required once. He then proceeded down that aisle to find the item. A couple of times, he passed right by the item. Once, I pointed it out, he got it and crossed it off. I think that he is more interested in crossing the items off because he knew once he was done, he can go to the magazine/book rack.

Maneuvering the cart went a little better. I would just say words like, "Slowly…" and he would know exactly what to do. On one aisle, an older lady was ahead of him to the right. He slowly tried to move around her. I had to help, but at least he knew what to do. Once again, the opportunity did not present itself to ask for help.

Once the list was completed, he was allowed his usual time to peruse the magazine/book rack. After 5-7 minutes, he was asked to cashier line. He looked to see which one was the shortest without prompting. (Great!) He said "Hello," to the cashier. The cashier asked me if we had a Kroger card. I gave the card to the student and the student handed it to the cashier. Again, there was a problem with giving the cashier the correct amount of money. The student read the total with no problem, but needed help when counting out the correct amount. Bags were taken to and loaded in the car with no problem.

Paying for items is continuing to be a significant issue. It may help to practice exchanging money before the next trip to the grocery store. It may also have to become a task that must be isolated and worked on alone.

Week 5: 3/31/05

This week, I did not give the usual directions before going into the store. We just got out of the car, and he did everything that he seemed to have mastered up to this point without prompting. This goes to show that the ideology that autistic students benefiting from repetition and consistent exposure to an environment and task definitely has some merit.

The main things we worked on today were those objectives where we were still having problems: reading the signs, maneuvering the cart in the aisles, buying items according to some organization, and asking for help. I had decided to remove giving the correct amount of money to the cashier as a task to be evaluated because I feel that it is an objective that needs to be focused on alone; nevertheless, I still made the student participate in the transaction.

After we entered the store, instead of asking him, "What is the first thing on your list?" I said, "Is there anything that we need to get from this area. We always start in produce

Student Behavior Checklist

Week: **3/21/05**

Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.		**x**	Student still refuses to ask for help, would rather find item on his own. **Another issue emerged: Reading store signs in helping to locate items.**
*Student will not run off during any time while in the store.	**x**		Student completed with minimal prompting.
Student will not stop/grab/touch other shoppers.	**x**		Student completed with no prompting.
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"	**(x)**		Still required prompting from instructor.
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.		**x**	Student continues to struggle with this task.
Student will maneuver cart through aisles without any danger of contact with another shopper or object.	**(x)**		Maneuvering went a little better today. Nevertheless, student still required consistent prompting.
**Student will shop for items according to store's organization.	**(x)**		Today was a learning experience in this area. Required consistent instruction and/or prompting.

* Broken cells indicate mastered skills.

**Bold cells in table indicate emerging issues.

We looked at the list, and decided that there was nothing that we needed. So then we moved on. As we past each aisle, I again made him attempt to read the signs to match items on his list. This was a little difficult today. He needed quite a bit of prompting and we ended having to read the entire list for him to give the correct answer. For example, a sign may have rice, pasta, instant potatoes, tomato sauce, etc. We are looking for ketchup. I tell him to look at the sign, "Is ketchup up there?" He says, "Yes." I tell him that it isn't and ask him to look again. He still says yes. Finally, I ask him to read the sign. "Does it say ketchup?" Finally, he says no. The only problem with this is, he does not *want* to read every sign. He signs loudly and tells me, "I don't wanny [want to] read the sign." I remind him of his reward (reading the magazines) and he grudgingly complies. This was a tough one. Thank goodness, for those items he can find easily.

Just when had completed obtaining all the items, he got excited because he knew that "magazine time" was coming. He was walking very fast with the cart. What happens when you walk too fast? You hit someone. He tapped this nice little old lady's rear. Thank goodness, she barely seemed to notice. I did prompt him to say, "Excuse me." He did, but she did not reply. He did move a little slower after that. When he was done reading, he chose a short line, handling the cart very well. He waited in line pretty patiently. I allowed him to give the cashier the money for the purchase, making him read the total, attempting to determine how much money needed. He still did not do a really good job at this. Nonetheless, we will keep trying. Exiting the store and complete his objectives once we got to the car were uneventful. He looked like a pro!

Student Behavioral Checklist

Week: **3/31/05**

Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.		**x**	Student still refuses to ask for help, would rather find item on his own.
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"	**(x)**		Still required prompting from instructor.
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.		**x**	Student continues to struggle with this task.
Student will maneuver cart through aisles without any danger of contact with another shopper or object.		**x**	Student "back-tracked" on this task. Did better last week. Not sure what prompted the "impatience." Student had to be constantly reminded on how to maneuver the cart **around** objects and people. To the student these things do not matter as long as he gets to the item he needs.
Student will shop for items according to store's organization.	**(x)**		Still required prompting, but seems as if beginning to understand, beginning to make it routine.
*Student will locate items by reading signs above each store aisle.		**x**	I would ask student to read the sign, then ask, "Is your item on that sign?" He would respond, "Yes." even when the item was not on the sign and could not be located on that aisle. Reading the entire sign was required in order for the student to realize that his item was either on or not on that particular store aisle.

*Bold cells in table indicate emerging issues.

Week 6: 4/5/05

This week, we did things a little differently. We went into the store without a list. I just basically told the student what was needed. He still everything he was supposed to upon entering the store without prompting, as well as, other objectives he has mastered up to this point. We followed the usual route, I told him what we needed, and he put those items and only those items into the cart. We had to go to the deli. I was concerned about him staying with the cart. Deli orders require some waiting. I was very pleased to see that he had no problem with this at all. In fact, when he mentioned that we were out of cereal, I allowed him to go on his own to get it. Even though it was just one aisle over and he knows exactly where it is, I was still a little nervous. Would he run off? He did not. He came back in the appropriate amount of time with the correct item.

We did not focus on reading the signs as much this time since we were without a list. Nevertheless, he did a good job moving the basket and finding unfamiliar items. Once we got on the aisle, he was usually able to find the item. I would tell him the exact brand to choose so that we would not have to contend with price comparison. This also eliminated the need of asking anyone for help. After I told him that we had obtained

everything, we walked to the magazine rack together. He then chose a short line, we paid for our items (he was not involved in this transaction) and left.

The one thing that I did notice more so this time than any other, was how comfortable he seemed to be in operating in these surrounding. His movements were more fluid, controlled, a substantial difference from the very first visit. He acts as if he knows what he is there for and what he is supposed to do.

Student Behavioral Checklist

Week: **4/5/05**

Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.		**x**	Opportunity did not present itself.
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"	**x**		Greeted the cashier, "Hello." and reached for my Kroger card. Handed it to the cashier, but said nothing else.
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.		**x**	Decided that this task will need individualized instruction.
Student will maneuver cart through aisles without any danger of contact with another shopper or object.		**x**	Student had to be constantly reminded on how to maneuver the cart around objects and people. To the student these things do not matter as long as he gets to the item he needs.
Student will shop for items according to store's organization.	**(x)**		Forming a routine. Has familiarized himself with store organization and beginning to learn how to gather items from one side of the store (left) to the other side (right).
Student will locate items by reading signs above each store aisle.		**x**	Did not read all of the items on the sign, but has at least developed a routine of looking up towards the sign when can't find an item.

Discussion

After conducting this action research study, several points began to emerge. The original query that delved into developing the functional skills of an autistic student by focusing on increasing the task specific behaviors of the student, provided a number of ideas that may prove effective in functional skills training of autistic students. Among these that provide a basis for possible integration into such training include: (1) the benefits of consistent interaction with a specific environment in teaching students how to adapt and master societal behavioral norms, (2) the complexity faced by autistic students in performing simple behavioral tasks, and (3) how repetitive interactions with objects, individuals and environments help learned outcomes of task actions become embedded behaviors.

The methods of this research were heavily based on two ideologies, the use of an everyday event or environment as a teaching tool and the use of repetitive exploration of that environment to help tasks become innate behaviors for the student. The autistic male student seemed to benefit greatly from his visits to the grocery store. The student began to feel and move comfortably within this environment. This consistent interaction helped to erase the overwhelming elements of the surroundings, enabling the student to focus more on the task at hand. For example, instead of being overcome by the vast number of

breads that were available in the store, the student was able to tune out, among others, the rye, wheat, or low-carb breads, French rolls and frozen biscuits, to zone in on the hot dog buns that were on his list of items; instead of frolicking aimlessly throughout the store, picking up random food items, the student began to focus on his specific list of items, traveling only to those aisles where his items could be find and putting only those items on his list in his cart. As cited by Steve Gutstein and his colleagues, consistent exposure to an environment helps an autistic child to become comfortable in those surroundings, eventually leading to developing the social skills needed to function in that environment. As displayed by this research study, this ideology has some merit.

Another element that helped to build this comfort level was the repetitive nature that the accomplishment of tasks was designed. The student engaged in the same specific tasks each week, building a proficiency in meeting task goals. He was allowed to practice the learned outcome over and over again until it became an embedded behavior, requiring minimal instruction. He must now have a list prior to entering the grocery store. Upon entry, he obtains a shopping cart, begins to gather his list of items and places them in the cart, crossing each item off the list. He remains with his cart until all shopping is completed. By week 6, each of these actions had become a natural occurrence, requiring no prompting from the instructor. He seemed comfortable when walking throughout the store, exhibiting similar behaviors as other shoppers.

Even though a number of successes were documented in this study, modifications were required. Moreover, some tasks would require individualized modeling and instruction, too complex for the autistic student to master while inundated with other tasks. Some of these tasks were initially listed; others emerged as the study progressed. For example, paying for items with the correct amount of money proved to be a task that could require its own six-week instructional period. Only when mastered, should it be added to a list of related objectives.

The tasks that emerged that proved difficult for the autistic student to master provided a number of opportunities for further research. For example, how do you get a student whose disability is often characterized by a severe language deficit to understand the linguistic relationship between “chili” (item on the list) and “canned meat” (the name of the item designated by the store)? Moreover, how will this student comprehend the rationale behind price comparison? How do we get this autistic student, possessing some type of cognitive impairment, to understand that cost effectiveness leads to less money being spent, a greater opportunity for his budget being met? These issues require further investigation. Nevertheless, the benefits from the investigation can prove greatly beneficial in developing methods and models that will not only provide solutions these specific issues, but can also continue to lead teachers in helping in the overall development of the social functioning of these types of students in society.

Overall, this study provided confirmation of existing models and principals, effective ideas and suggestions and ample opportunities for continued to research for managing a disability that continues to baffle, yet intrigue, medical and educational researchers. It provided me, as both a teachers and parent, with a little more knowledge and skill development in creating activities and opportunities for my son and other high functioning autistic students to become better equipped to move effortlessly within our society.

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Student Behavioral Checklist

Week:

Behavior	Task successful	Task unsuccessful	Comments
Student will plan a constructive grocery list.			
Student will obtain a shopping cart upon entering the store.			
Student will stay with the cart the entire time while in the store.			
Student will choose only those items on the list.			
Student will appropriately approach and ask for help of a store employee when he has difficulty finding an item.			
Student will not run off during any time while in the store.			
Student will not stop/grab/touch other shoppers.			
Student will greet the cashier in the appropriate manner. Example, "Hello. I have my Kroger card…"			
Student will pay for his items with the appropriate amount of money.			
Student will carry his bags directly to the car and load them into the trunk or back seat.			

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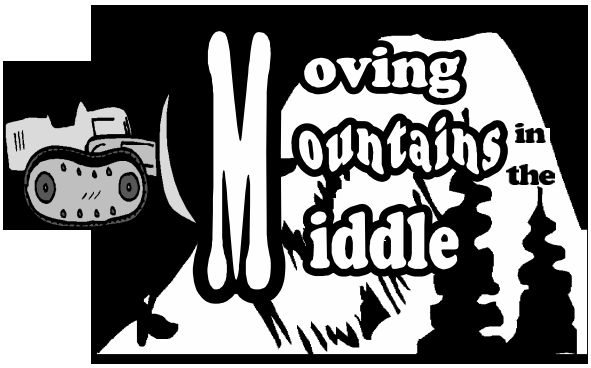

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