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HELPING THE SLOW LEARNER

by
Susan E. Little

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of
Rowan University
May, 2000

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved May 2001

Abstract

Susan E. Little

Helping the Slow Learner
Completed 2000
Dr. Ronald Capasso
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study is to increase academic success through the formulation of additional learning experiences for those students we label “slow learners”. The design of this study is one of action research. Through the observation of material culture and interviews of classroom teachers and Pupil Assistance Committee chairpersons, a list of eligible students will be formulated, with weak academic areas detailed. Additional learning situations will then be established for each subject and set into place through the regular classroom teacher and other certified personnel. Through the course of the school year, records will be kept through spreadsheet format and on-going data analysis will take place to measure growth and/or deficit.

At the conclusion of this study, it was found that slow learners’ academic achievement could be raised when compared with those scores achieved the previous school year.. This was produced through increases in remediation services, additional instructional programs, and pertinent intervention strategies. It is with these results in mind that the intern plans to establish annual assessment of all slow learners from year-to-year to ensure continued academic growth and success.

Mini-Abstract

Susan E. Little

Helping the Slow Learner
Completed 2000
Dr. Ronald Capasso
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study is to increase academic success through the formulation of additional learning experiences for those students we label “slow learners”.

This study found that additional learning experiences, increases in remedial services, additional instructional programs and pertinent intervention strategies worked in a positive manner to cause an increase in the subjects’ academic success and growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project results from the cooperation and support of numerous staff members of Alloway Township School. Particularly, the guidance of Fred Pratta, Robert Catando, and Julia Cirelly were paramount to its success. Also, those staff members who comprised the Pupil Assistance Committee during the 1999-2000 school year: Esther Chaney, Linda Dickinson, Joanne Lawrence, Erin Nienstedt, and Holly Riddle. The intern would also like to recognize and thank Lorraine Pfeffer who provided invaluable editorial assistance.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Study

“Johnny can’t read. Well, he can’t read like the rest of the class. What do I do with him? I had his parents get him tested, but the scores weren’t low enough for him to qualify for child study team classification. Now what? I only have so many hours in the day and I have 23 other students who need me, too.”

Many educators have heard or said this before. Probably the most frustrating part of the job is not being able to help Johnny enough. These children, the slow learners, are often left frustrated and anxious trying to meet the standards educators have set for all.

The focus of this project is to attempt to bridge the gap for these students. By identifying those children, grades kindergarten through eighth, who have been referred to the child study team, but who have not qualified for services, the school can plan activities, whether during school or after, to try to instill and reinforce the basics that are missing.

The Alloway Township School has a small number of students who, from no fault of their own, are “falling through the cracks”. These students experience continual learning difficulties in the classroom, and although most do receive some extra help from peer tutors and instructional facilitators, there are just not enough hours in a regular classroom schedule to accommodate the needs of these children. These students, for the most part, have been referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee as a stepping stone to the Child Study Team. Consequently, some interventions may already be in place to attempt to meet the needs of these students.

These students’ needs must be addressed with earnest. They are being pushed through the system until they are too old to care anymore. Meeting their needs now will hopefully attempt to solve some later problems and frustrations.

By analyzing these students, the intern wants to first determine the number of students who are in need of additional academic instruction to adequately meet the grade level's expectations and then implement additional sources of remediation in order to facilitate additional learning of these expectations.

Purpose of the Study

Meeting the instructional needs of students is the primary responsibility of every school today. Teaching children with the overall goals of education in mind is essential to each child's development. Somewhere along the line, there are some children whose instructional needs are not adequately met through regular classroom practices. These children work very hard but do not always quite "get it". They continually meet with frustration and often end up being referred along the way. The problem compounds when testing results come back and these children, who have stumbled for the first five months of the school year, do not qualify for any services to stop any encumbrances to learning.

It is the intention of this project to provide Alloway Township School's slow learners with additional learning experiences to ensure the acquisition of all basic skills necessary to achieve success at their grade level.

The goal of this project is to formulate additional learning experiences for those students we label "slow learners". Through the observation of material culture and interviews of classroom teachers and Pupil Assistance Committee chairpersons, a list of eligible students will be formulated, with weak academic areas detailed. A committee will be established to brainstorm additional learning situations for these children, such as available academic programs, after-school instruction, additional remediation during the school day, etc... "Slow learners", as referred to here, are those students who continually meet with academic frustration and/or failure but who do not qualify for CST assistance.

Definitions

Instructional facilitators - those employees, predominantly certified staff, whose job is to work with the classroom teacher to meet the needs of those students who are in need of remediation.

Peer tutors - select eighth grade students who work in a tutoring capacity during the school day based upon instruction and guidance from the student's classroom teacher.

Pupil Assistance Committee - a committee of teachers, guidance counselors and CST personnel, developed by administration, to analyze past and present records of those students who are referred, usually by the classroom teacher, due to classroom difficulties (may be academic and/or social). It is the intention of this committee to formulate a list of possible intervention strategies to enable students to improve in their daily learning so as to avoid future problems and/or child study team referral.

Slow learner - any student who continually encounters frustration with daily classroom activities but whose scores are not low enough to qualify for any type of child study team assistance

Limitations of the Study

This study will be conducted entirely within Alloway Township School involving students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Therefore, all regular classroom teachers will be involved in the identification process as well as those members of the Pupil Assistance Committee. The

The actual number of students who qualify for this project may vary from year to year and

and exact amount is difficult to predict. The students will always be chosen from Alloway Township School's regular classrooms.

Setting of the Study

The Township of Alloway is a residential community comprised of an area of 34.5 square miles. The Village of Alloway, in which the school is located, is six miles east of Salem City, the county seat; seventeen miles northeast of Wilmington, Delaware; and 30 miles southeast of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to the village itself, the smaller communities of Aldine, Freisburg, Penton, and Cohansey are all served by the Alloway Township School District. While always striving to remain the rural country setting it prides itself in being, easy access to shore points and nearby suburban businesses make Alloway a desirable place to live. These advantages, as well as the fine reputation of the school district and its receiving district, Woodstown High School, make the township one of the most attractive areas for families seeking to reside in the Salem or Cumberland County regions.

At one time, as many as five one-room schools and a high school met the needs of the residents of Alloway Township. Those students were condensed into one school building in 1930, with high school students being transported to Salem or Woodstown High Schools. With the expansion of the community, another school building was constructed in 1938. Alloway School System remained a two building entity until 1989 when an addition to the newer school was constructed. The purpose of the addition was to house all necessary facilities under one roof for the prekindergarten through eighth grade classes. Alloway remains a sending district only to Woodstown High School.

The district offers a wide spectrum of elementary education programs to meet the needs of the community. Most students occupy regular classrooms which utilize a regular instructional program. This instructional program includes a core curriculum, and instruction in the specialty areas of music, media science, physical education, art, home economics and technology.

Individualized programs are available for those who qualify. These include: basic skills instruction, through inclusion with instructional facilitators; handicapped physical education; physical and occupational therapy; upper and lower resource room instruction; primary and upper level perceptually impaired classes; guidance counseling; and speech therapy. Special services are available through the child study team, school nurse, guidance counselor, and Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). Peer leadership and peer tutoring are available from selected eighth grade students, while advanced sixth through eighth grade students have the opportunity to test into advanced courses of literature, mathematics, science (IPS), and Spanish in lieu of the regular course of study available to all. Various programs of enrichment are available after school including band, band front, intramural sports, and an enriched learning program.

This progressive school system has its roots born of colonial times. The community, or Village of Alloway, has progressed greatly since the days of the Haven Colony. In 1675, the Haven Colony settled in the area of the present day Village of Alloway thirty years before John Fenwick founded Salem, New Jersey. However, the colonists returned to New Haven after only two years. Upon John Fenwick's arrival, he named this section for the Duke of Monmouth, and the creek became known as the Monmouth River. In 1690, the land was purchased by William Thompson. He built a bridge across the creek for easier access to the village. The Village of Alloway was referred to as Thompson's Bridge. Later the Village was named after a Lenni-Lenape chieftain called Aloe, thus the name it bears the name today (*Alloway Remembers*, 1978, p. 2).

The Village of Alloway became a hub of industry for the local area while producing products that became well known throughout the colonies. The natural resources of the area were responsible for the establishment in 1739 of Caspar Wistar's Glass Works, the first successful glass-making plant in the colonies (*Alloway Remembers*, p. 5). Glass production was not the only prolific enterprise in the region. The abundance of raw materials located in the area, such as strong streams and plenty of clay, supported canning factories for the local farmers, flour, grist, and saw mills as well as brick making throughout the area.

In the middle of the nineteenth century Josiah, William, and Emmor Reeve established a shipbuilding company on Alloway Creek. In its prime, the company employed over one hundred men, constructing canal boats, schooners, brigs, and small steamships (*Fenwick Colony*, 1964, p. 82).

Two main events caused the Alloway area to transform from big industry to an agricultural setting and finally into a rural residential community. These two events transpired almost simultaneously. The first of these was the flood of 1940. The town was shut off from raw materials, labor, and the export of goods, since its only connection to the outside world, Thompson's Bridge, was washed out and destroyed. The second event involved the repercussions felt due to the increasing competition of other area shipbuilding communities. "The greatest impact on local industry was World War II. Most of the able-bodied men enlisted or were drafted, and those who were not in the military went to work for the DuPont Company. This created a severe shortage of manpower which the small industries could not overcome" (Robert Dorrell).

There is very little industry in Alloway today. Approximately seventy acres are all that is considered industrial. This encompasses only .3% of the total land of Alloway Township. This industrial land is comprised of businesses that one would barely consider industrial - a lumber mill, two gravel pits, two junk yards, and the county and township landfill (*The Facilities Master Plan*, p.6). There are numerous businesses which function to meet the basic needs of the residents. These include two small grocery stores, a beauty salon, a hardware store, a branch bank, a post office, a sandwich shop, and a sporting goods store. Outside the immediate Village, there also lies a veterinarian, a country club, and a local tavern. Most residents are employed by E. I. DuPont, Mannington Mills, Anchor Hocking Glass Works, or Artificial Island.

As one would surmise, this lack of industrial tax base puts a larger tax burden on the residential property owners. The tax burden falls almost entirely on the property owners and the agricultural businesses present in the Township. The Township tax base in 1998 was 77,213,910. The average residential assessment is \$64,400.00, which is 50% of actual value. The

school tax rate for 1998 was \$2.01, causing the average taxpayer to pay \$646.00 in school tax. There is always resistance to tax increases, no matter how strong the support for the school. With a large senior citizen population, resistance only increases. The defeat of the 1994-95 budget was the first school budget defeated in over thirty years. Although, thankfully, this has failed to happen again; due to the deliberation and hard work on the part of staff and Board members to continually bring supporters to the polls.

These supporters and other Township residents vary in their backgrounds. Most adults are high school graduates. According to the 1990 census, 78.72% of the Township residents age 25 or older are high school graduates or above. Of those graduates, 15.58% had earned a Bachelor's degree or better. The increase of adults with a high level of education has not, however, impacted the very strong traditional mind-set of the community. Although it has made it easier to find support for the school and its students, there still remains a very strong resistance to change, especially any which could impact property taxes.

This resistance to change is not limited just to the average resident of the Township. Those residents in a position of political power are often found to be set in the ways of the 'old Alloway' mentality. The Township government is made up of three committee persons, one of which is elected within the group to be mayor. There are nine elected members of the Alloway Township Board of Education, making it a Type I Board. The make-up of the Board at this time is four women and five men. They have a varied educational background, ranging from high school to Master's degree. Two of the members are farmers, one is a teacher, one is a homemaker, one is a senior citizen, one is self-employed, two are employed in local industry, and one is employed by a private residential school for troubled boys.

Over the past few years, there have been numerous times when the two factions have been at odds over the amount of dollars needed for the district and how those dollars should be spent. It was just one year ago that the school board and teachers' association finally reached a contract agreement after two and a half years of negotiations and six months of collective impasse. For the first time in fifteen years, the association became aggressive in its approach with the Board, calling

on active NJEA participation for much needed advice and persuasion. It is believed by some that this left a sour taste in the mouth of many residents throughout the community although the association feels strongly that this tactic brought many weak and negative practices of the Board to the surface for all to see. This alone has proven to be fundamental in the election of 'new blood' and positive viewpoints and ideas to the Board.

This Board, as well as the staff and administration of Alloway School, believe in the importance and value of each student as an individual and that both parties share the responsibility of providing the means for each student to develop to his/her maximum academic, physical, social, and emotional potential. The common belief that the acquisition of basic skills provides the foundation necessary for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving techniques and increasing knowledge is shared by all. The application of these skills, along with effective communication skills, will lead to successful, effective student performance (*The Facilities Master Plan*, p. 27).

Alloway School serves township students from prekindergarten through eighth grade. The prekindergarten program is a half-day program with both morning and afternoon sessions averaging twenty children in each group. The kindergarten program is full-day with the change from a traditional half-day made some six years ago. All primary grades are heterogeneously grouped in self-contained classrooms, although there is research currently being conducted by a committee in reference to possible looping between grades one and two beginning in the 2000-2001 school year. The middle and upper grades are heterogeneously grouped for departmentalized instruction. However, with the implementation of a literature based reading series five years ago, more and more divisional lines between subject areas are being discarded. This influence, along with state standards, have caused many curriculum and teaching style changes to occur. Despite some lingering resistance to change from older staff members, everyone remains committed to providing an educational experience for each child that will prepare them for the 21st century. Constant curriculum revisions and awareness of state guidelines and requirements keep all staff members current and working towards a common goal.

The total staff consists of sixty-one individuals who range in age from early twenties to late fifties. There are forty-four full-time and part-time certified staff members, twenty-eight members with a BA degree and sixteen with a Master's. Tenure has been attained by twenty-nine of the forty-four members. Most of the teaching staff belong to the New Jersey Education Association and the local Alloway Education Association. There are no minorities among the teaching staff.

The Alloway School administration remains slightly top-heavy, with one Superintendent, one Principal and a Board Administrator. The administration is supportive of the teaching staff and generally involve them in most decision-making opportunities. They work hard to promote excellence in education through their staff support and constant encouragement to explore new teaching techniques and strategies. Their efforts to maintain effective channels of communication continue to promote a positive working environment. This effective communication is not limited to staff but outreaches to all interested community members also. *The Alloway Township Quality Assurance Annual Report*, dated October 27, 1998, cites the following community involvement areas:

1. Participation in a comprehensive survey which was helpful in academic and support services decisions.
2. Participation in a large number of parent and community activities that are held to bring residents into the school. These included "Open House", "Wellness Night", "Family Connections", "Family Math", "Family Science", "Family Connections", and other grade level activities.
3. Formation of a new group called "Key Communicators" who meet with selected Board members to discuss common school problems and concerns.
4. Involvement of the Citizens Advisory Committee which meets once a month with the purpose of discussing current and pending issues that will affect Board policy, curriculum and student activities.

Alloway Township School remains a school with an excellent reputation, both within and outside the community. The district's strong historical foundation supports its vision for the future. The district and its staff stand firm in their direction and determination to prepare each student for success in the 21st century.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this project is widespread, encompassing eligible students in all grade levels from kindergarten through eighth. Although students in the lower grades will probably benefit the most (as their skill gaps should be smallest), all students will be able to benefit to some degree by additional skill assistance.

Through the implementation of additional learning experiences for these students, the significance and importance of this project is monumental. If the gaps for just one of these children can be bridged, frustrations and anxieties are lessened. School is supposed to be a comfortable place to learn and enjoy, not an anxious one. The intention is to facilitate this concept.

Organization of the Study

The following chapters will focus upon:

Chapter 2 - a review and synthesis of current research available in the field as it relates to the intern's research question. This research will give credence to the project's goal and will provide important information about the research context of the study. It will also provide rationale for the importance of the study and will set guidelines for the research design, instrumentation, and data analysis plan.

Chapter 3 - the design of the study itself. This chapter will focus on five major areas pertinent to the design. These areas include: 1) a general description of the design, 2) a description of the development and design of the instruments used, 3) a description of the sampling technique and sample utilized (if appropriate), 4) a description of the data collection method, and 5) a description of the data analysis plan.

Chapter 4 - presentation of the research findings. This chapter will focus on the information found through the research and what that information means to the project.

Chapter 5 - conclusions, implications and further study. This chapter will deal with the research findings and the conclusions drawn from them. These conclusions and their future implications will be discussed and the need for future study will be analyzed.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It is estimated that about one of every six American children is a slow learner. This type of child is difficult to recognize, identify and understand. Most elementary school classrooms in an average community can be expected to include three to five slow learners in the class (Lowenstein). But just what is a slow learner? A definition can be broad, depending upon whom you are speaking and what genre of education you are dealing. Ranging from slightly behind the average child in the classroom to classifiably mentally retarded, it is difficult to pinpoint a definition other than relying upon the researcher's need. In this case, a definition of slow learner, as it will apply to the study at hand, is as follows. Anyone, who is at the present time, for any reason, markedly deficient in the areas of reading, comprehension, oral and written expression, computation, and personal motivation shall be understood to be a "probable" slow learner (Abramowitz, 1970, p. 140) This is a very broad definition and one which many would dispute as too passive in its segregation, but one that this researcher feels best applies to the current research project.

How can one be sure that a child in your classroom is a true slow learner and not just a child that underachieves, for whatever reason that may be? This is the difficult part. Unfortunately, for both the teacher and the student, delineation between an underachiever and a slow learner takes time to make itself apparent. And of course, like all classroom teachers, time is of the essence. Educators, as a whole, become increasingly frustrated, when roughly a quarter to a half of the school year is spent assessing a student having difficulties before any an intervention plan comes into play, whether from input from parents or the Pupil Assistance Committee. Then more time goes drifting away as the intervention plan is put into place to assess new-found success. Finally, from the use of these intervention strategies, it becomes clear that a student needs more. The underachieving student has worked through most if its difficulties - the slow

learner is still struggling. Time is then spent preparing paperwork for Child Study Team analysis only to find at the end of approximately seven to nine months, this child does not qualify for any assistance, their scores are not low enough. They are just slow. So there you sit with almost an entire year wasted. Granted, you have made the job for next year's teacher an easier one - if the child has accomplished enough to move to the next grade. If not, at least you are poised and ready to start fresh with this child in September.

So many children give the impression of being slow that teachers and parents are very confused as to what the cause of their slowness really is. Any number of causes - whether physical, psychological or social in nature - may effect such behavior. The slow learner is usually normal in appearance and is able to function satisfactorily in many situations. It has been measured that the intelligence of a true slow learner is about 75% to 90% that of an average child's. They learn at a rate said to be 4/5 to 9/10 of normal, and they learn to read approximately 1 year later than the majority of the other children (Lowenstein). Most researchers agree that although slow learners may be slow in Reading and math, they very often make up for it in other subject areas, especially those that are tactile or social in nature.

It should be noted that these children are not to be confused with what we, as educators, see as underachievers. Although many of the characteristics may be the same for these two types of learners, the processes needed to remedy the situations are quite different. Underachievers very often need constant recognition or guidance in order to foster a feeling of self-worth and capability. The slow learner needs have his self-worth recognized and guided in order for other aspects of education to fall into place. While both are very needy, the slow learner is the child in greater need and the more difficult to reach.

A slow learner in a regular classroom may exhibit many different behaviors, depending upon the role they see themselves playing in amongst the other students. This child often has a much shorter attention span and will find it extremely difficult to remain attentive for long periods of time. As the attention wanders, they may find themselves in situations of distraction or times of amusement of others. Abstract or deep thinking and problem-solving are painful. This child

finds it much easier to relate problems to concrete experiences they are familiar with. This can be very difficult at times as this child's viewpoint is often more narrow than their peers. It is not unusual to hear parents of a slow learner state they are puzzled over their child's school difficulties since "they seem to understand things so well at home" (Lowenstein). This child may also be very awkward when it comes to expressing themselves, seemingly tied in with the lack of a broad experience base. Slow learners, as one would imagine, are frequently slow and laborious readers who learn and react more slowly than other students. Subject matter is more easily attained through other means than just text while directions repeated or addressed in another format are more easily attainable.

Make no mistake about it; this is not a problem common to a select few. It is not a condition of a certain group and it is not a problem afflicting other people's children. According to the Carnegie Corporation's recent report, *Years of Promise* (1996), by the fourth grade, the performance of most children in the United States is below what it should be for the nation and is certainly below the achievement levels of children in competing countries (Rimm, 1997, p. 2). But once we identify the problem, what steps can be taken to help solve it? And what caused it in the beginning?

Many factors have been identified over time to be possible causes for students' frustrations with learning. The most common being that of lack of intelligence. Regardless of the child's limitations, the slow learner can and does learn, just not necessarily at the same rate as others. Physical factors, such as chronic illnesses or sight or hearing problems can also be contributing causes. Missing many days of school or simply many pieces of assignments can quickly cause a student to fall behind. This occurring repetitively can cause major blocks of academics to be missed altogether. Lack of experiences at home coupled with poor or inappropriate instruction can also be contributing factors. It is important to remember that these factors do not usually occur in isolation. Many slow learners have combinations of these conditions all doubling with a severe lack of self-confidence and the stress of failing in school (*The EIRC Parent Reader*, 1996, p. 5). School quickly becomes a frustrating place to be. Most

of these students find school a hostile, uncomfortable place full of emotional anxiety. They are “school phobic” students who are forced into stressful situations almost everyday of their academic lives (Turner, p. 1). How do we, as educators, go about causing some change in these students’ lives?

There are many ways to begin to work towards making these childrens’ school days the slightest bit better, but understand, it can not be done alone. Not only does the teacher need to be committed to throwing the lifeline and reaching out for these children, but these children need to accept some responsibility of learning in order to be able to grab that line and hold on. One of the very first things both the teacher and student must do is work together to set smaller, attainable goals. Successfully reaching these small goals will increase a sense of personal control. This will counteract a sense of lack of control these children have over their school days (Mendal and Marcus, 1997).

Diagnostic remediation is crucial to the slow learner’s growth. While working with the classroom teacher to combat the obstacles found in the daily classroom setting, such as environmental factors and management techniques, academic remediation is needed to begin to ‘catch up’ on those things missed along the way. Identifying very specific areas of need, planned teaching to meet those needs, and evaluation of the effects of the remediation are critical elements of an active process with the slow learner. Through this process, teachers ensure that they are addressing the needs of the student, and closely monitor the progress that the pupil is making (UAP, p.1).

Concurrently with remediation, a slow learner’s classroom must be studied. Simply addressing missing academic skills will not be sufficient for this type of student. New ways to address daily needs must be explored. Reducing distractions, change of seating, grouping rather than intensive individualized work, tutors and giving the student permissible time out of their seat are all environmental interventions that may help to de-stress the classroom. Utilizing a variety of learning materials, incorporating computers and alternate learning style theories, providing opportunities for cooperative learning stations and maintaining time for guided practice are all

essential components for a slow learner's daily school experience. Varying the management techniques of a classroom are critical to a slow learner. Employing direct, positive contact, providing immediate feedback and opportunity for built-in success while randomly giving directions in format other than oral will increase this learner's ability to remain with you and concentrating on the tasks at hand. As for assignments, while no one feels a slow learner's academic load should be different in content, style and approach may need to be modified to meet the needs of the student. Specific instructions, individual contracts, simplifying or shortening tasks into reasonable and manageable chunks may often lessen the anxiety normally entertained when given directions, especially on large projects. This child can make progress in the normal classroom if the teaching and the materials used are at their level of learning.

All children are natural learners and begin life with a drive to acquire knowledge, understand it and make use of it according to their abilities. Children do not begin school with the intention of seeking failure or frustrating their teachers (Implications for the Classroom). Identifying causes of discomfort, providing the most appropriate learning environment, understanding the student's needs and attempting to facilitate the learning process by providing remedial strategies to overcome problems are all interventions necessary to address when attempting to reach out to these troubled youth. As Goethe once said, "*Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being*".

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Research Design Description

The design of this study is one of action research. Being conducted entirely within Alloway Township School, this study will involve those students in kindergarten through eighth grade whose Child Study Team test results deem as slow learners. Regular classroom teachers as well as members of the Alloway Township Pupil Assistance Committee will be involved in the identification process of this project. Through the observation of material culture, interviews of classroom teachers, and meetings with remedial services, a plan can be developed for those students who qualify for assistance.

Development and Design of Research Instruments

After identifying those students eligible to be included in this project, the intern developed a spreadsheet instrument to organize information and compare growth percentages as they occurred. The instrument was set up with the following headings: Identification of student and grade level at start of project; Previous school year's cumulative report card averages in the areas of Reading, Language, and Mathematics; Current school year's report card averages broken down into marking period quarters; Previous year's Terra Nova standardized test results in terms of national percentile in the areas of Reading, Language, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies and the current school year's Terra Nova results of the same.

Data Collection Approach

An interview process was utilized with all classroom teachers of grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The purpose of this was to identify those students who were having difficulty in the traditional classroom setting and had been referred to either the Pupil Assistance Committee and/or the Child Study Team for further evaluation. A definitive opinion on each child's ability was sought to aide the intern in developing a knowledge base to move forward into the next phase of the process.

After speaking with the classroom teachers, a tentative list of students was formed and taken to a meeting with members of the Pupil Assistance Committee. This committee then discussed each child's current standing within the PAC confines, interventions already established, and future plans for each student.

With this information gathered, an interview was called of the Child Study Team to share information obtained through testing of these students, if applicable, to determine eligibility status and future plans.

Data Analysis Plan

At this point, a list of eligible students was established with those who may have started on the list but been removed for various reasons completed. This list of students, narrowed through various interviews, was taken back to each appropriate classroom teacher for finalization and planning. With the aide of the research instrument, tracking of each eligible student will enable the intern, as well as the classroom teachers, to see growth and/or deficit areas at the conclusion of the project and thus, plan accordingly for the following school year.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Meeting the instructional needs of students is the primary responsibility of every school today. Teaching children with the overall goals of education in mind is essential to each child's development. Somewhere along the line, there are some children whose instructional needs are not adequately met through regular classroom practices. These children work very hard but do not always quite "get it". They continually meet with frustration and often end up being referred along the way. The problem compounds when testing results come back and these children, who have stumbled for the first five months of the school year, do not qualify for any services to stop any encumbrances to learning.

It was with this motivation in mind that the intern set about researching the number of children currently enrolled in our school system who would meet the definition of "slow learner". Initial interviews were conducted with regular classroom teachers and a number of students were identified, specifically seven. These students ranged in age from eight to twelve and all had been referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee, either the previous year or current. Upon further investigation, the intern found that all seven of these children had concurrently been recommended for study by our Child Study Team and results could be found in the CST office.

A meeting was established with the Pupil Assistance Committee to study the Child Study Team findings and draft a working list of slow learner candidates. The intern found a major setback at this level of the research. Due to a rewording of the Emotionally Disturbed classification by the State, five of these seven children, who previously would not have qualified for any type of assistance, were now eligible under this broader definition and were in the process of being placed into classified slots. This left only two students who, according to the definition set forth in Chapter One, were eligible to receive services under the slow learner auspice.

The intern, at this time, took this list of two students back to their regular classroom teachers and asked that a list be developed for each student regarding his current status in the classroom, specifically grades, additional help the student is receiving, and an overall statement of how the teacher sees the student in relation to other students in the class.

The teacher of Student A responded as follows: “ This student is a nice, young man who works hard in school, for the most part. He easily meets with frustration when assignments involve a quantity of reading and comprehension. Consequently, most subjects prove difficult for him. He is very strong in Mathematics and I often use him as an example to boost his self-esteem in school. He consistently scores well below average in Reading, Science and Social Studies. The exception to this would be when projects that involve manipulation are graded. He excels in lessons of this type. Student A currently receives basic skills instruction once a week with the Instructional Facilitator. I feel Student A could be an average student if the basic skills he is lacking could be established.”

The teacher of Student B responded as follows: “Student B is a caring and ambitious young lady who always tries her best with any lesson. Unfortunately, she struggles with reading comprehension and this makes other subjects difficult as well. Her Reading and Social Studies grades are low C/high D on the average. She does very well in Math (High B) and Science (A). Although Science does require an amount of reading, parental help gets her through the meaning of the lesson and then implementation of the DuPont Science Kits and their hands-on approach suits her well. Student B currently receives remedial instruction once a week from the Instructional Facilitator and Project Assist instruction once a week during study hall.”

This information was then taken back to the Pupil Assistance Committee for discussion and intervention strategy planning. The following recommendations were made. In reference to Student A, various strategies were set forth in regards to classwork and homework. Student A is very easily distractible during lessons and very often, becomes lost as to the flow of the lecture or discussion. It is recommended that his seat be moved to a location in the classroom which would cut down on distractions in the environment. This student will also be paired up with another

student who will act as a guide and a motivator for Student A, thus helping to keep focus on lessons and lectures. The teacher will work toward using more direct, positive contact and reinforcement with Student A while providing immediate feedback to questions, problems and concerns. This teacher, through her training in the Let Me Learn Program, will also attempt to provide directions and variety of lesson requirements in format other than simply oral and written. This will help to motivate Student A and encourage him to explore new strategies for completing lessons and homework. Student A was currently receiving remedial instruction through an Instructional Facilitator once a week. It was recommended that this occur three times a week for a more consistent routine and follow through. A peer tutor was assigned to Student A through the Guidance Dept. who will meet with him twice a week for further basic skills reinforcement. And with the agreement of the parents, Student A will be staying after school two times a week during homework clinic sessions to receive additional remedial services with one of our Project Assist Instructors.

As for Student B, similar initial instructions were given. Moving Student B to sit with a peer to assist in reading comprehension difficulties was recommended as well as the introduction of more small group work in Reading and Social Studies, thus broadening her concept field to include others as well. It was recommended that remedial instruction with the Facilitator increase to three times a week, as well as her Project Assist services. Student B already remains after school for homework clinic and it was discussed that parents allow these sessions to be the additional Project Assist times, rather than remove her from Instrumental Band to do so.

Both teachers readily agreed to those intervention strategies listed above for students A and B. Parental permission was given for both and therefore, the project began. It was decided by all that teachers would submit progress reports as well as report card averages to the Pupil Assistance Committee via the intern for each marking period this project was in effect. Data would be collected at these times and any changes in intervention strategies would be implemented if necessary.

This was accomplished for the first three marking periods of the 1999-2000 school year (Appendix A). With the close of this project occurring in the beginning of May, the fourth marking period is not applicable to this research. Consequently, a yearly average of growth will be unattainable. In addition, Terra Nova standardized test scores(Appendix B) will be compared following the close of this research project as the year 2000 scores will not be available before then.

As for this year, Student A came from first grade with the following achievement grades: Reading - Unsatisfactory with general comments regarding lack of attention and inability to focus on comprehension and vocabulary; Mathematics - Satisfactory; Science - Satisfactory with general comments discussing his skill at hands-on activities; and Social Studies - Needs Improvement with general comments on reading level and attention span. With the onset of this project and the implementation of additional remedial and instructional time - Student A has made some progress. At the close of the third marking period, Mathematics has become Outstanding. General comments include confident, willing to take risks, and eager to learn. Reading has improved but only slightly. Student A's reading comprehension is still a major stumbling block although improvement has been seen. In his second grade year, Student A has progressed from Needs Improvement in marking period one to Satisfactory Minus in marking period three. Science and Social Studies have remained Satisfactory through all three marking periods. Upon a follow-up meeting with the classroom teacher, she commented that although the steps have been small, she is pleased with Student A's progress. She attributes most of his Reading growth to the additional Project Assist instruction he is now receiving. She is optimistic that things will continue to improve through the remainder of the school year and that these interventions will be in place for Student A at the onset of grade three.

Student B has also shown growth through this research period, even more so in comparison. Student B entered fourth grade with third grade yearly averages as follows: Reading - 77C with general comments as exhibits difficulty with comprehension and phonetic approaches to new context; Mathematics - 92B with general comments consisting of eager to

please and a confidence with figures; Language - 83C; Science - 97A; and Social Studies - 81C. With the onset of this project and the implementation of new intervention strategies and the increase of basic skill instruction, Student B is progressing nicely. At the close of the third marking period, her scores have increased in most areas. Reading has progressed from a 80C in the first marking period to a 85C in the third. Comments were made that an improvement has been seen in her reading ability and attention to detail. Mathematics has progressed from a 91B to a 94A. Language is actually remaining the same with a 81C. Science has improved from a 93A to a 96A with comments regarding an eagerness to learn new things. Finally, Social Studies has gone from a 80C to an 83C. Upon meeting with her teacher for follow-up, she commented that she also feels the majority of Student B's success is stemming from an improvement in her Reading skills and attributes that to the increased time in Project Assist instruction. She feels confident that Student B will meet with success in fifth grade as long as these intervention strategies continue to be strong and Student B remains committed.

Make no mistake about it. This slow learner problem is not common to only a select few as this research would lead you to believe. It is simply that, in this instance, only a select few actually qualified on paper. Upon speaking at length with regular classroom teachers, there are numerous other students who may eventually fit into this 'classification' sometime in their academic careers. One of the main problems being that they must actually fall so far behind before anyone is able to do address it.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER STUDY

In conclusion, while the subjects of this study became smaller in number than originally planned, the project was successful. Two students who consistently struggle with daily academic responsibilities and assignments met with more success through the course of this project than they would have under normal circumstances. Increasing their instructional time, often times with a one-on-one learning situation, meeting needs in regards to attention and focus interventions, and implementing additional reading strategies through Project Assist created a learning environment that was more conducive to their needs and abilities.

Having now seen that small amounts of success are attainable with increased exposure to basic skill interventions and strategies, future endeavors for these two subjects, as well as other identified slow learners, are seen in a different light. While these additional instructional activities and time periods did not create genius, they worked to create a sense of worth and self-esteem by producing measurable amounts of success. It is this success, no matter how small, that motivates a student to keep trying, no matter how difficult the obstacle.

The intern spoke with the two subjects following the end of the third marking period. Both students, although two and a half years of age apart, were genuinely pleased with themselves but in different ways. Student A saw his successes in a broad light; remarking that he “felt like one of the group” and “knew where the teacher was all the time”. He said, “I just don’t feel as lost.” Student B was a little more specific, coming with age and maturity. She commented on her reading the most and how she even noticed that she was reading a little better. “I don’t have to stop and find my place as much and I don’t have to go back over every paragraph to figure out what they are talking about. Sometimes I still do - like in Social Studies, but not as much. That makes me feel good.”

The intern sees these small successes as large ones. The implications this holds for all slow learners, identified or not, is limitless. Reaching out to all children in the classroom that are struggling, not just waiting for the testing procedure to necessarily tell you what you already know, could mean the difference between retention and promotion, success and frustration. Meeting the needs of these students today could also reduce the number of classifications. Later, very often what occurs is that the deficit number which only qualified them as a slow learner will grow as the gap between them and the rest of the students widens. The result is ultimate classification. By working with these children now, in small instances like this, classification may not be the only road to follow. The path will widen as new experiences are made available.

Follow-up with this study is important. The intern would like to continue to track these students progress, both for the rest of the school year, as well as the beginning of next. Ensuring that these interventions and strategies are in place and consistent will be vital to success. Also, comparison of last year's standardized test scores with this year's may prove to be another significant part of the project. Time will tell.

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Appendix A
Research Instrument

Slow Learner Report Card Comparison

Student's Name	Grade Level	'98-'99 Avg.-Rdg.	'99-00 1st MP	'99-00 2nd MP	'99-00 3rd MP	Avg. to date
Student A	2	74D=U	75D=NI	76C=S	78C=S-	76C
Student B	4	77C	80C	80C	85C	82C
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		'98-'99 Avg.-Math.	'99-00 1st MP	'99-00 2nd MP	'99-00 3rd MP	Avg. to date
Student A	2	84C=S	88B=S	89B=S	93A=O	90B
Student B	4	92B	91B	92B	94A	92B
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		'98-'99 Avg.-Lang.	'99-00 1st MP	'99-00 2nd MP	'99-00 3rd MP	Avg. to date
Student A	2	77C=S	76C=S	81C=S	80C=S	79C
Student B	4	83C	81C	80C	81C	81C
<hr/>						
		'98-'99 Avg.-SS.	'99-00 1st MP	'99-00 2nd MP	'99-00 3rd MP	Avg. to date
Student A	2	73D=NI	76C=S	77C=S	79C=S	77C
Student B	4	81C	80C	79C	83C	81C
<hr/>						
		'98-'99 Avg.-Sci.	'99-00 1st MP	'99-00 2nd MP	'99-00 3rd MP	Avg. to date
Student A	2	89B=S	90B=S	91B=S	89B=S	90B
Student B	4	97A	93A	94A	96A	94A

Appendix B
Research Instrument

Slow Leamer Terra Nova Raw Score Analysis

Student's Name	Grade Level	NP - Math '99	NP-Comp '99	NP- Math '00	NP- Comp '00
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Student A	2	46	88		
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Student B	4	90	99		
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		NP- Rdg. '99	NP Voc. '99	NP Comp '99	NP Rdg '00	NP Voc '00	NP Comp '00
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Student A	2	45	15	25			
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Student B	4	36	41	39			
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		NP - Lang. '99	NP Mech '99	NP - Lang. '00	NP Mech '00
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Student A	2	26	NA		
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Student B	4	41	46		
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Biographical Data

Name	Susan E. Little
High School	Delsea Regional High School Franklinville, NJ
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts Elementary Education West Chester University West Chester, PA
Graduate	Master of Arts Educational Leadership Rowan University Glassboro, NJ
Present Occupation	Elementary Teacher Alloway Twp. School Alloway, NJ