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**HOMWORK BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS USED WITH
LEARNING DISABLED JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

by
Naomi M. Cressman

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division of
Rowan University in Special Education
May 1, 1997

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 5/1/97

ABSTRACT

Naomi M. Cressman
Homework Behavior Interventions Used with Learning Disabled
Junior High School Students:
A Comparative Study
May, 1997
Dr. S. Jay Kuder
Special Education

A three phase integrated intervention of study skills and work habits direct instruction, use of a self-monitoring device where all homework information and its completion was recorded, and a modified behavior management using self-selected extrinsic rewards was implemented. The sample for this study was three sixth grade learning disabled students serviced in a resource center. The purpose of this study was to determine which, if any, of these interventions would produce a positive effect in the ability of these students to complete independent tasks. While each of the interventions did bring about an improved homework completion rate, it was determine that the self-monitoring device caused the greatest improvement. It was concluded that this intervention was the most effective means of motivating these students to complete homework assignments.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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May, 1997
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A three phase integrated intervention of direct instruction, a self-monitoring device, and a modified behavior management system was implemented in order to determine if any could produce a positive effect in the ability of learning disabled sixth grade students serviced in a resource center to complete homework assignments. It was determined that the self-monitoring device caused the greatest improvement.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Naomi and Joseph Cressman

who have always loved me, supported me, and have had faith in me and my abilities even when I did not have faith in myself;

and my sister

Kathleen Cressman

who loves me, encourages me, and always wants the best for me.

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and their children Stephanie, Brittany, Thomas, and Adam**

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and

Dr. S. Jay Kuder

who patiently taught me everything I needed to know about writing a thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

Definition of the Problem

Introduction

A student's education is not only the six hours per day, five days per week, 180 days per year that is spent in the classroom. Teachers cannot be expected to convey all the required information youngsters need to live successful adult lives in that short time span. Learning needs to be extended outside the classroom. The skills which are taught must be practiced, reviewed and refined. If the classroom teacher allocated time in the daily schedule for all of this practice and review, then the time necessary for the other aspects of the curriculum would be lost. It is this role that homework plays in the educational system.

The problem is that students and teachers do not share this same view of homework. Many students do not do it at all, or if they do, it is done hurriedly or incompletely. They "sneak it in" in some other class. They do it in homeroom or in the lunchroom. They "share" it with each other or have some other student or a sibling do it for them. Students do not realize just how important homework is. Many students, especially those in the upper elementary and high school grades and those with special needs, may not see the educational significance of this independent practice. They may not view these assignments as an opportunity to practice skills learned in the classroom. They may see it as "busy work", or even worse, as "punishment", as revenge for misbehavior, or simply as a power tool used by the teacher. That is not to say that teachers have never used these tactics. Unfortunately, they have; but if used correctly, homework does have a true educational function. In order to cover all of the required

material in the curriculum, as expected by parents and boards of education, teachers must use homework assignments as a method of extension and evaluation.

There are several reasons why students do not complete homework assignments. The most obvious is simple stubbornness, "I'm not going to do it!" There are other reasons, as well, not quite as obvious. Many students do not have the ability to work independently and their home life does not provide the necessary support needed to complete assignments. Societal influences and socioeconomic factors also affect homework completion. Single parent families, two income families, high school students working after school hours, and school and community sports leagues all contribute to a student's inability to complete homework. All of these factors are beyond the educator's control.

Homework incompleteness is an aspect of education that educators always struggle with. Teachers are always seeking methods to motivate their students to complete their assignments. This is where my interest in this problem lies. It stems from my personal experience as a teacher. I have first hand knowledge that the special education students I service in a resource center setting do not complete homework assignments. It is then necessary for me to spend limited and valuable class time to review and extend lessons. I am interested in finding methods to motivate my students to complete homework assignments.

Problem Statement

Will an integrated program of direct instruction, self-monitoring, and extrinsic rewards improve the ability of perceptually impaired junior high school students serviced in a resource center to perform independent tasks by completing their homework? After

which intervention, if any, will the homework behavior of these students indicate the most improvement?

Hypothesis

After participating in the above stated integrated program, the same junior high school students will demonstrate an improved ability to independently perform and complete homework tasks. After a combination of all three strategies have been introduced, the students will complete more assignments in a more thorough manner. They will also have a better understanding of the significance that homework has on their learning.

Definition of Terms:

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

self-monitoring- the ability of students to record their assignments, accept responsibility for their completion, and then recording this completion in their homework notebook.

perceptually impaired- a classification of a special needs student used in the state of New Jersey. These students demonstrate a “severe discrepancy between current achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of several areas.” These areas include oral and or written expression, listening and or reading comprehension, basic reading skills, mathematical calculations and reasoning, and spelling. (Special Education New Jersey Administrative Code, 1992, p. 28)

severe discrepancy- achievement in one or more areas that falls at or below fifty percent (50 %) of the student’s expected achievement level, with consideration given to age and previous educational experience.

resource center- a classroom where a special education teacher is available to work with individual or small groups of students who have specific learning difficulties. The students in this study are placed in regular education classes for all subjects, with the exception of reading and spelling. The resource center teacher is responsible for instruction in these areas and also for providing additional support as needed in other subject areas.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study is to investigate three specific intervention in order to bring about improved homework performance. If the homework completion rate improves in these students, it will be concluded that the interventions were successful and several benefits will be gained for both the students and the teacher. Perhaps the most obvious benefit will be an improvement in the grades of these students. Completed homework assignments are calculated into a students' final grade average. These improved grades will foster the self-esteem of these students. An improved self-esteem will spread to other areas of the lives of these students and thus make them happier and more successful. For the teacher, the class time spent on incomplete homework can be put to more productive use.

If the hypothesized results occur, this research could have a potential impact on other students and teachers as well. Lack of homework completion is not exclusively a problem for special educators or those who teach junior high school. These interventions could be applied in other situations, resulting in more effective teaching and learning. Teachers could introduce the direct instruction strategy in regards to homework early in the school year to reinforce the role it plays in the educational process. In this way, they

can be assured that their students have the study skills and self-help strategies needed to complete these out of class assignments. The self-monitoring aspect is the most common of the three strategies to be introduced. With more structure, however, it can be more effective in giving students a guide and fostering a greater sense of personal responsibility toward their studies. Finally, the introduction of extrinsic motivators allow students to feel rewarded for a “job well done”. When used in combination, these three strategies relay to students the true educational significance of homework. It can help them realize that doing homework can only help them to do better in school and in life.

Overview

This study involves three perceptually impaired sixth grade students who receive special education services in a resource center setting in a small suburban New Jersey public school district. The initial step of this study is to plot the individual homework completion rates for each of the three students for one month prior to the introduction of any intervention. The integrated program to be used involves three phases. Phase One of this program involves direct instruction on the part of the researcher to the participants in terms of study skills and homework habits. Phase Two involves the introduction of a self-monitoring mechanism (a homework notebook) where the students record the necessary information regarding their homework assignments and can then indicate the completion of that assignment. Phase Three involves the introduction of a modified behavior management system using reinforcers selected from a menu formulated by both the researcher and the participants. These rewards are earned when assignments are completed in the allotted time frame.

The following measures of the students' homework completion rate will be taken prior to the introduction of the intervention and following each phase of the integrated program:

- A.) Pre-intervention homework behavior;
- B.) Post-direct instruction homework completion rate;
- C.) Post -self-monitoring device introduction homework rate; and
- D.) Post -extrinsic rewards homework completion.

These measures will be plotted and compared. Results will be calculated and stated:

Conclusions will be drawn from this data.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of the Literature

Homework has a variety of definitions, depending upon the context in which it is used. In several of the articles used for this review, Cooper's (1989) definition is cited: "Tasks assigned to students by school teachers to be carried out during non-school hours." [Cooper (1994), Bursack (1991), Jensen, et al (1994) and Patton (1994)] This definition does not include in-school guided study, home-study courses, and extracurricular activities. Jensen et al (1994) defines homework as "an effective, cost-efficient academic intervention when taken seriously by teachers and students." Armstrong and Mc Pherson (1991) expanded this definition by stating that homework activities in regards to special needs students must: a.) be teacher directed, b.) include only previously acquired skills, c.) be a planned extension of schoolwork, d.) be evaluated, e.) be based on individualized education goals and objectives, and f.) occur outside regular school hours. Bursack (1991) also reiterates Cooper and Nye (1991) by stating: "Homework is a significant aspect of American education. It is part of most teachers instructional repertoires and a part of the lives of most American families." When defining homework, Patton (1994) paraphrases the song in a popular cola commercial and says, "Wherever there is school, there'll always homework!"

Ashmore (1984), in A Manual of Instructional Strategies, provides educators with several methods of insuring that students complete homework assignments. Homework can be the completion of unfinished work for less academic students who work at a slower pace. It is important to review the assignment with students prior to class dismissal and to be certain that students understand how to complete it. Homework

should be short, relevant, reasonable, and related to class work. Consequences for not completing homework should be established and parents should be notified as to what these are. Assignments which are fun should also occasionally be included as homework assignments. A list of regular weekly assignments should be posted for the students to use as a reference. Homework should be graded and returned to students as quickly as possible. Students can resubmit assignments after they have corrected them. Answers can be assessable to the students for self-checking of homework or checking by another student. A homework buddy system can be employed which would allow a less abled student to call a stronger student partner for assistance.

Rosenshine and Stevens (1986) [cited Rosenberg (1989)] do not define homework, rather they discuss their observations of effective teachers. They state that effective teachers a.) direct their students to spend more time on academic activities; b.) provide clear demonstrations of new context and skills; c.) use directed prompts and cues; d.) provide sufficient amounts of guided and independent practice; e.) deliver feedback and correctives at appropriate rates; and f.) provide daily, weekly, and monthly reviews of previously presented material.

It was first indicated by Carroll (1963) [cited Rosenberg (1989)] that the degree of learning could be conceptualized as a ratio of actual time spent in a learning activity to the time actually needed to learn. Later, Anderson, Everson and Brophy (1979) conducted a study in which they attempted to determine effective methods of teaching reading to first graders. They were specifically interested in the relationships established by the classroom teacher with each reading group in his/her class. They examined relationships between teacher-student relationships and achievement. This examination

resulted in one indisputable finding: Higher rates of achievement are related to the amount of time students spend actively engaged in academic tasks.

Walberg, Paschal, and Weinstein (1985) synthesized 15 empirical studies which showed that the effects of homework on learning by elementary and secondary students were large and consistent. When homework is assigned without feedback, it can raise the typical student, on average, from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile. However, when graded or commented upon, homework appears to raise learning from the 50th percentile to the 79th percentile. Walberg calls this graded-homework effect among one of the largest ones discovered in educational research literature. The literature review conducted by these researchers indicated that homework showed larger effects on reading and social studies tests than on tests of other subjects. It conferred equally beneficial effects on children of lower and middle socioeconomic groups and various achievement levels. Homework given daily showed larger effects than homework required less often or sporadically. Homework is generally effective because it extends the school day and the amount of time students spend on learning activities. However, it may have other less obvious effects. It encourages academic endeavors independent of a teacher, perhaps more important than work done under direct supervision. This is an ultimate aim of education. It also can encourage solitary reflection and insight. As others have pointed out, homework does not have to be done alone, however. Teams of students can be assigned homework projects to foster cooperation skills.

The amount, quality, and usefulness of homework is a collaborative decision of teachers, parents, and students. If one of these components is unsupportive, little may be accomplished academically in the large amount of time students spend outside school.

Homework Use with Special Education Students

Homework, a large source of potential learning time, has been obviously overlooked in the research done by special educators. It can be an alternative variable that teachers could manipulate to benefit their students. A review of the literature on homework yields few empirical studies; most of the literature is "tips and suggestions" or opinion surveys. However, Paschal, Weinstein and Walberg (1984), examined the body of empirical research on the effects of homework on a computer search of Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI) databases. They found specific types and formats of homework superior to no-homework conditions on measures of student achievement. Their results concluded that traditional directed homework assignments returned with teacher feedback were superior to open-ended homework formats or homework returned with little or no comments or feedback. They also concluded that students in the United States may score lower than students in other countries because they spend so much less time studying within and outside their school classes.

Using the findings of Anderson, Evertson and Brophy (1979) as a basis for further inquiry, special and remedial educators, most notably, Leinhardt, Zigmond and Cooley (1981) and Sindelar, Smith, Harriman, Hale, and Wilson (1986) have documented how the efficient utilization of instructional time is associated with increased achievement and desirable learning conditions for students with mild handicapping conditions or learning disabilities.

Leinhardt, et al (1981) investigated the amount of time learning disabled students spent on reading instruction and/or related reading activities and their achievement. They

state that what students learn is a function of what students do, and that features of the curriculum and teacher behavior influence what students do rather than directly influence what they learn. Also, they concluded that how teachers structured the learning environment would influence the level of reading proficiency their students achieved at the end of the year.

A study was designed by Sindelar, et al (1986) to determine the relationship between the allocation of instructional time and student achievement of both learning disabled and educable mentally retarded students. Teachers were observed for an 80-minute period and it was recorded as to whether the students involved were engaged in teacher-directed instruction, independent work, or non-instructional activities. Afterwards, the total on-task behaviors in both teacher-directed and independent work were calculated for each student and added together, as well as off-task behaviors. The results indicated that, on average, the teachers involved in this study used approximately 80 percent of allocated class time for instruction. The overall percentage of actual time on-task was high for both learning disabled students, (90.3%), and educable mentally retarded students, (91.5%). The correlation between time spent actively engaged in learning activities and achievement on the California Achievement Test on both classifications of students were computed. A positive, significant correlation was obtained for both groups of students. These researchers investigated relationships between three variables in special education programs for learning disabled students and educable mentally retarded students. These variable included:

- 1.) allocation of instructional time,

- 2.) rates of student engagement, and
- 3.) pre-post measures of student reading achievement.

Results indicated that the time spent in teacher-directed reading instruction was the single best predictor of increased rates of time-on task behaviors and gains in measures of reading achievement. Although more empirical data is needed to determine how instructional time should be allocated and delivered in special education settings, all of the above cited investigations clearly indicate that time available for the learning and practice of appropriate instructional objectives is a valuable commodity that requires judicious use.

Patton (1994) discusses the range of attributes displayed by students with learning disabilities that can possibly interfere with their academic success. The characteristics that were most troublesome in term of homework include: distractibility, procrastination, need for constant reminders to sit down and start working, failure to complete homework, daydreaming, and the inability to work independently. The inverse is also true. It is also evident that many of the characteristics these students display interact negatively with many of the factors needed in the homework process. Cognitive characteristics related to attention and memory are needed throughout the completion of a homework assignment. Personality characteristics, such as self-management and locus of control, significantly contribute to a students' ability to successfully complete homework.

Rosenberg (1989) conducted a two-study investigation the purpose of which was to assess the relative effectiveness of daily homework assignments on the acquisition of basic skills by students with learning disabilities. The first study used six elementary level learning disabled students ranging in age from 8-6 to 10-6 who all demonstrated a

need to work on the acquisition and fluency of basic multiplication facts. Two groups were used, one which received 30 minutes of direct instruction each day and one which received the same daily 30 minute direct instruction and daily homework assignments which were math fact worksheets similar to the seat work activities used during the direct instruction. These assignments always reflected the material covered during classroom lessons. No intrusive controls or externally administered contingencies were associated with these homework assignments.

An initial look at the data produced by this study indicates the effects of the supplemental homework assignments on math performance can be characterized as equivocal; only two of the six students appeared to have benefited from the intervention. It must be noted, however, that several factors mediated the differential effects of the assigned homework. The six students' data revealed a pattern of three concurrently occurring factors related to the effects of the homework assignments. Homework was effective only when,

- a.) the rate of homework completion equaled or exceeded 70% or above,
- b.) the percentage correct on the homework assignments averaged 70% or above,
- c.) the student demonstrated at least moderate acquisition of the material during performance checks.

Students whose performance did not meet all of these criteria failed to show consistent benefits from the homework.

It was the identification of these three factors which prompted the initiation of Rosenberg's second study; the goal of which was to experimentally test the effectiveness of homework assignments specifically designed to meet the three identified factors. The

participants in the second study were a group of four learning disabled elementary students who received special education services in a resource room. The students ranged in age from 9-9 to 10-6. Using spelling words list developed from the students' reading and Dolch word lists, each student received a personalized word list which reflected each student's ability level. During the 30 minute spelling period, each student received 7.5 minutes of one-to-one direct instruction. This direct instruction included the administration of daily performance spelling checks, the checking of the previous day's homework and seat work assignments, the correction of errors, and instruction which provided several opportunities for guided practice. The remainder of the spelling period was used by the students to complete individually prescribed seat work activities related to their personalized spelling lists.

In contrast to the first experiment, the homework condition was designed in order to maximize the probability that homework assignments would be completed correctly. In order to achieve this goal, several steps were taken. First, the direct cooperation and participation of the parents was enlisted. The daily homework assignments were divided into two components: an oral test administered by a parent and an independent practice activity similar to the ones completed in class. Secondly, a classroom-based token economy program was established to further facilitate correct homework completion. The results of the second study indicate that these procedures were successful and that a high rate of homework return and quality did occur. The homework completion rate ranged from 83% to 99%. The three students with return rates in the 90% range demonstrated average performance rates of 94% or better.

Taken together, the results of Rosenberg's studies indicate that homework, "when planned, assigned, and implemented in a structured and responsible manner, can be successful in maximizing the effectiveness of direct instruction sequences for students diagnosed as learning disabled." It is clear that homework can be used as a method of additional individual practice opportunities and can provide an additional source of learning time for the important practice component of the direct instruction sequence. It must be noted, however, that children must learn the material during the direct instruction. If not, the practice done incorrectly for homework will be threatening, frustrating, and an inefficient use of instructional time.

Mims, Harper, Armstrong, & Savage (1991) stress the importance of relating homework assignments for the disabled to the stages of learning. These include:

- a.) acquisition- the primary focus is increasing accurate responses,
- b.) proficiency- the primary focus is to increase the rate of response while maintaining accuracy.
- c.) maintenance- the primary focus of which is to maintain speed and accuracy after initial instruction for an extended period of time.
- d.) generalization- the primary focus of which is to apply, adapt, or modify the skill to new situations.

Homework can be incorporated so that the drill and practice needed to master, retain, and apply the new skill can be provided. Frith (1991) supports this with his belief that the "need for repetition for those with disabilities may be additional justification for homework as an integral part of the instructional program." The purposes of homework should be conceptualized as leading to completion of one or more of the stages of

learning. Homework can be beneficial for disabled individuals when used in a manner consistent with the stages of learning by both special and regular educators.

One area of the curriculum where the assignment of homework would be very effective for special education students is social skills. These skills are defined as the skills that promote successful interactions with peers and adults. These skills generally fall into three categories. The first is being kind, cooperative, and compliant. The second is showing interest in people and socializing frequently and successfully. The third is possessing the vocabulary and other language skills that allow for easy expression of ideas. These skills occur more naturally outside the classroom. These kinds of homework assignments would include a parent observation and recording of specific skills such as maintaining eye contact, proper manners, and initiating conversation. Armstrong and Mc Pherson (1991) believe that it is critical that specific homework assignments be given to special needs students in this area for the following reasons:

- a.) Social skills are most conveniently taught in the classroom setting with structured instructional sessions.
- b.) The structured classroom is very different from the settings in which most social behaviors occur.
- c.) Generalization is a common problem in the teaching and learning of behavior.

Homework Incompletion

In an attempt to understand some of the reasons why homework is not always completed by students, Jayanthi et al (March, 1995) explored the problems involved with homework communication among parents, classroom teachers, and special education teachers. The purpose of this study was to identify the communication problems that

exist between home and school, particularly in relation to homework given to mainstreamed mildly disabled students in regular education classes. Participants included 15 special education parents, 14 special education teachers, and 14 regular education teachers who have mainstreamed special education students in class. These groups of participants identified six major homework communication problems:

- 1.) initiation
- 2.) frequency
- 3.) timing
- 4.) consistency
- 5.) follow through
- 6.) clarity/usefulness

In addition, the participants identified four areas of contributing factors to these homework communication problems which include:

- 1.) lack of time and opportunity,
- 2.) lack of knowledge,
- 3.) attitudes, abilities, and behaviors, and
- 4.) differing parental and teacher expectations.

These problems of communication in regards to homework were not only between parents and teachers, but also between special education and regular education teachers. This only further complicates the matter. The researchers stress the need for more collaborative interaction in the schools because of the increasing numbers of students being integrated into regular education classes.

In a follow up study, Jayanthi et al (July, 1995) sought methods to generate recommendations for improving communications between home and school in regards to homework. Specifically, they wanted to improve communication between the three groups described above. The recommendations that emerged were categorized on the basis of five themes:

- 1.) time and opportunity,
- 2.) knowledge,
- 3.) attitudes and abilities,
- 4.) bypass, and
- 5.) other.

In terms of time and opportunity, these were proposed by participants as a way of providing more occasions for parents, classroom teachers, and special education teachers to communicate about homework in mainstream classes. Many recommendations revolved around the use of technology to communicate so that working parents could be accommodated. Other suggestions were to change teacher and school schedules to allow for more collaboration time between special and regular educators. In terms of knowledge, participants need to share information concerning logistics, expectations, homework modifications and students' characteristics, and possible intervention strategies. In terms of attitudes, communication should be more positive. Shared "ownership of mainstream students , open attitudes, and sensitivity can enhance communications." Abilities included those of teachers and students. Students should take more responsibility for their own homework and the communication process that corresponds with it. Teachers should mentor good communication skills. In early

grades, teachers need to prepare and encourage students to be responsible for homework. It was suggested that at the beginning of the school year teachers ask students how they intend to be responsible for completing their homework and then throughout the year, continue to encourage them. Other suggestions from the researchers included changing district wide homework policies, IEP meetings, use of assignment books, and use of a consistent special education teacher throughout junior high or high school years.

Special Education Students and Direct Instruction

Rosenshine (1979) [cited Mastropieri et al (1986)] defines direct instruction as “academically focused, teacher directed classrooms using sequenced and structured materials” and “teaching activities where goals are clear to students, time allocated for instruction is sufficient and continuous, coverage of content is extensive, the performance of students is monitored, questions are at a low cognitive level so that students can produce many correct responses, and feedback to students is immediate and academically oriented.”

Mastropieri, Scruggs, and Levin (1986) state that, according to their research, direct instruction methods and materials have produced consistently outstanding results in student learning, in both regular and special education. However, another approach, mnemonic instruction, which uses memory-enhancing pictures as a way of facilitating students’ acquisition and retention of school-related content, had not been widely researched. They conducted a study which compared the effects of direct instruction and mnemonic instruction with exceptional learners.

These researchers concluded that certain teacher behaviors appeared to increase student achievement. These behaviors are referred to as direct instruction and are

grouped into five components: a.) academic focus, b.) work groupings, c.) teacher direction of activity, d.) verbal interaction, and e.) management. Their results also make it clear that educationally handicapped students can benefit from a strategy that combines direct instruction with a pictorial mnemonic strategy. Mnemonic strategies provide learners with a reliable means of retrieving coded information and are best suited for memory related instructional activities such as basic math facts. They are not as effective when instructional objectives include application of previous knowledge, such as inferential comprehension questions.

According to Gersten (1985), direct instruction shares many features with the analytic, behavioral approaches commonly used by special educators, specifically, “a belief in the utility of structured curricula materials, a concern for reinforcement of appropriate responses, the modeling and shaping of correct responses, the use of task analysis, and the continuous assessment of student performance.” However, there are certain features that distinguish direct instruction from most other behavioral models. These include: a.) the explicit teaching of “general case” problem solving strategies whenever possible; b.) an emphasis on small group instruction as to students working alone; c.) a systematic technology of correction procedures; d.) principles for cumulative review of previously learned material; and e.) insistence on mastery of each step in the learning process.

His paper reviewed six empirical studies which support the use of direct instruction programs and teaching procedures with special education students. He concluded that the six studies reviewed suggest that involvement in reading or language curriculum programs based on the direct instruction model tend to produce higher

academic gains for educationally handicapped children than traditional approaches. It was unclear to Gersten however, whether the increases were due to actual curriculum programs utilized, the teacher behaviors called for in the programs, or a combination of these factors.

Englert (1984) determined three general direct instructional practices which are consistently linked to pupil achievement:

- 1.) Teachers who maintain a brisk pace and a high rate of progress through the curriculum produce greater academic gains than those who do not.
- 2.) Teachers with expertise in providing successful practice at levels of 80 percent accuracy or higher positively influence the performance of low-achieving students.
- 3.) Teachers with skills in providing immediate teacher feedback following correct responses and errors produce greater learning than teachers who do not provide immediate feedback or who tell correct answers following errors.

She conducted a study which examined teachers' direct instructional practices in special education settings. This research produced the expected significant differences between groups of more effective and less effective teachers. This suggests that both the specific lesson strategies and the general management practices differentiated the effective teachers from the ineffective ones. Analysis of the factors comprising the specific lesson strategies of teachers indicated that teacher activities during the structuring, demonstration, and consolidation phases of the lesson were positively associated with pupil performance. In the structuring phase, the teachers who more often prepared the children in advance for the day's instructional activities by clearly stating

the objectives of the lesson and describing the nature of the activities that would follow had high-achieving students. In the demonstration phase, more effective teachers used several strategies: presenting more examples, requiring students to verbalize the component parts of the concept or principle, requiring students to relate the concept principles to examples and non-examples, and justifying their answers. In the consolidation phase, more effective teachers demonstrated specific strategies designed to facilitate consolidation and over-learning. These teachers consistently provided error drill which continually builds on the skills that the students have difficulty with and had previously missed. Low-achieving students need a number of repetitions to acquire new skills and the lack of error drill could have serious consequences on students' acquisition of new concepts.

Special Education Students, Study Skills, and Self-Monitoring

In order to ensure that special needs students can be successfully incorporated into regular education, Scruggs & Mastropieri (1992) suggest that these students must function acceptably within eight general areas. The area pertaining to study skills includes study/organizational skills which include listening, note taking, study strategies, research and composition skills, and test taking skills. The lack of these skills often results in mainstreaming failure, especially at the secondary level. If students are weak in these areas, they will experience difficulty in all academic classes. It should be the responsibility of the resource room special education teacher, in conjunction with the regular educator, to provide instruction and opportunities for the students to gain and strengthen these skills. Mastropieri (1992) suggests the following activities which will be beneficial to both special and regular education students:

- 1.) Provide structure. Be explicit with all assignments; give clear, explicit directions for all assignments and specify the criteria for acceptable performance. This structure will help special education students understand the expectations and to complete tasks in a timely and efficient manner.
- 2.) Teach general study techniques.
- 3.) Teach test taking skills.

Lotz (1992) defines study skills as a combination of abilities that have been learned for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and confidence. Study skills are also effective methods of gathering, recording, and evaluating information and the ability to transfer knowledge to new situations. The major objectives of Lotz's study were to develop a variety of instructional strategies to meet middle school aged special education students' needs in the area of study skills and to foster the teaching of study skills in each subject area by special education teachers through direct instruction.

This researcher hypothesized possible causes for the problem of a lack of study skills ability by special needs students. One reason is the reality that home-school communication for many families is limited to a once a year parent-teacher conference or an annual IEP meeting. This lack of collaboration between home and school can severely limit a students' potential to succeed. Another reason could be the classified student's lack of motivational skills. If they lack the motivation or desire to learn and are incapable of choosing or recognizing a particular study skill to fall back on for assistance, the result is all too often social and/or academic failure.

Research conducted by Sapp and Farrell (1994) suggests that individual and structured procedures are helpful for special education students. Specifically, scripts for

standardized programs of study skills instruction have been shown to be effective. Sapp modified a model developed by Harris and Johnson (1980) which was originally intended for college students and adapted it for middle school aged special education students. This model provides students with an overview of the study skills they will be trained in. The next step involves showing students how to monitor their own study behavior. This model also emphasizes several points to effective study behavior:

- 1.) Effective students block a certain amount of study time each day.
- 2.) Good students reward themselves when study assignments are completed.
- 3.) Good students start their work alone and only later study in groups as a form of review.
- 4.) Good students study one subject for at least 30 minutes rather than skipping over different subjects.
- 5.) Good learners start working on tasks long before they are do so that they will have plenty of time to do their best work.
- 6.) Good students exercise at least three times per week.

Sapp also found that the SQ3R method of studying effective with this population. This five step reading process of scanning, questioning, reading, reciting, and reviewing study material was developed by Robinson (1970). Sapp concluded that this method has the greatest effect when applied to actual tests used by students in class.

Homework and Behavior Modification

Poston (1991) conducted a study which used ten sixth grade students who rarely or almost never completed homework and class work, defined as zero to 25 percent. Each student participated with the researcher in the writing of an assignment completion

contract, which would be signed by teachers daily and parents weekly. This contract included assignment completion goals for each student as well as a student selected weekly reward or privilege to be earned if the assignment completion goal was reached. The students were also given the opportunity to earn bonus points. Individuals could earn these points if weekly assignments completion goals were exceeded, if the contract was not lost any time during the week, and if the contract was signed by the parent. The entire group of students could also earn these points if all of them met the above stated standards. The bonus points would be used weekly to buy items from the class store or they could be accumulated. Another incentive was a pizza party on the last day of the program for students who reached their weekly goals 80 percent of the time.

During the ten-week program implementation, teachers recorded daily assignment completion information on the student contracts and verbally praised those who completed them. They refrained from making any negative comments to those who did not. The students reported to the researcher at the end of the day to have their assignment completion information recorded. At this time, the researcher also provided positive verbal praise and encouragement. On each Friday, the weekly assignment completion percentage for each student was computed and it was determined whether or not the goal had been reached. At this time, a new contract and assignment completion goals were established for the following week. The successful students were also given their self-selected reward or privilege.

The results of this intervention were evaluated using teacher rating scales, assignment completion information, and researcher records and observations. The primary objective of this study was to increase assignment completion of the ten sixth

graders by 50 percent. Seven out of the ten students involved met this objective. The average increase for these students was 69 percent with three students reaching or exceeding 75 percent. Three students did not reach the desired level of assignment completion. The researcher concluded that the students who successfully met the research objective tended to be highly motivated to exceed program expectations. They enjoyed the daily contact with the researcher; they were excited by the opportunity of earning bonus points and a pizza party. They were motivated to succeed. In contrast, the three students who did not achieve assignment completion goals either failed to present their contracts to the classroom teacher or report to the researcher on a daily basis. They were not motivated to complete assignments even though continual unsuccessful attempts were made to remind and reinforce appropriate behavior.

Harris (1983) developed and implemented another behavior modification program used to increase homework completion. This program, Parent-Aided Homework, encourages parental involvement in their child's homework and educational progress. This plan stresses positive reinforcement for successfully completing homework assignments. The role of the parent is to provide additional support in several forms:

- 1.) Parents are responsible for enforcing agreed upon time limits for homework.
- 2.) Parents are asked to assume a degree of participation in homework.
- 3.) Parents are also urged to provide extra learning experiences for their children.

A basic responsibility of parents is to monitor the program. These steps include:

- 1.) explaining the program to the child,
- 2.) finding suitable rewards,

- 3.) providing extra work as needed, and
- 4.) timing and charting behavior.

In terms of rewards, this program stresses to parents that the rewards will not be effective if the child does not see any value in them. The key to a positive reinforcement system which uses rewards is to be certain that the child actually desires the reward enough to motivate him/her to work towards it.

The behavior component chart component of this program is key. It is the graphic representation of the success the child has achieved and serves as a motivator to complete assignments. One of the goals of this program is for the successes represented on the homework behavior chart to assume reward values for themselves. Harris concludes that this program has positive implications for both regular and special education students.

Patzelt (1991) also designed a behavior modification program to increase the rate of mathematics homework completion. Her study involved a 9 year 9 month old student who was in a self-contained learning disabled classroom. He was chosen for this intervention because he habitually failed to complete daily math homework assignments and because his test score average had dropped significantly over a four month period from 92 percent to 58 percent. Previous interventions, such as denial of free time and the classroom behavior management program of rewarding points for completed homework, had proved ineffective with this particular student.

A teacher-student conference was held to discuss the intervention where the teacher expressed concern for the student's behavior and explained the significance of it to achievement and responsibility. A three week contract was then developed. The students responsibilities included:

- 1.) understanding the assignment before leaving school,
- 2.) finding a good time and place to complete assignments,
- 3.) completing homework neatly,
- 4.) bringing the completed homework to school, and
- 5.) checking homework with the teacher and filling in a chart.

The following rewards were also included in the contract:

- 1.) If homework was 75 percent complete, the student would receive a snack or would be permitted to sit at the teacher's desk for 15 minutes.
- 2.) If all homework was 75 percent complete for the week, the student would be permitted to select a reward coupon on Friday.

Social and edible reinforcers were chosen by the student for daily assignments and social reinforcement coupons were selected as a weekly reward.

The homework charts were used to record the daily assignment, amount of homework complete, and the amount correct. Each morning, the student copied down the daily assignment into a homework notebook. These assignments always reinforced the daily classroom lessons. The classroom aide proofread the homework notebook and the previous night's assignment was checked by both the teacher and the student.

Corrections were made, the homework chart completed, and an edible reward was granted when the assignment was complete. If it was not complete, the reasons for noncompliance was discussed.

The student also received additional reinforcers. During the initial two weeks of the intervention, the student received a colorful memo listing the math homework assignment before leaving school. Also, at the end of the first week when the student

earned a weekly reward, he was also given a certificate of accomplishment. The teacher also provided daily verbal praise and encouragement.

Fading was implemented as self-monitoring during the final week of the intervention. The student was given the responsibility of checking and correcting his assignments with a teacher's guide and independently completing the homework chart. He then gave the chart to the teacher and received the appropriate reinforcement.

The results of this intervention indicate a significant improvement in performance: a change from a 7 percent completion rate during the baseline to a 65 percent completion rate during the intervention. During the fading phase, the homework completion rate averaged 67 percent, which is consistent with the first two weeks of the intervention. This data demonstrates the positive effect of a behavior modification intervention on homework completion.

Patzelt contributes this success to several factors. Because this project was school-based, the student became aware that homework is not assigned to simply keep him busy at home; it is an extension of school to enhance achievement. One aspect of this program was that the assignments reflected class work and the student was responsible for understanding the assignment before he left school. The teacher was not only concerned that homework was complete, but also that it was completed correctly. Another factor was the consistency of the assignments and feedback. Each day's assignment was similarly constructed and teacher feedback was consistent, whether the assignment was completed or not. Patzelt also felt that the methods of implementation impacted her results. These included the responsibility given to the student, immediacy of teacher feedback, and the overall attitude of the teacher.

The research provided in these three projects demonstrate the positive impact a behavior management system can have on student homework completion behavior. This type of program can motivate students to take the responsibility for completing their homework assignments. When homework is complete, it can have positive effect on student success and achievement.

In summary, homework is an educational strategy as individual as each instructor who uses it. The research provided by this literature review has provided me with tools to effectively implement the direct instruction portion of my integrated homework study. It has given me insight as to why homework incompleteness is such a problem for my special education students. It has supplied me with suggestions I can implement in order to make the inclusion experience more successful for my students. This literature review supports my contention that I can effectively improve the ability of my perceptually impaired junior high school students by integrating direct instruction of study skills, a self-monitoring device, and extrinsic rewards into the homework portion of my instructional strategies.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

Description of Subjects and Setting

The subjects of this integrated homework study were three perceptually impaired junior high school students who are in the sixth grade. One of the students is a black male and two are white females. They range in age from 11.9 to 12.7. Their I Q scores range from 90 to 115. They are mainstreamed into regular education classes for language arts, math, science, social studies, physical education, health, computers, music, and art with regular education teachers. They receive instruction in reading and spelling in a resource center setting one period a day with a special education teacher. This same teacher provides in-class support for their mainstreamed classes. As needed, pull-out instruction for a mainstreamed class subject is also an option. At the end of the school day, the students report to the resource center so that the special education teacher can check the completion of daily assignments and the completion of their homework assignment book.

The setting of this project was a small suburban public school in southern New Jersey. It is an elementary school, Kindergarten through Eighth Grade. For the 1996-1997 school year, 404 children are enrolled. There are several classes of each grade level and two self-contained special education classes for the perceptually impaired. The teaching staff is concerned and caring. Also, because it is in a small town, there is a high level of parental and community support.

Research Design

This study involved a three phase integration of direct instruction in study skills, self-monitoring of homework assignments and their completion, and a modified behavior management system including extrinsic rewards. It was anticipated that this program would bring about an improvement in the ability of these three perceptually impaired students to independently complete assignments outside the classroom as hypothesized by the researcher.

The initial step in this research was to plot the individual homework completion rates for the three subjects involved in the study. The researcher calculated these rates for the month of January 1997, subsequent to the introduction of any intervention with the following results:

Student One completed 51 out of 64 assignments (79.7%);

Student Two completed 36 out of 64 assignments (56.25%);

Student Three completed 42 out of 64 assignments (65.63%).

Phase One of this integrated homework behavior study involved the direct instruction of study skills and work habits by the researcher to the participants. Study skills are defined as a combination of abilities that have been learned for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and confidence. They are effective methods of gathering, recording, and evaluating information and the ability to transfer knowledge. The topic areas of this direct instruction included skills that these students needed to successfully complete their homework assignments. These skills include the use of reference materials and graphic aids, note-taking, outlining, and test-taking skills.

The students completed a Study Skills Self-Assessment Inventory (see Appendix B) which was used to determine the participants' knowledge of their own study skills. It also helped them to develop and improve their organizational and study skills habits. It was through this instrument that the researcher determined the topics to focus on in her study skills lessons.

These lessons occurred during the first twenty minutes of the resource center (reading/ spelling) period of the students' instructional day. Six lessons were conducted over the course of a two week period. The materials covered by these lessons included correct dictionary and thesaurus usage, note taking, outlining, organization, and test taking skills.

The students completed a Student Questionnaire About Homework (see Appendix A) twice; once prior to the beginning of any intervention, and again at the completion of the interventions. This instrument was used by both the researcher and the students to determine if the students' attitudes toward homework had changed and if the interventions had any impact on these attitudes.

Phase Two of this intervention involved the use of a self-monitoring mechanism, designed by the researcher, also known as the Homework Recording Sheet (See Appendix C). It was here that the students recorded all the necessary information regarding their homework assignments. This information included the assignment, (subject, type of assignment, e.g., worksheet, questions from textbook, long-term projects), the due date, any special instructions, and the materials necessary to complete it. This self-monitoring device was checked daily by the researcher. The students also had the ability to indicate the completion of assignments. This information was then

transferred to a homework completion chart which was kept by both the researcher and the participants. It was hoped that the successes indicated on this graph would serve as a motivator/reinforcer for the students to continue completing assignments. The introduction of this phase of the intervention began approximately after one month of study skills/homework habits direct instruction.

Phase Three of this integrated homework study involved the introduction of a modified behavior management system in order to bring about a change in homework completion behavior. The researcher and the participants jointly compiled a menu of extrinsic rewards. Research has shown rewards are only effective if the students want to work for them. These reinforcers were earned and rewarded if homework was successfully completed in the allotted time frame. It should be noted, that, in order to receive a reward, homework assignments must have been completed with a 90% accuracy rate. Daily, as well as weekly, rewards were earned. These reinforcers were given to the students at the end of the day after the researcher had determined from the subject teachers if the homework assignment had been completed with the designated degree of accuracy. Phase Three was introduced after approximately one month of self-monitoring.

Measures

Both a pre and post test of the students' attitudes towards study skills were taken. Prior to the beginning of the study skills and work habits direct instruction, a study skills self-assessment inventory was administered to the participants. Following Phase One, the same inventory was administered again to determine if a change in attitude toward study skills and homework had occurred.

The changes in homework completion rates were measured by the Homework Assignment Completion Charts compiled by the researcher for each participant during all phases of the intervention. Measures that were taken included:

- a.) Post-direct instruction homework completion rate,
- b.) Post-self-monitoring device homework completion rate, and
- c.) Post- modified behavior management system homework completion rate.

It is with this device that the researcher proved her hypothesis that these perceptually impaired junior high school students will demonstrate an improved ability to independently perform and complete homework assignments after participation in these homework behavior interventions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study is to determine if the integration of direct instruction, self-monitoring, and modified behavior management will positively effect the ability of perceptually impaired junior high school students serviced in a resource center to complete homework assignments and to determine which, if any, of these three interventions will cause the most improvement in the homework behavior of these students.

The method used to ascertain this was a three phase integrated intervention. The initial phase included the direct instruction of study skills and work habits. The second phase included the use of a self-monitoring device in which the student recorded all the necessary information regarding their homework assignments and indicated its completion. The final phase included the introduction of a modified behavior management system in which a menu of reinforcers was compiled and then earned by the students if their homework assignments were completed successfully within the allotted time frame and with a 90% accuracy rate.

The initial step in this integrated homework behavior study involved compiling the individual homework completion rates for the three perceptually impaired junior high school students involved. This data collection took place during the month of January, 1997 and the results were as follows: (number of completed assignments/number of total assignments)

Student One			Student Two			Student Three		
Reading	15/20	(75.00%)	Reading	10/20	(50.00%)	Reading	14/20	(70.00%)
Language	13/16	(81.25%)	Language	10/16	(62.50%)	Language	12/16	(75.00%)
Social Studies	8/10	(80.00%)	Social Studies	6/10	(60.00%)	Social Studies	8/10	(80.00%)
Science	1/2	(50.00%)	Science	1/2	(50.00%)	Science	1/2	(50.00%)
Spelling	14/16	(87.50%)	Spelling	10/16	(62.50%)	Spelling	13/16	(81.25%)
Total	51/64	(79.70%)	Total	36/64	(56.25%)	Total	42/64	(65.63%)

TABLE ONE

It was also during this time that the three students completed a Student Questionnaire About Homework (See Appendix A). This instrument was used by the researcher and the students to determine the participants' feeling towards the completion of homework assignments. It would then later be determined if the interventions had any impact in causing a change in these attitudes. The answers to this introductory survey indicated that:

- 1.) On average, the three students involved in this research spend 2.5 hours daily (Monday through Friday) on homework assignments for all of their classes.
- 2.) Two of the students complete their assignments at the kitchen table. The third student has a desk in their bedroom.
- 3.) All three students begin homework assignments within a half hour of arriving home from school and if necessary, complete it after dinner.
- 4.) All three students indicated that their mothers offer assistance with assignments when they return home from work if needed. They also stated that the resource center teacher is available for reinforcement and explanations after school if necessary.

- 5.) On average, the three students reported watching four hours of television on a typical school night.
- 6.) Student One thought that homework was very important to school success.
Student Three thought that homework was important to school success.
Student Two thought that homework completion was not at all important to school success.
- 7.) All three of the students reported that a reason for not completing homework was a lack of understanding of the assignment. Student Two also indicated that there were times when she “didn’t feel like doing it.” Student Three also indicated that he “had other stuff, like basketball practice, to do.”
- 8.) Student One chose “I usually turn in my homework” to describe herself.
Students Two and Three indicated that they “sometimes turn in their homework.”

Phase One of this homework behavior study involved direct instruction on the part of the researcher to the participants of study skills and work habits. Prior to the beginning of this stage of the intervention, the three students completed a Study Skills Self-Assessment Inventory (see Appendix B). This instrument was used by the researcher to determine the areas on which to focus in her direct instruction study skills lessons.

The results of this survey indicated that the participants display weaknesses in the areas of 1.) dictionary use, 2.) thesaurus use, 3.) note-taking, 4.) outlining, 5.) organizational/study habits, and 6.) test-taking skills. The researcher planned and

implemented six direct instruction lessons based on these areas of weakness during the first two weeks of February, 1997.

Homework completion rates were calculated for the two weeks during the direct instruction and for the two weeks after to determine if this phase of the intervention had any affect on the homework completion behavior of the three participants. The results of this data collection were as follows:

Student One			Student Two			Student Three		
Reading	15/18	(83.00%)	Reading	13/18	(72.20%)	Reading	16/18	(88.90%)
Language	14/16	(87.50%)	Language	11/16	(68.75%)	Language	14/16	(87.50%)
Social Studies	8/11	(72.70%)	Social Studies	6/11	(54.50%)	Social Studies	9/11	(81.80%)
Science	1/1	(100.00%)	Science	1/1	(100.00%)	Science	1/1	(100.00%)
Spelling	15/15	(100.00%)	Spelling	11/15	(73.30%)	Spelling	14/15	(93.30%)
Total	53/61	(86.80%)	Total	42/61	(68.90%)	Total	54/61	(88.50%)

TABLE TWO

Phase Two of this intervention involved the use of a Homework Recording Sheet.

This is a self-monitoring device, designed by the researcher and implemented by the participants. The students used this to record all the necessary information regarding their homework assignments, the due date, any special instructions, the materials necessary to complete it and if the assignment was completed. (See Appendix C). This recording instrument was used by the students for a two week period from March 3-14 , 1997. During this time, the researcher also recorded the students' homework completion rates with the following results:

Student One			Student Two			Student Three		
Reading	9/10	(90.00%)	Reading	7/10	(70.00%)	Reading	8/10	(80.00%)
Language	8/8	(100.00%)	Language	5/8	(62.50%)	Language	8/8	(100.00%)
Social Studies	5/6	(83.30%)	Social Studies	4/6	(66.70%)	Social Studies	5/6	(83.30%)
Science	0/1	(00.00%)	Science	1/1	(100.00%)	Science	1/1	(100.00%)
Spelling	8/8	(100.00%)	Spelling	8/8	(100.00%)	Spelling	8/8	(100.00%)
Total	30/33	(90.90%)	Total	23/33	(69.70%)	Total	30/33	(90.90%)

TABLE THREE

Phase Three of this integrated homework behavior intervention included the introduction of a modified behavior management system. The researcher and the participants jointly decided upon extrinsic rewards that could be earned by the students if their homework was successfully and accurately completed in the designated time frame. The three students unanimously decided upon Peanut M & Ms as a reward they would work towards. A fun size package could be earned as a daily reward if all of that day's assignments were accurately completed. A full size package could be earned if all weekly assignments were accurately completed.

The extrinsic motivators were introduced during the last two weeks of the intervention, March 17-26, 1997. Students also continued using the Homework Recording Sheet. Homework completion rates were also calculated during this time period with the following results:

Student One			Student Two			Student Three		
Reading	7/9	(77.50%)	Reading	6/9	(66.70%)	Reading	8/9	(88.90%)
Language	6/8	(75.00%)	Language	5/8	(62.50%)	Language	6/8	(75.00%)
Social Studies	4/5	(80.00%)	Social Studies	4/5	(80.00%)	Social Studies	4/5	(80.00%)
Science	1/1	(100.00%)	Science	0/1	(00.00%)	Science	1/1	(100.00%)
Spelling	7/8	(87.50%)	Spelling	6/8	(75.00%)	Spelling	8/8	(100.00%)
Total	25/31	(80.65%)	Total	21/31	(67.74%)	Total	27/31	(87.10%)

TABLE FOUR

TOTAL HOMEWORK COMPLETION RATES

	Pre-Intervention	Post- Direct Instruction	Post- Self-Monitoring	Post- Extrinsic Rewards
Student #1	79.70%	86.80%	90.90%	80.65%
Student #2	56.25%	68.90%	69.70%	67.74%
Student #3	65.63%	88.50%	90.90%	87.10%

TABLE FIVE

The above chart is a compilation of all the interventions introduced by this study. As indicated, Student One's homework completion rate improved by 7.1% after the direct instruction intervention, by 11.2% after the self-monitoring device intervention, and by .95% after the modified behavior management intervention. Student Two's homework completion rate improved by 12.65% after the direct instruction intervention, by 13.45% after the self-monitoring device intervention, and by 11.49% after the modified behavior management intervention. Student Three's homework completion rate improved by 22.87% after the direct instruction intervention, by 25.27% after the self-monitoring device intervention, and by 21.47% after the modified behavior management intervention.

In conclusion, all three of these interventions produced a positive effect in the ability of the junior high school students to complete independent tasks. For all three students, the self-monitoring device caused the greatest improvement and, at least for this group of students, was the most successful method of motivating them to complete homework assignments.

In order to determine if the interventions had any impact on the participants' attitudes toward homework, the Student Questionnaire About Homework (See Appendix A) was again administered approximately one month after the completion of the research project. The answers to this culminating survey indicated that:

- 1.) On average, the three students involved spend 2.75 hours daily (Monday through Friday) on homework assignments for all their classes.
- 2.) Two of the students complete their assignments at the kitchen table. The third student completes assignments at a desk in their bedroom.
- 3.) All three students begin homework directly after school and complete it after dinner.
- 4.) The mothers of all three students assist them with the completion of homework assignments. The students also depend on the resource center teacher for assistance.
- 5.) On average, the three students stated that they watch four hours of television on a typical school night.
- 6.) Student One thought that homework was very important to school success. Students Two and Three thought that homework was important to school success.

- 7.) Student One reported that there were times when she needed to be responsible for younger siblings and that this interfered with her ability to do homework. Other times she honestly stated that she forgot the books needed to complete the assignment. Student Two was the only one of the three students to report that a reason for homework incompleteness was a lack of understanding of the assignment. She also stated that there were times when she “didn’t feel like doing it.” Student Three stated that sports practices kept him from doing his homework and that he “couldn’t do homework on the night I’m with my Dad.”
- 8.) Students One and Three chose “I usually turn in my homework.” Student Two chose “I sometimes turn in my homework.”

These responses are consistent with the homework completion rates obtained by the research and reported in Table Five.

In comparison to the initial survey, the following differences were indicated:

- 1.) The average amount of time spent on homework assignments by the three students increased by .25 hours.
- 2.) Student Two had previously indicated that homework completion was not at all important to school success. After participation in the research project, this student indicated that homework was important to school success.
- 3.) Previously, all three students reported a lack of understanding of the assignment was the primary reason for homework incompleteness. After the interventions, only one student now feels this way. The follow-up survey also

revealed family situations as a reason for not completing assignments. This was not evident in the initial survey.

4.) Student Three initially indicated that he “sometimes turns in homework.”

After the interventions, he indicated that he “usually turns in homework.”

Student Two’s attitude towards the importance of homework to school success improved. Two of the students indicated that the lack of understanding of an assignment was no longer a reason for homework incompleteness. Student Three’s perception of his homework completion rate improved from “sometimes turning in homework” to “usually turning in homework”. For these reasons, it can be concluded from the responses on the follow-up survey that all three students have a more positive attitude towards homework completion than they did prior to participation in the interventions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

It was the intent of this research project to investigate three specific interventions in order to improve the ability of perceptually impaired junior high school students to complete homework assignments. These interventions included direct instruction in the areas of study skills and work habits, the use of a self-monitoring device to record all necessary homework completion information (see Appendix C), and a modified behavior management system in which the participants were extrinsically rewarded for completing homework assignments.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from the data that all three of the interventions described above produced a positive effect in the ability of the junior high school students involved to complete independent tasks. There was an increase in the homework completion rates of all three students involved in the study after each intervention when compared to the homework completion rates of the students prior to any intervention (See Table Five). There was a positive improvement in the homework completion rate when comparing the post direct instruction results and the post self-monitoring device results. Student One's homework completion rate improved by 4.1%. Student Two's homework completion rate improved by .8%. Student Three's homework completion rate improved by 2.4% (See Table Five).

However, when comparing the post self-monitoring device results with the post modified behavior management results, an improvement was not indicated. Student One's homework completion rate decreased by 10.25%. Student Two's homework

completion rate decreased by 1.96%. Student Three's homework completion rate decreased by 3.8%.

The results of the pre-and post- Student Questionnaires About Homework (See Appendix A) indicate that the students involved in this research project have a better understanding of the significance that homework has on their learning and on their success in school. The amount of time they spend on homework increased slightly. In this researcher's opinion, they indicated more valid reasons for homework incompleteness. Familial obligations are more significant than simply not wanting to do it. After the intervention, all three students indicated that homework completion was important to school success. From this, it can be concluded that participation in these homework behavior interventions produced a more positive attitude toward the completion of homework assignments in these learning disabled sixth grade students.

The researcher hypothesized that the sixth grade learning disabled students who received this integrated program would demonstrate an improved ability to independently complete tasks. It was also expected that the self-selected extrinsic rewards would cause the greatest increase in improved homework behavior. This was not the case in this study. The most improvement in homework completion was brought about by the use of a self-monitoring device by the students.

There can be several explanations which can be applied to these results. It is difficult to conclude which motivational factors actually influenced the change in homework behavior results. The researcher has developed a rapport with the students involved. We truly like and respect each other. It cannot be determined the extent to which this relationship influenced these results. It is also clear that, especially for

Student One, parental influence could also have played a role. Inadvertently, this project could also have created some competition among the three participants to complete homework assignments. Also, the self-monitoring phase of this project coincided with the end of the marking period. Considering the fact that a homework average is calculated and included in the final grade could also have definitely influenced the students to do their homework assignments. These are several of the factors which could have impacted the results but which the researcher could not control for.

Comparisons to Other Research

This research attempted to alleviate some of the characteristics Patton (1994) discusses which interfere with the academic success of students with learning disabilities. In this study, those characteristics included the lack of skills needed to work independently, lack of self-management, and lack of locus of control. It was through direct instruction in study skills that the researcher aimed to give her students the skills needed to complete independent tasks. She also strove to improve their self-management skills with the use of a self-monitoring instrument.

The researcher also followed Mastropieri's (1992) suggestions of activities which would be beneficial to special education students. These included providing structure and teaching general study techniques. These skills are not only important for learning disabled students to successfully complete homework assignments, but also to ensure that these students can be successfully incorporated into regular education.

The research project is also similar to one conducted by Lotz (1992). The same population was used in both - middle school aged students with special needs serviced in a resource room setting. While Lotz's objective was to develop a variety of instructional

strategies to meet this population's needs in terms of study skills, it was this researcher's objective to apply these skills to the completion of homework. Lotz hypothesized that the reason for a lack of study skills ability with these students could be the classified student's lack of motivational skills. This researcher attempted to overcome this in two ways. First, by daily contact and encouragement of the students involved and by the use of the self-monitoring device which also served as a motivator for the students to continue completing homework assignments. The results of this research and that of Lotz indicate that if given the necessary motivation, this population of students can obtain the study skills needed to be successful in regular education.

Sapp and Farrell (1994) also suggest that individual and structured procedures are helpful for special education students. Again, using the same population of middle school aged special education students, they taught these students how to monitor their own study behavior. The areas these researchers focused on were very similar to those the researcher focused on in her Student Questionnaire About Homework (See Appendix A). This researcher went a step further with her Homework Recording Sheet (See Appendix C) by having the students pre-plan their assignments. The results of both this research and that done by Sapp and Farrell indicate that self-monitoring does improve study/homework behavior for middle school aged special education students.

The modified behavior management phase of this study is also similar to one designed and conducted by Patzelt (1991). Similarities include the age of the students involved, the use of a homework recording device, the completion of homework charts, daily verbal praise and encouragement and the use of edible reinforcers. Differences

included the population size, one student compared to three, the use of social rewards as well as edible ones, and the use of a behavioral contract.

Implications

The importance of the role that homework plays in the American education system has been established through researching the literature in this field. Students in general, and those with learning disabilities specifically, do not comprehend the educational significance of homework. They do not appreciate the value of independent skill practice. If they did, they would do their homework.

Because of the extensiveness of the curriculum used in the educational system today, teachers must use homework assignments as a means of allowing students to practice, refine, and review the skills taught in the classroom. There is insufficient time in the daily classroom schedule for all of the necessary practice and review. In order to cover all of the material of the curriculum, as expected by parents, supervisors, and boards of education, teachers must use homework assignments as a method of extension and review.

This study focused on sixth grade students with learning disabilities. Lack of homework completion is not exclusive to this population. Teachers across the grade levels and across the curriculum encounter problems with students not completing homework assignments. This research successfully applied three specific interventions which produced a positive change in homework behavior. The three interventions could be introduced independently or in combination to any group of students in order to bring about a positive change in homework completion behavior.

At the beginning of the school year, a regular classroom teacher for the non-disabled, or a resource room teacher for the disabled could assess the study skills/work habits of their students. They could determine if their students are proficient in these areas and if they have the skills necessary to successfully work independently. If not, the direct instruction of study skills could be introduced into the curriculum. This would then increase the likelihood that their students would complete homework assignments.

The self-monitoring device instrument phase of this intervention could be implemented at any time during the school year. If the problem of a lack of homework completion arises, an educator can put the Homework Recording Sheet in place and then can be fairly certain that homework behavior will improve, based on this research.

Every teacher has some kind of behavior modification technique in their repertoire. This aspect of the study can be quickly introduced and then faded out by educators of all grade levels and fields of study whenever their students seem to be unmotivated to complete homework assignments.

Limitations

One obvious limitation of this study was the size of the population used. If it had been possible, this researcher would have included a larger number of students in the research. However, at the time, the three students used were the only ones that the researcher had access to. Also, the length of the time the interventions were put in place, especially the modified behavior management phase, could have been extended if time had allowed. Consideration could also have been given to the fact that the end of the study coincided with the end of the marking period. This, inadvertently, must have had some effect on the results.

One problem that the researcher did not take into consideration when planning this intervention was the attendance records of the students involved or the fact that absenteeism could impact the results. One student in particular has very poor attendance and was missing from school for a large portion of the study. This student was ill for an extended period and it was difficult to collect the necessary data and to provide this student with the reinforcement and praise needed to bring about the desired change in homework behavior. A larger sample could have been selected so that students with attendance problems could have been eliminated from the study.

Future Research

The next step in this research would be to apply the same interventions to a larger population, one which contained both learning disabled and non-learning disabled students. Data could be collected from both groups, independent of the other, and then compared to determine if one or more of the interventions implemented is more effective with either population of students. This same procedure could be followed with students who were a different age group.

Another modification to this research which could be explored would be to use more variance in the extrinsic rewards. Research has shown that students are much more likely to work towards rewards they self-select. This theory was put into effect for this study. However, perhaps more than one reward should be selected because of the possibility that the effectiveness of a single reward could wane. The students could simply just get tired of the same thing and lose their willingness to work towards it.

This research studied the effectiveness of a three phase integrated intervention to increase the ability of sixth grade learning disabled students serviced in a resource room

to complete homework assignments. The three phases included direct instruction, a self-monitoring device, and a modified behavior management system. All three of the above stated interventions produced an increase in homework completion behavior. Overall, the use of a self-monitoring device was the most effective means of motivating these students to complete homework assignments. Both special and regular educators from across the curriculum could implement any or all of these three interventions and expect an improvement in the homework behavior of their students.

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APPENDIX A

NAME _____

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT HOMEWORK

- 1.) How much time do you spend on homework on an average day for all your classes?
- 2.) Do you have a certain place at home where you do your homework? Where?
- 3.) Do you have a set time that you do your homework? When?
- 4.) Does anyone help you with your homework? Who?
- 5.) How much TV do you watch on a typical school night?
- 6.) Do you think homework is important to your success in school?
- 7.) Think about those days when you come to class without your homework. Why didn't you do it?
- 8.) Circle the statement that describes you.

I always turn in my homework.

I usually turn in my homework.

I sometimes turn in my homework.

I rarely turn in my homework.

I never turn in my homework.

APPENDIX B

NAME _____

STUDY SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

How frequently do I

- 1.) Eat well-balanced meals?
seldom sometimes often
- 2.) Study in a well-lit area?
seldom sometimes often
- 3.) Follow a daily study schedule?
seldom sometimes often
- 4.) Follow a weekly study schedule?
seldom sometimes often
- 5.) Plan for daily or weekly review sessions?
seldom sometimes often
- 6.) Skim through a chapter or portion of a textbook?
seldom sometimes often
- 7.) Make up questions on the information I read as I go along?
seldom sometimes often
- 8.) Summarize what I read?
seldom sometimes often
- 9.) Use reference materials other than the dictionary and the encyclopedia?
seldom sometimes often
- 10.) Use an assignment book or pad for recording of homework and special projects?
seldom sometimes often
- 11.) Check to make sure that my subject notebook are organized?
seldom sometimes often

APPENDIX C

HOMEWORK RECORDING SHEET

Subject	Assignment	Due Date	What do I have to do?	What do I need to do it?	Is it done?

