

A CASE STUDY OF ONE STRUGGLING MALE READER AND THE SCHOOL  
COMMUNITY THAT HE LIVES IN

by

GARY FOGARTY

(Under the Direction of Linda Labbo)

ABSTRACT

In this case study of a struggling male with a Specific Learning Disability who participated in a reading resource classroom, the community in which the student participated was examined. A disproportionate number of males are being placed in Special Education programs for Specific Learning Disabilities. The school community consisted of teachers, administrators, special education personnel, school psychologist, outside psychologist, tutors, parents, and the student. The study explored whether the school community functioned in a democratic manner over nine years of analysis. The democratic community was evaluated through the lens of John Dewey's pragmatism. The data was collected by analysis of over 700 pages of the student's school documents that contained grade reports, Individualized Education Plans, psychologist reports, testing results, and notes from school meetings. Data was also collected through multiple interviews of the parents and student. Results were mixed. The school community prospered before the diagnosis of the Specific Learning Disability; the student's literacy skills were positively influenced and he had good self-esteem. The community became non-existent in grades three, six, seven, and eight. In those years, teachers, administrators, and the school psychologist created a divisive, negative atmosphere that created conflict for the parents and student. Many questionable school decisions placed

the student in a resource setting when clearly he should have been in the regular classroom. This fractured community negatively affected literacy skills and self-esteem. The parents used an outside psychologist and tutors to help their son reach some of his goals. The parents and student persevered in an admirable manner. Communication and control were the major themes that affected the quality of the school community. Currently, the student is prospering in high school in the Regular Education setting with an IEP. The study should help school personnel as they work with reading disabled males.

INDEX WORDS: Specific Learning Disability, Reading resource classroom, Disproportionate, Pragmatism, Qualitative case study, Democratic communities, Male failure

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

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August 2008

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Terrae and my children Allie, Bryce, and Alayna. You inspired me to complete this challenge in the face of countless family challenges. Thank you for your sacrifice and love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank those who have helped me through this challenging process. I want to again thank my wife and children. I would not have made it without your support, Dr. Fogarty. You have always provided me with an exemplary example in all that you do. I watched as you completed your dissertation and marveled. You never let me quit. I did want to stop a couple of times. I want to thank you Allie for helping in so many ways. You are irreplaceable as a helper and daughter. Thanks Bryce for being such a team player. You never lost your enthusiasm for life. Thank you Alayna for all of those times that you encouraged me as only you can do. You will never know how much you helped. I also want to thank my extended family as well. I needed every one of you to help me complete this dissertation. Special thanks to Ward and Joann Vaughn for the countless times they took care of the grandchildren in such a loving manner. Joann will be watching from heaven. Thanks to my parents for their encouragement through the years.

Thanks to Dr. Linda Labbo for all of the things you did for me. You provided great advice; you always knew what to do. You have been a great academic resource and a good friend. You encompass all of the qualities of a brilliant teacher. I am extremely grateful.

Thanks to Dr. Donna Alvermann for your guidance and support. I am grateful for your continued support during this journey. Thanks to Dr. James Baumann who provided tremendous guidance until he moved to another university. Thanks to Dr. Jennifer Graff for stepping in at the last minute. You gave great advice and instantly became a key resource.

Finally, thanks to Ashley McMahon. This dissertation is for you, also. You are constantly in my thoughts. You have been an inspiration to me.



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## CHAPTER 1

### Background of the Problem

Three decades ago it was girls that were behind boys in most academic areas. Title IX was enacted into federal law in 1972 to mandate equal opportunities in the classroom for academics and athletics. There was no debate with respect to the fact that girls were being marginalized academically; they were certainly treated unfairly across the board and were suffering in many academic areas. The only issues with Title IX were claims from men's programs at the collegiate level that men's sports were paying to support female teams. That argument held little logic; girls had the right to compete academically and athletically in the same way as boys in our democratic system. Over the next 20 years billions of dollars were allocated to find ways to make female achievement equitable. Girls did make considerable improvement. Yet, the American Association of American Women (1992) published a report claiming that the work of Title IX was far from being accomplished. They lamented the many problems females endured. At the time of its release, this report was scarcely challenged from a proof standpoint. News outlets ran with the story. Much of the report relied on anecdotal evidence. Many feminist educators portrayed females as disadvantaged.

There was no mention in 1992 of academic male failure, yet one group of males was certainly in decline at this time—males who were being placed in reading resource classrooms. This boy crisis certainly evolved out of the identification of learning disabilities that came from testing boys at a young age, many times due to behavioral

concerns. Testing boys or girls in Kindergarten and First Grade is many times a guess at best. The push to identify struggling readers yields the same results. In addition, the rise of Attention Deficit Disorder increased the number of boys placed into Special Education classes due to behavioral reasons. These factors and the questionable report from the AAAU (1992) helped hide the problem of academic male failure for many years until multitudes of research not only documented problems with minority males, but also males in general. The big picture must be analyzed by researchers who want to solve a problem based on reasonable evidence. Many educators now realize that girls were making substantial progress and in many areas were surpassing boys.

I come responsibly and passionately to this study as a result of first hand experience. I have seen male students in reading resource classrooms in sixth, seventh and eighth grades reading at a third grade level. They had been diagnosed in the primary grades with a reading disability and as a result, Individual Education Plans (IEP's) were constructed (US Department of Education, 2008). These IEP's are a special education student's plan of action that has been passed into federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that was revised in 2004. The plan will have a section with goals and objectives, a section that outlines the student's class schedule, and a section that lists what modifications are to be implemented to help the student be more successful. There is also a section that discusses the actual disability and test scores and grades that the student has received each year. Parents were told that their sons would be working in smaller groups and doing the same work. Later on, many of them were told that their sons were too far behind to move back into the regular classroom. The majority of these boys were victims of a school community that either misidentified them with a

reading disability and misplaced them in reading resource classrooms or had no plan for moving these students back into the regular classroom at some point. I have worked with many male students and seen them improve tremendously after some specialized instruction, and with the understanding that they were capable of doing the work. What starts out as a grand idea to help a struggling young student many times ends up in a less than desirable outcome for that same student and his family. I have become aware of convincing research that shows that a disproportionate number of males, in particular African American and minority males, are being placed into reading resource classrooms. This problem is not limited to minority males only, though. Males across the board are struggling to achieve in reading resource classrooms. I suspect that there are many reasons for why this is taking place. I will explore this topic in order to examine one school community and to see how it fits into the wealth of research already established. Further study on this subject gives me hope that every child will not only have the same opportunities, but that many will have successful outcomes.

It is difficult for educators to admit that they have contributed to the failure of a group of students. The problem of male failure is not so simple as to think that documenting the problem will rally the teachers and administrators to action. The way to solve a problem is to look at all of the things that work and do not work for struggling males, and as we do so we need to examine the community that labels a child and places him in special education. Then, we must consider what happens to that child. This dissertation seeks to provide a portrait of a community of people who engaged themselves in guiding this child through his school journey in reading resource classrooms over the years. The analysis of the school democratic community will not

enable teachers and administrators to draw generalizations from this one student, but it will hopefully not only bring more awareness to the problem of male failure, but it will also illuminate one personal story of a community that may call researchers, teachers, and administrators to action. This problem of male failure is well documented.

### *Statement of the Problem*

This dissertation limits itself to a look at struggling males, especially minority males, in reading resource students classrooms in the United States. These males are supposed to be part of a democratic school community, and this case study will focus on the successes and failures of the school community which includes the student, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel. A resource class is a pull-out program where students in Special Education are removed from the regular classroom setting for part or all of the day. Certainly, females lack opportunities, and they have been discriminated against for centuries in this country and in many other countries and cultures. This dissertation does not make a claim that there are no problems to solve pertaining to females in education. Certainly, many problems exist in education today and some deal with female struggles. Some of those struggles are, for example, girls from minority groups that too have been identified in disproportionate numbers from the general population. In addition, many males are thriving in several academic areas. The problem outlined here is the disproportionate numbers of males in reading resource classrooms and the failure of the school community to stop misidentification and to deal more effectively with those who have legitimate learning disabilities. Perhaps no problem has received such little action as male failure for struggling readers. The problems that males, especially minority males, face in reading resource classrooms are immense. It is

a big problem when such a disproportionate number of males are being placed in reading resource classrooms and labeled as learning disabled. Why is this happening? I am aware of clear and compelling evidence that not only documents this problem, but the research also comments on many of the reasons why this is happening. The idea is to perform a case study of one ninth grade male that has a current IEP and has been in reading resource classrooms in the past. A case study will bring to life the successes and failures of one school community as it changed over time. A case study that covers nine plus years will certainly provide an abundance of decisions to analyze.

### *Research questions*

The study initially considered these questions: How did the school community Individual Education Placement team's decisions positively and negatively influence literacy development in the student over the years in reading resource classrooms and other classrooms? How did the male student feel about the decisions made by his parents and school personnel and what role did he play in the process? Did the school community function in a democratic fashion to provide the best possible outcome for this male student?

### *Literature review*

Many educators are aware that minority children are overrepresented in special education programs across the United States (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The reading achievement gap between white students and African American, Hispanic, and Native American students remains very large. The NAEP (National Association of Educational Progress) statistics have fluctuated somewhat over the last thirty years, but the gap is still statistically significant (Donahue, Voekl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999). Studies performed

by the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) reveal that, as early as kindergarten, 73% of White kindergarteners were proficient in letter recognition while 49% of Hispanic and 59% of African American students were proficient in the same. A lot more African Americans attend preschool than Hispanic children, according to NCEA data (2005). Thus, even though African American students spend more time in preschool, they quickly lose ground as they proceed through the primary grades. The differences were likewise noted between white students and other races in print recognition and proficiency pronouncing beginning and ending letter sounds. These types of minority students are then more likely to be referred for testing and eventual placement into special education.

A large body of research exists that clearly and emphatically exposes the overrepresentation of minority children in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Much of the focus of the research has centered on children of poverty and at-risk children. Overall, a statistically significant, disproportionate number of all minority students have been placed into special education classes with labels of specific learning disability (SLD), emotional disturbance (ED), and mental retardation (MR). The data is especially depressing for African Americans.

African American children are almost three times as likely to be placed in MR programs, two times as likely to be included in ED programs, and more than 1.3 times as likely to be placed in SLD programs (Parrish, 2002). For African American males, the statistics are much worse. More African American males, in fact, are placed in resource than girls as well as boys from other backgrounds (Parrish, 2002). This data does



emphatically demonstrate the plight of many minority students; however, another group has been struggling in recent years as well.

Males, in general, are placed in special education reading resource classrooms in disproportionate numbers. This section examines some of the literature pertaining to outcomes for males that are placed in special education classrooms primarily for reading disabilities, and for males who are struggling readers throughout their school years. Many of these males are at risk for dropping out, committing crimes, and abusing drugs; and the overwhelming majority has little hope for college. This problem is not just a minority male issue; a growing number of white males are also at risk for potential negative school outcomes. This section looks at outcomes, stereotypes, and teacher backgrounds in order to document a major problem for males. While the big argument concerns males in general, African American, Hispanic, and Native American male outcomes are clearly the most significant of any subgroup of males and their presence, data wise, impacts the overall negative numbers for all males. Furthermore, ESL student outcomes are hard to pinpoint because many do not have to test like other students and records of school assessments are inconsistent at best. The statistics presented here tell a major portion of the story for males, but not all of it. The statistics cause an analyst to logically inference from data on standardized tests, school grades, special education referrals, retention rates, dropout rates, and college admissions results in order to draw generalizations about male outcomes. Much of the data is listed in race and gender categories, but the data, in most cases, is not cross referenced to separate white male performance from minority male performance. There are also few studies that separate minority males and females, but the few available confirm that minority females are outperforming minority males in grades,

self-esteem, and standardized testing. Still, white males must participate in reading resource classrooms in large numbers, because males are placed in special education classes at a rate of about 4-1 (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Over 80% of students in special education have been diagnosed with reading disabilities. Many more have been labeled behavior disordered by committees comprised overwhelmingly of females. These classrooms have little evidence to prove they work in the best interest of all boys, and, in fact, become permanent placements because they are so ineffective.

### *Outcomes*

Males, not females, are rapidly becoming culturally and academically disenfranchised.

- o Ninety percent of all homicides in the United States are at the hands of males (Garbarino, 1999).
- o Males are responsible for the vast majority of cases of domestic violence against women and children (Sampson & Laub, 1993).
- o Most of the homeless in the U.S. are men who suffer from drug addiction and mental disease (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1997).
- o Nearly 125,000 teenagers, mostly boys, are serving time in state and federal penitentiaries with over 7,000 minors in adult prisons (Howell, 1997).
- o Teenage males are the fastest growing group among all absentee fathers (Maynard, 1997).
- o The majority of adolescent alcoholics and drug addicts are male (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1997).

- o Adolescent males are four times more likely than adolescent females to commit suicide (Smith, 1995).

There are a variety of factors that contribute to these statistics and academic failure is one of them. Many of the males who struggle in school also struggle to lead productive lives. If more of these males had succeeded in school academically, then, these statistics would have been less scary.

- o Four out of five children and adolescents diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) are boys (American Psychiatric Association, 2004).
- o Boys are three to five times more likely than girls to have a learning/reading disabilities placement in schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).
- o Boys in elementary through high school score significantly lower than girls on standardized measures of reading achievement (Hedges & Nowell, 1995; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).
- o Boys are 50% more likely to be retained than girls (Kleinfeld, 1999).
- o Fewer boys than girls now study advanced algebra and geometry, and more girls than boys study chemistry (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).
- o Boys are less likely than girls to take advanced-placement (AP) examinations and go to college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).
- o Degrees for males in medicine and law are on the decline, while women today earn 39% of medical and 43% of all law degrees awarded in the United States (Sommers, 2000).

- o Of the estimated 500,000 to a million students who annually drop out of U.S. schools, over 55% are boys (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

This data reports poor academic achievement and societal outcomes for many males.

More data exists that demonstrates male failure from primary age through college age.

The problems that arise from poor reading skills may be traced back to first grade.

In 2004, first grade males trailed females slightly by the end of first grade in overall reading performance, as measured by testing results accumulated by the National Center for Education Statistics (2005). Furthermore, girls scored seven points higher in scaled score in the area of sight word recognition. These statistics are noteworthy, considering that in 2004 males and females started school with the same general knowledge, as measured by NCES (2005). Despite of the fact that males started school with similar preschool academic skills in 2004 (NCES, 2005), they are falling further behind later in elementary school.

The data from an achievement test given to fourth and eighth grade students provides more proof that a gender gap in performance on achievement testing exists. It must be noted that this reading gap is just one factor in determining success and failure in school. The NCES (2006) results in reading and math for 2005 grade four public school students shows that females scored higher in reading and about the same in math. The gap for reading is now 222 to 216 in scaled scores. The gap was 221 to 213 in 1992. The gap is slightly smaller but it is still present. Male failure has been around for many years. In eighth grade, the gap is 267 to 257, while in 1992, the scores were 267 to 254 in favor of females. Again, the gap is a little closer. Fourth grade students with disabilities who could be assessed had a scaled score of 190, compared to 222 for students without

disabilities. The difference in scores for students with disabilities (most of whom are male) might be related to the high number of male students inappropriately placed in reading resource classrooms, even though this conclusion is an extrapolation of the overall data on male placements in special education. Test scores are just one academic indicator of male struggles. How Does the Reading Achievement Gap Factor into Overrepresentation of Minority Children and other males in special education?

As recently as the 1970s and early 1980s, the achievement gap between white students and African Americans had narrowed (Donahue, Voekl, Cambell, & Mazzeo, 1999). Since then, little progress has been made to narrow the gap. The reasons are complex for this achievement gap, but certainly one of the most powerful reasons is due to reading gaps.

Many experts cite reading gaps between minority and white children as the primary reason for special education referrals. For example, 80% of students referred for a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) are referred because of reading difficulties (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). According to data from the United States Department of Education (2001), 50% or more of students are placed in special education for an SLD. It is not known for sure how many students are placed in special education for behavior problems that arise out of frustration over lack of failure, or what effect the classroom environment that the teacher creates is conducive to achievement for minority males. It is known that reading difficulties at an early age lead to poor achievement, and that poor achievement in turn leads to referrals to Special Education (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Achievement gaps are not limited to minority children. This dissertation will examine

four primary explanations that may help explain the journey of one male student: stereotypes, teacher and administrator influence, societal influences, and genetics.

*Theories: Why are males struggling so much in reading?*

For years much research has focused on lack of opportunities for females. The American Association of University Women (1992) released a report about how schools shortchange girls. The AAUW summary stated that girls have fallen behind in areas such as higher level math and self-esteem. The AAUW lamented the fact that girls are silenced in the classroom, which causes poor self-esteem, and lower math and science grades. Most of the data came from anecdotal evidence and surveys. These findings have since been contested by a wealth of other evidence that looks specifically at educational outcomes.

Certainly, there exists some discrepancy in gender among higher level mathematics performance and job numbers. Males still score higher in mathematics on many standardized instruments, including SAT and ACT. The scores on college admissions tests are a bit distorted because a lot more females choose to take college admissions tests than men. Since there are more males on the upper and lower ends of testing data, it might be inferred that more females will go to college. Women are gaining ground in several areas. In addition, young girls are excelling in a lot of areas.

The NCES (2006) report shows that in 2005 males and females scored almost the same in scaled scores in fourth and eighth grades on standardized testing in mathematics. Girls receive higher grades in school and have higher class ranks. In high school, females in 1994 enrolled in more algebra, geometry, pre-calculus, biology, and chemistry courses, according to another NCES report (1996). Increasing numbers of girls have

enrolled in math and science Advanced Placement Exams, though males do score higher than females on these exams. The gender gap that favors males in math and science seems to be more evident in higher level courses. This might be explained by statistics that show that more males are at the top of the bell curve and more males at the bottom. This fact would show many more women fall into the above average to high average range, according to Willingham and Cole (1997). There are more females gaining admission to college than males. If more females are in the moderate to upper tier of standardized performance and have better grades and more Advanced Placement enrollments, then they logically have a better chance to gain admission. This data would also support the evidence of overrepresentation of males in special education. There are simply far more males in resource classrooms, which in time leads to less candidates for college. Many of these males are in resource for math and reading, although their original placement was for reading.

There has been much debate about the lack of females in math and science fields at the university level. Steele (1997) proposes a theory that school success is a result of identification in what school requires in all of its sub-domains. This theory of domain identification is used to outline achievement barriers faced by women in advanced math and science areas and by African Americans in school. The societal factors in these groups such as gender roles can inhibit this identification with school in its sub-domains. Many times these groups are stereotypes in a negative fashion. Steele claims that this threat depresses the test performance of African American women and that this causes misidentification with school. Steele also maintains that practices that reduce this threat can help alter the negative affects of the stereotypes. For school identification to form,

one must believe that he or she can be successful in the domain; the individual would have interests, skills, and opportunities to be successful there and the person would have a sense of being accepted and valued in this particular domain. Why then would African American females become frustrated and lose identification with certain components of school achievement? Steele says that segregating social practices, restrictive cultural orientations, socioeconomic issues, and limits of historical and ongoing effects contributes substantially to this disidentification. For example, a woman might have to endure the low expectations of teachers, family, and societal gender roles if she wants to exceed in a field where males dominate. In addition, these math and science fields are seen as unfeminine and not suitable for females in general. It is the social psychological threat that arises when someone is trying to enter a group where a negative stereotype exists.

Although African American females are struggling in math and science, African American males and other males in general are struggling in reading. The other males include White males and other minorities. The research by Steele may help explain the disidentification of male students academically. Male students who struggle may experience disidentification because they: must conform to literacy standards that may be too narrow for a lot of males; may not have time to acquire school academic and behavioral skills that female teachers and administrators expect; have been sent societal signals that cause them to pay less attention; or may have a genetic reason for their struggles.

Institutional and instructional discrimination are not relegated to just minorities and children of poverty. The problems for males run much deeper than minority and



financial issues. In a USA Today article, Sally Shaywitz (2003) claims that many schools are setting standards for all students based on what is normal for females. In essence, these female teachers may be imposing their value systems and expectations for classroom behavior on all the students. This expectation for certain behavior would not only affect many males but also many minority children as well. The overwhelming majority race of teachers is White and come from middle class backgrounds. It seems likely that, unintentionally, many of these teachers may be privileging the behaviors of students who have had similar experiences to theirs. Shaywitz (2003) further states that four times as many males are being identified with reading disabilities. Why is this happening?

Shaywitz and her research team at the Yale Center for the Study of Learning and Attention state that behavior is the primary reason. For example, boys who display normal levels of activity yet are above the normal levels compared to girls are many times referred for testing. Shaywitz says, "Behavior is used as a proxy for learning disabilities and here the normally increased activity of boys is perceived as pathological." Why should we use the same standards for normal female behavior as the benchmark for boys? Most of our teachers are women who possibly may relate to the behaviors of young girls. In the primary grades alone, about 85% of the teachers are female. Despite the fact that males and females early on in the primary grades test the same on reading evaluations, males are being referred to special education because teachers, according to Shaywitz, say that boys are more inattentive, more active, and display more academic and behavior problems. Thus, this generalization about male referrals may in part hinge on perceptions of males, educationally and culturally.

Since the middle of the 1990s, there has been new discussion on masculinity. This new thinking takes issue with the notion of masculinity as a unified theme. The concept of a single or essential way to define masculinity has been challenged by a description of masculinities that represent multiple Discourses (Connell, 1987, 1995, 1996). This view of masculinity relates masculinity to sexual orientation, race, class, and other contexts. Gee (1996) defines Discourses as our ways of being in the world. Each Discourse has a value system that defines a way each person thinks, reads, words, writes, acts, and plays. Discourses are embedded within family, school, and religion. They define and shape the power relations within individual institutions and society as a whole.

The Discourses of masculinity are often shaped by the Discourse of school. If females are thought to be the dominant Discourse in the school environment, it might be argued that males should learn to acquire the literacy skills that females employ to their advantage in the school environment. Young (2000) believes that males should explore a range of masculinities in the reading of text. Relations of gender and power are seen in language practices and they affect the Discourses of gender. Boys learn how to construct their masculinity as they interact with text. Critical literacy is based on the notion that language is a social practice that defines and produces gender. Literacy then is a practice that helps to shape masculinity. Certainly, power and masculinity are not shared equally by all boys. There are many variations of masculinity. Yet certainly, mainstream society privileges certain characteristics in the forming of major masculine Discourses.

Institutions define practices of masculinity in which individuals will be held accountable. The issue of male underachievement in school is a complex issue. A look at masculinity

and the role it plays in literacy is one way that we can better understand the many problems that are facing educators in the teaching of males.

Blackburn (2003) claims that sexuality is rarely mentioned in literacy discussions; most of the shop talk centers on race, class, and gender. Blackburn passionately argues that lesbians and gay men may not be masculine or feminine, but in some ways labeled as masculine or feminine due to stereotyping from our heteronormative society. She challenges even the shifting and expanding notion of masculinity outlined by Connell (1996). Others have posited other opinions. Is it possible that males are less capable or that literacy is the issue and not gender? Are males part of a culture that too many times places low emphasis on achievement? Are some males out of control and not teachable? Is it not cool to be a good student if you are a male?

Television and other media have promoted stereotypic models of gender behavior. These stereotypes impact the way males and females act. The second explanation evolves around female teachers. Some have said this has created a feminized environment. This feminized culture has resulted in lack of interest from many males. Finally, many of the books used in school language arts classrooms may not cater to boys' needs and interests which may contribute to their lack of achievement and potential disengagement with reading. If there is consensus on equal ability levels for most of our students, then why are so many male students failing to achieve in the classroom? If reading gaps are wide and ability levels the same, then a look at teacher failure is necessary.

*Teacher and Administrator Influence*

Too often, male students are placed in special education classes at an early age on an assumption the classroom teacher makes about a child. Rarely is there discussion on teacher failure. Teachers are failing male students, especially African American and Hispanic males. In high poverty situations and with high minority populations, instruction to meet individual characteristics and needs is not available to enough students. Achievement in these poverty laden schools is low (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh, 1999). The quality of the classroom teacher is generally low; many are inexperienced or not certified, and many of the schools lack equal print resources. Cognition should not be viewed as a separate entity but instead, as an integrated framework residing in the social and physical environment. Learning cannot be seen as apart from its ecological niche (Neuman & Celano, 2001). Low access to computers and print materials is a primary causal factor effecting low achievement, not a background issue. Too many schools impart low expectations on these students. Poverty itself does not mandate reading and school failure. There are many schools who overcome the challenges of poverty (Taylor, Pearson, Clark & Walpole, 1999). The problem is also not restricted to students of poverty.

African American males are being referred to special education classes in affluent and middle income schools and from middle class and upper class households. Expectations and race relations play an important part in the discrepancies in achievement between African American and White students (Ogbu, 2003). The background of the teacher could impact the outcome for the child. Often, in reading activities, culturally significant qualities of minority students are not encouraged. Many

students have not been exposed to 'appropriate' school language (Fine, 1991). The climate of the classroom silences many minority students. Fine also says that the climate may cause minorities to act out, which results in them being silenced academically with a special education referral and placement. Many of these students are capable of high achievement in the classroom. School personnel do not always exhaust all avenues of intervention before a special education referral is made. The underperformance of school intervention programs is hard to measure. Most schools have few statistics to demonstrate the effect. There is little coordination between mainstream classroom teachers and special education and intervention programs. The restrictions among programs results in a system that lacks cohesion (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). A large number of special education students are not able to participate in special intervention programs; they have to be taught by resource teachers, many of whom are among the least qualified of all teachers. Expectations can be low; many students never see the regular classroom again. In addition, some researchers point to genetics for possible explanations on male failure.

### *Genetics*

Currently, there is emerging evidence that describes genetic differences between males and females. Are there really differences between boy and girl brains? Some researchers have found that fundamental gender differences exist in the structure of the human cerebral cortex. One research team compared brain tissue from the brains of young boys and girls. The differences in the photomicrographs of the brain tissue are so dramatic that you can see them with the naked eye. These differences may eventually provide concrete evidence that will shed light on how males and females process

information. Genetic brain research is in its beginning stages. Shaywitz (2003) states that brain systems of poor readers process print information differently than good readers. The posterior area is strongly activated in good readers, while poor readers exhibit far less activation. Genetic imaging is a complex issue which clearly needs more research; however, Shaywitz contends that strong evidence from brain imaging supports a phonologic model of reading. This evidence may eventually predict who has dyslexia. When boys sound out nonsense words they activate an area on the left side of the brain, while women activate the right side as well. Both men and women could sound out nonsense words equally well. According to Shaywitz, this tells us that men and women use different processing techniques to achieve similar goals. Shaywitz research involved a longitudinal study in which she and her team randomly selected more than 400 five year old boys and girls who attended public schools. They were not selected because of reading problems; the progress of these kids were followed into their early 20's. They have been tested in reading and math every year, and there is little difference in reading scores. When Shaywitz and her team looked at all the children in her study they found that four times as many boys as girls were identified as having a reading problem. A look at the data indicated that teachers seem to be using behavioral criteria for their referrals. In the same study Shaywitz diagnosed just as many dyslexic boys as girls. Shaywitz found that the overwhelming percentage of female teachers identified rowdy boys over quiet girls in large numbers.

Gurian (2006) says that boys and girls each have unique sets of challenges and that by bringing attention to the differences, schools can learn how to effectively teach all children. He is worried that not enough girls have been identified as having learning

disabilities. Girls may not act out as much and teachers may allow them more time to succeed. They are also a little behind on SAT scores. Boys earn about two-thirds of the D's and F's in a school district and more than two-thirds of boys are on behavioral medications in comparison to girls taking these medications. Boys make up 80 to 90 percent of discipline referrals. It might be argued that boys create problems for themselves that force schools to place them in other programs. It also might be argued that boys have to meet expectations for behavior that are better suited for the majority of females. Gurian in *The Wonder of Boys* (1996) brought awareness to the links among brain science, gender, and teacher education. He called for new teaching strategies to train teachers on the differences between boys and girls. The use of genetic research in education is controversial, so it needs to be watched closely. Genetic research has benefited society in many ways, so maybe it will provide evidence that will help children read better.

#### *Additional Viewpoints*

Some researchers discount the male struggles; others disagree over its root causes. The AAUW (2008) recently published a report that claims that both boys and girls are doing well academically. The three main points of their conclusions are as follows: girls' successes do not come at boys' expense; girls' and boys' educational performance has improved; understanding disparities by race/ethnicity and family income level is critical to understanding girls' and boys' achievement. The AAUW report (2008) infers that some are not comfortable with the gains girls have made, so they attempt to create a boy crisis. The fact that girls are achieving is great, provided the institutional forces in place are not disenfranchising males. The report says that minority children and low income

children are the students who are struggling. This statement is certainly correct, but other students are also struggling. The AAUW report is focused on overall boy/girl statistics. The report also does not mention discrepancies between male and female enrollment in college, where girls have a decided advantage. The AAUW does acknowledge that minorities are struggling, yet the report does not mention discrepancies in performance in girl/boy statistics within minorities. The report also does not look at special education referrals, where boys (including White males) vastly outnumber girls. There is no mention of teacher failure or the fact that the vast majority of elementary teachers are females. The AAUW report (2008) utilizes selected data to state that boys are doing just fine. While many boys are doing well, too many are not. Others have weighed in to the issue of the boy crisis.

Vail (2006) explores whether the boy crisis is real. She cites research that suggests that the struggles of males evolve along race and class lines. Moreover, she states that brain research which suggests differences between males and females is in its early stages so we are not able to conclusively use that research to claim gender differences. Mead (2006) discounts gender differences completely. She says that there have been no significant changes in male performance in recent years. She attributes the uproar about male struggles to the fact that girls are making gains. She says that males have historically outscored females in math since the 1990s. Mead believes that conservative authors have used the alleged boy crisis to prove that feminists have used their influence to lobby for more attention to female issues. These conservatives also oppose a progressive education and, therefore, are using their power to push their own agendas. Mead further says that some authors create causal connections between findings



and stereotypical boy and girl personality traits without clear and verifiable data that this causality is real.

Certainly, the goal is to educate each child in a powerful manner. It is reasonable to believe that some girls are not being identified with reading disabilities and that this should be identified. The latter topic needs to be explored further. Some paradigms would look at class and race issues as reasons. If race is the sole reason, then why are more minority females not being placed in reading resource classrooms? More minority girls than white girls are placed in resource classrooms. However, proportionately far more males across races are placed in resource classrooms than females. Class does play a factor, but research by Ogbu (2003) suggests that class is hardly the sole determining factor in school failure. Ogbu points to many schools where low income students are succeeding and many schools where middle class and upper class students are struggling. As for a conservative conspiracy, it is doubtful that all of the researchers listed in the literature review were wearing blinders. There is a wealth of evidence previously introduced that documents the problem of male failure on the lower end of achievement. The statistics published by the federal government are factual; perhaps analysis of that data is debatable. This again brings up the paradigm debate. Some paradigms would not want to admit that there is a male problem, while others would want to exploit this issue. The Dewey pragmatist seeks to inquire and offer solutions in a fluid process. Along the way, the pragmatist may offer solutions that both cross and affect paradigms. The specific area that males are struggling refers to the disproportionate numbers of low achieving males, many of whom have been placed in special education reading resource classrooms.

Schools face a significant problem. The male students appear to have equal opportunities and capabilities, yet they have unequal educational outcomes. Fine (1991) says that poverty, school environment, critical consciousness, educator backgrounds and low expectations are some of the primary causal characteristics for African American failure in the classroom and for the high dropout rate among African American males. Delpit (1995) eulogizes the plight of children of color who are taught most of the time by White teachers, most of whom are female. She urges schools to decontextualize the rituals of mainstream schooling. Delpit talks about human-connectedness versus the heritage-destroying contexts of mainstream schooling. Dewey (1916) would agree if the vehicle used is democratic communities.

For many minority males and other males, the future is taken away many times at an early age. They are referred to special education in first and second grade with the promise of small classes and free support services. They are told that they will make up ground in this small class format. Teachers and support staff may believe they are telling parents the truth, but schools have little evidence to support their claims. The outcome for males is too many times the following: early referral to special education from a female teacher; lack of intervention opportunities from qualified reading specialists; lack of coordination among school personnel; permanent placement in resource reading classrooms; minute options for higher education; and high dropout rates. The future looks dismal for too many males at this time. Educators must take the lead in order to find solutions to the problems facing males in reading resource classrooms.

Chapter One has introduced the problem that a disproportionate numbers of males, especially minority males, are placed in reading resource classrooms by the school

community. Many of these males were placed there for behavioral reasons, cultural issues, teacher error, and administrator error. Most will stay in Special Education classrooms for the duration of their academic career. Chapter Two will discuss pragmatism as the theoretical lens that will guide this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theoretical Framework.

This dissertation uses John Dewey's pragmatism as its guiding light. Dewey's pragmatism seeks to provide solutions for many types of educational problems. It first seeks to identify a problem, then, it searches for answers. Pragmatism, as defined by Dewey, is able to cross paradigm barriers and solve problems without much restriction.

Researchers in reading education come from many diverse backgrounds. Many researchers dedicate their lives to many different endeavors such as the conception of cutting edge ideas, cultivation of existing ideas, defense of marginalized groups, deconstruction of ideas, statistical documentation and solution of problems. The paradigms in which these researchers participate, expand, or create inform and guide their work. In reading education the challenges for researchers are immense and noteworthy. This dissertation asks reading education teachers and theorists to consider a paradigm which creates democratic communities that work together and engage with each other in useful dialogue, practical thinking and problem solving; and this aids society through real world and continuous problem solving. Dillon, O'Brien, and Heilman (2000) contend that this time tested paradigm allows for compatibility with other paradigms, which in turn leads to unity and growth within the reading research community. The paradigm offered is Dewey's pragmatism; the vehicle democratic communities; and the outcome of continuous inquiry and problem solving. This discussion does not provide a history of pragmatic theory, but it seeks to situate Dewey's pragmatic thinking into a philosophical

and paradigm context, and then focuses its applications to literacy and reading research. These applications will involve qualitative case study examples, as well as mixed method and formative research. The focus is on Dewey's ideas not as set and inflexible beliefs, but as catalysts for forming rich communities that debate these and other ideas. The goal of this dissertation surrounds analysis of the democratic community involved with the male reading resource student to narrate an inquiry into a problem and the resulting successes and failures. This pragmatic approach enables the researcher to tell one story and speak to its value.

The word *pragmatism* conjures up many responses and misconceptions from researchers and teachers. Dillon, O'Brien and Heilman (2000) offer pragmatism that says, "conducting inquiry to useful ends takes precedence over finding ways to defend one's epistemology." These authors also assert that they are not following one pragmatist, but the spirit of its tradition.

### *Dewey's Thinking*

It seems problematic for researchers to focus on one person's ideas for fear of becoming a disciple and then not be able to grow through useful inquiry and debate. The researcher or teacher becomes a defender of the idea and may not allow for reconstruction of these or other ideas. In the same way, paradigms have a way of providing limitations, because there exists a set of beliefs that originally formed the paradigm. The continuity that Dewey proposes (1927) encourages the researcher to constantly inquire, adapt, reflect, and remake as situations change. Pragmatism offers ways to solve old and new problems in many fields, including literacy education.

Pragmatism, as practiced by Dewey, refers to a philosophical perspective that has many educational applications. In fact, all of philosophy is education to Dewey.

From a philosophical standpoint, Dewey takes issue with Descartes' view of dualism that focuses on unchanging things versus changing things. Dewey professes in *Experience and Education* (1938) that there is no such thing as absolute certainty. Every belief is an approximation. One can never be totally sure about any idea, although some ideas have withstood the test of inquiry for a long time and are thus reliable beliefs for the present. Experience entails more than observation, feeling, active and passive dimensions.

Experience, Dewey (1938) comments, refers to meanings that come from human interactions with other human beings in nature. It is real world, hands on interaction with actual conditions, as well as thoughtful consideration, inquiry, and feeling about all of these things. It is not just a personal or private thing to Dewey; it is an inclusive happening that may function as a part or a whole. Experience may refer to an economically disadvantaged boy that goes to school with inadequate clothes, nutrition, and hope. It is his feelings, struggles, reflections, and thoughts through a day, a month, a year, or several years. It is the interactions with his family, teachers, classmates, friends, and others. Each experience has its unifying characteristic, something that permeates the event and gives it meaning. It could be an unpleasant, calm, fulfilling feeling, or a multitude of other qualities. According to Dewey, people seek a situation that is fulfilling and satisfying. The reason why people make thought and action is to change actual conditions to make them less chaotic. Many times there is disorder and chaos that needs resolution. Conditions are working against the individual. This conflict arises from

external conditions, internal conditions, or between internal and external forces. The economically disadvantaged child may be dealing with significant internal and external forces that need to be resolved in some manner. The male reading resource student needs to exist in a community that functions in an effective manner. The male student, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel form a community that needs to work for the student involved. The child may not be able to solve the conflict without belonging to a unified community. The student is also an integral part of the community and must do his part to function well within it.

Pragmatism, as shaped by John Dewey (1927) offers opportunities to use observations and inquiry in real world settings in order to understand and solve problems. Glassman (2001) says that Dewey believes that the most important outcome for society is the ability of the individual to question through experience. Glassman describes the importance of everyday activities and social context, and how they factor into the educational process. For Dewey, problems provide opportunities for thought. Conflict is an inevitable experience. In the field of literacy and reading education individuals and groups grow and solve real problems that eliminate conflict. It takes smart, practical thinking to continuously achieve these goals.

The goal for the community focuses on continual inquiry into the male reading resource student to evaluate improvement. The student must be part of the decision making process. Dewey (1927) says that intelligence is a practical trait; it a tool for making things better, where improvement is the unifying theme. Intelligence considers the past experiences to provide guidelines to resolve the present struggles and to position for a better future. These past experiences may solve the current problem or they may

not. Since all situations are different, people have to use old methods or create new ones to solve the problem. We become more of what we are by collaborating with others individually. Most situations are social; we share many of the same things, including conflicts and resources. Dewey theorizes that cooperation works and conflict and chaos do not. In nature events happen because parts work together. On every level individuals develop and work together. Community is formed from these elements.

Community differs from society according to Dewey (1916). Society is perceived as a unifying group by nature. Some of the qualities that accompany society are community of purpose and welfare, dedication to the public, and mutuality of sympathy. However, Dewey says that political groups that function to exploit others have some of the qualities of a society; and to exclude them places the term society in such an ideal state that it is of no use. Therefore, we cannot create in our minds something that is an ideal society. Rather, we need to base our conceptions on something that can exist. Any education that is experienced by a group socializes its members. The quality of the socialization depends on the qualities and aims of the group. When quality socialization forms, a community starts its journey.

The school community of the reading resource student needs to have goals that include growth for placement, as well as academic, behavioral, and social dimensions. There must be proof that the community works. Community, to Dewey (1916), is to fulfill individual goals while helping others reach theirs. Democracy evolves from this concept of community. Society continues to exist by communication and in communication. People live in a community due to the things they have in common; and communication enables them to possess things in common. Dewey (1916) claims that in



order to form a community people must have goals, beliefs, knowledge, and some sort of common understanding. The communication that breeds a community evolves from shared expectations and requires similar intellectual and emotional dispositions. The sharing and goal attainment are the foundations of not just a community, but a democratic community.

Dewey (1916) further states that having the individual share or partner in an activity helps her or him feel its success as their success, its failure as their failure. For this dissertation, the term school community comes from Dewey's discussion of community, which to him implies a democratic community. For example, a struggling African American male reader may not feel like a sharer or partner with the teacher and his classmates in a first grade classroom. He is struggling and he is in conflict. A faculty member may be a member of his department but feels alienated because he or she adheres to a particular minority paradigm within that department. A fractured classroom or a splintered literacy team creates conflict that needs repair before it can serve all its members productively. A first grade reading teacher may decide that one way of providing reading instruction is to implement whole language concepts solely, and another teacher decides that he or she will only offer phonics instruction to the young reader. This single minded decision by the teacher may place some students at risk because they do not respond to the one type of instruction. The teacher may belong to a society of phonics instructors or a member of a paradigm that is situated in a set way of thinking. Certainly, in reading education a young child needs to participate in a democratic community that fosters inclusion and growth, and one that aids in the development of citizens. It is necessary to eliminate conflict, not to create more of it.

Divisions that alienate administrators, teachers, theorists, and students can be traced back to conflict caused by lack of formation of strong democratic communities within classrooms and school personnel. Obviously, some members of a community are not willing participants and can not be forced to comply with the democratic ideals that many within the community hold. They may come from a background that is contrary to the shared beliefs of the community. However, such social divisions that interfere with free and total discussion make the intelligence of the individual within the community and the community itself separatist, one-sided, and fixed (Dewey, 1916). Democracy, in theory and practice, stands for free discussion and social continuity that provides meaning and direction to its members. For younger children, the teachers, administrators, and literacy researchers need to find ways to construct fluid models of democratic practice that will empower all children who desire to be successful.

#### *Paradigms and Pragmatism's Potential Influence*

Paradigm debates in reading and educational circles hold the power to enrich or limit literacy inquiry. Paradigms are largely a collection of beliefs that has at its roots certain theoretical and methodological assumptions that allows for selection of criteria to research, evaluate, and critique (Kuhn, 1970). To Kuhn, a paradigm catapults a group into a discipline. From this point the group accumulates advocates and disciples, creates professional organizations, publishes new journal articles, meets at conventions, and gains strength until another paradigm steps in to offer solutions to problems the first one can not solve. These shifts, according to Kuhn, are revolutions within a field. Some of these shifts or changes may limit literacy inquiry.

If revolutions do take place during paradigm shifts, then people see that the dominant paradigm no longer provides answers to key problems, or new ideas persuade people to follow. However, these revolutions can cause friction among multiple paradigms. A debate between a post positivist and a post modern theorist may model a political debate between left wing progressive, secular Democrats and right wing conservative, Christian Republicans. Neither side will negotiate its preconceived beliefs. According to some progressive Democrats, the conservative Republicans are insensitive, inflexible, and dogmatic. According to some conservative Republicans, the progressive Democrats are immoral and unpatriotic. The post positivist may see the postmodern theorist as unscientific, elitist, cynical, boundless, and unwilling to take a stand. The postmodern theorist may see the post positivist theorist as cold, calculating, confined, limited, inflexible, and afraid to acknowledge subjectivity and social context. Dillon, O'Brien, and Heilman (2000) suggest that the field of literacy encompasses a set of communities that have incompatible beliefs, methods, and language. The field of literacy has had difficulty dealing with so many voices (Clay, 1994). Maybe this has to do with the extreme philosophical distance between some of the paradigms. However, differences in worldviews need not stifle research; research may be transformed by debate and continuous inquiry.

The multitudes of fields that influence literacy research and reading education do so in positive ways. Different problems can be solved by different types of researchers. These diverse researchers not only stretch the field; they provide a checks and balances system that encourages continuous inquiry and growth within literacy and reading education, though those in the individual paradigms may not show a lot of movement.

The members of paradigms have an obligation to enter into continuous growth and debate in order to shape the fields of literacy and reading education. The formation of democratic communities in research will help all voices to be heard. Some researchers effectively form literacy and reading communities that include all paradigm proponents to participate; other researchers blindly and cynically withdraw into their society. It is not enough to be cordial publicly, and to privately engage in non-collaborative rhetoric and practice. Multiple paradigms allow for more types of problems to be solved. However, pragmatism offers the unique ability to move from one paradigm to another to inquire, reflect, solve, and collaborate.

Dewey's pragmatism offers compatibility, albeit this compatibility has its limits. These limits may arise when conflicting perspectives such as democracy and Marxism compete against each other. However, even in these situations, pragmatists and Marxists may agree on many things. Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1916) agree that the social environment plays a huge role in the education and development of the child. They both believe that experience and reflection guide the learning process, although the process is different for these two men. They are also informed by different political beliefs. Researchers aligned with Freire's critical literacy views and goals may agree with Dewey on some of the key components of thought. For example, they may be aligned in respect to the experiential theories of learning. Both groups of disciples would agree that there are injustices that need to be corrected in regard to marginalized groups. Freire (1970) generalizes that class differences have created many of the inequities present in society. He offers as a solution a form of Marxism (Freire, 1992) that will help eliminate classes. The goal is to rid society of the oppressor, and then to form a better society. Dewey

recognized the dangers of class warfare in practice; Dewey's writings (*Democracy and Education*, 1916) indicate that opportunities have been limited to certain groups, but he offers democracy as the solution. Freire focuses on equality of class, yet at the present time the solutions he offers have not been successful in practice. Dewey claims that teaching students to be citizens first helps develop strong communities that effectively limit conflict. Through Dewey's plan, the continual reconstruction of issues and the constant reflection on problems leads to harmony. Freire's philosophy welcomes reflection on problems, and he focuses on power, race, and class. Dewey's pragmatism focuses on these themes, when analysis of the problem calls for it. The paradigms that are used to research students in the United States become more compatible with each other when democratic ideals are cherished and enacted.

We do live in a democratic society; therefore, we must use its power to create connecting research communities that empower each other (Dewey, 1916). For example, an African American male reader who has been placed in special education for unfair reasons may to a critical race theorist be the victim of power, race, and gender discrimination. The power of White administrators, White curriculums, and White atmospheres has disenfranchised this child and a whole society of African American males. Dewey's pragmatic thinking would evaluate this problem in its natural setting in order to fully understand it. Statistics from the post-positivist camp would be needed, as well as discussions with teachers, students, parents, administrators, and others who impact the problem. Change could then come from the transformation of power structures that have negatively affected such problem. The pragmatist might solve most of the problem for the critical race theorist. However, the pragmatist might also find that the

parents and child are victims, but not helpless. They need to be part of the solution as well. The problem might be solved partly through the courage of critical race activists, who passionately outlined and described the plight of these children. In addition, the quantitative researcher provided statistical data that further documented the problem and then, the quantitative researcher could provide further evidence that changes have been made. The pragmatist worked with both of these researchers to create a better outcome for the child and others like him. The postmodern researcher could then follow to deconstruct the problem. The Dewey pragmatist and postmodern researcher probably agree on subjectivity issues in research and the viewpoint that there is no final truth. The postmodern, critical race, and pragmatic researcher want to place issues in social context. They would disagree on limits; the postmodern researcher wants few limits placed on anything. A pragmatic study can address the needs of many different research groups simultaneously but that is not the goal. The goal is to solve problems through the creation of democratic school communities.

Dewey's pragmatism also offers balance. This balance provides students with more opportunities to become successful. The Dewey pragmatist can use more of an eclectic approach to solve problems. If a young reader struggles to read words, an eclectic approach may teach the applications of phonics rules; oral text reading to develop fluency and word recognition; word lists to develop memory; letter cubes to teach letter sounds; magnetic letters to make words, and a variety of other strategies to enhance results. Eclectic and balanced means multiple and diverse, as opposed to watered down, diluted, and fractional. As previously outlined, the pragmatist may use post-positivism data, critical theory components, and postmodern analysis in solving one problem. Each of

these paradigms may analyze the evidence differently, but the pragmatist has fewer restrictions placed on her or him. In this manner quantitative and qualitative data are both important. However, since social context is so vital in pragmatic educational research, the use of qualitative research takes on great significance.

Qualitative research provides a context to place the problem. It also offers a wealth of circumstantial evidence that allows more understanding of the problem and its possible solutions. One value of pragmatism is evaluating the practical considerations of an issue before deciding to research it. Dewey (1938) recognized that research must be viewed with the outcome in view. He also said that actual social problems that are taking place are suitable for inquiry.

#### *Dewey's Pragmatism and Qualitative Research*

Dewey's pragmatic perspective applies well to qualitative case study research. The qualitative researcher focuses on observation, inquiry, reflection, analysis, and outcomes. Interpretists, social constructivists, critical theorists, and postmodern theorists all participate in qualitative case study research. Steinkuehler, Black, and Clinton (2005) conclude that methods for research should be chosen after the selected interest. Paradigms and methods can inhibit the value of observation if the goal is not observation and sense-making first. In actual practice flexibility is needed because everything is not always neatly package for researchers. Steinkuehler, Black, and Clinton (2005) maintains that they are not advocating a movement towards formative experiments and mixed methods, but that qualitative research becomes more valuable when at critical points a variety of methodologies guides the researcher in literacy. Dillon advocates pragmatism as a viable perspective for qualitative research, yet she acknowledges that working with

diverse groups of stakeholders to outline the different intricacies of real problems is a real challenge. In addition, pragmatists must use ethical, empirical methods to search for answers. These answers may not be popular, which might create conflict with some qualitative researchers. However, Dewey's pragmatism expands and adds to the potential of qualitative research because politicians relate to solutions, especially democratic solutions. In this way all of qualitative research gains respect. If other qualitative researchers want to research issues of personal interest, that is great. However, Dewey (1916) cautions that researchers need to have a practical purpose before they start a research inquiry. In reading and literacy research, case studies play important roles.

Few current research studies use Dewey's pragmatism as their theoretical perspective. However, pragmatism may be useful in answering questions in case studies, mixed method studies, and formative research. Dillon, O'Brien, and Heilman (2000) claim pragmatism to be a new stance for communities of research inquirers. Further, they exhort literacy and reading researchers to challenge themselves to reflect on their own work to see if it is meaningful and helping to inspire students. Are the questions directing researchers to solutions that might work? Qualitative case studies offer a way to utilize rigorous qualitative standards to answer questions and do not only come up with answers that will provide solutions. The case study should indeed illuminate a portrait of the individuals or groups involved in the journey. In qualitative case study practice, the narratives of the individual participants bring to life real struggles and successes along the way. The case will be an inside look at a particular situation that compels us to feel the facts, emotions, and nuances that individual cases produce. In addition, the case study seeks to observe the participant in his natural, social setting in order to explore the same.



In a case study that traces the journey of struggling male readers, the pragmatist wants to explore all avenues in order to bring resolution to the question at hand. The case study provides a lens for the educational experts - classroom teachers, special education personnel, school administrators, county administrators, school psychologists – that allows them to personally see one or a couple of students whose struggles need explanation. Many times well meaning school personnel think that they would never be part of any trend that caused students unfair educational outcomes and potentially catastrophic life outcomes. Pragmatist researchers explore all issues and consider all possibilities. Qualitative case studies provide that lens that helps educators make connections to other students. Pragmatists can solve one problem that in turn may result in change, or they can evaluate several schools and programs that may result in major changes.

Qualitative inquiry is certainly not appropriate by itself for all educational research questions. Certain people, situations, and problems are more compelling and appropriate for qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). Qualitative inquiry provides a way to look at ongoing research as it happens in a natural environment. Patton says that different theoretical and paradigmatic approaches might influence inquiry in any problems that a qualitative researcher might explore. Stake (1992) states that an inquiry is carried out so that certain audiences will benefit and to help others further their own understandings. The audiences in literacy and reading education are the community of researchers and teachers, administrators, and parents.

Much qualitative research seeks to solve, explore, educate within the context of a natural setting. The goal is to bring to life the papers that populate archives in libraries

and to help persons who are in decision making positions in our schools and governments to understand social problems (Stake, 1995). If researchers work together to solve problems in a democratic manner, then everyone wins. Wolcott (2001) says that an educational case study is an empirical inquiry that happens within a localized boundary, primarily in its natural context. It uses some interesting aspect of education to explore, in order to make school personnel aware of information that will benefit educational outcomes. This is mostly what pragmatists informed by Dewey and democracy would do, though they would choose issues that would not only be interesting, but also compelling. Stake (1995) says that “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.” He believes that case study offers a way of examining educational programs and social services. The value of qualitative educational research depends on the quality and findings of the research.

Qualitative applications of pragmatism provide opportunities for mixed method studies. One pragmatic solution is assembling interdisciplinary teams and it uses a variety of methods to explore and solve problems. The research does not value one method or perspective over another. It involves a community of researchers collaborating to find answers.

Dewey’s pragmatism provides a theoretical perspective that offers a way for teachers, students, researchers, administrators, parents, and perhaps even politicians to form democratic communities. These communities engage with each other in useful dialogue, practical thinking and problem solving. Pragmatic research happens in a natural setting with careful evaluation of compelling problems. The problem is attacked from

every angle; the goal is to provide continuous inquiry until solutions are found, and then, reconstruction happens over and over again, if necessary. There are no absolute truths; researchers look for close approximations. Pragmatists can participate in qualitative, formative, and mixed method research. Pragmatism engages other paradigms and calls for collaboration and cooperation. The goal of pragmatism in literacy and reading education is to create democratic communities that empower each other and provide opportunities for all who share.

Chapter Two discussed pragmatism as an appropriate perspective for the problem of male failure in reading resource classrooms. The chapter presented pragmatism as a way to further inquire into the dynamics that create and fuel male failure in reading resource classrooms. The democratic community is the vehicle that needs to be working in order for most children to have success. The school community needs to be powered by open dialogue; this dialogue needs to come independently from all stakeholders in the community. If the school personnel position themselves as inflexible and controlling, then conflict is sure to follow. School personnel themselves be advocates for the student. Each member should act independently of each other. They should not come into a meeting unified; control comes from school personnel working out their position before meetings with parents. Conflict is an inevitable challenge, and the community needs to work together to limit conflict so that individuals grow and the community thrives. This perspective has also been selected because it aligns with qualitative research, in particular case study. This dissertation study uses case study as its methodological vehicle. The case study provides a personal touch that statistics do not provide. Pragmatism also attempts to solve the problem that researchers from other paradigms have weighed in on. In the

following pages, Chapter Three provides a subjectivity statement and a methodological outline for the proposed study. Case study is defined more specifically and detail is provided for the methods utilized.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### *Subjectivity Statement*

I have passion for and expertise in this field. I own a tutoring center that welcomes children of every background. Much of the work I do at my learning center focuses on struggling readers. Many of these readers who have been diagnosed with reading disabilities are just behind; they are certainly capable of doing superior work, and do not have permanent reading disabilities. They have fallen behind; they have not activated their talents yet. Many of the children became reading disabled because they were misplaced in special education, and there they were not taught at the same level as mainstream children. For most of these children, more specialized instruction creates a wealth of opportunity for them later on.

Certainly, my passion for my work makes me aware that I have potential for excessive subjectivity. My passion needs to be tempered with good judgment and precise data. The case study is not my story; it is the story of the community that surrounds one male student. I will be careful to explain how I selected the student, and I will ensure that my research plan, data collection, coding, and analysis meet accepted standards for qualitative research. The student selected will be someone whom I have not previously known. The student will not come from any contacts with my tutoring center. I have also written three proposals that deal with this issue and acquired one IRB approval to perform one limited pilot study. These experiences have allowed me to become more

proficient as a qualitative researcher, particularly in the field of case study. My passion and expertise for helping struggling readers are also my qualifications for doing this study.

I have personally sat in on hundreds of Student Support Team (SST) and Individualized Education Placement (IEP) meetings over the last several years. I have witnessed groups of teachers who did not fully understand a fair process; I have also seen other committees work effectively to provide young boys and girls with the same opportunities and care. I have an undergraduate degree in Secondary English Education and a Masters in Middle Grades Education. My doctoral work is focused on Reading Education. I have two certifications that qualify me to teach in Elementary, Middle, and High school. I am accepted in all schools as one of the team members. I have worked in unison with principals, assistant principals, school psychologists, counselors, and classroom teachers to facilitate changes in the outcome of many male and female students. I have also had strong disagreements with school administrators and teachers in some situations. There is no right or wrong way to serve individual students. My role as an advocate lets me focus on the best interests of the student; I have sometimes scolded parents for unreasonable or confrontational behavior in a meeting. I have never taken any money for my advocacy work; I do not want to be seen as a paid “lawyer” representing the parents’ interest. This problem of male failure has been well documented in terms of statistics. Now it is time to explore the relationships that factor into these stories. The outcome is not just a student being unable to go to college; it runs far deeper than that. Not only is opportunity taken away from a child, but so is a lot of hope. He cannot

participate in the “American Dream” unless he has the same opportunities, and we impart the same expectations on him.

### *Methods*

#### *Case Study*

Qualitative case study has long been controversial in the research field. Yin (2003) warns that we must do case studies with the knowledge that every aspect of our study will be challenged by rational and illogical viewpoints and that the insights derived from our research will be discounted and challenged by many skeptics. Yin also says that we may take comfort in the fact that case studies continue to be used extensively in many social science and practice oriented fields. In this dissertation case study methodology may provide a unique portrait process that has value.

Stake (1995) says that when researchers talk about a case instead of an instance or event, they are talking about a particular setting with some feeling of generality. An instance goes no further than that particular moment. A case may suggest something bigger than that. It implies a sense of a family and a claim. The case needs to be situated in a particular study within a specified set of data. Thus, Stake maintains that the theoretically grounded case explains why such case is central to the advancement of theory. The case brings the problem to life. We identify personally with individuals in case studies. This is not made up stuff. The case study is real life, real world data, as it happens in a natural setting. The term *case study* is difficult to define, though for a Dewey pragmatist it would present opportunities to explore a problem in education.

Ragin (1992) says that implicit in most social scientific notions of case analysis is the thought that the problems we investigate are similar and separate enough to allow us

to treat them as comparable instances of the same phenomenon. At a minimum, every research study is a case study because it represents a look at some form of social phenomenon at a specific time and place. Case studies, unlike quantitative experiments, capture portraits of real world experiences without exercising planned control over their participants.

The assumption is that educators care deeply about the well being of their students and that they will do anything to safeguard individual student success. Many times well meaning school personnel think that they would never be part of any trend that caused students unfair educational outcomes and potentially catastrophic life outcomes. A case study may reveal in a personal manner failures and successes that help school personnel problem solve through construction of appropriate plans for referred students, accountability from year to year on progress made, and better communication with parents, other teachers, and the student involved. Qualitative case studies provide that lens that helps educators make connections to other students.

The boundaries for this case involved a look at a community of participants that placed the young man at the center. The school community involved at least one current teacher and administrator and possibly a school psychologist and other teachers. The parent or parents were also part of the school community. The educational boundaries allowed for a focus on literacy development within the reading resource area only. Stake (1995) says that “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.” He believes that case study offers a way of examining educational programs and social



services. Certainly, loose methods of research are problematic. That is why it is so important to explain the uses and methods of good qualitative research.

As mentioned previously, one of the major criticisms of qualitative research is the anything goes attitude of some researchers. The latter have neglected to form relationships with other disciplines and other research methodology. For purposes of this research the case study methodology seeks to place its case study within the context of the literature review, which involves quantitative and qualitative research. McCracken (1988) calls for ecumenical cooperation among researchers and methods in order to take full citizenship in the research community. The communities have a shared responsibility to cooperate.

Good qualitative case study research depends on a variety of factors that encompass the individual case. Qualitative case study research is especially formidable as grounded theory that uses inductive processes that is generated from fieldwork. In the cases of the male student, interviews and all appropriate school documents were the sources of data collection.

### *Data Collection*

Data came from the interviews with the parents and male student, and from the documents. The teachers and administrators were not interviewed. It would have been difficult to arrange reliable interviews with school personnel from previous years. Each year the community changed. I was concerned that the teachers may have felt threatened, since there had been disagreements with the parents in some cases. I was also turned down by multiple counties who were concerned that it may expose their teachers to identification or criticism. The parents were interviewed together; they preferred to do it

this way. The goal was to find a seventh, eighth, or ninth grade male student that has an IEP for a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and has been in reading resource classrooms for several years. It was important to find a student that had participated in several communities through the years. The parents indicated that they had good and bad things to say about the educational journey their son had traveled. This dissertation examined the community on a yearly basis because the community changed each year with new teachers, administrators, IEP goals, and other factors. The United States Department of Education (2008) defines a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) as a disorder of one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language that is spoken or written. The SLD interferes with the ability to read, write, speak, listen, think, spell, and perform math operations. It includes directional and sequencing problems, as well as memory issues. These disabilities are not primarily due to visual, hearing, or fine motor problems. SLD's are not due to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or environmental, behavioral, or cultural factors. The student is said to have an SLD if achievement is not consistent with age and ability levels in one or more of the specific areas listed above. The student was not a previous student of mine in order to make sure that I was a researcher/observer not a participant/ observer.

The male student who was selected is currently enrolled in ninth grade. The student was enrolled in a regular classroom setting for some of his other classes and/or collaborative classes. The collaborative model was regular education with a special education teacher as the second teacher in the class. The special education teacher provided additional support for the students with an IEP. The male student had an average Intelligence Quotient (IQ). The student had a track record of successes and

failures. Seventh or eighth grade is a key grade for students with an IEP who have been in reading resource. In ninth grade the student will show if the decision made is working. The parents, students, and teachers will decide what courses a student will take in high school, which in turn will help decide if he will drop out, finish high school, or go to college. The parents also have the right at this time to overrule the teacher's recommendation. These decisions are critical. A student with an average IQ who is taking some regular classes will have the ability to choose college preparatory classes instead of a lower program. If a student realizes he is not going to benefit from high school, he is far more likely to drop out. The student with an average IQ may have been misidentified with a learning disability many years before. Students in ninth grade would have already made the decision for high school coursework, and a ninth grade student could possibly show the early returns on those decisions. It will be easier to comment on how well the democratic community worked for the student if the student has been under an IEP for many years. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade provides an opportunity to look back at the original plan and present situation, then, to focus on the future. The student will be found through a search of local public middle and high schools. Each school has an assistant principal who assists in writing IEP's for students with reading issues. I will contact a couple of these in order to select the student for the study. I wanted a male student who has a mother and father so I can examine parental roles without bringing into question single parent issues.

Data was collected through interviews and by examination of all documents pertaining to the academic career of the student. The parents of the student were interviewed. The child was interviewed. All of the school documents were evaluated.

These documents included mental abilities tests, achievement tests, grade reports, IEP reports, psychological testing and reports, Student Support Team (SST) notes, behavioral reports, and other pertinent documents.

### *Interview and Analysis*

Interviewing is the interest and understanding of the experiences of the people we interview and the meaning that they make of their own experiences (Seidman, 1998). Individuals are hard to code with numbers; it is our interest in the individual stories that is of true worth. Interviewing, therefore, is a process of inquiry. Recording narratives has been an age-old technique for recording historical events. Seidman proposes some guidelines for interviewing. He talks about the technique of the interviewer. He suggests some of the following: listen more, talk less; ask questions when you do not understand; ask to hear more about a subject; explore, don't probe; avoid leading questions, ask open ended questions; ask participants to tell a story; keep participants focused and ask for concrete details; ask participants to reconstruct; and use an interview guide cautiously. Seidman also talks about interviewing as a relationship. It is certainly important to establish good rapport with your participants. Kvale (1996) views interviews as a conversation. In an interview, the interviewer and his partner have an equity relationship and there exists a reciprocal relationship dealing with the participant's questions and answers. The purpose of the qualitative interview is to understand themes from the lived experiences of the participants. The structure of the research interview models everyday conversation, as well as elements of professional interviews. According to Kvale (1996), the interview seeks to obtain descriptions of lived experiences of the participants regarding meaning of the phenomena described. The topic of the interview is the lived

experiences and the participant's relationship to it. The interview also seeks to interpret central themes that relate to the topic that is being discussed. It seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal and conversational language. The interviewer attempts to obtain descriptive narratives of the participant's story. The interview seeks to look at specific situations and sequences, not general opinions. The interviewer seeks accurate representations of the participant's story, in addition to documents or another source of data. The length and intensity of the interview will depend on the time dynamics of the study.

Since many years' worth of documents were analyzed from the ninth grade student, the interviews with teachers, school personnel, parents, and student were long interviews for practical purposes. The long interview by itself proved to be less reliable for a variety of reasons; so the document analysis helped create visions of the school community, as it changed over the years. The primary goal was, in fact, to analyze the school community over the years.

In this dissertation, the long interview, as outlined by McCracken, (1988) was used as a basic guide. McCracken proposed a four step model of inquiry. This model accomplished many of the goals of an ethnography without the lengthy interaction in the community with the parties involved. The long interview model allowed for cultural categories and shared meanings as opposed to exploration of individual feelings. This study is concerned primarily with the school community and how it has functioned for the student over the years. The long interview helped place the numerical values that the student has achieved into a richer social and cultural context.

The first step in McCracken's model of inquiry focused on review of analytic categories and interview design. A good literature review prepares the investigator to evaluate problems and analyze data. The literature review also prepares the investigator for surprises. The findings may defy theoretical beliefs, and they may help provide for intellectual growth in the area being studied. The data may take issue with the theory proposed by other researchers. The investigator should be a knowledgeable skeptic of the previous research, not someone predisposed to preconceptions that will place blinders on the investigator. The literature review also helps in the construction of the interview questionnaire. It helps set parameters on the interview, it determines categories that aid in organizing the data, and it provides insight into the big factors that will direct respondent answers. The first step allowed for review and deconstruction of the literature.

The second step centered on review of cultural categories. It has been mentioned that the familiarity of the researcher with the topic and environment studied raised concern over preconceived notions and lessened investigative powers. However, it also gave the investigator a large, personal relationship with the study. This intimate knowledge gave the researcher an advantage over ethnographers that are immersed into an unfamiliar culture. The sharpness of insight provided by the intimate knowledge and detail gave the researcher an opportunity to understand associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the data. The main purposes of cultural categories were for questionnaire construction, identification of cultural categories not considered by the literature review, preparation of templates with which to match data, and maintenance of distance through sharpness of knowledge, preparation, and fineness of thinking. The

process of familiarization and de-familiarization are both needed to accomplish goals for the study.

The third step involved discovery of cultural categories. The questionnaire was outlined starting with biographical questions, as it ought to be. Then, the goal was to allow the respondent to tell their story in their way. It was important to ask questions in a nondirective manner. The investigator needed to break the ice in a non-threatening way, which allowed the respondents to tell their story. The parents and male student were very friendly and easy to interview. Rapport had been previously developed in the screening telephone interview.

McCracken's (1988) fourth step was the discovery of analytic categories. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. It was important to act quickly after the interviews were completed to develop the relationships, categories, and beliefs that the respondent held in general and the main topic, specifically. The investigator knew what the literature review said should be there, a sense of what he knew had been personally witnessed in other settings, and a sense of what transpired in the interview. The investigator used this information only as a guide, but he was ready to accept data that had no bearing on what he believed or what the literature says would happen.

The analysis, according to McCracken, involved several steps. The data was taped and then a transcription completed. The first step was to judge utterances without concern for their larger significance. The investigator was in the process of sorting out important from unimportant data. The investigator had the literature review and cultural review in mind, but he was also looking for other possible meanings. The investigator needed to be slow to make judgments.

The next step was to develop each observation deemed worthy from the first step. The goal was to have the possibilities examined more deeply, to relate them back to the interviews and to each other. All of the templates from the beginning were considered, but it was also time to look for new connections.

The ensuing step employed relating observations to each other and individually. The shift away from the whole interview signified the emergence of themes and labels. The interview was referred back to in a specific manner.

The process now turned to harvesting the general data into specific labels and themes. Once themes were categorized, the investigator organized them in a logical way to sort out major from minor themes. The cultural categories were developed from here.

Finally, it was time to take all of the interviews and determine how a thesis of sort can be constructed. At this point, the discussion did not focus on the characteristics of the individual but the general actions and thoughts of the community under surveillance. The talk shifted away from the eyes of the respondent to the eyes of the investigator.

The interviews provided an in-depth retelling of the journey of the community through the school process. The interviews were guided by the documents that helped to paint a picture of the student's educational trip through the years.

### *Documents and Analysis*

I provided a part of the education history of the student through examination of documents. Records, documents, and artifacts make up a rich source of information about many organizations and individuals (Patton, 2002). Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be directly learned from them, but also as a source of raising additional questions and solidifying and placing into perspective other sources of data



gathering. As with all information that is gathered, strict confidentiality of records must be maintained. In the case of the male student, much of the significance of their stories can be traced to lack of understanding from all involved. This rich source of data may have helped school personnel trace the records from first grade to eighth grade; these students may have had a completely different journey. The stories of the participants integrated with the information gathered from years of testing, grade reports, behavioral comments, psychological evaluations, and IEP analysis provided an in-depth real story of the journey of the male student. The analysis started with the first document.

The data was analyzed in the same manner that the interviews were evaluated. The amount of data was significant, which is why a student was chosen that had been in resource for many years. Each year a minimum of one IEP meeting was called that reviewed whether goals were met from the past year's IEP and to outline goals for the next year. In addition, complete psychological evaluations were administered for most students every three years. The psychological evaluation consisted of a battery of child specific tests that always included intelligence and achievement testing, and any other tests deemed appropriate. Each year the student had to take state mandated criterion referenced instruments. In addition, the student took standardized achievement and mental abilities tests in first, third, fifth, and eighth grades. School grade reports from Kindergarten to eighth grade were evaluated. There was a record of other meetings that involved school personnel that discussed ways to help. Any interventions received notations. The documents alone provided multiple sources of information for many years. There were 15-25 copies of standardized and criterion reference testing results in the file. The file also contained several IEP's, as well as several records of other meetings. In

addition, four grade reports a year times eight were in the file. There were at least 700 school documents to examine.

The analysis of the documents was another piece of the story. The documents were analyzed for frequencies, such as how often was there evidence of the democratic community making decisions based on supporting evidence. For example, an achievement test may be a signal that the student has improved enough to be placed back in the regular classroom. Other testing may substantiate the IEP or dispute its use. I looked for a pattern of school decisions based on comments from meetings, grade reports, testing data, IEP's, and other pertinent data to interpret decisions that the school community put into action. I searched for the story of this democratic community, so that just about anyone could see the logic of my analysis. I was able to trace back to certain time points and to also take a holistic look at the data. Furthermore, I was able to connect the data sources.

### *Analysis/Triangulation*

Stake (1995) says that data analysis begins at no particular moment; it gives meaning to first thoughts as well as final comments. Analysis is the taking apart and organizing information to make sense out of it. Since I have four sources of data, I will be able to triangulate the data more easily. Patton (2002) states that data triangulation occurs when a variety of data sources are used in a study. The analysis was a comparative pattern analysis that sought to understand the role of the democratic community and the members in the community (Stake, 1995). Each participant told a different story and the documents had a say as well. It was my job to represent the findings from the different data sources; I attempted to not only look for consistencies, but also inconsistencies.

There was no way to know what a case would yield until it unfolded; however, it was necessary to have multiple data sources in lieu of an extended observation period.

### *Setting*

The interviews took place at an agreed upon location in Georgia. The parents and young man signed consent forms.

### *Risks*

There were no risks anticipated for this study. I was careful to keep participant identities confidential. I handled and secured information in an appropriate manner.

### *Implication*

This study explored one school community to determine its effectiveness over the years with one student. The school community comprised the school personnel, parents, and child. The uniqueness of this study was that the investigator looked at the community as a whole. It was not the individual stories that were of utmost focus; it was a look at whether the democratic community that Dewey proclaims had been created. This look at a democratic community opens discussion on how to make schools better for all students. When Friere (1973) denounced the so-called neutrality of literacy, he was talking about functional literacy skills of marginalized groups. The overrepresentation of males in special education resource classrooms for reading is a disturbing trend. The problem is not relegated to minority males alone. This problem is an issue that seems not to improve despite the fact that many researchers have identified this as a problem.

The research took place over a six week period. The interviews and document analysis were the sources of data for the study. The long interview process (McCracken,

1988) was used for the parents and child. The document analysis took place before the interviews.

### *Six Week Plan*

Day1 Reviewed documents.

Day 2 Selected note-taking, preliminary analysis.

Day 3 Reviewed documents.

Day 4 Interviewed parents

Day 5-7 Selected transcription and note-taking.

Day 8 Interviewed parents a second time.

Day 9 Selected transcription, note-taking, and preliminary analysis.

Day 10 Interviewed student.

Day 11 Selected transcription, note-taking, and preliminary analysis.

Days 12-14 More interview analysis.

Day 15 Interviewed student again.

Day 16 Selected transcription, note-taking, and data analysis.

Days 17-18 More interview analysis.

Day 19 Interviewed parents again.

Day20 Selected transcription, note-taking, and data analysis.

Days 21-28 Interview analysis, categorizing, labeling, theming, etc..

Days 29-35 Document analysis

Days 36-42 Document and interview analysis

### *Parent Interview*

Tell me about the community where you were raised.

Tell me about your family.

Tell me about your academic background.

Tell me about your son's academic career.

Tell me your sense of the school community over the years.

Tell me about your role

Comment on your son's efforts over the years.

Tell me about his self-esteem.

Tell me about your plans for high school.

Tell me about the teachers that have worked with your child.

Tell me about the administrators.

### *Student Interview*

Tell me about the community you were raised in.

Tell me about your family.

Tell me about your interests in school

Tell me about your interests outside of school.

Tell me about your friends.

Tell me what you like and do not like about school.

Tell me about your self-esteem.

Tell me about your past teachers and current teachers.

Tell me about your administrators.

Tell me how you feel about your past, present, and future.

Tell me about your plans for high school.

Tell me about your plans for college.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how well the school community, comprised of the male student, teachers, administrators and other school personnel, parents and outside people, functioned from grades kindergarten through ninth. Over the course of nine years, it was fair to expect that the school community should function for the most part in a democratic manner. The participants in this case study were a ninth grade male, who will be called Job in this study, and his parents. In grades three through eight Job was in a reading resource classroom and at times in resource for other subjects. His biological parents will be called Faith and Thomas.

The discussion began with an analysis of the documents. Parents provided copies of all school documents from kindergarten to present. I decided to analyze the documents first in order to trace the educational statistics and comments from the school administrators and teachers. I have in my possession over 700 pages of documents that include grade reports, standardized testing and school testing results, meeting reports, psychologist reports, work samples, parental permission forms, school materials and individualized education plans. I used the documents and interviews with the parents to outline the student's progress over the years. Though we will not hear directly from teachers and administrators, the documents outline many of their thoughts because word-for-word comments are present throughout the documents. These documents may be more accurate because teacher memories from years ago would probably be less accurate.

The former teachers may remember general things, but they would be hard pressed to remember specific items. In addition, their comments in the file are part of Job's official record. These specific comments, his grades, and his standardized testing results contributed to the community decisions over the years. The parents have a much better memory. They have lived the experience with him. Job and his parents were interviewed. The long interview model (McCracken, 1988) also allows for cultural categories and shared meanings as opposed to exploration of individual feelings. This study is concerned primarily with the school community and how it has functioned for the student over the years. The long interview will help place the numerical values that the student has achieved into a richer social and cultural context. The cultural categories will be constructed by analysis of the data on a year by year basis. Dewey's pragmatic perspective guided the researcher through the analysis of the data. The inquiry was based on Dewey's democratic community.

The study initially considered these questions. How did the school community Individual Education Placement team's decisions positively and negatively influence literacy development in the student over the years in reading resource classrooms and other classrooms? How did the male student feel about the decisions made by his parents and school personnel and what role did he play in the process? Did the school community function in a democratic fashion to provide the best possible outcome for this male student?

The long interview was designed to extract cultural categories. The questions were constructed to explore cultural categories. Dewey's pragmatic lens evaluated how well the community functioned in order to solve problems and create solutions.

*Meet Job*

Job is a 14-year-old male student who is currently enrolled in a large suburban high school in Georgia. He is in ninth grade presently. He is part of a very close family that includes a 12-year-old sister and his parents. Job has been in the same cluster of schools since kindergarten. Job plays football and baseball for his school team. He is a polite, personable young man. He understands that he has a reading disability, yet he has always wanted to prove that he can compete in the regular classroom. Job has been embarrassed by his placement in resource classrooms over the years. He is definitely proud that this year he does not participate in any resource classroom.

*Meet Faith and Thomas*

Faith and Thomas met in school and were married at a young age. Both are college graduates. Faith is a nurse and Thomas is in management. The parents have been to almost every school meeting, and they have sought outside educational help for Job over the years. They are very passionate in their descriptions of school experiences. They remember all of his teachers, and the effect they played in the community process. They also vividly remember all the administrators. They have supported Job throughout his school years. The family lives in a middle class neighborhood in a suburb of Atlanta.

This section will outline year-by-year the data in the documents and the parents' comments. Job has little specific memory until third grade. His comments will enter at that point. In the middle school years some of the reports are missing. In sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, notes from some SST meetings were missing from the file. The school system had no explanation for the missing documents.



In resource classrooms students are typically not doing the same work as students in the regular classroom. Many times these students receive little or no homework. It is hard to equate an A or any grade in the resource classroom to a grade in the regular classroom. Job did not enter resource for Reading until third grade.

The school community of the reading resource student needs to have goals that include growth for placement, academic, behavioral, and social dimensions. Their must be proof that the community functioned in a democratic manner. The Community to Dewey (1916) is fulfilling individual goals while helping others reach theirs. Democracy evolves from this concept of community. Society continues to exist by communication and in communication. People live in a community due to the things they have in common; and communication enables them to possess things in common. Dewey (1916) claims that in order to form a community people must have goals, beliefs, knowledge, and some sort of common understanding. The communication that breeds a community evolves from shared expectations and requires similar intellectual and emotional dispositions. The sharing and goal attainment are the foundations of not just a community but a democratic community. The community was analyzed on a year-by-year basis in order to examine how well it functioned at various points. The school judges student growth in literacy primarily through grades. The grades determine whether students succeed or fail. They also use testing results for diagnostic and placement issues. If a student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a Specific Learning Disability, then he will be judged by grades and completion of IEP goals and objectives that are outlined once a year at the annual IEP meeting. In addition, the democratic community should

have all participants working together to accomplish goals that are inclusive and appropriate.

### *Kindergarten*

#### *Collaboration Facilitates a Good Start*

Job performed fairly well during Kindergarten from an academic evaluation standpoint. According to his teacher, he was progressing nicely except in the areas of letter/sound recognition. His nine-week grade report showed evidence of progress. The grading scale utilized awarded a C for consistently mastering the skill, an S for sometimes mastering the skill and N for needs improvement. Most of his grades were C's with a few S's and one N. His N was given in the first nine weeks for lack of letter/sound connection. Yet he received a C in the fourth nine weeks. On his final kindergarten assessment he identified his colors, numbers, shapes and letters. He failed to identify only the O and I sound. The teacher mentioned on grade reports that Job was having some difficulty staying on-task and completing work in a timely manner. He also had a small problem controlling his talking. Furthermore, Job was placed with a speech pathologist for articulation impairment.

Speech problems inhibit interaction with his peers some of the time, according to the notes in his file. His speech problem interfered with classroom performance 36% to 66% of the time. A conversational speech sample indicated that further assessment was necessary. The assessment of phonological processes indicated the presence of the following: liquid deficiencies, consonance sequences and gliding. Language skills were found to be within normal limits based on results from the Preschool Language Scale-3. Job's overall performance in kindergarten indicated that he had met most of the

benchmarks required to move on to grade one. The main concerns originated around his IEP for speech and his teacher's observation that early in his kindergarten year he was having trouble making letter/sound connections.

Even though kindergarten was a long time ago, Job's parents seem to recall it like their son attended just a few months ago. Many times parents can remember many specific items from a child's upbringing. The parents have saved all kinds of items from Job's school career (see Figure 1). In Job's case, his parents seem to have a very fluent memory. They were interviewed together and most of their comments indicated very similar type memories.



Figure 1: Awards from Kindergarten

The parents did have fewer comments about the early years because they felt everyone in the school community was doing their best at that time. The diagnosis of the learning disability did not happen until third grade so most of the comments about his educational progress seemed to start then. However, they did mention that at an early age they knew he was having trouble with word recognition and completing work. He also seemed to be distracted in the classroom. They did not observe this type of behavior, but in the conferences the teachers would mention that he was having trouble completing work and staying on task all of the time. These troubles were not an every day experience, but for the most part he did exhibit more trouble staying on task than the average student. They worked with him at home every night, practicing sounds, reading to him, and having him attempt to memorize and read picture books to them. They did notice that he was having a hard time with basic letter sounds.

They were not overly concerned. Job was their first child, and they did not have any experience working with the school system or teachers. In the early years, they took as gospel truth what the teachers were telling them. They played a very supportive role for the teachers, administrators, and for Job.

The community in Kindergarten included the parents, Job, the classroom teacher, and the Speech pathologist. The school community functioned well; Job's teacher and parents collaborated continuously throughout the year.

### *First grade*

#### *Democratic Community Functions Well*

Job's grades for first grade were based on a different grading scale. S plus equals 'surpasses standards'. S equals 'satisfactory'; N equals 'needs improvement'; U equals

‘unsatisfactory’ (see Figure 2). The county system utilized benchmarks for reading levels for first grade students. These benchmarks essentially provided the grade for the student in the nine weeks that he was assessed. For example, at the end of the first nine weeks of first grade, in order to receive an S a student would have to be at a minimal reading level of four. The particular assessment used was the Rigby Benchmark series (a reading program commonly used by teachers to determine reading levels); the reading level four would provide an S. A reading level of two would provide an N and below that, the student would receive a grade of U. If they were at a reading level of six, they would receive a grade of S plus. Students would be expected in first grade to advance four reading levels every nine weeks. At the end of first grade a student would need to be performing at a level 16 in order to be at grade level for Reading. Job ended first grade with a reading level of 14. For the first nine weeks, achievement in effort grades were S’s for all subjects. During the second nine weeks, Job received an N for reading and writing, which indicated that he was slightly below grade level at that point. He also received an N in the third nine weeks for reading and writing and in the fourth nine weeks for reading. All of his other grades were at least an S. He did receive S plus’s in Social Science, and Science in two of the four grading periods. Job’s grades for first grade were very consistent in most of his classes. His struggles were concentrated specifically in reading, writing, and spelling words. Job surpassed standards in Math, Social Studies, and Science. Job competed well in most of his classes for first grade. Based on his grades, Job appeared to have had a solid first grade year. There was no reason for alarm at the end of the school year; there was no reason to believe Job had a reading disability.

PROGRESS REPORT GRADE 1				
Reporting Scale				
S+ = Surpasses Standards S = Satisfactory N = Needs Improvement U = Unsatisfactory				
Reporting scale reflects student achievement of the AKS				
SUBJECTS	First Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort	Second Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort	Third Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort	Fourth Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort
LANGUAGE ARTS				
Reading	S/S	N/S	N/S	N/S
Writing-Usage & Mechanics	S/S	N/N	N/S	S/S
Spelling	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	S/S	S/S
MATH	S/S	S/S	S/S	S/S
SOCIAL STUDIES	S/S	S+/S	S/S	S/S
SCIENCE	S/S	S+/S	S+/S	S/S
HEALTH	S	S	S	S
PENMANSHIP	S	S	S	S
COMMENTS				
First:	[Redacted]			
Second:	[Redacted]			
Third:	[Redacted]			
Fourth:	[Redacted]			
<i>Job is off to a great start in social studies and science. His continued focus should be on word recognition. Job continues to make progress in math S/S &amp; science. Reading and writing skills are areas of focus. Job is doing well in Spelling Math &amp; Extension. Job will continue to work on reading &amp; writing strategies. Job has learned a lot in first grade. Have a wonderful summer, and best wishes in 2nd grade.</i>				

  

Help your child reach his/her potential—keep your child in school!				
ATTENDANCE RECORD	1	2	3	4
Days Absent	1	1	0	0
Days Tardy	1	1	0	0
SPECIAL AREAS				
MUSIC	S	S	S	S
ART	S	S	S	S
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	S	S	S	S
Spanish	S	S	S	S
Math	S	S	S	S
	1	2	3	4
CONDUCT	S	S	S	S
√ Indicates Need to Improve				
Shows self-control				
Exhibits a positive attitude				
Controls talking				
Shows good manners				
Works and plays well in a group				
Respects others				
	1	2	3	4
WORK HABITS	S	S	S	S
√ Indicates Need to Improve				
Actively participates in class				
Works independently/stays on task		✓	✓	
Returns materials sent home				
Listens and follows directions				
Completes assignments on time				
Completes homework				
Accepts responsibility for materials and clean-up				
Uses time wisely				
Grade Level	2			
Year	2000-2001			

Figure 2: First grade report card

During his first nine weeks, Job's teacher comments that 'he is off to a great start in social studies and science.' "His continued focus should be on word recognition."

During the second nine weeks, his teacher says that "Job continues to make progress in math and science; reading and writing still need to be areas of focus." In the third nine weeks, the comments are that "Job is doing well in his spelling and math." In the fourth nine weeks, the teacher states that "Job has learned a lot in first grade, have a wonderful summer and best wishes in second grade." Job missed two days of class in first grade.

His conduct was very good for the entire first grade year. The only check mark for the entire year focused on working independently and staying on task. Job was on an

academic contract for part of his first grade year. The academic contract (for this school district) is an agreement between teacher, student, and parent that outlines specific strategies for improvement (see Figure 3). The academic contract listed below was actually a second grade contract; it is used here to illustrate an example of an academic contract. His classroom teacher placed him in small group reading and used several interventions to address his needs. Job sat close to his teacher. He received supplemental support with flashcards and extra reading material to take home. He had peer support from a classroom helper and a fifth grader. He received immediate feedback and positive reinforcement. The teacher provided instructions for work at home. She advised the parents to take the supplemental materials and provide positive support for Job at home. She praised him continuously for his accomplishments. She downplayed the negative side. She instead chose to encourage him and to provide ways for him to make up the ground. He left first grade close to grade level.

Stock #90585

**ACADEMIC CONTRACT**

School:                      Teacher:                      Student:                      Level: 2

Areas of Academic Knowledge and Skills needing improvement:

- 1) Reading-<sup>a</sup>phonics and word identification  
<sup>b</sup>he recognize when reading isn't making sense  
<sup>c</sup>overread and read on to understand
- 2) Writing- write sentences relating to a topic  
<sup>a</sup>use question marks, periods, exclamation points, app. p. 121
- 3) Mechanics-<sup>a</sup>capitalization

INTERVENTIONS TO BE USED TO ADDRESS NEEDS	FINAL RESULTS OF INTERVENTIONS
School- EIP instruction - SST - Small group instruction - Book buddies - Provide opportunities to display leadership - encourage positive self-talk - supplemental materials for remediation Parent- Communicate using agenda book - Continue reading with student, having student read to sister - Review DOL nightly Student- Complete assignments to best of ability - Ask for help - Complete agenda book Recommendations: Promotion/Retention Conference to be held May, 2001.	To be completed by April 27, 2001

Parent's Signature:                      Student's Signature (optional):                     

Teacher's Signature:                      Administrator's Signature:                     

Blue -- Permanent Record Copy      White -- Administrative Copy      Pink -- Parent Copy

Figure 3: Academic Contract with interventions listed

In addition, the results from the Cognitive Abilities Test (Lohman, 2005) that he took in February of his first grade year indicated that he was in the average range for verbal, quantitative and non-verbal. The Cognitive Abilities Test (COGAT) is a mental abilities test that is given to kids typically in grades one through eight (see Figure 4). There are three sub-tests. The verbal sub-test measures a student's overall understanding of language, concepts and relationships. These verbal scores are significantly correlated with school success (Lohman, 2005). The quantitative sub-test requires that students



make comparisons related to relative size, positions, quantity, shape and time. Like the verbal sub-test, this sub-test is a good predictor of academic success particularly in the area of mathematics. The non-verbal sub-test does not involve words or numbers. Rather, analogies and problems are presented which involve shapes, geometric concepts and non-verbal figures. Students must compare or categorize shapes or figures according to the various criteria. The relationship between this battery of tests and academic success is lower on this test than on the other two sections. This section, particularly in grades three and five is significantly correlated with success in secondary and higher level mathematics, physical science and specialized fields such as architecture and engineering.

Both parents heaped praise on the first grade teacher. Faith commented how easy she was to work with, how well she communicated with them and how much Job loved being around her. They felt the communication was present throughout the first grade year. She provided extra materials and lots of encouragement. According to Faith, the teacher was always telling her how well her son was doing in a variety of areas. When it came time to critique some of his weak areas, she was also very optimistic about his progress and future. She did make them aware that he was having trouble with traditional letter/sound connections, but she did not feel that this was something that was going to stop him from accomplishing his goals. She told them to read with him every night. She asked them to take flashcards and to work with Job on words in isolation. She also recommended that sometimes they would work on isolated word study within the passage as he was reading. Other times they would let him develop his context skills and would not interrupt. Thomas was pleased with the overall communication skills of the teacher.

She mentioned to him that Job was a typical boy. He did not keep his attention on academics all day every day. However, she felt that his reasoning skills were very good and once he learned how to read all the words, he would be an outstanding student. Again, the parents have no other child to compare to Job. Job was their first child. They felt confident at the end of first grade that they knew what Job's strengths and weaknesses were. They were looking forward to second grade.

**Cognitive Abilities Test Results**

On the attached sheet, you will find your child's test results from the Cognitive Abilities Test. This test is a mental abilities or aptitude test which attempts to measure how students think and reason through different problems. Problems on the test do not ask for facts or content related questions. They do include analogies, classification of objects, completion of sentence/equation that requires the students to use familiar content in a new way. Aptitude tests can be predictors of future academic success, although they are only one of many indicators.

There are three subtests:

- (1) The Verbal subtest measures a child's overall understanding of language, concepts and relationships. These Verbal scores are significantly correlated with school success.
- (2) The Quantitative subtest requires that students make comparisons related to relative size, positions, quantity, shape and time. Like the Verbal subtest, this subtest is a good predictor of academic success, particularly in the area of mathematics.
- (3) The Nonverbal subtest does not involve words or numbers. Instead, analogies and problems are presented which involve shapes, geometric concepts and nonverbal figures. Students must compare or categorize shapes or figures according to various criteria. The relationship between this battery and academic success is lower on this test than on the other two sections. This section, particularly in grades 3 and 5, is significantly correlated with success in secondary and higher levels of mathematics, physical science, and specialized fields such as architecture and engineering.

These scores have been reported to you with Stanines, which is a scale with a range from 1 to 9 with the mean being 5. The students who have one or more scores of 9 and a second score of 8 are screened for the gifted program. You will be sent gifted program information if your child will be screened by the gifted program teachers.

GOOD SCHOOLS MAKE BETTER COMMUNITIES

Figure 4: A sample COGAT form from Job's file.

The democratic school community functioned well in First Grade. The parents and teachers saw that Job was struggling with Word Recognition and Spelling. Job was trying hard with tremendous support from his parents and with appropriate help from his teacher. The Academic Contract demonstrated the collaborative effort needed from all members of the community. It also outlined potential academic issues that had surfaced. Job's grades and teacher comments demonstrated that he would succeed despite the

concerns raised. The parents and teachers were partners in the process. Job had to learn how to function within a school setting.

### *Second Grade*

#### *Democratic Community Working: Job Starts to Struggle*

Job left first grade close to grade level. In second grade, his first nine-week grade report suggests that he was doing well. He received traditional letter grades this year as opposed to last year—A, B, C, D; below 70 would be a U. He received a C in Language Arts for Reading and S plus for effort. In Writing and Grammar, he received a B with an S plus for effort and in Spelling, he received an A with an S plus for effort. His other grades were a B in Math, an A in Social Studies, an A in Science and a ‘satisfactory’ in Health. The teacher comments, “Job’s confidence in reading and his ability to get work completed has shown great progress.” “Job continues to make good progress with his grades in the second nine weeks.” However, his C in Reading turns to a D in the second nine weeks. His Writing grade stays a B and his Spelling grade stays an A. His teacher comments turn more negative. She says that “reading continues to be the area of concern.” This is the first mention in a grade report (see Figure 5) that he is having trouble. She also says that Job has a “positive attitude and does well in small group situations.” There are no behavioral checkmarks for the entire year. Most of his effort grades are S pluses. He continues to do well in his other subjects - a B in Math, an A in Social Studies, and an A in Science.

At the beginning of the third nine weeks, Job’s teacher calls a conference. She develops an academic contract. The school decided to provide interventions for Job. He was going to be placed in a program called Early Intervention Plan (EIP). This is a state

of Georgia program (Georgia Department of Education, 2007) that pulls children that are struggling in the regular classroom out of the classroom. This move can be considered as a step in between regular classroom and resource classroom. Students are placed into small groups and are taught by a reading specialist. The qualifications of the reading specialist vary from school to school. Many of the reading specialists have little formal educational background in reading education. They do not have degrees in reading education or literacy instruction. Most of them are elementary school teachers who have gone to a workshop. Other interventions will include small group instruction, book buddies, positive self-taught and supplemental materials. The parent is advised to communicate using the agenda book (a daily planner that is given to students that should contain all assignments and messages between parents and teacher), to continue reading with student, have student read to sister, and review daily oral language nightly. The student is advised to complete all assignments to the best of his ability, ask for help, and fill out the agenda book. The second grade teacher recommended that a promotion retention conference be held in May of his second grade year. Job had not failed any course the entire year. Within the language arts area the only grades below C are the second and nine weeks reading grade of D.

At the end of second grade, a Student Support Team (SST) meeting was called. In Georgia, they are called SST meetings. The SST meeting is designed for the teachers, administrators, school psychologist, other school personnel, and parents to collaborate in order to find solutions for the student. Present at the meeting are the assistant principal, school psychologist, and classroom teacher, EIP teacher, school counselor, Job's parents and the school nurse. They decided to administer a complete psychological (a battery of

tests that include vision, hearing, intelligence testing, and achievement testing) to Job early in his third grade year. The teachers were concerned that he was having trouble processing information. They decided to have the school psychologist administer the psychological component (intelligence testing) and the Special Education department at his elementary school would administer the achievement component. It was also decided that there would be a series of observations. These observations were held before the testing. The assistant principals observed Job on two occasions and reported that he had trouble processing verbal information for meaning.

<b>OLS Academic Reporting Scale</b> A = 90 and above Excellent Progress B = 80-89 Above Average Progress C = 74-79 Average Progress D = 70-73 Below Average Progress U = Below 70 Unsatisfactory Progress <b>Special Areas, Penmanship, Health, Conduct, Effort, and Work Habits Reporting Scale</b> S+ = Surpasses Standards S = Satisfactory N = Needs Improvement U = Unsatisfactory Reporting scale reflects student achievement of the AKS																			
<b>SUBJECTS</b>	First Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort	Second Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort	Third Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort	Fourth Nine Weeks Achievement/Effort															
LANGUAGE ARTS																			
Reading	C/S+	D/S	D/S	D/S															
Writing-Grammar, Usage & Mechanics	B/S	B/S+	C/S	C/S															
Spelling	A/S+	A/S+	A/S+	A/S															
MATH	B/S	B/S	B/S	B/S															
SOCIAL STUDIES	A/S	A/S	B/S	A/S															
SCIENCE	B/S	A/S	A/S	A/S															
HEALTH	S	S	S	S															
PENMANSHIP	N	N	N	N															
<b>COMMENTS:</b>																			
First: Rhett's confidence in reading and his ability to get work completed has shown great progress.																			
Second: Reading continues to be the area of concern.																			
Third: [redacted] has a positive attitude and does well in small group situations.																			
Fourth: Rhett has had difficulty staying on task recently. Gains in reading are evident, but he continues to need reinforcement.																			
I have enjoyed teaching Rhett! Have a wonderful summer!																			
<b>Help your child reach his/her potential—keep your child in school!</b> <b>ATTENDANCE RECORD</b> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>1</th> <th>2</th> <th>3</th> <th>4</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Days Absent</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Days Tardy</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>						1	2	3	4	Days Absent	0	0	2	1	Days Tardy	0	1	1	0
	1	2	3	4															
Days Absent	0	0	2	1															
Days Tardy	0	1	1	0															
<b>SPECIAL AREAS</b>																			
MUSIC	S	S	S	S															
ART	S	S	S	S															
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	S	S	S	S															
Math Enrichment	S	S	S	S															
<b>CONDUCT</b>																			
√ Indicates Need to Improve																			
Shows self-control																			
Exhibits a positive attitude																			
Controls talking																			
Shows good manners																			
Works and plays well in a group																			
Respects others																			
<b>WORK HABITS</b>																			
√ Indicates Need to Improve																			
Actively participates in class																			
Works independently/stays on task				✓															
Returns materials sent home																			
Listens and follows directions																			
Completes assignments on time				✓															
Completes homework																			
Assumes responsibility for materials and clean-up																			
Uses time wisely																			
Grade Level	2		Year 00-01																

Figure 5: Second Grade report card

Faith and Thomas were becoming increasingly more concerned about his progress. They kept hearing from school personnel that there was something wrong. They were willing to do anything to help. They trusted the committee to be knowledgeable and to look out for the best interest of Job. They went to every meeting. They participated in all conferences and they continued to work with Job on a nightly basis. The school community agreed to have Job tested at the end of the school year. Despite the fact that he did not fail any of his classes, they had an uneasy feeling going into third grade.

The community functioned fairly well in Second Grade. The community expanded to include assistant principals, a school psychologist, a Special Education administrator, a school nurse, and a counselor. The SST meetings were designed to involve other school personnel to collaborate in order to find solutions to Job's reading struggles. The teacher felt that something was wrong and she involved others in the discussion. The school offered the Early Intervention Plan (IEP) to help solve his reading issues. An academic contract was used to further monitor Job's progress. The parents cooperated by working with Job at home on a nightly basis. The community decided to test Job at the end of the year. This decision to test seemed reasonable considering the interventions that had already been tried. However, the school personnel did not encourage the parents to seek an outside tutor; they did not give the parents the qualifications of the reading specialist who worked to help him in the EIP. In addition, two administrators observed Job in the classroom; they claimed that he had a processing disability, yet they were not qualified to diagnose such a problem. They observed him twice, and they used anecdotal evidence to substantiate their claims. School psychologists

should diagnose processing difficulties; the administrators should not have used two observations to convince the parents that their son had a processing issue. Overall, the inappropriate observations did not negatively affect Job, since there was ample evidence to recommend him for testing. The school members did not explain the EIP program to the parents; they did not provide the teacher's qualifications to be a reading specialist. The school had no data to prove that EIP worked for previous students.

### *Third Grade*

#### *Community Shattered: "He Did Not Want to Go"*

In Third Grade the discussion centered on processing issues. He has not been formally assessed with any processing difficulties. Job had completed second grade with many A's and B's, yet he went to summer worried. The psychologists administered a battery of tests on August 29, 2001. The psychologist stated that Job was referred for psychological assessment resulting from concern pertaining to his academic performance. School personnel were concerned that Job was having trouble retaining verbally based information and expressive language content. Academically his reading, spelling and written expression skills were behind that which would be expected for a child of his age and grade. Specifically, Job was said to have trouble recalling and locating information in stories, drawing conclusions and inferences and generalizing information. In written expression, he made letter and whole word reversals and his writing samples appeared to be elementary in nature. Job received services under the eligibility of speech/language impaired for the correction of articulation and phonological disorders when he was a kindergarten student. He was recently dismissed from the program when his articulation errors were corrected.

Job's verbal skill IQ, performance scale IQ, and full scale IQ are in the average range. The psychologist notes that a 14-point difference between Job's verbal and performance scale IQ was not statistically significant. In late 2004 Congress enacted legislation that updated requirements for diagnosis of Specific Learning Disabilities under the Individual with Disabilities Act that was finally implemented in full in 2006 (US Department of Education, 2006). The new legislation replaced the old guidelines that were in place when Job was diagnosed. The old requirements mandated a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement. The new requirements must permit for a process based on the child's response to a scientifically based intervention and allow the use of alternative procedures for determining a disability. However, Job's psychologist believed that this was not an accurate evaluation of his capabilities. She says, "There is much unevenness among the development of this young man's cognitive skills." The recently completed school testing showed that current achievement scores indicate that in the areas of basic reading and reading comprehension, Job's standard scores were 88 and 82 on the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test. On the Kaufman Test of Educational Assessment Job's reading decoding scores were 88 and his reading comprehension was 79. Average standard scores range from 90-110. The school suggested that Job's reading performance indicated that he was a disphonetic reader with difficulty recognizing words in a manner where automaticity is very important. His responses were slower and he made frequent errors. Typically, learning disabilities are diagnosed when there is a severe discrepancy between IQ and current achievement in the classroom. Job did not demonstrate this statistical difference. However, the psychologist



used other information; she also said that she retested him in some areas. She concluded that Job had a specific learning disability. She said:

Initial assessment found Job to be a youngster of average mental ability who is not achieving commensurate with his intellectual ability and his understanding of and ability to apply phonemic awareness skills, single word reading, and comprehension skill. Assessment data revealed the presence of psycholinguistic deficits in the areas of spoken language involving semantics, the ability to recognize the meanings of words and use words proficiently and accurately in speech syntax, the patterns of sentence formation and phonology, the ability to sequence sounds within words. Deficits were also noted in the areas of written language involving comprehension, word identification, spelling and sound/symbol processing. These processing deficits appear to be taking a toll on Job's learning and academic productivity. In learning situations, he has trouble formulating verbal responses, grasping cause/effect or the main idea of material, understanding the multiple meanings of words then following oral directions. While speaking, Job appears to have difficulty developing, elaborating and organizing his thoughts.

The committee recommended that Job be placed in a Special Education resource classroom for language arts, namely for reading and writing. In third grade, he was pulled out of the regular classroom to go to see his resource teacher.

The notes for third grade indicate that his teachers think a quite structured environment will best enable Job to compete at the highest level possible. There is no evidence to suggest how many students will be in the classroom with Job or what their

particular disabilities will be. There is no conversation on whether there will be behavioral disordered students within that classroom. There are no notes on whether the resource teacher had specific training in reading education. There is also only the label of Specific Learning Disability. This is the label schools give to students and it covers a broad range of learning disabilities. Job's disability is a reading disability. As noted earlier in the research, 80% of the kids that are in resource classrooms with a Specific Learning Disability suffer from a reading disability. The school offered no proof in the documents that dealt with their desire to eventually bring Job back into the regular classroom for language arts and reading. All of the notes were notes that indicated that he needed to be in resource and there was no indication that there would be some bridge built for him to come back into the regular classroom at any point. His grades for third grade were as follows: In his first year in reading resource classroom, he made a C, B, B and C for the four nine-week periods. There was an asterisk on the report card that indicates that his grade was modified due to his IEP. Within his IEP, there were certain goals and objectives for the kid to meet. Many of these goals were just minimal type objectives. For example, one of his goals for third grade was just to identify the first 100 words on the Sittin Word List (a word list that is used by many school systems). One of his other goals was to write a paragraph. Most of the goals were to be met at 80% accuracy. The teachers stated over and over in meeting reports and IEP's that he would not be successful unless he received this intervention. His spelling grades for the year have an N/A for not applicable. Spelling was said to have been one of his biggest problems. He received grades in spelling for kindergarten, first and second grade.

Spelling was listed on his report card for third grade but there are no grades written for the first nine weeks.

In writing and grammar usage and mechanics, he received a modified C for all four semesters. In social studies he received a B in the first nine weeks, a B in the second nine weeks, an A in the third nine weeks and his first U in the fourth nine weeks. In science he received a B in the first nine weeks, a C in the second nine weeks, a D in the third nine weeks and a D in the fourth nine weeks. Notes in teacher comments on the grade reports indicated that Job was having trouble focusing in class, working independently and staying on task, listening and following directions, and completing assignments on time. He also had checks for completing homework, accepting responsibility for materials, and using time wisely (see Figure 6). In grades kindergarten, first, and second grade, Job received only an occasional check. In grade three, 17 checks are listed on his report cards, the majority of them in the third and fourth nine weeks. After placement into the resource-reading classroom, Job's grades steadily went downhill. His checkmarks for self-control and his work habits declined as well. In addition, he missed five days in his third and fourth nine weeks.

The state of Georgia has a state mandated test that is given each spring. It is called the CRCT, the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test for the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Today, in third grade, students who do not score a minimum level can actually be retained. In third grade, after being in resource for one year, Job's scores for reading did not meet the state standards. His scores were 34 points lower than the minimum of 300 needed to pass. He did not reach 300 in any of the four categories listed: reading for vocabulary improvement, reading for locating and

recalling information, reading for meaning, and reading for critical analysis. He was 71 points below the state median score on the reading test for third grade in the state of Georgia.

Grades 2-5, Academic Reporting Scale (Ach = Achievement/Eff=Effort)		Grade 1, Special Areas, Penmanship, Health Conduct, Effort, and Work Habits Reporting Scale		Attendance Reporting Period							
				1	2	3	4	Total			
A = 90 & above	Excellent	NA = Not Applicable		Days Absent	3	0	3	2	8		
B = 80 - 89	Above Average	S+ = Surpasses Standards		Days Tardy	4	2	0	1	7		
C = 74 - 79	Average	S = Satisfactory		Days Enrolled	44	44	44	48	180		
D = 70 - 73	Below Average	N = Needs Improvement		Days Present	41	44	41	46	172		
U = Below 70	Unsatisfactory	U = Unsatisfactory									
<b>Subjects</b>											
Reporting Period		1	2	3	4	Reporting Period		1	2	3	4
Language Arts - Reading	Ach	C*	B*	B	C*	Penmanship	Ach	N	N	N	N
	Eff	S		S			Eff				
- Spelling	Ach	NA*	B*	B*	B*	Music	Ach	NA	S	NA	S
	Eff			S			Eff				
- Wrtg/Gram/Usg/Mech	Ach	C*	C*	C*	C*	Art	Ach	S	NA	S	NA
	Eff	S		S			Eff				
Mathematics	Ach	B	B	B	C	Physical Education	Ach	S+	S+	S	S+
	Eff	S+	S+	S+	S+		Eff				
Social Studies	Ach	B	B	A	U	Computer Lab	Ach				
	Eff	S	S+	S+	N		Eff				
Science	Ach	B	C	D	D	Math Special	Ach	S+	S	S	S
	Eff	S	S	N	N		Eff				
Health	Ach	S+	S+	NA	NA	Study Skills	Ach				
	Eff		S+				Eff				
<b>Work Habits</b>											
**CONDUCT**(X=NEEDS TO IMPROVE)		S+	S+	S	S+	**WORK HABITS**(X=NEEDS TO IMPROV		N	N	U	U
--Shows self-control				X		--Actively participates in class					
--Exhibits a positive attitude						--Works independently and stay on task		X	X	X	X
--Controls talking						--Returns materials sent home					
--Shows good manners						--Listens and follows directions				X	X
--Works and plays well in a group						--Completes assignments on time		X	X	X	X
--Respects others						--Completes homework					X
--						--Accepts responsibility for materials				X	
--						--Uses time wisely		X	X	X	X
--											
<p>If you have any questions about the report card, please contact your child's teacher.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Teacher Comments</b></p> <p>**** Reporting scale reflects - student achievement of Academic Knowledge and Skills ****</p>											

Figure 6: Third Grade report card

Job's Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT) was administered in the fall of his third grade year. The OLSAT (Lohman, 2005) measures verbal, quantitative, and spatial reasoning ability. His third grade scores indicated that he was in the average range across the board. A Stanford Achievement Test (a norm referenced achievement test) was also administered. The test company had problems scoring the test and said the tests were not valid—those words were stamped across the data in Job's file. By the end of the third grade, the teacher's comments were all very negative toward Job. Besides the marks on the report card, the teacher had notes in the file that alleged that Job was not cooperating, not staying on task, not an enthusiastic learner, did not want to do well, and a variety of other negative comments. There are no positive comments noted at the end of third grade. In each of the first three years of school—kindergarten, first grade and second grade—the teachers raved about Job's enthusiasm for learning. They were very complimentary of his desire to learn. By the end of third grade, Job was definitely struggling in the eyes of the school system.

He also carried the label of Specific Learning Disability; it is the label that is carried nationwide for students that meet the criteria. In most cases, there is a discrepancy between verbal/non-verbal or a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement (US Department of Education, 2006). In Job's situation the psychologist decided that there needed to be some retesting done and she decided that she would infer that Job had a specific learning disability because of some deficits on the auditory side and with expressive language. It should be noted that the school community was in agreement that Job was a struggling reader. However, the only consensus in the file came in the areas of letter/sound connections, spelling, and writing.

Job's parents were very concerned by the end of third grade. The original referral for testing was sent by the counselor. Though they had a meeting in May at the end of the second grade year, the counselor called at the beginning of third grade and wanted him tested immediately. His third grade teacher felt that he had an attention deficit disorder as well as a processing disorder. The mother was very upset by the end of third grade. Her son has spent an entire year in the resource classroom and Faith felt that he was going backwards. She was very frustrated and so was the dad. But no matter how much they worked with their son, it did not seem to be working. Job's self-esteem had gone straight down the hill. He did not want to go to school anymore. He was very upset. The parents decided that they needed to go outside the school to receive another opinion on Job's academic placement. They were not sure that the resource classroom that the school painted as being a place for him to thrive was not the source of his problems. They recognized that their sons' self-esteem was falling rapidly.

Faith and Thomas had both grown up in small towns. Faith was very focused on school. She loved school and she was very successful as a student. Her goal was make an A in every class. She was also a cheerleader. She continued that academic excellence into college and nursing school after that. Thomas was a very athletic individual. He excelled in all sports. He was a very good football player. Both Thomas and Faith had great self-esteem. It originated from their school community. Their parents were very supportive. Their teachers were supportive. The administrators were supportive and they felt totally at ease in their surroundings. They were finding it hard to believe that their son was struggling so much and they did not know what to do.

Pragmatism, as shaped by John Dewey (1927) offers opportunities to use observations and inquiry in real world settings in order to understand and solve problems. The teachers believed that they needed collaboration to aid Job. Glassman (2001) says that Dewey believes that the most important outcome for society is the ability of the individual to question through experience. Glassman describes the importance of everyday activities and social context and how they factor into the educational process. The teachers described Job's strengths and weaknesses to the SST committees. There was no rush to judgment. At the end of second grade, the entire school community believed that Job was a struggling reader. A referral for testing seemed appropriate. Fine (1991) claims many times that schools do not exhaust all avenues of intervention before a special education referral. Clearly, the teachers were in no hurry to place Job in Special Education. They had acted in an appropriate manner.

However, the actions of two administrators were brought into question at the end of second grade. Two administrators claimed that Job had a processing difficulty based on their observations. They claimed it dealt with processing information that pertained to making meaning out of words. They also said that he struggled to store information. Psychologists are qualified to determine learning disabilities, not administrators. Dewey (1916) maintains that conflict is an inevitable experience. In the field of literacy and reading education individuals and groups grow and solve real problems that eliminate conflict. It takes smart, practical thinking to continuously achieve these goals. The smart, practical thinking that was prevalent until the end of second grade eroded in third grade and the democratic community went away as well. When the democratic community disintegrated, Job's self-esteem also went away. The school psychologist concluded that

Job had a Specific Learning Disability that included: semantic, the ability to recognize the meanings of words and use words proficiently in speech; syntax, the patterns of sentence formation; and phonology, the ability to sequence sounds within words. The semantic diagnosis was disputed by the outside psychologist who said that Job had dyslexia. The school psychologist failed in many ways. She did not gather background information from the parents and she did not explain the tests that she administered. Moreover, she did not explain why she retested in some areas but not in others. Her conclusions were not supported by any comments from the previous teachers or subsequent teachers except in the areas of phonological processing.

The community was splintered at the end of Third Grade. The school urged the parents to trust them, but the parents felt they needed another opinion. The decision to seek outside help was logical; the parents watched Job's lack of progress in Third Grade and decided to act. Job's self-esteem eroded in Third Grade; his self-esteem was very good during the first three years of school. The decision of the psychologist not to interview the parents or explain the testing was evidence that she did not value the parents as equal sharers in the process. The assistant principal should have asked the school psychologist to explain the different tests that were administered. The parents did receive a report, but this report was something that the parents said they did not understand. Job could have been given a chance to stay in the regular classroom with modifications that the classroom teacher implemented. He was performing well in many areas. The school personnel had gained control of Job's educational direction. Job should have been placed in regular education with aids. The Georgia Department of Education (2008) lists clear guidelines for placement. In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, each administrator must



ensure that the placement decision is made by a group of persons, including the parents, and other persons knowledgeable about the child—and the meaning of the evaluation data and placement options must be clear. In addition, special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular class environment shall occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Job was passing his classes before he was placed in resource.

#### *Fourth Grade*

##### *Community Splintered: Teachers Great*

At the beginning of the fourth grade year, the parents decided to have their son tested by an outside licensed psychologist. The psychologist stated that the parents referred their son due to academic difficulties in the areas of reading, spelling and writing. The goals of the evaluation were as follows: determine Job's overall level of intellectual and academic functioning; evaluate the areas of needed intervention; recognize individual strength which may be used in academic planning; determine the most appropriate educational planning to best meet his needs. In addition to the IQ test and the achievement test, the psychologist decided to administer subtests in short term memory and long term retrieval. The psychologist also administered the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement, the Language Function, Phonemic Awareness and Memory, Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function, Dyslexia Screening Inventory and Attention Deficit Disorder Test.

The test results and interpretation are as follows: Job was seen for psychological testing and the psychologist and parents felt that the results were fairly accurate because

of his good focus during the testing. The psychologist felt that Job was able to concentrate and give his best effort.

She said: His attention was very good and he was trying very hard. Job was administered the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Ability & Academic Achievement III Edition. Together these instruments provided a comprehensive set of individually administered norm reference test for measuring intellectual abilities and academic achievement. The results of the present evaluation indicated that Job met Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Order IV Edition criteria for the following: a reading disorder and a written expression disorder. Job demonstrated strong logical problem solving and verbal abilities that should be utilized to assist with his challenges. The best estimate of his cognitive functioning was represented by his thinking ability, which was in the well above average range.

This key point is in contrast to the school's contentions that Job was having trouble applying information and retaining information. The psychologist felt that Job's early speech problems might have contributed to his current reading problems. She stated:

His overall IQ is within the average range. However, he still demonstrated a significant discrepancy between his reading and writing achievement scores and his intellectual ability. Job is likely dyslexic. Dyslexia is different from a general reading disability because it's actually more of a language disorder. Specifically dyslexia can be thought of as a phonological processing deficit disorder. Job demonstrated very clear signs of this type of disorder with his letter/sound

association difficulties and his challenges in storing and retrieving phonological information from his memory. Phonemic awareness refers to a student's understanding of and access to the sound structure of a language. Storage of phonological information during reading involves creating a sound based representation of written words and working memory. Job seems to have some deficits in the storage of phonological information, which results in faulty representations in memory. This then leads to inaccurate applications of sound rules during reading tasks. In addition, writing may have become one of the more difficult tasks for Job. Since he has a deficit in letter/sound associations, he is reluctant to choose words which he might misspell. His lack of self-esteem may have contributed to his shut down at the end of third grade.

It is recommended that he receive extensive practice in remedial spelling skills at home or with a tutor. Job's difficulties will most likely require intervention by individuals specifically trained in methods of teaching students with reading disabilities. Many successful methods to remediate phonologically based reading disorders are available. He will most likely continue to need supports within the regular classroom as well as individual instruction in his areas of difficulty. While these difficulties are approached for remediation, it is also important to take into account Job's strong non-verbal processing abilities, creativity, logic and unique approach to the world. He is capable of taking part in educational planning; as he gets older he will need to be an integral part of his goal setting. Job also has creative and logic abilities that will contribute to many careers and endeavors. It is crucial that Job be taught to understand the difference

between a learning disability and not being smart. Job's parents may want to consider a tutoring program at one of the specialized schools in Georgia designed for dyslexia.

The psychologist listed several of the schools that offered this type of tutoring. The psychologist also recommended several reading interventions that would benefit Job. Here were some of the recommendations: teaching meta-cognitive strategies, direct instruction in language analysis and alpha beta code, techniques to make phonemics more concrete, the use of multi-sensory teaching, teach for automaticity, teach reading and spelling in conjunction. The psychologist concluded that Job was very capable of doing work within a regular classroom setting with support. According to the International Dyslexic Association, dyslexia is a "language- based learning disability that refers to a cluster of symptoms, which results in people having difficulties with specific language skills, especially reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words." This diagnosis was consistent with the articulation disorder from Kindergarten and the wealth of classroom data over many years that outlined difficulties in spelling, written expression, and decoding.

The parents were confident that the profile that the psychologist painted was reflective of their son. They went and looked at all the information that they could find regarding dyslexia. They believed that Job was a classic dyslexic reader. The school had mentioned nothing about specific training in phonological awareness even though they had mentioned in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade that he was having trouble making letter/sound connections. He was also having trouble with spelling and written

expression. The report from the school psychologist when Job was in the third grade suggests that he was weak in regard to processing information that was given to him in a verbal manner, and that his reading comprehension, decision making, and application skills were also weak. The outside psychologist found that Job was very strong in those areas. The parents decided that they would go to the school and ask them to help their son.

One of the things that the parents had learned throughout the process of having their son tested by an outside psychologist was that the outside psychologist explained every part of their process to them. When Job was being tested through the school system, the parents never met the psychologist. They were never interviewed by the psychologist. The background information was gathered from teachers and from the Special Education department. Parent concerns were not allowed before the testing. The tests themselves were not explained during the meeting to place Job into resource. It was very confusing to sit there and listen to a bunch of numbers when they had no idea what those numbers meant. They trusted the school to tell them what they needed to know. On the other hand, they found that the outside psychologist cared enough to explain all of the testing to them. Even though they did not understand every bit of the testing, they certainly had a pretty general understanding of what was taking place. They were able to provide the outside psychologist with a background of the strengths and weaknesses in regard to their son. The parents told the psychologist, "Job has difficulty with phonics in remembering sight words." Faith also said that he was not on grade level in writing. She said, "His thoughts seemed on a higher level than other third graders but he's unable to put his thoughts into writing." She continued to say that, "Job's vocabulary seemed

limited and he has difficulty with synonyms.” She states, “Job may not be receiving the best assistance for his needs and his many strengths are neglected.” She reported, “He’s able to build Lego sets that are beyond the 12-year-old level then tear them apart and build even more complex structures. Additionally he’s a terrific and competitive chess player.” She also reported that his behavior is easy to manage. He listens well and he is very polite. Faith mentioned that he likes art, physical education, math and grammar. Generally, his self-image is pretty good, but during that year his self-esteem dropped to an all time low. His mother told the psychologist that Job had been pulled out of regular classroom for two hours a day, four days per week. She reported that his goals had not been mastered throughout the entire year. When she asked the teacher how she thought he could best be helped, the teacher said that they needed to read with their son. Faith said that she did not know what to read.

Both parents reflected back to the meeting when their son was placed in reading resource classroom for a Specific Learning Disability. Thomas recalled that the psychologist did not explain any of the testing results. She gave them this 20-page report with no examples. The psychologist placed lots of emphasis on his weakness. Thomas mentioned how it was so demeaning to hear all the negative things about his son when up until third grade his son had made mostly A’s and B’s; and his kindergarten, first and second grade teachers all praised him for his determination. All of a sudden in third grade, he no longer wanted to go to school. Faith said, “He did not want to go back to that place where all the dumb kids go. He wanted to be back in the regular classroom. He wanted to know if his parents thought he was smart.” There were teachers going into his classroom and observing him in third grade; they were reporting that he could not stay

on task. They said that he was having extreme attention issues and that he was having trouble processing. They took a bunch of notes from their observation and then, during one SST meeting, they reviewed their notes with the parents. They claimed they had evidence that he was not processing information and that was consistent with what the psychologist had found. None of those teachers were qualified to assess a processing deficit disorder; a psychologist or speech professional should make that determination, not a classroom teacher or assistant principal. Even in the report from the psychologist, the phonological processing deficits were evident but across the board, there were no processing issues. In certain isolated subtests, Job appeared to have a problem with auditory processing, especially when it came to letter/sound connection. This problem was directly related to phonological processing.

After the testing, the parents received a book by the outside psychologist that outlined their rights as parents. The book also explained what they could ask for in the IEP meetings. They felt like the new information they received about their son being dyslexic was going to help him in his fourth grade year. So they called a meeting in August of his fourth grade year. The reception, according to the mother, was “cold, unimpressed”. The teachers questioned the report from the outside psychologist. They kept going back to their expert. They said that the other teachers corroborated their psychologist’s report. The parents pointed back to the teacher comments in kindergarten, first grade and second grade that clearly suggested that their son was having trouble in three specific areas, letter/sound recognition, written expression and spelling. They also explained to Faith and Thomas that it did not matter if their son was dyslexic. They only had one label for students with that type of disability and it was called a specific learning

disability, which does not differentiate between learning disabilities. Faith asked them, “If he has dyslexia then shouldn’t he be taught in a special way?” They refused to directly answer, according to Faith. The outside psychologist report clearly outlined several steps that teachers needed to take into consideration when they taught her son. She claimed that she was very upset in the meeting. Both Thomas and Faith expressed frustration and discontent with the administrators. They decided to talk to the principal. The principal met with them and told them that he would review the file. However, even though he listened to them and told them that he was going to help, he kept telling them what good hands that they were in with the school staff that they were working with.

Job’s fourth grade year got off to an unexpected good start. His resource teacher communicated with Faith and Thomas many times during the first nine weeks. His grades were consistent throughout the year (see Figure 7). In the first nine weeks of his fourth grade, he received A’s in all of his subjects except for reading and language arts where he received no grade in the first quarter. In the second quarter, he had an A in reading, a C in spelling and a B in writing, along with A’s in social studies and science. His resource teacher commented, “He is making excellent progress; he is a motivated learner.” The classroom teacher was also supportive. However, the parents felt that the resource teacher was the catalyst for Job’s increase in self-esteem. He wanted to go to school. The resource teacher sent home extra work for them to help Job work in specific areas. She talked to them about all the good things concerning their son. According to this teacher, Job was charming, focused, prideful and very respectful. Many of the same comments that the kindergarten, first and second grade teachers had made were surfacing again. The parents felt initially that maybe the principal had something to do with it.



However, they found out as time went on that they had come in contact with a dynamic teacher. She truly inspired their son and she communicated with them in an exceptional manner. There was no need to have repeated SST meetings as in previous years. They no longer had to sit there and listen to assistant principals, school psychologists, classroom teachers, and other school personnel discuss all the negative things about their son. Job was fortunate that he was going to be taught in fifth grade by the same teacher. Here are some of the quotes from his IEP meeting at the end of his fourth grade year in May of 2003:

Job has made excellent progress this year. This shows in both academic areas and self esteem. Spelling is a weakness and affects writing; Job will be due for a re-evaluation next year. Job has shown improvements in reading, social studies, and science, both in class and at home.

Job's parents, as well as the classroom teachers and resource teachers, noticed increased confidence. The regular classroom teacher noticed a dramatic positive change in Job's ability to re-test in the classroom. The parents were very pleased with Job's progress that year.

Job can remember fourth grade more easily than second and third grade. He has a few recollections of third grade, most of them negative. He said:

It was embarrassing to go to that special classroom. I felt like I wasn't very smart. I was trying as hard as I could, but then I became frustrated. I didn't want to go to school anymore. I did not feel like anybody cared about me. My fourth grade teacher changed all of that. She made me believe in myself. She gave me the confidence to do my best. I wasn't afraid to make a mistake anymore.

Grade: 04

FROM 01/08/03 TO 03/07/03

ool

Third Quarter

Course	Teacher	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	Effort	See comment explanation(s) above.
4th/Gr (Conduct)		E	E	E			
LA/4/READ		A	A	A		E	10
LA/4/SP		A	C	A		E	10
LA/4/WTG		A	B	A		E	10
MA/4		A	B	B		S	07
SC/4		A	A	A		E	01
ST/4		A	A	A		E	03
ART/4		S	S	S			
HE/4		N-A	N-A	N/A			
MA/4/ENRICH		S	E	E			
MUS/4		S	S	S			
PE/4		S	E	E			

**\*\* PAGE 1 OF 1 \*\***

YTD Abs: 2  
(Year-to-date absences)

Grade level assignment for next school year: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Note: A passing score on each Gateway subject test is a requirement for promotion to grade 5.  
 A passing score on the Georgia Writing Assessment is a requirement for promotion to grade 6.  
 A special education student's promotion is determined by an IEP.  
 An ESOL student's promotion is determined by AKS Modification and Intervention Plan.

Figure 7: Fourth Grade report card

In Fourth Grade the parents were grateful for Job's teachers, especially his resource teacher. Communication between parents and classroom teachers was very good. The parents noticed a dramatic change in his self-esteem. Job seemed to improve in most areas. He performed well academically and behaviorally. However, the community was split. The parents did not trust the administrators; the latter placed themselves in the position of authority. The parents were upset that the school did not acknowledge Job's disability as dyslexia; the school dismissed the findings of the outside psychologist. The decision by school personnel to discredit the outside psychologist revealed a group of community members who were inflexible and unwilling to consider other viewpoints.

The school personnel were not functioning in a collaborative manner where each member shares its independent thinking. Dewey (1916) says that making an individual a sharer or partner in an educational process so that he or she feels its success as his or her success, its failure as his or her failure, is the completing step. The school administrators and psychologist did not consider the parents, student, and outside psychologist as partners or sharers.

### *Fifth Grade*

#### *Mixed Results; Administrators Authoritarian and Uncaring*

Job had another good year in fifth grade. The IEP's would come and go in fourth and fifth grade. His strengths were listed as long and short term memory, spatial ability, friendliness, helpfulness and positive attitude, desire to improve in reading and writing, and desire to please others. His weaknesses were described as auditory discrimination, editing work for completeness, and spelling. There was no mention of dyslexia. There was no mention of strategies to help him in the regular classroom. He stayed in resource for two hours a day, five days a week. His grades were good throughout the year—A's and B's and C's. Some of the comments from his IEP dated May 3, 2004 are as follows: "Job has made excellent progress this year in the areas of reading and writing. He works very hard in Special Education and Regular Education. He needs reminders to write things in agenda and pack proper books. Concerns regarding interventions in Regular Education have been ongoing and will be addressed in goals and objectives."

In fifth grade, the Georgia CRCT also carries a retention component. Once again, Job did not pass the reading or the language arts sections of the CRCT. This was something that the teachers expected. Written into his IEP are comments that allow him

to pass to the next grade, even if he fails the CRCT. Certainly, this is one of the advantages of the reading resource classroom. It can also be a possible disadvantage. As Job is leaving fifth grade, the staff wrote an IEP in May of 2004. These are some of the short-term objectives that are listed:

Job will accurately write down all assignments in agenda book every day and have teachers check and initial. He will complete all tasks on time with a minimum of 85% accuracy. Upon completion of class notes and outlines, have teacher check on accuracy. You will use multiple strategies to identify unknown words. He will expand vocabulary through reading. Increase vocabulary to reflect a growing range of interest and knowledge. Classify, categorize and analyze words into sets and groups with common characteristics. He will edit all written work for spelling prior to turning it in for a grade. He will edit all written work for sentence fragments. He will use writing handbooks, grammar checkers and references to edit usage and mechanics. He will write and combine various sentences to match purpose of audience. He will re-read all written work out loud to an adult to be sure it sounds right. He will recheck all written work for completeness prior to turning in for a grade.

Most of the goals are very general. There is no mention of a word processor that might enable him to spend less time taking notes. He certainly has had trouble keeping up with note taking throughout the year. As he leaves fifth grade and goes to sixth grade a variety of placement options are discussed: Regular Education without special education; Regular Education with consultative support; Regular Education with collaborative support from Special Education; Regular Education with pull out model for

resource for up to three hours a day; Regular Education with pull out model for resource more than three hours a day. The committee decided that Job would attend Regular Education for math and social studies. He would attend collaborative for science and resource for language arts. He would receive five hours resource reading and five-hour collaborative science for sixth grade.

Job received some good news at the end of fifth grade. The state of Georgia has a writing assessment that every student needs to pass for fifth grade. An essay is written and scored with two for a very minimal essay to twelve for an excellent essay. Job received a score of eight, which put him above average. He was very excited to see those results. Job is going to a new school. His parents provide the following insight. The mother is more outspoken than the father. Here are some of her comments:

I feel that in fourth and fifth grade my son had an excellent group of teachers.

They generally cared about him being successful. They wanted him to overcome his disability. They recognized that his disability centered around dyslexia even though in all the meetings we went to, dyslexia was never brought up. The school would not acknowledge that my son had dyslexia. I felt comfortable that the resource teacher had empowered my son to feel good about himself and to make improvement. Even though his test scores remain low, I felt his knowledge base had increased a tremendous amount. All of the negative comments in third grade seemed like a distant memory. I was very encouraged at this point.

Thomas said:

I was just pleased to see my son feel good about himself. The end of second grade and all through third grade were a big strain on the family and on Job. We

were very confused in third grade. We didn't know how to help him. We felt like the school let us down. We felt like they had that *we're too good for you* attitude. We don't have to explain anything, we're the experts, and we know what's right. We wanted some guidance and we wanted some proof that the school was on track. They offered no proof. They had no statistics for Special Education. They just told us that they had the right plan for our son. Never once did we hear about a plan for him to go back to the regular classroom in all of his subjects. They only brought it up once a year. But they dismissed it immediately. They never once took it seriously that he would ever go back into the regular classroom full time. Despite that, his fourth and fifth grade teachers were phenomenal. It was a big help having his fourth grade resource teacher as his fifth grade resource teacher. Overall, I felt pretty good about his progress in fourth and fifth grade, but I did not want to let my guard down. I wanted to challenge him, and I wanted him to do the best that he could do. I would accept that. As much as I was turned off about his third grade year, his fourth and fifth grade teachers re-instilled my belief that teachers are generally great people. I was still upset with the assistant principal, school psychologist, school counselor and some of the administrators. Their communication was non-existent, even in fourth and fifth grade. They refused to acknowledge that my son had dyslexia. They could not prove that their so-called experts had any background in helping dyslexic students. They wouldn't even acknowledge it. We were helping Job all we could outside of school. We knew going into the sixth grade that the course work was going to become harder. Even though we were excited about his performance in fourth

and fifth grade, I had personal reservations about how he was going to do in sixth grade.

In fifth grade Job's community was not unified; however, Job did have success. His grades were good; his teachers praised him. The parents were still very disillusioned with the administrators. They were not sure that any progress was made in terms of Job leaving his Resource Reading class. The goal of Job and his parents was to have him placed in all Regular Education classes. The teachers and administrators still controlled Job's placement. Job worked very hard to succeed.

### *Sixth Grade*

#### *No Democratic Community: An Unfriendly Start to Middle School*

The parents were told at the end of fifth grade that they could call an early meeting in sixth grade and introduce themselves to all of the teachers. The mother said:

We called the school and they were not receptive to that meeting. They wanted to have it several weeks into the school year. We insisted that the meeting take place the first week of school. We felt negative vibes in that meeting. The administrator and teachers seemed to feel threatened or challenged. All we were trying to do was get on the same page with them. We were hopeful that his sixth grade experience was going to be a good one. Early in the sixth grade year, his teachers started showing concern. They felt like he may be overwhelmed in the classroom and wanted him to possibly be placed with more resource help. We felt the opposite. We wanted him challenged even more.

Overall, Job's grades were very good in sixth grade. He held his own in his Regular Education classes and in his collaborative class. He passed all of his subjects in

all nine weeks. He made a mixture of A's, B's and C's. There were a couple of meetings during the year. Each time teachers expressed their concern that he was misplaced; his curriculum was too challenging. He would not be able to keep up next year. He seemed to be doing just fine. The sixth grade teachers told him that if he did well in sixth grade they would recommend that he go into all collaborative classes in the seventh grade. A collaborative model in Georgia is one in which the resource teacher comes into the classroom with the Regular Education teacher. All the students in the collaborative class do Regular Education work. The resource students have a little more support. Their resource teacher was their caseworker for that class. Whatever modifications were written into the IEP the resource teacher and all other teachers were responsible for implementation.

Problems started surfacing in the beginning of the sixth grade year. The parents stated that study guides and notes were not being sent home as agreed upon in the IEP. According to the mother, without the study guides and the notes, Job was having a hard time. He was trying to take notes in class, but since his written expression skills are part of his disability he was unable to pay attention to what was being said. This is something that had never been addressed in fourth and fifth grade because there was a lack of notes given orally during those two years. Job's mother and father both felt that the teachers were dodging their responsibility. They emailed the caseworkers over and over and over again asking for cooperation. There were a couple of meetings called to discuss the problem. One of the teachers stated that she didn't give notes. She didn't use the book. Parents felt like this was unacceptable. They felt like the teacher was giving them double talk. The curriculum in the county in which Job goes to school has a set of academic



knowledge and skills. There are certain state standards that the school system had to go by also. The books have been carefully selected. The parents read Job's IEP and realized that the school was supposed to honor all of the modifications that were written into the IEP in a reasonable manner. They felt like the school was not fulfilling that requirement. It then felt like they were blaming their son for the problems that were arising out of this neglect. Job had to go take a test without notes. The notes were his equal playing field. The teachers felt that if he needed notes then he didn't need to be in the regular classroom or in the collaborative classroom. The parents felt that the IEP was designed to give him the least restricted environment, and the notes were part of the IEP; the teachers had a legal and moral obligation to provide the notes and study guides as outlined by the IEP. The parents certainly indicated that they would be reasonable if the teachers missed providing notes or study guides occasionally. The parents asked them not to punish Job for their omission.

Again, in sixth grade, Job did not pass the CRCT for reading or language arts. He also narrowly missed in science and social studies. Despite the negative comments from his science and social studies teachers, he was still passing his courses with B's and C's and an occasional A. There was no indication from his grades that he was unable to do the work. His first nine week grades were an 89 in language arts, 89 in science, and 81 in social studies. The second nine week grades were a 76 in language arts, and 85 in science. In his third nine weeks he had an 80 in language arts, 82 in science and 77 in social studies. The pattern held true in his fourth nine weeks: 81 in language arts, 79 in science and 78 in social studies. His total GPA for the year was 2.792. He was promoted to seventh grade. At his IEP meeting at the end of sixth grade, teachers again raised

concerns about his placement. His parents felt that he had made adequate progress. Faith said:

I wanted my son to be able to go into the regular classroom, just to see how he was doing. He recognized that kids were making fun of him. It was starting to get to him. He felt like he was doing well. He was trying very hard. Why is it that his teachers didn't believe in him? He said that his teachers had promised him if he did well that they would recommend that he go into the regular classroom. This was not happening. On the contrary, it seemed like they wanted him to go into more resource settings.

Thomas said:

It's very frustrating. We went into sixth grade hopeful that the communication between the school and ourselves was going to be good. It was not good. He had a good year academically. He passed all his classes. He made mostly B's. He had a couple of C's and a couple of A's. We were very proud of his performance. He was only full resource in language arts. He was very talented in science and yet he was in a collaborative in science. We wanted him to be in the regular classroom for science. We wondered why we had to continually email the teachers to do what they were supposed to have done. We were starting to feel a little alienated from the school system again. We wondered what our son had to do in order to impress them. Again, the placement options were laid out for us. They argued for hours that he needed to be in more resource. We finally decided on the following schedule. He would again be in reading resource classrooms for all of his language arts. In social studies, he would also be in resource but he

would have a collaborative model. We are hopeful that one day he would be able to overcome his disability. We were concerned about his testing scores, but we felt like he was doing a good job. The school system kept bringing up the low CRCT scores. They claimed no responsibility.

The parents decided at the end of sixth grade that they were going to do something about it. They were going to seek outside professional help.

Job said:

I thought I had a pretty good year. I tried as hard as I could. I felt like I proved that I could compete in the regular classroom. My teachers promised me that if I did well they would move me up. That didn't happen. It's very frustrating to have kids talk about me being in special education. I just want to be like everybody else. If I was failing my courses, I would understand. Most of my grades were B's. I felt like I proved that I could belong even though I didn't always receive the help that I was promised. My parents told me that my study guides and notes should come home each week. They didn't come home every week and yet I still was able to be successful. My parents sure helped me a lot. They worked with me every single day. There were times when I was very frustrated because I wanted to go outside and play like the other kids. But I had to work a little bit harder. I guess that's one of the reasons why I like sports so much. I feel like I'm just like everybody else and I'm very successful when I'm playing sports. I'm hopeful that I'll be able to go to college one day and make everybody proud. I'm very determined; I'm going to prove everybody wrong.

The democratic community in Sixth Grade was missing in action. The school personnel did not want to meet early in the year, and they developed an attitude when the parents insisted on meeting. The underperformance of school intervention programs is hard to measure. Most schools have few statistics to demonstrate the effect. There is little coordination between mainstream classroom teachers and special education and intervention programs. The restrictions among programs results in a system that lacks cohesion (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Many special education students are not able to participate in special intervention programs; they have to be taught by resource teachers, many of whom are among the least qualified of all teachers. Expectations can be low; many students never see the regular classroom again. The parents were expecting cooperation; they received the cold shoulder. There was no transition from fifth to sixth grade; the teachers from fifth grade only sent the file to the new school. The school personnel portrayed a know it all approach to Job's situation. Job continued to persevere; his goal all along was to prove that he was a capable student. Job wanted to go back into the regular classroom. However, he was not removed from resource; teachers and administrators wanted him in more resource.

### *Seventh Grade*

#### *Determined Parents Insist on Cooperation; School Resists*

After the sixth grade year, the parents made some decisions. It was time to go outside for help. The parents felt comfortable with the outside psychologist; they were hoping to find help for Job.

Faith said:

We decided at the end of sixth grade that we could no longer rely on the teachers and administrators at the school to help our student progress. We felt like we had a lot of obstacles that Job overcame during his sixth grade year. But we knew he wanted to be back in the regular classroom. He was really only in one resource classroom, but he had a caseworker in a second classroom and now his teachers at the end of sixth grade wanted him to have all resource. We decided at the end of sixth grade that we would start making some phone calls. We finally decided that we would do some professional tutoring during the summer after his sixth grade year. We took Job to a tutor and the tutor evaluated him. We knew our son had a learning disability. We were very comfortable that the learning disability was dyslexia. We did not tell the tutor about that diagnosis initially. The tutor asked us if he had been diagnosed with a learning disability and was that learning disability dyslexia. We then brought copies of the reports to the tutor and a plan of action was devised. Job immediately opened up to the tutor and started feeling good about himself again. We saw a dramatic change in his confidence and performance level. He was reading words that he had not read before. He was coming home and studying word lists, reading stories and doing direct instruction in these books that were being sent home. The summer passed quickly, but we thought the growth was phenomenal. Job was looking forward to seventh grade. The tutor gave us lots of tips for going back to the school in seventh grade; she said we should ask the school to consider placing Job in regular education. The school had other ideas. They were intent on placing him

in resource across the board. It was extremely frustrating because we had just spent an entire summer improving Job's skills and the teachers and administrators didn't want to hear anything about that. They just wanted to look back at the sixth grade comment. They didn't consider the possibility that something could have changed over the summer. We had a meeting with the new case manager and found out that nothing was going to change as far as Job's schedule was concerned. The assistant principal was very adamant that the school knew what was best for our son. She said that all the teachers were experts and that we needed to listen to the teachers and trust the school; the school knows best. We decided we would work with the school in the first nine weeks to see what happened. We were growing weary as a family. It was difficult to take sometimes. Seventh grade was going to be the worst year, even worse than third grade when the original disability was confirmed. Meeting after meeting we had asked the school system if they had some type of plan for Job's dyslexia. Each time we brought that up they claimed that they had the plan. We never saw any evidence of any course work directly related to dyslexia or any type of literature that was sent home. The only advice we received was to help him do his homework and to read with him. Resource teachers never gave us a progress report as to when he would go back into the regular classroom or even if that was one of their goals. The only time it was brought up was once a year at the end of the school year when they immediately ruled out the possibility that he could go back in the regular classroom. They had promised him in sixth grade that if he

did well they would move him. That did not happen. We felt like he had done well.

The Student Support Team was comprised of the caseworker, assistant principal, school psychologist and various other school personnel. At the beginning of seventh grade the Student Support Team was very resistant toward any type of change unless that change involved him going into resource across the board.

Faith said:

At one of our first meetings, they argued that he would be in a better situation if he spent more time in resource. They based this on his failure to pass the CRCT for sixth grade. Yet on his IEP, he did not have to pass the CRCT. They recognized that with the time constraints in the verbal reading of the test, Job was going to have problems. There was no discussion of reading tests to Job. We knew he had a lot more knowledge than he could demonstrate on a typical multiple-choice test. He was having trouble reading all the words, following directions, and he certainly was frustrated when he had to sit down with time constraints. They felt like we were meddling. From the school's viewpoint we felt like they thought we were troublemakers.

Thomas said:

I'm becoming increasingly more frustrated. I wanted something to change. We felt like Job was doing much better after his summer tutoring. We decided to bring the advocate into one of the meetings with us early in the seventh grade year. All the talk of going into all resource classrooms stopped at that point. The resource discussion was brought into play when the advocate was not present, but

we eventually forced the school to spend only a little time on that topic. We learned from the advocate that we had certain rights. The school system could not bully us anymore. From that point on, we became activists for our child. We decided we would become more knowledgeable on our rights and the rights of our child. We decided that if the school was not going to be flexible, we were going to make sure all the things in the IEP were honored. We kept written documents through email of all the mistakes that were made during the seventh grade year. In Job's first nine weeks he passed all of his courses except for social studies. Social studies would be the only course in his entire career that he would not make a passing grade in for nine weeks. The teachers wanted Job to be in all resource. They pointed to the failing grade, but he had never failed any other course during any other time. The negativity was amazing. He passed all his courses for the rest of the year.

There is no evidence of teacher comments from some of the SST meetings. The copies that I have were copies saved by the parents. Copies of the SST meetings were prevalent throughout the elementary school. Comments from every meeting from teacher and administrators were in the file. In the middle grades, there is some evidence of those meetings. The school is required by law to provide copies of all meetings. They ask parents for signatures in all of those meetings. There were notes taken in those meetings, yet there is an absence of some of the notes for the SST meetings in the file. The parents stated that they have been to countless Student Support Team meetings during sixth, seventh and eighth grade. Some of the meetings bordered on confrontational. They provided a list of items in which the school was not honoring the IEP. According to the



parents, at one-seventh grade meeting, the teachers admitted that they had not even read the IEP for seventh grade. As a matter of fact, there is a piece of paper that shows all the teachers who had checked out the IEP in sixth, seventh and eighth grade (see Figure 8). The only people who had checked it out were the case managers for sixth and seventh grade. There is no evidence that any Regular Education teacher, collaborative teacher or other resource teacher had even read his IEP. The paper that documents who checked out the IEP clearly supports the parents' story. The parents directly questioned these teachers, and they admitted they had not read the IEP. There were many problems with compliance of the IEP. The parents were not receiving the notes and study guides on a regular basis. In one of his projects, on which he worked very hard, Job received a very low grade. The grade was so low that the parents went back over the project to determine the mistakes he made. They couldn't find any. So they called a meeting with the principal and here is what the mother says:

We were very frustrated with the grade from the project. We decided to meet with the principal and have her take a look at it. We had tried to work with the teacher and the caseworker. Both of them said the grade was more than fair. We felt that we had to go somewhere else, so we had a meeting with the principal. Our advocate went with us. Within ten minutes, the principal completely agreed with us and told the teacher that the grade should have been much higher. The principal also acknowledged the fact that the school had not complied with the details and the spirit of the IEP; she said changes were going to be made. She instructed the teachers to become familiar with the IEP. We were feeling a little

better, but we realized that we had heard the talk before. From that point on, the teachers seemed to withdraw from us even more.

PERSON REVIEWING RECORD	DATE	PURPOSE
Stephanie [redacted]	9/18/98	To establish file
S. [redacted]	5/11/99	Dismissal
D. [redacted]	9/01	Set up file for SLD paperwork
K. [redacted]	1/02	Report Progress
D. [redacted]	3/02	Report Progress
D. [redacted]	5/02	annual review for new resource teacher
K. [redacted]	8/02	file review
R. [redacted]	5/03	2pp prep
K. [redacted]	8/03	file review
K. [redacted]	10/03	file rev.
[redacted]	1/04	file rev. - re-eval.
[redacted]	3/04	file rev. - re-eval.
[redacted]	4/04	file rev. + IEP
J. [redacted]	8/04	Review file
J. [redacted]	10/04	review progress
J. [redacted]	1/05	Review progress
J. [redacted]	3/05	Review progress
J. [redacted]	5/10/05	Annual IEP
A. [redacted]	8/10/05	Review
A. [redacted]	8/24/05	Revised IEP
A. [redacted]	10/05	Parent Conference

Figure 8: Sign out sheet for anyone who checked out Job's IEP

The seventh grade year continued. In the second nine weeks Job passed all his courses. He had four B's and two C's. He had a 74 in language arts, which is a C. Again, in the third nine weeks he had a 74 in language arts. In the fourth nine weeks he had a 78 in language arts. His seventh grade GPA was a 76.167. His total GPA for sixth and seventh grade was 78.833. The school computed a numerical GPA. At the end of his seventh grade, again, the team had another meeting and the teachers, according to the parents and student) almost defiantly claimed that Job should be in all resource. It was decided that everyone would wait until the beginning of eighth grade to discuss placement.

Job said:

I was very confused. I had teachers pulling me off to the side and asking me did I want to go in resource but shouldn't I go in there. I told them no. They continued to question me. I needed to go to resource. I told them I didn't want to go to resource - that the teachers last year promised me I could go in the regular classroom. They kept asking me questions why and I told them I felt like I could do the work. I did not know why they kept asking me questions. I told my parents. My parents became very upset that the teachers were trying to persuade me to go into resource. I was still passing my classes. I didn't feel like they were giving me that much help. I felt like I was doing it on my own, with the help of my parents. I was frustrated but I also knew I had to get along with everybody. I would just smile at them and tell them that I wanted to stay in the classes that I already had. I did not want to be moved. I only went to a couple of the meetings. I felt like I was doing well. I felt like my tutor helped me a lot and I felt very confident. It was nice to know that somebody else believed in me. I wasn't sure my teachers believed in me. They had never told me that. The only thing they told me is how much I was struggling.

By the end of the seventh grade, the parents were very frustrated. They decided to continue to work with Job during the summer. They would go into the meeting early in the eight-grade year and ask that he be placed in all regular classrooms with support from a caseworker (a Special Education teacher who handled issues related to Job's IEP implementation and who was supposed to support Job). They felt that in math and science he could hold his own with notes and the study guides, and then in social studies

and language arts he would be in a collaborative program, which is the regular classroom plus a resource teacher team teaching with the classroom teacher. There are typically about five or six students that have an IEP that are in the collaborative setting. The rest of the students are Regular Education students. All of the students do the same work; the only difference is, in a collaborative setting the modifications that are written to the IEP are implemented in the collaborative setting.

The democratic community did not exist in Seventh Grade. The teachers and administrators refused to share their control; the parents were determined to challenge this authority. The teachers and administrators were required to read the IEP under the Individuals with a Disability Act (2004). They also refused to honor the modifications that were written into the IEP. The modifications were designed to give Job a level playing field. The administrators refused to take responsibility for their actions; they wanted to portray the parents as troublemakers. The parents were not going to back down. Job was not giving up either; in fact, he was becoming more determined. The tutor had inspired Job; she also gave Job enough confidence that he was able to compete with the other students.

### *Eighth Grade*

#### *Job's parents seize control*

As eighth grade started, the parents felt like the odds were stacked against them. They called a meeting for the first week of eighth grade.

Thomas said:

I didn't have much hope going into the eighth grade meeting. I had been told what was best for my son for many years. I was angry now. I wanted to be in charge of my child's education. It was my child. I know my child better than they knew my child. Obviously, they didn't know my child. He had passed every course except for one throughout all the years he had been in school. He had proven that he could do the work in the classroom. If it wasn't working then how come he wasn't failing the courses? The school did not honor the IEP; there was a battle to have them do what they were supposed to do. I guess they wouldn't know what to do if they hadn't even read the IEP like some of the teachers admitted.

Faith said:

I didn't know what to expect. I was hopeful that something would work out but I really didn't believe it was going to work out. Our advocate had told us that at the beginning of ninth grade we would have a one time only opportunity to enroll our student in all college prep courses. The school could do nothing about it. At some point Job was going to have his chance. The meeting that began with the eighth grade was the worst meeting we have ever had. The teachers adamantly stated that they knew that Job could not do the work in their classroom. I asked them how did they know. They haven't even met my son nor have they talked to them. We decided to bring our son into the meeting. He told them how badly he wanted to be in the regular classroom. They were not impressed. They kept going back into a long list of CRCT scores and said that they had talked to the

teachers from the previous years. They had admitted to collaborating before the meeting. They were going to come in unified into the meeting.

The purpose of an SST meeting is for each individual member to make their own determinations independently of the other participants. The mother continued with her comments:

I was starting to get angry. I had tried to be patient all these years, it had built up tremendously. I was not going to go away quietly this time. They wanted to move my son into resource. I told them, "Hell no, I want him in all collaborative setting". They refused. The teachers who did not know my son outlined all the reasons why he shouldn't be in there. Yet they couldn't prove to me how can he be possibly passing all the other courses from the previous years if he couldn't do the work. These are the same teachers last year who were saying he couldn't do it and yet he passed all of their courses. He passed them despite receiving little help from the IEP. The advocate was in attendance with us. We were advised to fight for our son. Things got very heated. My husband, who up until this time had been very calm in most meetings, was very upset. He accused the teachers of not wanting the best for our son. I totally endorsed that idea. They acted like he was their piece of property. That they could make whatever decision they wanted to. We were the parents; Job was our child. Our child had proven that he could do the work. I wanted one logical reason why he couldn't be in the regular classroom. The assistant principal was no help. She sided with the teachers, claiming how good they were. Every year the same thing. How good the teachers were. Never was there admission that the teachers weren't right. Yet

last year the principal had admitted that the teachers had failed my son. There was actually some shouting going on in the meeting. I was not embarrassed; it felt good to let them know how angry I was as a mother. I felt like they were selfish, self-centered, obnoxious and uncaring. The assistant principal did nothing to diffuse the situation. Finally, the advocate recommended that the administrators and teachers go out into the hallway. The parents would conference and make a decision on what to do. We decided that we would keep the original schedule from seventh grade; we very reluctantly decided to do that. But we were not about to let them put him back into more resource classrooms. We felt like we had won a minor victory. We also asked that we receive the work from the regular classroom from the English resource teacher. We wanted to have the Regular Education teacher send the work home, and we would do both sets of work. Rarely did we have homework from resource, so he had plenty of time to do the regular language arts homework even though he was not in that classroom. We felt very upset at the end of that meeting. We wondered if the teachers were going to retaliate against our son.

The first nine weeks of eighth grade proceeded. Our son made an 82 in language arts. He made B's in all of his subjects except for social studies where he made a C. He made an A in visual arts. It was decided at the meeting that if he made tremendous progress they would move him into the collaborative setting for the end of the year. Despite the fact that he made an 82 they refused to move him. He made an 85 the second nine weeks. They still didn't move him. Our son became increasingly frustrated. His self-esteem dropped in language arts and he

made a 71 his third nine weeks and a 71 his fourth nine weeks in language arts. We couldn't wait for high school. The eighth grade year was one of survival. We were outraged at the attitude of the school toward our son. We were outraged at the attitude of the school toward us as parents. We were determined that our son was going to be successful. They had told us in many of the meetings that he would not be able to go to college and graduate. They said he needed to look for some type of technical work. He would not be able to compete in a traditional college. They had told us that as early as third grade. How would they know how things would turn out? I kept thinking about all the thoughts from these previous meetings, all the negativity. It took me back to the fourth and fifth grade when the teachers cared. When my son's self-esteem was good. Our son kept a positive attitude despite all the negativity. He never was disrespectful or rude to any of the teachers. He did shut down in language arts the last two grading periods.

Job said:

I didn't understand why I was struggling so much at the end of the year. I guess I kind of gave up a little bit in the language arts classroom. It seemed no use. I would never make it to the Regular Education setting in language arts. I had tried really hard the first two grading periods and had done very well. But they would not move me. My parents told me that I could go into college prep in high school. I was looking forward to proving myself. I was a little worried that I might not be able to make it, but I at least wanted the chance. My parents told me that they didn't know either, but they just wanted me to have the opportunity. At least



then, they would know whether I could do it or not. If not, I would do my best in whatever setting that I was placed in. I had a good year other than that.

At the end of eighth grade the parents filled out Job's schedule for ninth grade.

They notified his teachers and the assistant principal that Job would be taking all College Prep classes in the Regular Education classroom (see Figure 9). The parents had the right to overrule any recommendations offered by the school. The final meeting at the end of eighth grade stunned his parents.

91145

**BLIC SCHOOLS**  
**OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**  
**NOTICE OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

Following are the graduation documents available to special education students and the requirements for each.

1. **Certificate of Attendance** - the document awarded to pupils who do not complete all of the criteria for a diploma but who meet all requirements for attendance and Carnegie units.
2. **College Preparatory Seal (CP)** - completion of this program is signified by a High School Diploma with a College Preparatory Seal indicating that the student has satisfactorily completed a college preparatory program specified by the State Board of Education. A minimum of 22 Carnegie units are required to complete this program of study.
3. **College Preparatory Seal with Distinction (CP+)** - a program requiring 24 Carnegie units and a grade point average in the Core Courses of 3.0 or above on a four point scale or 80 numeric grade point average or above as specified by the State Board of Education. Completion of this program is signified by a High School Diploma with a College Preparatory Seal of Distinction.
4. **Combination (College Preparatory and Technology/Career-Preparatory Seals)** - the high school diploma signifying that the student has satisfactorily completed the requirements for both a College Preparatory and Technology/Career-Preparatory program specified by the State Board of Education. This diploma requires a minimum of 22 Carnegie units. Both a College Preparatory and a Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal are affixed to the high school diploma.

Note: Students must take four additional academic elective units for entrance to a Georgia Public Research University or two additional academic elective units for entrance to a regional or state college/university to meet the Combination requirements.

5. **Special Education Seal** - the document awarded to students with disabilities assigned to a special education program who have not met the state assessment requirements referenced in Rule 160-3-1-07 Testing Programs - Student Assessment or who have not completed all of the requirements for a high school diploma but who have nevertheless completed their Individualized Education Programs.
6. **Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal (TC)** - a program of study requiring 22 Carnegie units as specified by the Georgia Board of Education. Completion of this program is signified by a High School Diploma with a Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal. (At least three technical units must be earned in a concentrated area and a fourth technical unit must be earned in the same or related area).
7. **Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal with Distinction (CP+)** - a program of study requiring 24 Carnegie units and a grade point average in the Core Courses of 3.0 or above on a four point scale or 80 numeric grade point average as specified by the State Board of Education. Completion of this program is signified by a High School Diploma with a Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal of Distinction.

\* Ninth graders enrolling in \_\_\_\_\_ School in 1998-99 and beyond are required to pass \_\_\_\_\_ Gateway Exam and achieve a passing score on all sections of the Georgia High School Graduation Test in order to receive a regular diploma seal.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B. \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ I have reviewed and understand the requirements for each of the seven graduation documents available to special education students.

\_\_\_\_ I understand that special education classes may not be used to satisfy technical or college prep requirements but may count as elective credits.

After reviewing my student's educational needs with appropriate school personnel, I understand that my student plans to pursue a program aimed toward the receipt of one of the following options and that this may be reviewed at a scheduled Individualized Education Plan meeting.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Certificate of Attendance	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Seal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory Seal (CP)	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal (TC)
<input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory Seal with Distinction (CP+)	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology/Career-Preparatory Seal with Distinction (CP+)
<input type="checkbox"/> Combination (College Preparatory and Technology/Career Preparatory Seals)	

5/12/07  
Date

2/99

Figure 9: Placement options for ninth grade and graduation requirements

Thomas said:

I knew at the end of the year we were going to have a meeting regarding Job's placement for ninth grade. I fully expected that they would resist our desire to place him in college prep classes. Nothing could prepare me for that meeting that day. The teachers and administrators had disappointed me before. The meeting regarding Job's placement was one of the most disappointing days I can ever remember. I couldn't believe how low the school system could stoop. We were supposed to meet with the ninth grade Special Education coordinator for the high school where my son was going to enroll. We had already emailed the case manager and the teachers and advised them that no matter what they recommended we were going to sign our son up into all college prep. In Georgia they have several different curriculums; college prep curriculum is one in which the overwhelming majority of students are enrolled. There is a gifted program for very advanced students; there is a technical program where kids who are probably not going to go to a college are enrolled. That's where the teachers wanted him. There is a Special Education diploma, which is lower than that and that would be self-contained, for four years of high school. A lot of behavioral kids would be in that classroom I was told. They told me they were doing us a favor. That really all Job could hope for would be a technical diploma. As the meeting started the assistant principal told us that she wanted to show us a video. I had no idea what she was talking about. The video was a clip that showed what students could do who are not going to college. The different work that they could do, the different occupations. That everybody was not cut out to go to traditional college. I stood

up and told them to stop the video. I had just been told that the video was going to be something I needed to see; I didn't need to see this. The ninth grade Special Education person brought a football coach with her to the meeting. The coach said how difficult it would be to keep up with studies and do college prep. I played football all the way through school. What was he talking about? What type of message was he sending my son? That if he was going to play football then he needed to take the least challenging curriculum? One that he couldn't even go to college and play football on? I was beyond outraged. The eighth grade principal and teachers had collaborated with the ninth grade Special Education person and coach before this meeting. They had not told them that we were insistent upon enrolling our son in college prep. She was totally blind-sided by my comment. She had no idea. The unbelievable audacity of the assistant principal to hold that meeting astounded me. I was actually fairly calm because I was so angry I could not show it. I was in disbelief. We told the coach that he was inappropriate and out of line. That our son would be playing football but he also would be in college prep.

Faith said:

I was outraged. I could not believe, after we had told him that he was going to go into college prep and had sent them emails. We had heard nothing back from then contesting that. Then to be set up like this was beyond belief. My husband was very angry yet he was able to control himself. We had told him for years we just want the opportunity. We don't know if it's going to work or not. We feel pretty sure it will since he had been successful in all his other Regular Education and

collaborative classes. He had passed all of them, why couldn't he pass those? Didn't the teachers want my son? Except for third grade, our son was found to be hard working, determined, and respectful. I was at a loss for words. We did tell the ninth grade Special Education person that our son will be enrolled in college prep and we want modifications written in for ninth grade. We didn't need an advocate anymore. The advocate had quit coming to the meetings because we were representing ourselves now. The advocate had taught us well. We were not intimidated by all the people that were in the meeting. On the contrary, we felt like we were taking control of the meeting and taking control of our son's education for the first time. We defiantly told them that Job would be in college prep.

The ninth grade Special Ed person quickly backtracked. She told us that it was a misunderstanding; she had no idea that this was going to happen and that we felt this way about things, and seemed very agitated toward the eighth grade committee. We did not speak to the coach again. The modifications were written in to his IEP. Our son was going to have a caseworker who would oversee his progress. We were hopeful that in high school, the teachers would be working with us more and they would be more supportive. We were very discouraged to see that the head of Special Education for the high school had come into the meeting, brought a video, a coach and tried to dissuade us from pursuing our son's dreams of going to college. She had taken at face value what the committee had told her. They had collaborated behind the scenes against my son."

The school personnel fought very hard to place Job in a high school track that would have severely limited his options for college. One year after the school's efforts to place Job into a Technical curriculum, the county where Job goes to school abolished the Technical curriculum on grounds that it discriminated against certain students and limited options for these students.

The democratic community was never in place in Middle School. The school personnel refused to listen to Job and his parents. There was poor communication. The school personnel created a confrontational relationship that would have caused serious harm to many other students. Job and his parents persevered through the process. Faith, Thomas, and Job finally gained control at the end of eighth grade.

Faith said:

Our son is a very good athlete. He is going to play football for the high school team. We decided that we would enroll him in an online course, and he would take college prep, language arts through a virtual program that the state of Georgia offers. We felt, if we could remove the language arts from the equation, he would be able to focus on the rest of his academic subjects more easily. The online course was a one-month college prep course that would cover the entire year. We knew he had his work cut out for him. We signed him up and then were contacted by teachers from his new high school that were going to oversee the process. They told us they would give us whatever extra time was needed, even in addition to the four weeks. They were incredibly positive. They admired us for enrolling Job and were very aware of the circumstances. We were taken aback by their courtesy and their sincere desire to help our son. We didn't know

what to think. Our son had assignments that required several hours' worth of work each day. This was his job for the summer. Six, seven, eight hours of focusing on the language arts. He read Romeo & Juliet and countless short stories and poems. He had grammar work to do. He had to write essays. There was the journal. This is a very comprehensive and very demanding course. We were very proud of our son. He was determined he was going to make it. He became very adept at working on the word processor. That was one of the things that was going to happen for ninth grade, something that middle school would never allow. He was going to have a word processor to take notes. Also, he would be able to review his notes on the program. He could spend more time listening to the teacher. He would be learning how to help himself. He would not rely just on the teacher providing a set of notes.

Job made a B for his first college prep course. He was extremely proud of that B, and so were we. It gave him and us a lot of confidence that he would be able to be successful in ninth grade. At the beginning of ninth grade, we held a conference. All of the teachers were there. The lady in Special Education had talked to us before the meeting and told us how supportive she was going to be. She would do everything she could to help our child. She was sorry for what had happened and that we would find the teachers to be very supportive. She was right. All of the teachers admired Job for his insistence in going to college prep. We told them the story. Job came into the meeting and represented himself very well. We didn't need to ask these teachers to read the IEP, they all had a copy. They were determined they were going to be part of the solution, not the problem.

They took it upon themselves that they were good enough as teachers to help our son as much as possible. If he couldn't make it with this type of help, we would have no choice but to back him down into a resource setting. We would have no problem with that. We just wanted an opportunity for our son. I'm very proud to say that not only did he pass all of his courses, but that almost all of his grades were B's. Even in biology that required a tremendous amount of reading. The teacher had come up with a plan that if there is something he didn't understand he would read the questions to my son. My son needed very little of that. He wanted to prove he could do the same things. He needed extended time only a few times. His test grades still weren't great. But he was still making B's. His knowledge base was extremely high. His teachers found ways to assess him and reward him for that. They knew he had a lot of knowledge and the traditional paper and pencil test was not a good match up for him. We never heard a word about the eight grade CRCT scores.

The teachers were focused on helping my son pass his courses and seemed totally and genuinely committed to him. He picked up on that. He was so excited. Ninth grade is normally a huge transition year for most students, we were told. But it turned out to be a blessing for our son. At the end of the first semester he felt confident that he could hold his own and that he was not only going to graduate with a college prep diploma like the overwhelming majority of kids in the state of Georgia, he was going to go to college. He was not thinking about playing football. Even though he is a gifted athlete, he knows that he could be injured or that he just might not be good enough. But he knows now he's good

enough to do the work. We're still in the middle of our journey but we feel confident that things are going to work out for our son. We're very grateful to the high school teachers for taking such an interest in our son.

Thomas said:

I couldn't agree with my wife more. It's amazing the difference between middle school and high school. Our son's outlook on education right now is so positive. He's thinking about his high school course but he also knows he's going to college. We don't care what kind of college he goes to; we just want him to have that opportunity. If he decides he does not want to go to college that will be fine too. We don't want something taken away from him before he had an opportunity. Many of those teachers were very wrong about our son. They do not know him. How could they know him better than the parents? Many of those teachers may have formed their opinions from comments of other teachers. They assume that what the other teachers said was true and so they just adopted what that teacher said. They never made their own determination. That didn't happen this time. Our son is reveling in all the praises being heaped on him by his teachers. They admire his determination. He's a typical high school student. He did have a week in the first semester where he became distracted and had some bad grades. He quickly put himself back on track. The teachers communicated with us when this was going on and we were able to stop it. Communication has been weekly. It has been positive, it has been constructive. We have set up a system at home to help support him with his homework. He has his assignments. There's no longer an issue there. We have books at home. We have all kinds of



options for him from a test-taking standpoint at school. All we have to do is mention that. The teachers have been very flexible. They all tell us he is not only doing the work but he is a very capable and talented and smart student. They don't see any evidence that he couldn't do the work and they are amazed to hear what we tell them about the teachers at the middle school. They just shake their head.

Job said:

I'm having a good time in high school. I was very excited when my grades came. I knew when I passed the summer school course that I could do it. But I thought I was going to have more trouble. The teachers have been so good. They have helped me so much. It feels good to be in regular education. That's all I always wanted. I was a little worried that I wouldn't be able to do the same work. But then I thought, I was doing it by myself for the most part anyway in my other classes in middle school. Some of those classes were Regular Education. It wasn't nearly as bad as I thought. I just have to be consistent. I hope I'm going to go to college.

Job's parents have many options for their son as he goes into the end of his high school career. I asked them if they could reflect on the positive and negative things that the school did during their schools years from kindergarten through ninth grade. Here is what they said.

Faith said:

In elementary school we really liked our teachers in kindergarten, first and second grade. They seemed very supportive. They knew something was wrong with his

decoding skills, yet they didn't tell us he had a learning disability. They just told us to keep working hard. That he was a smart young man, that things would work out for him. They said if things didn't improve we could always go and take a look at why. They didn't want him placed in Special Ed in kindergarten because they said he was just a little boy growing up. I'm very grateful to his teachers in kindergarten, first and second grade. I'm afraid that if he'd been pulled out earlier then he would never be in the situation he is in right now. Third grade was a difficult year. But in fourth and fifth grade the teachers were great. We did appreciate the principal coming in and trying to lend some support though we really know it was the fourth and fifth grade teachers who were successful. I can't point to anything in middle school other than some individual teachers who did a good job teaching our son despite the fact that his teachers were claiming that he didn't belong in a classroom. I have to admit that they did try to help him while he was there and he was successful in their classroom. Why they wouldn't admit that success and why they didn't think he could continue that next year I have no idea. I have no positive remarks from school psychologists in elementary school. Everything is negative. She talked down to us. She didn't tell us anything about the testing. She didn't explain it. She didn't say anything positive about our son. The Special Ed personnel didn't explain the testing. They acted like they knew everything; we shouldn't question anything that they said. The assistant principal was not very nice. She said the school knows best. We needed to get him the help right away. What help?

The administrators throughout this process were very condescending toward my child. They told me they wanted what was best for him. But they never listened to me and my husband on what we thought was best. Or if they listened, they never did anything we asked them to do. Everything was a fight. When we questioned them about why the teachers were not implementing the IEP, they got very defensive. They kept saying how hard it was, how many students they had in the classroom. We didn't want to hear any of that stuff. Overall, all the administrators in middle school were very poor. They never had a plan to bring our son back into the regular classroom in language arts. We knew he had a reading disability. He has maneuvered around it quite nicely. We're so thankful that we continued to fight them. The fourth and fifth grade teachers were wonderful. They made all the difference in the world. They raised my son's self-esteem. Except for third grade, the elementary teachers were very good. I didn't like the collaboration of the teachers before our meetings. They always came in unified. Sometimes the teachers told us one thing before we went to the meeting and then when they got into the meeting they completely changed. The seventh grade teacher told us that she was going to move him back into the regular classroom for language arts and then when she went to the meeting she did a complete reversal. We even questioned her during the meeting, and she said she had to reevaluate. Well, she reevaluated within 24 hours. The IEP's were always written out before the meetings. We were supposed to construct them, but they're always written out before hand. Then, they would say, "Oh, we have time limitations, but we can change anything in there."

Thomas said:

I agree with my wife. The elementary teachers, for the most part, were very good, the administrators were very poor. This was our first child. They acted like it was their child, and they acted like some of the reasons why he wasn't successful were because he wasn't trying hard enough. The thing that disappointed me the most from an administrator's standpoint, from a Special Ed standpoint, is that they would not acknowledge that our son had dyslexia, even though we had proof from an outside psychologist and all of his struggles were textbook dyslexic. Never once during his entire time was he ever tutored for dyslexia within the school system. Never one time did we have materials sent home that indicated some type of help program for dyslexia. I still remember the teachers telling us that he had processing problems but wouldn't tell us what type of processing problems. They weren't even qualified to be saying that. I was outraged many times during the middle school years. The assistant principal, school psychologists and caseworkers, seemed to be against us and our son. It's almost as if they took it personally that we were challenging their philosophies. I could never get around the fact that our son was passing all his courses and making B's in most of them, yet they kept telling us that he was incapable of doing the same work the next year. I can't tell you how many times I had to email them just to get them to implement the IEP. When I found out later that most of them hadn't even read the IEP, I was in disbelief. But it made perfect sense to me that they couldn't implement the IEP if they didn't know what was in the IEP. Each time there was always an excuse made for the teachers. They had

a big workload. They had too many kids with IEP's and that's just why he needed to be in resource because the resource teacher could look out for him. I'm very grateful to the high school teachers. They have been incredibly supportive. It has reaffirmed my faith in teachers and administrators. The caseworker has kept up with things and communicated with us. He's doing very well. I feel overall that the school community failed our son. Yet there were enough good individuals along the way to keep him going. Our son gets the credit because, no matter how negative we got toward the school, he never let that come across. He always tried his best, except for a few occasional lapses.

Job said.

I never understood why they didn't want me to leave resource. It did not feel good. Kids would say things; it would hurt my feelings. They wouldn't say too many things directly to my face because I was bigger than most of them. But they did pick on some of the other kids that were in my class. I didn't like that. I felt like most of my teachers were trying to help me. But they did lie to me a few times. They told me in middle school two different times that they would move me if I did well. I did well and they didn't move me back into the regular classroom. I don't know much about the assistant principals. They always seemed nice to me. But I'm not sure. I do know that this year was the best year. I'm in high school and I'm in college prep and I'm doing well. I'm going to college. I know that. I know I'm going to have to continue to work really hard.

The parents were asked: Tell me what you would recommend to other parents who are in a similar situation to your son's.

Faith said:

I would educate myself on all the rules that pertained to IEP's. I would read books. I would seek outside help to make sure I knew what disability my child had or if my child had a disability. I would stay on top of teachers and administrators. I would hire outside tutors and advocates to help me until I learned how to do it on my own. I would stay involved. I would try to be reasonable. But I would not be afraid to fight when the time came.

Thomas said:

Most of the same things my wife said. I would probably have been a little more aggressive early on with the school system. I probably would have forced more meetings with the principal. I believe I could have forced them to place my son in the regular classroom. At least we kept him going with collaborative and Regular Ed in some of his subjects even though in the reading classroom we were not able to do that. I was amazed that he had to read in social studies and science and the textbooks seemed to be much harder than what he was doing in his language arts classroom. They seemed to be written at a much higher level and he was still able to do well. I would recommend to other parents to make sure that the teachers read the IEP and that they honored it. I would not tell them to be confrontational toward the teachers and administrators until it became absolutely necessary. They are people too, they can make a mistake. You want to give them the benefit of the doubt. But when they make a mistake, you want them to correct it and not hold your son accountable for the mistake they made. I would tell them to stay involved, stay involved, stay involved.

Job's journey continues today. He proved that a determined, responsible student can overcome tough odds. The democratic school community was not in place for many years. However, the determination of Job's parents compensated for the failings of the school personnel.

### *Analysis*

The cultural categories surfaced from a comparative analysis of each grade (Appendix). They evolved from the comparative analysis. Merriam (2002) states that the basic process utilized in comparative analysis in case study is constant comparison. The researcher starts with a particular event or document in one set and compares it to other events in that set or other sets. In the analysis of the school community, comparative analysis was used to compare within each school year and from year to year (Appendix). The comparative analysis looked at the characteristics of each participant in the school community in each school year. The community changed constantly. The cultural categories were characteristics that repeated themselves over and over. The cultural categories chosen embodied the spirit of splendid communities and fractured communities.

Interviewing is the interest and understanding of the experiences of the people we interview and the meaning that they make of their own experiences (Seidman, 1998). Records, documents, and artifacts make up a rich source of information about many organizations and individuals (Patton, 2002). Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be directly learned from them, but also as a source of raising additional questions and solidifying and placing into perspective other sources of data gathering. The long interview model (McCracken, 1988) also allowed for cultural

categories and shared meanings as opposed to exploration of individual feelings. This study is concerned primarily with the school community and how it has functioned for the student over the years. The long interview helped place the numerical values that the student has achieved into a richer social and cultural context.

I organized the data based on what worked and what didn't work for Job as a result of how well the community performed. The whole dissertation revolved around how well the community functioned. Even though Job was in a reading resource classroom, reading certainly played a part in all of his subjects. It would be unfair to only look at his performance in the reading resource classroom. He participated in collaborative classrooms and Regular Education classrooms that required him to develop literacy skills that would help him become successful. Many themes surfaced over the years. One of the categories examined how Job's community positively and negatively influenced his literacy skills over the years. This literacy development was evaluated primarily by the outcomes from school performance. This narrow view of literacy development was extrapolated from the school's own methods that were supported by their comments and assessment tools. Dewey (1916) states that one must evaluate from the standards that are in place at the institution. His literacy development was traced through grade reports, testing results, and comments from teachers, parents, and administrators. A second category examined control. Some of the evidence came from quotes from the parents and Job, and some came from the remarks and decisions made by teachers and administrators. A third category was communication. The fourth category was perseverance.



*Literacy development*

In kindergarten through ninth grade all of Job's grades were passing, except for one grade in middle school for one nine weeks. Overall, for each year, most of his averages were B averages. He was able to hold his own in the classroom. He was successful grade wise. The file contains all of his grade reports from kindergarten through eighth grade. This was proof that he was a successful student grade wise. The teachers certainly helped him become successful. There was evidence in the file in grades K through five that his parents were an integral part of his education. There were many comments that indicate how hard they had worked at home, how supportive they had been. It is also noted that there was only one time when they missed a meeting, and they had countless meetings throughout the years. They were very much active and involved. They paid for outside tutors, advocates, and resources; they worked with their son on a daily basis. This evidence comes from teachers who complimented them and from the student himself who told me how hard his parents had worked with him on a nightly basis.

Job performed well on the Cognitive Abilities Tests (OLSAT and COGAT) and other intelligence tests administered by the psychologists. However, he struggled on The Georgia CRCT and achievement tests, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT II). According to Job and his parents, he was not given extra time to complete the tests. The file supports this claim; he had to take the tests with no modifications. He often could not finish the tests.

Job continued to do his best, even when the school community was splintered or non-existent. He proved that he was determined to prove his worth as a student.

### *Control*

Control was in the hands of the school personnel from Third Grade to the end of Eighth Grade; the parents shared control in the early years and in Ninth Grade. They were finally able to overrule the school's recommendation at the end of Eighth Grade. When parents go into school meetings, they typically have to contend with an assistant principal, special education representative, classroom teachers, school counselor, nurse, school psychologist, and other school personnel. It is an overwhelming experience for most parents. The parents are many times intimidated by the numbers; many parents are also afraid to challenge the authority of the school personnel. The administrators in Middle School refused to act on the pleas of Job and his parents, despite overwhelming evidence to logically support the family's wishes. The administrators gained further control by collaborating with each other before meetings. They ganged up on the parents; they effectively cast the parents as inferior participants. The school personnel even tried to keep control of Job's placement for high school by collaborating with the high school special education representative and a football coach behind the parents' back. In elementary school the administrators and teachers ignored the conclusions and recommendations from the outside psychologist; the school personnel refused to accept input from Job, his parents, and outside people. The parents finally gained control of his placement at the end of Eighth Grade.

### *Communication*

Communication between administrators, school psychologists, Special Education personnel and parents from third grade to eighth grade was very poor. There was no explanation given for why the communication was so bad. There is little coordination

between mainstream classroom teachers and special education and intervention programs.

The restrictions among programs results in a system that lacks cohesion (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Certainly, the parents have evidence that they were trying. They called countless meetings. They attended all the meetings but one. They worked with Job at home. They emailed, and asked the teachers and administrators questions. The school personnel seemed to be very hesitant to cooperate, especially in middle school.

### *Perseverance*

It's been documented that the parents did everything they could to help their son throughout this process: working with their son on a daily basis, telling their son never to give up on his dreams, communicating with teachers, communicating with administrators, hiring outside professional help, and loving their son. They never gave up. They stood firm throughout the process. They were solid members of every community that was formed. They worked with teachers and they challenged them to do their job. There was no record of any obligation that the parents did not fulfill. Their determination inspired their son.

Job persevered through seven years of reading resource and other resource classrooms. Some students may have quit; Job tried harder. The only teacher to complain about Job's effort was his third grade teacher. His determination inspired his fourth, fifth, and ninth grade teachers; it did nothing to his administrators and third, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers. Job worked hard even after his sixth and seventh grade teachers reneged on a promise to move him out of resource. He worked hard after his teachers tried to coerce him to go into resource classrooms in all subjects. He worked hard even

after his teachers did not provide the support which the IEP stated he must have. Job and his parents persevered through countless trials and tribulations.

Chapter Four discussed the findings from the study. The democratic community was examined through the lens of John Dewey's pragmatism. The analysis of the community revealed years when the community was vibrant and productive; years when the community was splintered yet productive, and too many years where it was non-existent.

Chapter Five discusses the researcher's judgments and take a look at the literature review to determine if Job's community fit within the research in the field. In addition, it provides a discussion on implications for further research on this topic and the viability of Dewey's pragmatism as a theoretical research lens. Finally, a discussion on limitations is offered.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine how well the school community functioned through the years. This school community changed multiple times. It was at times strong, splintered, or non-existent. This study was significant because it provided a portrait of a school community that failed to be part of a democratic process a majority of the time. This research study brought into focus the research studies that documented the failures of males in reading resource classrooms in a personal way. It exposed weak administrators, teachers, and other school personnel. Some of the teachers may have been afraid to challenge the administrators, so they showed their loyalty to their colleagues, rather than towards Job. This study was also important because it revealed some teachers and one administrator who were focused on being part of a dynamic school community. There were startling differences between a crisp democratic community and a group of authoritarian teachers and administrators who made improper decisions about Job. This case revealed far more bad than good, but it does provide one more reason to implement change. This change needs to occur because the previous research called for it. Dewey's pragmatism calls for constant change. It seeks to solve problems through continuous inquiry. Dewey (1916) exhorts educators to change the factors that inhibit the growth of the democratic community. Dewey also wants educators to continue using what works.

The study initially considered these questions: How did the school community Individual Education Placement team's decisions positively and negatively influence

literacy development in the student over the years in reading resource classrooms and other classrooms? How did the male student feel about the decisions made by his parents and school personnel and what role did he play in the process? Did the school community function in a democratic fashion to provide the best possible outcome for this male student? These questions were answered for the most part in Chapter Four; a brief summary is outlined below.

Job's literacy growth was apparent; he made good grades throughout his years in school. His performance in high school proved that he must have been improving all along. He would not have been able to handle a far more rigorous curriculum without essential literacy skills. This literacy growth was fueled by his parent's constant help, the tutors who worked with Job, and the many competent teachers who instructed him along the way.

Job clearly embraced his parent's efforts over the years. He did not agree with many of the decisions made by school personnel. These decisions centered on his continued placement in resource classrooms for Reading and other subjects.

The democratic community changed over the years for Job and his parents. The community functioned well at some points during the process. Good communication, hard work, and sharing of control defined the successful communities in which Job participated through the years.

The teachers in every grade must receive credit for helping Job accomplish goals grade wise, except in third grade. All the comments from third grade are negative. Job's self-esteem was extremely low in third grade. The communication between the teachers and parents was very poor in third grade. Communication in kindergarten, first grade,

second grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade was very good from the resource teachers and classroom teachers. Communication in sixth, seventh and eighth grade was very poor. Teachers felt like the parents were harassing them in middle school. There was no proof in the documents that the teachers believed that Job could do the work. There was no proof, despite the fact that he was successful in the classroom (they would not change his schedule or change his IEP). Job communicated his wishes to the teachers. In middle school many times the teachers approached Job to try to persuade him to go to resource in their particular subject area. The resource teachers often told him they would assist him in his return to the Regular Classroom, but they would change their mind before the meetings.

A lot of the friction between parents and school personnel came from the administrators. There is no evidence in elementary school that the administrators felt that the parents were being unfair. There are no notes to that effect. The latter was the case in middle school too. According to the parents, the administrators performed poorly from grades three to eight. Their communication was non-existent. They talked down to the parents. They did not explain the types of meetings, testing, or the way the testing results should be interpreted; and they were very defiant when they were questioned. The parents took notes during most of the meetings that they attended. They never closed the lines of communication and refused to be silenced. Job was not included in most of the meetings; his wishes were expressed privately to his teachers.

Over the course of nine plus years of school the school community made countless decisions that shaped the Job's past, present, and future educational experience. The members of the school community changed from year to year with different teachers,

administrators, tutors, and others entering and leaving the community. The constant was Job and his parents. This journey is ongoing for the school community; Job has many more years of school left. The past nine plus years yielded many good and bad actions from the school community. At times the community functioned well and at other times poorly, and other times the school personnel failed miserably and the democratic community was non-existent. In a sense the community was graded at different points along the way.

The school community functioned well until third grade. In Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers communicated well with the parents. They offered Job's successes (grades, work ethic, and intelligence) and failures (decoding, spelling, and written expression). Job's self-esteem was high; his effort and determination were also very good. Job was struggling with letter sound connections, writing, and spelling. The teachers called meetings to discuss ways to help Job. They used an academic contract to document his strengths and weaknesses and to develop an intervention plan. They gave the parents specific instruction on how to help Job at home. They did not rush to judgment. They praised him for being hard working, respectful, and determined. They recognized how well he was performing in math and science. They were not sure what was causing some of his struggles with reading. They called Student Support Team (SST) meetings to discuss Job's reading struggles, so that others could weigh in and offer suggestions. The school community functioned at a high level until the end of second grade.

The IEP was created from the analysis of the school psychologist; the analysis of the outside psychologist was not used, contrary to the Individuals with Disabilities Act



(US Department of Education, 2008). The administrators said they agreed with the school psychologist, who diagnosed a semantic difficulty that only the two administrators seemed to garner from a couple of observations. The IEP set specific goals for Job to master; many of these goals were based on semantics and were not necessary. The school had no plan to place Job in Regular Education for reading from third to ninth grade, despite extraordinary efforts by the parents to facilitate that change. Over 80% of students in special education have been diagnosed with reading disabilities. These classrooms have little evidence to prove they work in the best interest of all boys, and, in fact, become permanent placements because they are so ineffective (US Department of Education, 2008).

The goal for the community focused on continual inquiry into the male reading resource student to evaluate improvement. This continuous inquiry stopped in third grade, and it would leave altogether in middle school. The school encouraged the parents to place Job in Special Education for a Specific Learning Disability, so that they could give him the help he needed. The parents were not told what types of disabilities the other students in resource had. They were not told the qualifications of the teacher. Why did they not use the classroom teacher to implement the IEP? Job was meeting all of the requirements for good grades without any modifications (aids that were added to the IEP to help Job have a level playing field, such as access to study guides, notes, preferential seating, technology aids, and extended time for completion of work). In third grade Job received 17 checks for conduct that needed improvement. He displayed lack of self-control and did not work independently, follow directions, complete assignments on time, accept responsibility for materials, or use time wisely, according to his teachers. These

checks were more than those given in first, second, fourth, and fifth grade together. In third grade Job had his first resource class, his most checks, and he suffered from his lowest self-esteem. In addition, at the end of third grade his grades declined. The resource teacher rarely assigned homework or sent home extra work specific to his disability. The entire school team failed Job in third grade. He was diagnosed with a semantic reading disability by the school psychologist that is not supported from years of data that related to Job. The psychologist should have placed the results in the context of other evidence from previous years. The psychologist diagnosed problems with phonological processing, and this diagnosis was supported by a wealth of classroom data. The school psychologist did not explain the specific areas that she retested, nor did she state what the original scores were in those subtests. Everything changed again in fourth grade.

In fourth and fifth grade the teachers again opened lines of communication. Job and his parents were pleased with his progress in fourth and fifth grade. The teacher comments were extremely positive and his grades were good. His resource teacher sent home extra work, and she raved about his improvement. She told the parents that Job should be placed into a collaborative setting in sixth grade because of his great improvement in reading. Fewer meetings were called in Fourth and Fifth grades; the teachers were the catalyst for increased self-esteem and Reading performance.

Middle school teachers and administrators failed the community on countless occasions. They refused to give Job a chance in Collaborative or Regular Education Reading, despite his good performance in the Reading resource classroom, Collaborative Social Studies and Science, and his Regular Education Math class. They also denied a new placement for Job despite his parents' wishes, despite the teachers' own promises,

and most importantly despite Job's wishes. The parents never indicated to the school personnel that he would be successful in the new placement; they consistently requested only a chance to see if Job could handle the move. To Job and his parents, he had earned the opportunity. The school's refusal is absurd. The teachers who promised Job and his parents that they would help move Job back to Regular Education were extremely unethical. Each year, they also wanted to place Job in resource classes in other subjects, despite the fact that he was passing and doing very well in all of his Collaborative and Regular Education classes. They kept saying that they knew what was best and that next year it would be too hard for Job. In addition, the administrators in sixth and seventh grade refused to make the teachers implement the modifications written into the IEP despite the parents' continued efforts to have access to notes, study guides, homework assignments, and extended time on testing. The teachers had not even read the IEP and admitted not doing so. The administrators' performance was just as bad.

The administrators were not looking out for Job; they were backing up the teachers no matter what. They were ignoring their own evidence - success in the classroom. They also violated the rules and spirit of the Student Support Team (SST) which advocated collaboration and independent thinking. The parents were at the meetings; their wishes and concerns were rejected and discounted almost every single time. The administrators refused to discipline the teachers when they did not read the IEP. In the final meeting in middle school the teachers and assistant principal displayed remarkably poor judgment consistent with Job's time in middle school. They tried to use the Special Education coordinator from the high school and a football coach to change a decision that the parents were entitled to make. After three years they were still trying to

control Job's placement. This last desperate act was a troubling attempt to impose their will. The democratic community was not present during the three years of middle school. Job was determined to overcome all obstacles placed in his way. The tutor helped him gain confidence and improved his reading skills, according to Job and his parents. The community that worked for Job included his parents and outside people.

Dewey (1927) says the student must be part of the decision making process. Job was coerced by teachers in middle school to leave Social Studies and Science Collaborative classes to go into resource classes in those subjects. His wishes were not considered or acted upon. He was lied to by the teachers (according to Job and his parents), some of whom had promised that they would help him move back to the Regular Education classroom. Job received no help from the assistant principals or other administrators. The journey continued to ninth grade.

The ninth grade teachers and administrators embraced Job's placement into College Prep classes. They read his IEP and like most dynamic teachers set out to prove that the classroom teacher can be the difference maker. Job passed all of his classes; he made only one C; the rest were A's and B's. His self-esteem was at an all time high. Job talked openly about college. The future is bright; it could have been disastrous.

His teachers in five out of his six years worked as part of a democratic team. However, too many times the school personnel failed to listen to the voices of Job, his parents, and outside experts. The parents were concerned about their child. They acted in a reasonable and responsible manner. Job worked extremely hard to fulfill his obligations. In a democratic community (as outlined by Dewey) all participants should be

sharers in the process. The parents entrusted their child with the school. The school personnel failed the community and Job on many occasions.

The school failed to provide Job with the least restrictive environment (the regular education classroom). The administrators took an authoritarian attitude toward Job's situation on many occasions. Teachers and administrators did not read the IEP in middle school. They should have been disciplined, and they should have apologized to Job and his parents. Job's primary goal to participate in the Regular Education classroom in Reading was denied every time. Job had proven countless times that he deserved a chance. He could have been moved back if it did not work. His teachers many times did not honor the modifications (study guides, notes, and extra time for tests) designed to help him. The many mistakes that the administrators made in middle school revealed an arrogant, selfish attitude toward Job and his parents. The middle school teachers and administrators attempted to bully the parents; they did not want anyone to challenge their authority. They acted in a condescending manner toward Job and his parents. Their overall performance was disgraceful. This attitude was remarkably different than his high school experience so far.

Job had the entire support of his community in high school. The school personnel embraced Job's decision to take all College Prep classes in the regular classroom. Job, once again, performed at a high level. The teachers and administrators read the IEP, implemented it, and made sure that they were doing everything possible to help Job succeed. These teachers and administrators acted in an appropriate manner; they performed the duties of a teacher in a compassionate and fair manner. The result was a vibrant democratic community that exceeded all expectations.

In addition to the research questions, I was surprised that control became such a factor in Job's case, but I should not have been. Schools have the capacity to control major decisions, if they so choose. I was not surprised that communication was a constant problem; most breakdowns in a community come from poor communication. The biggest surprise was Job and his parent's perseverance; they embodied most of what responsible parents and students should be like. Many times parents are not reasonable or supportive. I have criticized parents in meetings that I have attended for improper comments and behavior. A lot of parents do not attend meetings or do not actively participate in them. The story of Job's community fits into some of the research outlined in Chapter Two in some cases.

Job was not inappropriately diagnosed with a learning disability; however, the school psychologist and outside psychologist differed in the specificity of the problem. The school was in no hurry to place Job in Special Education; they took reasonable steps before testing. One of the main problems centered on communication during the year and from one year to the next. There was little coordination between mainstream classroom teachers and special education and intervention programs. The restrictions among programs results in a system that lacks cohesion (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Many special education students are not able to participate in special intervention programs; they have to be taught by resource teachers, many of whom are among the least qualified of all teachers. Expectations can be low; many students never see the regular classroom again. Job almost did not make it back to the regular classroom. Job should not have been placed in resource until the school had exhausted all avenues in the regular classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (revised 2005) clearly states that

the removal of students from a regular education classroom is such that the student cannot perform in the regular classroom with supplemental aids (US Department of Education, 2005). This clarification by Congress was a result of a previous Supreme Court decision. Job was passing his classes before the IEP was constructed; he should have remained in regular education with aids until he could not pass his courses. It is hard to deal with incompetent and unethical school personnel. The overwhelming majority of teachers are good people who do a really good job. Most people would want an incompetent policeman removed or an unethical doctor to lose his license. The community broke down when the administrators refused to adhere to federal guidelines; they probably had never read the provisions of IDEA. The issue of whether Job's female teachers and administrators affected him in a negative manner cannot be answered. There is no evidence to support either side; it does not mean it did not happen. Job's story was one of mixed results. On the one hand, in some years Job's community was fueled by controlling, uncooperative, and misguided school personnel that failed to communicate or treat Job, the parents, and outside support personnel as sharers in the process. On the other hand, in some years Job's community was comprised of collaborative, cooperative, inspiring teachers who communicated well. The latter was an example of the concept of Dewey's democratic community.

### *Implications for Dewey's Pragmatism in Research*

Dewey (1927) claims that intelligence is a practical trait; it is a tool for making things better, where improvement is the unifying theme. We become more of what we are by collaborating with others individually. Collaboration helped fuel the positive communities in which Job was a part. When collaboration took place, the school

community thrived. Collaboration is not a group of people at a meeting; it is when each member is a sharer and partner in the process. Cooperation works and conflict and chaos do not. On every level individuals develop and work together. Community is formed from these elements. Job thrived when the community functioned in a democratic manner; he survived when the community broke down or went away. Many other students would have not survived. Dewey's pragmatism enabled the researcher to explore a problem in Reading Education through an inquiry into the dynamics at play in a real school setting.

Dewey's pragmatism offers the field of literacy a viable alternative to other paradigms. It also offers a way for other paradigms to coexist and work together in order to analyze and solve problems through continuous inquiry. There are no fixed truths or absolute solutions; however, certain ideas have withstood multiple tests and should be used until they no longer work. Pragmatism offers a way to work closely with paradigms in order to address problems in a comprehensive manner.

A critical race theorist might want to see if race is a major factor in male failure. The research cited in this study suggested that race has been a significant factor for many failing males who have been labeled with a Specific Learning Disability for Reading. A critical theorist might look at issues of power; the school held the power for most of Job's educational experiences. A post-modern researcher could explore the identities involved in the community. A researcher on gender could explore the teacher and administrators' stories from a gender perspective. The parents and Job did not consider gender to be an issue, but there are a disproportionate number of males in Reading Resource classrooms who were placed there by a statistically overwhelming number of female teachers and



administrators. Dewey's pragmatism looks to solve problems through continuous inquiry; it can solve problems in which other paradigms could never find consensus.

Dewey's pragmatism offers democratic communities to Reading Education as the solution for many of its problems. The field of Reading Education can use a time tested theoretical perspective that seeks to collaborate, unify, and empower students, parents and school personnel to work together.

### *Implications for Reading Education*

The issue of male failure in Special Education resource classrooms is the community of Reading Education's responsibility to help solve. These males have been diagnosed with reading disabilities in disproportionate numbers. One of the hard things to do is to enact change. Change has to take place if you are a Dewey pragmatist because the goal is to solve problems through continuous inquiry. Since every case is different, teachers and administrators never think they would be part of this disturbing trend. It is my belief that if females were struggling in the same way, there would be a groundswell of support for change. The International Reading Association often adopts policy statements to encourage change. In the case of male failure in reading resource classrooms in this country, a policy statement without action is window dressing. There needs to be education and enforcement of legislation in order to enact change. Education comes through teacher and administrator training. The field of Reading Education should unite to effectively bring more awareness and training. Universities need to discuss the problems associated with males in Special Education reading resource classrooms. Coursework should include discussion on these topics. School systems need to train teachers, Special Education personnel, and administrators in more effective ways.

Schools need to maintain statistics on the success of their resource classrooms. Someone should make sure that every teacher reads a student's IEP. Schools should be methodical and complete in their identification of reading disabilities. In addition to the annual IEP, each reading resource student and his parents should meet with school personnel early in the school year to insure a smooth transition. Students should be encouraged to stay in the regular education classroom with modification until they are overwhelmed. All school personnel should be instructed to independently offer their ideas in meetings to determine placement and interventions. Teachers and administrators should not collaborate before meetings; they should discuss all options in the meeting. Teachers need to treat parents as equals, because it is their child that is being discussed. The school personnel need to embrace the parent's support of their child. School personnel who do not engage in appropriate behavior should be disciplined or fired. Even though many of the above ideas should be already implemented, the schools cannot be trusted to engage in these practices.

The Individual with Disabilities Act was introduced in 1974 and updated many times since then. IDEA was recently updated in 2004 in efforts to further strengthen student rights. The problem lies with enforcement. There needs to be an intermediary appointed by the Federal government that works with the student, parents, and school personnel to facilitate a resolution in difficult circumstances. School personnel should be mandated to prove that they have provided adequate training or risk losing Federal aid. In the State of Georgia and other states parents have a right to enter into mediation with the school system. A mediator is appointed to hear the case. The problem with mediation is that it requires parents to hire attorneys or outside advocates to represent their child;

school systems have a lot more resources than most parents. School systems often send multiple high level personnel to these hearings. However, mediation is a good avenue; schools need to let parents know that mediation is available after every other step is exhausted. School personnel do not put up with bad behavior from students and parents; it should work both ways.

### *Implications for Further Research*

Job's story brought to life the struggles and successes of one school community. Bassey (1999) says that an educational case study is an empirical inquiry that happens within a localized boundary, primarily in its natural context. It uses some interesting aspect of education to explore, in order to make school personnel aware of information that will benefit educational outcomes. Other teachers have taught similar students like Job or they have sat in Student Support Team meetings and IEP meetings. They may not have taught a student like Job, but they were able to judge the actions of all of the different communities in which Job participated. Many administrators would be appalled to see the performance of Job's administrators over the years. This dissertation seeks to bring awareness to the problem of male failure in reading resource classrooms. It is not important whether Job neatly fits a stereotypical male in Special Education; every student is unique. However, it is important to remember the following facts:

There are many factors that influence student performance and opportunities. Job's journey through the years demonstrated the need for a democratic community to help him become successful. All students should be participants in this type of community. Many school communities must be failing male students; the disproportionate numbers of males in reading resource classrooms with a reading

disability documents this statement. The story of Job's different communities may only be a snapshot of a problem facing educators, but it bears further study. Each future case study will be different, but it will bring awareness to the problem. Many times one story can enact major change; Jackie Robinson (who shattered the color barrier in baseball) and Susan B. Anthony proved that anything is possible.

### *Limitations*

The study focused on one school community. This community was sometimes vibrant, sometimes splintered, and many times broken or non-existent. The teachers, psychologists, and administrators were unable to speak for themselves, except through the documents. I wish I could have interviewed some of the teachers and administrators. Would they have opened up to me? I am not sure. The parents and Job provided the details for the conflict in middle school. The conclusions were drawn from data that I deemed important. I selected the particular student. My theoretical lens influenced my research questions and analysis. Other researchers may have focused on other details and come up with a completely different analysis. I have participated in countless IEP and SST meetings; I might have associated past experiences with this experience. Finally, my subjectivity may have influenced my tough analysis of school personnel. I have personally witnessed many situations where other students have suffered from non-existent school communities. I have participated in countless meetings; my subjectivity is both my qualification and my Achilles heel.

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# Appendix: Comparative Analysis of Cultural Categories

## School Community

## Kindergarten

### Classroom Teacher

Cooperative  
Good communicator  
Positive  
Supportive  
Collaborative

Proactive  
Sent homework  
Academic contract  
Optimistic

### Faith/Thomas

Worked with Job at night  
Naïve  
Supportive

Concerned about reading  
Optimistic

### Job

Perfect attendance  
Citizenship Award  
Sometimes distracted  
Struggles with word recognition  
Trouble completing work

Pleasant  
Hard working  
Academic contract  
Optimistic

Grade 1

Classroom Teacher	
Cooperative	Proactive
Good communicator	Sent home extra work
Positive	Academic contract
Supportive	Optimistic
Collaborative	

Faith/Thomas	
Worked with Job at night	Optimistic
Naïve	Good communicators
Supportive	Team players
Concerned about reading	

Job	
Positive	Pleasant
Good grades	Hard working
Attentive	Academic contract
Struggles with word recognition	Trouble completing work
Optimistic	

Grade 2
---------

Classroom Teacher
-------------------

Cooperative Good communicator Positive Supportive Collaborative	Proactive Decoding concerns Academic contract Concerned about reading
---	--

Faith/Thomas
--------------

Worked with Job nightly Read nightly Supportive Concerned about reading	Optimistic Good communication Team player
--	---

Job
-----

Good start to year Struggling with reading Sometimes distracted Struggles with word recognition	Trouble completing work Pleasant Hard working Academic contract
--	--

Administrators
----------------

Observed Job Recommended testing Controlling	Well-meaning Based comments on observations Did not explain process
--	---

Grade 3
---------

Resource/Classroom Teacher
----------------------------

Not Cooperative Poor communicator Positive Authoritative	No homework Not encouraging IEP Pessimistic
---	--

Faith/Thomas
--------------

Worked with Job at night Very concerned Supportive	Concerned about school Unsure how to help Alienated from school
--	---

Job
-----

Special Education placement Missed several days Distracted most of the time Frustrated Lots of checks	Poor grades IEP Trouble completing work Did not want to go to school
---	---

Administrators
----------------

Authoritarian Controlling Did not explain process	Not team players No shared expectations Job had processing problems
---	---

School Psychologist
---------------------

Did not explain testing or diagnosis Unfriendly Retested Job without discussing exactly; what areas Poor communicator	Authoritative Talked to school personnel, not parents
---	---

Grade 4
---------

Classroom/Resource Teachers
-----------------------------

Cooperative Good communicator Positive Supportive Optimistic	Proactive Collaborative Sent home extra work Caring
--	--

Faith/Thomas
--------------

Worked with Job at night Communicated well with teachers Supportive Concerned about reading	Optimistic Loved teachers Outraged by administrators
--	--

Job
-----

Loved resource teacher Focused Rarely distracted Good grades Completed all work	Pleasant Hard working Mastered IEP Very Optimistic
---	---

Administrators
----------------

Bad communication with parents Controlling Arrogant	No plan Did not respect outside psychologist Job had processing problems
---	--

School Psychologist
---------------------

Bad communicator Dismissed outside evaluation Did not explain SLD
---

Outside psychologist
----------------------

Great communicator Diagnosis of dyslexia Plan to help disability	Explained testing in detail Positive outlook
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Grade 5
---------

Classroom/Resource Teacher
----------------------------

Had faith in Job Wanted Job mainstreamed Cooperative Good communicator Positive Academic contract	Supportive Collaborative Proactive Sent homework Optimistic
--	---

Faith/Thomas
--------------

Worked with Job at night Loved teachers Supportive	Concerned about reading Optimistic Outraged with administrators
--	---

Job
-----

Good grades Wanted to leave resource Focused Struggles with word recognition Completed all work	Pleasant Hard working Academic contract Optimistic
---	---

Administrators
----------------

Poor communicators Would not move Job out of resource	Adversarial relationship with parents Controlling
--	--

Grade 6
---------

Classroom/Resource Teachers
-----------------------------

<p>Did not read IEP Poor communicators Negative</p>	<p>Job should be in more resource Did not follow IEP Pessimistic</p>
---	--

Faith/Thomas
--------------

<p>Worked with Job at night Made sure IEP enforced Supportive Called several meetings</p>	<p>Disillusioned by teachers attitudes Determined to help Job School personnel not communicating</p>
---	--

Job
-----

<p>Good grades Wants out of resource Very determined Struggles with word recognition</p>	<p>Spelling, writing Pleasant Hard working Pessimistic</p>
--	--

Administrators
----------------

<p>Poor communication Believed Job should be in more resource Did not read IEP Confrontational</p>	<p>Controlling Defended teachers no matter the circumstances</p>
--	--

Grade 7
---------

Classroom/Resource Teachers
-----------------------------

<p>Did not read IEP Poor communicators Negative Job should be in more resource</p>	<p>Did not follow IEP Pessimistic Broke promise to Job</p>
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Faith/Thomas
--------------

<p>Worked with Job at night Made sure IEP enforced Supportive Called several meetings</p>	<p>Disillusioned by teachers attitudes Determined to help Job School personnel not communicating</p>
---	--

Job
-----

<p>Good grades Wants out of resource Very determined Struggles with word recognition.</p>	<p>Spelling, writing Pleasant Hard working Pessimistic</p>
---	--

Administrators
----------------

<p>Poor communication Believed Job should be in more resource Did not read IEP Confrontational</p>	<p>Controlling Defended teachers no matter the circumstances</p>
--	--

Tutor/Advocate
----------------

<p>Encouraging Motivating</p>	<p>Inspiring Turned parents into advocates</p>
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Principal
-----------

<p>Mediator Changed grade Upset with teachers</p>	<p>Communicator Not controlling Retired at end of year</p>
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Grade 8
---------

Classroom Teacher
-------------------

<p>Did not read IEP          Poor communicators          Negative`          Job should be in more resource</p>	<p>Did not follow IEP          Pessimistic          Broke promise to Job</p>
--	--

Faith/Thomas
--------------

<p>Worked with Job at night          Made sure IEP enforced          Supportive          Called several meetings</p>	<p>Disillusioned by teachers attitudes          Determined to help Job          School personnel not communicating</p>
--	--

Job
-----

<p>Good grades          Wants out of resource          Very determined          Struggles with word recognition</p>	<p>Spelling, writing          Pleasant          Hard working          Pessimistic</p>
---	---

Administrators
----------------

<p>Met with teachers before SST          Believed Job should be in more resource          Did not read IEP          Controlling          Deceptively arranged for meeting with high school to convince parent's to change mind</p>	<p>Defended teachers no matter the circumstances          Confrontational          Wanted Job placed in lower curriculum despite parents strenuous objections</p>
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Tutor/Advocate
----------------

<p>Encouraging          Motivating</p>	<p>Inspiring          Turned parents into advocates</p>
--	---

Grade 9
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Classroom Teachers
--------------------

Cooperative Good communicator Positive Supportive Collaborative	Proactive Mainstream Believed in Job Optimistic
---	--

Faith/Thomas
--------------

Worked with Job at night Supportive Thrilled with teachers and administrators Optimistic	Finally no resource Proud of Job's academic success in the regular classroom
---	--

Job
-----

Out of resource Good grades Enthusiastic Very focused	Very determined Pleasant Hard working Optimistic
--	---

Administrators
----------------

Cooperative Collaborative attitude Sharers in process	Meet at any time Believe in Job's new placement
---	--