

Nancy Frey

The Role of 1:1 Individual Instruction in Reading

General education classrooms are increasingly diverse as students with and without disabilities learn alongside one another. At each level, all students are learning to read and reading to learn standards-based content. A worry among some general and special educators who otherwise support the principles of inclusive education is what to do about the differences in academic levels between students with and without disabilities. This question is raised frequently in regard to reading instruction. This article makes a case for the use of 1:1 instruction that is often delivered in the general education classroom as a model for providing students with disabilities with access to specialized assistance.

ANDREW SETTLES INTO A CHAIR in a quiet area of his second-grade classroom. Ms. Matthews, a special educator, welcomes him and begins a guided reading lesson using the book

Snowy Gets a Wash (Randall, 1997). She will use this instructional time to introduce the story and the word families *-ake* and *-ide*. Ms. Matthews often preteaches the skills Andrew's classroom teacher will use later in the morning. For Andrew, access to 1:1 instruction provides him with the opportunity to preview activities.

Miriam meets with inclusion support facilitator Mr. Habib to review the key concepts on the moon, a topic just taught by her eighth-grade science teacher. Using a picture book text written at her reading level, Mr. Habib and Miriam read about the Earth's gravity in *Could We Live on the Moon?* (Wishinsky, 2005). For Miriam, access to 1:1 instruction means that she can review science concepts first introduced by her science teacher.

Hiroshi and the high school reading specialist meet twice a week in the 11th-grade American literature class. Students in his class are meeting in pairs to discuss the novels of Jack London. Ms. Santiago and Hiroshi read and discuss an illustrated version of *Call of the Wild* (London & Yamamoto, 2002). The reading specialist uses this time to provide direct instruction on reading comprehension strategies such as predicting, determining importance, summarizing, and evaluating. For Hiroshi, access to 1:1 instruction allows him to receive instruction on concepts not being taught in his general education classroom.

Nancy Frey is an Associate Professor in the School of Teacher Education at San Diego State University.

Correspondence should be addressed to Nancy Frey, School of Teacher Education, San Diego State University, 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92105. E-mail: nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.

A Rationale for 1:1 Instruction in Reading

The instructional delivery model known as 1:1 is different from, although not contradictory to, individualized instruction. The latter is a foundational principle of special education that requires students with disabilities to receive instruction tailored to their learning needs and strengths. Individualized instruction can be delivered in small groups or 1:1. Small group arrangements are more prevalent, commonly seen in pull-out resource programs and in the ability-grouping practices of general education classrooms. However, 1:1 instruction is rarely seen in general education classrooms and is often viewed as something that can be done only in a nonclassroom setting.

Inclusive education has evolved from the socialization goals of the 1980s to a focus on access to curriculum and standards-based instruction today. However, there is a danger that the increased emphasis on academic progress can have a backlash effect on these efforts. As the progress of students with disabilities has become a key measure in the accountability formulas of the nation's schools, there has been a retreat to segregated education in some places (Furney, Hasazi, Keefe, & Hartnett, 2003), especially among students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Klingner et al., 2005). As literacy is viewed as crucial to academic achievement for all students, it is time to revisit 1:1 instruction as a tool in a comprehensive support plan for students with disabilities.

Effectiveness of 1:1 Instruction in Reading

The practice of a knowledgeable adult offering reading instruction to an individual student has been a valued approach in American education, although many teachers state that they rarely have time to do so (Moody, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1997). For students without disabilities, this is often accomplished through any number of reading intervention programs, such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993), Success for All (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993), and Early Steps (Santa & Hoein, 1999). These programs vary quite

a bit from one another in terms of methodology and philosophy, but all share a belief in 1:1 instruction as an important component for ensuring student success. For example, Reading Recovery is a 30-min daily program for first graders delivered by highly trained program teachers. In contrast, Success for All is a schoolwide program that uses 20-min structured lessons with trained tutors. Early Steps, unlike the other two, is implemented by the child's classroom teacher.

There are, of course, many other 1:1 reading programs besides those mentioned. A meta-analysis of 31 studies of 1:1 reading tutoring programs found that "well-designed, reliably implemented, 1:1 interventions can make significant contributions to improved reading outcomes for many students whose poor reading skills place them at risk for academic failure" (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 2000, p. 617). This finding is consistent with a similar study of five 1:1 reading programs from earlier in the decade (Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

Like general education, the special education field has a long history of 1:1 instruction. As the field has evolved over the last decades of the 20th century, so has the role of individual instruction for students with disabilities. At one time, 1:1 instruction was emblematic of special education, especially for students with more significant disabilities (Winzer, 1993). However, as the knowledge base of the field has deepened, the time and place for individual instruction has been problematic.

History of 1:1 Instruction in Special Education

One-to-one instruction first rose to prominence in institutional settings. Institutionalized schools specializing in specific types of disabilities such as visual or hearing impairments were established in the 19th century, and although education was seen as a secondary goal (after issues of safety and comfort), instruction was often performed individually (Winzer, 1993). By the early 20th century, some students with disabilities were attending clustered and segregated day classes organized by age, intelligence testing, or shared subfeatures of the disability (Wright & Anne, 1988).

One intended goal was that by clustering students according to learning or behavioral characteristics, the more expensive 1:1 instruction would be unnecessary. Such classrooms depended on the efficiency of whole group instruction to advance student learning. Segregated practices were seen as a way to concentrate resources for the benefit of students and the convenience of the adults who taught them.

As the emerging field of special education codified in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, several instructional practices became firmly associated with the discipline. In particular, training in language and behavioral processes became a feature of the special education classroom (Polloway, 2002). Remediation became the goal, as illustrated by psycholinguistics training for language-based disabilities (Kirk & Bateman, 1962). McLeskey (2004) explains that these

“process training” methods were built on the idea that (a) components of student language are identifiable and measurable, (b) these components provide the underpinning for learning, and (c) if the components were defective, they could be remediated. It was assumed that once this remediation occurred, the student’s classroom learning would improve. (p. 82)

One-to-one instruction enjoyed a renewed status as it came to be viewed as a means for achieving this remediation.

Students with more significant disabilities were also taught using principles of training and remediation. The behavior modification approach, with its repeated trials and token reward system, soon became a staple of most special education classrooms (O’Leary & Becker, 1967). Although psycholinguistics training and behavior modification were later found to be ineffective, the structure of repeated trials using a 1:1 teacher/student ratio as a principle was firmly ingrained in special education classrooms.

The Dissonance Between Principle and Reality

However, the issue of access to specialized instruction in special education classrooms re-

mained problematic. Despite the promise of special education classrooms as a place to benefit from 1:1 instruction, the reality was that these classrooms rarely offered the opportunity to provide such services. Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) called this dissonance a *broken promise* because when it did occur in the 14 classrooms they observed over a school year, it was seldom sustained for any significant length of time—usually less than 1 min. The researchers attributed these findings to several factors, including beliefs by some special education teachers that individual instruction was harmful to the self-esteem of students. In addition, many of the participants found the number of students and the range of needs to be overwhelming. Therefore, whole class instruction was perceived as a more efficient means for teaching, even though students failed to achieve (Vaughn et al., 1998).

Their findings corroborated those of Allington and McGill-Franzen a decade earlier (1989), in which the reading instruction of 64 students in Grades 2, 4, and 8 were observed in general education classrooms, Chapter 1 pull-out programs, and special education classrooms. The researchers found that students in the special education classrooms received only 25% of the instructional time devoted to reading that their peers in general education received (1,333 observed min vs. 4,233). Moreover, active teaching consumed only 37% (492 min) of instructional time in the special education classroom, with the remainder devoted to seat work or other nonreading activities (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989). They noted that “time spent in seat work activities is not a potent predictor of reading achievement” (p. 538). As the 1980s drew to a close, special educators began to advocate for increased access to general education (Will, 1986).

Nevertheless, the physical relocation of students with disabilities into general education classrooms did not make these issues disappear. Critics of inclusive practices have reported that general education teachers who taught students with disabilities did not differentiate instruction or teach using a variety of grouping strategies (Baker & Zigmond, 1990). These and other researchers have attributed this in part to an expectation that

students with disabilities needed to conform to the demands of the general education classroom (e.g., Gersten, Walker, & Darch, 1988).

This may have less to do with students with disabilities specifically and more to do with resistance to any deviation from the practice of *teaching to the middle*. For example, similar findings have occurred in studies regarding students identified as gifted (Reis, Grubbins, & Briggs, 2004), low achieving (Thompson, Warren, & Carter, 2004), and English language learners (Olivio, 2003). In spite of these phenomena, few have called for the removal of these students from the general education classroom. To the contrary, the profession continues to advocate for better teaching practices to meet the needs of individual learners. Resistance to differentiation of instruction may be a product of a lack of teacher knowledge (Frey & Fisher, 2004).

The Nexus Between General and Special Education

What is clear is that general and special education have something to offer students with disabilities. The field of special education is moving away from its one-dimensional designation as a place, and increasingly defines itself as a continuum of services and supports. General education is recognizing that students with individualized education plans are not someone else's students. An important goal of special education in the 21st century is to identify and refine sound instructional practices that use the best of special and general education. This nexus represents the current and future direction of education for students with disabilities.

Special education has developed "a legacy of enduring practices, including individualized instruction" (Mostert & Crockett, 2000, p. 139) and it is prudent to incorporate these enduring practices within the context of inclusive education. As well, general education offers standards-based curriculum and the power of peers as language, academic, and social models (Freeman & Alkin, 2000; Kennedy, Shukla, & Fryxell, 1997). Rather than viewing 1:1 instruction as an either/or proposition, today's inclusive classrooms use this ap-

proach as part of a system of supports and services. However, the use of 1:1 instruction should be based on three principles:

- One-to-one instruction is appropriate for a wide range of students.
- One-to-one instruction is one part of a comprehensive education.
- One-to-one instruction complements classroom instruction.

Appropriateness for a Wide Range of Students

Special education has moved beyond the naïve practice of equating support needs with the specific disability. For instance, we know that a student with a learning disability may need behavioral supports, or that a learner with a cognitive disability may also require a modification to the physical environment to ensure access. As well, the decision to use 1:1 instruction should be predicated on the needs of the student, not on the label. Andrew, the student with a learning disability in the opening scenario, uses 1:1 instruction to preview reading material his classroom teacher will soon teach in more detail. His special educator, Ms. Matthews, meets with Andrew about once a week to preview his reading instruction with him. On the other hand, the reading specialist sees Hiroshi, a student with a cognitive disability, at regularly scheduled intervals to work on his reading skills. Access to 1:1 instruction that complements the instruction of the general education classroom is an effective means for increasing the literacy skills of students with significant disabilities (Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999). Likewise, not every student with a disability needs 1:1 instruction. It should be used judiciously, as with all potential accommodations and modifications.

Savage and Armstrong (2003) advise that the purposes of individual instruction fall into four categories: rate, content, method of presentation, and goals. These variables can be used to determine how often and to what extent a student needs 1:1 instruction. For instance, is the purpose to address the rate of learning, as in Andrew's case? Or

does the student need content instruction not currently offered by the general education curriculum, as with Hiroshi? A clear understanding of the purposes for 1:1 instruction can prevent misunderstandings between general and special educators.

One Part of a Comprehensive Education

An effective classroom offers a variety of learning experiences delivered through a variety of instructional formats. These formats include limited amounts of whole group focus lessons for modeling and scaffolding skills and strategies, guided instruction for coaching, collaborative learning to tap into the power of peers, and independent work for mastery (Frey & Fisher, 2006). Therefore, 1:1 guided instruction is situated within the context of a comprehensive education available to all students.

Like all lessons, 1:1 instruction requires planning to make the most of instructional time. This prevents the session from devolving into a less pedagogically rigorous lesson that focuses on helping rather than teaching. The same principles that apply to effective group teaching apply to the individual lesson: activation of background knowledge, introduction of concepts and vocabulary, and student demonstration of learning (Good & Brophy, 2003). Consider each of these guiding questions to facilitate individual lesson planning:

1. What is the purpose of the lesson? One-to-one lessons can be conducted to match the *rate of learning* for the student, such as previewing skills or providing more opportunities for guided practice. Others may benefit from *content instruction*, especially to build factual or conceptual knowledge necessary to participate in other classroom activities. Some students with disabilities may require an alternative *method of presentation*, as Miriam did when she worked with Mr. Habib using a science picture book written at a different grade level. Finally, 1:1 lessons may be conducted to teach alternative *learning goals* that are not being taught to the other members of the class.
2. What are the student's background knowledge and prior experiences? Effective teach-

ers use the learner's prior experiences and background knowledge to build new understanding (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). When planning the lesson, consider what academic and life experiences a student has had, as well as the background knowledge he or she possesses. When Mr. Habib began his lesson with Miriam, he used some of the equipment from the science teacher's gravity demonstration to review concepts.

3. What are the targeted skills or strategies for this lesson? It is critical to not only be exact in what will be taught but to also communicate it to the learner. One-to-one instruction is academically intense and often lasts 20 min or so. Therefore, it is important to resist the urge to cram too many skills or strategies into one session, as this can be confusing (and exhausting) for the student. It is better to focus on specific concepts or skills, teach them, and then return the student to the flow of classroom activities. One-to-one instruction is about precision.
4. How will essential vocabulary be taught? Individual instruction is an ideal time for introducing or practicing academic vocabulary. A few minutes of instruction and discussion is useful for expanding vocabulary, the best predictor for academic success (Espin & Foegen, 1996). The opportunities for oral language development in 1:1 instruction should not be overlooked. This is an ideal time for the learner to have multiple occasions to use the target vocabulary orally, in writing, or with a speech output device. Ms. Matthews made sure that Andrew understood the meanings as well as the graphophonic relationships of the word families.
5. What will the student write or produce? A measure of effectiveness of any lesson is the assessment of learning. Evidence of learning can take a multitude of forms, including oral, written, and performance products. For example, after Andrew was taught about the word families, Ms. Matthews gave him a closed-word sort to complete (Gillet & Temple, 1978). As she observed, Andrew placed

the *-ake* and *-ide* words written on 3 × 5 cards into the correct piles.

6. What future skills will the student need? This is perhaps the most critical part of 1:1 instruction because a goal is to integrate classroom instruction as much as possible. This reflective feedback is critical to the communication between special and general educators.

A planning form for developing a 1:1 instructional lesson should address each of the previous questions. In addition to planning, it can also serve as a way to document the specialized services provided for the student.

Complementing Classroom Instruction

A long-held principle of special education is that the learning milieu is altered as minimally as possible while still ensuring meaningful participation—summarized in the catchphrase *only as special as necessary*. The general education classroom is the context within which all decisions about accommodations or modifications are designed (Janney & Snell, 2004). Thus the teaching done during 1:1 instruction complements and supplements classroom instruction but does not replace it. Like other instructional arrangements (whole group, small group, and partners), individual instruction is a grouping format used as needed to support continued learning (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). It does not become the primary vehicle for delivering instruction in isolation from the rest of the classroom.

As noted earlier, the field of special education has advanced since its inception. Decades of institutions, schools, and classrooms for students with disabilities have demonstrated that the practice of segregation does not lead to anything other than segregated adult outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Dunn, 1968; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985). Therefore the use of 1:1 reading instruction should not be viewed as a retreat from the growth in the knowledge base of the field. As with other decisions for students with disabilities, the general education classroom must be considered first. In nearly all cases, 1:1 instruction can be delivered in

the classroom, not in a separate physical location. Depending on the learner and the classroom, it may be offered at the student's desk or in a quieter location in the room. The goal should be to minimize time lost to transition, such as relocating to another setting. Most important, 1:1 instruction offered in the classroom connotes a powerful set of values: this learner is a member of this classroom, not a visitor who “comes and goes” (Schnorr, 1990, p. 231).

Conclusion

One-to-one reading instruction is a useful practice to support some students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Although not necessary for all, it can be useful for students who benefit from a change of the rate, content, method of presentation, or alternative academic goals. The use of 1:1 instruction should be viewed as part of a comprehensive educational experience that involves a variety of learning experiences, including whole group, small group, and peer partners. It is never intended to replace the instruction occurring in the general education classroom.

As special education has evolved from segregated to inclusive practices, it is vital to retain what we have learned along the way. Inclusive education, and the general and special educators who are vital to its success, bring a host of talents and a knowledge base with them to the classroom. One-to-one instruction is one tool for capitalizing on the best of both worlds.

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