

To Read or Not To Read: Secondary Special Education Students' Perspective

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This qualitative research study explored the attitudes and beliefs of eleven secondary students with disabilities concerning their attitudes and reading abilities in a rural New Hampshire (NH) High School.

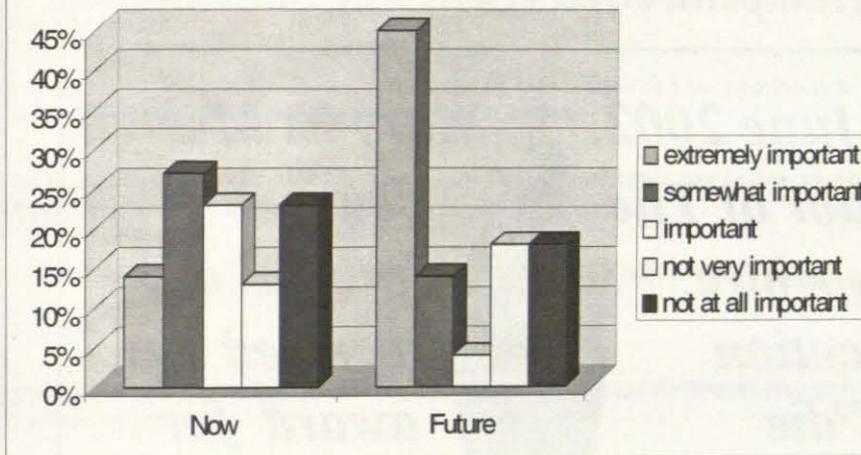
Literature Review

Research has shown, (Bartnick and Parkay, 1991; Blackorby and Wagner, 1996; Center for the Future of Children, 1996 and Lichtenstein as cited in Kortering, 1999) that youth with disabilities drop out of school at a much higher rate than nondisabled peers. Similarly, the office of Special Education Programs, suggested that the school dropout rate in special education is double that of general education (Capital Publications, (1997) as cited in Kortering, 1999).

Carmelita Williams (2000), President of the Individuals Reading Association and Professor of Department of Early Childhood Educator at Norfolk University in Norfolk, VA, states that literacy is a life long process of learning how to make meaning from text. This is a complex process that is always changing as each individual brings new experiences to interact with the text. This process becomes more complex at the secondary level. In addition, reading at the secondary level gets relatively little attention. Most education researchers and policy makers focus their attention at the elementary level. However, over the past decade, educators and researchers have given considerable attention to teaching reading for understanding at the secondary level. According to Buehl (1998), the movement to teach reading in the content areas at the secondary level has slowed in recent years. Allington (2001) agrees and declares that most states don't even target funds for reading teachers at these levels. Based on studies from Davidson & Koppenhaver, (1993); Showers et al., (1998); and Morris et al. (1996), there is good evidence that intensive, expert reading interventions can accelerate the reading development of adolescent struggling readers (as cited in Allington), and at the same time, when such instruction is provided, many of these students exhibit substantial acceleration in the development of their reading skills. Reading specialists can provide teachers with strategies to help students independently cope with interactive learning situations and engage in interactive reading and study more effectively. Content area teachers need to fend for themselves when confronted with their student literacy development, with predictable disappointing outcomes. It is evident that both teachers and students need the ongoing support of reading specialist services to meet the challenge of modern literacy standards.

The expanding literacy demands of the twenty-first century include more reading and writing tasks than any other time in human history. Allington reminds us that the information age places higher-order literacy demands on all of us. These demands include synthesizing and evaluating information from multiple sources. These multiple information sources have fewer editorial controls and fewer filters through which information is sifted for accuracy, reliability, and civility. Because of access to the World Wide Web, American schools need to

Importance of Reading Skills



enhance the ability of children to search and sort through information, to synthesize and analyze information, and to summarize and evaluate information they encounter through the vast arena of computer knowledge (Allington, 2001). Reinking (1995) concurs, computers run on literacy; computers are changing the way we communicate and disseminate information, how we approach reading and writing, and how we think about people becoming literate (as cited in Vacca, 1999). Reinking believes that computers can change the way we teach and learn. Teachers need to help their students to acquire the ability to choose and respond to literature. Learning occurs when the student perceives an importance between the material being presented and his life or world.

When asked how they feel about reading, responses varied; four out of eleven (36%) don't like it, four out of eleven (36%) like it, and three out of eleven (27%) think it's boring. However, the survey resulted in 65% rating their feelings about reading three or below on a scale of one to five, one being the worst and five being the best. Zero gave their feelings a rating of five and 25% gave reading a rating of four. Another interesting fact that came out in the study was that 72% of those surveyed remember their mother reading to them when they were little and 32% remember their father reading to them. Nine percent said they were never read to when they were little. The majority, (77%), of those surveyed stated that they read in their home, 77% read in school, and 18% read on the bus. These findings match what the literature has said about achievement, reading ability, and life long learning.

In Brief