



The TEACHER CENTER of Broome County  
Teacher Study Group Grant Award  
Summer 2008-2009  
FINAL REPORT  
DOCUMENT PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

**STUDY GROUP TOPIC: Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome**

**List of group members: John Sweeney and Danielle Guccia**

Describe the initial goal of the group noting any adjustments that had to be made as time passed.

Our goal was to become more effective teachers of reading to students with Down Syndrome of High School age who come to us without functional reading skills. We planned to attain our goal by studying Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome by Patricia Logan Oelwein and Classroom Language skills for Children with Down Syndrome by Libby Kumin. We decided to each read separate chapters and to discuss findings during our meetings. The major adjustment that our group needed to make was most of the reading was geared toward younger students. We do teach high school so all of our kids range from 15-21. We needed to mentally adjust and modify all work to “fit” our students.

Describe the ACTION PLAN that the group followed.

We read specific chapters from each book on our own. During our meetings we discussed any strategies that looked to be applicable to our classroom. We adjusted the material to make it more age appropriate and to address the needs of older adolescent students who are transitioning out of the school setting. We also looked at how their long standing coping strategies would influence how we will implement strategies in the classroom. We pulled work from previous years, and lessons, to see how we could tweak it to fit our new findings.

Describe how the action plan was implemented.

We read the materials and discussed it; attempting to separate the new information from what we already implement as part of our reading curriculum. We categorized newly learned material into topics and attempted to include them into our current curriculum. We wrote up specific objectives to enhance our daily lessons. Our group met for 3 sessions. Each session lasted at least 2 ½ hours. For each meeting we had taken notes, highlighted material, and came in with age related adjustments to facilitate our discussion.

Evaluate the impact of the study group effort on teacher/student performance.  
How has this study group changed you as a teacher? Do you anticipate that any of your teaching practices will have changed?

The study group has given us some real challenges and also a sense of satisfaction as a lot of our findings were already being practiced within our program. It allowed us to discuss and explore ways to make the strategies given more appropriate to our learners, some of whom are 21 years old and are sensitive to being taught down to. Some of what we learned will have to be changed to reflect the unique reading needs of our students whose main goal is to become functionally independent within our community. We will continue to be challenged to adapt the material of Oelwein and Kumin to what is appropriate for our grade level and practical needs.

What evidence do you expect to see of student achievement improving as a result of your participating in this study group?

The evidence that we expect to see will be an observable increase in independence and competence as our students begin to read for needed information. We hope to set up our classroom and maximize our opportunities within the community so that reading becomes useful to our students. Through our investigation we expect that our reading lessons will be more prioritized on the students' need for independence. Also that the delivery of the lesson, based on strategies taught in these units, will become more engaging and meaningful for our students.

What evidence is there that the goals of the study group has/has not been met?

Our primary goal of becoming more effective teachers of reading to students with Down Syndrome of the secondary level has been met insofar as we have come away with some concrete strategies and structured lessons. Our findings from the works of Oelwein and Kumin have been discussed, adapted to the age-related needs of our students, and fit into our existing framework/lesson plans. Our ability to improve instruction will be evidenced by an expected gain in both independence and confidence within our students. Furthermore, we now have access to specific information on how to teach our students with Down Syndrome information that we'll certainly incorporate into our weekly planning and curriculum development sessions.

Comment on the value of the study group process? Did it work for you?

Having the time to discuss the challenge of meeting the unique needs of our students was highly valuable. We were able to think, problem solve, and adapt lessons. We became more excited and confident to use proven strategies within our classrooms and community. As we meet on a weekly basis to create meaningful curriculum, we now have resources to guide our planning and help us to generate strong lessons.

How can we make this study group program better?

These grants are so important and vital to professional development across districts. The only way it could have been better for us is more time. We rarely feel, when we meet, that we have enough time to discuss and brainstorm on all of the important topics. The nice thing for us is we can continue to use the resources throughout the year together. Thank you!!