

## **The Effects of Mediated Learning Strategies on Teacher Practice and on Students at Risk of Academic Failure**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study was to determine the effects of Reuven Feuerstein's ten Mediated Learning Strategies on both teacher practice and on students that were at risk of academic failure. Changes in both teacher practice and student learning were analyzed to determine changes during the use of the ten Mediated Learning Strategies: Meaning, Intentionality and Reciprocity, Transcendence, Competence, Challenge, Control of Behavior/Self Regulation, Sharing, Individuation, Goal Planning and Self Change.

There was evidence from the transcribed interviews and teacher journal entries to indicate that these students as well as their more advantaged peers did indeed benefit from the Mediated Learning Strategies employed by their teachers. Mediation in regards to this study is a three step interactive teacher and student process by which there is an identification of a stimulus, followed by an assignment of meaning and the application of a teaching strategy that affects student learning (Payne 1998). Evidence from this study indicated that students who needed enhanced support as to content meaning, were better able to learn after receiving instruction via the mediated learning strategies. Noted also in this study were opportunities for all students, no matter the level of academic prowess, to complete the same types of instructional tasks.

This study was limited to one elementary school within a school district that is located on the South Shore of Long Island, New York. The schools within the district are all located in a low wealth, high tax area, where the overall reported free and reduced lunch rate is forty-eight percent. This school's population was approximately 1,300 students, and the ethnic characteristics of the students were predominantly Caucasian.

### **Introduction**

For more than forty years, educators in the United States have tried various programs to improve the academic performance of impoverished students. The greatest percent of students who live in families with incomes below the U.S. poverty threshold, as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, are under 18. The federal poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two students is \$16,530. "It is estimated, that of the poor in America 40% are children" (Census Bureau, 1999). Listed below are statistics that describe percentages of poverty by ethnicity.

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2000 Census Bureau Status of Impoverished Children

United States	Number of Impoverished Children	Percentage of Impoverished Children In Poverty
All Races	11,733,000	16.3%
White	7,527,000	13.4%
African American	3,492,000	30.2%
Hispanic*	3,570,000	28.0%
Asian American	369,000	11.5%
Native American**	260,403	38.8%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

\*Hispanics may be of any race \*\* Native American statistics from 1990 census

“Students from low-income families are three times as likely [to] drop out of school as those from more affluent homes.” Female students who come from families in the lowest Socio-Economic Status (SES) quartile drop out of school at five times the rate of females from the highest quartile. Male students in the lowest quartile drop out at two and half times the rate of those in the highest SES quartile. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 identifies poverty and economic disadvantage as significant at-risk factors. Although the number of poor people is both substantial and growing, there are also people who are chronically poor, due to under-employment, economic distress, and having been firmly entrenched in poverty for multiple generations. Students in these circumstances are at high risk of school failure (Laboratory, 2001).

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In 1960, the Johnson administration made the education of the poor one of the great social experiments of the War on Poverty. Some of the direct outcomes of the War on Poverty were educational programs such as Head Start and Chapter I. These programs provided parents and their preschoolers with access to both academic and nutritional programs, which were intended to prepare both child and parent for the academic rigors to come. Federally funded instructional programs geared toward assisting disadvantaged students arose from these programs as well. The Direct Instruction program titled Distar emerged during these times. Distar was considered the first research-based form of Direct Instruction, which involved breaking skills down to their smallest cognitive units and then teaching each sub-skill explicitly and repetitively. Overtime, this program became unpopular because educators found it to be almost robotic. Distar lacked in providing opportunities to raise the level of rigor for students that needed more than a steady diet of basic skills with no opportunity to learn to think critically (Traub, 2002). Resnick (1987) defines critical thinking as one's ability to monitor understanding, impose meaning and structure, and raise questions about materials and outcomes.

It is important to note that not all students who are at risk for academic failure understand the prevailing social mores or norms of the group, because of their lack of exposure to the world outside of their impoverished environments. The cultural background of many at-risk students may actually limit their ability to fully participate in classroom activities. It is not that they come to school ill-prepared or culturally deprived, but rather that they simply have not had some or any of the same experiences as their classmates who do not live in impoverished environments. Living in poverty is rarely about a lack of intelligence or ability. Many individuals stay impoverished because they

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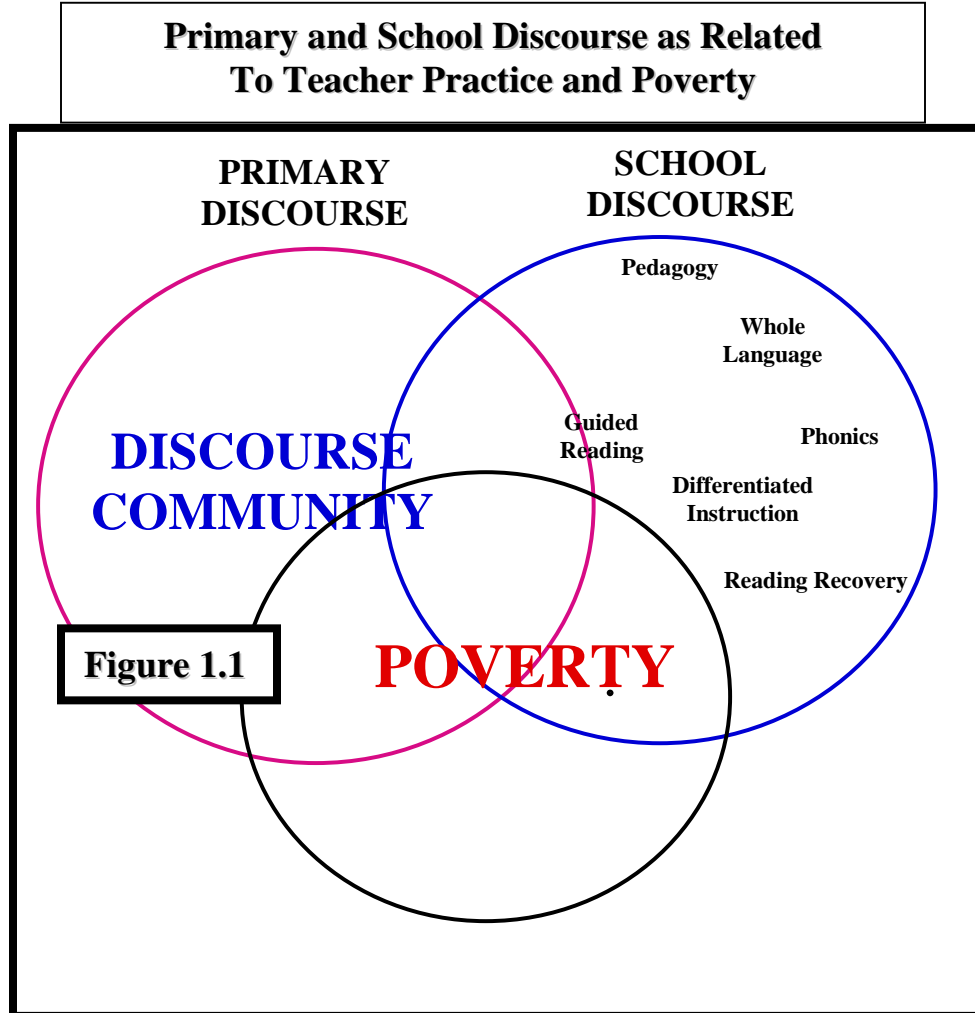
do not know that there is a choice not to be impoverished and if they do know, they have no one to teach them the hidden rules of the middle class or provide resources to get out of poverty. Schools are virtually the only places where impoverished students can learn the choices and rules of the middle class (Delpit, 1995; Payne, 1998).

Germane to the issue of providing an environment that is conducive to learning, one of the main challenges for many at-risk students is bridging the gap between their home cultures and the culture of school. Home life and culture are not closely aligned with school culture, making these student's prospects for success in school much more precarious (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). This lack of cultural synchronization increases students' chances of academic failure (Irvine, 1990). Because of the specific Discourse Community of at risk students, a definitive incongruence between the student's social norms and practices of communication at school make it difficult for some students to actually receive instruction. Gee (1996) defined Discourse Community as a socially accepted association among ways of using language, thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group. Primary Discourses are interactions whereby people are acculturated early in life during their initial socialization as members of particular families in sociocultural settings. They constitute our first social identity where, in terms of how we define and interact with individuals that are similar to us, we acquire or resist later discourses. Secondary Discourses encompass individuals who have been socialized by various local, state, and national organizations outside of the home and peer group. Churches, gangs, schools, and offices entail secondary discourses (Gee, 1996).

In becoming a full member of school Discourses, at-risk students run the risk of

becoming complacent with values that denigrate and damage their home-based discourse and identity. Educators must remember that the personal and social match between the student and the institution is based upon the students' understanding of values, experiences, and projected future; which include personal style of dress and posture, social class orientations, and racial and ethical values. Fitting into the middle-class value structure of a school is a major issue for many young people. To the extent schools represent mainstream middle-class culture, the problem of incongruence is most universally associated with youth from lower social-class backgrounds (Wehlage Gary G., 1989).

Figure 1.1 illustrates the importance of the relationship between Discourse Communities. If they are not in alignment as depicted on the graphic organizer, learning is actually negated.



Source:  
Hinds,  
J.L.,  
2004.

**Figure 1.1**

Cultural relevance encompasses both the positive and negative influences on student learning (Ladson-Billings 1994). There must be an understanding that not recognizing the students' cultural identity as important can hinder learning for these students. Understanding the issue of Discourse Communities advances instructional methodologies such as those depicted under the heading *Secondary/School Discourse*, in Figure 1.1. As the schools' Discourse is mastered by acquisition, pedagogical practices such as Whole

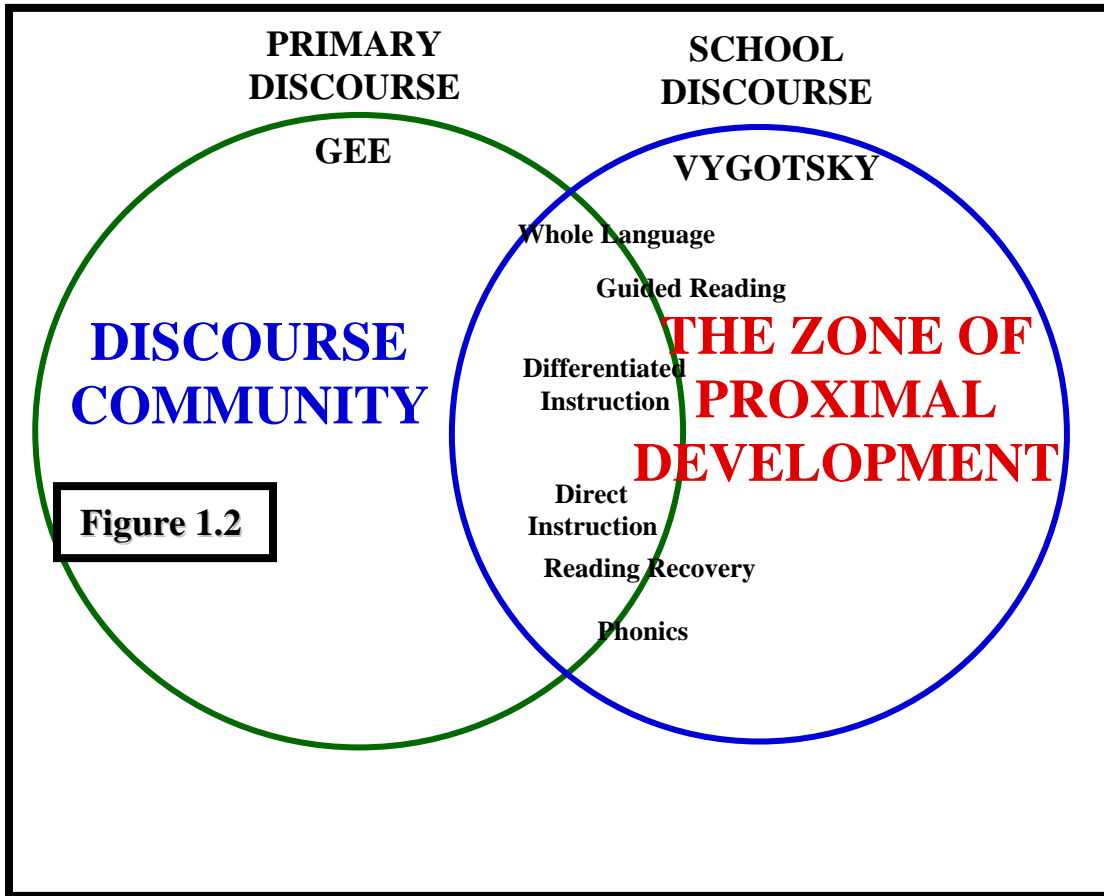
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Language, Phonics, and Differentiated Instructional practices can have their effect on student learning.

Reflection on Discourse Community mismatch takes the onus of breaking the learning impasse off the student and puts it on the teacher where it belongs. Important to this issue, the wide variety of instructional events, such as sharing time, reading group, math lesson, and morning meetings, involve complex uses of language that draw upon an array of cultural assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning. Each type of lesson has its own particular structure: who can talk and when, the explicit or implicit goals of the lesson, and how learning will be assessed or demonstrated. The cultural background of many at-risk students may limit their ability to fully participate in classroom activities. A student's ability to construct meaning rests on two factors: The assistance offered to the learner by the teacher at the limit of what he or she can do by his or herself and how the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) interplays with "academic learning behavior." The ZPD is the gap between what a student can do independently of his or her teacher (Pransky 2002).

In advancing instruction, Figure 1.2 demonstrates the need for teachers to give precedence to the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, to any point at which Discourse Community experience and academic expectations diverge between students and the school culture. If ZPD is the gap between what a student can do independently of his or her teacher, then the teacher should have some prior knowledge of the students background in order to move him or her toward the ability to construct meaning from the schools discourse

**Primary and School Discourse as Related  
To Teacher Practice**



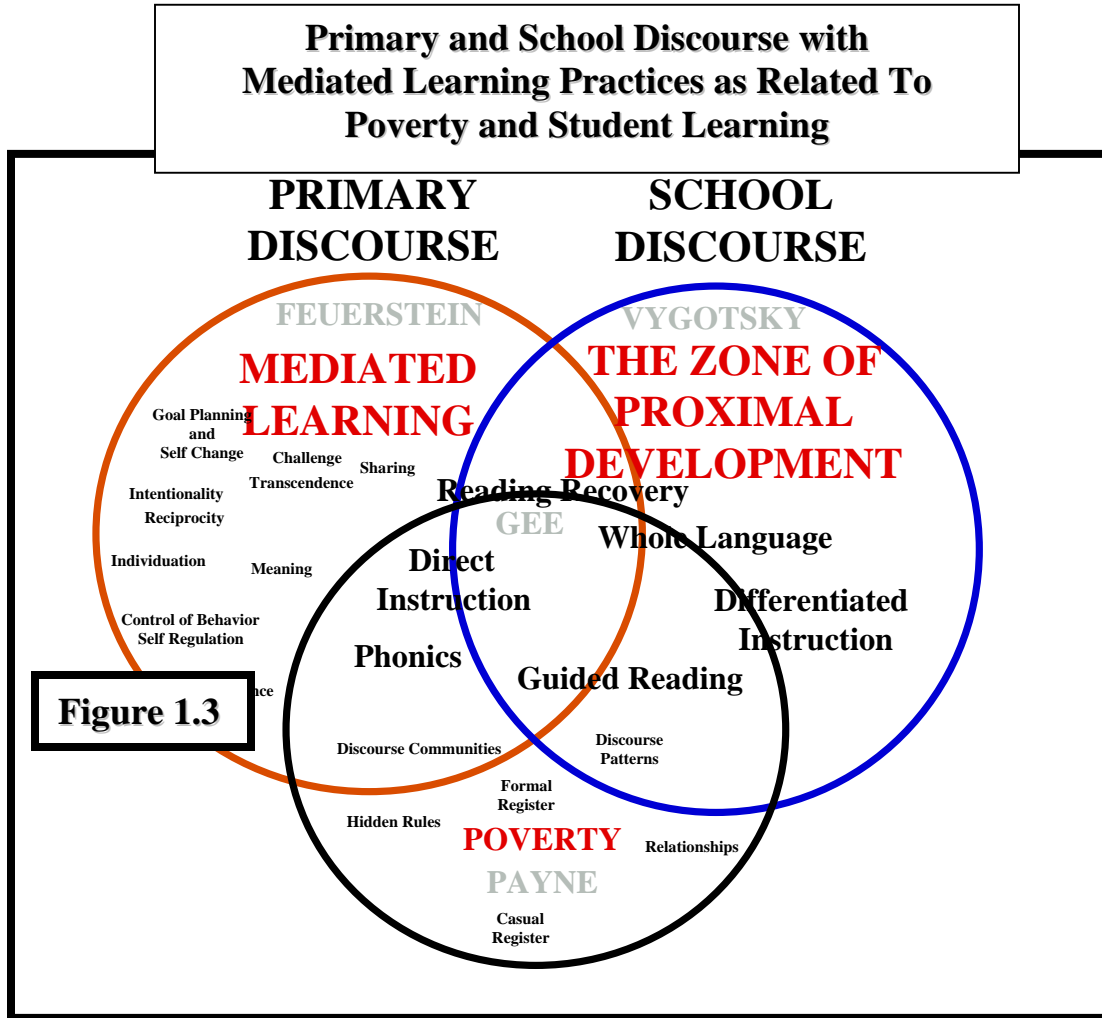
**Figure 1.2**

Feuerstein (1942) developed Instrumental Enrichment exercises that were considered a structured and progressive attack on a student's cognitive deficiencies that encompasses a series of organized opportunities for student teacher interactions. This construct is now identified as Mediated Learning. In Mediated Learning interactions, learning is both planned and intentional. Feuerstein believed that Mediated Learning allows a student to be more receptive to direct and explicit instruction. He determined



that students existing in adverse living conditions arrive at school without the necessary cognitive strategies for learning, and that cognitive functions are adeptly connected to one's cultural milieu. Payne (1992) describes the negative effects of poverty on learning. She states that the dissonance that exists between the school and the home environment of the impoverished student is that there is a defining difference in spoken register or speech in and outside of school. In addition, there are Hidden Rules that exist between the middle class socioeconomic strata and that of the lower socioeconomic strata. Gee, (1996) sums up this argument as the inability of the student to make sense of the new discourse community that exists in school.

Figure 1.3 represents an alignment of both primary and school discourse adaptation that no longer impedes, but advances the education of minority and disadvantaged students.



**Figure 1.3**

**Figure 1.3**

Within this alignment there is a concerted effort to give credence to the issues of Sociocultural theory that is the basis of all learning for students who experience a sense of dissonance between what they know to be true and that, which is foreign to their sense of being.

**Purpose of the Study**

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The purpose of this case study was to determine the effects of Reuven Feuerstein's ten Mediated Learning Strategies on at risk students. These students are at risk for academic failure. Some are at risk due to having very young, single, or low educational level parent; unemployment; abuse and neglect; substance abuse; dangerous neighborhoods; homelessness; mobility; and exposure to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences. These particular students reside in a low wealth high taxed suburban school district in the northeastern United States. The ethnicity of students in this study is predominantly Caucasian. A small percentage of the students live in families that exist in generational poverty. This study examined the effects of Mediated Learning on both student learning behaviors and instructional teacher practices. Changes in both student and teacher behavior(s) was examined and analyzed to determine if the Mediated Learning strategies had a positive influence on both teaching and learning.

Efforts to explain the overall failure of low socioeconomic status minority and disadvantaged student populations to attain literacy levels commensurate with the middle class have fallen short and closing the achievement gap has proven elusive. This study determined whether the Ten Mediated Learning strategies, that have been taught to fourth grade teachers and their students, improved the learning capacity of low socioeconomic status minority and disadvantaged student populations, enabling them to attain literacy levels commensurate with their more advantaged peers.

### **Conceptual Rationale**

Feuerstein (1942) believes it is Mediated Learning that allows a student to be more receptive to direct and explicit instruction. This is because mediation is a type of teacher-student interaction that develops the basic attitudes and competence for self-

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directed learning. In his work with the disenfranchised and the disadvantaged, Feuerstein determined that students existing in adverse living conditions arrive at school with cognitive functions that are both adeptly connected to ones' cultural milieu and that cognitive functions are not yet developed and ready for learning. The study included students that existed under impoverished conditions as well as those that lived under conditions that were considered more stable in regards to their needs being met, both social and academic. With that being the case, it is imperative that instruction be in alignment with the students existing capabilities. The social cognition-learning model asserts that culture is the primary determinant of individual development. Humans are the only species to have created culture, and every human child develops in the context of a culture. Therefore, a child's learning development is affected in ways large and small by the culture--including the culture of family environment--in which he or she is enmeshed.

Prior to learning there needs to be an alignment of both the students primary and school discourse accommodations that no longer impedes, but advances the education of minority and disadvantaged students. Within this alignment there is a concerted effort to give credence to the issues of sociocultural theory that is the basis of all learning for students that experience a sense of dissonance between what they know to be true and that which is foreign to their sense of being. The research and theories on the literacy of low-income children increased during the 1960's and 1970's. Reading was a particular concern because of the considerable evidence that it was highly related to most other kinds of academic learning and therefore could be used as an index of general academic achievement.

During the 1980s, educational anthropologists such as Shirley Brice Heath

proposed other language theories to explain why some children lagged behind in their literacy development. Heath (1983) determined that “culture was learned behavior and that language habits were a part of that shared learning”. [The aim of her work with teachers was to] “make school a place which allowed these children to capitalize on the skills, values, and knowledge they brought with them, and to add on the conceptual structures imported by the school” (Chall, 1990 p# ). To date, schools have been unsuccessful at providing instruction that allows this concept to remain alive and provide opportunities for new learning, specifically for students that are at risk for academic failure.

Students, parents, and teachers were interviewed in this study to determine the effects of the Mediated Learning Strategies. Four of the teachers in this school that teach fourth grade chose to be a part of this study due to the fact that they previously attended a fifteen hour workshop on impoverished students. The ethnicity of the students in this study is predominantly Caucasian. This study furthered Feuerstein’s work in mediated learning by providing another means toward changing or adding to teacher practice in relationship to effective teaching methodologies that can be utilized with impoverished or disadvantaged students.

Feuerstein’s (1942) work with Mediated Learning acts as a pathway for instruction and comes closest to giving credence to a method that draws the student in by acceptance of whom he or she currently is. The greatest cause of failure with these students is the attempt by many teachers to remain seemingly neutral and accepting of the noticeable failure rates with regards to the student’s inability to connect with the curriculum and learn as other students are able to do. How can we understand why so

many students fail to learn what the mainstream schools think they are teaching unless we can get a perspective from the learners and see the world through their eyes? The intentions of this study were to provide educators with an understanding of Mediated Learning. Finally, the results have provided a framework for understanding what types of instructional practices are effective with at-risk students. Teacher education programs, educational leaders and policy makers that are in the market for tested strategies that increase the academic prowess of at-risk students can utilize this framework to bring about significant changes in how educators, policy makers, business people and the general public view the ability of the disadvantaged to learn.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this case study was to determine the effects of Reuven Feuerstein's ten Mediated Learning Strategies on both teacher practice and on students that were at risk of academic failure. This study determined if Mediated Learning had a positive influence on teacher practice and on the education of students at risk for academic failure. There was evidence from the transcribed interviews and teacher journal entries to indicate that at risk students as well as their more advantaged peers did indeed benefit from the Mediated Learning Strategies employed by their teachers. Mediation in regards to this study is a three step interactive teacher and student process by which there is an identification of a stimulus, followed by an assignment of meaning and the application of a teaching strategy that affects student learning (Payne 1998). Evidence from this study indicated that students who needed enhanced support as to content meaning were better able to learn after receiving instruction via the mediated

learning strategies. Noted also in this study were opportunities for all students, no matter the level of academic prowess, to complete the same types of instructional tasks.

This study was limited to one elementary school within a school district that is located in the northeast. The schools within the district are all located in a low wealth, high tax area, where the overall reported free and reduced lunch rate is forty-eight percent. This school's population was approximately 1,300 students, and the students were predominantly Caucasian. There were nine sections of fourth grade, of which four sections participated in this study. The students in this study were all part of heterogeneously grouped classrooms, taught by one tenured teacher and three non-tenured teachers. The average class size was 25.2 students. There were two phases of data collection. The first phase consisted of a collection of Journal Recordings denoting both teacher and student behaviors during the study. During the second phase, each participant took part in an interview process. All of the interviews were conducted for the purposes of determining an awareness of change in both student and teacher behaviors, in Classes A, B, C and D. Parents were also interviewed to determine their awareness of changes in their children's ability to learn.

A qualitative research design was selected to provide an understanding of the participants' frame of reference, setting, and voice. This research approach was used to explore the complexities and processes of determining the effects of Mediated Learning on teachers and students, and on the resulting effects on both instructional practices and student learning (Marshall, 1995). Data collected were analyzed for patterns, themes, and discrepancies. This study was accomplished through an analysis of recorded interviews and reflective journals kept by the teachers in this study.

Teacher practice and student learning were analyzed to determine changes during the use of the ten Mediated Learning Strategies: Meaning, Intentionality and Reciprocity, Transcendence, Competence, Challenge, Control of Behavior/Self Regulation, Sharing, Individuation, Goal Planning and Self Change (Skuy, 1996).

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did the four fourth-grade teachers view the effectiveness of their instructional practices with their students, while utilizing the ten Mediated Learning Strategies?
2. How did students participating in the study view their ability to learn?
3. How did the parents view their children's ability to learn?

Three themes emerged directly related to (1) controlling behavior while in the classroom setting, (2) the teacher's ability to assist the student in making meaning, and (3) the intention of the instruction, as it related to the student's understanding of reciprocity, in relationship to positive outcomes regarding learning behaviors. These themes were in direct correlation with the strategies the teacher used in order to facilitate learning as well as the teacher's view of her instructional practices.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In all of the classrooms students were taught in heterogeneous small groups for the direct purpose of teachers assisting them in constructing meaning in regards to many of the assignments that required higher order thinking. In no instance was there evidence to indicate isolation of particular students from more advanced types of instruction or to learning that did not require higher order thinking. Students were also grouped together for peer-to-peer and social/academic interactions that supported the learning process.



Student/teacher mediated learning interactions support the review of literature in regards to authentic learning opportunities that engage all students, specifically those that are at-risk for social, emotional and academic failure. These findings support the work of Day (2000) who stated that motivation to learn is crucial for at-risk students who can be discouraged by constant lower-level drills and practice sessions that seem to focus on their shortcomings and repeated failures. Further, Day (2000) found that in fact, instruction of this kind has shown that by not challenging or encouraging at-risk students to use complex thinking skills, teachers underestimated students' capabilities and, as a result, discouraged their exploration of interests and meaningful work they could accomplish. Rather than treating the absence of essential skills as a roadblock for at-risk students, instructors can emphasize opportunities for learning and practicing basic skills using authentic tasks.

Teachers in this study noted that rote skill instruction, which is often connected to low level tasks did not engage their students even though they were capable of completing the task at hand. What teachers did discover is that their students needed purposeful interaction and direct instruction that guided them as they constructed meaning for themselves.

Shulman (1986) states that classroom ecology researchers look for criteria that indicate effective classroom practices. These include equality of opportunities to participate rather than participation frequencies, in addition to indications of clear communications of meaning between teacher and student especially focal in multiethnic classrooms where teacher and student may be from different cultural backgrounds.

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With issues of culture in mind, the outcomes of this study indicated that the teachers were not cognizant, nor felt that they needed to be cognizant of their student's cultural backgrounds. This could have resulted because this is a predominantly Caucasian school district and the percent of minorities represented in all of the classrooms were lower than 10 percent. As teachers were trained in the use of the Mediated Learning Strategies, instructions regarding positive student/teacher interactions were encouraged. Evidence of the same was indicated in the teacher, student, and parent interviews in addition to the teacher's reflective journals.

The outcomes of this study demonstrate that with the use of these Mediated Learning Strategies, learning did take place in all of the classrooms in this study. The Mediated Learning Strategies employed by the teachers after monthly training sessions did produce positive outcomes but the idea of addressing student's cultural background during instruction still requires exploration.

The issue of providing an environment that is conducive to learning is one of the main challenges for many at-risk students in bridging the gap between their home cultures and the culture of school. Home life and culture are not closely aligned with school culture, making these student's prospects for success in school much more precarious (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Delpit (1995) indicates that a teacher's ability to tap into the student's cultural background, and provide consistent and deliberate opportunities for the student to interact during instruction with the teacher and his or her classmates would prove to be beneficial to the student's ability to learn. Because of the specific Discourse Community of at-risk students, a definitive incongruence between the student's social norms and practices of communication at school make it difficult for

some students to actually receive instruction (Gee 1996). This lack of cultural synchronization increases the students' chances of academic failure (Irvine, 1990).

Mediated Learning Strategies offer opportunities for constant interaction between teacher and student, thereby creating a supportive and nurturing environment for students that are at-risk for academic failure. Strategies that explore the issue of helping the student feel a sense of competence were stressed throughout the study year.

The findings of this presented through the three themes that emerged in direct correlation with the strategies the teacher used in order to facilitate learning as well as the teacher's view of her instructional practices follow.

**Mediated Learning Strategy: Control of Behavior**

Control of Behavior (Self-Regulation) was the mediated learning strategy utilized to bring a sense of order to the sometimes disorganized, chaotic classrooms in order to facilitate instruction and student learning. For most of the participants this strategy was essential to the survival of the class. Descriptions concerning this topic of control of behavior centered around the teachers ability to model the importance of self-control and positive behavior. For this purpose teachers clarified their expectations and spent individual time with students helping them to better focus and become accountable for their actions. Students were given opportunities to remove themselves from situations without having to ask permission of their teachers, especially during instruction when the students found themselves unable to focus.

Sharron & Coulter (1994) believe that if students were given the opportunity to engage in the right kind of interaction, they would begin to develop efficient thinking skills that would enable them to become autonomous and independent learners. Low-

functioning students often suffer from impulsiveness and therefore need ways in which to inhibit these behaviors so that they can successfully gather processes and express information.

The outcomes in this study directly related to this strategy resulted in students that were successful in controlling their behaviors and therefore better able to participate in many ways during the instructional process. The emergence of this strategy as a theme was not a surprise, due to the fact that teachers during the training sessions indicated their frustration during instruction with their students inability to control their negative behaviors, both academic and social.

The students view of their ability to learn coincided with their teachers. In particular it is important to note that students stated that they were better able to control their behaviors and recognized that it was their responsibility to do so. Clearly this meant that students benefited from their teacher's ability to mediate this strategy. This same opinion was reflected in the parent's ability to articulate that their children were better able to control their impulsive behaviors while completing assignments both at home and in school on a regular basis.

An interesting development in the analysis of the data indicated that on several interview responses, parents believed that their children were better able to control their behaviors because the teachers this year were strict in their expectations for learning and behavior than teachers during the previous year.

**Mediated Learning Strategy: Meaning**

Each of the teachers in this study viewed their ability to provide instruction through the lens of pedagogical practices such as: reciprocal teaching and small group

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differentiated instruction. They believed that the mediated learning strategy of meaning was fostered through these practices and were used to assist each of their students in finding background knowledge to connect to new learning. These teachers articulated their findings by assessing their students ability to be on task and fluently describe the salient points within a given lesson. Meaning, according to Sharron & Coulter (1994) is the emotional and energetic principle that mediators need in order to ensure that the stimulus they are presenting to students gets through.

Students viewed their ability to learn by articulating the fact that during this academic year, they were better able to understand what the teacher taught because “she taught it until we understood.” Students constantly compared their experiences this year to the last, stating that one teacher taught the content better than the other by their ability to make comparisons and provide “good examples” they could understand.

These findings support Sharron & Coulter (1994) as they indicate that teaching by comparisons and sophisticated categorizations and interaction is the key to understanding. It is through interesting activities that involve students’ own responses, even when wrong, that become beneficial activities that foster the students abilities to think divergently and critically.

The strategy of meaning for parents translated directly toward their children’s ability to learn or to be seen as competent. Several parents responded by stating that their child’s teacher seemed to be trained in understanding how children learn better than the teacher the previous year. Typically, because they felt that the current teacher took more time with their child than the last. In other instances parents stated that the teacher taught their child specific learning strategies. For example: students were taught how to go

back into the text and find information that would assist them in acquiring the correct response. Students were taught in a very concise step by step manner. Other parents felt that the teacher made herself available for one-on-one attention, or extra help.

**Mediated Learning Strategy: Intentionality and Reciprocity**

Finally, the theme of Intentionality and Reciprocity was the strategy all of the teachers utilized during instruction. In fact, it is one of the five primary strategies, (Meaning, Intentionality, Reciprocity, Transcendence, and Competence) which all mediators need in order to facilitate “Mediated Learning.” Dynamic instructional practices such as reciprocal teaching, and small group differentiated instruction were used as an avenue to assist students in constructing meaning for themselves and transferring information into new knowledge. Interactions centered around intentionality and reciprocity provided opportunities for direct explicit instruction. Students had greater opportunities to receive one-on-one instruction and constant feedback. These strategies were used for the purposes of inciting student interest. Not only did the teachers see the need to provide appropriate developmentally sound instruction for the students that were potentially at-risk, but also for those that needed instruction that suited their needs at a much more stringent level of rigor.

Instructional practices such as reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning, authentic assignments, and various forms of assessment were needed for the purposes of conveying new and old content. According to Sharron & Coulter (1994) intentionality can be seen in the teacher-student relationship as a conscious intention with which the teacher controls the access to the stimuli. During instruction, teachers constantly evaluated the effectiveness of their instructional practices. Two of the teachers met on a regular basis

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to share student progress. In most of the classrooms, students were provided with pre- and post test to indicate their level of understanding. Lessons were planned around the theory of multiple intelligences, as well as issues of levels of rigor appropriate to the student. Lots of student conferencing took place and students were made aware of their progress. In essence, Intentionality and Reciprocity appears to have been the conveyor whereby students became focused and interested in what was being taught.

When asked how their ability to learn had changed since last year, students responded that they were performing better this year than last because of the fact that they were better able to listen and follow instructions as well as their ability to work independently. Students responded positively as they spoke about their ability to ask questions in class and having their questions answered by their teacher. Students stated that they did not get as confused as they previously had and that they raised their hands more often when asked a question. Students felt that they were in safe environments and therefore could take risks because they knew that their teacher would answer their questions or help them to understand the answers. Students stated that their teachers used good examples and that they explained the questions and answered their inquiries for understanding more than once. When compared to the previous year, one student stated that this year he did not get in trouble for giving the wrong answer. Others described themselves as being more focused. One student simply stated that: “she’s a great teacher, she’s very involved. Like when she explains something to us, she gets really into it. She gives us a conversation.”

Lastly, parents viewed their children’s ability to learn simply by the fact that the teacher got involve, she the teacher, “motivated” the students. Another parent responded

that their child became more confident and therefore was more successful. Their children realized that they could do the work. One parent responded, "I think that he gained confidence in himself early in the year. He started seeing some good grades coming back and some positive feedback from the teacher. That is why I think he did better." Framing tasks through direct instruction and achievable learning strategies, and explaining the reasons for success helped these teachers to reinforce for themselves and with their students, that a person's ability to change is a process of time, thought, and practice.

### **Conclusion**

The emotional and academic support that these teachers gave their students helped them to come to a place where they were willing to cope with their new learning. This support followed by the excitement of success made learning feasible and helped students to seek and meet their goals for learning. The teachers that participated in this study reported that their students were more capable of learning as a result of this approach than they had been when they arrived in their classrooms in September. As the study began, teachers were taught a new Mediated Learning Strategy each month. Some of the strategies were used more often than others. Some of the teachers better internalized the strategies and used them more seamlessly than their colleagues, which proved to effectively change the affect of their instructional practices. It is believed that this occurred because some of the teachers incorporated more of their existing instructional practices while mediating than others. Moreover, some of the teachers felt that they automatically utilized these strategies even though they could not give them a name. To support this, Sharron & Coulter (1994) point out, that good teachers already do much of these types of things in their classes intuitively. However, a good teacher's



interactions with her students might stimulate students and keep them involved, but might not be directed toward utilizing the strategies to mediate the precise cognitive skills and operations that the students need. In addition, a lack of theory and training about cognition and the common deficiencies manifested in students inevitably make classroom interactions less intentional and focused.

In this study, everything about Mediated Learning pointed toward the fact that thoughtful, purposeful teacher-student engagement was paramount to a student's academic, social, and emotional success. Focus on these interactive Mediated Learning strategies became the ten lynchpins that helped to facilitate meaningful instructional practices that provided the teacher with opportunities to know her students and provided the students with an understanding of the hindrances that often stifled their ability to capitalize on their teacher's instruction. Throughout this study students and their parents attested to the fact that learning did take place and that most often the teacher was the person to whom they attributed this success.

With the use of these strategies, changes in both student and teacher behavior(s) were determined to have had a positive influence on both teaching and learning. All of the teachers, to some degree, utilized a variety of Mediated Learning Strategies with their students. The Journal Recordings and Interview Protocols revealed that two of the teachers utilized and incorporated more of the learning strategies into their instruction than the others. The outcomes of this study did not indicate that teachers were cognizant or felt that they needed to be cognizant of their student's cultural backgrounds. Another issue closely related to the outcomes of this study was cultural milieu and a teachers understanding of its importance in regards to instructional practices and student learning.

Finally, instructional practices used in the classroom should be committed to meeting the needs of all students regardless of their cultural background.

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