

Meeting the Needs of High School Students Reading at Grade 2/3 Level
The Elements Curriculum
Field Research Data and Interpretation

All American students are promised a free and appropriate education. When young adults sit in high school classes and are given textbooks that they cannot read, they experience failure. The question is, who is the failure? Surely it is the educational system, which has not provided appropriate education.

Every day, teachers are confronted with decisions regarding how to best educate students for whom regular education instructional materials do not seem to work. For some students, accommodations are all that are needed to ensure success. Other students need lower-level materials and additional assistance.

High school students reading at a grade 2/3 level have many hindrances to success.¹ Typically, these students are more likely to have one or more handicapping conditions such as a learning disability, emotional disturbance, mental retardation, or autism. They are more likely to have medical conditions such as ADHD, asthma, allergies, or diabetes. Many of these students have learned English as a second language. Many come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Family situations may not be stable. Some have legal problems. Low self-esteem developed over years of academic failure is common. For many students, all of these factors are relevant. For everyone in this population, dropping out of high school is a real possibility.

It is our challenge as educators to provide these students the education that is rightfully theirs and the information that they need in order to be successful in real life. The Elements Curriculum is written at a grade 2/3 reading level. High school content matter is presented in an age-appropriate, easy-to-read format. This curriculum was provided to high school Special Education students who were not able to progress using higher-level instructional materials. Their progress was tracked and the results were documented.

In an attempt to make educational research more meaningful, we present the findings in a straightforward, uncomplicated format. This program will work for some students. It is

¹ There is extensive current research that indicates a high rate of co-occurrence or comorbidity of mental disorders in children and adolescents (Anderson, Williams, McGee, & Silva, 1987; Caron & Putter, 1991; Greenbaum, Prange, Friedman, & Silver, 1991). Anderson et al. (1987) reported that of 14 children in their general population sample with a depressive disorder, 11 had at least one other psychiatric condition.

Juvenile offenders have a high rate of mental retardation, learning disabilities, and specific developmental disorders. The comprehensive review of literature by the staff of the Institute on Mental Disability and the Law at the National Center for State Courts (1987) concludes that the prevalence of mental retardation among juvenile offenders is approximately 13%. The prevalence of learning disabilities/specific developmental disorders among juvenile offenders is approximately 36%. Prevalence rates of learning disabilities among juvenile offenders as studied by Davis et al., 1991; Hollander & Turner, 1985; Robbins et al., 1983; Smykia & Willis, 1981; and Wake, 1992, varied between 17% and 53%.

not designed to work for all students. The goal is for all students to grow beyond this curriculum and to function successfully in the mainstream.

The purpose of this study is to document success indicators:

- What population benefits from this curriculum?
- What are the benefits of this curriculum?
- What educational settings are appropriate for this curriculum?
- Do behavior problems increase or decrease with individuals while working in this curriculum?
- Is this curriculum user-friendly?

Participants

Students participating in the pilot program:

Total Number of Students	Hispanic	White	African American
147	51%	13%	36%

Participant criteria:

- Enrolled in a public high school
- Currently receiving Special Education services
- History of failure of statewide assessments
- Reading level at or below GE 3.5 (WIAT, WIAT II, WJ-R, WJ-III)
- History of lack of progress with regular education curriculum
- History of lack of progress with alternative curriculum with a reading level of grade 4/5
- Receiving reading interventions such as computer-based programs that target reading decoding, vocabulary enrichment, comprehension, and fluency
- Receiving individualized Special Education services in a resource or self-contained setting
- May be receiving ELL interventions
- May be receiving other interventions or related services, such as speech therapy or occupational therapy
- At risk for dropping out

Students with the following handicapping conditions were involved with the pilot project:

- Learning disabled
- Emotionally disturbed
- Other Health Impaired
- Mentally Retarded
- Other (Autism spectrum)

Pilot Setting

The pilot program was used in eight Texas public high schools for a period of four years.

Participating Schools	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Overall SES
8	4	1	2	Low

Intervention Procedures

Participants were identified by the educational team during the educational planning process. Previous interventions and programs were reviewed. Least restrictive environment issues were addressed. The team determined that the student was not successful using regular education instructional materials based on failing grades, failing statewide assessments, and testing at or below 3.5 GE on standardized assessments.

The Special Education teacher implemented and monitored the pilot program.

Materials for each student for each subject:

- Goals and objectives (reproduced from the Resource Manual or Resource CD or teacher developed)
- Student text
- Pretests, posttests, unit tests (reproduced from the Resource Manual or Resource CD)
- Activities (reproduced from the Resource Manual or Resource CD)
- Student worksheets (reproduced from the Resource Manual or Resource CD)

Implementation

The program was implemented according to individual education plans. Some students with very serious problems, such as mental retardation or schizophrenia, needed one-to-one or small group instruction and guided practice. Other students received instruction and then worked independently in a resource setting. Some students used the curriculum as side-by-side texts in mainstream settings with minimal assistance from the Special Education teacher.

Prior to implementation of the pilot program, teachers received training that included explanation of the instructional materials, strategies for implementation, and flexibility of use. Emphasis was placed on the importance of having high expectations for students. Teachers were encouraged to use the curriculum as a way for students to successfully move to higher-level instructional materials.

Treatment Fidelity

Teachers and students carried out instructions as intended. Treatment integrity by teachers was observed during site visits. Treatment integrity by students was measured and documented with daily work and content tests.

Data Collection and Analysis

The key person for the pilot program at each site was the Special Education teacher. This teacher completed an analysis documenting the total number of participants, ethnicity, and kinds of handicapping conditions, as defined by IDEA 2004. Many students had more than one handicapping condition. Some students gained or lost identification of one or more handicapping conditions over the course of the program. None of the students were dismissed from the Special Education program during the course of the pilot program.

The teacher documented the outcome of the program for each student. All students received passing grades of 70% or greater and were awarded credit. Additionally, teachers were asked to rate various outcomes that they observed were most beneficial.

Number of students who passed	147	98%
Number of students who failed	0	0%
Number of students who did not complete the program (attrition)	3	2%

Top 5 benefits of the program:

1. Understandable concepts
2. User friendly for students and Improved student grades (tied scores)
3. Age-appropriate pictures and text
4. Improved self-esteem
5. Reduced behavior problems

Results

Results indicate that high school Special Education students reading at a grade 2/3 level are able to successfully use the Elements Curriculum. These students are able to understand content material, demonstrated by teacher observations and passing grades. Students are able to experience success, demonstrated by passing grades and teacher observations indicating increased student self-esteem. Teachers reported fewer behavior problems.

The curriculum appears to be appropriate for Special Education students with the following handicapping conditions: learning disability, emotional disturbance, mental retardation, other health impairment, and autism spectrum disorder. The curriculum appears to be appropriate for Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian high school

students who are reading at a grade 2/3 level. The curriculum appears to be appropriate for students living in urban, suburban, and rural backgrounds. The curriculum appears to be workable in a variety of settings.

Interpretation

The Elements Curriculum is an instructional resource that is appropriate for high school students who are reading at a grade 2/3 level. Students are able to learn high school concepts. Students experienced success, teachers experienced success, and behavior problems were reduced.

The Elements Curriculum is not appropriate for all students. All students have the right to a curriculum that meets them at their level and provides information that is accurate, intellectually stimulating, and relevant to their life. For students who simply cannot read regular content material, the Elements Curriculum is a choice and an opportunity for success.

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More information may be obtained by contacting

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