

Collaborative Consultation and Curriculum-Based Assessment with Diverse Students

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This article describes the use of collaborative consultation and curriculum-based assessment as viable intervention practices to prevent school failure and identification in special education for children who are culturally and linguistically diverse. These practices are offered as alternatives to the traditional psychoeducational assessment process since they can often depict children as capable while providing them with more opportunities to learn. Implications pertaining to authentic assessment and the training of school psychologists in bias free procedures are discussed.

Three cases are presented to illustrate the effectiveness of collaborative consultation and curriculum-based assessment (CBA) in solving learning and behavioral problems presented by children who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). These procedures are used as part of a pre-referral instructional intervention and assessment process that aims to help students succeed in the regular classroom and prevent the over identification and placement of children of diverse backgrounds in Special Education. The use of collaborative consultation and curriculum-based assessment is presented as an alternative to the traditional referral-assessment model since both practitioners and researchers are increasingly viewing the norm-comparison psychoeducational assessment model as intrinsically flawed and as an assessment method that cannot be successfully adapted for use with CLD children (Figueroa, 1989; Mercer, 1986). Thus the need for alternative delivery systems that would account for children's diverse culture, language and socio-economic status in the assessment process (i.e., Graden, Zins, & Curtis, 1988).

In the traditional referral and assessment model, problems experienced by students are typically seen as prob-

lems children have in learning to read, doing math or spelling on grade level. In contrast, instructional consultation focuses on "the quality and nature of the interaction, which usually is an instructional mismatch, between an often vulnerable learner, inadequate instruction, and a muddled conception of the task. It is the goal of the collaborative consultation process to analyze the mismatch and facilitate a more productive interaction" (Rosenfield, 1987, p.10). Thus, from the person-environment interaction perspective variables such as the curriculum, instruction, classroom, school, family and community contexts are examined as critical variables that impinge upon the learning process. In some situations, as in the cases presented below, these variables become the focus of instructional interventions.

In view of the above discussion, consultation is defined as "a method of providing preventively oriented psychological and educational services in which consultants and consultees form cooperative partnerships and engage in a reciprocal, systematic problem-solving process within an ecobehavioral framework" (Zins & Erchul, 1995, pp. 609-610). Curriculum-based assessment is defined as "a

system for determining the instructional needs of a student based upon the student's on-going performance within existing course content in order to deliver instruction as efficiently as possible" (Gicklin, Shane, & Croskery, 1989, pp. 344-345).

The above definitions are particularly useful in school contexts since they cover a wide variety of problem situations. The first definition would permit interventions within a systems/ecological framework while the second one underscores the need to examine curriculum and instructional practices as they relate to children's learning problems. The generic steps of collaborative consultation; problem identification and goal setting, interventions, and, evaluation (Allen & Graden, 1995) are used to organize the following case presentation.

The Case of Frank

Problem identification and goal setting

Frank, a seven year old second grade student from the Dominican Republic, receiving instruction in Spanish in a bilingual classroom setting, was identified by his teacher as in need of instructional assistance. Frank's reading ability was characterized by a high rate of word omissions, changes in word endings, substitution/creation of words irrelevant to the passage and word repetitions. He was unable to recall information independently read.

Classroom observations were undertaken as well as observations and interviews with Frank's father. Curriculum-based assessment was utilized to evaluate Frank's reading ability and to identify his instructional level. Frank's oral reading fluency in Second Grade material was 34 words per minute (WPM) with nine errors per minute (EPM) or about 73% known material. Utilizing Shinn's (1995) benchmark guidelines, it was determined that Frank's reading ability was typical of a first grader during the Spring semester. According to reading benchmarks, he was performing at a frustration level in his Second Grade reading materials.

The goal set for intervention was to increase Frank's instant-vocabulary recognition by a rate of at least two new words per minute per week maintaining the reading comprehension minimally at 80 percent.

Interventions

The interventions selected through the decision making process included:

- to determine and adjust reading materials to Frank's ability level.
- to involve Frank's father with homework follow up at home.
- to create a list of words and phrases from Frank's reading material which he did not recognize.
- to use a variety of colored markers to identify key words.

- to utilize a tape recorder to record reading material for Frank to listen to as he read along.
- to record Frank while reading a selection in order for him to listen to it later on.

The above interventions were implemented by the classroom teacher on a daily basis, for 45 minutes, for 12 consecutive weeks with the support and assistance of the classroom instructional assistant (I.A.). The teacher was responsible for gathering the data in order to evaluate and monitor Frank's reading progress. Data was recorded on the curriculum-based assessment record form twice a week on Mondays and Fridays. This format provided a direct and frequent measurement of Frank's performance progress toward completion of instructional objectives and was utilized to plan future instruction. The instructional assistant prepared flash cards with vocabulary words in different colors. These words were previously identified by the teacher from Frank's weekly word list. Frank's father's responsibility was to reinforce, monitor and supervise Frank's assignments at home. He worked collaboratively throughout the duration of the interventions, reinforcing strategies being utilized in the classroom. Frank's father was advised on ways to assist Frank in the practice of newly learned vocabulary words. Additional reading materials at Frank's reading level were provided for practice during the evenings and weekends. The team (teacher, I.A., and Frank's father) agreed to meet at the end of the day on Fridays each week. Discussions about Frank's reading progress took place. Information, observations and concerns were shared. The curriculum-based assessment Record Form provided information on Frank's new words acquisition rate, retention of learned vocabulary words, oral reading fluency and comprehension level. The data was presented to Frank who kept a "Happy Face Chart" to monitor his own progress. This activity gave him the opportunity to be an active partner in his own educational program. As he progressed, increasingly higher goals were discussed and established at the end of each weekly meeting.

Evaluation

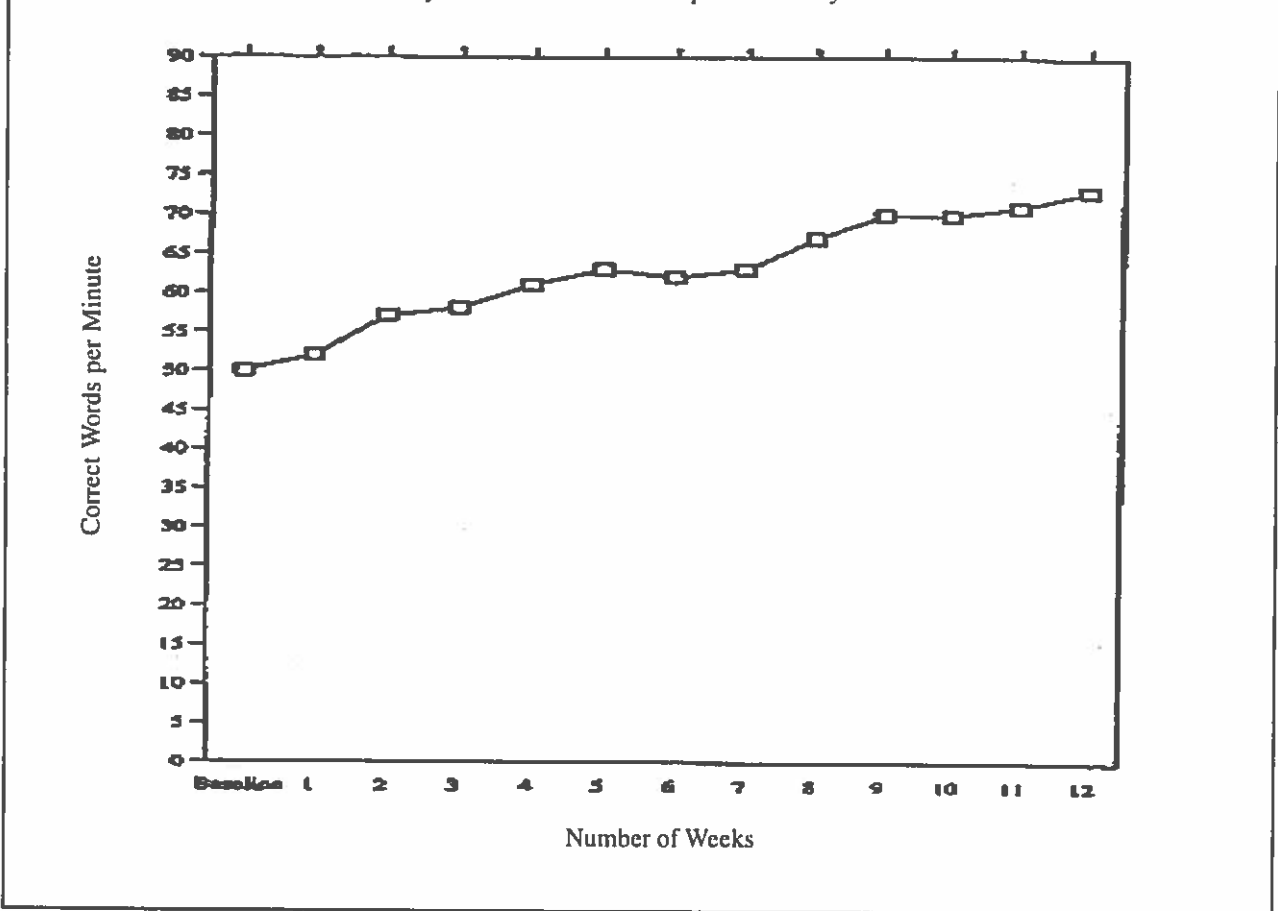
At the end of the curriculum-based assessment intervention (12 week period), Frank was reading 73 correct words per minute (cwpm) and had progressed to a higher reading level in the curriculum. Frank's performance with 97% accuracy rate reflects that he reached the goal set (See Figure 1). Frank felt proud and confident of his reading progress. He perceived himself as a better reader, volunteering to read out loud to his classmates.

The Case of Luis

Problem identification and goal setting

Luis, a seven year old second grader had been mainstreamed from a bilingual instructional setting into a regular English classroom. In the new setting, Luis was experiencing difficulties, especially in reading. In an effort

Figure 1
Intervention Results: The Case of Frank - Correct Words per Minute by Week



to identify the problem, and in collaboration with classroom teacher, English as a Second Language teacher, parents and consultant, classroom observations were performed. In addition, Luis' work samples and school records were reviewed. Interviews with Luis' former teacher and parents were also conducted. The assessment of Luis' language performance in both English and Spanish was one of the first steps taken as a means of determining possible language interference with Luis' academic achievement. Language assessment with the New York Language Assessment Battery in English and Spanish reflected a three point difference in favor of the English language. After eliminating language as responsible for Luis' deficient academic achievement a curriculum-based assessment (CBA) on Luis' reading was performed. Based on this assessment Luis' average oral reading fluency in second material was eight words per minute (WPM) with two errors per minute (EPM) or about 75% known material. CBA guidelines placed Luis as working at a frustration level on this material. When presented with a lower level passage (first grade 1.1 level), Luis performed at a 90% accuracy level which represented his instructional reading level. As a result of this assessment, modifications in reading instructions were

targeted for interventions.

A goal for the improvement of reading fluency skills was established, collaboratively by the classroom teacher and consultant, to be at a rate of at least two new words per minute per week, for the next twelve weeks, and a slow but steady gain in comprehension skills. Subsequently, additional interventions were brainstormed and prioritized according to what the team thought was feasible. Also decided was the manner in which interventions were to be implemented, the frequency and length of time needed, as well as those responsible for different aspects of the intervention. As a result an action plan was established.

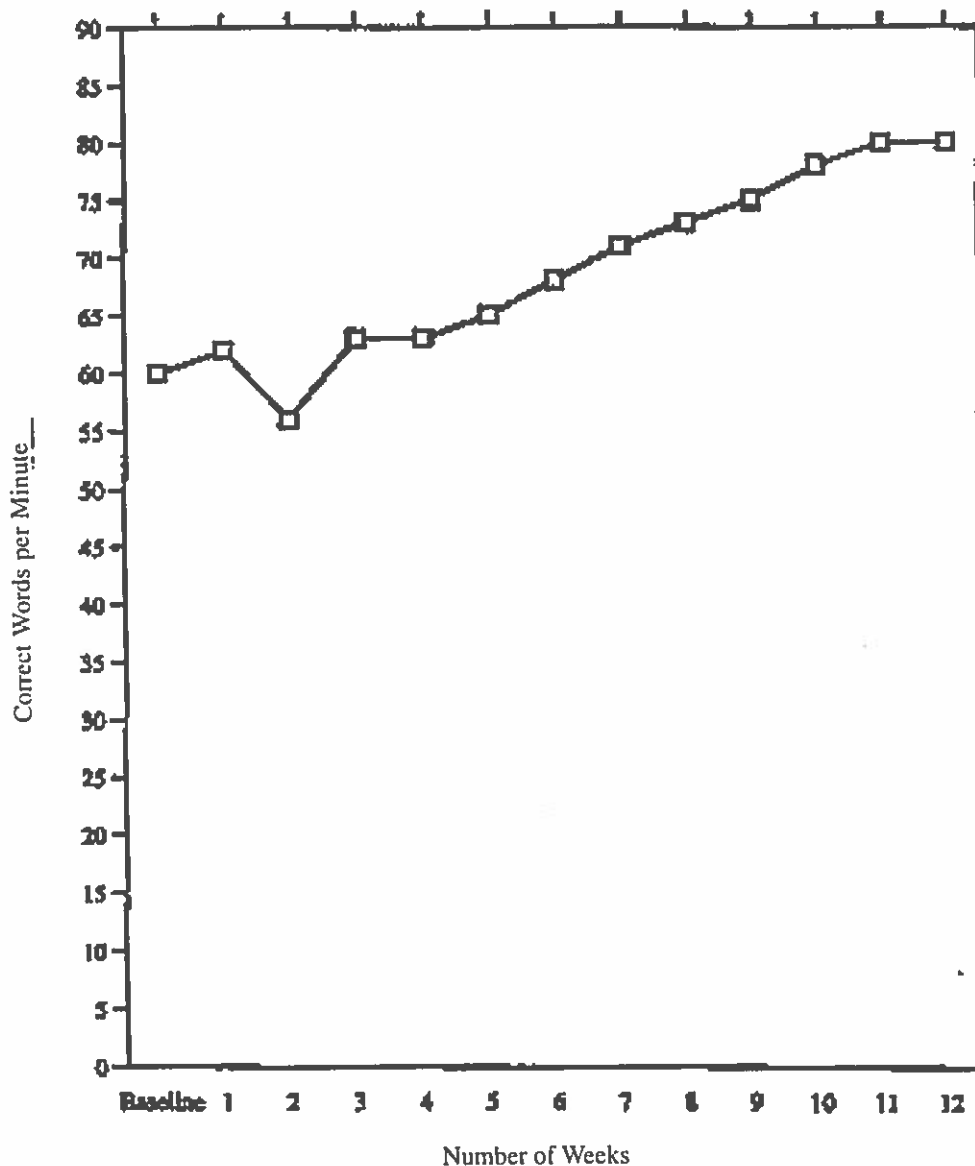
Interventions

The focus of the interventions consisted of teaching and offering practice of sight vocabulary and phonic awareness to Luis while reading at the instructional level with appropriate comprehension. The following interventions were utilized:

Placement of student in a reading group with material at his own ability level. The implementation of intervention took place in Luis' classroom with the teacher as the main implementor.

- Motivations, such as the use of computers, and praise were to be utilized in order to encourage Luis to be more successful.
- The teacher and instructional assistant were to implement these interventions. Access to the computer would be twice a week for 25 minutes during the afternoon.
- Materials were to be modified to better meet Luis' ability level by teacher and I.A. at least a week in advance, during collaborative planning time.
- Materials involving high interest, low vocabulary were to be selected by the classroom teacher and I.A., with the assistance of the librarian.
- The use of sight word vocabulary approach, in order to teach him key words and phrases when reading directions and instructions such as "circle", "underline", were to be utilized by the teacher during the Early Morning Activity everyday for two weeks with extension to other areas as needed.
- Monitoring and direct assistance were to be provided to Luis by his teacher and the instructional assistant. A learning center where a variety of information could be available on different topics at his level as well as material to be utilized at home

Figure 2
Intervention Results: The Case of Luis - Correct Words per Minute by Week



were also utilized.

- Practice on phonic skills, context clues, and picture clues using words and phrases Luis did not recognize and which had been taken from his reading material, were to be implemented by the teacher and the instructional assistant during the three (3) days a week, 25 minutes practice session.
- One-on-one instruction (tutoring) with direct teacher method were to be provided everyday for 15 minutes or more. The teacher implemented this strategy during the introduction of new skills and vocabulary while the I.A. utilized it to reinforce skills during the practice session.

Evaluation

In order to maintain treatment integrity, data pertaining to the number of correct words per minute (CWPM) read by Luis was gathered twice per week. Initial and terminal reading fluency measures indicated that Luis increased his reading fluency to 80 from 60 CWPM as a result of the CBA intervention; a net gain of 20 CWPM (see Figure 2). According to reading benchmarks for the Second Grade, this level of reading fluency would allow him to keep up with the rest of the class. Luis' overall classroom adjustment also improved as he was now more willing to participate in class.

The Case of Troy

Problem Identification and goal setting

Troy, an eleven year old fifth grader was referred by his teacher, Mrs. Smith, who was concerned with Troy's use of inappropriate language when addressing her and/or his peers. Attempts to meet with Mrs. Green, Troy's grandmother, were not productive due to her lack of telephone or transportation. Troy was suspended from school six times (three one-day suspensions and three, three day suspensions) for swearing. Mrs. Smith stated that suspensions had not been effective in resolving the problem. Troy was placed in Mrs. Smith's class because of the administration's knowledge of his previous behavior and Mrs. Smith's strong classroom management and teaching abilities. When an incident occurred, Troy was asked to leave the room and go to the principal's office which typically occurred twice a day.

The following goal was set; there will be a 20% reduction in the use of swearwords for the first four weeks of the intervention. After one month, there will be an additional 10% reduction in the use of swearwords.

Intervention

Before the intervention started, a decision was made by the teacher that Troy would not be sent to the principal's office for using swearwords in order to avoid any reward that he might perceive from being sent out. As a team, we agreed on the use of three social skills training activities. First, a consideration was made in regard to Troy's home environment. Although it was felt by the team members

involved that his language is not considered as offensive at home as it is in school, we agreed that Troy's verbal behavior was unacceptable in the school setting. Therefore, we decided to begin with a social skills training called *Don't Say That Here!* Secondly, it was felt that Troy did not really know the meaning of the words he used. In the second social skills training called *What Are You Really Trying to Say?* an attempt was made to teach Troy the meanings of the words he uses. Thirdly, we felt that Troy would benefit from an activity call *Dealing with Feelings*.

Because of Troy's involvement with sports, it was decided to request the assistance of the assistant football coach. Mr. Costa, the assistant football coach for the high school team teaches at the intermediate school. He had Troy in gym class and the two had established a good rapport. Additionally, the team felt that an intervention delivered by an adult familiar with Troy's cultural background would facilitate Troy's acceptance of the program. Mr. Costa agreed to be the social skill trainer and met with Troy during his prep period.

Evaluation

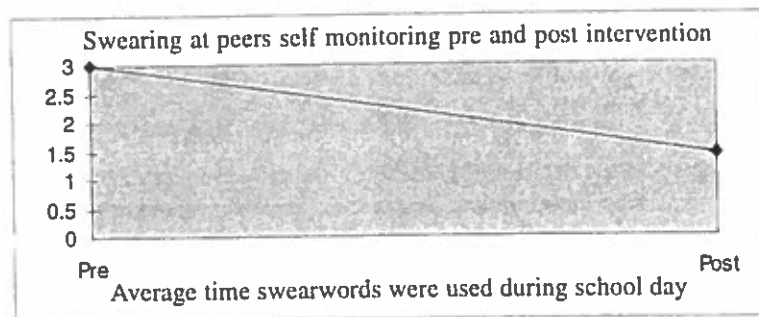
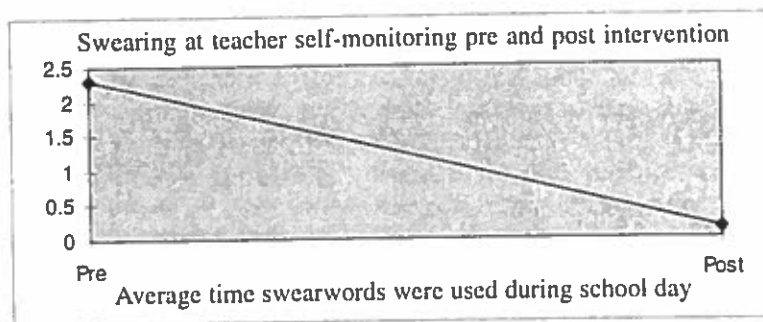
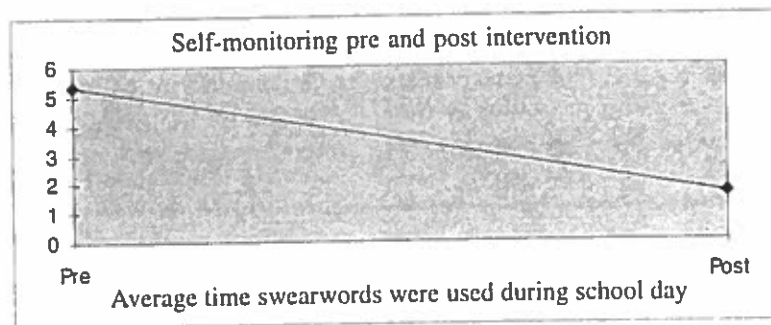
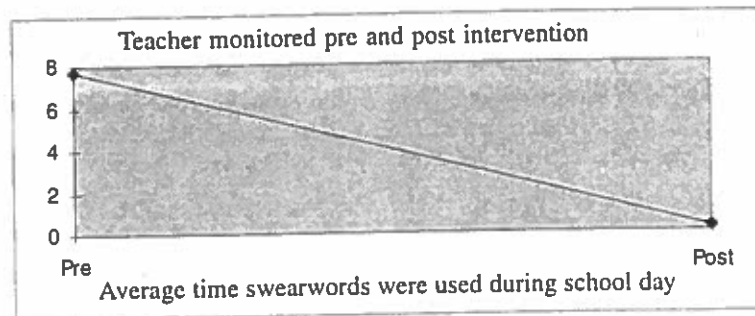
Frequency counts both by Troy himself and the teacher were selected for data gathering and evaluation purposes. Data was collected in four areas: Area 1 - teacher monitored pre-intervention 7.7 swear words per day as compared to post-intervention 0.14 swear words per day. Area 2 - self-monitoring pre-intervention 5.3 swear words per day as compared to post-intervention 1.6 swear words per day. Area 3 - swearing directed at the teacher self-monitoring pre-intervention 2.3 as compared to post-intervention 0.14. Area 4 - swearing directed at peer's self-monitoring pre-intervention 3.0 as compared to post-intervention 1.4 (see Figure 3).

At the outset, we considered the intervention a success. Although it can be argued that the behavior was not completely extinguished, it was never our intention to completely extinguish the behavior. Our intention from the beginning was to help Troy understand that the language he used was not always appropriate. This task was difficult for many reasons and Troy was not the only student with this problem. Before the intervention, Troy was swearing to his teacher several times a day in contrast to the end of the intervention where he was using a swearword in the presence of his teacher only one time in three days. Mrs. Smith felt that this was a behavior she could live with. Swearing with peers was reduced by nearly 50 percent.

Summary

In summary, all of these case studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative consultation and the use of specific intervention techniques. That is, for the consultant to work with a specific teacher in each one of these three cases helped, in the end, to benefit the progress of the individual child. In one instance, a child needed help within a bilingual program. In this case, the use of curriculum based assessment was effective in helping the child in col-

Figure 3
Intervention Results: The Case of Troy



laboration with his bilingual teacher. In another case, a child was struggling in a regular English classroom after having been placed in there from a bilingual classroom. Again, in collaboration with his regular classroom teacher, the consultant was able to be effective in helping the student through a curriculum-based assessment approach. And, in the third instance, a youngster was helped to reduce undesirable and aggressive behaviors through a collaborative approach in which the consultant helped a football coach to implement various social skills approaches with this youngster.

These case examples lend considerable support to the need for training and role modeling with the helping professions for investing the time and energy in preventive and intervention approaches in the hopes of warding off more serious issues which can often lead to classification and segregation of a child rather than helping to integrate or to mainstream the child.

Specifically, these case studies have implications for the role of school psychologists and other student support specialists. More training and practical experience is needed in prevention and intervention techniques. As this cases suggests, both curriculum based assessment and social skills training are two effective intervention models for consultant to be skilled at implementing. Another implication is the need for skill and expertise among child study team members in alternative assessment procedures such as the ones described here. This ability to work effectively with a colleague to help him/her to have a positive impact on an individual child or a group of children is, indeed, an art that merits a great deal of cultivation. And finally, the long range implication of this presentation is to help children to hopefully remain in the mainstream of society rather than to have to put the efforts on classification and a sorting out of children into separate categories.

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