The reading achievement gap: The difference between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers in middle school

Jason Sutton

George Mason University

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In most developed countries, the ability to read is considered a life skill. Human beings are not born knowing how to read, but rather develop the ability over time through formal education or other alternative methods. What happens when an individual does not develop this skill? How does an individual function in our society? It often depends on where that individual resides, but for the purposes of this paper let’s say the United States. One could surmise daily activities, often taken for granted by the mainstream become roadblocks for the illiterate portions of our population. For example, a teenager who cannot read, also cannot write, which affects their productivity in school, completing job applications, reading instructions, directions, taking notes, reading signs, passing a driver test, so on and so forth. After a while, strategies to cope will be used, such as technology to navigate directions or a map, technology to takes notes, memorizing some words and their corresponding symbols, but they will be hiding a secret they are ashamed of, which could lead to internal struggle, and the feelings of resentment, depression and solitude (Daves & Walker, 2012)).

According to the National Institute of Literacy (2003), in United States alone 32 million adults cannot read. That's equal to 14% of the population. In addition, 21% of adults in the U.S. read below a fifth grade level and 90% of high school graduates read on a basic comprehension level (Solis, Miciak, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2012). This affects individual’s job occupation, job stability, self-esteem, and their ability to become productive citizens.

Concerns with reading are not new in the United States. In fact, there have been periods throughout our history that we have implemented policies that aggressively attack gaps in reading. The two major policies that have had the greatest impact on public education is No Child Left behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) (Shirvani, 2009).

With policies and resources being implemented into public education, students are receiving support needed to excel in reading. With that said, the same policies and resources given to schools to help students achieve in reading in public education has also created a reading gap between different groups of students in school (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). According to data in 2013, 69% of fourth graders and 60% of eighth graders with disabilities score beneath the basic level on the national assessment of educational progress(NAEP) reading test, signifying performance well beneath grade level expectations. However, nondisabled peers only have 27% of fourth graders and 18% of eighth-graders score beneath basic on the reading tests (Solis, Miciak, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2014). As a result, one group in particular impacted by the reading gap are students with learning disabilities. Considering that there are more than 2.7 million students with learning disabilities (SLD) in grades K-12 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), it is instrumental that a focus be on addressing the learning needs and limitation of students with learning disabilities especially in middle school. More specifically, the achievement gap continues to expand during the transitional year to middle school. One explanation for the increased gap can be attributed to the fact that students are required to comprehend their text at a greater level. According to Mason (2004), reading comprehension is one of the most important cognitive skills students develop during school. During the transition to middle school, students are required to effectively manage increased expectations for independence. During this time, students are expected to complete difficult class assignments, manage time, plan and organize (Cleary, 2009). Students with learning disabilities often experience significant difficulty when reading and comprehending textbook information. Comprehension of most concepts presented in textbooks can be problematic due to the advanced written language that is used and students with learning disabilities have inadequate background knowledge (Swanson, Hairrel, Kent, Callo, Wanzek, & Vaughn, 2014).

When discussing the achievement gap in reading between middle school students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers, one has to ask the question why is there a gap. I do acknowledge that reading gaps generally involve all students with disabilities, but I chose to focus specifically on students with learning disabilities in middle school. There are policies that have been developed by the federal government to support students with learning disabilities and the research in the field of special education has created designs and evidence-based interventions to support students with learning disabilities with reading. There is countless research on what works for reading achievement with students with learning disabilities in middle school. Nonetheless, I feel there is a piece to the puzzle that needs to be incorporated with working with middle school students with learning disabilities to close the gap in reading.

**Research Purpose**

For the purpose of this paper, I will use the problem analysis framework to structure this paper to discuss the history of the policies that are being implemented to support middle school students with learning disabilities, identify and understand the current trends in reading with students with learning disabilities, the designs and measures that are being implemented to support middle school students with learning disabilities, and what other measures could be investigated to support reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities. To further my investigation about other measures, I will analyze the concept of self-regulation and how it can be implemented in reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities(solution). According to Zimmerman (2008) self-regulation is defined as “our ability to direct our behavior and control our impulses so that we meet certain standards, achieve certain goals, or reach certain ideals” (p.167). In 2011, Berkeley, Scruggs, and Mastropieri identified and coded forty studies with interventions including fundamental reading skills instruction, text enhancements, and questioning or strategy instruction. Out of the original forty studies coded, only eight contained a self-regulation component (Berkeley et al., 2011). This low number raises a great question in the area of awareness of self-regulation and why it’s not more common within reading comprehension interventions of students with learning disabilities.

The research in the field of special education is great at identifying the challenges and acknowledging that an achievement gap exists; however, the field still struggles with looking at old problems with a new lens. The topic of self- regulation requires further analysis. I want to explore the topic of incorporating self-regulation of students with learning disability in order to close the achievement gap in reading with middle school students.

**Research Question**

The research questions that will guide this paper are the following:

1. In what ways are current trends and policies impacting the achievement gap in reading between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers in middle school?
2. Do self-regulated learning components influence students with learning disabilities performance on increasing reading achievement in middle school?

**Literature Review**

**Learning Disability**

When discussing students in school, they are often categorized by labels. These labels are usually associated with certain behaviors and academic achievement in middle school (i.e. students who get upset easily are labeled emotionally disturbed). So what does it mean when we hear the label that a student has a learning disability? In my professional opinion, the label of a learning disability can translate into a teacher’s mindset that a student is slow with their thinking or processing, has a hard time retaining information, and can’t keep up with their peers. There seems to be a lack of a clear understanding of what it means to have a learning disability and how it translates into school achievement. Furthermore, roughly 80% of those with a SLD label have been described as reading disabled (Lewandowski, Cohen, & Lovett, 2013).

In my experience, students with learning disabilities have been difficult to understand and teach. One explanation could be a result of the category of a student with a learning disability has been increasing since the 1970s. (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). There are two main ideas about the increase of the category of a student with a learning disability. One argument states that we are doing a better job at identifying students with a learning disability. In contrast, another side states that the lack of a clear definition has created a loop whole that has allowed any struggling child to be diagnosed and labeled as a student with a learning disability (Daves & Walker, 2012). It is crucial that we develop a clear understanding of the characteristics of a student with a learning disability and how it is defined.

To help bring clarity to this paper, I will provide an understanding of what we know about students with a learning disability and then present an agreed upon definition. Learning disabilities derive from the neurological differences in the brain that affect the individual’s ability to process, comprehend, reclaim, and communicate information (Kim, Vaughn, Klingner, Woodruff, Reutebuch, & Kouzekanani, 2006). According to Vaughn and Wanzek (2014) scientifically, it has been proven there is a direct correlation of learning disabilities with genetics, maternal illnesses, drug and alcohol during pregnancy low birthrate, and oxygen deprivation during labor. Learning disabilities have been linked to traumatic brain injuries, not receiving adequate nutrition, and exposure to lead (Kim et al., 2006).

Learning disabilities are not caused by visual, hearing, and mobile impairment. An individual who might display difficulty learning and diagnosed as having an intellectual disability or emotional disability does not necessarily translate into a learning disability (Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts, & Fletcher, 2011). At the same token, an individual who is struggling with learning and who is an English Language Learner (ELL), live in poverty, and has received inadequate instruction does not mean that they have a learning disability. Nonetheless, there is a higher percent of students who live in poverty being diagnosed with a learning disability (Vaughn & Wanzek, 2014).

With all the variables that encompass the traits of a learning disability, children of poverty are a prime candidate. When living in poverty they are more exposed to insufficient health care, require a need for affordable housing, and normally not exposed to critical brain stimulation as an infant (i.e. parents reading to them). Even more, students of poverty can also be concentrated in particular schools, this concentration can increase the likelihood of students having a learning disability in the school that can increase the achievement gap in learning (Carter & Welner, 2013).

In a school setting, a student with a learning disability display the characteristics of serious difficulty in academic achievement with learning, even when provided with high-quality instruction (Kim et al., 2006). Students with learning disabilities often have a lifetime struggle with reading, math, written expression, and comprehension. Students with learning disabilities often suffer from depression, low self-worth, and set low expectations for their aptitude. As adults with learning disabilities, they often have trouble with employment, friendships, and have a greater chance of incarceration (Zirkel, P. A., & Rose, T., 2009).

In summary, to provide an agreed upon definition, we look at IDEA. IDEA defines a specific learning disability as:

“a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” (National Center for Learning disabilities, 2014, p.2)

This discussion of students with learning disabilities make it more urgent that we develop measures and policies as safeguards to support students with learning disabilities and their academic achievement.

**NCLB and Students With Disabilities**

In response to a public outcry to improve academic achievement of all students and close the achievement gap, federal legislation developed a system of standards and accountability called NCLB (Wei, 2012). NCLB has several important goals of closing the achievement gap between subgroups of students, improved teacher quality, and 100% proficiency for all students in reading and math (Kaufman & Kayne, 2012). Consequently, how does NCLB impact students with learning disabilities? As mentioned previously in the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test, 19% of fourth graders with disabilities score proficient in reading compared to 42% of students without disabilities in fourth grade (NCES, 2009b). This data alone could be interpreted as NCLB not having the intended effect of closing the achievement gap of students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers in reading. In fact, there have been numerous accounts of NCLB having the opposite effects of students with learning disabilities. For example, there have been frequent accounts of districts strategically using the subcategory of special education to protect their academic standing in their school under NCLB. This accusation has been supported by discovering across states an increase of the number of students in special education placement, non-diploma programs, and the failure of students with learning disabilities to pass the reading assessment (Amrein & Belliner, 2002).

Lastly, there are certain variables that are not taken into account with NCLB and students with learning disabilities that make it flawed. For instance, NCLB contradicts the developing theory for learning of students with learning disabilities (Shirvani, 2009). Students with learning disabilities typically enter school academically achieving at a slower rate than students without disabilities. Hence, NCLB is telling students with a learning disability to speed up their learning process with reading and math when cognitively this is a documented deficit that has been identified (Zirkel et al., 2009). NCLB has implemented a growth model; on the contrary, the growth model compare students with learning disabilities with their peers without disabilities short of taking into account students with disabilities might be growing at a slower rate (Shirvani, 2009). To conclude and most important, NCLB does not acknowledge differences of disabilities and the severity in which it can impact and individual’s ability. As an illustration, middle school students with learning disabilities are held at the same reading standard as students without disabilities. The only exception is if a student with a disability is so severe that they can qualify for taking an alternate or modified assessment for a standard (Wei, 2012). With NCLB, Carter & Welner (2013) sum it up nicely when they state, “NCLB has evoked an equality-of-results test of public school performance that neglects conditions inside and outside the schools that contribute to inequality” (p.25).

**IDEA**

With the impact that NCLB had on students with disabilities, it has had a causal effect on the revamping of IDEA legislation. Originally, IDEA was created by Congress in 1975 to ensure that children with learning disabilities had the same opportunity to receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE), just like all children (Davis & Walker, 2012). Actually, IDEA legislation main priority was insuring students with learning disabilities had access to educational benefits, not necessarily focusing on the educational performance (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). After NCLB (2002), Congress reauthorized IDEA (2004) to shift the priority of educational access to ensure a greater focus with students with learning disabilities and academic achievement. This amended policy change was called Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). This was congress reaction to NCLB and its attempt to align itself with NCLB to better serve students with disabilities (Amrein & Belliner, 2002).

Three authorization of IDEIA, included: (A) greater alignment of special education law and NCLB, (B) fund allocations for students who have yet to be identified as having a disability, (C) having the ability to change eligibility determination for students with disabilities, (D) restructure of hearing procedures and due process, (E) revamping discipline procedures with students with disabilities (Davis & Walker, 2012). There were two major implications in the new reauthorization that insured all special education teachers had to be highly qualified and the content that he/she was teaching. Likewise, there was now a clear definition of FAPE and accountability of academic success of students with disabilities.

As can be seen, the alignment of NCLB and IDEIA caused a greater emphasis on improving students with learning disabilities academic achievement by implementing federal mandates to reward or penalize schools (Shirvani, 2009). These mandates ensure that schools place a focus on creating goals and helping students with disabilities improve their educational abilities with standard base assessments. Conversely, there are still resistance to standard-based learning from parents of special education teachers (Davis & Walker, 2012). There is still a gap between test results and authentic real life learning. Giving these points, it has transformed the school to focus on how they are delivering instruction.

**Interventions**

We recognize that there is an achievement gap in middle school between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers in reading. Therefore, it is important we understanding what is being done in middle schools to close the achievement gap in reading with students with learning disabilities (Kim et al., 2006). When we focus on reading with students with learning disabilities, we will focus on the components of comprehension. There are two mechanisms being implemented to support students with learning disabilities. One mechanism is focusing on teacher instruction in the class, while the other mechanism is interventions being administered to the individual student with a learning disability (Sanford, Park, & Baker, 2011). In this paper, the focus will be on the intervention mechanism. There have been numerous studies about classroom instruction (e.g. co-teaching, direct instruction, etc.….) but less about interventions (Vaughn & Wanzek, 2014).

**Designs and interventions.**With the emphasis on the intervention mechanism, we need to analysis the design of the interventions that are being implemented. It is significant to examine which types of interventions are being used in middle school for students with learning disabilities with reading. We define an intervention as a program or strategy that is given to a group of students for the purpose of increasing their individual reading levels (Swanson, 2014). Solis et al (2012) identified 12 interventions that yield a high effect size when compared with multiple interventions. An effect size is defined as a correlation strength between two variables. The variables we are discussing are reading comprehension and interventions. With reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities the interventions that have the highest impact are text based strategies (identify main idea), paragraph strategy (written/retell), mnemonic strategies (graphic organizer), monitoring (self-question of main idea), and summarization (retelling story orally or written) (Berkeley et al., 2011).

When discussing reading achievement in middle school with students with learning disabilities, we need to look at how interventions and designs are being implemented in school. The primary type of research used with students with learning disability and reading is quantitative research. In quantitative research, there are two fundamental measures that are incorporated to close the gap in reading for students with learning disabilities in school, the design of the intervention(s) and the intervention(s) itself. The design of an intervention can be a single-subject design or a group design (Berkeley et al., 2011). I will briefly discuss each design and how it can be applied to increase students with learning disabilities reading comprehension in middle school.

A single-subject design is crucial for drawing causal inferences. It typically involves anywhere between three to five students. You have to establish an average baseline of each student before the intervention. Single-subject designs are not correlational or descriptive, but they do establish functional relationships. A single- subject design is typically conducted in a classroom (Solis et al., 2012). This design is commonly implemented when the researcher wants to reduce certain behaviors, when they are trying to decide which intervention is more effective, and which intervention is more or less affective when it is combined with another independent variable (Solis et al., 2012). There are definite strengths and weaknesses to this design. With its strengths, it allows a researcher to evaluate interventions in a diverse setting, the design allows for changes during a study (if an invention is not working well, you can modify the location or time), and a design can address multiple facets of an intervention (components that make it up) (Kim et al., 2012). On the contrary, its weaknesses limit the number of participants (it is hard to make generalizations about students with the intervention), the overall effect it has on the remaining students not receiving intervention, and the use of visual inspections can be limitation of the design (when there is not a clear interpretation of the data, it is hard to have a developed concise agreement) (Stanford et al., 2011). An example of a single-case design in reading that can be practiced in the middle school for students with a learning disabilities is a graphic organizer. You would take three to five students with a learning disability and assess them on their current level of reading(pretest). Then you introduce the students to a graphic organizer for an extended period of time. You would then re-administer another reading passes to the identified students to see if there was any growth in scoring of the reading passage (posttest).

A group design is experimental research of a homogeneous sample with fifteen to twenty participants. A group design allows the researcher to evaluate statistical differences between or within groups. Any group design you have a true experimental (subjects randomly assign two conditions), quasi-experimental (subjects are not randomly assigned), pre-experimental (no random assignment and no pretest or comparison group. There are strengths and limitations with a group design (Berkeley et al., 2011). The strengths include researchers consider this a strong design, it uses random selection, external validity (generalizable to similar populations), and it can be replicated (Solis et al., 2012). Its limitations include the complexity of the study (location, time limit, and in flexibility with attrition), large number of participants, assignment bias, environmental factors (Sanford et al., 2011) For instance, you can have one teacher assigned to two different reading classes in a middle school. The class is homogeneous (balanced reading level and gender) with its structure. One class is an experimental group (received the intervention) and one class is a control group (receives core instruction for reading). The experimental group receives the intervention for an extended amount of time, while the control group receives the regular core reading instruction. At the end of intervention, both groups receive a reading assessment. The data is interpreted to see if the intervention had any effect on the experimental group compared to the control group.

With clear designs and interventions for reading, especially comprehension being researched and implemented in middle schools, why do we still have an achievement gap in reading with students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers? Based on the topic of this discussion, I feel that we have overlooked an important variable. We clearly identified a problem, we have implemented designs and interventions to address the problem; however, we have missed the last step of focusing on the actual student.

**Self-regulation**

Boykin and Noguera (2011) acknowledged that interventions designed to foster belief changes among students who struggle with poor academic achievement are important to support a student’s achievement success. One intervention that supports this notion is self-regulation. The theory of self-regulation was commonly use in educational psychology. The concept is rooted in the social cognitive perspective that emphasizes interactions between persons, behavior, and environment (Lackaye & Margalit, 2008). Self- regulation theory has been making an impact in special education research in the last several years. Self-regulation can be defined as a student’s self-initiated, self-guided, and self-sustained efforts to learn in an academic environment (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2014). Researchers in the special education field have begun to study self-regulation to further student’s motivation and students desire to regulate their academic behaviors and functioning. Self-regulation research studies the mechanics that an individual interacts in vital or strategic thinking (Lackaye & Margalit, 2008). Self-regulation is based on theoretical frameworks that correlates and explains cognitive engagement and how the social environment can stimulate or retract individual motivation (Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts, & Fletcher, 2011).

In the field of special education, researchers are now implementing self-regulation measures in the research along with other variables. Researchers are discovering that students who are self-regulated exhibit a particular skill set for learning in that they are more attentive in their learning, strategic in that they employ strategies towards learning, and they are overall more motivated to learn (Cleary, 2009). In Table 1, there are nine articles researched to see if there was correlation between self-regulation and reading comprehension for middle school students with learning disabilities. On average, when a self-regulated learning component is embedded in a reading comprehension intervention, a moderate effect size was produced (.66). In general, effect sizes ranged from -.30 to 2.52. In Table 1, the effect sizes are presented below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1**  **Average Effect Size** |  |  |
| Study | Type of Treatment:  Treatment or Alternate Treatment | Average Effect Size Computation |
| Berkeley, Marshak, Mastropieri, Scruggs, 2011 | Self-Questioning | ES = -.11 |
| Berkeley, Mastropieri, and Scruggs, 2011 | RCS+AR (Summary)  RCS (Summary)  Average Summary ES  RCS+AR (Passage)  RCS (Passage)  Average Passage ES  RCS +AR (MSI)  RCS (MSI)  Average MSI ES  Overall Average Effect Size | ES = .9  ES = .98  **ES = .94**  ES = .14  ES = -.16  **ES = -.01**  ES = 1.10  ES = 1.04  **ES = 1.07**  **ES = .66** |
| Jitendra, Hoppes, and Xin, 2000 | Experimental with Main Idea Strategy instruction for Self-Monitoring | ES = 2.29 |
| Johnson, Graham, and Harris, 1997 | Strategy + Goal Setting  Strategy+ Self-Instruction  Goal Setting + Self-Instruction | ES = -.49 |
| Manset- Williams and Nelson, 2005 | PDF/EC: Instruction | ES = .27 |
| Mason, 2004 | TWA | ES = .66 |
| Miranda et al., 1997 | LD Attribution  LD Self-Instruction | ES = 2.52 |
| Schunk and Rice, 1991 | Process for Self-Efficacy  Process Goal + Progress Feedback | ES = .78 |
| Swanson and Trahan, 1992 | Paper, Computer No Reread, Computer Optional Reread | ES = -.30 |

To gain a deeper understanding of how self-regulation is implemented in a school, the researchers use forms of questionnaires to assess self-regulation of students and have been implementing specific strategies to increase self-regulation awareness in students. Zimmerman (2008) has a Self-Regulation Model that incorporates three phases that include forethought, performance, and self-reflection. Forethought, involves strategy choice and goal setting. Performance entails self-monitoring and strategy use. Self-reflection comprises causal attributions and self-evaluation for success or failure. All three phases are fundamental for students to be successful in their own monitoring of learning. When students with learning disabilities begin to comprehend the power of monitoring their learning, it will increase engagement in their learning (Cleary, & Callan, 2014). In addition, self-regulation model is the focus on process goals instead of outcome goals. Process goals teach students with learning disabilities to value the strategies and steps in reading; in contrast, outcome goals can frustrate middle school students with learning disabilities (Cleary, 2009). Even more, the self-reflection phase is where students assess goal progress, pinpoint causes of achievement or disappointment, which brings in attribution theory, and decides whether to proceed with the current strategy or change the approach towards a task (Clearly and Chen, 2009).

According to Cleary and Callan (2014), two core components of most self-regulation models are student’s motivational beliefs such as self-efficacy and interest and student’s use of self-regulatory strategies to foster their learning. Students’ who possess strong beliefs in their abilities (i.e. self-efficacy) are more likely to be persistent when approaching academic tasks. It is the students who do not exhibit strong self-efficacy beliefs in their abilities who get lost in the process, fall behind, and develop avoidance techniques for schoolwork (Johnson et al., 1997). So far, self-regulation strategies are predominantly being implemented in reading and writing of students with learning disabilities (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to understand the achievement gap in middle school reading between students with learning disabilities and their peers. The topic was addressed by implementing a problem analysis framework of discussing the history of the policies, stating the current trends with students with learning disabilities with reading, and the designs and measures that are being implemented to support middle school students with learning disabilities. A solution was purposed by investigating the effect of self-regulation on middle school students with learning disabilities and reading. The paper was guided by answering the research questions.

With addressing the first research question, the paper discussed NCLB and IDEA and the impact it had on students with learning disabilities. It can be concluded that there are policies that were implemented to support students with learning disabilities; however, it has resulted in over identification of students with learning disabilities, violation on FAPE, and unrealistic expectations related to academic growth (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). I believe that the policies developed to support students with learning disabilities were built on the foundation of good intentions. Nonetheless, lack of oversight and development of the policies from qualified individuals have created policies with unclear, under thought actions that lack practicality and equity.

In regard to the second question, this paper has demonstrated that implementing the components of self-regulation help to support middle school students with learning disabilities in closing the achievement gap of reading with their nondisabled peers (See Table 1). There should not be a question of researchers exploring the need to have a greater focus on self-regulation of students with learning disabilities, but a requirement that it be implemented in middle school interventions. In addition, I believe it will have a greater impact in closing the reading achievement gap between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers in middle school. During the transition to middle school, students are required to effectively manage increased expectations for independence. During this time, students are expected to complete difficult class assignments, manage time, plan and organize (Cleary, 2009). Due to the increased expectations for independence this is a crucial time to embed self-regulated strategy development in reading comprehension interventions. To further support my statement, Zimmerman & Kitsantas (2014) stated that self-regulation can be a critical component of strategy instruction for reading comprehension interventions. Self-regulation develops the students with learning disabilities metacognition by assisting the students to understand their ability to apply the strategies independently. It teaches students with learning disabilities to monitor their own learning, while they become focused on the process instead of the outcome (Zimmerman, 2008). I believe that embedding self-regulation strategies in interventions and classroom instruction will help close the achievement gap in middle school reading between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers.

It is great that we provide students with their external needs through policies, structures and interventions, nevertheless, we must address their internal needs of motivation, thinking, and self-worth to truly make and sustain achievement by shrinking the reading gap of middle school students with learning disabilities. It is vital that we begin to look at the current paradigms that we are educating our students and make a change. If we truly want to close the achievement gap we must begin to devise strategies to focus on problems of the future (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). When we as educators, further develop the practices of policies, structures, interventions, and self-regulation we will truly be able to diminish the achievement gap in middle school reading between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers.

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