

Final Report of the Project

**Retention of the Newly Recruited:
Engaging Pre-service Teachers in Critical First Steps to
Fostering Improved Student Reading and Writing Abilities**

**Recruitment and Retention of Special Education Teachers in Texas
Competitive Grant Application –
Project Expansion Grant - 2005-2006**

**A competitive grant for recruiting and retaining special education
teachers at the undergraduate and graduate level in the Coastal Bend of
South Texas**

Report Submitted by:

**Mary Ann Zipprich, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Special Education
Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi**

The funding received from the Competitive Special Education Grant entitled *Retention of the Newly Recruited: Engaging Pre-service Teachers in Critical First Steps to Fostering Improved Student Reading and Writing Abilities* was both appreciated and well used for the benefit of our students and their future students. Students with special needs struggle to learn the basic skills needed for satisfactory school performance; therefore, teachers must know how to teach for student success. This project was designed to equip new special education teachers with effective strategies to incorporate in their reading and writing instruction.

Rationale for this Project: Sharing books with special education students on a daily basis is critical to the development of successful readers and writers, and sharing books written in recognizable patterns leads to noticeable multiple benefits. Approximately ten book patterns were presented to the new special education student majors, to include among other patterns, A-B-C and Counting Books, Circle Tales, and Add-on Stories (See Attachment 1 for List of Pattern Books). Examples of all patterns written by both professional and student authors were shared and additional books were developed within the project by the participants. Instructional tactics were discussed for multiple benefits: 1. Teaching common book patterns promotes predictability and recognition of text structures. 2. Using the same patterns as pre-writing structures fosters improved student writing products that contain good ideas and organizational structure. 3. Developing a website for students to post their books in the corresponding pattern categories motivates students to write for an expanded audience. 4. Encouraging students to read other student work on the website provides reading pleasure, fluency building practice, and reinforces knowledge of patterns.

This project incorporated reading and writing activities designed to motivate and actively involve the participants who are preparing to be teachers and are looking for different and interesting experiences, ideas and materials to take to the classroom and the students they will eventually teach who will have diverse abilities and needs.

In summary, students with special needs must be taught common text structures that become part of their working common/prior knowledge that helps them be active readers with the ability to recognize patterns. Students can also use the same knowledge of patterns to write well organized stories. Teachers hold the key to this happening. Teachers must learn the patterns and have a library of pattern books close at hand to share the patterns repeatedly with students.

Principle Project Objectives: The goal of this project is threefold: a) to increase retention of quality teachers in the field of Special Education by providing instruction and excellent hands-on experience with books written in common patterns, books that they can keep for use in their classrooms; b) to develop the technology skills of newly recruited teachers in the field by providing practice and

procedures in the use of a website developed for the purpose of using technology to teach common book patterns to students for multiple benefits; and c) to foster pre-service special education teacher's knowledge about text structures to teach to students to enhance their reading comprehension and fluency and improve their writing ability.

Project Methodology: The project addressed the recruitment and retention of students in the special education program at TAMU-CC in the following ways:

- **Advertisement of the project within special education classes and the advisement office at TAMUCC took place spring semester 2006. The department educational advisement counselors provided a list of names of new majors to special education, both undergraduates and graduates to the grant author and co-director, Dr. Mary Ann Zipprich. Those new students were then sent an e-mail, by group mailing, inviting them to a Saturday workshop that was scheduled and held April 29, 2006.**
- **The grant provided funding for the purchase of books written in common patterns to be given to student teachers at a Saturday workshop to keep and share with their future students to promote active readers with the ability to recognize common patterns. The grant was written allowing for the purchase of twelve sets of twelve books each, and the grant funding actually allowed for the purchase of twenty-four complete sets of pattern books. The purchase of the books was made, and books were distributed to twelve students who were invited and attended the April 29 workshop. The additional twelve sets of books was still available during summer 2006, and with permission from the funding source, those books were distributed to students majoring in special education and enrolled in the course SPED 5386: *Reading and Language Strategies for Exceptional Children*. Twenty-seven (27) students received five books each of their top choices, and the teachers expressed their appreciation for the collection of books they were given.**
- **The development of the website for the posting of student books prepared in pattern formats to be posted to the proper pattern category by following procedures developed for this project by Dr. Sue Elwood and her students was a major activity of this grant (See website: epatternbooks.org). Getting the new website established took more time and effort than anticipated and its development is still in process needing additional funding and attention. Both participating professors featured the website at the April 29 workshop and they continue to visit and share the website with their students.**
- **Personal relationships and supports developed between newly recruited special education students, educational technology students and the faculty members participating in this project. Some of the participants teach in the local school district and have taken knowledge gained from the activities of this special project back to their classrooms. As an added networking feature, a first grade teacher from an elementary school in Rio Rancho, New Mexico came out of interest and participated in the Saturday, April 29 workshop, bringing many examples of student books from her classroom**

written in the patterns of this project to share with TAMUCC special education and technology students. The value of what she shared cannot be measured; our students learned much from her, exceeding their expectations for the workshop. That teacher also shared her student work and information about the website as a guest speaker in additional TAMUCC classes, and she has returned to her school in New Mexico with the intention of drawing the teachers and students in her school into an on-going interaction with TAMUCC participants as both institutions continue to use the website (epatternbooks.org).

- Advertisement of the project in the local newspaper did not occur as initially intended. After seeking quotes for newspaper advertisement space, it was discussed and decided that we would get greater publicity value by purchasing pens advertising our programs, pens to be distributed at summer and fall recruiting activities and in our classes for retention value. This was done in lieu of newspaper advertisement.

General Conclusions:

This grant project was successful in that the participants were enthusiastic to be a part of a project that combined teacher literacy instructional skills with technology expertise in the development and use of a website. The development of a teacher and student instructional and interactive website, epatternbooks.org, was more labor intensive than anticipated, and the website still requires additional attention to improve procedures for its use. The book patterns selected for the project were simple patterns that supersede in nature the more complex stories containing all elements of narrative story. A next step to this project would be to expand the scope of story patterns to include a story web configuration including all elements of a story: setting to include characters, time and place, problem and goal, action and resolution/conclusion. The results of this project were typical of good projects-- what was intended was accomplished and then new challenges were posed.

Attachment 1

List of Pattern Books

Books in Set Given to Special Education Majors

Total: Twelve Books in Each Set

TAMUCC Special Education Recruitment and Retention Grant Activity

Patterned Language/Predictable Book

It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles Shaw

Counting Book

Ten, Nine, Eight by Molly Bang

Alphabet Books

Alphabet City by Stephen T. Johnson

The Z Was Zapped by Chris Van Allsburg

Add-On Stories

One Sunday Morning by Uri Shulevitz

There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly by Simms Taback

Circle Tales

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie by Laura Joffe Numeroff

Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey

Good-Bad, Good-Bad Story

Fortunately by Remy Charlip

Books Containing Essential Elements of a Story

The Stranger by Chris Van Allsburg

Wreck of the Zephyr by Chris Van Allsburg

Poster Book with Story Starters

The Mysteries of Harris Burdick by Chris Van Allsburg