

Rebecca Gudmundson

Professional Portfolio

Master's in Education, Reading Specialist

Concordia University, Nebraska

4/25/11

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# Vita

## GRADUATE STUDENT PROFESSIONAL VITA

Rebecca Gudmundson

I grew up in Sioux Falls, SD. My dad was a pastor at a small Lutheran church and my mom stayed home with her children. Although there was a Lutheran grade school in Sioux Falls, my three brothers and I attended public schools as my parents could not afford to send 4 children to private school. For the most part, I was happy at the schools I attended. I had quality friends and teachers, but I always had a desire to go to a Lutheran school

In the middle of my sophomore year of high school, my dad took a Call to a church in Sheboygan Falls, WI. This meant saying good-bye to everything that was familiar and comfortable and moving to a different state and school in the middle of high school. It was a very hard time for me, but through it all I learned that God has a plan in everything. Moving to Wisconsin brought my family closer to our relatives, which was a huge blessing.

I began to look at colleges, due to my desire to attend a Lutheran school, the first place I visited was Concordia University Wisconsin, which is conveniently located just 40 minutes south of Sheboygan Falls. CUW was the only school I visited; I knew immediately that that was where I wanted to go. Teaching, leading and working with children have always come naturally to me, so it was a natural fit to go into education. And, because of my lifelong attraction to Lutheran schools, I decided I wanted to become a Lutheran educator.

CUW turned out to be a great fit for me. I developed strong friendships and had opportunities to develop leadership skills. And, although I appreciated the proximity of my parents during college, I also had a desire to try something new. So, when I began interviewing for teaching positions, I indicated that I would be willing to move away from the Milwaukee area. I ended up having 2 schools ask me to designate at the same time! One school was in the Milwaukee area and was a large K-8 school with beautiful facilities. The other school was in Omaha, NE. I wasn't able to visit the Omaha school and did an over-the-phone interview. Although the Milwaukee school seemed like the obvious choice, I strongly felt God leading me to Omaha.

I currently teach at Concordia Jr./Sr. High School. The school has grown immensely in the 7 years that I have been there. I enjoy working with both high school and junior high kids, and really appreciate the staff. I teach 4 sections of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English, and 3 sections of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies. In addition to teaching, I coach the speech/forensics team at the school. This year 10 of my students performed at the state competition. I also coordinate Interim, a 3-day period before spring break in which students take special interest classes. I love working with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

Because I get each student two times a day, I really get to know the kids over the course of a year. It's also neat to watch kids grow from the beginning of 7<sup>th</sup> grade to the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

I love teaching English, and especially reading. However, because I minored in Speech Communications in college instead of Literature or English, I have often felt like I was not fully prepared in my undergraduate program to teach reading. I decided to enter the Reading Specialist Master's program in hopes that it will help me to become more knowledgeable about the process of teaching reading. I believe this will benefit me as I work with kids of all different reading interests and abilities. Additionally, although I teach young adolescents and enjoy them, I am licensed to teach grades 1-9, and I hope to learn more about the process of teaching young kids how to read.

*Reflection: The classes that I have taken at CUNE have provided me with the resources I feel I need to be a knowledgeable reading specialist. I believe that much of what I have learned is also directly applicable to my current role in teaching English and Social Studies. I now feel I have the tools to help those students that I identify as struggling readers realize success.*

I believe that teaching, especially teaching young adolescents, gives me a unique opportunity to impact coming generations in a positive way. As such, my primary role in the classroom, aside from teaching, is serving as a Christian role model to very impressionable minds. In a society that points kids in every direction BUT the Bible, it is my job to show my students that it is possible to live a Christ-like life. I share a lot of my life with my students, which helps them to see me as a real person and establishes an environment where they feel comfortable sharing about themselves with me.

I believe that relationships are the key to being an effective teacher. It is my desire to get to know each of my students and form a personal relationship with each one of them. Forming positive relationships with my students is the key to effective classroom management as well. Students who have a relationship with me are going to be more respectful of me in the classroom. It is also important to form positive relationships with the parents of my students. Ideally, as a teacher, I am partnering with parents in the education of their children, and it is therefore important that we work together as a team. Relationships with my co-workers are also very important. It is important for the staff of a school to be united, and therefore having solid interpersonal relationships with those with whom I work is imperative.

Of all educational philosophies, I tend to be more of a progressive teacher. I believe in teaching concepts that students can apply to other subjects, as well as to their own lives. I do not believe in rote memorization and I do not believe in teaching something because it is in the textbook. While I am in charge of my classroom, I also give my students the opportunity to make choices about various things in the classroom. It is important for students to be able to control some elements of their education. Additionally, I believe that it is important for cooperative learning to occur in the classroom, as well and therefore many activities in my classroom involve working with others.

*Reflection: One year later, I still believe this to be all the more true. Classroom management is all about relationships. Relationships with the students help them to feel safe and comfortable in the classroom, which much exist in order for learning to occur. It is important for students to understand that the teacher is the key decision-maker in the classroom and that it is because of respect that they exhibit toward authority that they are given choices.*

My goal as a teacher of junior high students is to teach them how to be independent, successful students. Kids often come into my classroom from elementary school and are used to very “elementary” ways. It is my goal to transition them from being dependent students to being independent. Part of what I teach about becoming an independent learner involves developing critical thinking skills and the ability to organize one’s life.

Finally, we’re all sinful. People make mistakes. I don’t expect my students to be perfect, and they know that. When my students make bad decisions, get low scores, or have relationship problems, I try to focus on helping them to discover what they can learn from the experience, how they could approach the situation differently in the future, and what they can do to rectify the situation.

I plan on staying at Concordia Jr./Sr. High School for several years unless God makes it clear to me that I should be elsewhere. As the school grows, I would like to be able to work with administration to separate the junior high from the high school and develop a middle school structure with a team teaching approach. I would also like to be able to develop the English program in grades 7 and 8, first by separating the grades by class. I believe that becoming a Reading Specialist will help me to accomplish this goal. Even after I finish my Master’s degree, I hope to be able to continue learning about newer, better ways to do my job.

## Professional Resume

# Rebecca Gudmundson

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[gudmundsonr@gmail.com](mailto:gudmundsonr@gmail.com)

### PROFILE:

I have taught 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students for four years, specializing in teaching Language Arts, Social Studies. I have also taught Speech to 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and English to 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

I possess excellent written and verbal communication skills, and I have the ability to convey subject material in an accessible and interesting manner. I employ a range of teaching methods to ensure higher student achievement, and I am effective at maintaining positive relationships with my co-workers, students, and parents of the students.

Additionally, I have a genuine interest in and respect for young people and a passion for teaching English, along with a commitment to remaining up-to-date with new developments in the field.

### MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS:

My students have scored above the national average on standardized test scores in reading and writing for the past 6 consecutive years

My students' pieces of writing and poetry are consistently selected for publication by various organizations.

Have dramatically increased the amount of outside of school reading that my students through creative assignments.

### EXPERIENCE:

August 2004 – Present

**Concordia Jr/Sr High School**

#### **Jr High English/Social Studies Teacher**

- Teaching classes and assessing students' progress and performance.
- Planning and preparing lessons, grading papers and preparing report cards.
- Maintaining order and discipline in the classroom.
- Communicating with parents, teachers and other professionals, both formally and informally.

- Coordinating and directing the school-wide community service program at the school.
- Helping to prepare students for the future workforce by introducing new technology.
- Maintaining high but achievable standards for my students.

#### **OTHER EXPERIENCE:**

2005-2009                      **Concordia Jr/Sr High School**

##### **Speech Coach**

- Coaching students in the categories of duet acting, oral interpretation of drama, humorous and serious prose, informative and persuasive speaking
- Conduct meetings
- Organize and plan trips

2005 – 2008                      **Sylvan Learning Center**

##### **Teacher**

- Teaching Academic Reading, Study Skills, Beginning Reading and Academic Writing programs
- Assessing the individual academic needs of each student.
- Interacting and communicating with students ages 4-18.
- Communicating concerns and ideas with coworkers and supervisors

#### **QUALIFICATIONS / EDUCATION:**

1/2010-5/2011                      Concordia University Nebraska   Seward, NE

##### **MS Literacy (Reading Specialist)**

Cumulative GPA: 4.0

1/2007 – 1/2010                      University of Nebraska Omaha   Omaha, NE

##### **MS Secondary English Education**

Cumulative GPA: 4.0

12 credits earned

Emphasis on Middle Level Education

2000 – May 2004      Concordia University Wisconsin    Mequon, WI

**BA Elementary/Middle Level Education**

Minor: Theology

Speech Communication

Dean's list all 8 semesters

<b>CERTIFICATION</b>
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- Nebraska                      #504119181                      Valid through: 8/31/2014

Specialization: Middle Grades Level 5, Speech Level 5



T1, T2, T3, T5, T8

## Conceptual Framework--Outcome Teaching

### Case Study

Name of student (pseudonym): Tim M  
Date of report: 4/24/11  
Age of student: 13      Gender: M  
Grade in school : 7  
School name: Omaha Lutheran School  
Parent's/Guardian's name (fictional) Mr. and Mrs. M

### **Background Information**

#### **Reason for Referral**

- Parental concerns regarding:
  - Lack of interest in reading.
  - Inability to remember what he has read.
  - Amount of time it takes to read a passage.

#### **Family Information** (rank in family, composition of home)

- Second adopted child of Mr. and Mrs. M.
- Older sister is 5 years his senior.
- Lives with his adoptive parents, older sister, and exchange student from Norway.
- Both parents work full-time out of the house, but they are actively involved in Tim's school and also help him with schoolwork.

#### **Linguistic Background**

- Grew up in an English-speaking home.
- English is the only language that he knows.

#### **Social and Personality Factors**

- Is respectful to his teachers and peers.
- Is a very easygoing kid.
- Maintains normal, healthy peer relationships.
- Fairly quiet in the classroom.
- Displays a lack of self-confidence—uses many word fillers and has trouble making direct eye contact.

#### **Medical History**

- Adoptive parents do not know much about the circumstances surrounding his birth.

- Tim's school records show regular immunizations and physicals and a near-perfect school attendance record.
- Needs to have vision retested for possible far-sightedness.

### **Educational History (includes instructional factors)**

- Attended Trinity Lutheran School in Lincoln, NE for kindergarten.
- Attended Abundant Life Lutheran School in Omaha, NE for first grade.
- After consulting with his first grade teacher, Tim was moved back to kindergarten as he was lacking in reading skills.
- Maintained high grades throughout elementary school.
- Inconsistent reading test scores throughout elementary school.
- Self-contained classrooms throughout elementary school.

### **Results of Student/Parent Interviews**

- Receives a lot of support at home.
- Parents voiced concerns about his reading pace and comprehension.
- Mother believes he has a hard time finding books he likes.
- Student views himself as a below average reader.
- Student understands the importance of being a good reader and expressed a desire to work on this.
- Parents believe Tim's older sister is unkind to him and degrades his intelligence, which may contribute to his lack of self-confidence.
- Student does not have a desire to read in his free time.
- Student is very interested in sports and music.

### **Summary of Previous Assessment Data**

- **Explore-ACT (7<sup>th</sup> grade)**
  - English 12 (39<sup>th</sup> percentile)
  - Mathematics 15 (53<sup>rd</sup> percentile)
  - Reading 13 (54<sup>th</sup> percentile)
  - Science 14 (30<sup>th</sup> percentile)
- **Terra-Nova Achievement Test (6<sup>th</sup> grade)**
  - Reading —43<sup>rd</sup> percentile
  - Language—21<sup>st</sup> percentile
  - Mathematics—45<sup>th</sup> percentile
  - Overall—35<sup>th</sup> percentile
- **Terra-Nova Achievement Test (5<sup>th</sup> grade)**
  - Reading—23<sup>rd</sup> percentile
  - Language—29<sup>th</sup> percentile
  - Mathematics—30<sup>th</sup> percentile
  - Overall—25<sup>th</sup> percentile

### **Summary of Assessment Data Derived During the Case Study**

- QRI-5
  - Scored at upper middle school when given word list portion of the assessment.
  - Passage 1: Level 6
    - 98% accuracy in oral reading of passage
    - Was able to retell 11% of the ideas from the passage. This retelling lacked coherency and missed many important main ideas.
    - Scored a 62% when answering both explicit and implicit questions. This places him at frustration level in comprehension.
  - Passage 2: Level 5
    - No oral reading data collected.
    - Was able to retell 31% of the main ideas from the passage. This is an improvement over level 6, yet it lacked an overall understanding of the structure of the piece.
    - Comprehension was at a frustration level (62%) without lookbacks, but with lookbacks he scored a 100% (independent level).
  - Passage 3: Level 5 (silent read)
    - WPM: 147 This indicates that Tim is at or above level 5 in oral reading skills.
    - Was able to retell 40% of the ideas. This, again, is an improvement which could possibly be linked to the fact that this piece was narrative rather than expository.
    - Comprehension score was 50% without lookbacks (frustration level) and 75% with lookbacks (instructional level).
- Running Record
  - Tim read the passage “Gentleman’s Agreement” for the running record.
  - He read this with 95% accuracy.
  - The passage contained a total of 173 words and he made 8 total errors.
  - Many of his errors were syntactically correct and maintain the author’s original meaning.
  - Tim had a self-correction rate of 0. He did not correct any of his errors, which could have an effect on his comprehension.
  - In Tim’s first retelling, he was able to recall two specific details from the piece. On a non-fiction retelling rubric, scored 1-4, this places him at a 1—“Relates a limited amount of information conveying little or no understanding of the text”.
  - 2 ½ weeks later, Tim was again asked to read the passage and retell. This time, with a little more focus from me, he was able to give me more facts from the passage. This places him at a 2 on

the retelling rubric-“Demonstrates partial understanding of the text, restating facts/concepts, or relying heavily on the author’s words. May include some inaccuracies, omissions, or confusions”.

- Observation Checklist of Student’s Expository Reading
  - Before reading, the student checks how long the passage is.
  - Before reading, the student seldom makes predictions about what the text is about and sometimes determines the purpose for reading and skims to get an overview of the passage.
  - While reading, the student never looks up unknown words in the glossary or connects reading material to prior knowledge.
  - While reading, the student decodes new words easily, usually reads punctuation correctly, and sometimes reads figures and pictures.
  - After reading, the student seldom summarizes in logical order, retells main points, or retells information not found in text.
  - After reading, the student sometimes interprets text correctly and sometimes makes inferences.

### **Diagnostic Teaching**

- **Hypothesis:** Student does not use self-monitoring strategies used by effective readers to comprehend what he is reading.
- **Strategies:** I began to introduce the concept of think-alouds to Tim and will continue to work with him on developing these skills. I introduced different types of think-aloud statements, modeled the strategy and guided him as he began to use the strategy. As he becomes more comfortable with the strategy, this will become a rich tool for him to use to be an effective reader and raise his comprehension.
- **Hypothesis:** Student has little understanding of expository text structure, which affects his ability to comprehend and remember what he has read from his textbooks.
- **Strategies:** I began to introduce the five main structures in which expository text is written and will continue to teach this. Along with the organization, I also introduced signal words and graphic organizers. Understanding and being able to identify expository text structure leads to greater comprehension and retelling ability.
- **Hypothesis:** The student does not regularly use strategies of effective readers.
- **Strategies:** I began by introducing Tim to strategies that he can do before he even begins reading. Using his textbook, I guided him through setting a purpose for reading, previewing the text and looking at the features, activating prior knowledge, and making predictions. I

will continue to introduce new strategies, model these strategies, and help him to learn and utilize them.

- **Hypothesis:** Student has not found literature that is written at his comprehension level and that interests him.
- **Strategies:** As we worked on think-alouds, I introduced different trade books written by different authors and different styles that I thought would be of interest to him. I will continue to introduce new books to him that I believe will appropriately meet his needs, including graphic novels and nonfiction literature.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

#### Student Strengths and Needs

- **Student strengths:**
  - The student exhibits a positive attitude toward school.
  - The student exhibits a willingness to learn new strategies.
  - The student has a strong work ethic and is conscientious about his school work.
  - The student is a fluent oral reader.
  - The student has high sight-word vocabulary.
  - The student uses decoding strategies to identify words he does not know
- **Student needs:**
  - Continue to practice self-monitoring strategies when reading.
  - Continue to practice strategies of effective readers when reading.
  - Utilize rereading and lookbacks.
  - Grow in confidence of abilities.
  - Use graphic organizers and visual aides to aid in comprehension.
  - Increase the amount of reading for pleasure using book recommendations.
  - Find opportunities to talk about what he is reading.

#### Specific Methodologies

- Tim is a well-rounded learner, though his activities in life suggest he has more tendencies toward being kinesthetic and visual. Plan lessons and activities that meet these needs.
- Allow Tim opportunities to draw what he is reading about.
- Provide graphic novels to engage him in literature.
- Provide graphic organizers to visualize the organization of the text.
- Provide Tim with frequent breaks and the opportunity to move about.

#### Materials

- Tim's instructional level is at fifth grade.

Level of Support

- Continued one-on-one tutoring with a reading specialist
- Participate in summer reading program at the local library
- Daily reading during summer

*Rebecca Gudmundson*

4/24/2011

LD2, LD5

Conceptual Framework Outcome—Leading



## Current Culture and Practices

- Concordia Jr./Sr. High school is a growing private Lutheran school.
- It presents itself to parents, students, and the community as a college preparatory school.



## Current Culture and Practices

- Because it is college preparatory, classes are content-oriented and rigorous.
- Teachers tend to teach in a traditional manner; ie, content is taught and then students are tested on it.

[五步PPT制作技巧](#)





## Current Culture and Practices

- One result of Concordia's continued and exponential growth is an increasingly diverse student body with more specialized needs.



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## Current Culture and Practices

- Concordia, however, offers no remedial instruction, ELL help, or special education.


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## Current Culture and Practices

- Because of this, teachers at Concordia must learn new ideas and strategies to adjust to their changing classroom.
- Much can be gained through various professional development opportunities.

学校PPT整理发布



## Why Develop Professionally?

- “Professional development serves as the bridge between where prospective and experienced educators are now and where they will need to be to meet the new challenges of guiding all students in achieving to higher standards of learning and development.”

~Building Bridges, 2000







## My Perspective on Professional Development

- I believe:
  - The school has an obligation to meet the ever-changing needs of its students.

设计PPT的步骤




## How to Fulfill This Vision:

- The staff must collectively participate in professional development seminars.
- Differentiation strategies should be integrated in to the classrooms.




设计PPT的步骤



## My Perspective on Professional Development


- I believe (cont'd):
  - The school needs to aim to be the best that it can be by continually learning and using the best available research in teaching, learning, and leadership that will have an impact on students learning.

学校PPT管理方案




## My Perspective on Professional Development

- I believe (cont'd):
  - There is a need for a whole-school approach to improvement of instruction.




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## What is Differentiation?

- Differentiated instruction is “a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is ... rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum.” (Huebner, 79)



## What is Differentiation?

- In other words, we become more conscious and intentional in the ways we think about our students and in the ways we plan our lessons.





## How Do We Implement This?

- Teachers usually differentiate instruction by adjusting one or more of the following:
  - the content (what students learn)
  - the process (how students learn)
  - the product (how students demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge or skills) (Huebner, 80)




## What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?

- According to Huebner (80), the guiding principals of differentiated instruction include:
  - Focusing on the essential ideas and skills of the content area, eliminating ancillary tasks and activities.
  - Respond to individual student differences.

无分PPT制作方案






## What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?

- Group students flexibly by shared interest, topic, or ability.
- Integrate ongoing and meaningful assessments with instruction.
- Continually assess; reflect and adjust content, process, and product to meet student needs.


PPT整理方案



## What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?

- Some differentiation strategies include:
  - Tiered lessons
  - RAFT
  - Graphic organizers
  - Anchor activities and task cards

学校PPT整理方案




## An Example of a Differentiated Instruction Strategy:

**Think Tac Toe**  
The Pythagorean Theorem

*Directions: Complete the activities described in either one vertical or one diagonal row.*

Draw a right triangle and label the right angle, legs, and hypotenuse. State the relationship of the sides of a triangle.	Name a career in which one would have to use the Pythagorean Theorem. Give an example of when, where and how it would be used.	Design a teaching tool with a diagram of a proof of the Pythagorean Theorem. Label it for all to understand.
Complete all of the <b>EVEN Practice Problems</b> on p. 266 of your Prentice Hall text.	Complete the <b>Practice Problems</b> found at this site: <a href="http://regentsprep.org/Regents/math/pyth/PracPyth.htm">http://regentsprep.org/Regents/math/pyth/PracPyth.htm</a>	Create four (4) real world problems that would need the use of the Pythagorean Theorem. Show the solutions.
Determine a set of 8 Pythagorean "TRIPLES." Prove them with equations.	Write a descriptive essay about Pythagoras: his life, accomplishments, and failures.	Find another mathematical theorem. State it, diagram its proof, and write a paragraph about why, how and where it works.

[http://danelodifferentiates.wikispaces.com/file/view/hago\\_choice\\_menus.pdf](http://danelodifferentiates.wikispaces.com/file/view/hago_choice_menus.pdf)



## An Example of a Differentiated Instruction Strategy:

**Diner Menu—Photosynthesis**

**Appetizer (Everyone Shares)**

\*Write the chemical equation for photosynthesis.

**Entrée (Select One)**

\*Draw a picture that shows what happens during photosynthesis.  
 \*Write two paragraphs about what happens during photosynthesis.  
 \*Create a rap or song that explains what happens during photosynthesis.

**Side Dish (Select at Least Two)**

\*Define respiration, in writing.  
 \*Compare photosynthesis to respiration using a Venn diagram.  
 \*Write a journal entry from the point of view of a grass plant.  
 \*With a partner, create and perform a skit that shows the difference between photosynthesis and respiration.

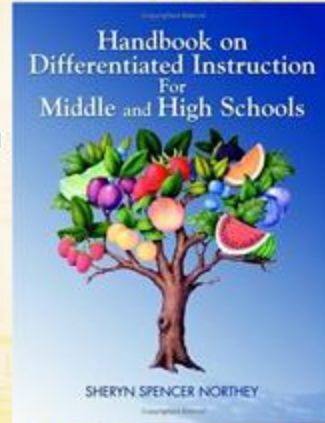
**Dessert (Optional)**

\*Create a text to assess the teacher's knowledge of photosynthesis.




## Where Do We Go from Here?

- Read *Handbook on Differentiated Instruction for Middle & High Schools* by Sheryn Spencer Northey for the next meeting.
- Concordia is providing a copy for each faculty member.



## Where Do We Go From Here?


- I challenge you each to incorporate one of the techniques discussed today or in the book in at least one of your classes in the next month.
- We will also be discussing the book at the next faculty meeting.



## Other Key Issues and Concerns

- As we look toward the future...
  - Teachers must be given more planning time during the day to incorporate more techniques.
  - Teachers must have fewer additional duties that take their time and energy away from teaching.

[学校PPT管理方案](#)



## Other Key Issues and Concerns

- As we look toward the future...
  - Teachers must have fewer classes for which to prepare.
  - Concordia must support the ongoing learning of its teachers financially.

[学校PPT管理方案](#)

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五批PPT资源发布

LR5, LR7

Conceptual Framework Outcome—Learning

**The Effect of the Separated/Divorced Home on Adolescent Achievement**

A Research Prospectus

Presented to the Department of Teacher Education

at the

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for TED 8010

Introduction to Research

By

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## Abstract

### The Effect of the Separated/Divorced Home on Adolescent Achievement

The purpose of this study is to measure the academic achievement of 13-18 year old students who come from homes with separated parents and those who live in a traditional nuclear family setting. The problem of the research is whether the achievement of adolescents in separated households is lower than that of their traditional nuclear family counterparts. This study will track the grade point averages of approximately 2000 students at 4 different schools in the Omaha Metropolitan area who are randomly selected the course of a year. Half of the students will come from each of the 2 situations. GPA's will be tracked over the course of a school year, at which point the traditional group will be compared to the separated group. The hypothesis to be investigated will be that divorce and separation of parents is negatively related to the academic achievement of affected adolescents.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The world that exists today runs at a greater pace than ever before in history. Food is fast and the pace at which the world gets information is faster. Quick is good, but quicker is better. People thrive on instant gratification and are generally speaking not willing to wait for what they want. Such beliefs and opinions have carried over into family structures found in America. Where once tradition was held that marriage should last a lifetime, today marriage is thought to last as long as the parties involved are happy. Divorce is as common as marriage in this culture, and while it leaves many adults involved emotionally distraught, it is the children involved who are innocent yet seem to suffer immensely.

The commonly held beliefs that children can easily bounce back from setbacks in their lives are now being thrown out the window as more research is being conducted regarding children of divorce. In contradiction to that attitude, researchers have found that children who experience the divorce of their parents have a considerable amount of pain and distress that they have to work through. They have been shown to endure more stress than their two parent household counterparts. In addition, they have greater tendencies to display emotional and behavioral difficulties both in and out of school. (Thiessen, 1997).

Are children who experience such emotional trauma before adulthood able to separate them from their studies at school and still succeed academically? The academic achievement of adolescents who have experienced the divorce of their parents in comparison to their counterparts who live in a traditional nuclear family is the focus of

this study, which will examine the background and significance of the problem, as well as the hypothesis of this study and the definition of important terms.

### Background of the Problem

In the middle of the twentieth century in the United States, it was rare to have a child of divorce in the classroom. But, as the attitudes toward tradition and marriage have changed in American culture, so have the statistics on marriage and divorce, which are startling. Over the last 4 decades, America has seen the number of divorces rise exponentially. In fact, since the 1960's, the divorce rate in America has almost tripled (Nisivoccia, 1997). Unfortunately, children are often involved as well. It is estimated that over 1 million children in the United States will experience the divorce of their parents this year. Additionally, statistics indicate that 50-60% of children who were born in the 1990's, today's middle and high schoolers, will live in a household with only one of their parents at some point in their lives (Frisco, Muller, & Frank, 2007).

Unfortunately, children are not only affected by the separation of their parents when they are at home; the breaking up of a family more often than not leads to other problems in the child's life, which has for many years caught the attention of researchers. In fact, there has been much research in recent years regarding the effects of divorce on children. Research regarding the relationship between divorce and student achievement became more common in the 1970's and over the years many have speculated about the extent to which divorce impacts a child's success at school. The results have been very controversial and contradictory.

Some studies have shown that divorce has little to no impact on the academic achievement of children (Frisco, Muller, & Frank, 2007). Such researchers point to a



variety of other factors that must also contribute to such a situation, like the child's age at the time of the divorce and how long that child has lived in a one parent household. They also point to statistics which show little disparity in the standardized test scores of children from one and two-parent households.

Other research, on the other hand, has shown a clear relationship between divorce and academic achievement. According to Frisco, Muller, & Frank (2007), "...academic performance declines in the short term when parents' unions dissolve." Thus, said study indicates that children struggle in school initially after the divorce of their parents. Studies have also shown a clear relationship between single-parent families and lower educational attainment post high school (Garg, Melanson, Levin, 2007), which would indicate clear long term effects of divorce on the child as well.

The results of such contradictory studies leave teachers wondering how to effectively enable children of divorce to succeed in the classroom. While some studies show no relationship, others suggest a strong correlation, which leaves teachers with a lack of direction and understanding when trying to help such children rise to high expectations.

#### Statement of the Problem

Children who experience the dissolution of their parents' union experience effects that are often overlooked by both parents and educators alike. But do they see negative academic effects, or simply experience emotional problems? The question of this research is: Is the achievement of adolescents that come from separated or divorced homes lower than that of those who come from a traditional nuclear family, as defined by cumulative GPA?

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and randomly select both teenagers who have experienced the divorce or separation of their parents, and those who lived in the traditional nuclear family, and compare the cumulative GPA of both over the course of a year. Grade point averages are to be tracked quarterly and the results analyzed after the period of one school year.

### Definition of Terms

“The Effect of the Separated/Divorced Home on Adolescent Achievement” can be explained and defined. The definitions of terms are as follows:

Achievement is the ability to demonstrate accomplishment of some outcome for which learning experiences were designed. In this study, achievement will be represented by cumulative academic GPA at the end of the most recent year of student enrollment.

Adolescent involves any individual between the ages of 13 and 18.

Separated/Divorced Home is assumed to be a family unit in which the parents live apart; they are not living together as man and wife; they are maintaining separate residences. From this study, that information will be secured from school records, and students with deceased parents will not be included in this study.

Traditional Nuclear Family is a term developed in a western world to distinguish the family group consisting of parents (usually a father and mother) and their children, from what is known as an extended family.

Cumulative GPA (Grade Point Average) refers to the overall grade point average, which includes dividing the number of quality points earned in all courses attempted by the total

degree-credit hours in all courses attempted in which a grade of “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, or “F” has been received.

### Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions: In this study, it is assumed that:

1. All schools have similar standards for recording grades.
2. All schools have the same grading scale.
3. All students who are selected as coming from a divorced/separated home, are not a part of a family in the process of separating, but rather, the event happened in their past.
4. Students are in appropriate courses for their ability level.

Limitations: The researcher realizes that the courses that students in middle school and high school take have a variety of class difficulty levels which this study does not account for.

### Hypothesis

Adolescents aged 13-18 years old who have experienced or are experiencing the divorce or separation of their parents experience a negative change in their academic achievement, as defined by their cumulative GPA.

### Importance of this Study

Although there is much controversy regarding the effect of divorce on children, there is no questioning the statistics of divorce. Because the number of divorces have risen so dramatically in America, and by every indication will continue to rise (Nisivoccia, 1997), and so many children are now involved in such divorces, and idea of

the effect of the divorced household on student achievement can no longer be ignored or trivialized.

In today's world, a student's grades and success in high school have a significant impact on their future. Students who succeed in high school with a high grade point average have a greater likelihood of receiving the funding they need to continue on to post-secondary education and, likewise, obtain a higher paying job out of college.

Therefore, success in high school can lead to greater occupational opportunity.

Unfortunately, adolescents who have experienced divorce have also been known to have lower educational aspirations. On the other hand, students who have low grades are more likely to experience less financial success out of high school. And, according to Frisco (2007), if students have academic problems, they tend to be apparent first in grades.

Grades, according to Frisco, "are a measure of how well students meet course demands, such as test-taking, homework completion, and possibly other forms of behavioral expectations..." Therefore, this study focuses on grades as an assumption that it is a primary indicator of overall academic distress.

A decline in grades can also be an indicator of other problems the child may be experiencing, such as anxiety, anger, loneliness, and depression (Nisivoccia, 1997), which all appear to be common afflictions of children who have experienced the separation of their parents. And, if a child is experiencing emotional problems from the separation of one's parents, resulting in the decline in their grades, the divorce is then negatively affecting such a child's chances at a bright future. It is therefore critical to understand the factors that can lead to healthy post-divorce adjustment.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Relevant Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an investigative inquiry into the area of divorce and student achievement. To give direction to this study critical focus is targeted to three areas of investigation:

- 1). theories about the family structure related to the hypothesis,
- 2). research on the risk factors leading to negative effects of divorce, and
- 3). research on the effects of divorce.

### Theories About the Family Structure Related to the Hypothesis

Over the past 40 years, researchers have explored the effect of single parenting on the children involved in the situation. They have often analyzed their results using models of family structure to explain differences between one and two parent households. The two most prominent models of family structure are the Deficit Family Model and the Risk and Protective Factor Model.

When researchers first began to analyze the effects of divorce in the early 1970's, they analyzed their research based on the Deficit Family model. This model made the assumptions that living in a family with only one parent would have resulting deficiencies in the children (Thiessen, 1997). Using this model, researchers made the assumption that single parenting would have a negative effect on the children.

Researchers had a tendency, using this model, to make this assumption rather than using the facts of their research to back up such beliefs. For example, in a study done on the effects of single parent households on school achievement in 1973, results pointed to the idea that there was little to no indication of a correlation between the two, yet

researchers came to the conclusion that because the results were too difficult to interpret based on the deficit family model (Thiessen, 1997).

Today researchers gravitate more toward the Risk and Protective Factor model to explain the effects of the single parent family structure. This model supports the notion that there is “a continuum of alternatives” to family structures, each one containing its own strengths and weaknesses (Thiessen, 1997).

The Risk and Protective Factor Model theorizes that family structure is merely one risk factor that can be made either better or worse by other protective (beneficial) or risk (harmful) factors. According to Thiessen (1997), this model supports the idea that risk factors are cumulative. The more risk factors in a child’s life, the worse their educational outcome will be.

Using this model, one can assume that it is not the fact of being in a one parent family that is the problem. Instead, it is the combination of other risk factors that contribute to a negative outcome of student achievement in single parent households. A child who lives in a single-parent household, for example, may receive less help from their parent, a risk factor, which would then lead to lower academic achievement. The evolution of the family structure and how researchers view it will no doubt influence the aim of research regarding this topic in the coming years.

#### Research on the Risk Factors Leading to Negative Effects of Divorce

Assuming, based on the Risk and Protective Factor Model, that risk factors lead to negative effects in children of divorce, it is necessary to identify such factors. Researchers have been in disagreement over what risks make a negative contribution to a child’s life.

Socioeconomic status is a perfect case and point. The assumption is often made that single parent households take in less money and therefore often experience a lower socioeconomic status (SES) than that of the two-parent household. But does this lower SES affect student achievement? A study in 1998 revealed that children from single parent families experienced educational disadvantages that could be directly related to their lower socioeconomic status (Rashmi, Melanson, Levin, 2007).

A study conducted by Mulkey, Crain, and Harrington (1992), however, found that it is not the lower income that causes problems. In fact, their findings revealed that the loss of income has virtually no effect on grades or test scores of students involved and instead it is the absence of one parent and a lack of attention from the custodial parent that brings about problems.

Rashmi, et.al., in their study entitled, “One-Parent Households and Achievement: Economic and Behavioral Explanations of a Small Effect” (1992), concluded that a negative effect of divorce on student grades could be more greatly attributed to students’ misbehavior in school than lower SES. Misbehavior may be a direct result of divorce and can demonstrate anything from a child’s frustration over their familial circumstances to their need to have increased interpersonal connections with those around them. Misbehavior lowers a student’s time in the classroom due to consequences, such as both in and out of school suspension, as well as their concentration levels while present in the classroom.

Therefore, it would appear that low socioeconomic status, decrease in parental involvement, and student misbehavior are all risk factors that could potentially bring about negative effects from the divorce and/or separation of one’s parents.

## Research on the Effects of Divorce

Adolescents who endure the separation of their parents undergo a major transition in their lives. They often endure a great deal of emotional stress and trauma that is difficult for anyone to deal with, let alone someone who is going through physical changes as well. Naturally, they often exhibit the effects of such trauma in many different ways.

Neighbors, Forehand, and Armistead (1992) have identified four major areas in which young adolescents who withstand the divorce of their parents exhibit, which are:

- 1). prosocial skills
- 2). internalizing problems
- 3). externalizing problems
- 4). academic achievement

Students who struggle with prosocial skills struggle in their relationships with their peers. They may react strongly and harshly to those around them simply due to a lack of ability to connect with those around them. When adolescents internalize their problems, they often have an inability to express themselves to those around them. They have a tendency to struggle with anxiety and depression disorders and may withdraw from the people in their lives. Students who externalize their problems have aggressive behavior, often resorting to a physical means to express an emotion.

The concept of divorce and academic achievement has been greatly controversial among researchers. According to Neighbors, et. al., “Children from two-parents families demonstrate higher mental aptitude, academic achievement, and school grades than do those from one parent families” (1992). This idea is supported by the study of Frisco,



Muller, and Frank, in 2007, who collected the data of over 20,000 random respondents from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement Study, concluded that students do not perform well academically after their parents separate. Children and adolescents of divorce also achieve lower educational attainment as compared to their two-parent counterparts.

Others, however, have found little to no relationship between divorce and academic achievement. Ware and Lee (1988) found that there were no notable effects of living in a one-parent family on the child's standardized test scores. These findings are further validated by Mulkey, Crain, and Harrington (1992), who used the test scores, transcripts, and survey responses of 15,000 students through High School and Beyond to measure academic achievement. They concluded that there is only a very small impact of a single-parent family structure on grades.

There is no question as to whether or not divorce affects the lives of the adolescents involved. Instead, researchers are left to discover exactly what those effects are and how such effects can be minimized in the future.

### Summary

This chapter outlined theories about the family structure related to the hypothesis and explored research on the risk factors leading to negative effects of divorce, as well as research on the effects of divorce. These selected studies and opinions are representative of what is available in journals and documents.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods and Procedures

Methods and procedures that will be used in this study are presented in this chapter. The research design and null hypothesis are stated followed by the description of subjects and study procedures. Proposed instrumentation and data collection and analysis are also described in this research investigation.

#### Research Design

The causal-comparative design of this study aims to choose groups on past differences in relation to their present circumstances. Documentation will be attained from students attending one public high school, one public middle school, one private high school and one private middle school, all executing identical grading scales. Students will be randomly selected based on documentation of current family structure. Students from both separated homes and traditional homes are to be identified and grade point averages will be tracked throughout the period of a school year in an effort to analyze the relationship between divorce and student achievement.

#### Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis states that there is no measurable difference in student achievement, as measured by grade point average, between adolescents of divorced/separated homes and adolescents who come from the traditional nuclear family. Students experiencing both familial living situations exhibit similar grade point averages throughout the course of a year.

### Subjects

Based on school records, 10% of students from traditional nuclear homes in 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades and 10% of students from separated/divorced families of 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades from the schools selected are to be randomly selected.

### Study Procedures

Cumulative grade point averages for each student will be obtained from the involved schools with parental consent throughout the course of a school year at quarter long intervals (after 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>). Mean GPA's of students' will be calculated by grade level and school.

### Instrumentation

Documentation of grade point averages will begin at end of the first quarter of the school year and end after the 4<sup>th</sup> and last quarter of the school year. Using cumulative grade point averages is assumed to be an accurate measurement of student achievement.

### Data Collection

Data collected after each 9 week interval will be obtained for each of the randomly selected students, entered into a spreadsheet, and saved for future analysis.

### Data Analysis

Separation of data by school and by grade will occur, which will allow for the results to account for socioeconomic differences (the difference between private and public schools), developmental differences (the difference between achievement of 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 11<sup>th</sup> graders), as well as overall achievement between divorced homes and traditional homes. Data will be analyzed using a 1-tailed Anova test.

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