

**A SOCIOMETRIC COMPARISON OF RESOURCE
AND NONRESOURCE STUDENTS IN THE
CLASSROOM**

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A SOCIOMETRIC COMPARISON OF RESOURCE AND
NONRESOURCE STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

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by
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Joy Dickens Overby entitled "A Sociometric Comparison of Resource and Nonresource Students in the Classroom." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

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Major Professor

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Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An unresolved issue in the field of education is the most effective placement of children who are not achieving in school because of mental retardation or the presence of learning problems. For most of America's history, children with special problems were placed in classes with normal children, if allowed to attend school at all. Although supposedly given equal educational opportunity, the individual differences of these special children were overlooked. Efforts have been continuous to help these special children achieve their rightful dignity and worth.

A growing concern in the education of children with handicaps is their social acceptance by other children. Low social acceptance constitutes a problem for any child. It has apparently been the practice to place children in special classes without any consideration of their social needs. Research by Johnson (1950) had indicated that the handicapped were more isolated and rejected in the normal classroom than in the self-contained classroom, which led Tennessee, in accord with the national trend, to place and continue to keep the handicapped in the self-contained classroom during the 1950's and 1960's.

The Clarksville-Montgomery County System was one of the first school systems in Tennessee to remove the educably mentally retarded (EMR) from the self-contained classroom and return them to the regular classroom. State and federal legislation was later passed requiring school systems to "mainstream" its educably mentally retarded students.

In the summer of 1972, the Clarksville-Montgomery County, (Tennessee), School System changed its policy regarding the placement of children classified as educable mentally retarded and began offering services for children with learning problems. Before the 1971-72 school year, all of the educably mentally handicapped were in self-contained classrooms within the regular school building or in an adjacent building. The children with learning problems were receiving no special programs and were in the regular classroom. During the 1970-71 school year, the educably mentally handicapped were placed back into the regular classroom. Both the children with learning problems and the children classified as educably mentally retarded received special help in mathematics and reading from a resource teacher for one, two or more periods a day depending on their needs, but remained in the regular classroom for the remainder of the school day.

Tennessee Public Law 839, passed in 1972, and federal legislation called The Education of All Handicapped Children

(P.L. 94-142) mandated that all handicapped children, which includes the mentally handicapped, be assured an education in the "least restrictive" environment. In addition, the Tennessee law designated a new category which would provide special education services to children who were deficient in the basic academic areas of reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic and were unable to have their academic needs met in the regular classroom programs. In order to be eligible for special services in this category, problems such as mental retardation, sensory, motor or emotional handicaps could not be considered responsible for the deficiency in their academic work (Rules, Regulations and Minimum Standards, 1977-1978).

With the passage of the state and federal legislation, the "resource room" and "resource student" became a legal entity. Both special education teachers and regular classroom teachers have expressed concern over the social stigma attached to the students labeled as "resource." Typically, these students have been referred to as "rejects," "dummies," "weirdos," "retards," or the like. It has been feared that these labels have further ostracized the educably mentally handicapped and learning problem children from other children in the classroom.

Although the sum total of a child's traits and abilities make him unique, social acceptance, or at least his perception of it, plays a big part in the intellectual

development of the individual. Thus, each child should be placed in an environment which would allow him to reach his optimum intellectual and social growth.

Some authorities support integration of children with special problems in the regular classroom. Others maintain optimum intellectual and social growth can better be obtained in a special class.

Johnson (1950) concluded, after studying 25 classes which contained EMRs and other students, that the mentally handicapped were more isolated and significantly more rejected than non-handicapped children. Johnson felt that this isolation was due to the lack of mentality rather than variables such as sex, age, socio-economic status, etc.

Baldwin (1958) administered the Ohio Social Recognition Scale to 572 non-retarded children and 31 retarded children in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades. From his findings, he concluded that there was a trend toward a low degree of social acceptance of the mentally retarded children.

An attempt was made by Kern and Pfaeffle (1962) to measure social adjustment of retarded children in three settings: a special school, a special class and a regular classroom. After administering the Social Adjustment section of the California Test of Personality to 91 students in three settings, the study gave support to the belief that mentally retarded children who are in special classes or special schools are better adjusted socially

than mentally retarded children who are forced to compete with other children in the regular classroom.

Jones, Gottfried, and Owens (1966) found among 186 high school students that the severely mentally retarded were more unacceptable socially to their peers than were the mildly mentally retarded.

Strauch (1970) attempted to measure the attitude of junior high students toward EMRs placed into the regular classroom and EMRs in a special class. As a result of his findings, he concluded that student attitudes were more favorable for the students in the special class than the integrated EMRs. It is possible to conclude from this study that social contact may reinforce negative attitudes toward EMR students.

After administering the Vineland Social Acceptance Scale to nine regular classes and one special class integrated at the elementary level, Lapp (1972) found that EMR students were significantly different from other students and were not sought out by other individuals in a friendly relationship. However, these students were not totally rejected.

In a similar study, Gottlieb, Goodman, and Harrison (1972) administered sociometric questionnaires to two groups of students; one group of 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders and one group of 4th, 5th and 6th graders, equally divided between the sexes. The questionnaire contained items to evaluate

the acceptance of EMRs who were integrated, EMRs who were segregated and non-EMRs. The results indicated that both integrated and segregated EMR subjects were rejected significantly more often than non-EMR subjects, that younger subjects were more accepting of EMRs than older subjects, that males expressed more rejection of EMR students than females and that female EMRs were more accepted than their male counterparts.

Gottlieb and Davis (1973) asked 42 children in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades to select one of two children as a partner to help them win a prize at a bean-bag toss game. One member of the pair from which the child was to make a selection was either an integrated EMR student or a non-integrated EMR student. Their findings were that both integrated and non-integrated students were chosen less often than non-EMR children. They concluded that merely not assigning a child to a special class in hopes of removing or at least reducing social stigma is not sufficient to improve the social acceptability of EMR children.

Gottlieb and Budoff (1973) compared the social acceptability of EMRs in schools which had traditional buildings and schools which were unwallled and open. On a sociometric questionnaire administered to 136 children in two schools, the EMR students were known more often in the unwallled school; however, there was a significant difference in the number of EMR children chosen as friends and the number of

non-EMR children chosen, with the EMR children being chosen less often.

Bryan (1974) administered a sociometric technique to 62 children in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade classrooms which contained at least one learning disabled child. The results indicated that learning disabled children, particularly white and female, were significantly less chosen as friends and more rejected than non-learning disabled children.

Iano, Ayers, Heller, McGeltigan, and Walker (1974) studied the sociometric status of 40 former special class educable mentally retarded children who participated in an integrated resource program. The results showed that the EMRs were no better accepted in regular classes than were educable mentally retarded children in previous studies for whom no supportive resource room services had been made available.

Contrary to research previously presented, Jaffe (1966) asked 240 high school seniors to read and answer questions about a theoretical pair of persons. One sketch contained the description "mentally retarded," and the other did not. The study findings indicated that the students were not unfavorably influenced by the mentally retarded label. They suggested, however, actual contact might change feelings.

Bruininks and Rynders (1974) administered sociometric questionnaires to 1,234 non-retarded peers to determine the

social acceptance of mildly retarded children enrolled in regular classes and resource centers within urban and suburban school settings. When rated by children of the same sex, mildly retarded urban children achieved significantly higher peer ratings than non-retarded children, whereas suburban mildly retarded children received significantly lower ratings than non-retarded children. However, when male and female ratings were combined, there was no significant difference in either group.

In further support of integration of EMR students into the regular classroom, Sheare (1974) conducted a study of 400 non-retarded and retarded combined 9th graders from three suburban junior high schools. After administering sociometric questionnaires, he found no significant difference in the social acceptance of EMR students and non-EMR students. His conclusions were that placing a label on the EMR student had no effect on social acceptance.

Finally, Gottlieb and Budoff (1976) compared academic, personal and social growth of 31 EMR children in the lower elementary grades who were assigned randomly to regular grades or retained in special classes at three intervals: prior to the assignment, two months after the assignment and at the conclusion of the school year. There were no significant differences between the two groups prior to or two months after reintegration. After one year, the integrated children showed more internal control. Gottlieb

and Budoff concluded that EMR children would benefit more from regular class assignment than special class placement. The 31 children studied felt better about themselves and about others in the educational settings as the result of being in the regular classroom than the children who had remained in segregated classrooms.

Thus, it can be seen that the research data present contradictory conclusions regarding the effects of integrated and non-integrated placement of special children in regard to their social acceptance and self-concept. Some researchers indicate the need for special classes for the educable mentally handicapped and learning problem children, while others feel these children should be "mainstreamed" into the regular classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether significant differences exist in the peer acceptance of 9th grade students who attend resource classes for two or more periods of their class day and those who do not attend resource classes. No attempt was made to differentiate between students classified as learning problems or mentally retarded as all of these students receive resource services from the same teachers. Although the child's classification was available in the placement decision report, they were not publicly identified as EMRs or learning problems. In fact, it is the author's opinion, as a

teacher in the school being used for the study, that many of the teachers are unaware that all of the children who attend resource classes are not classified as mentally retarded.

Pumphrey, Goodman, Kidd, and Peters (1970) and McDaniel (1970) predicted from their studies that EMR students were better accepted socially when involved in non-academic skills than in academic areas. This variable was also included in this study.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested by statistical analyses of the data collected.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean sociometric scores of the 9th grade resource students and a matched group of non-resource students.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean sociometric scores of male resource students and non-resource students.

3. There is no significant difference in the mean sociometric scores of female resource students and non-resource students.

4. There is no significant difference in the mean sociometric scores of 9th grade resource students in academic classes and a matched non-resource student.

5. There is no significant difference in the mean sociometric scores of 9th grade resource students in non-academic classes and a matched non-resource student.

Definition of Terms

Sociometric status was determined by the score earned on a sociometric questionnaire, which allowed each student in the classroom to rank every other student in the classroom on the basis of friendship with them.

The resource student was defined as any student who had been evaluated and placed in the resource classroom for additional help for one, two or more periods per day.

The non-resource student was defined as any student attending regular classes and receiving no special resource services.

The educable mentally retarded were defined as any child who had been identified as EMR by individual assessment as functioning intellectually at approximately one-half to three-fourths the normal rate of development.

The learning problem children were defined as students who exhibited deficiencies in the basic academic areas of reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic and were unable to cope with classroom instruction appropriate to their age.

Academic classes were defined as classes requiring students to exhibit average ability in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Classes used for this study were science, geography, and speech.

Non-academic classes were defined as classes requiring more use of manual or physical skills as opposed to the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Classes used

for this study were physical education, art, home economics, shop and agriculture.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects selected for this study came from a Montgomery County (Tennessee) 9th grade junior high school. The original sample included 636 students. Twenty-seven were identified as resource students, 12 females and 15 males.

Ninth graders were chosen for study because no previous studies of the social acceptance of resource students of this grade level who had been mainstreamed into the regular classroom had been conducted.

Apparatus

The instrument used to measure sociometric status was the How I Feel Toward Others scale developed by Dr. Merl E. Bonney. This scale allowed each student to rank every other student in the classroom on the basis of friendship. As all students in the classroom were included, no individual or individuals were singled out for social assessment.

The scale included five categories: (1) My Best Friends, (2) My Other Friends, (3) Students I Don't Know, (4) Students I know but who are not my friends, and (5) Students I do not want to have as friends - as long as

they are like they are now. The rating scale divided the social acceptance of the students into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. Directions for completing the instrument were given to the students by the classroom teacher and the author. A copy of the How I Feel Toward Others scale used for junior high students is included in the appendix to this paper.

The extent to which sociometric results have any practical meaning is determined, in part, by the constancy of the sociometric scores. The How I Feel Toward Others scale has shown reliability coefficients for total scores to average about .78 for periods of several weeks and about .73 for periods of several months (Bonney, 1962). These high positive correlations were considered to be sufficient evidence of the reliability for purposes of this study.

Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of the school involved and the Montgomery County Director of Pupil Personnel Services. All of the children who attended resource classes at the junior high school were identified by the school psychologist. After 27 classrooms were selected, each containing one or more resource students, teachers were contacted and asked for their cooperation in administering the sociometric scales. The selection of classrooms was based on the presence of

at least one resource child. Although more than one resource child might be in a particular classroom, twenty-seven different classrooms were used in the study because of the difficulty of finding matched pairs of two or more children chosen as subjects in the same classroom.

Previous to the administration of the scale, the author met with and instructed the teachers involved on the administration procedure. On the day of administration, each teacher passed out a form containing the name of each student in the classroom and a brief description of the rating scale used. Each student was then asked to write the number from the rating scale which indicated his feeling of friendship toward every other student in the classroom. The teacher directed students to keep their form sheet covered as they worked on the scale. This was done to reassure students that their ratings would not be seen by other students. Students were also told that the ratings, which included the names, would only be viewed by the teacher and the author of this paper.

The How I Feel Toward Others scale was administered to the students in the classroom during the last week of the school year. As students had been in constant association for the school year, each had had time to form definite feelings about other class members.

Following the procedure suggested by Dr. Bonney (1962) on scoring of the How I Feel Toward Others scale, the

students selected for the study were assigned a numerical score. The score was computed in the following manner. For every choice received as Best Friend, a positive two was given; for every choice of Other Friend, a positive one was given; for every Don't Know choice, a zero was given; for every choice as Not My Friend, a negative one was given; and for every choice of Do Not Want As My Friend, a negative two was given. An algebraic sum of the scores assigned to every student was then computed. The maximum score a student could obtain was determined by multiplying by two the number of students in the class who rated him. A student's percentage of the maximum score was obtained by dividing the maximum score into his actual score and multiplying by 100 to remove decimal points. To remove negative numbers from the computation, a constant of 50 was then added to each score.

As this study dealt with the social acceptance of resource students as compared to non-resource students in the classroom, only two student sociometric scales were used for each classroom. One represented a control student. The other represented a student receiving resource services. An attempt was made by the author and the teachers in each classroom which participated in the study to select a control student who was the most similar in age, sex and race to the student receiving resource services. This

was not a random selection since the intention was to select the best possible match for each resource child.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Five different types of comparisons of the scores were made: the total sample of resource and non-resource students; resource and non-resource males; resource and non-resource females; resource and non-resource students in academic classes; and resource and non-resource students in non-academic classes.

To test for significant differences in mean socio-metric scores, the values were computed for each possible pairing of groups using the t statistic for comparing matched pairs. The results of the t -tests and standard deviation for each pairing of groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Results of t -tests and Standard
Deviation of Groups Compared

Group	N	df	M	SD	t
Total Sample					6.69**
Resource	27	26	43.41	37.83	
Non-resource	27	26	74.44	15.29	
Male					2.35*
Resource	15	14	50.73	26.03	
Non-resource	15	14	72.20	13.17	
Female					1.39
Resource	12	11	50.92	28.41	
Non-resource	12	11	61.80	17.01	

Table 1 (Continued)

Group	N	df	M	SD	<u>t</u>
Academic					3.87**
Resource	12	11	48.58	26.81	
Non-resource	12	11	82.00	12.77	
Non-academic					
Resource	15	14	52.60	27.19	3.19*
Non-resource	15	14	68.40	14.03	

*significant at .05 level

**significant at .01 level

The sociometric scores of the non-resource students in the total sample were significantly different from the scores of the resource students, $t(26) = 6.69$, $p < .01$. The hypothesis of no difference in the scores of resource and non-resource students is rejected.

The sociometric scores of male non-resource students were significantly different from the scores of the male resource students, $t(14) = 2.35$, $p < .05$. The hypothesis of no difference in the scores of male resource and male non-resource students is rejected.

The sociometric scores of female non-resource students were not significantly different from the scores of the female resource students, $t(11) = 1.39$. The hypothesis of no difference in the scores of female resource students and female non-resource students is accepted.

The sociometric scores of non-resource students in academic classes were significantly different from the scores of the resource students, $t(11) = 3.87$, $p < .01$. The hypothesis of no difference in the scores of resource and non-resource students in academic classes is rejected.

The sociometric scores of non-resource students in non-academic classes were significantly different from the scores of resource students, $t(14) = 3.19$, $p < .05$. The hypothesis of no difference in the scores of resource and non-resource students in non-academic classes is rejected.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

For the total sample, the differences in sociometric scores indicate a trend toward lower social acceptance of students receiving resource services. As there were significant differences between the sociometric scores of resource students and non-resource students, the placement of students in resource rooms has not resulted in the same level of acceptance as compared to non-resource students. Since no data are available on the sociometric scores of these students before they were mainstreamed, there is no way of determining if they are better accepted by non-resource children than they would have been if they had not been mainstreamed.

The data obtained in this study suggest that females who receive resource services are more socially acceptable, as measured by their sociometric scores, than males who receive the same services. The mean sociometric score of the female resource students was lower than the female non-resource student; however, the difference was not significant. The contrary proved to be so for the male resource student. The mean sociometric score was significantly lower for the male resource student than for the male non-resource student.

When analyzed, the data indicated a significant difference in the scores of resource students as compared to the scores of non-resource students in academic classes. Likewise, significant differences were found between resource students and non-resource students in non-academic classes. From the statistical data available, it could only be concluded that significant differences exist between resource students and non-resource students in both academic and non-academic classes. No attempt can be made from the data, as gathered, to determine if resource students are better accepted in academic or non-academic classes.

The large standard deviation of the sociometric scores indicated more variability of social acceptance of the resource students as compared to non-resource students. This suggests the possibility that resource students were either strongly accepted or rejected.

Any conclusions reached as a result of this research must be evaluated in the context of certain limitations. The study was conducted with only one grade level in only one school in a restricted geographical area, specifically, Montgomery County, Tennessee. The sociometric findings in this study would be applicable only to age groups in similar communities and schools.

The question of student honesty in responding to the sociometric questionnaire constituted a further limitation. This limitation is present in all self-report questionnaires.

From the research conducted, the author made no attempt to determine why the resource student was less highly chosen. The self-report questionnaire determines friendship only as measured by the sociometric scale utilized. From the limited data, no conclusions could be drawn about variables that contribute to the lower scores of resource students..

The conclusions presented in this study must be evaluated in the light of the above limitations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the question of whether significant differences exist in the peer acceptance of 9th grade students who attend resource classes one, two or more periods of their class day, and a matched group of students who do not attend resource classes.

The subjects were 54 ninth grade students, 27 of whom were identified as resource students, and a matched group of 27 who were non-resource students from the same classroom in a junior high school. As each resource student was identified, the best matched student in the same classroom, considering the variables of sex, race and age, was chosen to be representative of a non-resource subject in the sample. Peer acceptance was determined by scores on the How I Feel Toward Others scale (Bonney, 1962).

The conclusions reached as a result of this study indicated that significantly lower sociometric scores were attained by resource students than by the matched non-resource students. Significantly lower sociometric scores were attained by male resource students than by the matched male non-resource students. However, the scores of female resource students were not significantly different from the scores of female non-resource students. Significantly

lower sociometric scores were attained by resource students in academic classes than non-resource students in academic classes. Significantly lower scores were attained by resource students in non-academic classes than non-resource students in non-academic classes.

The data from this study supports the research that resource students are not as highly accepted by their peers as friends as are non-resource students. No conclusions can be drawn on whether students were better or less accepted than they would have been if they had been in a self-contained classroom. The data do suggest that those interested in the social acceptance of special children should seek methods to help them gain friendship in the regular classroom. A careful look at the labeling and placement of students in resource classes and the training of teachers who are able to deal with the individual differences of the mentally handicapped may minimize the low peer acceptance of the special child.

Further research is suggested to investigate the following areas:

1. The relationship between age of the resource student and social acceptability.
2. The relationship between I.Q. range of the resource student and social acceptability.
3. The relationship of teacher variables on the social acceptability of resource students.

4. The relationship of social acceptance of students identified as resource and students of similar measured intelligence who have not been receiving resource services.

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APPENDIX A. How I Feel Toward Others

The teacher and the pupils should read this entire scale together.

To the pupils:

You have all taken a lot of tests in mathematics, reading, and other subjects. You have been asked to take those tests so your teachers would know better how to help you in your studies. Now you are asked to tell how you feel toward other students in your room. This is not a test like the others you have taken. There are no right or wrong answers. All you need to do is to tell how you feel toward other students in your room. By doing this you will help the teacher to know which other students you get along with best.

No student will be allowed to see another student's paper.

DIRECTIONS: On another sheet of paper you have the names of all the people in your room. As soon as we finish reading the directions you will be asked to place a number to the left of each of these names, including your own. The numbers which you will use are the numbers of the paragraphs listed below.

Do not put any numbers now. Please put your pencils down until you are told by your teacher to begin.

We must first read all the directions together, so you will be sure to know how to mark your list of names.

Number 1 is for: My Best Friends. How can we tell our best friends from just ordinary friends? Below you will find listed some things which are generally true of our best friends. Put a 1 to the left of the names of those students who are best friends.

- A. You are with your best friends a lot and have fun with them.
- B. You treat them nice, help them whenever you can, and share your things with them.
- C. You go places with them and talk with them a lot.
- D. You go to their homes and they come to your home quite often.

Number 2 is for: My Other Friends. Besides our best friends all of us have other friends whom we like fairly well. Put a 2 to the left of the names of those children you like fairly well.

- A. You are with them sometimes, but you do not always have fun with them.
- B. You are nice to them most of the time, but you seldom share your things with them.
- C. Sometimes you go places with them, and talk with them, but not very often.
- D. You seldom go to their homes, and they seldom come to your home.

Number 3 is for: Students I Don't Know. There may be some people on your list whom you don't know well enough to know whether you like them or not. It may be that you have not been with them enough to tell much about them. You don't know how you really feel about these students. Put a 3 to the left of the names of those people whom you don't know well enough to rate.

Number 4 is for: Students I know but who are not my friends. All of us know some persons quite well but we do not consider them to be our friends. Put a 4 to the left of the names of those people you do not consider as your friends.

- A. You are seldom with them.
- B. You do not get along very well with them when you are around them.
- C. You do not talk to them or go places with them unless it is necessary to be polite.
- D. You do not like some of the things they do, and the way they act at times.

Number 5 is for: Students I do not want to have as friends - as long as they are like they are now. Nearly all of us find there are a few persons we cannot get along with. These people may be all right in some ways, and may be regarded as good friends by others, but not by us.

- A. You avoid being with them, and you never choose them as partners for a game.
- B. Sometimes you fuss, quarrel, and fight with them when you are around them.
- C. You never go places with them and you never talk with them unless you have to.
- D. You dislike very much some of the things they do, and the way they act at times.

Now let us go over the main headings.

What is number 1 for?	(Student response)
What is number 2 for?	(Student response)
What is number 3 for?	(Student response)
What is number 4 for?	(Student response)
What is number 5 for?	(Student response)

You do not have to use all these numbers. You may use any of these as many times as you wish. All you need to do is to show how you feel about each person on your list by putting one of the above numbers to the left of his name.

Be sure to put a number to the left of every name.
Do not leave out anyone.

Has everyone found his own name? If your name is not on the list tell the teacher so she can have all the children add your name to their lists. As soon as you have found your name or have written it in, put a 6 to the left of it.

If you have any questions, please ask them now.

When you have finished marking your list, turn your paper face down on your desk and leave it there until the teacher takes it up.

Go ahead now and place the other numbers (1-2-3-4-5) to the left of the rest of the names on your list.