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**A COMPARISON STUDY ON SELF-ESTEEM OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING  
DISABILITIES IN DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENTS**

By  
Kara A. Cooper

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University

May 14, 2003

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved 5/14/03

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Kara A. Cooper**

### **A COMPARISON STUDY ON SELF-ESTEEM OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENTS**

**2002/2003**

**Dr. Joy Xin**

**Master of Arts in Special Education**

The purpose of this study was to compare the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities who were being placed in different settings, such as inclusive classrooms, self-contained classrooms, and resource rooms. Students who were classified and eligible for special education under the category of specific learning disabilities participated in this study. Three groups of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students with a total of 82 students were surveyed. The survey consisted of ten statements related to the students' perceptions of themselves. The surveys were administered individually to the three groups of students. All responses of the survey were collected and analyzed using the SPSS program. The mean and standard deviation of each statement from each group were computed. An ANOVA analysis was also used to compare differences among the three groups. The results of this study indicate that class placement does not affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities significantly.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for their continuing support throughout my educational experiences. Without the constant guidance and support from them, I would not have accomplished all that I have. They have always encouraged me to do my best and to strive for success in order to reach my goals. As I fulfill this goal of obtaining my Master's Degree, I want them both to know that they made it possible. Thank you!

I would also like to thank all the students who participated in my research, the parents who granted consent, and the teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms. Additionally, a final thank you should be expressed to the administrators and supervisors of the elementary schools who recognized the importance of this study and allowed their schools to participate in it. This would not have been possible without your help.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Statement of Problem**

In 1975, the federal law, Education for all Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) was passed to provide a free and appropriate education to children with disabilities. This law was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), then, amended in 1997. One of the major components of this law is to provide the least restrictive environment (LRE) to educate students with disabilities (Crabtree, Gartin, & Murdick, 2002).

The least restrictive environment is “the most ‘normal’ place in which appropriate education can be offered” (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1999, p.130). According to Fuchs and Fuchs (1995), it must serve two criteria, (1) to provide students with disabilities an education appropriate to their unique learning needs, and (2) to do so in close proximity as possible to their age-appropriate peers without disabilities. This environment may vary depending on each student’s different needs. When placing a child with disabilities in an appropriate setting, the continuum of services must be considered. These services would be arranged from the most physically integrated to the least physically integrated (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). For example, when a child with learning disabilities is eligible to receive special education services, the first question analyzed might be: How much can this child be included in the regular classroom? The regular classroom is always the first placement option considered

because it is the most physically integrated. The goal for placing these children is a regular education classroom as Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) indicated that children with disabilities should not be placed out of a regular classroom or school environment unless their needs require. When choosing a placement other than the regular classroom for a learning disabled child, evidence must be given as to why the regular classroom is not the appropriate environment. If the student's needs are not fulfilled in a regular education setting, the resource room may be the next placement option according to the law (IDEA, 1997). When the student is not able to succeed through the resource room approach, a self-contained classroom becomes the next alternative (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Through the continuum of alternative placements, there is constantly a placement option. This option may be considered by a child study team, and consented by the parents and family.

Recently, an inclusive environment has been advocated by parents and educators (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). The inclusive environment refers to placing students with disabilities in regular education classrooms with their age appropriate peers. In an inclusive classroom there may be two teachers, a special educator and a regular educator, to share responsibilities for lesson instruction and classroom management. According to Roach (1995), inclusion can be defined as the practice of serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom – with appropriate in-class support. It is found that 76% of learning disabled students were served in a regular education classroom during the 1990-1991 school year and this number will assume to increase (Maloney, 1995). These students may achieve more academically and socially in such an inclusive environment than in a placement segregated from their peers

(Burden & Parish, 1983). They have an opportunity to fully participate in general education programs to develop more positive perceptions of themselves (Evans, Gable, King, & Whinnery, 1995). It is also found that these students may have a higher self-esteem (Morvitz & Motta, 1992).

In contrast, Jenkins and Heinen's study (1989) as cited in Evans, Gable, King, and Whinnery (1995) found that students with disabilities preferred 'pull-out,' such as resource room programs because they were less embarrassed than they were in inclusive classrooms. Morvitz and Motta (1992) also indicated that special education placement may not necessarily lead to lower self-esteem in children. Similar information is found by Roberts and Mather (as cited in Evans et al., 1995) that some students simply cannot make satisfactory learning and social adjustments without a significant program and instructional accommodations in classrooms. The individualized instruction in special education classrooms may provide students significant assistance to meet their needs, however, in inclusive settings, some teachers are neither willing nor able to accommodate the diverse nature of individual needs of students with disabilities (Mather & Roberts, 1995 as cited in Evans et al., 1995).

Another placement option is resource rooms. Resource room programs, known as pull-out programs, require students to leave the regular education classroom for part of the school day (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). These programs provide small group instruction or individual instruction to students with special needs. This kind of individual instruction can provide students extra help as needed. It can also allow students to ask questions in order to help them understand material better without facing embarrassment that the regular education class would have (Jenkins & Heinen, as cited in



Evans, Gable, King, & Whinnery, 1995). Resource rooms were once the main placement option for students with learning disabilities. Because of the inclusive environment as another option of placement some critiques of the resource room have appeared. Heinen and Jenkins (1989) report the many criticisms on resource rooms:

They have been charged with disrupting classroom instruction (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1987); absolving classroom teachers of responsibility for instructing lower-performing students (Pugach & Lily, 1984); attaching stigmas to children who are pulled out (Will, 1986); failing to coordinate their instruction with that of the classroom (Johnston, Allington, & Afflerbach, 1985); and, most important ineffectiveness (Gallagher, 1984). (p. 516)

Self-contained classroom environment refers to a class typically of fifteen or fewer special education students with particular characteristics or needs. The teacher has been trained as a special educator and provides all or most of the instruction (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Some self-contained programs allow students to spend time with their nondisabled peers for their nonacademic activities, while others are segregated without any activities with regular students. Supporters of self-contained classrooms believe that “people will use others in their environment as the basis for forming estimates of their own self-worth” (Morvitz & Motta, 1992, p. 73). Therefore, students in self-contained classrooms have high self-esteem because they are comparing themselves among only other special education students. According to Morvitz and Motta (1992), a self-contained classroom is less competitive and therefore the students are able to see themselves in a “more positive light” (p. 73). In contrast, some researchers, however, argue that students with disabilities need to associate with regular students in order to learn socially (Stainback & Stainback, 1984).

There is always a debate over the best placement option for children with learning disabilities. Inclusive placement seems to be the most popular option for this group of students, but the research suggests positive and negative comments (e.g. Morvitz & Motta, 1992; Battle & Blowers, 1982; Evans, Gable, King, & Whinnery, 1995). Other options, such as a self-contained classroom or a resource room, are also popular placements, but the very least restrictive environment in the continuum of placements is always the regular education classroom (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1999). When a child is segregated one way or another from the regular classroom, his/her self-esteem may be decreased because such placements “can lower a person’s self-esteem or cause others to behave differently towards him or her” (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000, p.49).

Self-esteem refers to our feelings about our inside qualities, such as our worth as human beings and our sense of purpose in life (Pawel, 2001). It has always been a problem of students with learning disabilities (Haskett, Kistner, Robbins, & White, 1987). It appears that a direct relationship between self-esteem and academic performance is present (Morvitz & Motta, 1992). Children’s self-esteem plays an important factor in academic achievement. For example, students who do well in school tend to rate themselves higher on tests of self-esteem than those who do not perform well (Morvitz & Motta, 1992). This positive correlation between academic success and self-esteem can be detrimental to students with learning disabilities. It is found that students with learning disabilities tend to have lower self-esteem than their nondisabled peers (Haskett, Kistner, Robbins, & White, 1987). Because of these children’s school experiences (e.g., academic failures; placement in special classes), they tend to foster negative feelings of themselves and their self-worth (Battle & Blowers, 1982). Gever

(1970) and Siegel (1974) (as cited in Haskett, Kistner, Robbins, & White, 1987) emphasize that professionals working with learning disabled students express wide concern that their unsuccessful experiences may lead to negative self-concepts that adversely affect their adjustment both in and out of school. This is evidenced by the results of a number of studies reporting lower scores of learning disabled children on self-concept measures relative to their nondisabled peers (Haskett, et. al., 1987).

To date, much of the literature is available comparing self-esteem of students with learning disabilities with that of regular education students. There is a minimal amount of research comparing students with learning disabilities in different placements. As indicated by Evans, Gable, King, and Whinnery (1995) there are still many unanswered questions, one of which pertains to the effect of inclusion on students' perceptions of themselves. It seems that there is a lack of research comparing learning disabled students' success across placements. The need for further research comparing learning disabled students in inclusive settings, self-contained classrooms, and resource rooms is imperative, especially these students' self-esteem. Special class placement may affect the self-esteem of children with learning disabilities, but little evidence supports this assumption (Battle & Blowers, 1982). Inclusive settings may also impact these students self-concepts, but findings are controversial (Morvitz & Motta, 1992, Evans, Gable, King, & Whinnery, 1995, Burden & Parish, 1983). The present study examined the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities who were placed in an inclusive classroom, a resource room, or a self-contained classroom. A comparison was conducted to determine if a placement option would impact a student's self-esteem.

### **Significance of the Study**

Specific learning disabilities constitute 50% of all special education cases (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Self-esteem is a major factor of academic success for all children in school, especially for students with disabilities. It is found that students with learning disabilities have a lower self-esteem than their regular educated peers (Haskett, Kistner, Robbins, & White, 1987). Because of placement options for students with learning disabilities, they may be placed in inclusive classrooms, resource rooms, or self-contained environments. Research has shown controversial findings on self-esteem of these students in different settings (Morvitz & Motta, 1992; Battle & Blowers, 1982; Evans, Gable, King, & Whinnery, 1995). This present study tended to further compare the self-esteem of learning disabled students in those three placements. Measurement of a self-esteem scale was used to evaluate students with learning disabilities in each placement and the results were analyzed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to compare the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities who were being placed in different settings, such as inclusive classrooms, self-contained classrooms, and resource rooms.

### **Research Questions**

1. Will inclusive settings affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities?
2. Will resource rooms affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities?
3. Will self-contained classrooms affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities?

4. Are there any differences in self-esteem of students with learning disabilities in three different environments: inclusion, resource room, and self-contained settings?

### **Definitions**

The following terms are defined and used in this study:

1. Self-esteem: A feeling of self-worth or self-concept. This study will compare the self-esteem of learning disabled students in three placement settings.
2. Inclusion: For purposes of this study, inclusion will be defined as learning disabled students and regular education students being taught in the same general education classroom with the proper support.
3. Resource room: Throughout this study when the term resource room is used, it will mean when learning disabled students are pulled out of the regular classroom for certain subjects or for part of the day.
4. Self-contained classroom: For purposes of this study, students in self-contained classrooms are not taught in the regular education classroom for any academic subject. They might have lunch or specials with the regular education students, but that is the most exposure students in the self-contained classroom will have with regular education students.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Believing in oneself will develop self-confidence, motivation, and the ability to be successful in one's life. This self-believing may be referred to as self-esteem. It is found that students with learning disabilities have a lower self-esteem than their non-disabled peers (Haskett, Kistner, Robbins & White, 1987). This low self-esteem may impact students with learning disabilities in school. It is also found that placing these students in different class environments such as inclusive classrooms, resource rooms, and self-contained classrooms can alter self-esteem (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). This chapter will review the literature on placement options and self-esteem including the definition of self-esteem and how it is impacted on children, especially those with learning disabilities, factors influencing self-esteem, and a comparison of different class placements that may impact students' self-esteem.

#### **Self-Esteem**

The Webster Dictionary defines self-esteem as "a confidence and satisfaction in oneself" (p. 1066). It is determined by how one believes in himself as competent, belonging, and worthwhile. Self-esteem refers to our feelings about our inside qualities. This includes our worth as human beings, sense of purpose in life, and how loveable we

think we are (Pawel, 2001). As Pawel explains:

True self-esteem comes from within. When we have a healthy self-esteem we are confident, independent, and willing to try new things. We strive for excellence and try to do our best. We accept ourselves as we are, recognizing both our strengths and weaknesses. We work to improve ourselves, but are not perfectionists; we have realistic expectations for ourselves. (Pawel, 2001, p. 5)

Self-esteem is an important component in all children because self-esteem is built by “the perceptions of ourselves involving our attitudes, feeling, and knowledge about our skills, abilities, appearance, and social acceptability” (Byrne, 1984 as cited in Chapman, 1988, p. 348). The National Association for Self-Esteem considers self-esteem as the experience of being capable of meeting life’s challenges and being worthy of happiness (<http://www.self-esteem-nase.org>). It has been revealed that low self-esteem has a direct relationship to many social and behavioral problems, such as crime, violence, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, and suicide, as well as students’ academic achievement in educational performance. (<http://www.self-esteem-nase.org/research.shtml>). It is also found that the lack of self-esteem has become the standard explanation for many, if not all, problems American children face (Rosemund, 1994).

Self-esteem is viewed as the cornerstone of both social and emotional development (Kean & Sandler, 2001). Throughout a child’s early ages it is established that the first five years of a child’s life are very important to develop self-esteem. This self-esteem may be determined through the child’s interaction with his/her environment (Krieg, 1994). For example, the initial interaction with the parents and family, then, with peers and others outside the family, children gradually develop a concept of who they are and what they are like (Brewer, 1998). According to Krieg (1994), the view children take of themselves most closely correlates with the expectations and attitudes of their

significant others. Parents and school personnel have the most profound influence on children's self-esteem. Children must develop an accurate, realistic, and consistent understanding of their abilities, and a 'degree of congruence' between expectations and performance (Krieg, 1994). Parents and school personnel must help students achieve this "congruence" either by raising performance or lowering expectations to a realistic level. Either of these two actions can achieve a positive outcome and enhance self-esteem (Krieg, 1994). It is important that children with learning disabilities are provided with an environment where they are able to achieve true success. This true success means that they are successful and achieving. As Stevenson (1992) states in Hwang and Tobin (1997), a "false inflation of self-esteem may make children more vulnerable to disillusionment in the end when they leave the safety of the classroom and enter the real world, they are left with no weapon to fight" (p. 132).

### **Characteristics of Children with High/Low Self-Esteem**

Children with high self-esteem are likely to be confident in social situations and school achievement. They have retained a natural curiosity for learning, and are eager and enthusiastic when presented with a new challenge (Lawrence, 1996). Children with high self-esteem act positively, assume responsibility, tolerate frustration, feel able to influence their environments, and are proud of their deeds (Schatz & Wiggins, 1994). Those with positive self-perceptions usually try harder and persist longer when facing difficult or challenging tasks (Chapman, 1988). Usually children with high self-esteem are educated in the regular classroom and are not labeled as having a learning disability.

In contrast, children with low self-esteem might lack confidence in their ability to succeed. Consequently, they might try to avoid situations in which they see as potentially



humiliating (Lawrence, 1996). In the words of the famous philosopher and psychologist William James (1890), 'With no attempt there can be no failure; with no failure no humiliation' (as cited in Lawrence, 1996, p. 7). This explains why some students prefer to do nothing even though they know they are likely to incur the teacher's displeasure. Being punished and perhaps being regarded as something of a hero by their peers is better to be seen to be foolish (Lawrence, 1996). Children with low self-esteem are easily led by others, become frustrated quickly and easily, often blame others for their shortcomings, and tend to avoid difficult situations (Schatz & Wiggins, 1994). Those who feel relatively worthless and ineffectual tend to reduce their effort or give up altogether when work is difficult (Chapman, 1988). Some students with learning disabilities display similar characteristics to those with low self-esteem (Hallahan, Kauffman & Lloyd, 1999). It is found that most children with learning disabilities have low self-esteem (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000).

Chapman (1988) compared the self-esteem of learning disabled students to that of regular education students. In his review of numerous studies he found that learning disabled students have lower self-concepts than nonhandicapped students (Chapman, 1988). Achille and Beltempo's study (1990) found similar results. One hundred and thirty one students from five different elementary schools participated in this study. Of these participants four groups were formed: (1) learning disabled students in maximum placement, (2) learning disabled students in partial placement, (3) learning disabled students not placed outside the regular classroom, and (4) the last group consisted of regular education students. The Piers- Harris Self-Concept Scale was administered to the participants. The results of this study revealed that learning disabled students, when

compared to regular education students, have a lower self-concept (Achille & Beltempo, 1990). The results also suggest that low self-concept may be closely related to the origins of learning disability.

Ayres and Cooley's study (1998) also reveals differences in self-esteem among students with learning disabilities and student without learning disabilities. Forty seven nonhandicapped students and forty six students with learning disabilities between the ages of 10 to 14 were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Children with learning disabilities reported significantly lower self-concept scores than their nonhandicapped peers. It is evidenced students with learning disabilities have a lower self-esteem than students without learning disabilities (Chapman, 1988; Achille & Beltempo, 1990; Ayres & Cooley, 1998).

### **Factors Influencing Self-Esteem**

There are two important factors influencing students' self-esteem. One is teacher attitude towards students and another is student performance. For example, the most effective tool to build self-esteem is a teacher's encouragement to the student (Pawel, 2001). Their words and phrases will focus on positive, internal qualities such as courage, a sense of purpose, or self-worth (Pawel, 2001). Studies have shown a teacher's support and encouragement towards students can create higher self-esteem. This support and encouragement are associated with student self-esteem (Murray & Scott, 1996). Nelson (1984), as cited in Murray and Scott (1996), found that teacher variables such as teacher involvement and support, the degree to which teachers stressed over order and organization, and innovation, were positively associated with overall student self-esteem. Also, Ryan and Grolnick (1986), as cited in Murray and Scott (1996), found that a

positive relationship does exist between self-worth and their perceptions of whether their teachers allowed them autonomy. Thus, teachers need to realize that “all students are unique individuals, each with his/her own set of physical, intellectual, and psychological characteristics” (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p. 103). Acknowledging this uniqueness rather than comparing him or her with others will help establish and strengthen students’ self-esteem (Washington, 1996).

Teacher attitude towards students with learning disabilities might have a great impact on their self-esteem. It seems that most teachers want to build the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities and help them gain a sense of personal competence. However, some teachers may have negative responses. For example, Clark’s study (1997) examined teacher responses to students with learning disabilities. Ninety-seven general education teachers in an elementary school were given hypothetical cases of boys, with and without learning disabilities, failing a test. Teachers were asked to respond to each case and the responses were evaluated based on feedback, affective responses, and expectations. The findings suggested that teachers make casual attributions and subsequently respond to children with learning disabilities on the basis of, at least in part, the belief that:

(a) these students will fail more, (b) they are deserving of more pity and less anger, and (c) they should be provided more reward and less punishment than their nondisabled peers for an equivalent outcome, perhaps to maintain or encourage motivation to perform (Clark, 1997, p. 7).

These findings send negative messages to students with learning disabilities to impact their self-esteem. The responses of teachers in this study “are often interpreted as low-

ability cues, that may affect students' self-esteem, sense of competence as learners, and motivation to achieve" (Clark, 1997, p. 1).

Student achievement also impacts self-esteem. Successful school experiences appear to be positively correlated with self-esteem (Morvitz & Motta, 1992). It is found that students who do well in school tend to rate themselves higher on self-esteem tests than those who do not perform well. Low achievement is the one characteristic that consistently impacts students with learning disabilities (La Greca & Stone, 1990). This is evidenced in Patten's study (1983) conducted to compare the self-esteem and academic achievement of students with learning disabilities. A total of 88 kindergarten through sixth grade students with learning disabilities participated in the study. Among those, 85% were white and 15% were black and Latino. The majority were in the middle socioeconomic range, although some students were from the middle and upper middle class range. All students were administered the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The results show that achievement and self-esteem are positively correlated for students with learning disabilities. These findings are also evidenced in other studies that self-esteem seems directly correlated with school performance to at least a moderate degree (Clemes & Bean, 1981; Wiggins, 1987; Bloom, 1977 as cited in Schatz & Wiggins, 1994).

### **Placement Impact on Student's Self-Esteem**

Traditionally, students with learning disabilities are placed in self-contained environments, resource rooms, or inclusive environments to receive remedial instruction (Hallahan, Kauffman & Lloyd, 1999). Students with learning disabilities who are educated in a self-contained environment do not associate with their regular peers

throughout the school day. However, sometimes students in self-contained classes do participate with regular educated peers for nonacademic subjects. Morvitz and Motta (1992) critiqued such special education placement options. Although the assumption in the literature states that “identifying children as exceptional and isolating them from the larger school population for instructional purposes results in diminution of self-concept due to the stigmatizing effects of the label,” (p. 72) findings have been reported differently. Morvitz and Motta (1992) conducted a study to compare the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities in different settings using the Piers-Harris Children’s Self Concept Scale. A total of 126 students from third to sixth grade participated. They were placed into three groups of class environments: self-contained class, resource room, and regular education setting (i.e. inclusive classroom). The students in the regular classroom had higher achievement than those in the resource room and in the self-contained classroom. It was found that the self-esteem of the students in the self-contained setting was not significantly lower than that of the students in other settings, even though students in the self-contained classroom have greater difficulty than those in other settings (Morvitz & Motta, 1992). It is also found that the self-esteem of the students in the resource room was significantly lower than that of those in the regular education environment. Meanwhile, it is revealed that other studies involving students in self-contained classes often have higher self-esteem than or equal to that of regular class students who are experiencing learning problems (e.g., Chassin, Stager & Young, 1983; Coleman, 1983). Special class placement was associated with a significant increase of student self-esteem (Battle & Blowers, 1982, Evans, Gable, King, & Whinnery, 1995).

Another study by Battle and Blowers (1982) provides support towards special class placement for children with learning disabilities. Sixty-eight students with learning disabilities from grades one to seven were investigated. The Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Children was used to measure their self-esteem. It was found that children with learning disabilities who were placed in special education classes evaluated themselves more positively than those who were enrolled in regular classes (Battle & Blowers, 1982). The results indicated that smaller special education classes allow for more individual instruction that may help those students focus on learning and achieve a greater degree of academic success. Findings of the study clearly indicate that special education programs tend to foster the development of more positive perceptions of self-worth in children experiencing learning problems (Battle & Blowers, 1982). It is found that special education programs can promote the development of mental health in children with learning disabilities, as evidenced by this increased self-esteem. The study has supported special education class placements, such as self-contained classes or resource rooms, and also indicated the need for further research to verify the results.

Another placement for students with learning disabilities is known as resource rooms. In a resource room, students with learning disabilities are provided with small group instruction or individual instruction. This kind of special instruction requires students to leave the regular education for part of the school day. To investigate resource room placement, Patten (1983) studied 88 children with learning disabilities through kindergarten to sixth grade. All participants were placed in the regular classroom, but instructed in the resource room for part of the day. Two measurements, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Sarason general Anxiety Scale for Children were used in

this study. The results showed that students with learning disabilities had low self-esteem. Some students with learning disabilities may have difficulty to concentrate, memorize information, and handle problem solving tasks (Patten, 1983). These common behavioral characteristics are presented by many students with learning disabilities, therefore, it may be possible for teachers to increase student self-esteem that may help them succeed academically. This may be accomplished for some students in the regular classroom, however, for others, resource rooms may provide the help they need. In resource rooms, small group or individual time may assist these students to identify what is important and to provide an opportunity for the teachers to further demonstrate their trust (Patten, 1983).

Recently, to place students with learning disabilities into inclusive classrooms with their non-disabled peers becomes another option. This inclusive setting is supported by parents and educators as the best placement for students with learning disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). It is assumed that including students with learning disabilities with in the regular education classroom will provide them an equal opportunity to work together with their non-disabled peers to increase their self-esteem. Evans, Gable, King, and Whinnery (1995) compared the attitudes of elementary students with learning disabilities who receive services either in traditional resource room programs or an inclusive environment. A total of 32 students from grades two through five participated in the study with 16 in the resource room and 16 in the inclusive classroom. Students took a survey on self-esteem to compare any differences between the 2 groups. The results showed that the attitudes and feelings of students in the resource room and inclusive classroom did not differ significantly (Evans, et.al, 1995).

However, the most significant difference between resource room students and inclusive students was that resource room students often felt left out of activities. This is directly related to the fact that resource room students do leave the regular classroom, therefore, they may feel left out of some activities. Also, it is found that resource room students were more likely to feel that the classroom teacher embarrassed them in front of other students. However, even with the minor differences between inclusive and resource students, the study provided limited support for the belief that special education students served in inclusive settings develop more positive attitudes than those who received instruction in a resource room (Evans, et.al, 1995). It is concluded that some students may have difficulty to make satisfactory learning and social adjustments in an inclusive classroom where some teachers are neither willing nor able to accommodate the diverse nature of individual needs (Evans, et.al, 1995).

Achille and Beltempo (1990) also examined class placements of students with learning disabilities and their effects on student self-esteem. In their study, 131 elementary students with learning disabilities participated. Of these students, 28 children were placed in a classroom where over seventy percent of their school day was spent in a special education classroom, 11 were separated from the regular classroom with 30% of each school day, and 44 placed in the regular education classroom full-time. The final group of 48 children were non-disabled and received instruction in a regular education classroom. Students in each group were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The results showed that children with learning disabilities presented a remarkably low self-concept, regardless of special or regular class placement (Achille & Beltempo, 1990). It is found that students with learning disabilities who are placed in a



regular classroom for the maximum amount of time have a higher self-concept than those with learning disabilities who are placed out of the regular classroom (Achille & Beltempo, 1990). This study has supported to place students with learning disabilities in the regular education classroom so that they can be with their non-disabled peers that may help shape their positive self-esteem.

Heinen and Jenkins (1989) compared service delivery models in education. One of the service delivery models compared in their study was the resource room. Placement options were compared using preferences of the students with learning disabilities. A total of 686 special education students in grades two, four, and five participated in the study. Each student was interviewed individually to find his/her preferred setting to be educated. Although some students preferred a resource room, the majority of students participating thought of the resource room as a very embarrassing experience because they had to leave the regular classroom during the class activity. In conclusion to this study, feelings of embarrassment caused by the resource room can eventually lead to student negative self-esteem (Heinen & Jenkins, 1989).

In addition, McLaughlin, Rea, and Walther-Thomas (2000) investigated the relationship between inclusive environments and pullout special education programs known as resource rooms. Participants consisted of 58, 8<sup>th</sup> graders with learning disabilities in two groups, 36 inclusive students and 22 resource room students. Through the use of archival data, the relationship between placement of students with learning disabilities and specific facets of school performance, namely, achievement, behavior, and attendance was examined. It was found that students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades and achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests

(McLaughlin, Rea & Walther-Thomas, 2000). Also, it is further demonstrated that students with learning disabilities included in general education classrooms achieved better outcomes on some measures than did their peers in pullout programs. It appears that students who achieve more academically will have higher self-esteems, and the inclusive environment may provide students with learning disabilities an opportunity to work cooperatively with their non-disabled peers and make them feel better about themselves.

### **Summary**

Self-esteem is a vital component for students with learning disabilities to be successful in school. Placement options for students with disabilities may alter their self-esteem and it is important for school personnel to consider appropriate settings for these students. When comparing placement options for students with learning disabilities in terms of self-esteem, it is found that the findings of different studies have yielded various results. Because of the inadequacies and mixed outcomes of research, this present study attempts to measure the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities in three different settings: inclusive environments, resource rooms, and self-contained classrooms, to verify the previous findings and to add more information to existing studies.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Setting**

Three public elementary schools in southern New Jersey participated in this study. According to the United States government census, the median household income for the towns where the schools were located ranged from \$46,000 to \$60,000. Both, School 2 and 3 are similar in economic status of the middle class. School 1 seems to be of a slightly higher economic status, with the median household income being at the higher range of \$60,000. The majority of students attending the 3 schools are white, English speaking students.

School 1 serves students from preschool to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. According to the New Jersey School Report Card, in October, 2001, enrollment was 761 students. Among those students, 16 percent required special education services and had individualized education plans. School 2 serves students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Total student enrollment is 516 and the percentage of students needing special education services is also 16. School 3 serves students from preschool to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and total enrollment is 499. Similar to School 1 and School 2, 15 percent of the students are classified and receiving special education services.

### **Sample Population**

Students who were classified and eligible for special education under the category of specific learning disabilities participated in this study. For this research, three groups of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students with a total of 82 were surveyed. The first group of students were educated in an inclusive classroom and never separated from their regular educated peers throughout the school day. This group consisted of 21 students. The second group consisted of 36 students who were educated in a resource room part-time during each school day. These students spent at least half a school day with their regular educated peers. The third group of students were served in a self-contained classroom. These 33 students spent their school day in a classroom with their peers who have similar disabilities. These students may associate with their regular educated peers during lunch or other specials, but all academic subjects are taught in the self-contained environment. Certain students may have Social Studies or Science in the regular education class, but this does not happen very frequently.

The following table presents the number of students in each group from each school:

	Self-Contained	Resource Room	Inclusion
School 1	10	12	12
School 2	12	10	0
School 3	11	14	9

### **Instrument**

The instrument used to collect data was a structured self-esteem survey. The survey consisted of 10 statements related to the students' perception on themselves.

Students would self-report their choices to respond to each statement. The survey was developed based on Evans, Gable, King, and Whinnery's study (1995). Statements were also taken from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965), and a self-esteem scale developed by the Department of Psychology at Henderson State University (2002). Considering the age of the students, simple and brief statements were used. The following are the ten statements in the survey:

1. I like myself.
2. I am fun to be with.
3. I am a good person.
4. I am proud of my work.
5. I am a happy person.
6. Sometimes I feel dumb.
7. My classmates make fun of me.
8. I am an important member of my class.
9. I feel left out of class activities.
10. Sometimes I feel that I am NO good at all.

### **Procedures**

The survey was given individually to 3 groups of students in different educational settings, inclusion, resource room, and self-contained environment. The first group of inclusion students were administered the survey within the regular education classroom while the class was divided into groups. Both groups 2 and 3 took the survey amongst classmates in their respective groups.

Prior to the survey, the directions were provided and the ways to respond to the survey statements were explained to each group. Students were told that this was strictly

confidential. Students were asked to answer yes (agree) or no (disagree) to each statement as honestly as possible. As soon as the survey was completed, the researcher would collect and keep the surveys in 3 separate envelopes, each representing inclusion students, resource room students, and self-contained students.

### **Data Analysis**

All responses of the survey were collected and analyzed using SPSS program. The responses of “Yes” and “No” were dummy-coded as Yes = 2 and No = 1 in the data analysis and the mean and standard deviation of each statement from each group were computed. To analyze the different responses among 3 groups, an ANOVA analysis was used to compare the difference.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This study was designed to compare the self-esteem of 3 groups of students with learning disabilities placed in different settings, such as inclusive classrooms, self-contained classrooms, and resource rooms. Data were collected via a survey anticipating the results to show significant differences on the self-esteem of the students in each group. However, statistical analysis of the data using SPSS software program revealed that there were no significant differences between the groups of students. However, some differences were noted, but not statistically significant. Figure 1 represents the standard deviation and the mean of each statement on the survey for each group of students. Figure 2 represents the analysis of each survey item and figure 3 shows each statement and the percentage of responses on each item from each group.

**Figure 1****Mean and Standard Deviation of Survey Statements**

Survey Statements	Group 1 Inclusion		Group 2 Resource Room		Group 3 Self- Contained	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. I like myself.	1.86	.36	1.86	.36	2.00	0
2. I am fun to be with.	1.95	.22	1.89	.36	1.91	.30
3. I am a good person.	1.95	.22	1.89	.36	1.97	.22
4. I am proud of my work.	1.81	.40	1.83	.30	1.94	.30
5. I am a happy person.	1.86	.36	1.83	.22	1.88	.40
6. Sometimes I feel dumb.	1.57	.51	1.56	.51	1.33	.51
7. My classmates make fun of me.	1.29	.46	1.36	.48	1.24	.48
8. I am an important member of my class.	1.62	.50	1.64	.48	1.58	.51
9. I feel left out of class activities sometimes.	1.29	.46	1.39	.51	1.33	.51
10. Sometimes I feel that I am no good at all.	1.24	.44	1.44	.46	1.21	.44

Yes = 2, No = 1



**Figure 2****Analysis of Variance on Survey Statements**

Statement		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1. I like myself.	Between Groups	.412	2	.206	2.605	.80
	Within Groups	6.877	87	.079		
	Total	7.289	89			
2. I am fun to be with.	Between Groups	.054	2	.027	.323	.725
	Within Groups	7.235	87	.083		
	Total	7.289	89			
3. I am a good person.	Between Groups	.122	2	.061	.972	.382
	Within Groups	5.478	87	.063		
	Total	5.600	89			
4. I am proud of my work.	Between Groups	.283	2	.142	1.217	.301
	Within Groups	10.117	87	.116		
	Total	10.400	89			
5. I am a happy person.	Between Groups	.036	2	.018	.140	.807
	Within Groups	11.087	87	.127		
	Total	11.122	89			
6. Sometimes I feel dumb.	Between Groups	1.090	2	.545	2.220	.115
	Within Groups	21.365	87	.246		
	Total	22.456	89			
7. My classmates make fun of me.	Between Groups	.248	2	.124	.579	.563
	Within Groups	18.652	87	.214		
	Total	18.900	89			
8. I am an important member of my class.	Between Groups	.070	2	.035	.144	.866
	Within Groups	21.319	87	.245		
	Total	21.389	89			
9. I feel left out of class activities sometimes.	Between Groups	.148	2	.074	.318	.728
	Within Groups	20.175	87	.232		
	Total	20.322	89			
10. Sometimes I feel that I am no good at all.	Between Groups	1.075	2	.538	2.568	.082
	Within Groups	18.214	87	.209		
	Total	19.289	89			

**Figure 3**

Percentages of survey responses of each group

Statement	Response	Inclusion	Resource Room	Self-Contained
1. I like myself.	Yes	86%	86%	100%
	No	14%	14%	0%
2. I am fun to be with.	Yes	95%	89%	91%
	No	5%	11%	9%
3. I am a good person.	Yes	95%	89%	97%
	No	5%	11%	3%
4. I am proud of my work.	Yes	81%	83%	94%
	No	19%	17%	6%
5. I am a happy person.	Yes	86%	83%	89%
	No	14%	17%	11%
6. Sometimes I feel dumb.	Yes	57%	56%	67%
	No	43%	44%	33%
7. My classmates make fun of me.	Yes	29%	36%	24%
	No	71%	64%	76%
8. I am an important member of my class.	Yes	62%	64%	58%
	No	38%	36%	42%
9. I feel left out of class activities sometimes.	Yes	29%	39%	33%
	No	71%	61%	77%
10. Sometimes I feel that I am no good.	Yes	24%	47%	21%
	No	76%	53%	79%

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

In this study, the following research questions were examined: “Will inclusive settings affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities? Will resource room affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities? Will self-contained classrooms affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities? Are there any differences in the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities in three different environments: inclusion, resource room, or self-contained setting?” The research was expecting to find significant differences among the groups. However, no significant differences were noted between the groups for any of the statements. Therefore, this study may indicate that a class placement does not affect the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities significantly.

### **Discussion**

Some differences of student responses were noted however, even though they were not significant. The results showed students in the resource room responded “yes” to the statements, “I am an important member of my class,” “I feel left out of class activities sometimes,” and “My classmates make fun of me” more than that of the students in the self-contained environment or inclusive classrooms (% vs. %). The response to these statements by the students in the resource room may lead directly to their response to the last statement on the survey, “Sometimes I feel that I am no good at all.” Students in the resource rooms responded “yes” 23% more than the other groups

These higher percentages from the students in the resource room can somewhat support the study conducted by Morvitz and Motta (1992) that the self-esteem of students in the resource room was significantly lower than that of students in other class placements.

Also, this study can partially support the many criticisms reported by Heinen and Jenkins (1989) about resource rooms:

They have been charged with disrupting classroom instruction (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1987); absolving classroom teachers of responsibility for instructing lower-performing students (Pugach & Lily, 1984); attaching stigmas to children who are pulled out (Will, 1986); failing to coordinate their instruction with that of the classroom (Johnston, Allington, & Afflerbach, 1985); and, most important ineffectiveness (Gallagher, 1984). (p. 516)

The results of this study can also give partial support towards self-contained classrooms. This is similar to the study by Morvitz and Motta (1992). It is found that students in self-contained environments did not differ significantly in terms of self-esteem from their disabled peers served in inclusive or resource room environments. Meanwhile, students in self-contained environments answered more positively to the following statements: "I like myself," "I am proud of my work," and "I am a happy person." These students also responded the least to "My classmates make fun of me" and "Sometimes I feel that I am no good at all." Reviewing the percentages of student responses can find that students in one self-contained environment do not have lower self-esteem compared to students in resource rooms or inclusive environments.

### **Limitations and Implications**

There are some limitations in this study. First of all, only a small population of students with learning disabilities in each placement was surveyed. Only 4 elementary schools were willing to participate in this study. Over twenty elementary schools in the

southern New Jersey area were contacted and only 4 were open to participate. One school willing to participate was not included in the results because their programs for special education students did not relate to the other 3 schools in this research. Also, different schools have different programs for students with learning disabilities therefore; if inclusive, resource room, and students in self-contained classrooms were surveyed at other elementary schools the results may differ drastically.

Another limitation to this study was that the students may have answered inconsistently. Some students answered all “yes” or all “no.” Some answered the first 5 statements “yes” and the second 5 “no” or vice versa. The measurement developed did not have a validity and reliability check, thus, some statements may not be accurate to reflect students’ perspectives. In addition, the survey used in this study is a self-reported measurement, and there is no opportunity to check if the responses are accurate.

Other factors may also influence self-esteem besides class placement. Academic achievement, parental support, and socio-economic status are other variables that could have been used in the study to compare the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities. Future research may be needed in this area to further examine factors that may impact student self-esteem in different educational placements.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to compare the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities placed in different settings, such as inclusive environments, self-contained classrooms, and resource rooms. Results indicated that no significant differences existed among the different placements.

Self-esteem is an important factor that impacts students' motivation, confidence, and performance in school, especially those students with learning disabilities. The options of different educational settings/environments may not be the major factor that impacts those students' self-esteem as this study has found. The research tells us that academic achievement and self-esteem are positively correlated (Morvitz & Motta, 1992; Patten, 1983; Schatz & Wiggins, 1994). To conclude, no matter what setting a student with learning disabilities is placed in, teachers should find ways to help boost student's self-esteem because self-esteem is an important factor for academic success.

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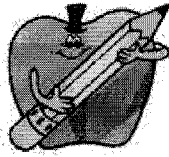
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## APPENDICES



**Read each sentence and circle YES if you feel that way and NO if you do not feel that way.**

1. I like myself.....Yes No
2. I am fun to be with.....Yes No
3. I am a good person.....Yes No
4. I am proud of my work.....Yes No
5. I am a happy person.....Yes No
6. Sometimes I feel dumb.....Yes No
7. My classmates make fun of me.....Yes No
8. I am an important member of my class.....Yes No
9. I feel left out of class activities sometimes.....Yes No
10. Sometimes I feel that I am NO good.....Yes No

Date

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Hello! My name is Kara Cooper and I am currently a graduate student at Rowan University. I am planning to receive my Master's Degree in Special Education in May. I am working on my graduate thesis now and have chosen to conduct research that evaluates the best placement option for students with learning disabilities. I believe this is a very controversial issue and an important component of Special Education. My research will examine placement options such as inclusive environments, resource rooms, and self-contained classrooms in terms of a student's self-esteem.

I am asking permission for your son or daughter to take part in this research study. They will be asked to fill out a survey that will take them approximately five minutes or less to complete. The survey consists of ten statements asking them how they feel about themselves. Your child will circle yes if he/she agrees and no if he/she does not agree. The surveys are CONFIDENTIAL and your child will NOT be asked to write his or her name on the survey. Completed surveys will in no way be able to be traced back to your son or daughter. This is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty if you wish for your child not to participate. The Institutional Review Board at Rowan University has approved this research, in addition to your child's school.

It would be greatly appreciated if you would return the form on the following page whether or not you want your child to participate so that I know this information has reached you. Return the form to your child's teacher.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kara Cooper  
Graduate Student, Rowan University  
Special Education Department

Please check the appropriate box and send this form back to school with your son or daughter.

☐ My child is given permission to participate in the explained research.

☐ My child is not given permission to participate in the explained research.

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Thanks Again!!!**

