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PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL GENERAL
EDUCATION SOCIAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE TEACHERS WITH
RESPECT TO THE INCLUSION OF LOW READING LEVEL
STUDENTS IN THEIR CLASSROOM

By
David Walls

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
Of
The Graduate Division
At
Rowan University
May, 2001

Approved by _____

Professor

Date Approved May 7, 2001

Abstract

David Walls

Perceptions And Experiences of Middle School General Education Social Studies And Science Teachers With Respect To The Inclusion of Low Reading Level Students in Their Classroom

Advisor: Dr. Stanley Urban, 2001
Learning Disabilities

Summary

P.L. 94-142, and subsequent laws, require that all students receive a free and appropriate public education provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE). When a child study team has determined that a child is eligible for special education services they decide which program will most benefit this child's academic progress. Numerous variables determine placement in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment, so that when I child is placed in the general education setting for content area classes it is in the best interest of that child.

This study provided documentation of the attitudes, perceptions, and concerns of general education social studies and science teachers on the inclusion of low reading level students in their classrooms.

Mini Abstract

David Walls

Perceptions And Experiences of Middle School General Education Social Studies And Science Teachers With Respect To The Inclusion of Low Reading Level Students in Their Classroom

Advisor: Dr. Stanley Urban, 2001
Learning Disabilities

This study examines the perceptions of general education middle school social studies and science teachers in relation to the inclusion of low reading level students in their classrooms. Thirty-seven teachers were surveyed. Results of this study indicate that the sample shares a common overall positive attitude toward the inclusion process, however, many teachers feel inadequately trained. Recommendations include the need to provide detailed and intensive training to deal with the variety of students served in the inclusion classroom.

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I would like to thank both of my parents for all their love and support, without which I would have never achieved this goal. I thank my mother for working diligently with me throughout my education in order for me to achieve my potential. I am grateful for your tireless dedication, especially early on, when you acknowledged my difficulties but never gave up on what I was capable of achieving. I thank my father for whom I learned how to work hard and never give up on anything you want bad enough. I am grateful that he worked extra jobs in order that I could focus on my education and reach my goals.

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Chapter One: *Introduction*

Background

In 1986, Madeline Will, a former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, proposed the Regular Education Initiative (REI), which promoted greater collaboration between special and general educators (Bradley, Sears, Switlick, 3). This was the beginning of a new trend in special education. With a firm policy articulated by the U.S. Department of Education to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. Many students were not only participating in their local school districts but also in regular education classrooms with their peers.

Currently 68% of students with a wide range of disabilities are placed in general education settings for at least 40% or more of the day (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Recent trends in special education programming, the influence of litigation and the mandates of legislation, have made the inclusive classroom commonplace in most school districts. In an inclusive placement, children with disabilities face numerous challenges, including academic, social, and emotional. Students with disabilities not only face adjusting to fast-paced lessons, but also must work to gain the acceptance of the general education students. One factor that is critical to the success of inclusive placements is the general education teacher, who will be the primary educator in these classrooms.

It is generally acknowledged that a teacher establishes the climate and atmosphere found in the classroom. If the teacher is accepting and willing to integrate a student with a disability, then the mood of the classroom will be generally accepting and open-minded. However, if the teacher's perception is that of being forced to accept a child

without adequate training and/or knowledge of the child's disability, then chances for a successful experience are much less likely.

It has been this researchers experience that students are usually placed in general social studies and science classrooms as a first step toward their inclusive education. This seems like a logical approach for child study teams, since most students' primary disabilities include both reading and math deficiencies. Thus the student is more likely placed in a resource room for reading and/or language arts, as well as, math. This leaves only the exploratory classes such as home economics, computers, etc. and content area classes as options for inclusive placements. With these restraints in mind, the majority of students tend to be placed into general education social studies or science classrooms.

Subsequent litigation, such as Daniel R.R. V. State Board of Education (Daniel R.R. vs. State Board of Education 874F.2d 1036, 5th Cir. 1989) and Oberti v. Board of Education Clementon District (Oberti vs. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District, 995 F. 2nd, 1204, 3rd Circuit, 1993), expanded the concept of placing mildly handicapped children into the regular education classrooms. It also extended this concept to children with moderate and severe cognitive impairments. Soon a greater number of students with disabilities that had more severe learning problems were now participating along side of their peers in the general education classroom. Many parents were no longer satisfied with the placement decisions of school districts and took a more involved role in determining their child's placement along the education continuum. They no longer wanted their child's eligibility label or available programs to determine placement. Many parents now wanted their child to be placed according to

their own unique special needs. Frequently this included placing the child, wherever possible, in the general education classroom with all the supports necessary.

For many students with educational disabilities the regular classroom may be appropriate; however, for others, inclusion can be a failure-producing situation. Some children need more intensive instruction than can be provided in a general education classroom. With school districts working to comply with new laws, and parents advocating for more inclusive setting, everyone involved was less certain as to what constituted the most appropriate program. Generally students with low reading and math abilities were commonly placed within a resource center or self-contained classroom setting. With the trend to place more students within more academically focused classrooms, middle schools often chose general education science and social studies classrooms as the placement of choice.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of general education social studies and science teachers of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the inclusion of students with reading disabilities and eligible for special education into their general education classrooms. Also, inferences will be drawn regarding training needs of the teachers and possible refinement of the inclusion process.

Research Question

To accomplish the general purposes of this study, the data obtained is used to answer the following research question:

What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school science and social studies teachers with respect to inclusive education programs and practices within their school?

Need For The Study

Many studies related to inclusion have focused on how to have teachers share the classroom and work collaboratively in the same classroom. One area not sufficiently examined is the general education teacher's perception of the student's needs and abilities/disabilities. It seems that the area most neglected is the relationship between the teacher and the student, versus the relationship between the two teachers in the classroom, which has received extensive study. The literature is generally in agreement that a careful plan of inclusion is the formula for a responsible inclusive program. And as part of this process, understanding the perceptions of those teachers involved is essential.

This study will examine the inclusion of middle school special education students who are low level readers and are served in an inclusion model, in the general education science and social studies classrooms. The inclusion plan within one school district will be examined, and the perceptions of the general education teachers who are a part of this process will be obtained. Gaining insight into the perceptions of teachers will clearly indicate to what level they feel capable of incorporating these students into their classrooms.

Value Of The Study

This study's general objective is to understand the point of view of a general education teacher toward the inclusion of special needs students in their classroom. With this knowledge, members of a child study team and administrators can build a communication link in order to educate themselves and hopefully make the inclusion of students more successful. This is an important objective because the enactment of PL94-142, and the amending of this law in 1990 as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the trend toward a more inclusive education has expanded. When inclusion is considered as the placement option, students are often placed with their regular education peers in content area classrooms. They encounter numerous challenges and they must adjust to a setting that may contain hostility from peers as well as a lack of understanding from their teachers.

On the surface, placing students in social studies and science classes would seem to be the most logical choice since many of these students have severe reading or math deficiencies. However, an issue that increases teacher's frustrations is that low level reading students are being placed in a classroom that relies on some degree of independent reading ability at the student's grade level.

One of the survey items asks the specific question of how teachers were trained and educated on the topic of inclusion. Based on the findings, suggestions will be made for dissemination of successful approaches or further training.

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms have specialized meaning within the context of this study:

Learning Disability- generic term referring to a heterogeneous group of disorders that are most evident as problems with the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities; presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction (Haring, McCormick, and Haring, 1994).

Inclusion-the policy of providing special services within the general education classroom. This concept recognizes the general education classroom as the “least restrictive environment” for all learners (Boyles, N. and Contadino, D., 1998).

Full Inclusion- placement option in which students who are disabled or at risk receive all instruction in a regular classroom setting in their home or neighborhood school and in which support services come to the students (Haring, McCormick, and Haring, 1994).

Collaboration- the process of working together to attain a common goal; sometimes referred to as professional partnership (Haring, McCormick, and Haring, 1994).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)-The placement of a child with a disability with other learners who are not disabled, usually the general education classroom (Boyles, N. and Contadino, D., 1998).

Cooperative Learning- instructional approaching which students work together to achieve group goals or rewards (Haring, McCormick, and Haring, 1994).

Public Law (PL) 94-142- Education of All Handicapped Children Act, originally passed in 1975, requiring that all children with disabilities receive “a free, appropriate public

education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs.” Its name was later changed to the Education of the Handicapped Act (Haring, McCormick, and Haring, 1994).

Public Law (PL) 101-476- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a reauthorization in 1990 of the Education of the Handicapped Act. It added new eligibility categories and services to PL 94-142 (Haring, McCormick, and Haring, 1994).

Chapter Two: *Review of the Literature*

Introduction

In the United States the education of students with disabilities has evolved from complete neglect and/or institutionalization, to separate schools and classes, to pull-out classes with mainstreaming as appropriate, and most recently integrated programs that are referred to inclusive placements. Advocates for students with special needs have called upon the field of special education for change. These advocates have sued for certain rights, and have successfully implemented reforms through legislation.

These advocates for special education rights have promoted the integration of special needs students with their general education peers. “The term ‘integration’ refers to the removal of barriers that impose segregation on identified groups of people. In the 1950’s, integration referred to the desegregation of schools that previously had separated a race of students by maintaining separate educational facilities” (Bradley, Sears, Switlick, 1995, p. 8).

Legislation

The 1960’s are seen as the decade of advocacy for students with disabilities. The families of these students worked hard on the local and national level to change the delivery of services for their children. As described earlier, the delivery of services had a long continuous evolution from neglect to inclusion. And as with minority students, the laws were enacted, but the struggle to change perceptions is a long and difficult one that continues today.

Changes in the education of children with disabilities began in the early 1970’s with the implementation of “The Education for All Handicapped Children Act” which became law in 1975 and eventually referred to as PL94-142 revolutionized the way special

education was implemented in our country. Bradley, Sears, and Switlick report that “although prior legislation had occurred, this law carried with it some requirements and guidelines that compelled states to provide education for all students with disabilities” (1997, p. 24).

Studies were conducted to find ways to intervene and have students become as successful as possible. The area of early intervention was the focus of PL 99-457 (Bradley, Sears, Switlick, 1997) which stressed the importance of intervening with at-risk students or those who were already diagnosed with a disability between the ages birth through three. During the following period, best practices in special education emphasized placing the child as close to his/her general education peers as possible. Public Law 101-146, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was the reauthorization of PL94-142. It added two disability areas and reemphasized the least restrictive environment concept of PL94-142.

Although laws have been written and regulations enacted, full implementation of the “least restrictive environment” principle has not been achieved. The inclusion process has not gained the full recognition it deserves, due in part that the program has yet to educate those who will implement the services, namely the general education teacher. As Meyen and Skrtic point out, “these new public policies are intended to assure equal rights for persons with disabilities. The true meaning of equal rights, however, is still evolving, as courts try cases and agencies put into practice their interpretation of what they perceive those rights to be” (1995, p. 39).

Litigation

Before legislation occurs, some type of call occurs for this change. Some advocate by promoting programs and theories. Others people advocate and challenge the current system through litigation. Recent landmark cases have made inclusion more accessible to students with more severe disabilities. Cases such as Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education (1989), Greer v. Rome City School District (1991), and Oberti v. Board of Education of Clementon School District (1993) have challenged current special education practices. In each case, and many others, families have relied on the lack of consistency in programming from district to district, as a means to obtain more inclusive services for their child. Each case has met with resistance, but as more cases are tried and won by advocates, the more school districts work to comply with the law. “The classification of handicapped children for educational purposes has always been a controversial matter among educators. Recently, however, the parents of handicapped children, national and state associations of parents, and social scientists have extended the controversy—even to the point of involving the courts in efforts to arrive at actions that will be most equitable for handicapped children in public education” (Meyen and Skrtic, 1995, p. 50). These decisions present both positive and negative outcomes. Litigation and legislation alone can not be relied upon to change the general populations’ perceptions of disabled children.

Current Issues

Regular Education Initiative (REI)

“In 1986, Madeline Will, then assistant secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, called for a partnership between special and general

educators.” (Bradley, Sears, Switlick, 1997). The proposed new partnership was calling for students with mild disabilities to become the shared responsibility of all educators, rather than the responsibility of the special educator. This action was termed the Regular Education Initiative (REI). Bradley, Sears, and Switlick (1997) define the Regular Education Initiative as “a shared responsibility and joint ownership between special educators for the education of students with mild disabilities within general education classrooms in which instruction is differentiated” (1997, p.5). This new concept of “shared responsibility and joint ownership” led to many changes in the general education classroom. However, almost 15 years later, these changes are not fully understood by many educators, administrators, school boards, or families. Thus the interpretation and implementation of services are not consistent state to state, county to county, district to district. As Sailor (1991) describes it:

In one sense, REI is to children with moderate and mild disabilities as the integration imperative is to children with low-incidence and severe disabilities. The common denominator is the principle of the least restrictive educational environment which, in turn, is born of the recognition that social and communicative development in children with disabilities is predicated upon opportunities for mainstream socialization as well as academic experiences, and constitutional guarantee of freedom of association. (p. 11)

Inclusion

Bradley, Sears, Switlick(1997)report that, “the philosophy that embraces the inclusion of students into the general education setting is one that is based on welcoming all

neighborhood students into the community school and meeting their needs in that educational setting” (1995, p. 10).

In the ideal inclusive posited that both general and special education students would work side by side on the same curriculum, and mostly at the same pacing. In order for the special education student to transition into, and remain in, the general education setting, they would need special modifications to the class work. The special educator’s expertise in this area was needed in order for the general education teacher to focus on their area of expertise. This would involve the general and special education teacher working collaboratively on the classroom content. The general education teacher would control the focus of the content, while the special education teacher would analyze the material and make necessary adaptations based on the student’s needs.

There are many models of collaborative teaching, and the one that is used is also determined on an individual basis. Many factors influence the decision to use one model over another; however, the most important factor to consider is which will be most advantageous to optimal learning for all students.

Responsible Inclusion

The following is a list of “best practices for inclusion” according to Bradley, Sears, and Switlick(1995, p. 10):

- The inclusion of each child in the regular program with peers who do not have disabilities for at least part of the day
- Heterogeneous groupings whenever possible
- Technical expertise and equipment
- Curriculum adaptations when necessary

- Assessments that are curriculum-based and give information about how students learn instead of what is wrong with them
- Behavior management techniques
- Social skills curriculum
- Data-based instructional practices
- Empowerment of students through the use of such techniques as peer teaching, cooperative learning, and self-developed rules
- Ongoing staff development

Inclusive Practices

Harmon, Katimas, and Whittington report that “although content classrooms are described as logical and optimal contexts for helping low-achieving students become more proficient in learning with texts, this task frequently becomes the responsibility of the reading improvement teacher and other support teachers, such as learning disabilities specialists” (1999, p. 70). Although students are increasingly being placed in inclusive science and social studies classrooms (content area) the teachers are not addressing the reading skills needed for the material. This trend has become most apparent at the middle school level.

When a child with a low reading level is placed in a general education science and social studies classroom, there are many difficulties to overcome. The program adaptations must meet the student’s needs without making the child dependent. The general education teacher may feel some confusion regarding the basis for placement in their classroom when it seems apparent that they do not possess the reading ability to be successful.

One example of a student in an inclusive middle school science program includes a report on Ben by Bradley, Sears, and Switlick(1997). They report on a student named Ben, “who participates actively in the classroom with the students studying biology, but

focuses on very different learning objectives” (1997, p. 7). They report that the school system that Ben attends has worked vigorously to make his inclusion into the general population successful, including all the support to the staff that is necessary in making the appropriate accommodations in the classroom.

One factor that influences teachers’ perceptions on inclusion is the “fairness” in the adaptations. Mary Milleret Ring and Linda Reetz report that teachers feel that when inclusion occurs, students should work at the same level as their peers, with little modifications and adaptations to the curriculum, approach, and grading. “Because, by definition (U.S. Office of Education, 1977), students identified as learning disabled are performing significantly below their average grade level, the disability often affects their ability to meet the general course requirements in the content areas (science, social studies, language arts, etc). Due to their low achievement, teachers adapt materials and implement alternative classroom teaching techniques. To adequately report the students’ progress, teachers often need to modify grading scales and formats, but they may be reluctant to use adapted grades on report cards” (Ring and Reetz, 2000, p. 35). The willingness of teachers to accommodate students in the classroom presents challenges in many aspects of the program.

Teacher Perspectives/Perceptions

“General educators cannot educate students with disabilities alone, but research has shown that special educators cannot do it alone either” (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

The perception of the general educator regarding the inclusion of a special education student in their classroom will influence whether the program is a positive and successful

one for *all* students in the classroom. Use of the term all is intentional since each child is affected in some way by the inclusion process. If implemented correctly, the program will produce more students without prejudices towards disabled students.

One general education teacher, Michael A. Federico, on his experiences in an inclusive classroom reports, “A successful inclusion program requires a total commitment from the principal down to the school custodian. In other words, the general and special education teachers cannot bear the responsibilities of an inclusion class by themselves” (Federico, Herrold, Venn, 1999, p. 79). Federico also reports that, “students feelings of belonging grew as they shared feelings of joy, pride, mutual respect, and comradery. Throughout the year, children in this class were helped to express feelings of sympathy, appreciation, pride, and good wishes in concrete ways as a group.” (1999, p. 79). In reviewing most articles that include teacher’s perceptions, it seems apparent that the majority of teachers are willing to work in an inclusion classroom, with the appropriate support and training.

In her article, Measuring Perceptions About Inclusion, Marikay Prom notes one general education teacher’s perceptions, “I’m also concerned about the fact that (the students) really could not function in my classroom without (the special educator’s) constant attention to them. They are very dependent on her. I’m afraid they will not be able to function adequately when she will no longer be at their sides” (1999, p. 40-41). In her study, Marikay Prom found that some perceptions of teachers had changed after inclusion had been implemented in their classroom. She did find that some teachers’ perceptions actually became more negative, while others became somewhat more positive. She attributed this to the training, background, and resources available to the

teachers involved in this study. “Despite limitations in the study, the results of this pilot study have implications for further research and practice. Although the perceptions of general educators regarding the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities were revealed in this pilot study, additional research is necessary to determine the impact their perceptions have on the success of an inclusion class” (1999, p. 42).

In another study on the perceptions of inclusion of students at the middle school level, Paula J. Stanovich reported that “according to teachers in a focus-group discussion, the chief benefit of inclusion was the opportunity for students with disabilities to model appropriate kinds of social behavior when they were taught with their general education peers”(1999, p. 54). Ms Stanovich reported that there were two resources that teachers most often mentioned as essential to a successful inclusive classroom. “One of the most important resources they requested more of was time” and “other resources the teachers mentioned were the need for more materials that were written at varying levels of reading ability and the need for more space”(1999, p. 55).

Summary

The re-education of our country has been a slow and laborious journey; however, many students reaped the benefits of these changes. Students with disabilities are now successfully completing school and moving onto colleges and universities. They are self-advocating for equal rights/protection under the law. Their own examples have broken down barriers and set new standards for education. A new generation is growing up to see students with disabilities in a new light. Change was inevitable, however the attitudes and prejudices still remain. Some students are being placed in programs that do not meet

their needs, when this happens, negative attitudes and perceptions are reinforced. A balance is needed in order to keep making progress in this area, a retreat from the principles of inclusion.

“When students enter middle school, many are soon overwhelmed by new school environments and increasingly more complex learning demands. For example, they are expected to read more sophisticated informational texts across a number of content areas” (Harmon, Katims, Whittingham, 1999, p. 70). This statement provides the impetus for the present study.

Chapter Three: *Design of the Study*

Population and Sample Selection

This study is designed to survey a sample of general education middle school science and social studies teachers who are currently, or have been, a part of an inclusion program within their school district. Three middle schools within the Washington Township School System were contacted and agreed to participate. A general introduction of the survey and my research question were sent to the Superintendent for his review and approval (Appendix A). Approval from the school district's Superintendent was obtained before the survey was conducted. A brief letter of introduction and explanation of the survey as well as the instrument itself (Appendix B) was distributed to all general education science and social studies teachers within the three middle schools.

There are fifty-seven general education middle school social studies and science teachers within the Washington Township School District. The entire group of fifty-seven teachers were surveyed for this study. Selection of the population of teachers was based on the accessibility of the participants to this researcher. It is felt that these teachers are representative of the broad population that teaches in suburban middle class school districts.

Instrumentation

A survey instrument was constructed that would obtain the opinions of teachers related to the inclusion of low-level reading students in their general education science and social

studies classrooms. The construction of the survey instrument was modeled on instruments developed by Daniels & Vaughn(1999), and Salend(1999).

The first instrument was reported in, “A Tool to Encourage *Best Practices* in Full Inclusion”(Daniels and Vaughn, 1999). As part of their research they developed an instrument that would survey teachers’ training and background to determine the relationship between a teacher’s training and background to the degree of successful inclusion achieved within that teacher’s classroom.

The second instrument was reported in an article entitled, “So What’s with Our Inclusion Program?” (Salend, 1999). He researched how to evaluate educators’ experiences and perceptions on the inclusion of special education students within their classroom. Specific parameters were developed gaining useful information from this questionnaire.

In addition eight demographic questions were placed on the survey to gather background information about each participant. The survey gathered data about each teacher’s training, degree, years of teaching, current teaching situation and relevant class size. These questions are to be taken into account when interpreting the data. Years of experience and amount of training will be specific variables that will be examined to determine if there are consistent perceptions among certain groups of teachers (e.g. does the number of years of teaching influence how a teacher feels about the inclusion of students into their classrooms).

Fifteen personal opinion and philosophy items related to participants perception of inclusion were included in the survey. The following 5-point Likert scale was used to score each item; one = strongly disagree, two = disagree, three = neutral, four = agree,

and five = strongly agree. Statements began with the phrase, “I feel that...”, thus making the survey their personal perception.

A brief pilot study was completed by having several colleagues review the instrument and respond to the items. Feedback from the pilot study was reviewed and the survey revised and refined in order to make the survey as “user-friendly” as possible. Also the range of statements was narrowed down to make the survey as clear and precise as possible. Taken into account was the fact that if the survey were too long fewer responses would have been returned.

Collection of Data

Fifty-seven surveys were distributed to each teacher through inter-office mail on October 20, 2000 to the three middle schools with the district. Teachers were instructed to return their completed surveys through inner-office mail by November 21st. A reminder to return the questionnaire was sent to all teachers, through our school systems’ inter-office e-mail.

Analysis of Data

The instrument was designed to survey a specific sample of teacher’s perceptions on various components of inclusion. Frequency of responses to each statement will be tallied and survey items will be categorized according to positive verses negative responses.

Chapter Four: *Analysis and Interpretation of the Data*

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

The results of the study are presented in a format which attempts to answer the research question listed in Chapter 1. An informal questionnaire was given and results were tabulated and analyzed.

Results

Background Information of Respondents is contained in Table 1.

The majority of teachers have a bachelor's degree, where about a third of the teacher's have post bachelor's degrees. Most teachers have elementary degrees, where some have secondary education degrees, and two had special education degrees. Most teachers have between 11 and 30 years experiences, in comparison the majority of teachers have only been working in the inclusive setting less than ten years.

Table 1

*Frequency Distribution of Biographical Data
For Subjects Included in the Study*

	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
<i>Professional Training</i>		
Bachelor's Degree	26	26
Master's Degree	11	37
<i>Area of Certification</i>		
Elementary Education	31	31
Secondary Education	16	47
Special Education	2	49
Other	4	53

Table 1 (con't)

	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
<i>Total Years of Experience</i>		
1 – 10 years	21	21
11 – 20 years	12	33
21 – 30 years	1	34
31 – 40 years	3	37
<i>Years of Experience In Inclusion</i>		
1 – 10 years	36	36
11 – 20 years	0	0
<i>Currently Working In Inclusive Setting</i>		
Yes	29	29
No	8	37
<i>If Response is 'No' to Last Question, Do You Have Experience In An Inclusive Setting</i>		
Yes	7	7
No	1	8
<i>Number of Students Taught, Who Are Classified</i>		
1-2	1	1
3-5	6	7
6-8	18	26
9-12	6	32
13 +	5	37
<i>Average Class Size</i>		
16 – 20	1	1
21 – 25	12	13
26 – 30	24	37
<i>Type of Training for the Inclusion Class</i>		
College	3	3
Professional Workshop	9	12
Inservice Workshop	31	45
Other	8	48
<i>Were You Adequately Prepared/Trained</i>		
Yes	10	10
No	27	37

Research Question:

What are the perceptions and experiences of middle school science and social studies teachers with respect to inclusion education and programs and practices within their school?

The findings relating to each item contained in the questionnaire is presented on the next page.

Table 2

Personal Opinion/Philosophy of Education

Strongly Disagree (SD) Disagree (D) Neutral (N)
Agree (A) Strongly Agree (SA)

This first chart shows a positive agreement to a positive situation for inclusion.

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
I feel that inclusion is a good idea.	--	2	9	23	3
I feel that students with disabilities would receive a better education in a special education classroom.	1	12	9	11	4
I feel that inclusion helps students with disabilities improve academically.	--	9	5	15	8
I feel that inclusion is working well in my classroom.	2	1	8	21	5
I feel that having other adults in the classroom is an asset.	--	2	4	13	18
I feel that it is easy to communicate effectively with my inclusion students.	--	4	7	20	6

This second chart shows a somewhat ambivalent responses to a positive point of view on important variables.

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
I feel that students with disabilities who are in inclusion classrooms will be ridiculed by their classmates.	9	21	5	2	--
I feel that students with disabilities who are in inclusion classrooms will experience failure and frustration.	2	18	10	5	2

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
I feel that it is difficult to modify instruction and my teaching style to meet the needs of students with disabilities.	5	15	6	11	--
I feel that I can make the necessary adaptations to the text in order for my low level reading students to comprehend the material.	3	10	9	13	2

This third chart shows a negative response to a positive statement, or a positive response to a negative statement.

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
I feel that I have the time to implement inclusion effectively.	10	11	2	10	4
I feel that I have the training to implement inclusion successfully.	9	13	6	6	3
I feel that I receive the necessary support and resources to implement inclusion successfully.	5	13	6	10	3
I feel that the demands of the curriculum make it difficult to implement inclusion.	4	11	5	12	5
I feel that students with low level reading skills are not appropriately placed in my content area class.	--	6	7	14	10

Teacher's Comments

The following comments were included on some of the teacher's surveys. While there I did not ask for feedback, and did not leave a space for this purpose, some teachers provided insight into their responses. The quotes below are from those teachers.

"Basic Skills Instruction Students need Special Education teachers, too."

"5 in-class support students + 24 regular education students = too many kids in a class."

"My ICS person doesn't do much!"

"I think we could all use some more training."

“I feel that the in-class support teacher does not do his/her job effectively.”

“Some students do well in ICS because they are motivated and can cope and compensate for their disability. Students who read below level, regular or special education, struggle with science.”

“Most inclusions have been fine-it’s the more severe cases I’m concerned about.”

“I agree with this when it is only one extra adult in the class, but more than one is a detriment.”

Summary

These results suggest extremely ambivalent and contradictory values, attitudes, and perceptions related to inclusion. On the one hand the majority of teachers feel that inclusion is a “good idea.” On the other hand a significant proportion feel that “students with low level reading skills are not appropriately placed into content area classes.” Teacher’s apparently see the benefits of inclusion, however, they do not feel they have adequate training or support to effectively implement inclusion.

Chapter Five: *Summary and Conclusions*

Summary

P.L. 94-142, and subsequent laws, require that all students receive a free and appropriate public education provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE). When a child study team has determined that a child is eligible for special education services they decide which program will most benefit this child's academic progress. Numerous variables determine placement in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment, so that when a child is placed in the general education setting for content area classes it is in the best interest of that child.

This study provided documentation of the attitudes, perceptions, and concerns of general education social studies and science teachers on the inclusion of low reading level students in their classrooms. Several recommendations are considered according to where the most concerns lie.

Findings

I found that 70 % of teachers felt that inclusion was a good idea, and 62% felt that it was in some ways beneficial to the students. Thirty-five percent of teachers surveyed disagreed that the special education classroom was the best setting for low reading level students and 40% of teachers felt that the special education setting was the best placement of these students. Also, of greatest interest to this study was the reaction to the statement, "I feel that students with low level reading skills are not appropriately placed in my content area class". 65% of the teachers responded that they agreed that these students are *not* appropriately placed in their content area classroom. So although they most teacher feel that inclusion is a good idea, they do not feel that low reading level students are appropriately placed in their classroom. And since the majority of students

who are eligible for special education fall into this category, the teachers express contradictory their attitudes. What factors account for this contradiction? Many possible variables could be present; for example, most teachers do not want to admit that they disagree with having disabled children in their classroom, or they do not feel they are adequately prepared to meet the needs of these students.

These findings are somewhat inconsistent, most of the teachers surveyed expressed a positive attitude toward inclusion, and also feel that the students will benefit, but when it comes to implementing these services they are not so confident in their abilities or the students ability to effectively master the skills. Only 54% of the teachers felt that students would not fail in the general education setting for content area classes. Obviously, complex interactions of knowledge, values and attitudes interact when teachers implement the inclusion of students in their classrooms.

The following chart summarizes just a few possible concerns, or variables, that affect the success of the inclusion program in content area classrooms, as addressed in my survey.

Possible Concern	Potential Solutions
Educators express concerns about educating students with low reading levels in their content area classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify specific concerns, such as, comfort level with adapting tests, notes, reading assignments. • Provide educators with training and information to understand the specific needs of these students. • Make sure those teachers and students are receiving the necessary assistance they require to adapt to the material.
General educators report that they are not receiving enough support from others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine existing arrangements for providing instructional support. • Provide educators with greater support form special educators, paraeducators, and ancillary support personnel.

<p>Educators report that they do not have the expertise and training to implement inclusion effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a needs assessment to identify educators' needs for training (such as specific areas of concern) • Offer systematic, ongoing, coordinated and well-planned staff development activities. • Encourage educators to visit model programs and attend professional conferences. • Provide educators with access to professional journals and other resources addressing current trends, models, research, and strategies.
<p>Educators indicate class size detracts from the success of the program and their ability to meet the needs of students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that inclusion class size is appropriate. • Encourage educators to use cooperative learning arrangements and behavior management techniques.
<p>Educator's report that they feel they cannot make the necessary adaptations required for low reading level students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide educators with appropriate curriculum materials, technology, and equipment. • Offer educators greater access to curriculum consultants. • Explore ways to diversify and modify curriculum.

Conclusion

While I find that many general educators have a positive perception of the inclusion process, there seems to be some discrepancy in their belief to effectively implement a program for low reading level students. Determining which variables, such as training, supplementary resources, and time, are most effective can only happen with considerable effort on the part of all those involved in the process of educating a child. Parents, teachers, administrators, and the community must be willing to explore ideas that will provide the resources necessary to implement effective inclusion.

Appendix A

David Walls

Orchard Valley Middle School
Special Education Department
Ext. 5816

Dear Mr. Flemming,

I am currently a special education teacher at Orchard Valley Middle School. This fall and spring semester I will be working on my thesis for my masters degree at Rowan University. As part of the Learning Disabilities/Teacher Consultant program, I will be working on a thesis that closely relates to the work that I do at Orchard Valley. Namely, I will be looking at what the regular education teachers' perceptions are of the inclusion of special education students in the regular education class. My thesis title will give you a clearer picture of what I will be studying, and it is; *The Perceptions of Middle School Science and Social Studies Teachers on the Inclusion of Low Level Readers in their Classrooms.*

My purpose is two-fold. I want to bridge the communication gap between the regular education teachers and their special education counterparts. It has been my experience that many teachers are willing to work with students on the inclusion process, however, they do not have a clear picture of the vision of the program's outcomes. By building a solid foundation, by educating all teachers on the process and purpose of inclusion, I feel that many frustrations can be alleviated. Thus, a more productive educational experience for all students.

The second purpose I had in mind was to help all persons involved in the evaluation process become more knowledgeable so that placement of students is more accurate, reflecting the best interest of the individual student. This includes, possibly, interviewing and/or surveying the parents of students already involved in the inclusion process. This would give me a more complete picture of how the services are perceived by the families of these students.

The reason I am writing to you is to ask for your permission to survey each of the middle school science and social studies teachers. I will be asking each of the middle school science and social studies teachers in our district to participate in this survey. I am attaching a copy of the survey that I will be sending to these teachers.

All information in this survey is for my research, and I will be the only person reviewing your responses. Results will help me write my paper. However, no names will be used in association with their surveys. The results are for my research only, and will help further my ability as a potential Learning Disabilities/Teacher Consultant.

I am very grateful for your time with this matter. If you have any further questions or if you have any advice or information to add, I would welcome your input. I am sending a copy of this letter and survey to Mr. Buono for his input and advice. You may contact me at extension 5816 and dwalls@wtps.org. Thank you again for your help.

Sincerely,

David Walls

Appendix B

David Walls

Orchard Valley Middle School
Special Education Department
Ext. 5816

Dear Teachers,

I am currently a special education teacher at Orchard Valley Middle School. This fall and spring semester I will be working on my thesis for my masters degree at Rowan University. As part of the Learning Disabilities/Teacher Consultant program, I will be working on a thesis that closely relates to the work that I do at Orchard Valley. Namely, I will be looking at what the regular education teachers' perceptions are of the inclusion of special education students in the regular education class. My thesis title will give you a clearer picture of what I will be studying, and it is; *The Perceptions of Middle School Science and Social Studies Teachers on the Inclusion of Low Level Readers in their Classrooms.*

My purpose is two-fold. I want to bridge the communication gap between the regular education teachers and their special education counterparts. It has been my experience that many teachers are willing to work with students on the inclusion process, however, they do not have a clear picture of the vision of the program's outcomes. By building a solid foundation, by educating all teachers on the process and purpose of inclusion, I feel that many frustrations can be alleviated. Thus, creating a more productive educational experience for all students.

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The reason I am writing to you is to ask for your participation in this survey. I will be asking each of the middle school science and social studies teachers in our district to participate in this survey. I am attaching a copy of the survey that I am asking for you to fill out. ***Bob, you can give this to me whenever, Thanks.***

All information in this survey is for my research , and I will be the only person reviewing your responses. Results will help me write my paper. However, no names will be used in association with their surveys. The results are for my research only, and will help further my ability as a potential Learning Disabilities/Teacher Consultant.

I am very grateful for your time with this matter. Your participation in this survey is invaluable to my research. Please send all completed surveys through inner-office mail, ATTN. Dave Walls. If you have any further questions or if you have any advice or information to add, I would welcome your input. You may contact me at extension 5816 and dwalls@wtps.org. Thank you again for your help.

Sincerely,

David Walls

Appendix B

Part I: Demographic Information

Directions: Please answer the following questions about yourself and your school by placing a check() in the appropriate blank, or by providing appropriate information in the blank.

1. Professional Training (Highest Degree)

- Bachelor's Degree
 Master's Degree
 Specialist Degree
 Doctorate

2. Area(s) of Certification

- Elementary Education
 Secondary Education
Subject: _____
 Special Education
 Other(specify) _____

3. Total Years of Teaching Experience (for each setting place the number of years on the line provided)

- General Education
 Special Education
 Inclusion

4. a. Are you currently working in an inclusion setting? (do you have a special education teacher in your class, that you are working with collaboratively with the special education students)

- yes
 no

b. If you are not currently working in an inclusion setting, have you ever worked in an inclusion setting?

- yes
 no

5. Approximately how many students do you teach, in your class who are identified as having disabilities?

- 1-2
 3-5
 6-8
 9-12
 more than 12

6. What is the average class size of the classes you teach that include students with disabilities?

- 16-20
 21-25
 26-30
 more than 30

7. Indicate the source(s) from which you have received training on inclusion.

- college course work
 professional conference/meetings
 inservice workshop(s) at local school
 other (specify) _____

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