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Attitudes toward inclusion: a survey of general and special educators

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ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION:
A SURVEY OF GENERAL AND
SPECIAL EDUCATORS

by
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ABSTRACT

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A Survey of Regular and Special Educators
1998
Advisor: Dr. Dihoff
School Psychology

Whether or not the attitudes toward inclusion differ between regular educators and special educators was investigated. From the current literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that special educators would have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators. Forty-nine regular educators and 63 special educators responded to a questionnaire. The results of an independent groups *t* test did confirm a statistically significant difference between the two groups. However, the significant difference revealed that, overall, *regular educators* had a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than special educators.

Over half of the regular educators believed that the challenge of a regular class promotes the academic growth of a handicapped student, while over half of the special educators disagreed. In addition, over half of the special educators believed that: the extra attention handicapped students require is detrimental to other students, the behavior of special-needs students will set a bad example for others, handicapped children will exhibit behavior problems in the regular classroom, and special-needs students are socially isolated by regular-classroom students. Over half of the regular educators disagreed with these same statements.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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Whether or not the attitudes toward inclusion differ between regular educators and special educators was investigated. It was hypothesized that special educators would have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators. The results of an independent groups *t* test confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. *Regular educators* had a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than special educators.

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Chapter One

The Problem

Introduction

Ready or not, here they come! There is a strong national movement to include *all* students in the regular neighborhood schools and classrooms. Some groups such as the Association for Retarded Citizens, United Cerebral Palsy, and the Association for Persons With Severe Handicaps have been strong advocates for this inclusion movement (Gorman & Rose, 1994). These groups want to eliminate segregated classrooms. They hope to create a better social environment at school, by producing innovative programs that allow children with handicaps to function in the regular classroom. People in support of this trend believe that inclusion provides more effective education for all students, not only those with handicapping conditions.

As with any significant change there are also those who hold strongly differing opinions. The two most prominent opponents of inclusion are The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA). These groups have urged schools to keep the available service options open to students (Gorman & Rose, 1994). They argue that inclusion may not be appropriate for all handicapped students. One other group that has resisted the movement toward including all students in regular classrooms is the American Federation of Teachers. Many teachers are strongly concerned with the movement toward inclusion (Sklaroff, 1994).

Teacher attitude is one of the most important variables in determining the success of innovative programs in special education (Stoler, 1992). Although inclusion is recognized as an important recent innovation, few studies have been done to judge how teachers feel about it. Research on special education has been dominated by a focus on the individuals who face learning challenges, rather than the people who respond to those individuals.

While inclusion may be imposed by law, the way the regular classroom teacher responds to the needs of the special child may be the most potent variable in determining the success of inclusion. As more and more handicapped students are placed into regular education classrooms in public schools, it becomes necessary to find out the attitudes and perceptions that regular education teachers have toward this concept.

Purpose

The present project was undertaken to ask regular education teachers and special education teachers what they thought about inclusion. The intent was also to investigate whether there are differences in attitudes and beliefs between regular education teachers in local school districts, and special education teachers in a school specifically for handicapped students.

Although changes in educational environments are significant for handicapped students, the concept of inclusion also brings up new issues for the regular education classroom teacher. Including students with moderate to severe disabilities can constitute an additional and unpleasant commitment for regular education teachers. Until recently, the responsibility for educating students with disabilities has been with the special educator, not a regular education teacher.

Hypothesis

As a group, regular educators are more reluctant to deal with the range and intensity of maladaptive behaviors exhibited by handicapped students than special educators. Thus, the hypothesis of this project is that the movement toward inclusion will be viewed more favorable by special educators than by regular educators.

History

This current trend, often referred to as full inclusion, is one of the most widely and hotly discussed topics in education today. Regardless of the academic debates surrounding inclusion, it is an undeniable fact that schools are educating more students with disabilities in regular classrooms now, than in the past (Yell & Shriner, 1996). To examine this movement, it is important to have an understanding of the legal basis surrounding it.

In 1975, the United States Congress passed Public Law 94-142, which has become commonly known as the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA). Mandated to be in effect by 1978, this law ensures a free and appropriate public education for all children. It emphasized having children with disabilities receive education in the "least restrictive environment." These students must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are not disabled.

Consequently, schools had to have an entire range of placements that varied in restrictiveness. This would ensure that students with disabilities would not be educated in settings more restrictive than necessary because an appropriate, less-restrictive setting was not available. In 1975, this was a landmark decision; previously, disabled children were offered only a limited number of services and/or placements.

Most school districts relied on two models to conform to this legislation. One model provided a "resource room" where children with moderate disabilities could be taken out of regular classrooms to work with specially trained teachers for several hours a

week to help overcome their academic deficiencies. Except for those few hours of extra help, these children spent the rest of the week fully "mainstreamed" in their regular classrooms.

The second model, for children with more severe disabilities, was the self-contained "special education classroom." This included legislated mandates on class size (generally 12) and personnel (a teacher and assistant are frequently required). Children whose disabilities required even greater supervision and attention, continued to be placed in alternative public or private schools, with reimbursement provided by the state and/or local school board.

Currently, a new effort is underway that seeks to include *all* children in the regular education environment. Two major reforms in education are providing a push toward this new movement. One is the Regular Education Initiative (REI), which encourages practices that allow students with mild disabilities to remain in general education settings (Bradley & West, 1994). The other is the development of programs to include students who have moderate and severe disabilities, in regular education classes. This is commonly referred to as "inclusion;" changing existing classrooms and structures so that all students can be served within a unified system. Rather than merging regular education and special education, inclusion tries to create a new, improved, more comprehensive system for all students (Sapon-Shevin, 1996).

Both of these initiatives are causing a movement away from resource rooms, self-contained classrooms, and segregated schools, and toward the inclusion of all students with disabilities in general education programs. There is no question that this trend will greatly impact the regular education classroom teacher.

Assumptions and Limitations

Important questions must be asked before judging the achievements or inadequacies of inclusion. How much impact does a teacher's attitude have on the success

or failure of his or her students? What *are* the current attitudes that teachers have about integrating *all* students into a regular classroom?

From the body of evidence available, it is accepted that a teacher's attitude is perhaps the foremost predictor of student success. To answer the second question, regular and special educators have been surveyed, and information was gathered regarding their attitudes and beliefs about inclusion.

Special educators were polled from one, local, special services school. The special education teachers were in contact with only classified students. All classrooms at the special services school contained handicapped students. Regular educators were surveyed from suburban school districts. The regular educators teach in traditional classroom settings. There is one teacher, and classified students have minimal handicaps.

It is assumed that the participants in the survey were a random selection of teachers that varied in gender, age, and experience, as did the distribution in the population. It is further assumed that each participant put in an equal amount of attention, thought, and honesty when surveyed.

Given the assumptions in the undertaking of this project, there are still limiting factors that must be taken into consideration. First, all teachers surveyed were from Central New Jersey. The results from this study may not generalize to urban areas, or areas of the country that have a large difference in the percentage of students that are classified. In addition, all of the special educators were surveyed from one special services school district. These results may very well be indicative of special educators attitudes in general. However, the possibility exists that other factors, specifically related to the particular school, may be in effect.

If regular educators from neighborhood school districts are hesitant to embrace inclusion, it may limit the potential accomplishments of their students with disabilities. If inclusion fails in some areas, a critical question arises: How much of that failure can be attributed to teachers' attitudes? Clearly, it is important to know how teachers feel about

inclusion. Obtaining this information from teachers, wherever inclusion is to be implemented, may prove to be the most important factor in predicting its success.

Overview

In the chapter that follows, current empirical support for the rationale and undertaking of this project will be discussed. The importance of a teacher's attitude as it relates to a student's success in the classroom will be established. Positive and negative factors that influence inclusion will also be discussed in the literature review. The project design will be outlined in Chapter 3, as well as information about the selected rating scale. An analysis of the results will appear in Chapter 4, along with several tables summarizing the data that was gathered.

Chapter Two

The Literature Review

Introduction

These are the best of times and the worst of times for proponents of education who seek to improve the life prospects of all children, including children with disabilities. They are the best of times because establishing an inclusive system of educating students has the potential to provide a more effective education for *all* students. The integration of all students could provide better coordination of programs and lead to a more powerful general education system.

They are the worst of times because educators are not ready or prepared to establish cooperative inclusive programs containing handicapped students. There is a strong case for intensive settings, and also the issue of whether regular educators are willing to accept handicapped students into their classrooms.

For the most part, however, educators must be willing to communicate and collaborate for the best system possible for all students. How our current system will transform, and what the future of our educational system might be, is still being passionately discussed. Change, especially in education, is inevitable, but with these changes come numerous implications.

These transformations are a mixed blessing for children with disabilities. Whether or not the philosophy of inclusion is embraced, the struggle over its successful implementation is perhaps the greatest challenge that our educational system faces today.

The Triumphs of Inclusion

Many educators are in favor of integrating students with severe handicaps into regular classrooms. They believe that by placing severely handicapped students in regular education classes, all individuals will benefit (Lapp & Flood, 1996). Some experts in the field believe that students can assist one another based on their individual strengths and needs, as well as develop friendships and interact with nonhandicapped peers (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). It is believed that handicapped students, regardless of their handicapping conditions, will be able to achieve their optimum potential in this type of integrated setting.

Several researchers have shown that there are various benefits for those involved in the full inclusion movement. For instance, Boyd (1996) has noted that full inclusion provides disabled children with increased interactive behaviors, better social development, and higher academic achievement. Beckers and Carnes (1995) reported on information gathered during the first three years of an inclusion program in Los Angeles. Standardized test scores increased by approximately ten percent, and the number of elementary students sent to the office for disciplinary problems decreased by twenty-three percent.

Beneficial effects of inclusive education on the academic and social outcomes of special-needs children have also been demonstrated by Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1995). They have shown that inclusive education has a positive effect on the achievement of educational objectives, social skills, communication skills, and postschool community involvement. In addition, they state that segregated education has had a deleterious effect on academic performance and social adjustment of handicapped students.

Proponents of full inclusion encourage everyone to consider the rationale for inclusive education and recognize the benefits of including students who present diverse and unique differences. When inclusive schools maximize everyone's resources, positive learning outcomes can become a reality for *all* students.

The Inadequacies of Inclusion

Though it might seem that being against the full inclusion movement is like being against baseball, apple pie, and the American flag, there really are some problems associated with such inclusion, at least in certain situations. For example, in an article by Huestis (1994), he warns that little good is done by including children who are very emotionally disturbed, or medically fragile and in need of medical attention throughout the day. Of course, no sane person wants to see innocent children hurt or denied an education by individuals who are unduly disruptive, and the courts have generally supported this position (Boyd, 1996).

Hallenbeck and Kauffman (1995) refuted the notion that placement of handicapped students in regular classes facilitates the modeling of appropriate behaviors by nondisabled children. Kauffman, Baker, & Riedel (1995) demonstrated that the more nonhandicapped students came to know the student with disabilities, the less they liked them. When children exhibit behaviors that are objectionable, contact is likely to promote less favorable attitudes. Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee (1993) also found that children with behavior disorders are much more likely to be rejected by their nondisabled peers.

In a study by Phelps (1993), staff previously working in a special school were surveyed about a new inclusion program. Results indicated that most of the faculty and staff had a negative opinion of the school climate after the implementation of the program. They preferred to work with only special education students, and felt that the regular school population was noisy, rude, disruptive, and provided poor role models.

Efficacy studies on full inclusion have suggested that regular class placements are not as successful as special education classes (Clarke, Schaefer, Burchard, & Welkowitz, (1992). The energy and resources needed for success in the regular class may not be commensurate with the questionable gains achieved (Fuchs, Fuchs, Fernstrom, & Hohn, 1991).

Opponents of full inclusion argue that extreme cases of handicapping conditions have not been among those studied by researchers reporting positive effects from inclusive placements (MacMillan, Gresham, & Forness, 1996). Yet, these children are included among *all* children with disabilities. Before adoption of full inclusion, it is essential that these students be included in the evaluation of any such effort, if the policy is to be advanced for *all* children with disabilities.

Teacher Attitudes and Student Success

Inclusion is not only bringing about significant changes to the educational environment for handicapped students. It is also introducing new issues for the regular education classroom teacher. Implementing the process of teaching handicapped children requires a change in curriculum and teaching methods; this can also affect other aspects of the instructional program. The literature on effective teaching has identified a number of factors that are positively and powerfully related to the academic success of both general and special education students. One factor, the attitude that a teacher has toward the inclusion process, is closely tied to the effectiveness of educating handicapped students (Stoler, 1992).

Sanacore (1996) not only focused on the importance of teachers being thoroughly prepared in their teaching specialty, but also highlighted the priceless intangibles of successful teachers: patience, understanding, clarity, insight, and responsibility. This humanistic perspective demonstrates to all students that their teachers care deeply about

their personal and academic growth. Students, in turn, are more likely to respond positively as a community of learners.

As inclusion of handicapped students into regular education classrooms becomes a reality within the public school system, it becomes necessary to determine attitudes and perceptions of regular education teachers toward this concept. From previous literature, it has been shown that the attitude of the regular education teacher toward a handicapped child can influence the climate of the classroom (Stoler, 1992). Vaughn and Schumm (1995) indicated that general education teachers do not feel prepared to meet the needs of students with special needs, especially those with learning disabilities. Other findings indicate that general education teachers are less knowledgeable about special education law, less skillful in working with students with disabilities, and made fewer teaching and testing accommodations (Yasutake & Lerner, 1996).

Research has demonstrated a strong link between student-teacher interaction and student achievement (Wigle & Wilcox, 1996). Students whom teachers expect to achieve tend to be asked more questions, to be given more chances and a longer time to respond, and to be interrupted less often than students whom teachers expect to do poorly. Teacher attention is given to students in a differential manner, depending on the teacher's expectation of student achievement (Babad, Bernieri, & Rosenthal, 1991).

Students with disabilities have difficulties learning and need much more direct teacher attention than those without disabilities. Yet, differential treatment of students by teachers in the general classroom means that students with disabilities receive less teacher attention, not more (Janney, Snell, Beer, & Raynes, 1995). Without intensive and systematic intervention, made very difficult in the high student-teacher ratios of the general classroom, students with disabilities tend to lag further and further behind the achievement of their age-grade peers (Wigle & Wilcox, 1996).

Pearman, Huang, Barnhart, and Mellblom (1992) found significant differences between the regular classroom teachers and the special education teachers, with the latter

having more positive attitudes about inclusion. In a study by Jobe, Rust, and Brissie (1996), the most significant relationships that correlated positively with teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, were special education teaching experience and inclusion in-service training.

When the perceptions of regular and special class teachers were compared, Center (1993) found that regular educators perceived a wide variety of behaviors as more disturbing than did special educators. Monahan, Marino, & Miller (1996) reported that over 60 percent of their respondents indicated that inclusion will not succeed because of resistance from regular education teachers.

Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar (1991) pointed out that although the changes involved in including students with disabilities in general education classes have a major impact on both special and general education service providers, little attention has been given to the views of these educators. Special educators, who have been instrumental in preparing, receiving, and working with students with disabilities, are in a unique position to be able to identify the specific preparation regular teachers need for reaching the various learners in their classrooms. Regular educators, who will be responsible for implementation, are able to determine the feasibility and desirability of the inclusive practices recommended, and can establish guidelines that are in the best interest of all students. All educators are needed for inclusion to succeed.

Successful Inclusion

Educators who believe that their input is considered and used are increasingly likely to accept and support the changes that result from implementing inclusive practices (Bradley & West, 1994). The inclusion of students with disabilities will not be successful, however, unless a collaborative connection between special education and general education occurs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). Of major importance in the classroom are realistic learning expectations established collaboratively by special education and

classroom teachers. These expectations send a strong message to all students that their teachers believe they can succeed.

Sullivan and Sugarman (1996) have stated that many teachers and administrators resist inclusion. The reasons often cited for this opposition are the inability of regular instructional personnel to meet health needs and handle behavior problems presented by some of these students. Forced inclusion of special students into the regular classroom may have teachers reassessing their professional roles. In one large public school in Texas, four teachers exited the school by mid-year, and one-fifth of the teachers surveyed said they were considering resigning their jobs at the end of the year because of forced inclusion (Baines, Baines, & Masterson, 1994).

Lanier & Lanier (1996) studied inclusion policies and found them to be more successful when teachers are familiar with the characteristics and behaviors of special students, understand their needs within the regular classroom environment, and are willing to accept a wide variety of challenging students.

Discussion

The importance of a teacher's attitude to a student's success has been amply demonstrated. For students with disabilities, there must be a high level of student-teacher interaction, consistent and frequent teacher monitoring of student activity, numerous opportunities to respond, and a great deal of effective teacher feedback.

However, it is often very difficult for general education teachers to individualize curriculum and accommodate individual students with disabilities. To do so means that they must be able to plan and implement an ever growing number of activities and materials in their classrooms. The diversity of needs brought to the classroom by students with disabilities significantly complicates an already complex task for the teacher.

Research has shown that the attitudes of educators toward students with disabilities are multidimensional and complex. Positive attitudes encourage the

establishment of policies and the allocation resources to increase the integration of students with disabilities into regular classrooms. Negative attitudes support expectations of low achievement and inappropriate behaviors by students with disabilities, which limit their acceptance and integration (Anderson & Antonak, 1997). If the attitudes of prospective educators could be positively modified during their academic preparation, their willingness to teach students with disabilities might increase. This may remove the barriers from students with disabilities and integrate them into the larger society.

Implications

Until recently, most educators spent their professional lives working alone. Few opportunities were provided to discuss, plan, and participate in ongoing projects with other adults. Consequently, most are poorly prepared for their new roles as collaborators and co-teachers. Although school systems want their teaching staff to be innovative and continually improve the quality of instructional efforts, few are prepared to facilitate this process. Typically, most teachers implementing new ideas receive limited preparation and classroom support. As a result, and as any experienced educator will attest, many worthwhile innovations never take hold and become integral parts of the system.

Successful change demands years of ongoing support, resources, and monitoring. Schools genuinely committed to changing their current models must plan accordingly. Investments must be made in long-term support efforts to facilitate meaningful change and proactively address problems that emerge naturally as part of the inclusion process. Although many organizations try to ignore these issues, comprehensive planning is essential to the lasting success of innovations. Inclusion is the latest in a long succession of educational reforms.

Summary

On one side of the issue are those who believe that a full array of service options should be available to students with disabilities. They believe in integration in general education classrooms and general education activities whenever possible, but they also believe that other services, even separate schooling, may be necessary. On the other side of the issue are those who believe that the least restrictive environment means that all students should receive their education exclusively in the general education classroom with their age-mates, and that special and general education are unnecessary dual systems.

The feasibility of placing a student with disabilities successfully in a regular class depends not only on the nature and severity of the student's disability, but also on the features of the regular class into which the student is to be enrolled. Schools, like the students they serve, differ along salient dimensions that directly impact the feasibility of inclusion.

The results of the literature reviewed indicate that further examination of teacher attitudes is warranted. It seems reasonable to expect that teacher's attitudes toward inclusion are affected by various institutional variables. The variables chosen for consideration in this project included the type of school setting (traditional or special services), and the type of certification held by the teacher (regular education or special education). The research reported in this paper examines the effects of such variables on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Chapter Three

The Design of the Study

Introduction

Until recently, special education teachers have been the primary educators of handicapped students. Changes in education are shifting this responsibility to include greater participation by the regular education teacher, as well as an increase in accountability. The purpose of this study was to determine if regular and special educators differed in their attitudes toward inclusion.

Sample

A sample of 112 teachers, kindergarten through grade 12, representing Central New Jersey, participated in the study. Forty-nine teachers surveyed were regular-classroom teachers from nine suburban districts. Another 63 teachers surveyed were special educators from a special services school district which services handicapped students from the surrounding counties. Most of the teachers who responded to the survey taught at the elementary level.

Measures

An attitude scale entitled *Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities* (ORI), constructed by Larrivee and Antonak (1994) was used, in part, to

examine the attitudes of teachers concerning the inclusion of all handicapped children in the regular classroom. The ORI was derived from a questionnaire by Larrivee and Cook (1979). Verbal permission to use the scale, and to substitute the word *inclusion* for *integration,* was obtained.

Questions deal with the benefits of inclusion, management issues when dealing with special education students, and a global measure of attitudes about inclusion. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with each statement using a five-point rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale administered consisted of twenty items.

Procedure

One hundred questionnaires containing the attitude scale were mailed directly to the principals of ten randomly selected public schools in Central New Jersey. The school districts were located in suburban areas. A special services school, also in Central New Jersey, participated in the project.

Each regular school administrator was mailed ten questionnaires with a cover letter requesting that he or she distribute the surveys to a sample of regular-classroom teachers in their building. A postage-paid envelope was provided for the questionnaires to be returned. The special services school's administrators were asked to distribute their questionnaires to a sample of special education teachers, and also return the surveys in the envelope provided. Of the ten regular public schools sampled, nine school administrators returned the questionnaires. The average return of surveys per school was five of the ten questionnaires sent.

Testable Hypotheses

The null hypothesis used in this study was as follows: No differences will be found in attitudes toward inclusion between regular educators and special educators. The

alternate hypothesis was: Special educators will have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators.

The independent variable was the type of educator responding to the questionnaire: Regular Educator or Special Educator. The dependent variable was the attitudes that each group had toward including children with special needs into regular education classrooms. Scores can range from 20 to 100, with higher scores reflecting a more favorable attitude toward inclusion.

Design

The design of this study is an independent groups sample with two variables. The respondents were divided into one of two categories, "Special Educator" or "Regular Educator." For every item, percentages for each group were calculated and displayed in a table. Comparisons and conclusions were made based on the results.

Analysis

An independent groups *t* test was used to analyze the relationship between the two variables. A .05 alpha level was used to define the rejection region, with 110 degrees of freedom.

There are several assumptions that formally underlay the use of the *t* test. First, it was assumed that the distribution of scores within each population follows a normal distribution. Second, it was presumed that the variances of scores within each population were equal across populations. And finally, it was assumed that the samples were randomly and independently selected from their respective populations.

One limitation of these general assumptions was that the geographical area from which all respondents were polled, was relatively small in size. This may serve to make the results less generalizable.

Other assumptions were made in the collection of this data. The first includes a belief that all respondents answered the questions with an equal amount of effort and honesty. Furthermore, it was assumed that each participant was willing and able to complete the survey, and all items answered reflected his or her own thoughts.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if regular and special educators differ in their attitudes toward inclusion of all handicapped children in a regular educational setting. Forty-nine teachers from regular public schools in suburban districts, and 63 teachers from a special services school, responded to the survey. Most taught at the elementary level.

The attitude scale used to measure teachers' beliefs about inclusion was entitled *Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities* (ORI). The scale consisted of twenty items. Respondents indicated the extent of their agreement using a five-point rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scores could range from 20 to 100, with higher scores reflecting a more favorable attitude toward inclusion.

Nine public schools were sampled, as well as one special services school district. The average return rate of questionnaires was 50%.

The null hypothesis stated was: No differences will be found in attitudes toward inclusion between regular educators and special educators. The alternative hypothesis stated was: Special educators will have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators.

An independent groups *t* test was used to analyze the relationship between the attitudes of the special and regular educators. A .05 alpha level was utilized to define the rejection region, with 110 degrees of freedom.

Given the sampling and implementation information, it is believed that the results from this project accurately reflect the attitudes that teachers hold about inclusion. Furthermore, any differences found in these attitudes can attributed to the population that the teacher was trained to work with (special education populations or regular education populations), and the experiences those teachers have had in that capacity.

Chapter Four

The Results

Introduction

This project was undertaken to investigate whether there are differences in attitudes and beliefs between regular education teachers in local school districts, and special education teachers in a public school specifically for handicapped students. An attitude scale containing questions concerning the benefits of inclusion, management issues when dealing with special education students, and a global measure of beliefs about inclusion, was used to examine the attitudes of 112 teachers.

The null hypothesis stated that no differences will be found in attitudes toward inclusion between regular educators and special educators. The alternate hypothesis stated that special educators will have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators. The independent variable was the type of educator who responded to the questionnaire: Regular Educator or Special Educator. The dependent variables were the attitudes that each group had toward including children with special needs into regular education classrooms. Potential scores could range from 20 to 100, with higher scores reflecting a more favorable attitude toward inclusion.

Forty-nine regular education teachers were surveyed from nine different public school districts. Sixty-three special education teachers responded to the questionnaire

from one public special services school. Most of the teachers, from both groups, taught at the elementary level.

Results

In order to examine whether or not there was a significant difference in attitudes toward inclusion between regular educators and special educators, scores on the questionnaires were obtained, descriptive statistics were calculated, and an independent groups *t* test was performed. As shown in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, a significant difference was found between the two groups.

Table 4.1

	Regular Educators	Special Educators
Mean	**64.4**	**48.1**
Median	**66**	**48**
Variance	**101.9**	**65.4**
Stnd. Dev.	**10.1**	**8.1**
Min. Score	**34**	**30**
Max. Score	**81**	**67**
Range	**47**	**37**
Skewness	**-.784**	**.277**

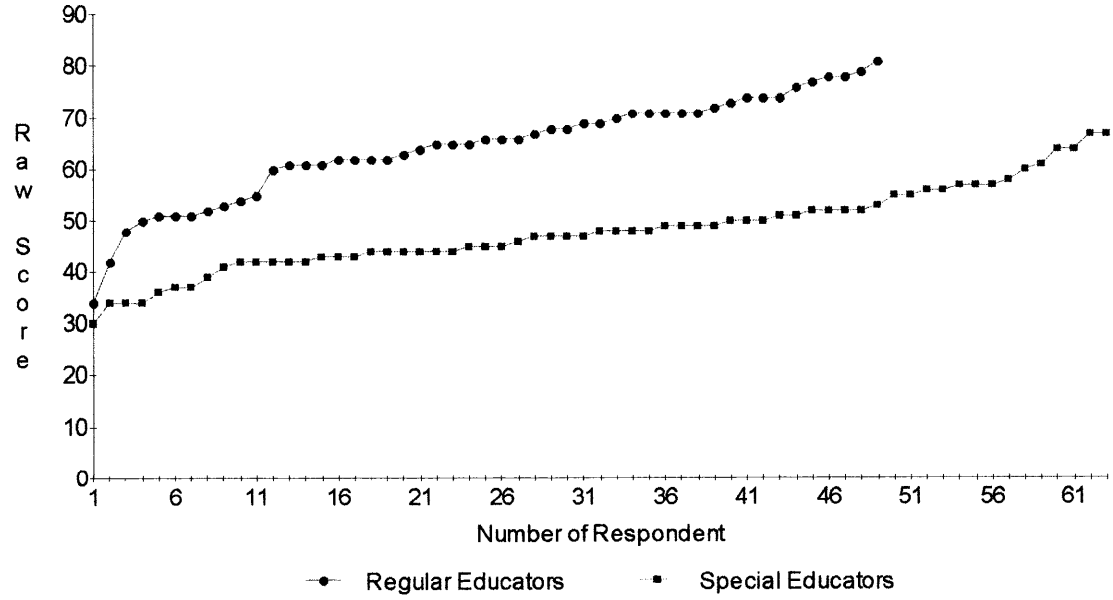
Table 4.2

t	df	2-tailed sig.	Mean Difference	Stnd. Error of Difference
9.482	**110**	**.000**	**16.2880**	**1.7077**

Furthermore, regular educators were found to have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than special educators! In addition to examining the descriptive statistics and *t* test, the difference between the two groups of educators can also be observed by looking at their individual raw scores. Table 4.3 represents this information as shown below.

Table 4.3

Attitudes Toward Inclusion



Besides interpreting the results of the questionnaire in the form of one total score for each individual respondent, the survey can be examined by looking at the answers of each question. By reviewing the results in this manner, it is easy to see where differences in opinion are, and where some attitudes are relatively similar.

Table 4.4 is shown on the next two pages, and displays information by listing the percentages of respondents for each group. To simplify and clarify the results, the answers were grouped under three categories: Strongly Agree/Agree, Undecided, and

Strongly Disagree/Disagree. Some of the questions were abbreviated for the table. The survey, in its entirety, can be found in Larrivee and Cook (1979).

Table 4.4

Individual Questions by Percent of Respondents

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
1. Many things teachers do w/ regular students are appropriate for handicapped students.			
Regular Ed.	**88**	**2**	**10**
Special Ed.	**45**	**14**	**41**
2. The needs of special students can best be served through special, separate classes.			
Regular Ed.	**26**	**31**	**43**
Special Ed.	**70**	**22**	**8**
3. A special-needs child's behavior generally requires more patience from the teacher.			
Regular Ed.	**70**	**6**	**24**
Special Ed.	**86**	**6**	**8**
4. The challenge of regular class promotes the academic growth of a special-needs child.			
Regular Ed.	**53**	**27**	**20**
Special Ed.	**16**	**28**	**56**
5. The extra attention handicapped students require are a detriment to other students.			
Regular Ed.	**24.5**	**22.5**	**53**
Special Ed.	**66**	**19**	**15**
6. Inclusion offers interaction that fosters understanding and acceptances of differences.			
Regular Ed.	**90**	**4**	**6**
Special Ed.	**47**	**35**	**18**
7. Regular teachers possess the expertise necessary to work with handicapped students.			
Regular Ed.	**41**	**16**	**43**
Special Ed.	**9**	**5**	**86**
8. The behavior of special-needs students sets a bad example for the other students.			
Regular Ed.	**8**	**16**	**76**
Special Ed.	**40**	**35**	**25**
9. Isolation in a special class has negative effects on social and emotional development.			
Regular Ed.	**47**	**31**	**22**
Special Ed.	**14**	**18**	**68**
10. The special-needs child develops academic skills more rapidly in a special classroom.			
Regular Ed.	**35**	**43**	**22**
Special Ed.	**67**	**14**	**19**

Table 4.4
continued

Individual Questions by Percent of Respondents

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
11. Most special-needs children are well behaved in the classroom.			
Regular Ed.	**39**	**33**	**28**
Special Ed.	**17**	**5**	**78**
12. Regular classroom teachers have sufficient training to teach special-needs children.			
Regular Ed.	**10**	**6**	**84**
Special Ed.	**6**	**5**	**89**
13. Special-needs students monopolize the teacher's time.			
Regular Ed.	**51**	**24.5**	**24.5**
Special Ed.	**79**	**13**	**8**
14. Special-needs children will exhibit behavior problems in a regular class setting.			
Regular Ed.	**24**	**33**	**43**
Special Ed.	**78**	**16**	**6**
15. The integration of special-needs students can be beneficial for regular students.			
Regular Ed.	**80**	**10**	**10**
Special Ed.	**41**	**37**	**22**
16. The special-needs child will be socially isolated by regular-classroom students.			
Regular Ed.	**12**	**10**	**78**
Special Ed.	**61**	**30**	**9**
17. Parents of a special child are no greater problem for a teacher than a normal child.			
Regular Ed.	**49**	**14**	**37**
Special Ed.	**19**	**13**	**68**
18. Integration of handicapped students will necessitate retraining of regular teachers.			
Regular Ed.	**59.2**	**20.4**	**20.4**
Special Ed.	**90**	**5**	**5**
19. Handicapped students should be given every opportunity to be in a regular class.			
Regular Ed.	**76**	**8**	**16**
Special Ed.	**78**	**17**	**5**
20. Special-needs children are likely to create confusion in the regular classroom.			
Regular Ed.	**25**	**12**	**63**
Special Ed.	**56**	**38**	**6**

Summary

In conclusion, this project was investigated to determine if the attitudes toward inclusion differ between regular educators and special educators. Forty-nine regular educators and 63 special educators responded to the questionnaire. From the current literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that special educators would have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators.

The results of an independent groups *t* test did confirm a statistically significant difference between the two groups. However, the significant difference revealed that, overall, *regular educators* had a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than special educators.

Regular educators had a mean score of 64.4, a standard deviation of 10.1, and minimum and maximum scores of 34 and 81 respectively. Special educators had a mean score of 48.1, a standard deviation of 8.1, and minimum and maximum scores of 30 and 67, respectively.

Over half of the educators in both groups agreed that a handicapped student's behavior requires more patience from the teacher, and monopolizes the teacher's time. In addition, they agreed that special-needs students should be given every opportunity to be in a regular class setting, while also reporting that the integration of handicapped students will necessitate the extensive retraining of regular teachers.

Since there was a statistically significant *difference* in attitudes between the two groups, they were divided among many more questions in the survey, than they agreed upon. Over half of the regular educators believed that the challenge of a regular class promotes the academic growth of a handicapped student, while over half of the special educators disagreed.

In addition, over half of the special educators believed that: the extra attention handicapped students require is detrimental to other students, the behavior of special-needs students will set a bad example for others, handicapped children will exhibit

behavior problems in the regular classroom, and special-needs students are socially isolated by regular-classroom students. Over half of the regular educators disagreed with these same statements.

In Chapter 5 some explanations behind this unanticipated outcome will be offered, and areas for future research will be detailed.

Chapter Five

The Conclusion

Introduction

Whether or not the attitudes toward inclusion differ between regular educators and special educators was investigated in this research project. From the current literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that special educators would have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than regular educators. The results of an independent groups *t* test did confirm a statistically significant difference between the two groups. However, the significant difference revealed that, overall, *regular educators* had a more favorable attitude toward inclusion than special educators. Explanations for this unexpected result will be discussed in this chapter.

The Similarities

Although there was a significant difference between regular and special educators in their attitudes toward inclusion, they did not differ in all areas. In truth, there were four meaningful areas in which most educators agreed. Probably the most significant finding for inclusion in general, was the fact that over 75% of educators in both groups agreed that handicapped students should be given every opportunity to function in a regular classroom.

As the reality of inclusion draws closer for more and more regular educators, this finding is a good beginning which will help all educators when dealing with problems encountered with these changes. A positive attitude at the core of the issue can overcome many obstacles that would otherwise condemn any new initiatives. If regular and special educators are going to be working closer together, it is important that this basic belief is retained by all involved. The literature on effective teaching has identified that the attitude a teacher has toward the inclusion process is closely tied to the effectiveness of educating handicapped students (Stoler, 1992).

It may seem contrary then, that over 50% of the teachers in both groups also agreed that a handicapped student's behavior requires more patience from the teacher, monopolizes the teacher's time, and that the integration of handicapped students will necessitate the extensive retraining of regular teachers. It appears as if regular educators are willing to take on the responsibility of inclusion, even though they feel it will involve more responsibility and an increased workload. Special educators agreeing with these same statements are acknowledging, from their experience, that such statements are true.

The Sample

Before discussing the differences between the two groups of educators, it is important to review some information about the sample groups from which these results were obtained. The regular educators were teachers exposed to classified students with mild to moderate handicapping conditions. It is assumed that when they responded to the questionnaire, they envisioned a mild to moderate handicapped student, and answered the questions accordingly.

On the other hand, the special educators dealt exclusively with severe handicapping conditions. It is assumed that when they responded to the questionnaire, they envisioned a severely handicapped student, and answered accordingly. This

difference, in how each group of educators defined a special-needs student, is thought to be responsible for the unanticipated outcome.

The Differences

The results of the questionnaire highlighted three areas in which there was at least a 50% discrepancy between the attitudes of regular and special educators. These areas included academic, social, and behavioral issues.

The difference in academic issues was most notably recognized in two particular questions. Fifty-three percent of the regular education teachers agreed that the challenge of a regular classroom promotes the academic growth of a handicapped student, while 56% of the special educators disagreed with this same statement. Additionally, 53% of regular educators *disagreed* that the extra attention handicapped students require is a detriment to other students; 66% of the special educators *agreed*.

The differences in the populations that each group of educators is experienced with and in contact with, is thought to be responsible for these contrasting attitudes. A regular education teacher envisioning a mildly handicapped student is likely to agree that a regular classroom is a good academic challenge, and any extra attention that student needs will not be sufficient enough to be detrimental to the other students. However, a special educator, envisioning a severely handicapped child, is inclined to think that a regular classroom is not the place to challenge a special-needs child, and the significant amount of extra attention that the child needs will be detrimental to the other students.

A second area of marked difference between the two groups of educators is the social realm. Seventy-six percent of regular educators and 25% of special educators believed that the behavior of a handicapped student will *not* set a bad example for the other students. Furthermore, 78% of regular educators disagreed with the statement that handicapped students will be socially isolated by regular-classroom students. Only 9% of the special educators disagreed with this same statement. These discrepancies are again

attributed to the differences in exposure to handicapping conditions that these teachers have.

Teachers dealing with mildly or even moderately handicapped individuals may see their behavior as no more or less extreme than "regular" students' behavior. Moreover, they see the special-needs students as no more or less socially isolated than any other student. On the other hand, those teachers exposed to the most severely handicapped students, especially the Emotionally Disturbed population, must surely believe that these special-needs students will set a bad example for the others, and as a consequence, be socially isolated by them.

Kauffman, Baker, & Riedel (1995) demonstrated this notion when they found that the more nonhandicapped students came to know the student with disabilities, the less they liked them. When special-needs children exhibited behaviors that were objectionable, contact was likely to promote less favorable attitudes. Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee (1993) also found that children with behavior disorders were much more likely to be rejected by their nondisabled peers.

Finally, there were also marked differences between regular and special educators in their attitudes toward the behavior of handicapped students in the classroom. Seventy-eight percent of special educators agreed that handicapped students will exhibit behavior problems in the classroom; only 24% of regular educators agreed. In addition, just 6% of the special educators *disagreed* with the statement that handicapped students are likely to create confusion in the regular classroom; 63% of the regular educators disagreed!

Again, it makes sense to attribute these differences to the severity of the handicapped population that these groups of teachers are exposed to. The regular teachers surveyed, dealing with mildly or moderately handicapped students, did not perceive them as creating behavior problems or confusion. Nevertheless, the most severely handicapped students, with whom the special educators were exposed to, were

clearly seen as potential sources of conduct problems and confusion in the regular classroom.

Summary

The differences in attitudes between the regular and special educators surveyed in this project has been attributed to the differences in the populations of the children they teach. Regular educators, exposed to classified students with mild to moderate handicapping conditions, probably envisioned these children when answering the survey. Correspondingly, the special educators, exposed to the most severely handicapped students, probably envisioned them, when responding to the questionnaire. This difference, in how each group of educators defined a handicapped student, is thought to be responsible for regular educators having a significantly more favorable attitude toward inclusion than special educators.

The Future

To be assured of the reasoning behind the conclusions in this thesis, future research is necessary. Further investigation should not only include teachers exposed to all types and severities of handicapping conditions, but also strict definitions of what defines a "mildly" handicapped child, a "moderately" handicapped child, and a "severely" handicapped child.

The results of this study appear to indicate that regular teachers are ready and willing participants for full inclusion. But are they ready for the severely handicapped? These children are not currently accounted for by regular educators. As it stands now, the severely handicapped students are the sole responsibility of special educators in a special services district.

Those special educators surveyed showed strong disagreement with the regular educators in many areas of the questionnaire. The special educators may believe one of

two things, or both. First, they may believe the severely handicapped student is not capable of succeeding in a regular classroom, and second, perhaps they feel it is the regular educator who is not ready for the most seriously handicapped individuals.

Further research into this area is essential. MacMillan, Gresham, & Forness (1996) argue that extreme cases of handicapping conditions have not been among those studied by researchers reporting positive effects from inclusive placements. Yet, these students are included among *all* children with disabilities. Before adoption of full inclusion, the most severely handicapped must be included and recorded in evaluations.

Successful change demands years of ongoing support, resources, and monitoring. Schools genuinely committed to changing their current models must plan accordingly. Investments must be made in the long-term to support efforts and facilitate meaningful change which includes proactively addressing problems that emerge naturally as part of any changing process. Although many organizations try to ignore these issues, comprehensive planning is essential to the lasting success of innovations. Inclusion is only the latest in a long succession of educational reforms.

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