The impact of the resource room on peer relationships

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THE IMPACT OF THE RESOURCE ROOM ON PEER RELATIONSHIPS

by

Jennifer Howells

A Thesis

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Approved by

Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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THE IMPACT OF THE RESOURCE ROOM ON PEER RELATIONSHIPS
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Dr. Randall Robinson
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The purpose of this study was to ascertain if resource room attendance for classified students had an impact on social relationships with their non-classified, general education peers. Specifically, the study sought to establish trends in the following two areas: if resource room students were in fact less likely to be accepted by their general education peers, and the most likely reason why resource room peer non-acceptance would occur. Using student interviews, which consisted of a peer nomination rating, and a Teacher/Faculty Survey, which consisted of three open-ended items and one forced-choice item, data was collected. Using a chi-square analysis of data, it was determined that no significant correlation existed between resource room attendance and peer non-acceptance. It was also determined, via the Teacher/Faculty Survey, the most likely reason resource room students would not be accepted by their general education peers would be because being pulled out for instruction limits the amount of time the two groups of students spend together throughout the school year.
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Chapter I
The Scope of the Study

Introduction

Based on a growing body of knowledge concerning special education, attention has primarily been focused on that of the academic successes and/or failures for students in special education. Specifically, researchers have exhaustively sought to determine which special education model is most effective in facilitating student learning. Two main special education models of instruction that have been the topic of much debate involve inclusive classroom settings, versus that of a pull-out, resource room program. In either case, many researchers have concluded that one model of service does not prevail over the other in regards to academic achievement (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000).

Therefore, within the last two decades, a significant shift has occurred in special education thought and theory, from that of an academic perspective to that of potential social implications of the mode of special education delivery. It is a common belief held by many professionals and researchers in the field that inclusive classroom settings typically foster social relationships among special education and regular education students (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000; Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). Vaughn and Klingner (1998) have conducted numerous research studies and have written extensively on the matter of the socialization of children with special needs. They agree with the assumption that
"students with learning disabilities who are placed full-time in general education settings will have more positive self-perceptions, be better liked and accepted, and have more friends than if they are not so placed" (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998, p. 79). The results of one of their studies concurs with this assumption, which found that the "majority of students with learning disabilities perceive that it is easier to make and keep friends in inclusive settings" (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998, p. 86).

What then, in comparison, has been said about pull-out, resource room models of special education delivery, and how has that affected social relationships between special and regular education students? Vaughn and Klingner have said that "when it comes to making friends, the findings [of their study] indicate that students perceive inclusive settings as providing more opportunities for making friends than resource room, pull-out settings" (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998, p. 86). Madge, Affleck, and Lowenbraun (1990), who are also major contributors to the field of special education, have likewise expressed concerns over that of pull-out models of special education. They have argued that removing students with learning disabilities from the general education classroom, even for brief periods of time, can threaten their social standing among their classmates (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990). Researchers Le Mare and de la Ronde (2000) provide specific examples as to why social relationships may be jeopardized for special needs students in a pull-out program. They suggest that by removing children from the classroom, one is limiting their contact time with classmate, which can ultimately "inhibit the development of positive peer relationships" (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000, p. 53). They also suggest that taking children out of the classroom for help "draws attention to their deficiencies, stigmatizing them among their peers" (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000,
p. 53). Le Mare and de la Ronde conclude that these two effects can possibly result in "lowered peer status, which has been linked to poor self-esteem, dissatisfaction with the school environment, and an increased risk for school drop-out" (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000, p. 53).

Statement of the Problem

Given the present debate over inclusive classroom settings versus that of pull-out, resource room instruction, it is important that we assess whether or not a particular model of special education delivery is having an impact on the children it serves. As mentioned previously, regardless of the service delivery, academic performance does not appear to be affected either way. In both models, the academic needs of students with special needs are being met. The issue, therefore, becomes that of how well these children are able to establish relationships with their general education peers. If students are continually being pulled out of the general education classroom, are they being deprived of time spent bonding with peers? Are they being placed at a social disadvantage? Does the fact alone that they are leaving the room for special education instruction negatively stigmatize them? These are important questions to be considered, because if special education students are not able to formulate relationships with peers and as a result have lower social statuses due to their special education classification, their self-esteem will greatly be affected. As a result, poor self-esteem can lead a multitude of problems, including school failure and depression. Additionally, if special needs students are unable to establish relationships with regular education peers, their ability to learn and
apply basic socialization skills will never reach its full potential. This can later serve as a
detriment to the child in his or her adult interactions and relationships.

Based on the mounting evidence that pull-out, resource room models of special education may negatively affect the ability to establish peer relationships between special and regular education students, the following question of inquiry had been formulated to further provide insight into this topic. The present study, entitled “The Impact of the Resource Room on Peer Relationships,” investigated the following: are peer relationships affected for learning disabled students who receive pull-out, resource room services for part of the regular school day? Are these children less likely to be accepted by their regular education peers? What are the possible reasons that account for lower peer acceptance of resource room students? Specific areas of concentration of related literature will include: an exploration of how learning-disabled students perceive their social relationships with students outside of the resource room setting; how regular education peers view their learning disabled classmates; and how do perceptions of both groups impact the formation of friendships. Attention has also been paid to that of the resource room model itself, and an attempt has been made to demonstrate its exact role, whether it be negative, positive, or neutral, in the socialization process of special needs students with their regular education peers.

Hypothesis

This study hypothesized that, due to limited contact time between classified and non-classified students, the resource room model of special education delivery negatively
impacts the social relationships between special education and regular education elementary school students.

Limitations

As with any qualitative research study, there are certain factors out of the researcher’s control which may affect the outcome of the study and the interpretation of its results. The factors, or limitations, to the present study are presented as follows. The first limitation of this study included the highly specific context in which the study was conducted. This research study was conducted in two specific elementary schools, located in southern New Jersey, which included second through fifth grade students from within each of the designated schools. Participants included both the regular education students, as well as students classified as learning disabled. Learning disabled students received resource room instruction for part of the school day. The rest of their school day was spent within their general education classroom. Because the location of the study was highly specific, and the participants were relatively few in number, the determined results of this study are not to be generalized to the special education community as a whole.

A second limitation to this study included that, due to parental wishes, some of the students targeted for research were not able to participate. As a result, this further reduced the already small sample of students that were studied.

A third limitation included the nature of the school district, which can be described as a highly transient area. New students were continually coming into the
district while others were frequently moving out. Therefore, when gathering data to determine peer relationships and social standings within a classroom, the newer students, rather than the special education students pulled out for resource room instruction, were usually ranked much more lowly. This interfered with analyzing data records for trends of special education students falling on the lower end of a classroom’s student social standings.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the discussion of the present study, several terms will be used and are to be defined as follows:

1. **Inclusive Classrooms**- A model of special education delivery that enables special education students to receive instruction within their general education classroom.

2. **Learning Disabled (abbreviated as LD)**- A special education classification in which a discrepancy exists between a person's ability and academic achievement (Gargiulo, 2003). The person possesses average intelligence. The special education students targeted for research in the present study will have an LD classification.

3. **Regular (or General) Education**- A classroom where both non-classified students and classified students receive academic instruction.

4. **Resource Room**- A model of special education delivery that requires the student to be removed from the general education classroom and receive instruction in a designated classroom (i.e. a pull-out program). The resource room will be instructed by a special education teacher.

5. **Special Education**- Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of an individual recognized as exceptional (Gargiulo, 2003). In this study, two models of special education delivery will be discussed: resource room programs, or inclusive classrooms.
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In Chapter 1 entitled The Scope of the Study, the inclusion model of special education and the resource room model of special education delivery were briefly discussed. It was determined that while neither model appeared to have an impact on academic achievement, it was suspected that the resource room model of special education may negatively impact social relationships between regular education and special education elementary school students. Citing from numerous research studies, several reasons were offered for why it was believed the resource room model of special education delivery had a negative impact on peer relationships. The main reason given for why social relationships are negatively affected by resource room instruction included the belief that special education students are unable to form strong friendships with their regular education peers (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). This is because special education students do not spend enough time in their regular education classroom (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990). Other reasons, such as special needs children having “social challenges” or the resource room having a “negative stigma” were also discussed (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

In efforts to better understand how resource room models of special education may or may not adversely affect peer relations between learning disabled and non-
learning disabled students, one must first take into account the numerous studies that have yielded data relevant to the topic at hand. In this chapter, the investigation begins with a more in-depth exploration of the two most common special education models: an inclusion model and a resource room model. The research studies discussed in the following pages will provide a better understanding of both the potential social benefits, as well as the potential social consequences of either model.

Inclusion Classrooms vs. Resource Room: The Debate

Kemp and Carter (2002) studied the social skills and social status of elementary age school children, who were followed over the course of preschool through fifth grade. These twenty-two students, from the area of New South Wales, Australia, were classified as having "intellectual disabilities" and were fully mainstreamed into inclusive classroom settings from preschool. The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential of inclusive settings to support the social development of these students (Kemp & Carter, 2002). Data collection consisted of teacher, parent, and principal ratings of social skills and status, peer nominations and peer rating, and naturalistic observations. There were several aims for this research; one of which was to determine differences in the social interaction skills and social status of students with intellectual disabilities versus "average" peers (Kemp & Carter, 2002).

After implementing the above-mentioned methods of data collection and analyzing the results, it was concluded that students with intellectual disabilities do suffer from some degree of social isolation from their regular education peers, even though the special education students were mainstreamed full-time. However, it is important to note
that, while there was some degree of isolation, this did not mean that the students with disabilities were rejected (Kemp & Carter, 2002). In fact, playground observations revealed few negative interactions between both groups of students, indicating that students with disabilities were not rejected by their regular education peers. Therefore, based on this model of inclusion, Kemp and Carter's study does not support the fear of social rejection of special education peers who are mainstreamed full time in a general education classroom.

Are fears of social rejection of special education peers who participate in pull-out, resource room instruction similarly unfounded? Vaughn and Klingner (1998) compiled and synthesized the results of eight studies that examined the perceptions of learning disabled students of their educational settings, both inclusive and resource room.

In this study, Vaughn and Klingner investigate past trends in special education (i.e. the movement from specialized services to a model of inclusion). While concerns exist over the academic progress made by special needs students in both integrated settings and resource room settings, a greater concern exits over the social functioning of students who receive replacement services (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). According to the researchers, it is commonly assumed that LD students who are pulled out of general education classrooms are placed at a social disadvantage, while LD students in an inclusive classroom have more "positive self-perceptions, are better liked and accepted, and have more friends" (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998, p. 79).

To test the validity of such statements, Vaughn and Klingner synthesized the findings of eight studies dealing with perceptions of LD students and which educational setting they prefer. Of the eight studies, six addressed elementary school students and
two addressed secondary education students, totaling 442 students in all. Within these studies, the primary data sources were students' self-reports of their perceptions of instructional settings, and the specific methods utilized included individually administered interviews, semi-structured interviews with follow-ups, and student surveys (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998).

Upon the conclusion of this study, the following five trends were consistently found across all research studies discussed within the chosen articles: 1. most students with learning disabilities preferred to receive specialized instruction outside of the general education classroom for part of the day; 2. students generally liked the resource room setting because the work was found to be easier, more fun, and help is readily available; 3. most students in a general education classroom could not distinguish the special education teacher from the regular education teacher (in a collaboratively taught classroom), and valued the support the special education teacher provided in the classroom; 4. most students were unsure as to how they were placed in special education nor are they aware of who placed them there; and 5. students stated that they liked the inclusion classroom because it was "better for making friends" (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998, p. 79).

While all of the above mentioned findings are important trends in the realm of special education, the latter finding is one of importance to this paper. Vaughn and Klingner, in their study, uncovered a perception of social relationships held by many students in special education. In general, special needs students view inclusive classroom settings as providing more opportunities for making friends as compared to a resource room setting (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). Therefore, in the context of friendship, many
LD students may be inclined to prefer inclusion settings rather than resource room settings. Despite this trend, however, many students also felt that it was easier to make and keep friends with other students who were pulled-out for support services (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998).

The findings of this study were corroborated with another similar study, in which special education models of instruction and peer social status outcomes were topics of exploration. Researchers Le Mare and de la Ronde (2000) designed a study that extended existing literature on students' perceptions of service delivery models (i.e. inclusion versus pull-out programs) and any social impact associated with these models (particularly pull-out, resource room models).

Le Mare and de la Ronde present information from previous studies that unanimously agree that students with LD are the least accepted among their peers. Several reasons are offered for this, most noteworthy being that students in pull-out programs have limited contact time with their classmates, and that students pull-out for services inevitably draw attention to themselves and to their deficiencies. Both of these effects thus result in lowered peer status (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000). However, to obtain a more precise understanding of this relationship between pull-out programs and low peer status, Le Mare and de la Ronde added elements to their study which differed from previous studies in several ways. First, they more clearly addressed achievement group differences by evaluating learning-disabled, low-achieving, and normal to high-achieving children. Second, they provided a more comprehensive analysis of service delivery preferences by using both forced-choice and rating scale methods. Lastly, they expanded upon the assessment of stigmatization associated with special education models.
by using both peer and self-perceptions, and by evaluating both play and work interactions (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000).

For this study, 124 students, drawn from thirteen schools in a suburban area of a large metropolitan city in western Canada, participated. Of these students, forty-two were learning-disabled, forty were low-achieving, and 43 were average to high-achieving. Sixty-three students were drawn from grades 2-4, while sixty-one were drawn from grades 6-7 (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000). Research methods consisted of sociometric rating scales, and interviews, which allowed for both forced-choice and rated responses (Le Mare & de la Ronde, 2000).

Upon the conclusion of this study, it was found that, given the choice between pull-out and in-service delivery of special education, the majority of students in this study preferred the pull-out model. Also, this study's findings concurred with that of other studies regarding social status of LD students, that these children were the least well accepted of all the groups studied (learning disabled, low-achieving, and average/high-achieving). What is of interest to this present study, however, is the complex relationship between peer social status and the preferred delivery preference mode. Le Mare and de la Ronde draw two possible conclusions: that LD students who have low social status may prefer resource room because it allows for an escape of the classroom of "unsympathetic peers;" or the preference to leave the classroom (because they feel they receive better academic support) may have possibly resulted in lower social status. In either regard, the social status of LD students is jeopardized.

One such study, which offers some evidence of the negative impact resource room models may have on the social status of learning-disabled students, was conducted
by Madge, Affleck, and Lowenbraun (1990). Over the course of a three year period, Madge, Affleck, and Lowenbraun investigated the social status of elementary students with learning disabilities (LD) who were served in either an inclusive classroom setting (specifically, an Integrated Classroom Model), or were served in a resource room setting for part of the school day. The social statuses of these LD students were then compared in both settings. This study sought to prove that the negative social standing of children with learning disabilities was not a direct result of the child's disability itself, but rather stemmed from the stigmatizing effects that a pull-out resource room program could potentially have on a child's social standing in their regular education classroom (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

It is presumed from previous established research that children who have learning disabilities typically have lower social status than their non-learning disabled classmates in school settings (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990). The question evolves, however, as to what contributes to the lower social status of LD students: does lower social status evolve due to the effects of possible social skill deficits in the child; as result from LD students being labeled as "different;" or because students in a pull-out program are segregated from the rest of the class on a regular and consistent basis (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990)?

To help answer these questions, Madge, Affleck, and Lowenbraun designed a study involving the Issaquah School District in Washington State. The participants in the study included a total of thirteen classrooms in three buildings within the district. The study focused on two groups: classrooms who employed an integrated approach to special education (i.e. both regular education students and special needs students were
taught in the same classroom all day), and classrooms where special needs students were pulled-out to receive resource room support in the subjects they required additional support in. For the students who received pull-out support services, the average time out of the regular education classroom per day was anywhere from thirty-five minutes to three hours.

To help determine the prevailing social statuses of the all the students involved within the study, a peer rating method was utilized to assess interpersonal relationships. Due to a reliable nature in producing valid results, sociometric measures, such as positive and negative peer nomination scales, and peer rating scales, were used for data collection (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

From the findings, Madge, Affleck, and Lowenbraun were able to draw several conclusions. First, the data supported previous research findings indicating that students who have learning disabilities are generally less accepted by their regular education peers than are non-learning disabled students (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990). However, the data did suggest that special needs students in both settings are more likely to form relationships with other special needs students. Therefore, it was concluded that social problems that may exist for LD students cannot be totally attributed to the possible stigmatizing affect of being pulled-out for resource room services (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

The study also found that special education students in both settings were more likely to be selected in the latter part of the peer nomination scales, rather than in the middle or upper parts. However, more of the LD students in the integrated classrooms were placed in the middle section of the scale (considered "average") as compared to the
LD students who receive resource room instruction (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

A third conclusion of the study stated that there was a significant relationship between the placement of the special needs student (in an integrated room or pull-out program) and the "probability of reciprocal choice," referring to peer choice. Learning disabled students in integrated classrooms were more likely to be selected as preferred peers by regular education students; whereas learning disabled students in pull-out programs were less likely to be selected as a preferred peer (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

Lastly, it was also concluded that, given the design of this study, a student in an integrated classroom had a better chance of being chosen in the top five by a regular education peer than a LD student who was in the resource room placement. Despite this, the probability of being chosen in the bottom five were similar in both programs (approximately 95%). This fact also suggests that for some, social problems will accompany the learning disability, regardless of what type of special education the individual may be placed in (Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990).

These findings, while localized to the district of study and not readily applicable to heavily urban, rural, or culturally diverse areas, support the assumption that resource room models of special education may impact the social statuses of those students who are pulled-out for services. Students who receive these support services are oftentimes out of the classroom for an extended period of time on a daily basis—possibly up to three hours as indicated by this study. Therefore, due to a decreased amount of time spent with their regular education peers, the possibility of establishing relationships with their non-
learning disabled peers is likewise decreased. This assumption seems to be supported by the fact that special needs students placed within an integrated classroom are not as heavily "outcast" by their regular education peers, as founded by the Madge, Affleck, and Lowenbraun study.

It is evidenced in these studies that either model of special education instruction has its pros and cons. Yet all of the above mentioned studies, in some way, propose valid findings which seem to reiterate the idea that inclusion settings may potentially help foster social relationships. Conversely, it is evidenced that resource room settings may potentially harm the ability for LD students to establish social relationships with their regular education peers.

**Resource Room Models: Perceptions and Consequences**

The discussion now turns from a comparison perspective to a more focused study on that that of perceptions, held by both learning-disabled and regular education students, of social status and social status changes over time, of special education as a whole, of special education students, and of the resource room- the main component in this study.

One such study attempts to answer the first part of our investigation. In this study, Kuhne and Wiener (2000) investigate how learning-disabled students' social status changes over time. While they cite that student with learning disabilities have consistently been found to be less accepted than their non-learning disabled peers, they argue that the stability of their peer acceptance over time has not been clearly established. Kuhne and Wiener expected to find that, in concurrence with the current knowledge of lower social statuses for LD students, social status of LD students would remain fairly
stable over time, and that the social preference of students with LD would decrease over time (Kuhne & Wiener, 2000).

The participants for this study were seventy-six nine through twelve year old students, within fourth through sixth grade, randomly selected from eight schools in a suburban district outside of Toronto, Canada. Thirty-eight of these children were identified as learning-disabled, and received partial self-contained educational instruction (i.e. resource room), with the remainder of their day spend in their general education class. Sociometric measures, such as positive and negative nomination scales, were used to collect data (Kuhne & Wiener, 2000).

As anticipated, Kuhne and Wiener (2000) found that children with and without LD differed in terms of social status. Children with learning disabilities obtained higher "Liked Least" and lower "Social Preference" scores than their non-learning disabled peers. The study also found that, while social status of both LD and regular education students typically declined over time, the decrease in social status for learning-disabled children was much more pronounced (Kuhne & Wiener, 2000).

Information gathered from this study that is particularly relevant to this paper include Kuhne and Wiener's acknowledgement that students in self-contained (resource room) special education instruction are severely limited in the amount of time they spend with their regular education peers. This ultimately can lead to lower levels of familiarity with the LD students, which can then lead to lower social status and lower peer acceptance. However, the fact that the status of LD students did not change over time and got worse indicates that regular education students were not making negative judgments about peers whom they were simply unfamiliar with (Kuhne & Wiener, 2000).
Does this mean then, that negative judgments were a result of negative perceptions of special education and special education students overall?

To answer this question, a study conducted by Vaughn and Bos (1987) can be included. This study, while not included in Vaughn's synthesized study previously mentioned (Students' Perceptions of Inclusion and Resource Room Settings, 1998), can give additional insight into how students view special education and the resource room.

In this study, Vaughn and Bos do not investigate social relationships specifically, nor do they question the resource room model of special education may affect those relationships per se. However, Vaughn and Bos do propose that having an understanding of the perceptions of resource room, held by both regular education and special education students, may prove to be important information when considering overall attitudes towards special education. According to Vaughn and Bos, it is important to investigate perceptions of the resource room because "what regular students know and think about special education and the resource room program may influence their perceptions and attitudes about the students who attend" (Vaughn & Bos, 2001, p. 218). Additionally, Vaughn and Bos argue that "LD students' knowledge and understanding of the resource room may influence their self-perception and their attitude toward involvement in the program" (Vaughn & Bos, 2001, p. 218).

The exact purpose of this study was to distinguish both learning disabled and non-learning disabled elementary students' knowledge and perception of the special education resource room. A sample of 126 regular education students and 20 special education students, grades 1 through 6, taken from two elementary schools in a New England school district, participated in this study. The method of data collection was individual
interviews. Specifically, the following areas were addressed in questioning: knowledge of students leaving the regular education classroom to work in the resource room; defining special education; defining the resource room; and rank places in which they would like to spend their time, other than in the regular education classroom (Vaughn & Bos, 2001).

Upon reviewing the data, Vaughn and Bos determined that students' understanding of the resource room is more directly related to their level in school (i.e. primary or intermediate), rather than whether the student is or is not receiving special education services (Vaughn & Bos, 2001). They also found that older students (i.e. middle school age) were more aware of those students who left for resource room instruction, and were more aware of the purposes for special education and the resource room (Vaughn & Bos, 2001).

This study found that that LD students did not produce any more accurate information in regards to special education and resource room than their general education counterparts. Eighty percent of primary students and fifty-one percent of intermediate students replied they "did not know" what special education meant (Vaughn & Bos, 2001). Vaughn and Bos surmise that this lack of understanding raises a question about the negative stigma that has traditionally been associated with special education.

Lastly, Vaughn and Bos determined in the results of their study that older LD students and non-LD students selected the resource room as a desirable place to go, while only a smaller percentage of primary LD students selected the resource room as a desirable place to go.
Overall, the results of this study indicate that there are few differences between regular education and special education students in regards to their understanding and perception of the resource room and special education. This seems to question the findings of Kuhne and Wiener, who claim that low social status ratings of LD students were not a result of unfamiliarity (i.e. LD students constantly being pulled-out of class), but possibly because of negative overall perceptions. As Vaughn and Bos have proven in this particular study, negative perceptions may not necessarily be the cause.

What is more critical to this investigation, however, is the finding that there were significant differences between primary and intermediate students. Primary students appeared to have little knowledge of special education and the resource room, and students who received resource room services ranked resource room very lowly on their "most desirable" place to go outside of their general education classroom (Vaughn & Bos, 2001). For primary school students, does the resource room still carry the negative stigma that has been typically assumed? Are primary school students' social relationships with their regular education peers lacking because of any negative stigma? What correlations can be made between resource room and lower peer status of special education students? In order to answer these questions, Vaughn and Bos admit that further research is needed into the extent of which students' perceptions of resource room may affect how well-accepted learning disabled students are among their peers. This will be one such aim of the present study.

To offer some insight into the resource room dimension of this present study's investigation (specifically, does the resource room itself, negative student perceptions of special education, or a combination of both affect relationships between regular and
special education students?), one last study, focusing on primary school age children, can be addressed. Hoyle and Serafica (1988) studied the social relations of third-grade children with and without learning disabilities. The purpose of the study was to determine if sociometric studies (i.e. peer nomination scales, rating scales, etc.) provide an accurate view of peer relations of students with learning disabilities. More importantly, however, the study also sought to establish the determinants of learning-disabled students' relatively low social status.

Unlike previous studies, Hoyle and Serafica looked beyond the school setting and included assessments of social networks of the home, neighborhood, and community. The researchers hypothesized that low social status can be partially attributed to cognitive variables, such as a learning-disabled child's inability to accurately view and perceive friendships. Another prediction was that ecological and environmental factors, such as the pull-out program of resource room, likewise can negatively affect the social standings of LD students (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988).

Participants included 187 students, divided into three groups: learning disabled, non-learning disabled outside of the mainstreamed classroom, and non-learning disabled within the mainstreamed classroom. All the learning-disabled children were included in regular education classrooms, but all spent part of their day receiving special services in the resource room. Peer nominations, multipoint "liking" rating scales, and social network questionnaires were used to obtain data (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988).

Upon the conclusion of this study, it was determined that LD students oftentimes did perceive friendships with classmates incorrectly. Specifically, Hoyle and Serafica (1988) state that LD children have difficulty perceiving that they are liked, or that they
like children who do not like them back. In light of the present study, it can be concluded that learning disabled children's "failure to reciprocate liking" may ultimately contribute to their lack of popularity, which thus negatively affects relationships with their non-learning disabled peers (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988, p. 328).

Lastly, the study was unable to obtain any empirical data to support the hypothesized relationship between school factors (i.e. resource room) and social status. They attribute this to the wide individual differences found in the amount of time mainstreamed and the amount of time spent in resource room (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988).

Summary

In this chapter, an investigation into the prevailing literature on this topic has been presented. Specifically, the present study has focused on two areas of consideration: inclusion classrooms versus resource room models of special education, and the perceptions and potential social consequences of resource room instruction. In the first section, social relationships between learning disabled and non-learning disabled peers were assessed and compared. Through these studies, it was determined that while learning disabled students’ social status were generally low, those students receiving resource room instruction were comparably lower than students receiving instruction in inclusive classroom settings.

In the second section, the resource room model of special education was studied more closely, with an emphasis on determining if the resource room itself, or if other factors, were contributing to the lower social statuses of learning disabled students.
Through these studies, it was determined that students who receive resource room instruction are generally less-accepted by their non-learning disabled peers. No studies, however, were able to clearly determine if lower acceptance was a result of pull-out, resource room instruction, and if the resource room still connotes a negative stigma for those who attend. Thus, it will be the aim of this study to determine if a link exists between social factors—such as the resource room, and social status.
The present study sought to determine if the resource room delivery model of special education has an impact on the peer relationships between classified and non-classified students. It was hypothesized that the resource room model of special education delivery negatively impacts the social relationships between these two populations of elementary school students. To test this hypothesis, a correlational, qualitative study had thus been designed. In this chapter, a description of the subjects and of the context in which this study took place has been provided. Additionally, the procedure of the research study, as well as a description of the data collection instruments, has also been provided.

Description of the Subjects

This study was conducted in two elementary schools located in a southern New Jersey school district. The first school, which will be referred to as School A, contained approximately 115 students, kindergarten through grade five. With the exception of first grade, there was only one class per grade level. Individual class sizes averaged approximately twenty students. The students selected for this study were in second
through fifth grade. Kindergarten and first grade were eliminated from this study because there were no classified children in either grade. Both groups were also eliminated from this study because it was believed that the students were too young to carry out the task that the study would require of them. Only those students who returned a permission slip signed by a guardian were able to participate.

School A participants were both male and female, between the ages of seven and eleven. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were Caucasian, and one-third were African American. Approximately three-fourths of the participants came from two-parent households, and one-fourth came from single-parent households. The socioeconomic status of the participants’ families ranged from middle class to lower-middle class. Approximately 20% of the students included in this study were classified as learning disabled. Of these classified children, the length of time in resource room ranged from forty-five minute sessions to two hour sessions daily.

The second school in which this study was conducted, which will be referred to as School B, was also located in the same southern New Jersey school district. This school was larger than the first. Approximately 300 students were enrolled in this school, preschool through fifth grade. There were two classes per grade, with an average of 25 students per class. To maintain consistency between both study locations, only second through fifth grade students were selected to participate. Similar to the study conducted at School A, both classified and non-classified students were solicited to participate, yet only those who returned signed permission slips were eligible to take part.

School B participants were also both male and female, ages seven through eleven. Approximately one-half of the participants were African American, one-fourth were
Caucasian, and one-fourth were Hispanic. Approximately one-half of the participants came from two-parent households, and one-half came from single-parent households. Similar to School A students, the socioeconomic status of the participants' families ranged from middle class to lower-middle class; however many more families fell within the lower-middle class socioeconomic category. A small percentage of families were categorized in the low socioeconomic category. Once again, both classified and non-classified students participated in this study. The length of time in resource room ranged from forty-five minute sessions to one hour and forty-five minute sessions daily.

In addition to students, teachers and other faculty members in both School A and School B were solicited to participate in this study. Rather than participating in an interview, which is the mode of data collection for the student subjects and is described in further detail under the Procedure and Data Collection sections, a different method was utilized for teachers and faculty. The teachers and other faculty members were asked to complete a survey, based on their experience with and knowledge of peer relationships between classified and non-classified students. All teachers, not just those in second through fifth grade, were given a survey to anonymously complete. Other faculty members who would likewise have experience working with regular and special education students, such as classroom aides, the guidance counselor, and specialty area teachers, were also given the survey.

Procedure
Both students and teachers/faculty members were solicited for participation. To do this, teachers of grades second through fifth were given a packet of information. Materials in this packet included: a letter to the teacher explaining the study and his or her role in the study if he or she chose to have their class participate (see appendix A); the Teacher/Faculty Survey to be completed and returned (see appendix B); and an Informed Consent Letter/Permission Slip for the students to take home and have it signed and returned by a parent or guardian (see appendix C).

Teachers were asked to return the packet by a predetermined deadline. Packets were returned with the following items: the signed permission slips, a class roster (with resource room students and the length of time spent in resource room indicated), and a convenient time in which the student interviews could be conducted in their class. From this information, a new class roster was developed that listed all students in the class, with those who returned permission slips indicated with an X. Special education students were noted as well, with the length of time spent in resource room indicated.

This class roster, known as the Master Class List (MCL) (see appendix D), was duplicated so that each student interviewed would have his or her information recorded on an individual sheet. From the MCL, index cards with all the student’s first names were developed. These Student Name Cards (SNC, see appendix E) were used in the actual interviewing process.

The method of data collection proceeded in the following manner. Students who returned permission slips (indicated with an X on the MCL) were called into the hallway. Student interviews were conducted in the hallway and not in the classroom so to maintain the confidentiality of the student’s selections in the peer nomination rating.
interviewer then introduced herself to the student and explained that he or she had the option of participating in a research study, and that he or she did not have to participate if they did not want to. If the student chose to participate, it was explained that his or her answers would be kept confidential.

The student being interviewed was presented with the Student Name Cards (SNC) in which all of his or her classmate’s names were written. They were spread out, face up, so that the student could read all the names. The student who was being interviewed had his or her name removed from the array. The researcher confirmed that the student was able to read all of the names on the index cards. The researcher then presented the student with the following fictional situation: “I want you to pretend that I gave you 3 stickers. Pretend I told you that you could give out these three stickers to any three people in your class. Who would be the first three people in your class that you would give the stickers to?”

Because it was determined that homework passes possessed more value to older students than did stickers, “stickers” were replaced with “homework passes” during the interviewing process for forth and fifth grade students. All students were reminded that there were no “right” or “wrong” choices, and that no one other than the researcher and the student would have knowledge of the choices made.

As the student made his or her selections, the student was asked to remove SNC with the selected student’s name from the array and place it in a separate pile. As the student did this, the researcher recorded the order in which the selections were made on a blank copy of the MCL that was premade and duplicated. The order was recorded on the
copy of the MCL using numerals (Student A-1; Student B-2; Student C-3) in a separate
column specifically for the ranking results.

After the first three selections were made, the interview proceeded in the
following manner: “Pretend I gave you 3 more stickers…Who would be the next three
students in your class that you would give them to?” As before, the student would say the
name of the student he or she was selecting, remove the index card with the student’s
name from the array, and the researcher would record the results (Student D-4; Student
E-5; Student F-6). Using groups of three, this process continued until all students in the
class had been ranked.

After the data was collected, the researcher thanked the student for his or her
participation and once again reminded the student that his or her selections would be kept
confidential. The next student was taken from class for the interview, and, using a blank
copy of the MCL to record results, the same interview routine was followed. This
process continued until all of the students eligible for participation were interviewed.

To gather information from the teachers and faculty, a Teacher/Faculty Survey
was used. Teachers were asked to complete this survey and return it directly to the
researcher or to a designated mailbox. For teachers whose classes were not selected to
participate in the study, and for other faculty members, a copy of the Teacher/Faculty
Survey was placed in their mailboxes. Additionally, a letter explaining the study and
purpose of the survey was attached. Once completed, teachers and faculty members who
chose to participate returned the survey directly to the researcher or to the designated
mailbox.
For this study, two main methods of data collection were employed. The first method of data collection involved student interviews. Specifically, the student interviews consisted of a peer nomination rating. In this type of interview, students were presented with a fictional scenario in which they had to select peers based on preference. Students made their selections until all the students had been ranked, and the rankings, or order of selections, were recorded and were later analyzed for patterns.

The second method of data collection used in this study consisted of a Teacher/Faculty Survey. The survey consisted of three open-ended questions which inquired about past experiences working with special needs children. The survey also contained one forced-choice response, in which participants had to select the main reason they feel special needs resource room students would not be accepted among their general education peers.

To collect and record data gathered from the student interviews, two main items were utilized. The first item consisted of index cards, known as Student Name Cards (SNC) which were developed for each class, grades second through fifth, who participated in the study. On the SNCs, the first names of all the students in that particular class were written in black marker- one student name per index card. If there was more than one child with the same name, the last initials were used.

The second item used to collect data was the Master Class List (MCL). The MCL consisted of a chart that was set up in the following manner: the name of the class and grade level indicated at the top; a column entitled “Name” which listed all the students in
the class, a column entitled “Permission Slip Returned,” in which an X was placed if the slip was returned for that child; a column entitled “Services Received” in which special needs students and the amount of time spent in resource room was indicated; and the final column entitled “Ranking,” where the student selections of the student being interviewed would be numerically recorded. This master list was duplicated, so that a blank copy could be used for every student interviewed.

This study also employed a Teacher/Faculty Survey, which consisted of three open-ended questions and one forced-choice response. Specifically, the open-ended questions focused on describing the social relationships of special needs children, with both their resource room classmates and their general education classmates. Another question asked teachers/faculty members to state whether or not they believe students who attend the resource room are socially accepted by their general education peers and explain why. The final item on the survey consisted of a forced-choice response, in which teachers/faculty members had to determine the main reason they believe a special needs resource room student would not be socially accepted among their general education peers. Forced-choice responses included the following, which reflect the three main trends of thought regarding special needs children and social relationships: that being pulled out for instruction limits the amount of time spent with general education peers; that special needs children are socially challenged; that the resource room carries a negative stigma that translates to the students who attend; or “other,” that required an explanation.
Chapter IV
Analysis of the Findings

Introduction

It was hypothesized that the resource room model of special education delivery negatively impacts the social relationships between classified and non-classified students. A correlational study had thus been designed to test this hypothesis. Two data collection methods were used in this study. The first method was a student interview which involved peer nomination ratings. The second method was a teacher/faculty survey. The researcher was interested in determining if resource room students were consistently ranked lower than their regular education classmates in terms of peer preference. The researcher was also interested in establishing the most likely reason why resource room students would be ranked lower in their class, in terms of peer preference. In this chapter, the procedure in which the data was analyzed from both sources has been discussed. Findings derived from this data have also been provided.

Tabulation of Raw Scores

After having completed the student interviews in both School A and School B, the data was then analyzed. The researcher first investigated the data provided by each individual student, which was tabulated and evaluated in conjunction with data collected
from other classmates. From this, class totals of data were calculated. After all class
totals of data were calculated, data totals for the school were determined. After data
totals were determined for both School A and School B, the data was combined so that
one, singular set of data could be used for statistical analysis.

The researcher tabulated data in the following manner: using the data instruments
in which individual student ranking’s were recorded (a copy of the Master Class List,
discussed in Chapter III), the researcher determined the frequency of how often the
resource room students of a particular class fell within the bottom third of the class
rankings. For example, if there were sixteen students in the class, the researcher was
interested in how many times the resource room students received a ranking of eleven,
twelve, thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen (a ranking of sixteen was not possible because the
student participating in the interview did not rank him or herself). Because each class
had different amounts of students, the criteria for the bottom third ranking varied with
each class (i.e. for a class of fifteen students, the rankings of eleven through fifteen
represented the bottom third; for a class of twenty-three students, the rankings of sixteen
through twenty-two represented the bottom third, etc.). Once the criteria was determined
for what constituted the bottom third, the researcher went through each ranking sheet
generated by the students who participated in the study. Every time a resource room
student in that particular class met the criteria for being within the bottom third of the
class, a tally mark was made. Once each participating student ranking sheet was
analyzed, the total number of tally marks was calculated to get a frequency total for the
class.
A similar process was used to determine the frequency in which the resource room students of a particular class fell within the top third. This data was important to determine so that the researcher could make comparisons between the top third and bottom third frequencies, and thus be able to establish any significance of the findings. Likewise, the bottom third and top third rankings of the regular education, non-classified students was also determined so that an additional comparison could be made between the frequencies of the resource room students (top third and bottom third) and the regular education students (top third and bottom third) could be made.

After having compiled the total top third and bottom third frequencies for both resource room and regular education students in each individual class, the researcher tabulated the total frequencies for the entire school. For School A, the researcher added together the frequency totals (for resource room students ranked in the bottom third) for second grade, third grade, fourth grade and fifth grade. Frequency totals for resource room students ranked in the top third, regular education students ranked in the bottom third, and regular education students ranked in the top third, were calculated across the grades as well. The same process was used for School B (table 1 and table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequencies of Rankings: Resource Room Students in the Bottom Third</th>
<th>Resource Room Students in the Top Third</th>
<th>Regular Education Students in the Bottom Third</th>
<th>Regular Education Students in the Top Third</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A: Tabulation of Frequencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Resource Room Students in the Bottom Third</th>
<th>Resource Room Students in the Top Third</th>
<th>Regular Education Students in the Bottom Third</th>
<th>Regular Education Students in the Top Third</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Totals:</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the frequency totals were tabulated for each individual school, the total frequencies were calculated for both schools combined. By the end of calculating the data, there were four main frequencies that were determined: the total frequency of how many times resource room students fell within the bottom third (68); the total frequency of how many times resource room students fell within the top third (54); the total frequency for how many times regular education students fell within the bottom third (333); and the total frequency for how many times regular education students fell within the top third (343) (table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequencies of Rankings:</th>
<th>Resource Room Students in the Bottom Third</th>
<th>Resource Room Students in the Top Third</th>
<th>Regular Education Students in the Bottom Third</th>
<th>Regular Education Students in the Top Third</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Grades</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the total frequencies of both schools were calculated, the researcher determined other key pieces of information prior to applying statistical analysis of the data. The researcher determined that one hundred forty-seven students were ranked in the peer nomination scales from both School A and School B. Of the one hundred forty-seven student subjects that were ranked, twenty-three were classified as learning-disabled.
and attended the resource room on a daily basis. The above mentioned frequencies were calculated based on seventy-five peer nomination ranking sheets (i.e. seventy-five subjects actually participated in the student interview, from which data was collected) (table 4).

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined Student Subject Data for School A and School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Students Ranked:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Resource Room Students Ranked:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Student Interview Subjects:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine the statistical significance of this data, a chi-square test was used. When assigning values to the data to complete the formula, the resource room group of student were noted as variable one (v1), and the regular education students were noted as variable two (v2). Resource room students who ranked within the top third were given a value of one (1), and resource room students who ranked within the bottom third were given a value of two (2). Regular education students who ranked within the top third were likewise given a value of one (1), and regular education students who ranked within the bottom third were given a value of two (2). The chi-square test revealed the Pearson chi-square value equivalent to 1.734 \( \chi^2 (1) = 1.734 \). Because the resource room and regular education student group sizes differed, attention was paid to the continuity correction value, equaling 1.485, which accounted for this imbalance. Lastly, the
probability value (P) was found to be .111 (P = .111). A resulting probability value equaling a figure less than .05 (P < .05) would have indicated statistical significance. In this study, with a P value of .111, the data derived from the peer nomination ratings was found to not be significant.

The second component to this correlational study involved Teacher/Faculty Surveys. These surveys were used primarily to determine the most likely reason why resource room students would not be socially accepted within their class. Teacher/Faculty Surveys were not separated in terms of School A or School B. Rather, all surveys were analyzed together and commonalities among them were noted.

The first three items on the survey consisted of open-ended questions in which participating teachers and faculty members could describe their opinions regarding peer relationships. The first item asked teachers and faculty members to describe the peer relationships of special needs children with their general education peers. The second item asked teachers or faculty members to describe the peer relationships of special needs resource room students with other special needs children in their peer group. The third item asked teachers and faculty members to state whether or not they feel resource room students are socially accepted by their general education peers, generally speaking. Teachers and faculty members were asked to explain their reasoning for this item.

The last item on the Teacher/Faculty Survey consisted of a forced choice response, in which participants were asked to select one of the four answer choices provided. Participants were asked to select what they believe to be the main reason for special needs resource room students to not be socially accepted among their general education peers. Answer choices included the following: being pulled out for instruction
limits the amount of time spent with general education peers; special needs children are
socially challenged; the resource room carries a negative stigma that translates to the
students who attend; or “other,” which required an explanation. These answer choices
were derived from the existing body of knowledge on resource room peer relationships,
and they reflect the three most common beliefs found in this research as to why resource
room children are less likely to be socially accepted than their regular education peers.

Between School A and School B, a total of thirty-three Teacher/Faculty Surveys
were distributed. A total of nineteen Teacher/Faculty Surveys were returned. One
completed survey, however, could not be used in the data analysis process, because more
than one answer choice was selected for the last question. Therefore, a total of eighteen
surveys were used for data analysis.

In regard to the first question of the Teacher/Faculty Survey, eighteen out of
eighteen surveys stated that peer relationships between special needs students and general
education students were generally positive. None of the eighteen surveys indicated any
negative relationships existing between classified and non-classified students. Two of the
eighteen surveys indicated that peer acceptance could be affected if the classified child
had noticeable physical disabilities, in which general education students might be less
accepting of that child. Overall, however, all surveys indicated that social ostracism
based on resource room attendance was not a factor in his or her classrooms, nor has it
been a factor in past experiences.

In regard to the second question of the Teacher/Faculty Survey, eight surveys
indicated that they believe resource room students generally form friendships with each
other rather than with the regular education peers. Reasons for why this occurs included
the resource room students having similar academic strengths and weaknesses, and that
the students spent more time together in resource room, so they are more likely to bond.
Ten of the surveys, however, indicated no noticeable pattern in regards to resource room
students forming friendships with other resource room students. While it was indicated
that resource room students may form friendships with other resource room students,
these surveys also indicated that the resource room children were just as likely to form
friendships with their regular education peers. Many of these surveys indicated that peer
friendships depended on the individual child rather than on whether or not he or she may
attend resource room.

In regard to the third question of the Teacher/Faculty Survey, eighteen out of
eighteen surveys indicated that resource room students are socially accepted by their
general education peers. Of these surveys, many participants explained that resource
room peer acceptance may depend on several conditions, such as the child’s personality,
the attitudes of the teacher, the class size, and the school size. However, none of the
surveys indicated that resource room students would be socially unaccepted simply
because they attend resource room. These surveys evidenced that the classification as a
resource room student had no bearing on peer acceptance (table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: How would you describe the peer relationships of special needs children with their regular education peers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Peer Relationships are Positive Between Groups: 18/18 or 100%

Peer Relationships are Negative Between Groups: 0/18 or 0%

**Question 2:** How would you describe the peer relationships of resource room students with other special needs children in their peer group?

Resource Room Students Mostly Form Friendships with Each Other: 8/18 or 44%

Resource Room Students Form Friendships with Each Other and with Regular Education Peers: 10/18 or 56%

**Question 3:** Do you think resource room students are socially accepted by their general education peers?

Resource Room Students Are Socially Accepted: 18/18 or 100%

Resource Room Students Are Not Socially Accepted: 0/18 or 0%

In regard to the last question on the Teacher/Faculty Survey, eight out of eighteen surveys indicated that being pulled out for instruction, limiting the amount of time spent with general education peers, was the main reason why participants believe special needs resource room students would not be socially accepted among their general education peers. Seven out of eighteen surveys indicated that special needs children being socially challenged would be the main reason for their non-acceptance. No survey indicated that the resource room carrying a negative stigma, translating to the students who attend, would be the main reason for non-acceptance. Lastly, three out of eighteen surveys indicated "other" as a response to the question. When asked to explain, these participants...
stated that they did not feel that resource room students would not be socially accepted among their general education peers, from which the researcher assumed that these participants did not understand the hypothetical nature of the question (table 6).

### Table 6
Survey Results: Item 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited Time Spent with General Education Peers:</th>
<th>Special Needs with General Children are Socially Challenged:</th>
<th>The Resource Room Carries a Negative Stigma:</th>
<th>Other:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/18 or 44%</td>
<td>7/18 or 39%</td>
<td>0/18 or 0%</td>
<td>3/18 or 17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings of this study indicated that, in regards to the peer nomination ratings, no correlation could be found between students who attend the resource room and a greater likelihood of being less socially accepted by their general education peers. It was found that resource room students were no more or less likely to be ranked in the bottom third of the class as were their regular education classmates. Similarly, regular education students were no more or less likely to be ranked in the bottom third as were their resource room classmates. The researcher’s hypothesis stated that the resource room model of special education delivery negatively impacted the social relationships between special education and regular education elementary school students. Based on the data,
which revealed no significant correlations between resource room attendance and lower peer acceptance, the hypothesis has thus been rejected.

The findings of this study also indicated that, in regards to the Teacher/Faculty Survey, most teacher and faculty subjects agreed that limited contact time between resource room and regular education students would be the most likely reason why resource room students may face peer non-acceptance (a total of 44%). This assumption was closely followed by the belief that special needs students are socially challenged, thus contributing to a lower peer acceptance (a total of 39%).
Chapter V
Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if the resource room delivery model of special education had an impact on the peer relationships between elementary special needs students who attend the resource room and their regular elementary education classmates. One specific area of concern included determining if resource room students were more likely than regular education students to face peer non-acceptance. Another area of concern included determining the most likely reason why resource room students may not be socially accepted. Using peer nomination rankings and a Teacher/Faculty Survey, data was collected. After reviewing the data, it was determined that no correlation was found between attending the resource room and lower peer acceptance. It was also found that most teacher and faculty subjects believed that the limited amount of contact time between resource room and regular education students was the most likely reason why resource room students would not be accepted by their regular education classmates.

Summary of the Problem
Given the present debate in current research over that of inclusive classroom settings versus that of pull-out resource room instruction, it was of importance to the researcher to determine whether one particular model of special education delivery was having a negative impact on the children it serves. Because pull-out, resource room models of special education delivery separates classified, special needs children from regular education students, this present study sought to determine if that placed attendants of the resource room at a social disadvantage when developing relationships with their regular elementary education classmates.

Specifically, two research questions were proposed in this study: Are resource room students more likely to be socially unaccepted compared to their regular education peers? If this is found to be the case, what are the possible explanations as to why resource room students would be less socially accepted?

Summary of the Hypothesis

The resource room model of special education delivery separates classified students from their non-classified, regular education classmates. This daily separation thus limits the amount of contact time between the two groups of students. This study hypothesized that, because of limited contact time between classified and non-classified students, the resource room model of special education delivery negatively impacts the social relationships between special education and regular education elementary school students.
Summary of the Procedure

This study was conducted at two New Jersey elementary schools. Second through fifth grade elementary school students participated in this study. Both resource room students and regular education students were included in this study, totaling seventy-five student participants in all. Students were interviewed using a peer nomination ranking. For this method of data collection, student subjects were given a fictional scenario in which they were to pretend they were given stickers or homework passes. They were then asked to "give out" these stickers or homework passes to fellow classmates based on peer preference. Student selections were made in groups of three (i.e. the first group of three students were selected and removed from the Student Name Cards, then the second group of three students were selected and removed from the SNCs, etc.) By the end of the interview, every student in the class had been given a ranking.

Additionally, this study utilized Teacher/Faculty Surveys. A total of eighteen surveys were completed and submitted to the researcher for analysis. The survey consisted of three open-ended questions, which inquired about past experiences working with special needs children, and about resource room students’ relationships with other special needs students and with regular education students. It also consisted of one-forced choice question, in which participants had to select the main reason why they feel special needs resource room students would not be accepted among their regular education peers.

Summary of the Findings
After completing the student interviews in both schools, the researcher tabulated the frequency of how often resource room students fell within the top third and the bottom third of student rankings. The researcher then tabulated the frequency of how often regular education students fell within the top third and the bottom third of student rankings. Using a chi-square formula of data analysis, these four totals were compared as to determine correlational significance. It was found that no correlation could be made between lower peer acceptance and resource room attendance.

From the Teacher/Faculty surveys, it was found that the most likely reason why resource room students would not be socially accepted was because of the limited amount of time resource room students spent in their general education classroom (a total of 44% of participants). Because resource room students are pulled out for instruction, they spend less time during the school day with their regular education peers.

It is noteworthy to mention, however, that many teacher and faculty subjects also found special needs students to have social challenges, which they believe to be the main reason for peer non-acceptance (a total of 39% of participants).

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Based on statistical analysis of the peer nomination rankings, it was determined that no significant pattern could be made between resource room attendance and lower peer acceptance. Resource room students were no more or less likely to be accepted compared with their regular education peers. Likewise, regular education students were
no more or less likely to be accepted compared with their resource room peers. This data failed to show that resource room students would consistently be ranked much more lowly than their regular education peers. Based on the data collected, a case stating that being pulled for resource room instruction inhibits social relationships cannot be made. Therefore, the findings of this study negate the researcher’s hypothesis that the resource room negatively impacts peer relationships between special needs and regular education elementary school students.

Despite this finding, some insight has been given as to why resource room students may be less socially accepted. Even though in this particular study it was proven that resource room students were socially accepted by their regular education peers, other current literary research has found instances where special needs resource room students were in fact less socially accepted. Therefore, the rationale as to why this may occur is of importance. Teacher and faculty subjects believed that the most likely reason for peer non-acceptance of resource room students was because of the limited amount of time resource room students and regular education students spend together throughout the school day. This finding, in part, supports the researcher’s hypothesis.

Due to the partial rejection of this hypothesis, the following is recommended:

1. Given the relatively small student body size of School A and School B, the researcher recommends that a similar study as the one conducted be replicated with a larger population of students. The researcher recommends larger sample sizes for both resource room students and regular education students. By having larger sample sizes, the researcher
would be able to collect more data, thereby providing more accurate results when applying statistical analysis.

2. It is also recommended that a further study be conducted in several other schools, as was not the case of the present research study. Because the school district in the present study was smaller than most others, many of the students who participated had become friends in kindergarten, and have moved up through the grades together in the same class. Therefore, because many of these children have been with the same people throughout their elementary school years, it was difficult for the researcher to determine any difference in peer acceptance based on resource room attendance alone. It is suggested that a similar study be conducted in other school districts with larger student populations where students are not as familiar with each other. By doing this data collected from all districts can be compared and trends in social acceptance may be established.

3. The researcher suggests that this study be conducted over a longer period of time. The researcher also suggests that a future study should investigate both special education delivery models discussed in this study: the resource room and inclusion. The researcher should investigate the two classroom settings simultaneously. Data regarding current student rankings should be collected in the beginning of the school year in classrooms that utilize the resource room model, and in classrooms that use the inclusion model. Towards the end of the school year, data regarding student rankings should be collected again in both classroom
settings. Using the data collected in the beginning of the school year, the researcher could establish a baseline from which to compare the second set of data. The researcher could then compare the second set of student rankings of resource room students with the second set of rankings of special needs students in the inclusive classroom. By setting up a research study that directly compares both special education delivery methods, one would be able to clearly determine which method would be more beneficial in terms of promoting peer relationships.

If resource room students are continually pulled out for instruction anywhere from one to three hours daily, these students are missing out on time interacting with their regular education peers. Because of the continual separation of these two groups of students, resource room students and regular education students alike may find it more difficult to establish friendships than would otherwise be the case had they received instruction in the same classroom. Therefore, while the researcher supports the use of the resource room for academic purposes, she also feels that the special needs student should receive instruction in an inclusive classroom setting as much as possible. By receiving instruction in an inclusive setting, where classified and non-classified students learn together in the same classroom, the special needs students will not only receive the academic support they need, but will also be afforded the opportunity to truly establish strong bonds with their peers. In effort to establish the most optimal method of instruction, continued research of this topic is necessary. Future research may reveal how special education students’ academic needs, as well as social needs, can best be met.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Letter to Teachers
School A Teachers,

Hello! My name is Jenn Howells and I am student teaching in Ms. X’s classroom. I am currently pursuing my Master’s degree in education. As part of this process, I am required to conduct research for my thesis at the school where I am student teaching.

The research study that I will be conducting is entitled *The Impact of the Resource Room on Peer Relationships*. This study investigates the social relationships that exist between general education students and special education students. Specifically, I will be investigating the resource room model of special education and the impact this model has on student relationships.

In order to conduct a valid correlational study, a large number of participants are required. It is for this reason that I am asking the assistance of 2nd through 5th grade teachers.

Your role in this research study would include the following:

- To distribute, collect, and return parental permission slips for student participation in this study (by Monday, March __).
- To provide me with a class roster, with classified students receiving resource room instruction indicated (length of time of resource room instruction per day indicated as well).
- To indicate days and times during the weeks of May 1st or May 8th that are convenient for you that I may conduct student interviews.
  - Each child (general ed and special ed) will be interviewed individually in the hallway for approximately 5 minutes. The interview itself will consist of a peer nomination rating, in which the student will be presented with a fictional scenario (“Pretend I gave you 3 stickers/homework passes…”) and asked to “give out” the stickers/homework passes to his or her classmates based on preference (“Who would be the first 3 students in your class that you would give them to?”… “Pretend I gave you 3 more stickers…Who would be the next three students you would give them to?” etc.)
  - Of course, all results will be kept strictly confidential. Students will have no knowledge of the choices made by their fellow classmates.
- To complete the *Teacher/Faculty Survey* (by Friday, March __)

If you do not wish for you or your class to participate, you may simply return the materials to me, or place the materials in Ms. X’s mailbox.

I thank you in advance for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Jenn Howells
Teacher/Faculty Survey

1. Given your experience working with special needs children (particularly those pulled out of class for resource room instruction), how would you describe the peer relationships of special needs children with their general education peers?

2. How would you describe the peer relationships of special needs resource room students with other special needs children in their peer group? (i.e. Do you feel they are more likely to formulate friendships with each other; Do they generally “stick together” in the general education classroom; Are they socially withdrawn? etc.).

3. Based on your experiences and observations, do you think resource room students are socially accepted by their general education peers (generally speaking)? Why or why not?

4. In your opinion, what do you believe to be the main reason for special needs resource room students to not be socially accepted among their general education peers? Select one.

   ___ Being pulled out for instruction limits the amount of time spent with general education peers.

   ___ Special needs children are socially challenged.

   ___ The resource room carries a negative stigma that translates to the students who attend.

   ___ Other (Please explain).
Appendix C

Informed Consent Letter/Permission Slip
School A Friends and Families,

Hello! My name is Jenn Howells and I am student teaching in Ms. X’s classroom. As a Rowan University Graduate student, I am currently pursuing my Master’s degree in education. As part of this process, I am required to conduct research for my thesis paper at the school where I am student teaching.

The research study that I will be conducting is entitled The Impact of the Resource Room on Peer Relationships. This study will investigate the peer relationships that exist between general education students and special education students. Specifically, I will be investigating the resource room model of special education and its impact on 2nd through 5th grade student relationships.

For this study, I will be conducting individual student interviews. The interviews will be approximately 5 minutes long and will be conducted in a private area. The interview will consist of a peer nomination rating, which will proceed in the following manner:

- The student will be presented with a fictional scenario (“Pretend I gave you 3 stickers/homework passes)
- The student will be asked to “give out” the stickers/homework passes to his or her classmates based on preference (“Who would be the first 3 students in your class that you would give them to?”... “Pretend I gave you 3 more stickers/homework passes... Who would be the next three students you would give them to?” etc.

Of course, the information gathered from the interview will be kept strictly confidential (only myself and Dr. Randall Robinson, my thesis advisor, will have access to this information). At no point will any names be used in the writing and publication of the thesis. Students will have no knowledge of the choices made by their fellow classmates.

If you permit your child to participate in this study, kindly fill out the attached permission slip and give to your child to return to his or her teacher no later than Monday, March ___. If you have any questions, please feel free to talk to me after school hours or send me an email: xxxxx@students.rowan.edu.

I thank you in advance for your time and cooperation 😊

Sincerely,

I permit ____________________________ , grade __________
(name of child)

To participate in the research study, “The Impact of the Resource Room on Peer Relationships.”

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________
Appendix D

Sample Master Class List (MCL)
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<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Permission Slip Returned</th>
<th>Services Received</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>(student interviewed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>RR/ 1hr 30m</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student G</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student H</td>
<td></td>
<td>RR/ 45m</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>RR/ 45m</td>
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<tr>
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<td>in process of CL</td>
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</table>
Appendix E

Sample Student Name Cards (SNCs)
Thomas

Linda