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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE RATE OF PARTICIPATION
OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND
FACTORS INHIBITING THEIR
PARTICIPATION

by
Lyn Vetter

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
1997

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 4/28/97

ABSTRACT

Lyn Vetter

A Study to Determine the Rates of Participation of Special Education Students in Extracurricular Activities and Factors Inhibiting Their Participation, 1997.

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Stanley Urban
Learning Disabilities

This study compared special education students who join extracurricular activities versus those that do not join, and identified factors that inhibit participation in the various extracurricular activities that are offered. Twenty special education students at the seventh and eighth grade levels enrolled in the Mullica Township Middle School were interviewed individually during their study hall period to determine the extent of their participation in extracurricular activities. Their responses were recorded and analyzed to determine the rate of participation. The groups were then divided into participants and non-participants and responses were content analyzed. Results showed that the majority of this sample of special education students were involved in at least one extracurricular activity. It was also shown that the major inhibiting factor for participation was lack of time.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to compare special education students who join extracurricular activities and those that do not join, and thereby identify the factors that inhibit participation in the various extracurricular activities that are offered. Results showed that the majority of the students interviewed joined at least one extracurricular activity. The inhibiting factor that was present in the majority of cases was lack of time.

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ABSTRACT

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Chapter 1

The Problem

Introduction

Special education students are included in the regular education program with increasing frequency. Even though they attend regular classes, there is little evidence of inclusion in the area of extracurricular activities. In order to be a fully participating member of the regular education program, special education students need to feel as though they belong in these activities as much as they belong in the classroom. Studies have indicated that one of the possible obstacles to involvement in extracurricular activities for these students is poor development of social skills.

Theory

Special education students benefit from being included in the regular academic programs that schools have to offer. For students to be considered fully included, they must also take part in extracurricular activities. Studies have shown that as students spend more time in the general education program, isolation decreases, and they are more likely to be affiliated with school or community groups (SRI International, 1991).

In addition, academic performance can be positively affected by the nonacademic benefits of mainstreaming such as improved self-esteem and increased motivation. It is for this reason that special education students need to be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compare special education students who join extracurricular activities and those that do not join. An attempt will be made to identify the factors that inhibit participation in the various extracurricular activities that are offered by the school district.

Research Questions

Questions considered in this study were as follows:

1. What is the proportion of the special education population in the Mullica Township Middle School that participates in extracurricular activities compared to the participation rate of the regular education population?
2. What are the reasons stated by special education students for not participating in various extracurricular activities?
3. What is the frequency of participation of each special education child in extracurricular activities?
4. What strategies for increasing involvement of special education children in extracurricular activities are suggested by the findings?

Value of the Study

Much study has gone into the academic needs of special education students that are being included in the mainstream. Very little investigation has occurred in the area of extracurricular activities. This is an aspect of education that needs to be studied if students with disabilities are to benefit from a well-rounded school experience. Learning disabled students tend to see themselves as less able in academic achievements, but not in areas involving extracurricular activities. An examination of the traits and motivation of "joiners" should offer insight, suggestions, or strategies to involve more special education students in extracurricular activities. It is to be hoped that the findings can identify these variables, then they could be used to help special education students become part of the total school environment.

Many of the studies conducted in this area use elementary age students. This study will focus on Junior High level students in the seventh and eighth grades. This is a critical period in the social development of children and suggestions for increasing participation in extracurricular activities would be particularly useful.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study were as follows:

1. Since this is an exploratory study, there is very little literature on this specific topic. Articles have been written on the benefits of joining extracurricular activities for regular education students, but very little can be found in the area of special education. The majority of the literature is related to the regular education

population, but it is assumed that the generalizations can be applied to special education students as well.

2. Most of the research that has been done in this area is based on severely handicapped students. For this study, interviews will be conducted with resource room and mildly handicapped students. This will limit the generalizability of the findings of the present study.

Definition of Terms

Extracurricular activities - any club, sport, organization, or activity that takes place apart from the academic component of the school. These may include activities that are sponsored by agencies outside of the school.

Inclusive Education - a provision of education and related services to all special education students in the regular classroom setting for all or a substantial part of the school day (National Education Association, 1993).

Learning Disabled (LD) - having a disorder in learning which affects listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic skills. Students' performance exhibits a significant discrepancy between potential and achievement. These learning problems are not due to mental retardation or emotional disturbances.

Mainstreaming - the movement of individual students with physical, emotional, and learning disabilities from their segregated status in special education

classes to integration with regular students in regular classrooms.

Multiply Handicapped - the presence of two or more educationally disabling conditions which interact in such a manner that programs designed for the separate disabling conditions will not meet the pupil's educational needs.

Perceptually Impaired - a specific learning disability manifested by a severe discrepancy between the pupil's current achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas: basic skills, reading comprehension, oral expression, listening comprehension, mathematics computation, mathematics reasoning and written expression.

Special Education - specially designed instruction that meets the unique needs of a student with academic, physical, or emotional disabilities including instruction conducted in the classroom, home, hospitals, other institutions and other settings, and instruction in physical education (National Education Association, 1993).

Students with Disabilities / Handicaps - students with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities and who, by reason thereof, need special education and related services (National Education Association, 1993).

Socially Integrated - member of group and is socially accepted, has at least one reciprocal friendship, and actively and equally participates in activities performed by the group.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Empirical studies have demonstrated that extracurricular activities play a very large role in the development of middle school popularity (Eder and Kinney, 1995). These activities are frequently the center of the adolescents' social concerns. It is within these activities that adolescents begin to find their niche in the school community. Participation in certain activities, especially sporting events, increases the students' status among their peers.

Sporting events are the main cultural events of schools; community interest makes these events even more popular. Participation in sports is perceived to be more prestigious than participation in other events. The male participant in any sport is immediately included in the popular clique in school. He becomes the "athletic star" (Goldberg and Chandler, 1989). On the other hand, the popularity of girls is dependent on the type of activity that they join. It is hard to determine whether popular students tend to participate in these activities or whether participation in these activities leads to an increase in popularity (Eder and Kinney, 1995).

Research shows that special education students and regular education students differ very little in their self-concept (Sabornie, 1994). It is felt that a student's self-concept plays a large role in what they perceive as their capabilities. Self-concept is generally only a problem when it concerns school-related functioning (Carrol, Friedrich, and Hund, 1984). Learning disabled students see themselves as less able in most areas

other than extracurricular activities. Researchers look at this as a form of selective comparison to enhance self-worth (Johnsen and Tracy, 1994).

Self-esteem can be a problem with all adolescents whether they are special education or regular education. Studies indicate that adolescents show a decline in involvement in school related activities during middle school and junior high school years (Sabornie, 1994).

Special education students generally participate less in extracurricular activities than their regular education counterparts (Deshler and Schumaker, 1983). These participation levels need to be addressed to make the special education students' life more like that of the regular education student in social as well as academic areas.

An area of particular concern is that of belonging to a group. Middle and junior high school students with severe disabilities are similar to their counterparts without disabilities with regard to loneliness (Sabornie, Thomas and Coffman, 1989). All students in this age level need help with social skills necessary for forming friendships. The literature demonstrates that students interact differently with aggressive, rejected, and ignored students than they do with socially accepted classmates (Dodge, 1983). For this reason special education students need extra help and opportunities to practice, refine, and expand their social skill repertoires (Hendrickson, Shokoohi-Yekta, Hamre-Nietupski and Gable, 1996).

Special education students are being included more frequently in regular education academic situations, but are still not as thoroughly included in other areas of the school community. In an attempt to determine why this is so, researchers have looked at many

different aspects of the regular and special education programs. They have researched students from both programs and have found some similarities and differences within the two groups.

Students interact differently with aggressive, rejected, and ignored students than they do with socially accepted classmates. As a result, students with severe disabilities experience fewer opportunities to practice, refine, and expand their social skill repertoires, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will develop friendships (Hendrickson, Shokoolu-Yekta, Hamre-Nietupski, and Gable, 1996, p. 19).

Students that do not belong to any social group within the school setting or are perceived as outsiders, are less likely to join any of the various extracurricular activities that the school offers. This isolates them even more and the cycle continues. For this reason, it is important that the special education students are given assistance developing their social skills so that they will be accepted by their peers and made to feel as if they belong. This will in turn promote friendships between regular and special education students and increase the likelihood of special education students becoming a part of a club or organization.

Learning disabled students see themselves as being less able in most areas associated with school achievement except for extracurricular activities. In that area they see themselves as equal to regular education students (Johnsen and Tracy, 1994). The key to successful mainstreaming is the establishment and maintenance of favorable social interactions with peers (Cullinan, Sabornie, and Crossland, 1992). This needs to be done on two levels, physical and social. The physical area usually is the more successful one. It

includes the placement of the special education students in the regular education classroom. The social aspect is the part that presents problems for some students. It is the lack of appropriate social behavior that keeps the special education students from being totally included in the program.

Most educators generally consider learning disabled students to have social difficulties. These poor peer relations of students with disabilities are caused by these social difficulties (Farmer and Farmer, 1996). Individuals usually choose friends and associates that are similar to themselves. Compared to non-handicapped students, students with disabilities have more negative conscious and unconscious self-concepts, higher anxiety levels, more negative perceptions of intellectual abilities, school status and popularity, and more emotional feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, guilt, impulsivity, and immaturity (Jones, 1985). These negative school related self-concepts sometimes include extracurricular activities. Learning disabled students tend to have lower opinions of their cognitive abilities, and less favorable perceptions of their physical abilities, however, this is not a general dissatisfaction with themselves (Kistner, Haskert, White, and Robbins, 1987).

Summary

In summary, reviews of the literature reveal that there is a lack of research related to extracurricular participation of youngsters in inclusive education programs. Most studies that have been done are targeted toward the regular education population. This is an area that needs to be considered when evaluating a special education student's

performance in the regular education setting. It is of great importance that teachers consider the social implications that participation in extracurricular activities will have on the development of the special education student.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Mullica Township Middle School is located on a 20-acre campus in western Atlantic County, New Jersey and serves the municipality of Mullica Township. The Mullica area consists of a rural setting. Most of the land is forested, beginning in the Pine Barrens, and there are also many farms. There are only four housing developments in the township and these are very small. The community is ethnically diverse, but the student body remains primarily white with other ethnic groups making up to 30% of the population. A large majority of households are in the low - to middle - income level. Many of the households are on some type of public assistance.

The total population of Mullica Middle School is approximately 350 student with 69% white, 12% black, 17% Hispanic, and 3% other. Approximately 15% of the students are in the special education program.

Sample

The students interviewed for this study were seventh and eighth grade classified students. This sample included students who attend the resource room as well as students in one of the two self-contained rooms. There are 11 seventh graders and nine eighth graders included in the sample. Approximately 80% of the classified student population are male, and 20% are female.

Table 3.1
Classifications of Subjects
(N = 20)

Subject	Grade	Sex	Classification
1	7	M	MH
2	7	M	MH
3	7	M	MH
4	7	M	MH
5	7	M	MH
6	7	M	PI
7	7	M	PI
8	7	M	PI
9	7	F	PI
10	7	F	MH
11	7	F	PI
12	8	M	PI
13	8	M	MH
14	8	M	MH
15	8	M	PI
16	8	M	PI
17	8	M	PI
18	8	F	PI
19	8	M	PI
20	8	M	PI

Males = 16 MH = Multiply Handicapped

Females = 4 PI = Perceptually Impaired

Mullica Township Middle School offers a variety of after-school activities for all its students. These activities include art club, alliance club, band, basketball (girls' and boys'), cross-country, drama, honor society, safety patrol, student council, technology club, and yearbook. This study will examine the numbers of special education students that join these activities, and the reasons for their participation.

Measures

This is an exploratory study and there are no formal measures that address this topic. For this reason, the inventory that was used consisted of six questions designed to explore the reasons for involvement in the various activities offered by the school. This questionnaire is listed in Appendix A of this study. It was administered orally, and individually to each student. An attempt was also made to find out the reasons behind their level of involvement, and what, if anything, could be done to increase this level. The interviews were administered during the regular school day. All students were interviewed during their study hall period and their responses were recorded.

Design and Analysis of the Data

The initial interviews were conducted in the month of January 1997 during the regular school day. The data was then analyzed with regard to the number of activities each student was involved in and the reasons for lack of involvement. Percentages were compared to the numbers of non-classified students in each of the clubs.

Chapter 4

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to compare special education students who join extracurricular activities and those that do not join, and to identify the factors that inhibit participation in the various extracurricular activities that are offered. The students were orally administered an individual questionnaire to determine the extent of their participation in extracurricular activities. It was also used to determine reasons for non-involvement and the termination of participation in various clubs.

Tables 4.1 to 4.4 present information on the various subjects and their participation in extracurricular activities. Percentages are compared to the regular education students' participation in the various activities.

Examination of Tables 4.1 to 4.4 reveals that 85% of the classified students are involved in at least one activity. It is further shown that the major contributing factor to non-participation was not enough time. When questioned about this response, the students stated that they were involved with general "hanging out with friends", helping their parents with younger siblings, and going places with their parents.

Table 4.1

Percentages of Each Club That Are Special Education Students
(N = 20)

Activity	Percentage of Special Education Students	
Art Club	9%	(N = 2)
Band	11%	(N = 5)
Baseball	Not Available *	
Basketball - Boys'	13%	(N = 3)
Basketball - Girls'	4%	(N = 1)
Boxing	Not Available *	
Cheerleading	Not Available *	
Chorus	2%	(N = 1)
Cross Country	6%	(N = 3)
Drill Team	Not Available *	
Drama	8%	(N = 3)
Football	Not Available *	
Gymnastics	4%	(N = 1)
Hockey	Not Available *	
Honor Society	0%	
Industrial Technology	17%	(N = 2)
Municipal Alliance	7%	(N = 4)
Safety Patrol	9%	(N = 3)
Student Council	5%	(N = 1)
Soccer	Not Available *	
Wrestling	Not Available *	
Yearbook	6%	(N = 4)

* Data not available due to activity being held outside of the school community.

Analysis of Table 4.1

Analysis of Table 4.1 shows that industrial technology has the largest percentage of special education students participating in it. This percentage is low, 17%, but it is proportional to the total middle school population that is enrolled in special education. Boys' basketball is the second club with a high proportional percentage of special education student involvement. Honor Society has the lowest percentage with no special education students involved with that club. The next lowest club is girls' basketball, with an involvement rate of just 4%. Part of the reason for a low rate of involvement with girls' basketball may be that there are very few female special education students and therefore a smaller pool of potential players is available.

Table 4.2
Percentages of Students Involved with Each Activity
As Compared to the Total Number in Each Group

Activity	Percentage of Special Education Students (N = 20)	Percentage of Regular Education Students (N = 161)
Art Club	10%	12%
Band	25%	11%
Baseball	Not Available *	Not Available *
Basketball - Boys'	15%	13%
Basketball - Girls'	5%	17%
Boxing	Not Available *	Not Available *
Cheerleading	Not Available *	Not Available *
Chorus	5%	10%
Cross Country	15%	12%
Drill Team	Not Available *	Not Available *
Drama	15%	13%
Football	Not Available *	Not Available *
Gymnastics	5%	7%
Hockey	Not Available *	Not Available *
Honor Society	0%	7%
Industrial Tech.	10%	4%
Municipal Alliance	20%	18%
Safety Patrol	15%	15%
Student Council	5%	6%
Soccer	Not Available *	Not Available *
Wrestling	Not Available *	Not Available *
Yearbook	20%	27%

* Data not available due to activity being held outside of the school community.

Analysis of Table 4.2

Analysis of Table 4.2 shows the percentages of special education and regular education students that are involved with each club. These figures were obtained by counting the number of special education and regular education students that were in each club and dividing that number by the total number in each group (20 for the special education sample, 161 for the regular education sample).

Visual inspection of the data shows that six of the 23 clubs listed have a higher percentage of special education students that join them than do regular education students. These clubs include band, boys' basketball, cross country, drama, industrial technology, and municipal alliance. One of the clubs listed, safety patrol, has the same percentage of special education students and regular education students. There is no data for the eight clubs that operate outside of the school.

Table 4.3

Frequency of Involvement of Each Subject

Subject	Grade	Current Participation	Previously Participated In	Desire Participation
1	7	2	0	0
2	7	2	1	1
3	7	5	0	1
4	7	2	0	1
5	7	0	1	1
6	7	1	3	2
7	7	2	2	1
8	7	0	2	1
9	7	0	0	3
10	7	1	0	1
11	7	3	1	0
12	8	2	0	0
13	8	6	0	3
14	8	1	2	1
15	8	2	3	0
16	8	1	1	0
17	8	1	1	1
18	8	2	2	1
19	8	2	3	0
20	8	1	0	1

Analysis of Table 4.3

Analysis of Table 4.3 reveals that most special education students (85%) are involved with at least one extracurricular activity, which is a high percentage of involvement. 30% are involved in one club, 40% are involved with two clubs, 5% show involvement with three, five and six clubs, and 0% are involved with four clubs. When the data for wanting to join another club was analyzed, it was found that 30% of the special education students were happy with their overall involvement and would not want to join another club, on the other hand, 55% of the students interviewed wanted to be involved with one more club, 5% wanted to become active in two more clubs and 10% would want to join three more clubs. This data shows that special education students, given the right motivation and encouragement, would become more involved with the extracurricular activities offered.

Table 4.4

Reasons for Non-Involvement

Subject	Reasons for non-involvement
1	not enough time
2	it gets boring
3	parents won't give permission
4	none given
5	none given
6	don't want to hurt grades
7	no ride
8	leg hurts
9	parents won't let join/ problem with fees
10	crippled hand
11	too much homework
12	not enough time
13	none given
14	not enough time
15	other people in clubs; snobs and punks
16	don't like sports
17	none given
18	too much to do
19	not enough time
20	don't know people involved with them

Analysis of Table 4.4

Analysis of Table 4.4 reveals that the subjects perceive “not enough time” as the major contributing factor to their lack of participation. The next most frequent response was too much homework, and the fact that their parents would not let them join clubs. When questioned about the later response, one of the subjects said that their parents were punishing them for breaking their curfew by refusing to let them join any clubs.

Further analysis of this table can reveal some strategies that could be used to get more special education students to join the various extracurricular activities:

1. Talk to the parents to find out why they won't let their child join an activity. Stress the importance of participation for the students' social development.
2. Provide support or modifications for any student that has a physical disability that is preventing them from participating.
3. Design a “Buddy System” to ensure that the special education students know at least one other person in the club. This “Buddy” could be a regular education student or another special education student that is already in the club, or is interested in joining.
4. Work with the special education students to improve social skills that will help them to be accepted into the activities.

Research Question Analysis

Answers to the research questions are based on the analysis of the data previously presented.

1. What is the proportion of the special education population in the Mullica Township Middle School that participate in extracurricular activities compared to the participation rate of the regular education population ?

The data from this study shows that the percentage of participation of special education students is comparable to that of regular education students. Some activities have a higher percentage of special education participation. These clubs include band, boys' basketball, cross country, drama, industrial technology, and municipal alliance. Further analysis reveals that the following clubs have less special education participation than regular education participation: art club, chorus, girls' basketball, gymnastics, honor society, student council and yearbook. One club, safety patrol, had the same percentage of participation for special education and regular education students.

2. What are the reasons given by special education students for not participating in various extracurricular activities?

The findings of this study show that the most frequently given reason for lack of participation in extracurricular activities is lack of time. The students stated that they were involved with caring for younger siblings, going places with their parents and just "hanging out" with their friends. The other reason that was given with some frequency was that the students had too much homework to do. This is an understandable answer since most of the students interviewed were in the resource room and mainstreamed for part of the day.

3. What is the frequency of participation of each special education child in extracurricular activities?

From the data collected, the following conclusions can be drawn: 30% of the special education students in the Mullica Township Middle School are involved in one activity, 40% are involved in two activities, 5% are involved in three, five, and six extracurricular activities.

4. What strategies for increasing involvement of special education children in extracurricular activities are suggested by the findings?

The findings suggest a variety of strategies that may be used to increase the frequency of participation in extracurricular activities for special education students. One strategy is talking to parents to determine the cause of non-participation. Some parents may withhold permission as a form of punishment. Alternative suggestions could be given and the importance of having the special education student become fully included in the school community should be stressed. Other strategies would include teaming the special education student with a buddy, offering modifications or accommodations to allow the student to participate, and providing the student with social skill training that would ease their acceptance by regular education students.

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare special education students who join extracurricular activities with those that do not join. An attempt was made to identify the factors that inhibit participation in the various extracurricular activities that are offered. Seventh and eighth grade students from the Mullica Township Middle School in southern New Jersey were interviewed to determine the extent of their involvement in extracurricular activities. The subjects were individually questioned and their verbal responses recorded in written form. The questionnaire used in the interviews is included in Appendix A.

Data was collected in the span of one week during January of 1997. Each subject was interviewed during their study hall period. The percentages of students involved were than compared to the percentages of regular education students involved in the various activities. No information was available for those activities that were conducted outside of school. The findings of this study identify a variety of reasons for lack of participation in extracurricular activities.

Conclusion

The following conclusions are supported by the findings of this study:

1. Special education students in this study join extracurricular activities at about the same rate as do regular education students.
2. Special education students had higher percentages of participation in six of the 12 activities where data was available. The sample group also had the same level of participation in one activity, and a lower level of participation in five activities.
3. Twenty percent of the special education students list lack of time as the number one reason for not being involved in extracurricular activities.
4. Some special education students stated they had no desire to be involved in any additional extracurricular activities.
5. Seventy percent of special education students have at least one activity they want to be involved in, but have not yet joined.

Implications for Further Study

Similar studies involving a larger sample might provide more reliable results. The study could be broadened to include fifth and sixth grade students also. Information regarding the number of students in the extracurricular activities held outside of school may also be helpful.

A separate parent questionnaire might also lend some insights into reasons for student participation or lack of participation. It is therefore recommended that further research be conducted to offer more insights into reasons for non- participation.

Despite the shortcomings of the methods used in this study, the findings do indicate a lack of participation of special education students in extracurricular activities. The results of this study imply that these students need to be given incentives to become involved in extracurricular activities to involve them in a total inclusive school setting.

APPENDIX A:-
QUESTIONNAIRE

**APPENDIX A -
QUESTIONNAIRE**

NAME _____

AGE _____ DOB _____

CLASSIFICATION _____

1. What clubs, sports, and activities, in or out of school, do you belong to or participate in during the current school year?

2. Do you hold a leadership position in any of these clubs, sports teams, or activities?

3. What clubs have you belonged to in the past?

4. Why did you stop participating in these clubs?

5. Would you like to be in more clubs?

6. What would get you to join more clubs?

7. What clubs, sports, or activities would you like to join?

8. What do you see as inhibitors to joining clubs?

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