

Inclusion: Do General Education Teachers Feel they are
Equipped to Teach Special Education Students?

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Inclusion: Do General Education Teachers Feel they are
Equipped to Teach Special Education Students?

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study was conducted to determine if general education teachers felt they were equipped to teach special education students, as well as to determine what special education teaching strategies general education teachers implemented in their classrooms. A survey was sent out to all middle school teachers within an Eastern Washington school district. The majority of teachers supported inclusion, but many felt ill-prepared to work with special education students. Participants responded that they currently utilized many of the teaching strategies used in special education, but several weak areas were found. The researcher concluded that teachers were in favor of inclusion and utilized some special education strategies but professional development should be offered to those teachers that were interested.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

Were general education teachers equipped to teach special education students within a general education classroom? The most recent trend in education placed special education students in as many mainstream classes as possible, aimed to fulfill legal requirements to place a student in the least restrictive environment. However, this trend raised several important questions. Was inclusion of special education students the best placement for the student? Did general education teachers, who often possessed no special education endorsement, have the skills needed to provide the care necessary to effectively teach these students? Did these teachers have the legal knowledge of the expectations and rights of special education students that the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) demanded? The purpose of this project was to investigate answers to these questions.

Statement of the Problem

To fulfill law requirements as well as best serve students, special education (SPED) students had been placed in as many general education (GENED) classes as appropriate, otherwise known as the least restrictive environment (LRE). While this was a commonly held practice, it presented several challenges. General education teachers were often not provided with the professional development (PD) necessary to effectively teach special education students. General education teachers were often not aware of special education teaching strategies, classroom management strategies appropriate for special education students, or aware of the nature of the disabilities and the necessary accommodations. With these shortcomings, was a general education classroom really the best placement for a special education student?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project was to collect evidence of how well prepared general education teachers believed they were to teach special education

students in a general education setting. This evidence was collected in the form of teacher surveys.

Delimitations

The survey took place in a mid-size school district. The student population was 11,280, with 5,777 males and 5,503 females. The district had a student population that was 80.2% White, 10.4% Hispanic, 2.6% Black, with the remaining population having been a different minority. Within the district 28.5% of students received free or reduced lunch and 10.5% of students received special education services (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2011).

A survey was sent to the three middle schools in the district at the beginning of second semester with the hope of getting as many surveys returned as possible. The research was conducted within the 2011-2012 school year, assessing the degree to which general education teachers believed they were equipped to teach special education students. The results of

the survey were then analyzed and evaluated to determine if professional development was needed.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that general education teachers in Washington State had similar education experiences as those in southern states where similar studies had been conducted. In previous studies, general education teachers had classes with special education students regardless of the teacher's training and professional development (Trzcinka & Grskovic, 2011).

Research Question

Did general education teachers believe they were properly trained to teach special education students in a general education classroom?

Significance of the Project

Similar studies collected evidence to suggest general education teachers believed they had not received a sufficient amount of professional development or other training to prepare them to teach special education students (Trzcinka & Grskovic,

2011). Teachers also had little knowledge about learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), autism, Asperger's syndrome, or other disabilities commonly represented in a general education classroom, nor knowledge of special education teaching strategies (Trzcinka & Grskovic, 2011).

If the findings of Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) were applicable to other school districts than the ones that were studied, then a significant change in the amount and direction of professional development was necessary. Recent trends in education emphasized the importance of putting students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible, which commonly placed special education students in a general education classroom, even when many general educators did not have special education teaching endorsements. The study would be significant in allocating funds to increase professional development in this area in order to better prepare teachers for those students.

Procedure

A survey was carefully constructed using the Likert scale to determine teacher perception of his or her own preparedness to teach special education students. This survey was emailed to all middle school teachers in the district along with a request to answer the questions honestly and to return promptly. Of the 200 surveys sent out...were returned. The researcher then used the statistical tool chi square to generate data in order to best explain the outcome of the surveys.

Definition of Terms

Asperger's syndrome. Asperger's syndrome was a developmental disorder characterized by severely impaired social skills, repetitive behaviors, and often, a narrow set of interests, but not involving delayed development of linguistic and cognitive abilities, considered one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders.

autism. Autism was a pervasive developmental disorder of children, characterized by impaired

communication, excessive rigidity, and emotional detachment.

least restrictive environment. The least restrictive environment was the placement of a special needs student in a manner promoting the maximum possible interaction with the general school population. Placement options were offered on a continuum including regular classroom with no support services, regular classroom with support services, designated instruction services, special day classes and private special education programs (Hancock, 2009).

individualized education plan. Individualized education plans were written documents that stated goals, objectives and services for students that received special education (Hancock, 2009).

inclusion. Inclusion was a term used to describe service that placed students with disabilities in general education classrooms with appropriate support services (Hancock, 2009).

Likert scale. The Likert scale was an instrument on which individuals responded to a series of

statements by indicating whether they strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), were undecided (U), disagreed (D), or strongly disagreed (SD) with each statement (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

mainstreaming. Mainstreaming was a term used to describe the integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms for part of the school day. The remainder of the day was in a special education classroom (Hancock, 2009).

Acronyms

ADD. Attention Deficit Disorder

ADHD. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

CEC. Council for Exceptional Children

FAPE. Free Appropriate Public Education

FCS. Family and Consumer Sciences

GENED. General Education

IDEA. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP. Individualized Education Plan

LRE. Least Restrictive Environment

OSPI. Office of Superintendent of Public

Instruction

PD. Professional Development

SPED. Special Education

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The researcher chose literature to best support research written on the following topics: legal requirements of special education, best practices of special education, and teacher perception of inclusion. The literature that was reviewed was informative to the researcher and supported the research.

Legal Requirements of Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) granted rights for students with disabilities as well as regulations for the schools those students attended. According to Essex (2008) IDEA stipulated that all schools that received federal money were required to provide a free and public education (FAPE) to all qualifying children who had a disability. According to Essex (2008), all public schools had to identify and evaluate all children with disabilities to determine what educational needs they had, provide

a free and appropriate education to meet those needs, and they had to have done so in a timely manner.

Essex also described the components of a FAPE--each student had the right to an individualized education plan (IEP) and was to receive specifically designed instruction and services at the expense of the public (2008). An essential piece of a FAPE was the IEP, which was required to be written with input from regular education teachers and parents in addition to the special education teacher. If for any reason these requirements were not met in a timely manner, the school risked being sued or being forced to pay for the student's education at another establishment (Essex, 2008).

Christle and Yell (2010) purposed to review the legal requirements that IDEA required of an IEP and then reviewed common litigations involving special education services. Their study found that an IEP was required to state a student's current academic capabilities, set measurable goals, have a method of monitoring progress, describe special education

services, dictate time spent in general education classrooms and on assessments, and provide a timeline for services rendered (Christle & Yell, 2010). Christle and Yell (2008) found that of the court cases that they reviewed, more than half of the lawsuits were lost by the school districts because of procedure failure such as failure to include all required IEP members in the process, failure to include IDEA components, failure to provide services based on student need, not availability or cost, or the failure to fully implement services in a timely manner. Christle and Yell (2008) also found that special education was the fastest growing area of litigation and IEP content was lacking in many areas. Christle and Yell (2008) concluded that interventions were much more successful with clear goals and targets and that it was essential that educators got it right when creating and implementing IEPs. IDEA demanded certain procedures be followed and services be provided no matter what the cost or availability. Well-trained

staff caused all areas to improve, and suggested that training be more accessible to the public.

Another important legal document was the Code of Practice for Special Education Needs of 2001. Goepel (2009) investigated how well this document was being utilized and followed by educators that were developing IEPs. This Code of Practice was revised to stipulate that the special education teacher, parents, child, and general education teachers should be involved in the process of an IEP. Goepel followed students through the IEP process to determine if involving parent, teacher, and child was most beneficial to the student.

Goepel (2009) cited four case studies of students with IEPs from a middle school in England. She also examined each child's IEP once it was completed and compared the needs and accommodations listed with the needs and accommodations verbalized by teacher, parent, and child. In addition, Goepel explained some of the history leading up to the revision of the Code of Practice to support the need for teacher, parent,

and student involvement in the IEP process. Goepel found that of the four students that were studied, only three of their feedback on their needs were taken into consideration when the IEP was written. These three students could explain most of their objectives and seemed to buy into the process. The fourth student whose opinion was overlooked was disengaged from the interventions suggested in the IEP and didn't really care to follow the plan (Goepel, 2009). Goepel also noted that the teacher's voice seemed to be more dominant than that of the parents or child, but the parents did not see it as an issue because of the teacher's expertise. She concluded that students who were involved in the IEP process and who were asked what they thought their areas of struggle were, as well as what some solutions might be, were much more likely to follow the steps laid out in the IEP.

IDEA stipulated all students were entitled to FAPE, no matter what their ability level. Parents were entitled to be involved in the special education process and were a crucial piece. If parents

disagreed with the school, they were entitled to a due process hearing. These cases generally went to the Federal Court but could be brought to the Supreme Court in the appeals process. Yell, Ryan, Rozalski, and Katsiyannis (2009) examined four Supreme Court cases from 2005-2007 that involved special education. With each case they explained the IDEA procedural rights of parents, reviewed rulings, and discussed implications for future cases.

In the Supreme Court case of *Schaffer v. Weast*, the question of the burden of persuasion was brought up. The parents felt that their son, Shaffer, hadn't been provided with a FAPE. After the parents had enrolled their son in a private school that they felt provided FAPE, they sought compensation for the tuition. The court found that both parties presented equally compelling cases so the decision would have been made in favor of whichever party did not bear the burden of persuasion. The court found that the burden of persuasion fell on whichever party requested the due process hearing, in this case, the parents. The

judge ruled in favor of the school district because the parents couldn't prove Shaffer wasn't provided a FAPE.

In the Federal Court case of Arlington Central School District Board of Education v. Murphy, the parents sought reimbursement from the school district for private school tuition. Federal court found in favor of the school district, just as it had in Shaffer v. Weast. However, the parents then sought fees for an educational consultant they had hired for the trial and won. The school district took the case to the Supreme Court which overturned the federal court's decision.

A common thread seen throughout litigations was that the law must be followed to the letter. When it was not, courts did not find in favor of school districts. Parents had to be meaningfully involved in the IEP process, and researchers and administrators needed to understand FAPE and IDEA requirements or risk being sued. Special education teachers must be able to make an IEP that was both meaningful and

legally sound. In order to ensure these things, inservice training must be provided in new research-based practices for special education.

Effective Practices in Special Education

Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) researched effective behavioral practices utilized in alternative education settings for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Students with emotional or behavioral disorders were found to have had more frequent suspension, expulsion, academic failure, and a higher dropout rate. Neitzel (2010) described the behavior of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Students with ASD exhibited two types of behavior; repetitive and stereotypical behaviors such as rocking back and forth or repeating the same sound, and disruptive behaviors such as aggression or tantrums (Neitzel, 2010).

Cook and Schirmer (2003) examined the historical perspectives of special education. Seven practices were identified in their research--individualized instruction, structured tasks, opening student senses,

carefully arranged environment, instant gratification, tutoring in basic function skills, and the belief that each child should have been educated to their greatest capability (Cook & Shirmer, 2003). They described that the most basic foundation of special education-- that instruction had to be individualized to be effective--was not often observed in general education classrooms (Cook & Shirmer, 2003).

Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) identified nine effective practices to aid students with emotional or behavioral disorders in avoiding the disappointing statistics typical of students with emotional or behavioral disorders. Like Cook and Shirmer (2003), Flower and others (2011) found that the most effective practice was reduced class size of less than a 20:1 teacher-to-student ratio. They also suggested highly structured classrooms with strict behavioral expectations were very effective (Flower et al., 2011.) Students with emotional and behavioral disorders did best when expectations were black and white with zero grey area. Other effective practices

identified by Flower and others (2011) were positive reinforcement, an adult mentor, functional behavioral assessment, instruction on appropriate social skills, specific and tailored academic instruction, parental involvement, and positive behavioral interventions and support.

After they identified the historical basis of special education, Cook and Shirmer identified three themes that were current in special education. The first theme was that there were many effective practices developed and utilized by special education teachers for students with special needs that weren't often observed in a general education classroom (Cook & Shirmer, 2003). The second theme identified was how often and how carefully these effective practices were utilized in special education classrooms which smaller class sizes and lower student-to-teacher ratio allowed for. Lastly, Cook and Shirmer (2003) described a third theme--although most of the effective practices implemented in special education classrooms would have been effective for all learners, they were not often

used by general education teachers either because of lack of knowledge or lack of time.

Students with ASD were also included in the special education themes Cook and Shirmer described, but ASD students presented different challenges than students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Students with ASD typically struggled more with social skills and communication rather than academics (Neitzel, 2010). Neitzel found that students with ASD did not like to have routines disrupted and often had triggers that would cause an inappropriate behavior to occur. Neitzel (2010) suggested that the use of the three tiers of positive behavioral support (PBS) could have been adapted to diminish the frequency of disruptions and behavioral problems in order to maximize the learning potential.

Tier one of PBS was designed to prevent interfering behaviors from happening by having a highly organized learning environment that promoted positive behavior and a curriculum that developed social skills. In order to do so, classrooms with ASD

students needed to be highly structured and solicit a high level of student engagement, a positive classroom climate, a reward system, consistency, and clear communication (Neitzel, 2010).

Tier two of PBS provided additional support for students that required more than what tier one provided. This tier focused on coming up with and implementing behavior plans and ways to further develop social and communication skills (Neitzel, 2010). These interventions were implemented proactively to help the student make good choices and for which they received a reward. Neitzel explained that tier three used similar practices to tier two, but in a more individualized, one-to-one ratio. Tier three of PBS was reserved for students that needed individual instruction to avoid disruptions. These interventions were time consuming and complex, and sometimes were still ineffective (Neitzel, 2010).

Teacher Perception on Inclusion

The mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) called for students with disabilities to be

placed in the least restrictive environment (National Resource Center on ADHD, 2011). This mandate went against traditional special education of the past when those students would have been put in a separate room and educated with peers of similar abilities. Current IDEA laws placed students with special needs in general education teachers' classes as much as their disabilities allowed, despite the fact that many general educators were not trained to teach students with special needs. Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) identified the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that were most important for general education teachers to possess. Some essential standards included knowledge of disabilities, pre-service experience with students with disabilities, behavior management, and consistent expectations (Trzcinka & Grskovic, 2011). Although laws did not stipulate that a special education student had to be taught by a teacher endorsed in special education, there was no guarantee that a general educator would possess the necessary

skills Trzcinka and Grskovic identified through their research.

With this essential piece of research the question was raised, how did general educators perceive inclusion? Like it or not, most general educators taught special education students regardless of endorsement or preparedness and practiced inclusion in their classrooms. Inclusion was defined as a service that placed students with disabilities in general education classrooms with appropriate support services (Hancock, 2009), although these support services were often not in place due to budget cuts and understaffing.

To investigate teacher perception of inclusion, Harding and Anderson Darling (2003) used qualitative research to better understand the feelings of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) teachers that worked in inclusion classrooms while Idol (2006) used qualitative and quantitative research to discover the amount of inclusion taking place in four elementary schools and four secondary schools. Harding and

Anderson Darling (2003) used in depth interviews, surveys, and observations to gather information in order to find out how much knowledge these teachers possessed about working in an inclusion classroom, as well as the FCS teachers' attitudes towards the special education students they were serving. Idol (2006) did case studies on the eight schools that were chosen, conducted interviews, administered surveys that utilized the Likert scale, and analyzed data.

The four FCS teachers that were studied by Harding and Anderson Darling were chosen from four different counties in the same state. The teachers represented a variety of age ranges and teaching experience, and had between one and seven special education students in their inclusion classes. The authors found that none of the FCS teachers they studied had received any inservice training for working with special education students or on inclusion. Each teacher stated they felt inclusion was best for special education students, but voiced

frustration at not having an aide or any support in the classroom (Harding & Anderson Darling, 2003).

Idol (2006) found that in order for inclusion and collaboration to be supported by general education teachers, professional development was needed in both elementary and secondary schools and support was needed in the classroom. Idol (2006) also found evidence to support only putting some students with serious behavioral problems in general education classes when appropriate rather than putting them in full inclusion, meaning these students would only spend a small percentage of their day in a general education classroom and the rest in a special education room.

Idol (2006) found that inclusion was not harmful to general education students, as was evidenced by state testing scores. In some cases, it was actually found to be beneficial. Special education students benefited from inclusion by being placed in the least restrictive environment and by being surrounded by students of all ability levels.

Professional development was another important aspect of a successful inclusion program. In developing their study, Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) discovered that the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) had 213 standards and indicators special educators were to meet. The authors used these standards to create a survey and sent it to over 3000 educators. They asked them to rate the standards on a scale from not important to essential in order to identify which should be emphasized in teacher preparation programs and inservice training. Thirty-one standards were deemed to be essential, although all of the standards were considered to be of some importance (Trzcinka & Grskovic, 2011). The 31 standards Trzcinka and Grskovic identified could be administered to school staff in the form of a survey in order to attain what areas needed the most development. Professional development programs could be planned accordingly to support general education teachers serving special education students.

In addition to the need for professional development, the research suggested that while most general educators were in favor of keeping special education students in their classrooms, a successful inclusion program demanded efficient communication and collaboration between the general education classroom and the special education department. Utilizing a teaching aide such as a para professional or parent volunteer or using a model of co-teaching with the special education teacher was also important, although many districts lacked the necessary support.

Summary

Because of the rights IDEA granted to students, school districts were held to strict regulations and guidelines when it came to providing a FAPE. Failure to provide a FAPE often resulted in litigation and verdicts not in favor of the district. Research showed it was essential that not just special educators but general educators and administrators were aware of the legal requirements as well.

The foundation of special education was individualized instruction, and remained so in current themes. Students with disabilities required IEPs and frequent monitoring. Lower teacher-to-student ratio was the number one identified effective practice in helping students perform to the best of their ability. Special education encompassed a diverse group of learners with their disabilities having been emotional, behavioral, social, or academic.

Teacher perception of inclusion varied. While many educators were in support of inclusion, many lacked the training or knowledge necessary to accommodate students with special needs. Successful inclusion programs often included specific professional development to address those needs.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The researcher sought to find out if general education teachers believed they were equipped to teach special education students within a general education classroom and whether or not they used special education teaching strategies in their classroom. Laws and trends in education caused special education students to be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) which was often found to be a general education classroom, despite the fact that many general educators lacked training for students with disabilities. The researcher created a survey and sent it to middle school teachers in an eastern Washington school district to determine teacher perception.

Methodology

The researcher implemented a qualitative study using survey research. Survey research was defined as collecting data to test hypotheses or to answer

questions about people's opinions on some topic or issue (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). A questionnaire was carefully constructed to assess what special education strategies general educators utilized in their classrooms. The survey also investigated the perception of their level of preparedness in teaching special education students within their general education classrooms. The survey was then sent out to all middle school teachers within the district by email using the website Survey Monkey.

Participants

The questionnaire was sent to all middle school teachers within the district with the hope to get as many as possible returned. According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2011) teachers in the district had an average of 12.2 years of teaching experience, 66.7% had at least a Master's Degree, and 98.7% of teachers had been deemed highly qualified.

Instruments

The measuring instrument used was a rating scale which was a type of attitude scale. An attitude scale was an instrument that measured how people felt or what they believed about something. A rating scale asked the individuals to rate their performance using a numerical scale similar to a Likert scale. For example, "I use instructional strategies that encourage active participation in individual and group activities: 5-always, 4-almost always, 3-sometimes, 2-rarely, 1-never" (Gay et al., 2009).

One issue of reliability with a self-report instrument such as an attitude scale was that people sometimes responded in the most socially acceptable way and were not honest. To avoid this issue as much as possible, the questionnaire was constructed in a way that required no identifying information. The questions were also worded as to not have been leading towards a particular answer.

Design

The survey was designed to investigate teacher perception of inclusion as well as the degree to which general education teachers utilized special education strategies in their general education classrooms. Some questions were open-ended to allow in depth answers. Questions about teaching strategies used a rating scale of 1-5 to assess the degree to which they were used while questions about teacher perception used a modified Likert scale to determine how strongly a teacher agreed or disagreed with a statement.

Procedure

The researcher used survey research to investigate beliefs and practices of general education teachers about special education. A questionnaire was created and divided into two parts, teacher perception and teaching strategies. The survey was then sent out to all middle school teachers in the district using the website Survey Monkey. The results were tabulated and analyzed by the researcher.

Treatment of the Data

Once the majority of surveys had been returned, the results were calculated and analyzed. The researcher organized the information into data tables and discussed the results in narrative form. In the narration, the researcher discussed the correlations found between teacher perceptions and teaching strategies that were used by educators.

Summary

The researcher used survey research to investigate teacher perception about inclusion and the special education teaching strategies used by general education teachers. A survey was created and divided into two parts, teacher perception and teaching strategies. The survey was sent out to all middle school teachers in the district using the website Survey Monkey. Once the surveys were returned, the researcher tabulated and analyzed the data and organized it into data tables. The researcher also described the results in narrative form, discussing

the correlations found between teacher perception and teaching strategies.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

The researcher conducted a qualitative study to investigate teacher perception about inclusion as well as identify the special education teaching strategies that were utilized by general education teachers. The researcher designed a survey to find out if teachers felt they were equipped to teach special education students in a general education classroom. The survey was emailed to all middle school teachers in the district using the website Survey Monkey. The results of the survey were then analyzed and evaluated to determine if teachers believed professional development was needed.

Description of the Environment

The survey took place in a mid-size school district. The student population was 11,280, with 5,777 males and 5,503 females. The district had a student population that was 80.2% White, 10.4% Hispanic, 2.6% Black, with the remaining population

having been a different minority. Within the district 28.5% of students received free or reduced lunch and 10.5% of students received special education services (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2011).

A survey was sent to the three middle schools in the district at the beginning of second semester with the hope of getting as many surveys returned as possible. The research was conducted within the 2011-2012 school year, assessing the degree to which general education teachers believed they were equipped to teach special education students and what, if any, special education teaching strategies were used.

Of the 127 surveys that were emailed, 42 were returned. That amount was a sufficient sample size, which allowed the researcher to draw some conclusions regarding teacher perception about inclusion and special education teaching strategies.

Research Question

Did general education teachers believe they were properly trained to teach special education students in a general education classroom?

Results of the Study

Of the 42 participants, only one held a special education endorsement. However, 97.6% of participants said they either currently or had previously worked with special education students in a general education classroom. In regards to professional development, just 50% of participants reported they had received appropriate training regarding working with special education students, while most of the remaining participants indicated they had received little to none.

At 88.1%, the majority of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "special education students should be placed in general education classrooms as much as they are capable." Only 4.8% of participants said they disagreed and 9.5% felt indifferent. However 28.6% of participants

reported that they were not confident teaching special education students in a general education classroom and 16.7% were indifferent or unsure.

Of the special education teaching strategies the participants were asked about, some were well implemented in the general education classroom and some were not. Only 2.4% of participants responded that they did not use instructional strategies to compensate for deficits in perception, comprehension, memory, and retrieval. Ninety percent of participants said they modified curriculum to teach essential concepts, vocabulary, and content, and 71.4% said they taught reading strategies to aid in accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. All participants reportedly utilized instructional strategies that encouraged active participation for all students, and all but 7.2% of participants provided academic accommodation for students with disabilities.

Participants were split when it came to using instructional strategies and materials that were individualized for students with disabilities. Nearly

half, 42.5%, disagreed or strongly disagreed, 20% felt indifferent, and 37.5% agreed or strongly agreed.

Several participants wrote in the professional development suggestion box that it would be helpful to learn about individualized instruction for special education students.

Findings

Teachers overwhelmingly supported the placement of special education students in the general education classroom. However, only 50% of teachers felt they had received appropriate professional development to work with students with special needs and only 57.1% felt confident teaching special education students in a general education classroom.

The majority of teachers felt they effectively implemented many special education teaching strategies, although some were implemented more than others. With only 37.5% of teachers reporting they individualized instruction for students with special needs, this was a potential area for future professional development.

Discussion

The research supported what the researcher expected to find about teacher perception of inclusion. Eighty-eight percent of teachers supported inclusion of special education students but many expressed that they did not feel confident teaching special education students in their general education classroom. Like Harding and Anderson Darling (2003) found, teachers in this district had not received adequate professional development in the area of special education teaching strategies. However, the data collected from the survey showed that many teachers in the district felt they were effectively implementing many of the teaching strategies that Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) found to be most essential in an inclusion classroom. The area that the survey participants lacked was in individualizing instruction for special education students, with only 37.5% agreeing that they were able to do so effectively.

Summary

The researcher sought to determine whether or not teachers felt they were equipped to teach special education students in a general education classroom and to learn what special education teaching strategies were being used. A survey was sent to all middle school teachers within a district in Eastern Washington and 42 were returned.

The researcher found that teachers supported inclusion but not all felt confident teaching special education students within a general education classroom. Despite the lack of confidence, many teachers responded that they were already using many of the special education teaching strategies in their classrooms. One area that needed improvement was individualizing instruction.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The researcher intended to find out if general education teachers felt they were equipped to teach special education students within a general education classroom. Recent trends in education placed special education students in as many mainstream classes as possible, aimed to fulfill legal requirements to place a student in the least restrictive environment. Did general education teachers, who often possessed no special education endorsement, have the skills needed to provide the care necessary to effectively teach these students? The researcher investigated how prepared teachers felt they were to teach special education students within a general education classroom as well as to discover what special education teaching strategies they implemented.

Summary

A qualitative study was conducted in order to best study teacher perception of inclusion. Legal

requirements, effective practices in special education, and teacher perception about inclusion were researched. A study done by Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) outlined the top effective practices in special education, as rated by special education teachers. The researcher created a survey using the Likert scale to assess both teacher perception of inclusion and the degree to which special education teaching strategies were implemented within general education classrooms. The researcher used the effective practices deemed as essential by Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) in creating the survey questions. The survey was sent to all middle school teachers in the district and then analyzed by the researcher.

Conclusions

Analysis of the survey showed that teachers supported inclusion, and many already implemented some of the special education teaching strategies in their general education classrooms that Trzcinka and Grskovic (2011) found to be most essential. The outcome of this survey was similar to that of Harding

and Anderson Darling (2003) in that teachers supported inclusion but some felt they were not prepared and had not received adequate professional development. Unlike the teachers Harding and Anderson Darling studied, teachers in this district reported that they felt they already effectively implemented many of the special education strategies. Harding and Anderson Darling reported a lack of special education strategies.

Though the survey revealed much strength already present in the general education classrooms, there were weaknesses evidenced as well. The biggest area in need of improvement was in individualizing instruction. Many teachers wrote that this would be a valuable area for professional development--42.5% of teachers said they did not feel they effectively individualized instruction for special education students.

Recommendations

The research proved that most teachers think special education students belong in a general

education classroom as much as possible, but some felt ill-equipped to teach them. In the short answer section of the survey, 15.4% of teachers said it would be helpful to be provided with more information about specific common disabilities and effective practices in special education. Other requests for professional development, 12.8%, were that the lingo associated with special education be explained and that professional development be led by special educators. Only two of the 42 participants surveyed said they did not feel they needed any more professional development in the area of special education.

If current trends in education continue the way they have in the past, special education students will continue to be placed in the least restrictive environment. The law demands it. The duty of a school district is to ensure its teachers are adequately prepared to teach these students. This survey demonstrated that teachers were supportive of inclusion and some were eager and willing to receive training that would better equip them to teach special

education students in a general education classroom. Therefore, based on this study, the researcher suggests that the school district, at the very least, offer voluntary professional development related to individualizing instruction for special education students.

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APPENDIX

Teacher Perception of Inclusion by Survey Monkey

1. How many years have you been teaching?

0-5 years 11.9% (5)

6-10 years 2.4% (1)

11-15 years 23.8% (10)

16-20 years 28.6% (12)

21 or more years 33.3% (14)

2. What endorsements do you hold?

Endorsements varied, only one endorsement related to special education.

3. What is your current teaching assignment?

All participants currently placed in middle school.

4. Do you now, or have you ever worked with special education students in a general education classroom?

Yes 97.6% (41)

No 2.4% (1)

5. Have you received professional development or training on teaching strategies appropriate for special education students? Please specify.

Twenty four participants responded they had received little to no professional development in this area. Others answers were training specific to disorders such as autism, ADD, and ADHD; teacher conversations; GLAD; IEP training; adapting curriculum; behavioral problems; experience with inclusion.

6. What professional development do you feel would be beneficial in preparing you to work with special education students?

Responses included training on language disabilities, understanding special education lingo, special education teacher-lead in-services, information on individual students, disability-specific training on ADD/ADHD/autism, practical strategies for working with special education students, individualizing instruction, best practices in special education, and inclusion. Two participants responded that they didn't feel they needed any more professional development in this area.

7. Special education students should be placed in general education classrooms as much as they are capable.

Strongly disagree 0.0% (0) Disagree 4.8% (2)

Indifferent 9.5% (4) Agree 66.7% (28) Strongly agree 21.4% (9)

8. I have received professional development that has helped me work with special education students.

Strongly disagree 14.3% (6) Disagree 28.6% (12)

Indifferent 11.9% (5) Agree 31.0% (13) Strongly agree 19.0% (8)

9. I am confident teaching special education students in my general education classroom.

Strongly disagree 0.0% (0) Disagree 28.6% (12)

Indifferent 16.7% (7) Agree 38.1% (16) Strongly agree 19.0% (8)

10. The instructional strategies and materials I use are individualized for students with disabilities.

Strongly disagree 5.0% (2) Disagree 37.5% (15)

Indifferent 20.0% (8) Agree 20.0% (8) Strongly agree
17.5% (7)

11. The instructional strategies and materials I use
are individualized for students with
disabilities.

Strongly disagree 2.4% (1) Disagree 34.1% (14)

Indifferent 17.1% (7) Agree 34.1% (14) Strongly agree
12.2% (5)

12. I modify the curriculum to teach essential
concepts, vocabulary, and content.

Strongly disagree 0.0% (0) Disagree 7.5% (3)

Indifferent 2.5% (1) Agree 75.0% (30) Strongly agree
15.0% (6)

13. I provide academic accommodations for students
with disabilities.

Strongly disagree 2.4% (1) Disagree 4.8% (2)

Indifferent 0.0% (0) Agree 69.0% (29) Strongly agree
23.8% (10)

14. I utilize instructional strategies that encourage
active participation for all students.

Strongly disagree 0.0% (0) Disagree 0.0% (0)

Indifferent 0.0% (0) Agree 61.9% (26) Strongly agree
38.1% (16)

15. I use instructional strategies to compensate for
deficits in perception, comprehension, memory, and
retrieval.

Strongly disagree 0.0% (0) Disagree 2.4% (1)

Indifferent 11.9% (5) Agree 76.2% (32) Strongly agree
9.5% (4)

16. I teach reading strategies to aid in accuracy,
fluency, and comprehension.

Strongly disagree 2.4% (1) Disagree 9.5% (4)

Indifferent 16.7% (7) Agree 50.0% (21) Strongly agree
21.4% (9)