

AN ANALYSIS OF
PARENT PERCEPTIONS
TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF
INCLUSION
IN THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

MASTER'S PROJECT

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by
Diane Friemoth Gibfried
University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio
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Approved by:

Official Advisor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Suzanne leaves her developmentally handicapped self-contained class of second, third, and fourth graders for an art class next door with a second grade class. Her peers and second grade teacher help her to find her materials, to get to her seat and to complete the art project. She is treated like a welcomed guest. After thirty minutes she returns to her classroom and begins to do a worksheet from her folder. That thirty minute visit four times a week for art, physical education, music and social studies is the limit of the contact Suzanne has with her peers. Her parents are concerned about her language development, her lack of friends, and her imitating behaviors of her older classmates.

Meghan is in a regular fifth grade classroom. Meghan has a developmental delay. She spends the entire day with this group of children. Meghan participates in a cooperative learning group. With the help of an instructional specialist, she learns a modified curriculum based upon her Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.). Her parents have concerns about Meghan keeping up with her classmates, the lack of individual instruction, and the teasing of other children.

These two classrooms are examples of how some students with special needs are instructed in the elementary school today.

The first illustration describes a self-contained classroom with minimal mainstreaming. The second describes one model of inclusion where children are taught with their same age peers. These two service delivery models differ greatly in theory and in practice.

Traditionally it was believed that the needs of children with disabilities could best be met in a small, specialized class setting. Today the trend is to educate children with special needs in a regular education class with peers, in their neighborhood school, with support services delivered at that school (Lee, 1995).

Inclusion of children with special needs has occurred in many schools in Ohio. This type of programming is encouraged by a concept known as Alternative Service Delivery Option (ASDO). This waiver option permits schools to educate students with special needs in a variety of settings. There are four experimental models that schools use. In Model 1, special and general educators serve nonhandicapped students and students with special needs enrolled full-time in a general education environment. In Model 2, special educators serve nonhandicapped students and students with special needs in the special education classroom. With this model services may be provided cross-categorically. Special educators serve students with special needs in the special education classroom using a functional curriculum in Model 3. With this model, services may

be provided cross-categorically. Model 4 is the most flexible model. In this model, special educators serve students with special needs as needed. Services are provided in a location that may be a general education classroom, a learning center, or a special education classroom. The special educator provides services as a consultant, teacher or a tutor (Herner, 1993).

While many feel this is the best way to educate children with special needs, educators need to develop a body of knowledge that supports the belief that integrating students, redesigning services, and restructuring schools to accommodate diversity will result in positive outcomes for all students (Wilson, 1993). One important aspect in that body of knowledge is the perspective of parents toward the philosophy and the practice of inclusion.

Research indicates that parents have an integral part in making inclusion work (Raynes, Snell, & Sailor, 1991). Parents should be a partner in program planning and program implementation (Buswell & Schaffner, 1990). Parent support is necessary for future federal funding (Lee, 1995). Research shows that greater parent involvement leads to greater success of the program (Van Dyke, Stallings, & Colley, 1995).

This writer has had personal experience with teaching students with special needs in a self-contained classroom and with teaching students with special needs in a general education classroom. This writer also has had personal experience as a parent of a child with special needs being served in both settings.

This personal involvement with children with special needs, both as a teacher and as a parent, has led the writer to this study topic.

The focus of this paper is an analysis of results of a survey sent to parents of children with special needs and/or general needs, enrolled in classrooms together. The questionnaire will ascertain parents' perceptions of the philosophy and practice of inclusion.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions of parents toward inclusion as it is implemented in the elementary classroom.

Assumptions

To conduct this study, a Likert-type survey along with some open ended questions were used to gather parents perception toward inclusion as it is implemented in the elementary school.

This writer assumes that the instrument is valid in that it measured what it was intended to measure; parents true perceptions. This writer assumes that the parents completed this instrument in a manner which honestly reflects their personal beliefs.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One of the limitations is that the sample size of only one elementary school

(189 students involved) in one limited geographical area. Another limitation is that the instrument will obtain perceptions at one moment in time. Another limitation is that the term inclusion, even though defined on the survey, could be interpreted differently by parents.

Definition of Terms

Inclusion. Inclusion is an educational philosophy based on the belief that all students belong and are entitled to participation in a regular education classroom. Students with disabilities have membership and daily consistent participation in the regular education classroom with appropriate modifications of the regular education curriculum with the provision of special education support services.

Mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is the instructional plan where a student with special needs is educated in a self-contained special education classroom except in specific, usually non-academic, subject areas. For those specific subjects the student is educated in a regular education setting.

Self-contained class. A self-contained classroom is an instructional setting that serves only students with special needs.

General Education Student. A general education student, as used in this study, is a student who does not qualify for special education services.

Child with special needs. A child with special needs is a child who exhibits conditions which affect learning to such a degree that special assistance is required to enable the child to

learn. Children identified with special needs are provided educational services through an Individual Education Program (Shapiro, Loeb, & Bowermaster, 1993).

Elementary. Elementary, as used in this study, refers to grades kindergarten through grade five.

I.E.P. An I.E.P. is an individual education program that is written for each school year for each child with special needs. The plan outlines the goals and special services required to meet the needs of the student. It is written by a group of persons knowledgeable of the student and must include the parent of the student.

Parent Perceptions. Parent perceptions are the observations, opinions, and interpretations of parents related to their own experiences.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Prior to 1950, American citizens with disabilities were often placed in institutions; separated totally from a general school environment (Wilson, 1993). The curriculum in these institutions was dependent upon the functional level of students. Students were taught very basic primary subjects, social skills, and maintenance tasks (Allen, Baker, & Harris-Kinney, 1985).

In 1950, the National Association for Retarded Citizens was founded. Through this organization, parent support groups were formed to set up classes or schools for children with IQ's lower than 50. Soon after, day programs at training centers were started to teach children who were ineligible to attend a public school program. The goals of these programs were to help these students adjust to society (Allen, Baker, & Harris-Kinney, 1985).

In 1971, the class action suit, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* resulted in the agreement that provided for a free, appropriate public school education for all children who were mentally retarded. Other states soon had similar suits filed. The *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* case, in 1972, extended this right to a free and appropriate public education to all children with disabilities (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Ittenbach, 1994).

In 1975, Public Law 94-142 or the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, mandated a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities, educated in the least

restrictive environment with an individual education plan (Lee, 1995). The least restrictive environment follows a continuum of services and placement opportunities. There is a continuum of services to meet the unique needs of students. Not all students will achieve success with full time membership in a general education classroom (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). A range of options from part-time pullout, tutoring, co-teaching, self-contained classroom, separate school or hospital setting must be available.

In 1986, Madeleine Will authored a document entitled, *Educating Students with Learning Problems: a Shared Responsibility*. It gave evidence that the system for education of individuals with disabilities was not successful when outcome measurements were analyzed. Current special education programs were producing unexpected, negative results. The report named a fragmented approach, the stigmatization of students and the dual system as causes for the poor outcomes (Will, 1986; Wilson, 1993). This report clearly indicated a need for a change.

In 1990, Public Law 101-476 also known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized and expanded provisions guaranteed under Public Law 94-142 (Lee, 1995; Wilson, 1993). IDEA clearly articulated federal policy for education of and early intervention for infants, toddlers, children and youth with special needs. It changed its wording to a people

first language. IDEA also made provisions for transition services (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Ittenbach, 1994). Currently 5.4 million children are served under this law (Lee, 1995).

As mentioned earlier, Public Law 94-142 and Public Law 101-476 guarantee a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. To many students with special needs this least restrictive environment refers to full time placement in the general education classroom. Inclusion is when students with special needs have membership and daily consistent participation in a general education classroom with appropriate modifications of the regular curriculum and with the provision of special support services.

The National Survey on Inclusive Education reports that the practice of inclusion is taking place across the country and in a wide range of locations (urban, suburban and rural districts). Inclusion programs are getting started by teachers, parents, administrators, university faculty, state departments of education and through court orders (Lipsky, 1994).

One of the considerations in support of inclusion is that each child has a legal right to an equal opportunity to obtain an education. The majority of court cases do not uphold separating students with special needs. To some, inclusion is seen as a civil rights issue because segregated programs are viewed as basically unequal (Van Dyke, Stalling, & Colley, 1995). In federal cases to date, courts have upheld the rights of children

with "significant cognitive disabilities to attend general education classes full time" when the educational benefits for the student with a disability warrant such a placement (Lipton, 1994).

Human diversity is an expected and valued characteristic among people (Raynes, Snell, & Sailor, 1991). Accepting individual differences was a part of the dream of our founding fathers. To make that dream a reality, we must accept and value children who differ from the norm. We must accept children as they are (Van Dyke, Stallings, & Colley, 1995). With inclusion is the basic belief that all children are equally valued. It presumes that the diversity will provide benefits for all children (Wilson, 1993).

Another consideration in support of inclusion is the development of positive self-concept, social interaction, and friendship among children (Lipton, 1994; Yatvin, 1995). In one survey, parents reported that including children with special needs promoted acceptance in the community, prepared children for the real world, and provided the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities (Guralnick, 1994).

Inclusion has been shown to be educationally effective as seen by increased language skills and academic skills in both students with disabilities and students without disabilities (Guralnick, 1994; Lipton, 1994). A large body of research done in the 1980's by special education departments in universities supported the benefits of integration for children with

disabilities. The degree of progress in children with disabilities in social, language, academic and psychological area was shown to be directly related to the amount of integration(Lipton, 1994).

When parents were asked to evaluate the growth of their children being served in an inclusive setting a large percentage of parents rated the performance of their child as excellent in the areas of learning new skills, feeling good about him/herself, and making and keeping new friends (Herner, 1993).

With inclusion, we need to look at long term outcomes. A 1992 study by the National Association of State Boards of Education, showed that only 49% of students who were in special education are employed two years after graduation and only 13.4% live independently. The National Association of State Boards of Education concluded that one of the causes was the segregation and labeling of students with special needs and the ineffective practice of mainstreaming (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1994).

One consideration opposing inclusion is that it could infringe on the rights and education of students in general education (Lee, 1995). The inclusion movement has taken a great toll on the learning environment according to one member of the State Advisory Council for Special Education (Associated Press, 1996). If a student is inappropriately placed in a general education class, it could affect the learning of all students (Shapiro, Loeb, Bowermaster, et al 1995). Some would argue that students with significant physical or intellectual disabilities

cannot be served in a general education classroom (Van Dyke, Stallings, Colley, 1995). If a school tries to cut costs by placing a child with special needs in a general education classroom without needed supports, then everyone suffers (Shapiro, Loeb, Bowermaster, et al 1995).

There is a need to examine the practice of full inclusion for all students. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities does not support the practice that all students with learning disabilities must be provided services in a regular education classroom. A continuum of services must be available. Unique individual student needs must be examined (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1993).

Another concern is that students with special needs will be rejected or ignored by others (Guralnick, 1994).

General education teachers need to be prepared and instructed to teach children with disabilities. Currently general education teachers learn methods to teach to a group, but not to individualize teaching to follow an Individual Education Plan (McKinney & Horcutt, 1988). Many teachers feel that they lack the necessary knowledge or skills to instruct students with learning disabilities. Even though teachers know that modifications should be made in instructions, it is not always possible (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

Parents who oppose inclusion, often see inclusion as a cost cutting measure. They feel that their children will lose special resources or that the quality of the program for their child

will suffer (Raynes, Snell, & Sailor, 1991). One parent reported a lack of attention to the special needs of her son in a general education class made her decide to have him placed in special education classes (Associated Press, 1996).

Although research overall has favored general class placement, research needs to determine if the type of disability affects success in general education placement (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Although IDEA supported inclusion in a general education classroom, it is certainly not limited to that. Case by case placement decisions must be made. Being in a general education classroom may in fact exclude them from the appropriate education their special needs demand. (Kaufman, 1993).

Parent perceptions towards inclusion are important. Parents are often the pioneers in forming programs and in challenging traditions. One parent insisted that her child be educated in a general education classroom, even though no child with similar condition or intelligence had ever been included in a general education setting. That one parent altered that school's program for children with special needs. In one school the administrator reports that parent involvement helped to focus on ensuring that students receive a quality education. These parents redirected discussions to focus on the needs of the children rather than the needs of a particular interest group (Cross & Reitzug, 1995-1996). The National Survey on Inclusive Education reports that encouraging parent participation results in

as least two benefits. One is the direct benefit to children and the second is the opportunity provided for parents to become a part of school activities (Lipsky, 1994). Families can offer resources, can help with behavior, and can share their vision (Buswell, 1990). With parent's sharing their expertise with educators, a beneficial partnership will be created.

Parents often influence funding (Lee, 1995). For example, the House Appropriations subcommittee bill was to eliminate funding for a parent training program, but after hearing from parents across the country, funding for this program was restored (Lee, 1995).

Parent perceptions affect parent participation in programs. If parents have positive perceptions about a program, they will be more likely to take part in the program. Parent participation often determines the success or failure of programs (Van Dyke, Stallings, & Colley, 1995).

Parent perceptions toward the philosophy and the practice of inclusion help to determine programs and policies. The vision, expertise and commitment of parents will determine the future of inclusion (Lee, 1995; Buswell & Schaffner, 1990).

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Subjects

The subjects chosen for this study are parents of general education students and parents of students with special needs enrolled in an elementary classroom implementing inclusion practices. There were nine classrooms, kindergarten through fifth grade involved in the study. There were 210 students in general education and 30 students in special education (having an I.E.P. but not including children with a speech only I.E.P.) The students with special needs included children with developmental delays, specific learning disabilities, Down Syndrome, autistic tendencies, or behavior disorders. Some of the handicapping conditions were visible others were not obvious by sight.

Setting

The setting for this study is a public elementary school with a total enrollment of 407 students. The school is located in an urban area in southwestern Ohio.

Data Collection

Construction of Data Collection Instrument. The instrument was constructed using information gathered from the researched literature and from the expressed concerns of parents and teachers. The instrument is a Likert-type questionnaire along with some open ended questions and a comment section (See Appendix). The survey includes items related to inclusion

using a five-point Likert-type scale to ascertain the degree of parental agreement or disagreement with items. A definition of inclusion was printed on the survey to ensure a general agreement on the meaning of the term.

The following areas are included: social, organizational/educational, teacher issues, and philosophical issues (Guralnick, 1994; Reichart, Lynch, Anderson, et al, 1989; Schultz, 1994; Wilson, 1994). Statements related to social issues are statements 1, 13, and 15. Statements related to organizational/educational issues are statements 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Statements related to teacher issues are statements 4, 9, and 10. Statements related to philosophical issues are statements 11, 12, and 14 (See Appendix).

The instrument was reviewed for clarity and content by the district director of pupil personal, a special education supervisor, and the elementary school principal. The instrument was then modified accordingly.

The instrument was then reviewed item by item with several parents, who are classroom volunteers, to ensure a general consensus of meaning. The instrument was again revised based upon the parent recommendations. The parent recommendations included changing the wording of number one from "self-concept" to "feeling better about themselves." In number four, "instruction is diluted" was changed to "teachers are less demanding." Parents felt that this gave a clearer idea.

In number eight the parents added the phrase "depending on the child's abilities." In number ten, the parents recommended deleting the words "individualized attention" to make it just "attention". The instrument was then revised to follow their recommendations.

Color coded copies were then made to differentiate responses of parents of students in general education from responses of parents of students in special education.

Administration of the Data Collection Instrument. After receiving administrative approval, the instrument, including an introductory note and a return envelope, was then distributed by classroom teachers to students. An incentive was issued to students to encourage the return of completed surveys. All students turning in a survey, received candy and an ice cream cone certificate. The classroom with the greatest percentage of surveys returned, earned a popcorn party. The principal provided the popcorn for the class party. Administration and staff were very supportive during this process.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation of Results

Golden surveys were given to 30 students with special needs and yellow surveys were given to 210 students in general education. Parents were asked to return one survey per family. Teachers did not give surveys to siblings of students with special needs to ensure that those parents would only answer the golden survey for parents of a child with special needs. The number of surveys returned from parents of students with special needs was 16 and the number of surveys returned from parents of students in general education was 124. A response rate of 53% was achieved from parents of children with special needs and a response rate of 59% was achieved from parents of children in general education.

Table 1 shows the responses of parents whose children are in general education. Table 2 shows responses of parents whose children have special needs. Table 3 shows a comparison of parent responses.

Discussion of Results

First of all, 48% of parents of general education students knew that their child was in a classroom along with children with special needs. In 8% of the surveys, parents stated that they did not know if their child was in an inclusion classroom and 38% of parents responded that their general education child was not in an inclusion classroom. In 6% of the surveys, there was no response to that question.

The surveys from parents of students with special needs showed that 93% of parents knew that their child was in an inclusion classroom and 7% did not respond to that question.

All parents of students with special needs responded affirmatively (agree or strongly agree) to the statement that children with special needs feel better about themselves when included in a general education classroom. Parents of general education children responded in agreement in 61% of responses, but 39% were either undecided or they disagreed.

When included in a regular classroom, children with special needs feel better about themselves.	32%	*79%	29%	*21%	31%	*0%	6%	*0%	2%	*0%
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In response to the statement concerning discipline problems increasing when children with special needs are present in a general education classroom, no parents of children with special needs agreed, but 36% of the parents of general education children thought that this was true.

Discipline problems increase when children with special needs are in regular education classrooms.	8%	*0%	28%	*0%	26%	*29%	24%	*42%	14%	*29%
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No parents of children with special needs felt that teachers were less demanding when children with special needs were included, but 15% of parents of students in general education perceived this to be true.

Teachers are less demanding when students with special needs are in the classroom.	5%	*0%	10%	*0%	41%	*49%	34%	*29%	10%	*22%
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In the statement, having students with special needs included decreases the quality of the educational program, no parents of children with special needs agreed, but 26% of parents of general education children perceived this to be true.

Having students with special needs included decreases the quality of the education program.	10%	*0%	16%	*0%	23%	*0%	28%	*43%	23%	*57%
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Parents of general education children perceived students get less attention with inclusion in 27% of responses, whereas 17% of parents of children with special needs agreed with this statement.

With inclusion, students receive less attention from teachers.	9%	*0%	18%	*17%	30%	*8%	31%	*50%	12%	*25%
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Similar responses from both groups of parents were found on seven of the statements. Both sets of parents gave approximately the same responses to the statement, all students should do the same amount of work, with the disagree areas getting the greatest percentages.

All students should do the same amount of work.	7%	*15%	21%	*8%	15%	*23%	44%	*39%	13%	*15%
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In the statement, students with special needs need to "keep up," both sets of parents disagree with 54% of parents of general education children and 57% of parents of special education disagree.

Students with special needs must "keep up" in order to stay included.	8%	*7%	21%	*7%	17%	*29%	42%	*43%	12%	*14%
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Parents also had similar perceptions on the statement, all children can learn. Parents of children with special needs agreed in 93% of the surveys and parents of children in general education agreed in 87% of the surveys.

All children can learn.	64% *86%	23% *7%	4% *7%	3% *0%	6% *0%
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All parents of children with special needs agreed with the statement that inclusion will help students realize that everyone has special talents and abilities. Parents of children in general education answered in agreement in 78% of the responses, with only 13% of those parents in disagreement.

Inclusion will help students realize that everyone has special talents and abilities.	40% *85%	38% *15%	9% *0%	10% *0%	3% *0%
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Children with special needs are perceived as being similar to children in regular education. This is shown by parents responding in disagreement to the statement that students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common. Parents of children in general education disagreed in 85% of the surveys and parents of children with special needs disagreed in 87% of the surveys.

Students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common.	0% *13%	6% *0%	9% *0%	46% *34%	39% *53%
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All parent of children with special needs agree with the statement that inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models. Most (73%) of parents with children in

general education agree with this also.

Inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models.	29%	*85%	44%	*28%	19%	*0%	4%	*0%	4%	*7%
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Parents of children in general education agree in 80% of responses that teachers should receive training in both areas.

Parents of children with special needs agree with this statement 86% of the responses.

Teachers should have training in both areas (special and regular education).	44%	*71%	36%	*15%	11%	*7%	7%	*0%	2%	*7%
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On the issue of grades, 55% of parents of children in general education and 86% of parents of children with special needs agree that different grades could be given for different amounts of work. That means though, that 21% of parents of children in general education disagree and 24% were undecided.

Parents of children with special needs responses were 7% disagree and 7% were undecided.

The same grade can be given for different levels and amounts of work depending on the child's abilities.	20%	*38%	35%	*48%	24%	*7%	12%	*7%	9%	*0%
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On the statement, students with special needs should be instructed in a separate classroom, 51% of parents of children in general education disagree, but 27% were undecided. Parents of children with special needs disagree in 86% of the responses, but 14% were undecided.

Students with special needs should be instructed in a separate classroom.	6%	*0%	16%	*0%	27%	*14%	31%	*29%	20%	*57%
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The most difficult to define information from the survey was found in the area on the survey where parents were asked to write their concerns about inclusion and/or the successes of inclusion. These comments are organized under the following areas: social, organizational/educational, teacher issues, and philosophical issues. These narrative comments are listed here. A * denotes answers given by parents of children with special needs.

SOCIAL

Children will be degraded.

It's okay to be different.

They learn compassion by helping others.

My son developed a special relationship with an inclusion student. It benefited both of them.

They are more apt to be made fun of with inclusion.

Inclusion improves the social relations of all.

*When a child can come home and show his work and not feel ashamed, that's a small success.

*With inclusion by son has grown mentally and socially.

*Students don't feel left out.

*My child won't be thought of as dumb.

ORGANIZATIONAL/EDUCATIONAL

My children's education has suffered, but money has been saved.

They would learn better in a small class, 1 on 1.

The school must decide what is best for each child.

My child is less motivated when he sees another child do less work and still get a good grade.

- * More structure is needed with more modifications.
- * There is not enough time for the special attention needed.

Class size is too large.

Bright kids are held back.

Is there too much time spent with special needs?

Students may need small class for extra help.

Children who do well are responsible for inclusive children, they miss out on own learning and free time.

TEACHERS

Train teachers to work with all children.

- * Give inservice training to teach how to modify lessons.
- * How do the teachers feel about inclusion?

Teachers need special skills.

Stressful for teacher to keep up with all students' needs.

PHILOSOPHICAL

They can learn.

Everyone benefits from inclusion.

Include only for parties and special occasions.

- * A more normal educational setting will lead to a more normal society setting.

Kids learn from other kids.

Inclusion is not appropriate for all children.

Inclusion will increase tolerance and acceptance.

To be included is good.

TABLE 1
PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION
PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN GENERAL EDUCATION K-5 (N=124)

	SA	A	U	D	SD
When included in a regular classroom, children with special needs feel better about themselves.	32%	29%	31%	6%	2%
Discipline problems increase when children with special needs are in regular education classrooms.	8%	28%	26%	24%	14%
Regular education students benefit from special education teachers and materials.	22%	34%	26%	16%	2%
Teachers are less demanding when students with special needs are in the classroom.	5%	10%	41%	34%	10%
Having students with special needs included decreases the quality of the education program.	10%	16%	23%	28%	23%
All students should do the same amount of work.	7%	21%	15%	44%	13%
Students with special needs must "keep up" in order to stay included.	8%	21%	17%	42%	12%
The same grade can be given for different levels and amounts of work depending on the child's abilities.	20%	35%	24%	12%	9%
With inclusion, students receive less attention from teachers.	9%	18%	30%	31%	12%
Teachers should have training in both areas (special and regular education).	44%	36%	11%	7%	2%
All children can learn.	64%	23%	4%	3%	6%
Inclusion will help students realize that everyone has special talents and abilities.	40%	38%	9%	10%	3%
Students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common.	0%	6%	9%	46%	39%
Students with special needs should be instructed in a separate classroom.	6%	16%	27%	31%	20%
Inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models.	29%	44%	19%	4%	4%

TABLE 2
PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION
PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS K-5 (N=16)

	SA	A	U	D	SD
When included in a regular classroom, children with special needs feel better about themselves.	79%	21%	0%	0%	0%
Discipline problems increase when children with special needs are in regular education classrooms.	0%	0%	29%	42%	29%
Regular education students benefit from special education teachers and materials.	36%	43%	21%	0%	0%
Teachers are less demanding when students with special needs are in the classroom.	0%	0%	49%	29%	22%
Having students with special needs included decreases the quality of the education program.	0%	0%	0%	43%	57%
All students should do the same amount of work.	15%	8%	23%	39%	15%
Students with special needs must "keep up" in order to stay included.	7%	7%	29%	43%	14%
The same grade can be given for different levels and amounts of work depending on the child's abilities.	38%	48%	7%	7%	0%
With inclusion, students receive less attention from teachers.	0%	17%	8%	50%	25%
Teachers should have training in both areas (special and regular education).	71%	15%	7%	0%	7%
All children can learn.	86%	7%	7%	0%	0%
Inclusion will help students realize that everyone has special talents and abilities.	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common.	13%	0%	0%	34%	53%
Students with special needs should be instructed in a separate classroom.	0%	0%	14%	29%	57%
Inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models.	65%	28%	0%	0%	7%

TABLE 3
PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION
PARENTS OF GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS K-5 (N=124)
***PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS K-5 (N=16)**

	SA	A	U	D	SD
When included in a regular classroom, children with special needs feel better about themselves.	32% *79%	29% *21%	31% *0%	6% *0%	2% *0%
Discipline problems increase when children with special needs are in regular education classrooms.	8% *0%	28% *0%	26% *29%	24% *42%	14% *29%
Regular education students benefit from special education teachers and materials.	22% *36%	34% *43%	26% *21%	16% *0%	2% *0%
Teachers are less demanding when students with special needs are in the classroom.	5% *0%	10% *0%	41% *49%	34% *29%	10% *22%
Having students with special needs included decreases the quality of the education program.	10% *0%	16% *0%	23% *0%	28% *43%	23% *57%
All students should do the same amount of work.	7% *15%	21% *8%	15% *23%	44% *39%	13% *15%
Students with special needs must "keep up" in order to stay included.	8% *7%	21% *7%	17% *29%	42% *43%	12% *14%
The same grade can be given for different levels and amounts of work depending on the child's abilities.	20% *38%	35% *48%	24% *7%	12% *7%	9% *0%
With inclusion, students receive less attention from teachers.	9% *0%	18% *17%	30% *8%	31% *50%	12% *25%
Teachers should have training in both areas (special and regular education).	44% *71%	36% *15%	11% *7%	7% *0%	2% *7%
All children can learn.	64% *86%	23% *7%	4% *7%	3% *0%	6% *0%
Inclusion will help students realize that everyone has special talents and abilities.	40% *85%	38% *15%	9% *0%	10% *0%	3% *0%
Students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common.	0% *13%	6% *0%	9% *0%	46% *34%	39% *53%
Students with special needs should be instructed in a separate classroom.	6% *0%	16% *0%	27% *14%	31% *29%	20% *57%
Inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models.	29% *65%	44% *28%	19% *0%	4% *0%	4% *7%

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

As more and more schools develop inclusionary practices for children with special needs, research must be conducted to determine if inclusionary education results in positive outcomes for students. Research has indicated that parents have an integral part in the program planning and implementation. Parents have an integral part in making inclusion work successfully (Raynes, Snell, and Sailor, 1991). Parents also have the ability to ensure future federal funding through their congressmen. How parents perceive inclusion will affect their support.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of parents toward inclusion as it is implemented in the elementary classroom.

The study included a survey of 15 statements in which parents were asked to indicate their perceptions of inclusion from strongly agree with the statement to strongly disagree with the statement. Color coded surveys were used to separate parents of students in general education from parents of students with special needs. There was a section in the survey for parents to give their opinions in narrative form.

Both groups of parents had similar perceptions on seven of the statements. They agree with the statement that all

children can learn as well as the statement that inclusion will help children realize that everyone has special talents and abilities.

They both also agree with the statement that inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models. Both groups of parents agree that teachers should have training in both areas, regular education and special education.

They both disagree with the statement that students with special needs must "keep up" in order to stay included and with the statement that all students should do the same amount of work. Another statement that both groups of parents disagree with was the statement that students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the survey indicated that parents have strong feelings about inclusion. Perceptions of parents of children in regular education and parents of children with special needs were similar in almost half of the statements.

Even though both sets of parents generally agree that all children have special talents and abilities and that all children can learn, parents of children with special needs were found, in general, to be more accepting of inclusion and more positive about inclusion, than were parents of children in general education.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey, the writer recommends that schools openly inform parents that their child is a part of a classroom with children with special needs. This openness verifies the worth of the program to parents. This openness by the school, would allow parents to have their concerns addressed.

The study further indicates a perceived need for the training of teachers to be effective educators of both children in regular education and children with special needs. However, we are not sure of the real need here. A needs assessment should be conducted to determine where teachers feel more training is needed. The evaluation of teachers by the principal and special education supervisor may also indicate a need for more training.

The study also indicates a need to develop a better grading policy, one that clearly verifies what the student is accomplishing. The grading system needs to show the performance level of the student. Perhaps a narrative account of achievement would indicate best what is being achieved.

There is a perception that having students with special needs in the classroom decreases expectations. Teachers need to make it clear to parents that the adopted course of study will be followed. Parents and students need to be informed of expectations. Teachers need to teach each child, to focus on the uniqueness of the education of each child. Children who are gifted as well as children with special needs, can be taught in the

the same room, but with different adaptations.

Parents were concerned about discipline problems with children with special needs. Schools need to study this concern. When children with special needs are discipline problem, is it because of their disability or is the cause a lack of attention, a frustration of being asked to do work that is not appropriate, or a feeling of not being important or needed? Too often discipline problems are solved by a "quick fix" rather than by a study of the problem and a continuum of steps to take to rectify the specific problem.

The study indicates a need to involve parents to see how inclusion is working. This involvement could be in the classroom as a volunteer, helping with special events or programs at school, or reading information about inclusion in classroom and school newsletters. Parents may feel that children with special needs should be in a separate classroom. When they see children of all abilities working together on a project or hear the excitement in the voice of a child with Down Syndrome as she reads to the class, or read about improved test scores, then they can see the successes of inclusion.

This study clearly indicates the need to continue to involve parents in evaluating the process of inclusion. It also indicates the need to continue working on improving the communication with parents to ensure that their perceptions are based on reality.

APPENDIX

Dear Parent,

Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below. You do not need to sign your name. We want to hear from you. YOUR OPINIONS COUNT!

1. How many children do you have at this school?_____
2. At this school I (Please check all that apply)
_____ volunteer in a classroom
_____ am active in the Parent Club-Boosters
_____ help once or twice a year for special events
_____ Other_____

At our school, many classrooms have children with special needs. These children are instructed in the regular classroom with extra instruction given routinely by a special education teacher. This is a fairly new way of teaching special needs students and is called inclusion.

3. Is your child in an inclusion classroom?_____

Please read the following statements about inclusion and circle the number which best describes how you feel.

- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Undecided
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly Disagree

1. When included in a regular classroom, children with special needs feel better about themselves. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Discipline problems increase when children with special needs are in regular education classrooms. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Regular education students benefit from special education teachers and materials. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Teachers are less demanding when students with special needs are in the classroom. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Having students with special needs included decreases the quality of the education program. 1 2 3 4 5
6. All students should do the same amount of work. 1 2 3 4 5

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 7. Students with special needs must "keep up" in order to stay included. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. The same grade can be given for different levels and amounts of work depending on the child's abilities. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. With inclusion, students receive less attention from teachers. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Teachers should have training in both areas (special and regular education). | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. All children can learn. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. Inclusion will help students realize that everyone has special talents and abilities. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. Students with disabilities and students without disabilities have very little in common. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. Student with special needs should be instructed in a separate classroom. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. Inclusion gives students with special needs positive role models. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

What are your concerns about inclusion?

What do you view as successes of inclusion?

Comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND YOUR THOUGHTS. Please return to school in the attached envelope. If you receive more than one of these surveys, please complete only one. Thank you!

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