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An Assessment of the Impact of Resource Room Placement on Elementary Student Self-Esteem

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF

RESOURCE ROOM PLACEMENT ON

ELEMENTARY STUDENT SELF-ESTEEM

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An assessment, in the form of an interview, was
conducted to measure the effects of resource room placement
and full-time classroom integration on special education
student self-esteem. Sixty students in the Wenatchee School
District participated in the project during the 1990-1991
school year. The results of the project indicated that the
placement of special education students in a full-time
integration program does not insure a greater enhancement of
their total self-concept; although it may be of benefit to
certain areas in their self-esteem. The project included
conclusions and recommendations.

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CHAPTER I

Background of the Project

The issue of educating a child with special needs
appears to be caught in a restless continuum. This state of
constant flux may be perceived by some as the inability of
educators to cope with this challenge or, it could be
indicative of creativity and its resulting momentum.

Dealing with the special needs child, who by no action
of his own appears to be locked into physical, emotional or
intellectual limitations, is indeed a perplexing dilemma.
This dilemma not only encumbers our system financially but
emotionally as well. As long as we are willing to confront
and strive to surmount it, the education of the handicapped
child will continue to challenge and perplex us.

Focus of the Project

Columbia Elementary School in Wenatchee, Washington, has
responded to the challenge and altered its Special Education
Program during the 1990-1991 school year. The program gives
staff the option to allow their special education students to
be pulled out and instructed in the resource room or remain
in their regular classroom for all instruction. Those
teachers who opt to keep their students will be allowed a
predetermined amount of finances to hire an aide or purchase

aide or purchase materials to help meet the needs of their special students. Those teachers who elect not to participate may send their special needs students to the resource room for instruction. Individual education plans (IEP) will be written by a team of staff members with Special Education (SPED) certification.

A major assumption motivating this pilot program is that pull-out resource programs may be a hindrance to the growth of student self-esteem. Conversely, a resource model that would allow special education students to remain with their peers for instruction might, perhaps, enhance or encourage growth in student self-concept.

Purpose of the Project

The project has been designed to produce information to assist in evaluating the pilot project. This study will provide data regarding the self-esteem of special education students and the ramifications, if any, to student self-concept of classroom integration and resource room placement during the 1990-1991 school year.

Limitations of the Project

The validity of the assumption that integration of special education students into the regular classroom on a full-time basis will result in enhanced self-esteem will be monitored and assessed. The self-esteem levels of

approximately 60 elementary students in the Wenatchee School District will be evaluated by both pre and post testing during the 1990-1991 school year.

The students involved in this project will be classified into three groups. Group 1 will consist of 20 special education students involved in resource room pull-out programs. Group 2 will consist of 20 special education students participating in the Columbia integrated program. Group 3 will consist of 20 nonresource students. The students, monitored and assessed, will be attending grades second through fifth in the Wenatchee School District.

Definition of Terms

In order to insure clarity, the following terms are defined as they were used in this project:

Self-Concept or Self-Esteem. This term refers to the beliefs or feelings an individual holds regarding himself.

Resource Room. A special education placement option for handicapped students who require specialized instruction in addition to their regular program for relatively short periods of time. The students are based in the regular classroom and "pulled-out" for instruction in the resource room.

Regular Classroom. A grade level classroom consisting of one's peers and instructor.

Learning Disabled Student (LD). A term used to describe students with a disorder in the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. These individuals must have an intelligence quotient that falls in the average to above average range but have severe discrepancies between their intellectual ability and their academic achievement. These deficits cannot be explained by visual or hearing problems, motor handicaps, mental retardation, behavior disorders, or cultural, environmental or socio-economic issues.

Individual Education Program (IEP). A program developed in a meeting with parents, teachers, special education personnel, and the involved student (if appropriate) which describes the child's present levels of performance, states specific, measurable goals and objectives, and a description of services to be provided. The IEP must be reviewed annually.

Mainstreaming. To the greatest extent possible, the practice of providing handicapped children an education with their nonhandicapped peers.

Special Needs Student. This term will be used interchangeably with learning disabled or the LD student.

Integrated Program. A program that places a child full-time in an age appropriate program with non-handicapped peers.

Public Law 94-142. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act which insures a free public education for all children in the least restrictive environment.

Special Education. Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent or the student, to meet the unique needs, abilities, and limitations of a student with a handicapping condition.

Least Restrictive Environment. A continuum of options that must be addressed by the IEP team. The team must look for the maximum extent appropriate that handicapped children can be educated with non-handicapped children. The least restrictive environment must address the following four issues:

1. Type of services the child will receive and why (placement).

2. The extent to which the child will interact with non-handicapped peers.

3. The child's access to nonacademic extracurricular activities.

4. Should the child be served in his neighborhood school - if not, why.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The enactment of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, created within the American education system both an increased awareness of the plight of the special education student and a mandate to address their academic needs on an individual basis. According to this legislation, students would also receive that education deemed appropriate in the least restrictive environment possible. The intent was to normalize, to the greatest extent possible, the education these students would receive and maximize their academic potential through individualized planning (Mercer, 1979).

Although this legislation defined the educational rights of the handicapped, it did not truly provide the wherewithall to guide educators in their endeavor to nurture the human potential of each individual child. Granted, the mechanics were laid out and goals defined, but the process remained vague and open to interpretation in at least one area of critical need, if not more (Caparulo and Zigler, 1983).

If the least restrictive environment as an educational setting is the legislative mandate and educational goal, it must be determined which environment speaks to the whole

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child. We cannot say, in good conscience, that academic
enhancement is our only goal; whereas, it is of no
consequence how the child feels about himself. Educators
must strive to discover the environment or combination of
environments that provide not only the instruction to meet
academic needs but those which enhance the child's
self-concept as well.

Theories of Self-Concept

In order to ascertain the educational environment that
would promote growth in student self-esteem, one must
consider relevant theories of self-concept. There are
several theories that appear to be not only predominant, but
very appropriate for the educational setting. These theories
are the Reference Group Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory, Social
Psychological Theory, and Social Comparison Theory.

The Reference Group Theory implies that individuals
based their self-concept on comparisons they draw between
themselves as individuals and another social group. Their
self-concept can either be strengthened or weakened depending
on how they view themselves in comparison to a particular
group. For example, placing a student who lacks coordination
in an advanced physical education class could very easily
cause him to experience diminished self-concept as a result
of comparing his skill levels to the group. However, if he

were exposed to students of the same skill level, his esteem would most likely maintain, or even grow, depending on the comparison he draws (Swayze, 1980).

The Social Psychological Theory tends to center in on the social implications of individual relations. According to this theory, the self-concept one holds is directly related to the social interactions one has with others and the perceptions that are communicated. Self-concept is directly dependent upon how an individual believes others perceive him. For example, if a student is laughed at for inappropriate actions or remarks and thus not included in activities by other students, his self-concept could falter because of his perceptions as to how his peers view him (Swayze, 1980).

The Psychoanalytic Theory tends to focus on the individual's perception of himself and self-concept is determined by whether the individual can live up to the personal expectations he holds. A positive self-concept would require a realistic positive view of one's self and the ability to attain to that perception. Unfortunately, a negative view could be self-fulfilling and very easily attainable. Those life expectations which mold individual perceptions of one's self would be the determiners (Swayze, 1980).

The Social Comparison theorists suggest that when lacking objective standards of comparison, individuals will choose significant others in their environment as the basic

criteria for forming estimates of their self worth
(Festinger, 1954). According to this theory, when given the
opportunity, individuals are more likely to select similar
others as a basis for social comparison rather than
dissimilar others (Strang, Smith, and Rogers, 1978).

Learning Disabled and Self-Esteem

Dealing with the self-esteem of the learning disabled
student is indeed a delicate matter. The fact that an
individual has been tested and diagnosed as learning disabled
(LD) is not in itself indicative of low self-esteem.
However, the circumstances that LD students face and the
academic limitations with which they must work do place them
at risk for developing a negative self-concept.

Research in the area of self-esteem has found
significant positive correlations between the self-concept of
the child and the patterns of parent-child relationships,
interaction with peers and significant others, academic
achievement, and environmental interactions (Piers and
Harris, 1964; Sheare, 1878). Unfortunately, all of these
areas of correlation have a tendency to be heightened as a
result of the individual child's disability. As we know,
normal parent-child relations are not without their everyday
tensions. The relationship between the parent and the
learning disabled child may, if not carefully guarded,
contribute on the home front to the spiraling of a child's

self-concept. Struggles over parent expectations and student ability often have a negative impact (Piers and Harris, 1964); however, positive communication from parents relative to a child's ability leads to a significant increment in both self-perception of ability and grade point average (Williams and Cole, 1968).

The issues of peer relationships and academic success are crucial elements in the forming of student self-esteem; unfortunately, in the educational setting these elements form a negative alliance which preys on a child's view of himself. Fitts (1972) asserts that self-esteem can be linked to a variety of factors associated with failure in school and student motivation.

Being different is not a desired status among students of any age and appears to become increasingly alarming as adolescence approaches. Students who do not fit in to the peer mainstream are often the recipients of negative input and ostracized. Goodlad (1954) concluded that children who fail academically are less well-liked or accepted than those who do not fail. Studies have indicated that there is a significant difference in the amount of peer acceptance between the learning disabled student and the normal student. Learning disabled students consistently receive lower peer acceptance ratings than do students without disabilities (Sheare, 1978).

The self-perceptions of LD students relate to their perceived access to adequate social support. A positive support system of parents, classmates, teachers, and friends is associated with higher self-esteem in many areas. As might be expected, the most important predictor of positive self-esteem is support and acceptance from other students (Forman, 1988).

In light of this needed support and acceptance to maintain positive self-regard, it is distressing to acknowledge that success and failure experiences, both in the academic and social arena, are important stepping stones to personality development and general mental health. As we know, learning disabled students often experience failure and frustration. This in turn, my lead to social behavior unacceptable to the very peers from which they need support (Clark, 1968; Kirk, 1966).

Although the impact of significant others, such as teachers, may not have as much influence as peer relations on a child's self-concept. It is, nevertheless, a factor that may hinder or promote positive mental health in the LD student. The child who is at risk and experiences a lack of social support from significant others is very likely to experience a considerable amount of emotional trauma. On the other hand, a child who is less vulnerable because of his supporting social network is much more likely to cope or deal in a more effective way with his or her disability (Foreman, 1988).

Unfortunately, research has indicated that as a whole, learning disabled students are highly susceptible to these influences and do struggle to maintain their fragile self-concepts. Strang, Smith, and Rogers (1978) reported that when LD students were requested to compare themselves with their peers whose academic achievement was in the normal range, the perceptions of themselves were significantly lower than when no reference group was suggested by the researcher. Kistner, Haskett, White, and Robbins (1987) found that elementary and middle school age LD students reported lower perceived scholastic ability or competence than normal students. Purkey (1970) concluded that a student's failure in academic areas is linked to, or is a consequence of poor self-perceptions. Williams and Cole (1968) found that a child's concept of school may be an extension of one's own self-concept and that peer group communication may constitute one of the more decisive determinates of both self evaluation and school achievement. Research by Larson, Parker, and Jorjorian (1973) indicated that learning disabled students had poorer self-concepts than students with normal academic ability. Bryan and Bryan (1983) maintained that LD students are at great risk for developing negative self-concepts. Researchers (White and Robbing, 1987) discovered that LD students were more likely to rate themselves lower in academic and cognitive competence than were normal students.

Obviously, research indicates that educators face a formidable task as they endeavor to prepare these students to function academically in our society. Their undertaking would be much simpler if the issue was not complicated by the delicate balance that must be maintained to assure the development of positive mental health as well.

The Environmental Factor

Although at times it may seem to be an unfair burden or responsibility, the development of student self-esteem does lie to a great extent in the hands of our educational system. School is secondary only to the home in importance when weighing factors that are social forces in shaping and maintaining a child's self-concept (Purkey, 1970). As our society changes and the role of the family adapts, the time may occur when school becomes the primary determinate of self-esteem. As we know, many of our students now receive at least two meals a day at school and spend more time with their teachers and school peers than they do with parents or other family members.

If our schools play such an important role in the development of self-esteem, it would behoove us, especially in the case of the learning disabled student, to carefully weigh the impact of the educational environment. School organization not only affects the children we work with by establishing the educational setting, but it can also

influence them directly, by allowing students to associate with certain children and not with others during the school day (Strang, Smith, and Rogers, 1978).

Presently there remains a diversity of opinion among educators regarding the best educational environment for the learning disabled child (Caparulo and Zigler, 1983). The dilemma appears to focus on three optional environments and their affect on student self-concept. These educational alternatives are the self-contained resource room, mainstreaming, and the full integration of the LD student into the regular classroom.

The possible negative impact and stigmatization of students placed in the resource room has been a concern of educators for a considerable length of time; however, research does not appear to clearly support this belief (Jones, 1974).

Research indicates that a major determinate of positive self-esteem in the learning disabled student is the reference group they utilize for personal comparison. Coleman (1983) found that learning disabled students placed in a full-time resource room or self-contained classroom scored higher on self-concept indicators than did students with similar handicaps who attended regular classrooms. Coleman hypothesized that the children's self-concept was primarily based on comparing their abilities with their peers in the classroom. Those students in the resource or self-contained room compared themselves to peers of like ability and thus

felt good about themselves; whereas those LD students in the regular room compared themselves to their normal peers and thus rated their self-esteem lower.

Research by Strang, Smith, and Rogers (1978) also concluded that academically-handicapped student self-concept depended upon with whom they compared themselves. If the students were restricted to only one comparative reference group that consisted of regular classroom peers, their self-esteem declined. However, when similar peers were available for comparison, the LD students tended to choose those students like themselves and disregarded their normal peers as a comparative measure. If other learning disabled students were removed from their environment and only regular classroom students were available, again their self-regard tended to decline.

Youman (1980) examined the effect of tutoring integrated LD students in the regular classroom and found those students received significantly lower self-concept scores than the normal students. The tutored students did experience greater academic growth in the area of reading but experienced diminished self-esteem. Youman contributed these results to the greater demands placed on the integrated students versus those demands that would have been required of them in the resource room. The tutored children utilized the regular classroom students as a comparison group when evaluating their success or failure. The regular class obviously

provided greater competition than the special education room. Because of this, the integrated students standing among the normal students would be much lower than had they been in the resource room.

Unfortunately, integrated students in the regular classroom are not unaware of their differences despite efforts to normalize their environment. Students reported that they perceived themselves as much more academically competent while in the LD classroom rather than the integrated classroom. The students were also very aware and sensitive to the fact that they required more teacher time to complete their work. As students grew older, their perceptions of personal academic competence lessened in the integrated room; whereas, like students in the resource room did not experience lessened confidence (Renich and Harter, 1989).

A study by Silon and Harter (1985) casts a slightly different perspective on mainstreaming and self-esteem when dealing with handicaps of a more severe nature. Their research, which dealt with the educable mentally retarded, found that these students did not tend to identify and base their self-esteem by comparing themselves with normal students in the classroom. These students related to, and based their self-concept on, other students with like handicaps. This appears to occur as a result of the socialization that has taken place between members of this special population. These students were not weighed down

with the cares and concerns of competing with those around

them. You might say their innocence tended to prevail and

shelter them from the negative aspects of their handicap.

Obviously, the issue of comparison and reference groups

should be of great concern when dealing with children's

self-regard. If students are indeed basing their

self-esteem, as research suggests, by how they measure up to

the others around them, then educators need to tread lightly

as they select the placement for the learning disabled child.

We cannot control the internal decisions made by the child,

but we can perhaps influence the outcome by being very

cautious in our placement of students.

Research has given us some indications of how students

may make decisions which affect their self-esteem. When

given a choice, many students are likely to choose similar

others over dissimilar others as their basis for social

comparison. When dealing with the learning disabled child in

the resource room setting, it would be expected that they

would use the disabled students in their room as the basis of

comparison. If this held true when social comparisons were

made, we could expect little or no negative changes in the

self-concept of the child. On the other hand, if the child

was mainstreamed for part of the day, this would introduce

the student to a new reference group for potential social

comparison. Since this new group would not possess

handicapping conditions, this might diminish the mainstreamed

child's self-regard if that child chose to identify with his

new peers. The student would obviously be placed in a position of being an underachiever and possibly be adversely affected by his new environment.

Renich and Harter (1989) found that LD students perceive themselves to fare better academically in the resource classroom than in the regular classroom. When making comparisons, 84 percent of their subjects mainstreamed into the regular classroom spontaneously used their normally achieving peers as their reference group, thus diminishing their standing. They concluded that learning disabled students would rather identify with their normal peers in the classroom.

The logic of learning disabled children desiring to identify with normal students is very understandable and hardly surprising. However, other research has suggested that even though disabled children may long to be like their normal peers, they may not use them as a reference group if another alternative group is available. Morse and Gergen (1970) suggested that even though students are exposed to many different peers during the school day, not all of those will serve as a model for comparison--in assessing his position, only those whom the child deems as valuable will be utilized. Hyman and Singer (1971) pointed out that a child may exercise freedom in making relevant self-concept comparisons; while Festinger (1954) concluded that children will most likely choose those who are similar over those who are dissimilar when making self-concept comparisons.

Research by Strang, Smith, and Rogers (1978) found that students mainstreamed for part of the day experienced increased self-concept. The researchers suggested that the exposure to the regular classroom and the resource room allowed LD students to select their self-concept reference group. It would appear that these students used the resource room group for academic comparison and used the regular classroom for other relevant comparisons such as feeling accepted into the school organization as a whole.

Obviously, there are many factors that will influence the decisions that each individual child makes as he or she selects to identify with a particular peer group. As we can see from research, there is no one finite rule which governs the development of a child's mental health. In fact, at times, research itself seems to struggle with contradictory evidence or come to slightly different conclusions. Nevertheless, research has provided us with indicators that can help us govern student placement while minimizing adverse effects.

If, after having weighed all the factors relating to the development of student self-esteem, the practices of mainstreaming or full integration are instituted as part of the school environment, another element needs to be considered to enhance the potential for the program's success. As we know, competition within a classroom exists, whether fostered by the instructor or not. This competition may manifest itself over a variety of issues: academics,

relationships, athletics, or other peer-related issues. It
would be naive to assume that learning disabled students
would not encounter and experience difficulties with their
self-esteem as a result of these issues.

Research suggests that handicapped students placed in
the regular classroom may tend to be perceived by their
non-handicapped classmates in negative ways (Iano, Ayers,
Heller, McGettigan, and Walker, 1974). Obviously, any
non-acceptance for whatever reason will hinder or damage
their personal mental health. Learning disabled students
often experience failures both academically and socially.
Both of these encounters are likely to impact the self-regard
of the student involved (Sheare, 1978).

If these students are to be placed within an environment
that has the potential to promote both the negative and the
positive, we must accentuate the positive and, to the best of
our ability, strive to diminish the negative. Simply placing
the handicapped child in the classroom will not be enough to
insure the development of positive social relations between
the learning disabled and their non-handicapped peers. The
implementing of classroom interventions will be necessary to
promote positive and constructive interaction between the two
diverse groups.

As we know, instructional goals may be structured
competitively, individually, or cooperatively. Obviously,
the learning disabled student is in no position to compete
with his normal peers. Working on an individual basis would

eliminate the competition, but it would not tend to foster relationships desired to meet the social goals of mainstreaming or integration. Cooperative learning within the regular classroom would tend to promote more social interaction between the handicapped and non-handicapped students. According to Johnson and Johnson (1983), relationships that developed during cooperative learning activities carried over into non-academic times. Handicapped students were not left out and tended to develop peer rapport that bridged some of the gaps between the students. The cooperative learning strategy tended to promote a belief on the part of the handicapped students that they could experience success and thus had a positive impact on their mainstreaming experience.

Madden and Slavin (1983), found that cooperative learning over a seven-week period resulted in a decrease in rejection of mildly handicapped students by their normal peers. Students experienced greater academic growth and enhanced self-concept as a result of this learning strategy; however, the researchers reported that friendship levels between the learning disabled students and their classroom peers did not increase even though they experienced less rejection.

According to the findings of Johnson and Johnson (1983), teachers would be well advised to structure cooperative learning situations when working with mainstreamed students. Their findings suggest that, as a result of cooperative

learning groups, learning disabled students will not be ignored and the self-esteem of both the handicapped and non-handicapped students will increase. Their research also found that the non-handicapped students received a greater social perspective by working and interacting with the learning disabled students.

Another study by Johnson, Johnson, and Rynders (1981) suggests that not only does the cooperative learning environment have the potential to increase the LD students self-concept, but it also caused them to view their teachers in a more positive light. Classroom instructors who taught in a cooperative environment were perceived as more caring and accepting than those who worked within a competitive or individualized setting.

Summary

Research appears to indicate that those educators who undertake the full-time integration of special education students into the regular classroom may run the risk of hindering the self-esteem of those children. Likewise, those students who are mainstreamed into the regular classroom are also at risk, although research does suggest their chances of developing a diminished self-concept may be lessened. A key factor that appears to influence these outcomes is the availability and impact of peer reference

groups. Fortunately, the implementation of cooperative learning strategies in both of these educational settings, has the potential to decrease possible negative outcomes.

As we can see, a great deal of time and effort has been spent by researchers seeking to find the answers that will help us unlock the puzzling nature of a child's self-esteem. Such a quest is an endeavor that will continue as long as human beings retain their curiosity and concern for the development of the whole child. Unfortunately, this issue appears to have no simple answers or formulas that will guarantee success when working with the learning disabled student, The issue of whether to mainstream or integrate learning disabled students into the normal classroom will continue to be a decision that must be made by educators on a local basis. Each decision should be based on sound educational research, with the child's well-being as the primary concern.

CHAPTER III

Procedures of the Study

Introduction

An understanding of the whole child is an essential element necessary to effectively educate and prepare students to succeed in today's society. The way in which children perceive themselves has a direct bearing on both his social and educational development. Learning disabled students are inherently at a disadvantage as they struggle to meet their personal and societal expectations. Additional information regarding the effects of one's educational environment may be useful in the development of programs that strive to meet the needs of the whole child, disabled or not.

Subjects

Sixty elementary students in the Wenatchee School District participated in this project. These students were enrolled in grades two through five. Forty of the 60 students were special education qualified and served by the Wenatchee Special Education Program. The remaining 20 students were not involved in special education.

<u>Procedure</u>

The 60 participating students were divided into three groups. Group I consisted of 20 students attending a special education resource room program who were mainstreamed when deemed appropriate by their IEPs. Group II consisted of 20 special education students who were totally integrated into regular classrooms and received no resource room instruction. However, these students did receive aide time or adapted material to be used in the classroom. Group III consisted of 20 students who attended regular classrooms and whose ability levels were in the normal range.

Parental permission to assess levels of self-esteem was acquired for those students not involved in the special education program. It was determined by the special education department that permission to assess the students qualified for special education services was not necessary due to testing waivers already acquired.

In the Fall of 1990, all 60 students involved in the project were orally administered a self-esteem assessment. In the Spring of 1991, 53 students were again assessed using the same procedure and instrument. Seven students had moved during the school year or were unavailable for posttesting. The testing, both pre and post, was administered by the same special education aide. Each student was interviewed individually by the administator of the assessment. In both instances, all testing procedures were completed during a one-week time span.

Instrument

The interview format was chosen in order to allow for differentiations in the reading levels of students involved in the project. The assessment instrument utilized was a modified version of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. The interview consisted of 45 statements designed to measure a child's overall self-concept in relation to the following six categories:

1. Behavior

2. Physical appearance and attributes

3. Popularity

4. Intellectual and school status

5. Anxiety

6. Happiness and satisfaction.

Each question required a "yes" or "no" response. All student responses were recorded by the administrator of the assessment instrument.

Treatment of the Data

Individual pre and posttest scores were compared to ascertain any change in self-esteem that may have occurred during the 1990-1991 school year. The self-esteem interview scale is based on a positive correlation; thus students who scored higher on the posttest were assessed as having increased their self-concept. Individual scores were ascertained for each category of the interview and compiled within their group to create total scores. Group scores were

then converted to percentages to be utilized as a means of comparison between the three groups being assessed. Group scores were then graphed to visually represent any changes that may have occurred in the self- esteem of the groups as a whole.

CHAPTER IV

Results of the Project

The purpose of this Chapter was to report and analyze
the data collected by means of the self-esteem interview
administered to special eduction students of the Wenatchee
School District. Results and analysis of the interviews
provided information that was utilized to compose each
section of this chapter. Results of the interviews have been
organized into six categories that compose the self-esteem
analysis and are listed below. The remainder of this Chapter
discusses the collective results of the interview.

1.   Behavior

2.   Physical appearance and attributes

3.   Popularity

4.   Intellectual and school status

5.   Anxiety

6.   Happiness and satisfaction.

The purpose of this project was to examine the self-esteem of
special education students in the Wenatchee School District
and to determine whether students placed in a full-time
integration program experienced a greater enhancement of
their self-concept than that experienced by students
participating in a resource room pull-out program.

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Initially 60 students participated in the pretesting during Fall of 1990. The posttest administered in the Spring of 1991 recorded the responses of 53 students. Seven student, or 12 percent of the participants, had moved during the school year or were unavailable for posttesting. The student population posttested consisted of 18 resource room students, 16 full-time integration students, and 19 non-special education students, Individual student scores were derived from the pretest taken in the Fall of 1990 were compared with individual scores gained by posttesting in the Spring of 1991. The result of individual pre and posttest scores were combined within their separate groups to calibrate results that would be representative of each tested group as a whole. Group scores were converted to percentage figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

The interview consisted of 45 statements which required positive or negative responses from the participants. Each statement, when analyzed, became part of one of six pre-determined categories. The six categories reflected student self-concept in relation to: behavior, physical appearance and attributes, popularity, intellectual and school status, anxiety, and happiness or satisfaction.

Behavior

The section of the interview relating to behavior consisted of the following ten statements:

1. I am well behaved at school.

2. It is usually my fault when something goes wrong.

3. I cause trouble for my family.

4. I often get into trouble.

5. I dislike school.

6. I am often mean to other people.

7. I am picked on at home.

8. I get into a lot of fights.

9. I am a good person.

10. I lose my temper easily.

Data

Twenty-seven percent of resource room students indicated an increase in self-esteem relating to behavior. Forty percent indicated no change. Thirty-three percent experienced decreased self-concept.

Twenty-five percent of integrated students indicated increased self-concept in the area of behavior. Twenty-five percent indicated no change. Fifty percent experienced a decrease in self-esteem.

Twenty-one percent of regular students experienced an increase in this area of self-concept. Fifty-three percent indicated no change. Twenty-six percent experienced a decrease in this area.

TABLE I

BEHAVIOR

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	27
Resource	18	No Change	40
Resource	18	Decline	33
Integrated	16	Improve	25
Integrated	16	No Change	25
Integrated	16	Decline	50
Regular	19	Improve	21
Regular	19	No Change	53
Regular	19	Decline	26

Data shown in Table I and the behavior graph indicate that resource room students scored slightly higher than the integrated and the regular student groups in the area of positive growth in the behavior category. The regular student responses indicated a greater stability, scoring approximately 25 percentage points greater in the area of no change. Finally, the integrated students experienced the greatest decline of the three groups in this category, with 50 percent of these students scoring lower on their posttest than the pre-test. The decline that the integrated group indicated could be attributed to the change in structure which they experienced in the integration program. The transition from small group instruction in the resource room to large group instruction, or perhaps the availability of more self-directed time in the regular classroom, could account for this data.

<u>Physical Appearance and Attributes</u>

The physical appearance and attributes section of the interview consisted of the following statements:

1. I am smart.

2. I can draw well.

3. I have pretty eyes.

4. I have nice hair.

5. My classmates in school think I have good ideas.

6. I am good-looking.

7. I am a leader in games and sports.

8. I am good in music.

9. I am good at making things with my hands.

Data

Thirty-three percent of the resource room students indicated enhanced self-concept in this area. Twenty-two percent experienced no change. Forty-five percent indicated decreased self-regard.

Thirty-eight percent of integrated students indicated an increase in this area. Thirty-one percent indicated no change. Thirty-one percent experienced decreased self-concept.

Thirty-two percent of regular students indicated increased self-concept in the area of appearance and attributes. Twenty-six percent experienced no change. Forty-two percent indicated decreased self-regard.

TABLE II

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND ATTRIBUTES

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	33
Resource	18	No Change	22
Resource	18	Decline	45
Integrated	16	Improve	38
Integrated	16	No Change	31
Integrated	16	Decline	31
Regular	19	Improve	32
Regular	19	No Change	26
Regular	19	Decline	42

The data shown in Table II and the accompanying graph indicate that the integrated students scored slightly higher than the other two groups in the positive growth area of this attribute and experienced less decrease in self-concept than the resource or regular students. This score could be attributed to new opportunities to work within the regular classroom and perhaps a lowering of stigmatization associated with moving in and out of the classroom to attend special education classes. The difference between the three groups were not great, but enough to suggest growth on the part of the integrated students in their new program.

Popularity

The popularity section consisted of the following eight statements:

1. My classmates make fun of me.

2. I am shy.

3. I feel left out of things.

4. I am among the last to be chosen for games.

5. I have many friends.

6. In games and sports, I watch instead of play.

7. My classmates in school think I have good ideas.

8. I am different from other people.

<u>Data</u>

Twenty-two percent of the resource room students indicated enhanced self-esteem. Twenty-two percent experienced no change. Fifty-six percent indicated a decreased self-concept.

Thirty-eight percent of the integrated students indicated enhanced self-esteem. Nineteen percent experienced no change. Forty-three percent experienced decreased self-concept.

Forty-seven percent of the regular students experienced growth in the area of popularity. Eleven percent indicated no change. Forty-two percent of these students decreased in this area.

TABLE III

POPULARITY

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	22
Resource	18	No Change	22
Resource	18	Decline	56
Integrated	16	Improve	38
Integrated	16	No Change	19
Integrated	16	Decline	43
Regular	19	Improve	47
Regular	19	No Change	11
Regular	19	Decline	42

The data in Table III and the accompanying graph suggest that the integrated students developed a greater acceptance or belonging in respect to their peer group than the resource room students. The data also indicates that the resource room students struggled with the issue of popularity and experienced a greater decline and the least growth of the three groups in regards to this issue. The struggle of the resource room students with their popularity could be attributed to the potential stigma of going at times to a separate classroom for instruction. Relationships which might otherwise be formed by continual contact time, could possibly be hindered or thwarted by the pull-out program.

Intellectual and School Status

The intellectual and school status section of the interview consisted of the following statements:

1. I am smart.

2. I get nervous when the teacher calls on me.

3. When I grow up, I will be an important person.

4. I have good ideas.

5. I am an important member of my family.

6. I am good in my school work.

7. I am slow in finishing my work.

8. I am an important member of my class.

9. My friends like my ideas.

10. My classmates in school think I have good ideas.

11. I forget what I learn.

12. I am a good reader.

13. I would rather work alone than with a group.

Data

Forty percent of the resource room students experienced growth in the area of school and intellectual status. Seventeen percent indicated no change. Forty-three percent experienced decreased self-regard in this area.

Thirty-eight percent of the integrated students experienced growth in this area. Twenty-five percent indicated no change. Thirty-seven percent of these students experienced a decrease in intellectual and school status. Thirty-two percent of the regular students increased in the area of intellectual and school status. Twenty-six percent experienced no change. Forty-two percent indicated a decrease in self-concept in this category.

TABLE IV

INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	40
Resource	18	No Change	17
Resource	18	Decline	43
Integrated	16	Improve	38
Integrated	16	No Change	25
Integrated	16	Decline	37
Regular	19	Improve	32
Regular	19	No Change	26
Regular	19	Decline	42

According to Table IV and the accompanying graph, intellectual and school status appears to be a fairly consistent struggle for all three groups with rates of decline ranging between 43 and 37 percent. On the other hand, the rates of improvement are fairly consistent but may reflect the instructional strategies that each group of students experienced. Resource room students, working within small instructional groups consisting of students with similar ability levels, experienced the greatest growth at a rate of 40 percent. The integrated students, exposed to a broader peer group with a variety of abilities and adapted curriculum and instruction, had a 38 percent growth rate. Regular students, working with curriculum at grade level with less individualized help, indicated a 32 percent rate of growth.

Anxiety

The following statements made up the anxiety section of the interview:

1. I am often sad.

2. I am shy.

3. I get nervous when the teacher calls on me.

4. I like being the way I am.

5. I feel left out of things.

6. I wish I were different.

7. I am unhappy.

8. I am often afraid.

9. I am always dropping or breaking things.

Data

Twenty-eight percent of the resource room students indicated an enhancement of their self-concept in this area. Thirty-nine percent indicated no change. Thirty-two percent experienced worse self-regard in the area of anxiety.

Twenty-five percent of the integrated students indicated growth in self-concept in the area of anxiety. Twenty-five percent experienced no change. Fifty percent experienced diminished self-regard in this category.

Sixty-eight percent of the regular students improved in this area. Twenty-one percent indicated no change. Eleven percent experienced a decrease in their self-concept in this area.

TABLE V

ANXIETY

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	28
Resource	18	No Change	40
Resource	18	Decline	32
Integrated	16	Improve	25
Integrated	16	No Change	25
Integrated	16	Decline	50
Regular	19	Improve	68
Regular	19	No Change	21
Regular	19	Decline	11

The data in Table V and the accompanying graph indicate that regular students, with a 68 percent improvement rate, experienced the greatest growth. This group also experienced the least amount of increased anxiety at 11 percent. The diminished anxiety and resulting growth among the regular group could be attributed to the settling in to the regular routine of the new school year. Heightened anxiety is a common factor among students and staff as the year begins.

The integrated students experienced the greatest amount of anxiety with 50 percent indicating an increase in these feelings. These students also reported the least amount of growth in this area. This may be attributed to the fact that their instructional program was literally a new educational experience for them. At least 50 percent were never truly comfortable.

The resource room students indicated slightly more growth at 28 percent and did not experience as much decrease as the integrated students. This group appeared to adapt more readily to their educational setting with 40 percent remaining stable throughout the year. The shift in anxiety level could, as mentioned previously, be a result of starting a new school year; however, the resource students would be entering a program they had experienced the year before and would thus soon adapt more readily than the integrated students.

Happiness and Satisfaction

The following statements made up the happiness and satisfaction portion of the interview:

1. I am a happy person.

2. I like being the way I am.

3. I wish I were different.

4. I am unhappy.

5. I am easy to get along with.

6. I am a good reader.

7. I have good ideas.

Data

Seventeen percent of the resource room students indicated an enhancement of their self-concept in this area. Thirty percent experienced no change. Fifty-three percent indicated decreased self-regard.

Nineteen percent of the integrated students experienced growth in this area. Thirty-eight percent indicated no change. Forty-three percent experienced diminished self-regard.

Twenty-one percent of the regular students indicated positive growth in this area. Seventy-four percent indicated no change. Five percent experienced a decrease in this area.

TABLE VI

HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	17
Resource	18	No Change	30
Resource	18	Decline	53
Integrated	16	Improve	19
Integrated	16	No Change	38
Integrated	16	Decline	43
Regular	19	Improve	21
Regular	19	No Change	74
Regular	19	Decline	5

The data in Table VI and the corresponding graph indicate a fairly consistent growth pattern among all three groups. The resource group reported 17 percent growth, the integrated group 19 percent, and the regular group 21 percent. The regular group maintained the greatest stability with only five percent of the students experiencing a decline in their esteem; however, the resource students declined at a rate of 53 percent and the integrated students indicated a 43 percent loss. The resource and integrated students obviously struggle with this area of their self-concept and experienced these feelings to a greater extent as the school year progressed. Most of the regular students indicated a general contentment with this area of their self-regard.

Group Total Scores

Total group scores represent the collective results of the following six categories:

1. Behavior

2. Physical appearance and attributes

3. Popularity

4. Intellectual and school status

5. Anxiety

6. Happiness and satisfaction

<u>Data</u>

Forty-four percent of the resource room students indicated an increase in total self-esteem. No resource room students maintained the same total score on both pre and postscripts. Fifty-six percent of the resource students experienced a decline in total self-concept.

Thirty-eight percent of the integrated students indicated an increase in total self-esteem. No integrated students maintained the same total score on both pre and posttests. Sixty-two percent of the integrated students experienced a decline in total self-esteem.

Forty-two percent of the regular students indicated an increase in total self-esteem. Twelve percent of the regular students indicated no change. Forty-six percent of the regular student experienced a decline in total self-concept.

TABLE VII

TOTAL GROUP SCORES

Student	Total Number of Students	Result	Percent
Resource	18	Improve	44
Resource	18	No Change	0
Resource	18	Decline	56
Integrated	16	Improve	38
Integrated	16	No Change	0
Integrated	16	Decline	62
Regular	19	Improve	42
Regular	19	No Change	12
Regular	19	Decline	46

The data in Table VII and the related graph indicate that the self-esteem improvement rates of the three groups were fairly close. The resource room students had the greatest improvement at 44 percent. The regular students followed with an improvement rate of 42 percent. Lastly, the integrated students indicated an enhancement of 38 percent. In the regular group, 12 percent of the students maintained the same score on the posttest as on the initial pretest. Conversely, in the resource and integrated groups, no students achieved the same total score. All three groups indicated that a fairly high percentage of students participating experienced a diminishing of their self-concept during the school year. The integrated group indicated a decrease of 62 percent, resource room students followed with a decreased rate of 56 percent, and the regular group experienced the least decrease of 46 percent.

CHAPTER V

Summary

The purpose of this project was to provide data
regarding the self-esteem of special education students and
the ramifications, if any, to student self-concept of
classroom integration and resource room placement during the
1990-1991 school year. The validity of the assumption that
integration of special education students into the regular
classroom on a full-time basis will result in enhanced
self-esteem was monitored and assessed.

The self-esteem levels of 53 elementary students in the
Wenatchee School District were evaluated by both pre and
posttesting during the 1990-1991 school year. Initially 60
students participated in the pretesting during the Fall of
1990. The posttest administered in the Spring of 1991
recorded the responses of the 53 students. Seven students
had moved during the school year or were unavailable for
posttesting. The student population pre and posttested
consisted of 18 resource room students, 16 full-time
integration students, and 19 non-special education students.
The results of individual pre and posttest scores were
combined within their separate groups to calibrate results
that would be representative of each tested group. Group
scores were converted to percentage figures rounded to the
nearest whole number.

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The interview consisted of 45 statements which required positive or negative responses from the participants. Each statement, when analyzed, became part of the six pre-determined categories. The six categories reflected self-concept in relation to: behavior, physical appearance and attributes, popularity, intellectual and school status, anxiety, and happiness or satisfaction.

Analysis of the data indicated that a large number of elementary students struggle with their self-esteem. Approximately 55 percent of those students participating in the project experienced an overall decline during the 1990-1991 school year. Data also indicated integrated students did experience self-esteem enhancement that exceeded resource room students in certain areas. However, total results revealed that resource room student self-concept scores exceeded those of the integrated students.

The review of the literature showed special education students integrated on a full-time basis into the regular classroom are likely to experience diminished self-esteem. If full-time integration is implemented, cooperative learning strategies may increase the probabilities of student success.

Conclusions

. As a result of this project, it can be concluded that:

1. The manipulation of the learning environment of special education students, to enhance their self-esteem, brought about mixed results.

2. A large percentage of elementary students in Wenatchee struggle to maintain positive self-esteem. Fifty-six percent of the resource room students experienced a decline in overall self-esteem. Sixty-two percent of the integrated students experienced a decline, and 46 percent of the regular students indicated diminished self-regard.

3. Special education students experience a greater amount of continuing anxiety than regular students.

4. The placement of special education students in a full-time integration program does not insure a greater enhancement of their total self-concept than that experienced by special education students participating in a resource room pull-out program.

5. The full-time integration of special education students into the regular classroom, may be of benefit to certain areas of their self-esteem. The integrated group did experience greater growth than the resource room group in the assessment categories of appearance, popularity and happiness; whereas, the resource group experienced greater growth than that experienced by the integrated group in the areas of behavior, anxiety and intellectual status.

Recommendations

As a result of this project, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. A need exists to understand the growth of self-esteem in elementary special education students attending Wenatchee School District. To accomplish this goal, it is recommended that self-esteem assessment be continued during the 1991-1992 school year.

2. It is recommended that the use of individual self-esteem assessments be examined as a potential tool to diagnose and define self-esteem deficiencies in special education students.

3. The integration of special education students into the regular classroom, as a means of enhancing their overall self-esteem, warrants further examination before district wide implementation.

4. Programs created to enhance student self-esteem need to be explored for all elementary students attending the Wenatchee School District.

5. Further studies should be conducted on the self-esteem of elementary students in general.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTERVIEW

THE MODIFIED PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S
SELF-CONCEPT SCALE

STUDENT INTERVIEW

THE MODIFIED PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S
SELF-CONCEPT SCALE

I am going to ask you some questions. Some of them are true
of you and some are not true of you. There are no right or
wrong answers. Only you can tell how you feel about
yourself, so please answer the way you really feel inside.

1.	I am a happy person.	Yes	No
2.	I am often sad.	Yes	No
3.	I am smart.	Yes	No
4.	I am shy.	Yes	No
5.	I get nervous when the teacher calls on me.	Yes	No
6.	I have good ideas.	Yes	No
7.	I am an important member of my family.	Yes	No
8.	I am good at making things with my hands.	Yes	No
9.	I am good in my school work.	Yes	No
10.	I can draw well.	Yes	No
11.	I am slow in finishing my work.	Yes	No
12.	I often get into trouble.	Yes	No
13.	I like being the way I am.	Yes	No
14.	I dislike school.	Yes	No
15.	I am unhappy.	Yes	No
16.	I have many friends.	Yes	No
17.	I get into a lot of fights.	Yes	No
18.	I am easy to get along with.	Yes	No
19.	I am a good reader.	Yes	No
20.	I would rather work alone than with a group.	Yes	No
21.	I am often afraid.	Yes	No
22.	I am a good person.	Yes	No
23.	My classmates make fun of me.	Yes	No
24.	When I grow up, I will be an important person.	Yes	No
25.	I am well behaved at school.	Yes	No
26.	It is usually my fault when something goes wrong.	Yes	No
27.	I cause trouble for my family.	Yes	No
28.	I am good in music.	Yes	No
29.	I am an important member of my class.	Yes	No
30.	I have pretty eyes.	Yes	No
31.	My friends like my ideas.	Yes	No
32.	I feel left out of things.	Yes	No
33.	I have nice hair.	Yes	No
34.	I wish I were different.	Yes	No
35.	I am among the last to be chosen for games.	Yes	No
36.	I am often mean to other people.	Yes	No

37.	My classmates in school think I have good ideas.	Yes	No
38.	I am good looking.	Yes	No
39.	I am picked on at home.	Yes	No
40.	I am a leader in games and sports.	Yes	No
41.	In games and sports, I watch instead of play.	Yes	No
42.	I forget what I learn.	Yes	No
43.	I lose my temper easily.	Yes	No
44.	I am always dropping or breaking things.	Yes	No
45.	I am different from other people.	Yes	No