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Case Study: Attitudes of Rural High School Students and Teachers Regarding Inclusion

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This case study was intended to explore the premise that the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding inclusion should enhance the implementation of the process in a k-12 rural setting. Therefore, rural high school students' and rural general education and special education teachers' perceptions of inclusion provided the primary focus of this case study. Data analysis identified that while overall general education teachers supported the idea of inclusion they did not believe that they were trained. Additionally, the students supported the concept of inclusion when they were allowed choice in which classroom they were placed and if the teacher allowed choice in classroom activities. Also the classroom size was identified by all stakeholders as an issue by being affected negatively by the addition of more students being placed in inclusive classrooms. Implications for the teacher training, and the allocation of resources in rural settings are significant.

The *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation that established national strategies to achieve the goal of all students achieving (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001[NCLB]) has facilitated the need to create standards of accountability that emphasize teacher efficacy as central to the process of improving student achievement (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000). While few educators would disagree with the premise expressed in the federal law, if one would examine closely the practices of many teacher preparatory programs or public school classrooms one would find "that this belief is typically superficial and not supported by attitudes or practices" (Boutte, 2005, p. 5; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Within the arena of special education, many changes have occurred regarding the classroom setting where special education students are being placed. The increased need for more special education inclusionary services could be a result of these calls for higher accountability standards (McLeskey & Henry, 1998). However, Hehir (2002) postulated that, "there is significant evidence that large numbers of students with disabilities are not receiving appropriate modifications in the regular education classroom to allow the students to benefit from inclusion" (p. 34). Thus, there has become a significant need for additional programming options to meet the needs of all students with disabilities and the current overall trend has been to move toward more inclusion within the public school setting. The attainment of success for all children with disabilities requires that all stakeholders focus and agree upon the key factors that make for a successful inclusion program (Martin, Ireland, & Claxton, 2003)

It appears the myriad beliefs held by educators play a major role in the success or failure of inclusion within a classroom or district (Martin, et al, 2003). A major concern of educators, regardless of subject matter, is the time element. There simply is not enough time for appropriate modification of the curriculum. When team teaching or collaboration is not present, time or lack of it, is a major factor for individual teachers (Brown, 1997). The use of support services, staff and resources also appear to be areas where concerns are significant. And the largest obstacle to inclusion appears to be the attitudes of teachers, parents, and administrators (Williams & Fox, 1996), and "reversing the negative performance trends of marginalized students requires structural reframing in attitudes, knowledge bases, and instructional practices" (Boutte, 2005, p. 5). This acknowledgement of the connection between educators' attitudes and the success or failure of an inclusionary program is significant; however, little data exist on teachers' attitudes (D'Alonzo et al., 1997; Martin et al., 2003) and even less data on students' attitudes regarding inclusion.

Therefore, rural high school students' and rural general education and special education teachers' perceptions of inclusion provided the primary focus of this case study. The research questions critical to this inquiry were:

1. To what extent do students (with disabilities and those without disabilities) feel that inclusion is beneficial to them? What do they see as the benefit?
2. To what extent do teachers (both special education and general education) feel that inclusion is beneficial to the school setting? What do they see as the benefits?
3. To what extent are attitudes different between the groups of students and teachers?

Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusion

Public schools have experienced a "restructuring" for the past several years. This has become significantly evident in the area of special education, especially concerning inclusion, as efforts have increased toward a shared responsibility for students, which requires coordination and cooperation between general and special education personnel (Huang et al., 1997).

The instructional benefits for most inclusive educational programs are increased cooperative learning, collaborative teaming, partner learning, peer tutoring, student empowerment and creative problem solving (Williams & Fox, 1996). Other areas of benefits for an inclusion program have been identified as academics, social acceptance, health and safety, self-concept, self control and inclusion in integrated activities (Williams & Fox, 1996).

Additional advantages for students stemming from inclusive classrooms have been cited in the literature. Social acceptance by peers (Banerji & Dailey, 1995), academic and behavioral progress (Moore, 1998) and increased student ownership (Giangreco, 1997) are a few that have been noted. When students with disabilities are within the general education setting most of the day, there is a tendency for them to be more apt to "blend in" with the rest of the classroom (Banerji & Dailey).

Conversely, there are disadvantages with inclusion programming. Students are often in situations for which they are ill prepared academically or socially (Din, 1996, 1997). Lack of organization, planning, and coordination are other disadvantages frequently identified (Martin, 1995). Still another disadvantage may be the possible misinterpretation of the law as it relates to "continuum of services" (Wigle, 1994). At times, students with disabilities can not do the work required in a general education classroom, even with modifications, thus the best placement would not be the inclusion classroom. This could especially be true in the case of full-inclusion situations where no other option is available to the student or to the teacher (Martin, 1995).

Teacher and Students Attitudes towards Inclusion

A number of researchers, (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000; Waldron, McLeskey, & Pacchiano, 1999) have noted that the attitudes of teachers toward inclusionary programs are one of the most important variables affecting its success. The lack of sufficient funding and personnel, along with the extra time and training needed for appropriate collaboration (Trump & Hange, 1996) are additional identified concerns. Wood (1998) reported that teachers recognized the challenge of collaborating in an inclusive classroom where small-group interpersonal skills are required and they believed they needed more training in those skills.

Another investigation found that although the preponderance of respondents had positive beliefs regarding inclusion they also had strong reservations about the adequacy of pre-service and in-service professional development (Bunch, et al. 1997). Hobbs and Westling (1998) reported that of all the factors related to the success of inclusion, teacher attitude, teacher training and understanding of collaboration were arguably the most important. They went on to argue that while general education teachers may support the "concept" of inclusion, most of them did not feel that they could successfully integrate these students into their own classrooms. In fact it has been reported that general education teachers do not share with special education teachers the belief that students with special needs have a basic right to receive their education in general education classrooms (Martin, et al. 2003)

As the general education teachers' attitudes vary so do the students' attitudes. Most students tend to want to be in the "mainstream" and not be labeled as a student who goes to a special education classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). This is especially true as the child gets older. However, according to Martin (1995) high school students received lower grades in "included" classes than do students seen as non-disabled. They drop out more frequently and experience a higher percentage of trouble with the law (Martin).

The literature also has revealed that there does not seem to be an overall concern about the attitudes of special education students or their peers in the included classroom as few studies have addressed student attitudes about their inclusion with all students or about the peer acceptance (Huang et al., 1997). Included in the few studies that involved student's attitudes it was found that when teachers demonstrate patience and understanding the student's viewed inclusion as positive (Sanacore, 1996). Also students who have teachers who provided a variety of delivery and assignments had improved attitudes toward that inclusive classroom (Huang, et. al., 1997; Sanacore, 1996).

Rural School Issues Regarding Inclusion

All the challenges facing educators and students regarding inclusion appear to be even more apparent when inclusion occurs in a rural setting (Salend, 2001). From the changing populations those rural areas serve (Dean & Behne, 2002) and the limited access to appropriate teacher training programs and in-services (Salend), a mismatch has developed between the kinds of skills teachers have and the kinds of skills they need. Furthermore, according to Salend, rural schools are serving more children of poverty than ever before. Because of these challenges and due to limited access rural areas have to universities and technical assistance centers (Dean & Behne, 2002) teachers do not always have opportunities to learn how to address the needs of students with diverse learning needs. Many teachers in rural areas do not understand how a student's diverse learning needs affects that student's access to the curriculum

– for example, how reading is affected by the dynamics of a learning disability (Dean & Behne). Monahan, Marino, and Miller (1996) found that the rural general education teachers perceived that they were not prepared by their universities to meet the needs of children with special needs.

As reported by Dean and Behne (2002), rural schools are often limited in the amount of outside support available to serve all students, as well as, lacking in the infrastructure or skilled personnel to provide the range of programs necessary to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. Schumm, Vaughan, Gordan and Rothlein (1994) further noted, often in rural settings teachers have not received the appropriate training to deal with the myriad of learning issues in the classroom. Martin, Ireland, and Claxton (2003) postulated that educational leaders could change teacher behavior "by providing appropriate comprehensive teacher training grounded in best practices; by providing appropriate and meaningful feedback regarding the implementation of training; and finally by holding educators accountable for the success of all students under their supervision" (p. 9).

However, some of the possible consequences of the limited resources of rural areas to serve students have many times driven schools to classify students as needing special education, bilingual education, or supplemental services because they need the resources that come with these classifications in order to serve culturally and linguistically diverse students (Dean & Behne, 2002).

Since in an inclusive classroom teachers must address the needs of each individual child, Zeph (1991) recommended a variety of models for rural communities as they utilize the process of inclusion. The models include team teaching, parallel teaching, general classroom-based tutorial, and separate tutorial with general classroom base, general classroom placement with support services, and general classroom placement with dual-certified teacher. By providing a myriad of options Zeph has created a continuum of possibilities for the rural educator. Dean and Behne (2002) further suggested that schools must have a process to ensure that educational decisions are based on the needs of all students, not just some students, by bringing all stakeholders to the table. Second, schools must find ways to assist all stakeholders in understanding what is happening, why it is happening, and how the school personnel are responding. Third, if they do not have teachers that have the skills required to meet the needs of all students, they should find experts to help them. Finally, if rural schools are to successfully implement classrooms that are inclusive, then they must be adequately trained in inclusionary practices, communication skills, and collaboration (Martin, et al., 2003).

Overall, the literature revealed that teachers view the inclusionary process with much skepticism and rural teachers believe that many obstacles are currently in place that hinder the implementation of successful inclusionary programs. Also the literature revealed that the attitudes of students have not been sufficiently considered in regard to inclusion. Moreover, the literature revealed that the attitudes of teachers regarding their practices will have significant impact on the implementation of those practices. Therefore, an investigation of the perceptions of teachers and students in a rural setting was warranted.

Methods

Participants

The population for this study included students with disabilities and general education students attending a rural high school in a Midwest state. This study also included special education teachers and general education teachers from the same high school. The total sampling method was utilized with a questionnaire distributed to all students and teachers meeting the selection criterion. The students with disabilities had to have both "included" classrooms and classes within the Learning Center (self contained special education), in order to be part of this population. These students also had to have an IEP (Individualized Educational Program) in place along with a diagnosis of their disability. General education students had to have classes with no "included" students and classes where inclusion took place. One group of teachers for this study had to have some classes where they taught part of the day in the Learning Center (special education teacher) and part of the day with an "included" classroom, which had a general educator in the classroom setting, as well. The other group of teachers taught only in the general classroom setting, but had "inclusion" classroom(s) at some point during their school day. The enrollment of the special education classroom (Learning Center) ranged from 5 students to 12. The general education classroom enrollment ranged in size from 24 students to 36, depending on content.

This Midwest high school is located in a rural school district and covers a very wide geographic area. The high school includes freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The high school has approximately 1000 total students. Specifically, the sample for this inquiry included a total of 72 (29 students with disabilities and 43 students without disabilities) and 20 teachers (7 special education and 13 general education). The total student population was made up of 32 males and 40 females. The teacher population was consisted of 5 males and 15 females. All of the teachers and all of the students completed and returned the survey.

Data Collection

This study was a mixed design study, but primarily qualitative in nature. Observations, surveys and interviews were conducted with participants. Three sets of classroom observations of both types of environments were employed with a checklist of yes and no responses and a place for relevant comments. This consisted of inclusionary

classrooms where two teachers were present and where team teaching was taking place. The following academic classrooms were observed, which fit the above criteria: Language Arts, World History, Physical Science, Health, and Technical Mathematics. Additionally, three sets of observations of Learning Center classes took place. These were special education classrooms, where only a special education teacher and students with disabilities were present. Classes observed were Language Arts, Biology, World History, Physical Science, and Mathematics. Two external observers, the researcher and a trained observer conducted observations. These observers filled out an observation form developed by the researcher.

Personal interviews were also used with open-ended discussion questions. Students with disabilities who had both Learning Center classes and included classes were selected for interviews. General education students selected were those who had experienced being part of an "included" classroom at some time during their high school career. Ten percent of special education and general education personnel that had experience within a regular "included" classroom and taught special education/general education classes during their school day were also selected. These interviews were comprised of questions dealing with attitudes toward inclusion. Questions were taken from the literature reviewed in this inquiry and framed around the research questions posed for this inquiry. Open discussion concerning inclusion was also part of the interview process. These interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis by the researcher.

Finally, a questionnaire survey based on a five point Likert type scale was administered to both students with disabilities and their peers within the inclusion classroom(s). Teachers from both populations were also given the survey, based on the same scale. The survey instrument was developed by the research based on the literature of Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996), Mastropieri and Scruggs (2000), Martin (1995), and Sanacore (1996). The same survey instrument was administered to students and teachers with modifications appropriate to the audience.

In the development of the survey instrument, a principal component analysis on a small sample of ten students and ten teachers was utilized to identify related benefits and attitudes. The results were subjected to a Cronbach's Alpha examination to correlate the scores. The Cronbach's Alpha method is a modification of the Pearson correlation coefficient (Dereshisky, 1999). This procedure tests for reliability of the instrument, which would be evidenced by a high, positive correlation between sets of scores (Stockburger, 1998). The Cronbach's Alpha scores for the two components were .754 (benefits) and .698(attitudes).

The interview protocol consisted of five open-ended questions that asked: "What benefits do you receive by being put in an inclusionary classroom?"; "Do you feel inclusion is always beneficial? Why or why not?"; "Do you think you should be part of the decision-making process regarding inclusionary classrooms?"; "What can teachers do to make their classrooms more comfortable for all students?"; and "What can cause your attitude to change (positive or negative) in a classroom?" For each group interviewed the questions were modified accordingly. The data from these five questions were coded and triangulated to attempt further validity of this research.

Data Analysis

Since this was a mixed design study, the data for this study were organized following several steps. First of all, the data from the participant surveys were entered into SPSS. Then the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages. Next using a table of means and analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure the mean differences were analyzed and finally the differences between the four groups were analyzed to see if there were any significant differences in perceptions. A critical value of .05 was used to determine significance. If a significant difference was found then a post-hoc multiple comparison test was used to determine which groups differed significantly from one another.

Next, coding processes were utilized on the five open-ended questions. The coding processes including identifying concepts embedded within the data, organization discrete concepts into categories, defining the properties and dimensions of categories and linking them according to their properties and dimensions into board, explanatory themes (Boghan & Biklen, 1998). Finally, the data from the three sets of observation forms were entered into SPSS. Then the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages.

Limitations

This inquiry was limited in the scope of coverage by the sample that was chosen. The students and teachers selected were all located in one rural high school setting; therefore, some error may have been introduced into the findings due to limited sampling. In addition the small sample, especially the special education teachers, limited the use of some statistical analysis. While the authors indicate only plausible interpretations of the data in the report there may be other explanations for the date that are more accurate, especially due to the limitations as stated.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of Benefits of Inclusion

As seen in Table 1 the highest average rating for the overall group regarding benefits of inclusion was socialization (M=3.91). For the student with disabilities (M=4.00) the general education student (M=4.04), and the special education teachers (M=4.00) this was the highest or

second highest average rating. However the general education teachers rated socialization (M= 3.20) as one of their lowest benefits. Another point of interest in data indicated that all four groups rated feeling comfortable in the inclusionary classroom as one of the lowest benefits if not lowest (3.10) for students with disabilities, (3.20) for general education students, (3.33) for special education teachers, and (2.90) for general education teachers. Also for the students with disabilities they indicated that teachers at this school did not always make them feel comfortable in their classrooms (M=2.85). For the general education
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students benefit of being with students with disabilities was also rated low (M=3.18). The special education teacher did not agree that being in a general classroom had more benefits than not being included in that classroom (M= 3.00) Though it is important to note that overall the special education teachers viewed the benefits of inclusion much more positively than the other three groups. An analysis of variance (see Table 2) further indicated that there was significant differences among the four groups on the belief that all students within a regular classroom learned more in the inclusive setting (*p=.002).*

Table 1.

Means and (Standard Deviations) of Perceptions of Benefits of Inclusion by Shareholders and the Significance Levels Between Groups

Factor	M	SWD(SD)	GS(SD)	ST(SD)	GT(SD) Sig	
Item 1 Gen. Ed	3.24	3.00(1.58)	3.38(1.35)	3.00(1.63)	3.28(1.32)	.722
Item 2 Social	3.91	4.00(1.29)	4.04(1.00)	4.00(1.33)	3.20(1.30)	.195
Item 3 Learning	3.56	4.00(1.02)	3.18(0.96)	3.58(1.03)	4.14(0.86)	.002*
Item 4 Feeling	3.19	3.10(0.96)	3.20(1.29)	3.33(0.94)	2.90(1.14)	.757
Item 5 Sp. Ed.	3.46	3.60(1.23)	3.36(1.19)	3.80(1.31)	3.42(1.08)	.699
Item 6 Subject	3.73	4.00(1.21)	3.70(1.07)	4.10(1.10)	3.21(1.36)	.183
Item 7 Teacher	3.37	2.85(1.42)	3.56(1.32)	3.30(1.56)	3.50(1.34)	.273

Note. SWD denotes Students with Disabilities, GS denotes General Education Student, ST denotes Special Education Teacher, GT denotes General Education Teacher. Likert-type scale: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=disagree. *Difference between the means is significant at the .05 level.

Table 2.

Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons of Differences in Perceptions of Stakeholders Regarding Benefits of Inclusion

Factor	Role & Mean		Role & Mean		Mean Diff	Sig.
Item 3 Learn More	SWD	4.00	GS	3.18	-.82	.013*
	SWD	4.00	ST	3.80	.02	.954
	SWD	4.00	GT	4.14	-.14	.976
	GS	3.18	GT	4.14	-.96	.010*
	GS	3.18	ST	3.80	-.62	.279
	GT	4.14	ST	3.80	.34	.838

Note. SWD denotes Students with Disabilities, GES denotes General Education Student, ST denotes Special Education Teacher, GT denotes General Education Teacher. Likert-type scale: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=disagree. *Difference between the means is significant at the .05 level.

From the personal interviews of students and teachers three major themes emerged from the analysis regarding benefits of inclusion. Themes of *learning more* and *losing the benefit of smaller classes* emerged. These themes are supported best through the voices of the participants.

Learning More. One student with disabilities responded, "I get more benefits when I'm in other classes because you get to see and learn just like the rest of the kids your age and don't get treated like you don't know how to do the same work as the rest of the kids." Another student with

disabilities stated," I have more friends, I learn more and I do a lot more stuff". A special education teacher noted, "I often observe my kids just sitting in class not participating. While a general education teacher noted, "all the kids in my class regardless of disability are expected and do participate."

Losing benefit of smaller classes. However several of the students with disabilities noted that "they don't like the large classes" and one noted, "No, being in regular classes isn't always good. Cuz some teachers only help the one who they really like or that makes good grades and the larger classes left you out". A general education student noted that inclusion "allowed for meeting more kids" and "let those kids learn like the rest of us". A special education teacher noted," I don't feel like I get to do as much with the kids as I did when we had a small self-contained room".

The analysis of the observation data revealed that during the observation the students with disabilities were all involved in some type of class activity. Additionally, throughout the observation they stayed on task at least 50 % of the time. It was also observed that the students with disabilities asked for help when needed. However those

same students did not volunteer for any class discussions nor did they turn in all assignments when asked.

Analysis of Attitudes towards Inclusion

Overall the highest average rating for the four stakeholders regarding attitudes towards inclusion was that involvement in the decision regarding inclusion ($\underline{M}$=3.94) is essential (see Table 3). To further support that belief students with disabilities and special education teachers rated consistently higher than the general education students or teachers the belief that attitude improves when chosen to be in a class. Additionally, the data revealed that the student with disabilities (2.96) and the special education teacher (2.00) did not always believe that the student with disabilities was fully accepted by the general education teacher. That attitude was, in fact, the lowest rating for the special education teachers for the component of attitudes towards inclusion. As indicated in Table 4 the analysis of variance further indicated that there were significant differences among the four groups (*p=.002*).

Table 3.

Means and (Standard Deviations) of Perceptions of Attitudes towards Inclusion by Stakeholders and the Significance Levels Between Groups

Factor	$\underline{M}$	SWD(SD)	GS(SD)	ST(SD)	GT(SD)	Sig
Item 8 Positive	3.69	4.20(0.76)	3.44(1.24)	4.00(0.94)	3.64(1.21)	.070
Item 9 Accept	2.96	2.25(1.33)	3.39(1.11)	2.00(1.29)	3.14(1.40)	.002*
Item 10 T Attitude	3.71	3.70(1.52)	3.62(0.97)	3.42(1.81)	4.14(1.09)	.513
Item 11 Chosen	3.79	4.00(0.45)	3.62(1.00)	4.00(0.57)	3.92(0.73)	.296
Item 12 Negative	3.94	4.30(1.12)	3.88(.93)	4.28(125)	3.42(128)	.106

Note. SWD denotes Students with Disabilities, GES denotes General Education Student, ST denotes Special Education Teacher, GT denotes General Education Teacher. Likert-type scale: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=disagree. *Difference between the means is significant at the .05 level.

Table 4.

Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons of Differences in Perceptions of Stakeholders Regarding Attitudes towards Inclusion

Factor	Role & Mean		Role & Mean		Mean Diff	Sig.
Item 9 Accept	SWD	2.25	GS	3.39	-1.14	.005*
	SWD	2.25	ST	2.00	0.25	.967
	SWD	2.25	GT	3.14	-0.89	.169
	GS	3.39	GT	3.14	0.25	.910
	GS	3.39	ST	2.00	1.39	.034*
	GT	3.14	ST	2.00	1.14	.196

Note. SWD denotes Students with Disabilities, GES denotes General Education Student, ST denotes Special Education Teacher, GT denotes General Education Teacher. Likert-type scale: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=disagree. *Difference between the means is significant at the .05 level.

From the semi-structured interviews three themes emerged regarding attitudes. These themes were attitudes can be made positive with *teachers who care and are accepting*, *too large of classes are distracting*, and *involvement in the decision making process* is necessary. The participants offered the following thoughts.

Caring and accepting teachers. Both sets of students valued the teacher's interactions. As one student with disabilities expressed, "The teachers help you feel good about your work." A general education student said, "The teachers don't nag as much and they take time to understand your problems." Another student with disabilities echoed this when he said, "My attitude goes to positive when I know I can count on the teacher to take time and explain things to me and help me with things." However that same student went on to say, " My attitude changes to negative when the teacher don't give me the time I need to do my homework because they think I should do it on my own. I can do for myself but if the teacher helps that helps me learn better and understand better." A special education teacher said," I wish I had the power to select which teacher had my children. There are some more open to kids with problems than others." A general education teacher noted, "I generally am asked to have those kids because to be frank some of my colleagues don't want them in class"

Too large of classes. Both group of students expressed the value of smaller class sizes to make the classrooms more comfortable for all students. One general education student stated," "Keeping the size of classes down helps. Less people do better and too many distractions can cause me to get in trouble even though you might like the people" And a student with disabilities reported that "the amount of people in the class helps (me) understand what the teacher is teaching. If too large it can get out of control" Both groups of teachers voiced concern and need for small classes when noting " if there were smaller classes we all could go a better job of teaching and even getting to know the kids better."

Involvement in Decision–making. For both groups of students there was agreement that involvement in the decision making process is very important for the students. As one general education student expressed," I should be a part of the decision-making process regarding what classes I take because of my age." And as a student with disabilities stated "Yes I should be involved because of my age and because we know what we can and can't do." That same student went on to say, "we could be nervous and scared when they decide where we should go". Another student with disabilities echoes the same thoughts, "I think we should be able to choose whether or not we want to be in the Learning Center or not because we know what we can do and what we can't do." She went on to say, "People who give us those tests don't mean a thing cause we could be nervous when we take it that's why we fail." Both sets of teachers voiced support for involving the students in the decision-making process however as one stated, "I believe we want to always involve the students but sometimes time or the lack of time determines who is involved or not."

The data from the observations revealed that only about half of the students with disabilities in the class and forty percent of the general education students seem to have a positive attitude toward the class. Additionally the data revealed that the majority of classrooms observed grouped the students into heterogeneous ability groups.

From the triangulation of all the data sets the first conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that when using the inclusionary programming as a way to meet the needs of students with disabilities the student enrollment in the classroom can be affected negatively. From this examined rural population the use of combining the students with disabilities and the general education students into one inclusive classroom setting resulted in larger classroom student enrollment. And that larger classroom setting affected how the student with disabilities and the general education student viewed the outcomes of the instruction and learning in the classroom. Both groups of students noted

the loss of small size classes resulted in the lack of personalized attention by teachers. And the teachers echoed that same concern. The larger the classroom, regardless of the use of two certified teachers, the more the students felt they were on their own. Again the element or time or lack of time is an important issue when dealing with inclusive classrooms (Salend, 2001). Because rural settings do not always have the external resources to provide smaller classes (Dean & Behne, 2002) this is a barrier to successful implementation of inclusive classrooms.

The next conclusion one could draw from the data is that that all stakeholders involved in inclusion want a choice in the classroom placement, especially the students. However this can become problematic in a rural setting when the choices for placement are somewhat limited. As noted by Dean and Behne (2002) the amount of outside support and the lacking in infrastructure is limited in a rural setting. However, the finding that classroom placement choice is important was similar in findings to studies by Huang, Mellblom, and Pearman (1997) and Sanacore (1996). The perceptions of stakeholders that they were given a choice in classroom selection affected whether or not they felt successful. The older the student the more positive his/her attitude when it is his/her choice to be within that inclusionary classroom. This current study also validated previous findings from Deering (1998) that when students are given choices for their learning, especially at the high school level the chances of the students' attitudes being positive towards any type of inclusion programming is enhanced.

If we want our students with disabilities and students without disabilities to benefit from an inclusive environment we must create and maintain appropriate class size which allows for trust-building, communication, and problem-solving to occur. If these perceptions from these rural teachers and students represent other rural communities then the need for smaller class sizes must be addressed. Furthermore, the results of this study indicated that there is a strong perception that students will be successful if there is a strong positive student-teacher relationship along with a positive relationship between the special education teacher and the general education teacher. The findings further support Hobbs and Westling (1998) in showing that the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion can affect either positive or negative the student-teacher relationship and ultimately the success of the students. Thus it is imperative that all barriers to successful implementation of inclusion be recognized and policies and procedures created to minimize their effect.

While the reasons for positive or negative attitudes towards inclusion continue to vary, consequently if inclusionary classrooms are going to be effective, they must provide learning environments where all of the students feel accepted and valued. We need to continue to examine teacher's perceptions about inclusion and design in-service programs that will address and hopefully eliminate those negative beliefs. If we continue to ignore those perceptions the success of future inclusionary practices could be affected. Perhaps more than just smaller classes and choice of class placement are needed to make this programming option work effectively and allow the student with disabilities and teacher to feel welcome. A change in attitude is warranted. Again this resistance to inclusion could be closely linked to the lack of training that many rural teachers report (Wood, 1998). This study further validates the findings of Bunch, Lupart, and Brown (1997) and Martin, Ireland, and Claxton (2003) that although most of the participants had positive attitudes regarding inclusion, they also have strong reservations about the support and professional development afforded them prior to implementation.

Implications for Practice

As schools in rural communities continue to examine a myriad of programming options for the student with disabilities, it is imperative that the voices of all involved are heard. This inquiry revealed that the perceptions of the constituencies surveyed, interviewed or observed, are that while inclusionary practices are generally successful there are still areas of improvement needed. This improvement includes smaller class size, more student voices heard in the decision making process, more personal interaction between teacher and student, and improved teacher attitude toward inclusion through training. Since rural schools are often plagued by limited resources, it is important that rural educators utilize to the fullest the resources available to them. Strategies such as training teachers to listen carefully to the needs of all students can only enhance an inclusionary classroom setting. Identifying key personnel within the rural community and/or utilizing volunteers within classrooms can decrease the student-teacher ratio and enhance the learning environment. Also promoting success for all students within the unique attributes of an effective inclusionary class setting requires addressing the needs of students, as well as the needs of the teachers. Developing teacher training programs that address the challenge of collaboration and small- group interpersonal skills are important. The challenge for the rural teacher in inclusionary classroom settings is to be knowledgeable about collaboration and effective instruction and flexible enough so students who need more attention are given that appropriate and effective instruction. Finally, the regional universities need to increase their rural outreach programs and provide the necessary training and resources to the rural educators. The traditional on campus classroom delivery approach must be re- examined in light of the perceptions revealed by these students and educators, and additional resources must be provided by institutions of higher education if inclusive classrooms are to be viewed successful through the eyes of all stakeholders.

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