Teacher Attitudes Towards Inclusion In Early Childhood Classroom Settings

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Master of Education

Wagner College

2014

Wagner College

Division of Graduate Studies
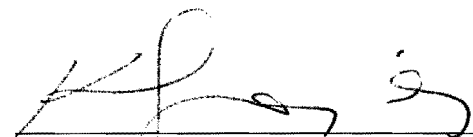
Master's Thesis

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Title of thesis: Teacher Attitudes Towards Inclusion In Early Childhood Classroom Settings

Degree: MSED: Early Childhood/Special Education (B-Grade 2)

Date of Graduation: December 2014

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Abstract

Despite federal mandates to educate students with disabilities in the general education setting, many teachers continue to have mixed feelings towards their ability to implement inclusive practices (Swain et al., 2012). In this study, student teacher perceptions of their cooperating teachers' attitude toward inclusion and ways attitudes affected inclusionary practices was studied. In addition, the influence of cooperating teachers attitudes on student teachers' own perceptions about inclusion was evaluated in order to determine the right professional development needed. This study utilized a survey consisting of 32 Likert-type items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and 11 open-ended questions. Student teachers were placed into one of three settings, general education, integrated co-teaching and self-contained. Results indicate that all 10 student teachers hold positive experiences towards inclusion, even though some have had a negative experience with inclusion because they were placed with a cooperating teacher who had a negative attitude towards inclusion practices.

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Conceptual Framework

Educating all students in the least restrictive environment, regardless of dis/abilities, has been a focus of many educational advocates. Although laws to protect the rights of students with disabilities are in place, challenges related to the way inclusive educational practices are implemented continue to exist. Over the last 40 years, the educational system of the United States has undergone a profound transformation in order to provide the opportunity for students with disabilities to access a free and appropriate education (Shady, Luther, Richman, 2013). Laws such as Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and Section 504 protect the civil rights of students with disabilities and families while also addressing the rights to a free and appropriate education when it comes to educational opportunities in schools receiving federal funding. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), amended in 1997 and 2004, specifically addresses how the educational needs of students with disabilities ages 0 to 3 and 3 to 21 must be individually considered, protected, and addressed. Prior to IDEA over 4 million students with disabilities were denied access to public education. Instead individuals with disabilities lived in state institutions for people with intellectual disabilities or mental illness (United States Education Department, 2007). These settings were very restrictive and only offered minimum food, clothing and shelter often lacking educational opportunities to prepare students for integration into society and the workforce. Those with disabilities were simply accommodated rather than assessed, educated and rehabilitated (United States Education Department, 2007). IDEA provided the necessary legal rights for the integration of students with disabilities in neighborhood schools in regular classroom with their non-disabled peers.

The least restrictive environment (LRE) is a key area of IDEA. In the LRE, students with disabilities are educated with students without disabilities with appropriate accommodations. As stated in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), only when education in the general education setting could not be achieved, the school could alter the placement into a more restricted environment. Therefore, children with disabilities must be educated with students who were not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or the removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational environment need to occur only when the nature or the severity of the disability is such that the education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services can not be achieved satisfactorily (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004, p. # 39).

Inclusionary practices adhered to the least restrictive environment mandate by promoting the belief that all students with disabilities should be fully integrated into the general education setting, while receiving instruction to meet individual needs and necessary supports and services (Swain et al., 2012). Although laws are changing to further promote and implement inclusive practices, teacher attitudes are not adapting to fulfill and carry out these laws. Although the trend toward educating students with disabilities in general education settings is continuing, mandated laws have undermined the need for all teachers to be prepared to work with all learners (McCray & McHatton, 2011).

Rationale and Purpose

Although the inclusion education movement has gained momentum in recent years, a key element in the successful implementation of the policy is the views of the personnel who have the major responsibility for its implementation, teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010). Teacher beliefs influence teaching practice and have an impact on students' educational experiences;

therefore it is important to examine teacher attitudes regarding inclusion (Berry, 2006). Over the last decade, researchers have concluded that teacher attitudes towards inclusion are the most essential key to successful inclusion practices (Cipkin & Rizza, 2003). Sharma, Forlin, Loreman & Earle, (2006) explained how attitudes were often recognized as precursors to behavior, and that teachers with more positive attitudes toward inclusion were more able and likely to modify and adjust their instruction and curriculum to meet the needs of individual students with a range of abilities (Swain et al., 2012). Cipkin and Rizza (2003) supported the idea that teacher attitudes were essential in the success of educating students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. Positive attitudes held by educators toward inclusion encourage children to strive, whereas negative attitudes limit children to meet their potential ability (Cipkin & Rizza, 2003). These conclusions suggest that the inclusion movement would benefit from research that identifies effective methods that assist teachers in the formation of positive attitudes and beliefs toward inclusion (Cullen et al., 2010). Studies have been done related to teachers' attitudes and impact on implementation of inclusive practices – add information about professional development (please add some of the research to make a case for the impact studying current attitudes of student teachers and impact experiences and cooperating teachers can have in order to include this in the discussion section related to professional development and teacher training and work with partner schools.

A review of the literature indicated that teacher attitudes toward the concept of inclusion correlate positively with effective inclusion practices and outcomes. However, it is important to note that it is possible for teachers to have expressed positive feelings toward the general concept of inclusion, but have been less optimistic about the degree to which they are adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusion (Cook, Cameron, Tankersley, 2007). On the other

hand, it is possible that teachers who are opposed to the philosophy of inclusion are very effective at its implementation (Cook et al., 2007). The present study will examine student teacher attitudes through its three major components, cognitive, affective and behavioral, but to control for the discrepancy that exists between attitude and implementation, the behavioral component will be of major focus.

Federal laws mandate inclusion practices. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) does not specifically use the word inclusion, but the use of the term "least restrictive environment" concept in the law has for many come to mean inclusion. IDEA (2004) defines the least restrictive environment as giving a student who has a disability the opportunity to be educated with peers who are non-disabled to the greatest extent appropriate. The implementation of the least restrictive environment principle is inclusion (Hernandez, 2011). "Inclusionary practices adhere to the least restrictive environment by promoting the belief that all students with disabilities should be fully integrated into the general education community," (Swain et al., 2011). Because the least restrictive environment is the law, educators should do their best to accept, promote and implement inclusive practices. Students with disabilities have a civil and legal right to be taught in a general education setting with non-disabled peers and receive a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. It is the educator's job to give his or her students the best possible education they can. If teachers hold negative attitudes toward inclusion and do not effectively implement it, students are at a disadvantage. If teachers are not on board and not ready to implement inclusive practice effectively, not only are our students missing out, but also educators are not fulfilling the requirements of mandated federal laws.

The current study examined student teachers' perceptions of their current cooperating teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Not only is it imperative to educate student teachers about

attitudes that exist towards inclusion, but it is easier to create positive attitudes of student teachers regarding inclusion than it is to change existing in-service teacher attitudes about inclusion. It is important for student teachers to be aware of mixed attitudes towards a prevalent topic in the field. By looking through the lens of the student teacher, this study served as a catalyst for a discussion about inclusion attitudes and beliefs between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. It is important for student teachers to have a positive experience with a cooperating teacher who accepts inclusion and implements it effectively. If they have a cooperating teacher who is eager and excited to serve as a mentor, and show how effective inclusion can be, this could possibly increase positive attitudes towards inclusion within the education field, therefore maximizing student achievement (Shady et al., 2013).

Research by Everington, Steven, Winters (1999) and Olsen (2003) found positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion while research by Kalyva, Gojkovic and Tsakiris' (2007), Bussing et al. (2002) and Snyder (1999) found negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Alghazo and Naggar Gaad (2004) and Batsiou et al. (2008) found neutral teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Teacher concerns toward inclusion are important factors that can assist schools to improve inclusion experiences. Gokdere (2012) revealed that one negative factor contributing to negative attitudes towards inclusion are that inclusive education causes extra work. McLeskey and Waldron (2006) found that two major concerns of teachers regarding inclusion are whether or not teachers have the necessary skills to scaffold support within their classrooms and whether the school system supports collaboration with special educators and other service providers in an effort to improve outcomes for all students. Leatherman (2007) highlighted the need for training and workshops and positive experiences to foster success. Boer, Pijl, Post & Minnaert (2011) noted the importance of variables such as gender, teaching experience, assistance in class, type

of diagnosis and experience with special educational needs influencing teacher attitudes toward inclusion. Cook et al., (2007) found variables such as number of college courses taken in special/inclusive education, class size, type of disability and hours per week spent collaborating with special educators or therapists outside of class effect teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Olsen (2003) used experience/training, collaboration between teachers, a supportive school environment, workload and type/severity of the disability as crucial variables contributing to teacher attitudes toward inclusion. After a thorough review of research, three major and consistent themes affecting teacher attitude toward inclusion can be reported: teacher experience and preparation, support and collaboration within the school building and type/severity of the student's disability. The findings of Gokdere (2012) indicated that differences between inclusion attitudes exist because of reasons related to occupational experience and preparedness of educators to serve children with special needs.

Although there are a multitude of factors impacting teacher attitudes about inclusion such as class size, classroom management, student-teacher ratio, assisted help, number of years teaching, insufficient planning time, and many more, there are three factors that have been expressed as major barriers towards inclusion implementation across a variety of research. The three major themes influencing teacher attitudes towards inclusion are teacher experience/preparation, collaborative and supportive school environment and type/severity of a child's disability.

Leatherman (2007) found using discussion groups that teachers expressed the need for more training, workshops, positive experiences with inclusion, and support from administrators, peers, and therapists. Hernandez (2013), Olsen (2003), Gokdere (2012) and Korkmaz (2011) highlighted the importance of collaboration and support between teachers towards inclusion

principles. Gokdere (2012), Olsen (2003), Cook (2001), Swain et al., (2011) and revealed the importance of special education training and courses as an important factor contributing to teacher attitudes regarding inclusion.

McCray & McHatton (2011) showed that teachers were most leery about having students with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities in their classroom, while students with learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and health impairments could be taught in the general education classroom. Cassady (2011) revealed that teachers were more likely to have a child with autism in their general education classroom than a child with an emotional behavioral disorder. The findings of Boer et al., (2011) showed that teachers were least positive about the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities and moderate/severe behavioral problems. Olsen (2003) showed that while all teachers believed that students with emotional/behavioral disabilities, cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities can be taught in the general education setting, teachers agree that learning disabilities were the most productive in the general education classroom.

Examining student teachers' perceptions of their current cooperating teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and the impact it had on their own attitudes related to inclusionary practices in the least restrictive environment is important. It is imperative to educate pre-service teachers about attitudes that exist towards inclusion and the impact it can have on student growth and development. By looking through the lens of the student teacher, this study served as a catalyst for a discussion about inclusion attitudes and beliefs between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher focusing on ways to target professional development for student teachers prior to entering the profession full time. It is important for student teachers to have a positive experience with a cooperating teacher who not only accepts inclusion but also implements an effective

learning environment for all students. If they have a cooperating teacher who is eager and excited

to serve as a mentor, and show how effective inclusion can be, this can increase positive attitudes

towards inclusion within the education field, therefore maximizing student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Despite federal mandates to educate students with disabilities in the general education

setting, many teachers continue to have mixed feelings towards their ability to implement

inclusive practices (Swain et al., 2012). In this study, student teacher perceptions of their

cooperating teachers' attitude toward inclusion and ways attitudes affected inclusionary practices

was studied. In addition, the influence of cooperating teachers attitudes on student teachers' own

perceptions about inclusion was evaluated in order to determine the right professional

development needed.

Research Objectives

Indicated by the in-depth literature review, studies have shown that a variety of attitudes

exist among teachers towards inclusion, including positive, neutral and negative attitudes, as well

as contributing factors to these attitudes (Kalyva, Gojkovic and Tsakiris, 2007). It is essential to

measure attitudes with the intention to utilize these findings to prepare professional development

and support for student teachers entering the field. This study first assessed student teachers'

perspectives of their cooperating teachers' attitude toward inclusion using a survey and second, it

devised possible ways to bridge inclusive attitude gaps that exist among teachers through

discussion groups. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do student teachers perceive their current cooperating teachers' attitude toward
   inclusion?

2. What type of disability are teachers least willing to have in their classroom?

3. What views do student teachers hold about inclusion?

4. How do cooperating teachers impact student teachers' own perceptions about inclusion and inclusionary practices?

5. How can student teachers be better prepared to work with teachers who have a negative attitude toward implementing inclusive practices?

<u>Definitions of Inclusion</u>

Although the specific term "inclusion" is not used once in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), this term came to being through two major provisions outlined in IDEA, a free appropriate education and least restrictive environment. Because IDEA (2004) does not specifically outline a definition for inclusion, its implementation varies throughout programs. Swain et al., (2012) described inclusion as "the belief that all students with disabilities should be fully integrated into the general education community, and that instruction should be planned to meet their individual needs." Taylor (2010) recognized inclusion as "the principle that students with special needs, skill sets, and abilities should be integrated in publically supported activities to the same extent as their non-disabled peers" (p. 3). Gokdere (2012) defines inclusion as " an educational approach provided the students with special needs education in their regular classrooms, which are the least restrictive educational environment for them." Odom et al., (2011) defined inclusion as "more than only physical placement of children with disabilities in the same classroom, but rather it conveyed that children with disabilities would become a part of larger social, community, and societal systems." Hernandez (2013) defined inclusion as "the placement and education of every student with disabilities in the general education classroom setting." Finally, Olsen (2003) defines inclusion as "when students are integrated into the general education population where they actively participate with their peers and their teachers." For the

purpose of this study, inclusion will be defined as the education and placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting, where students receive necessary services and accommodations so that they can be educated in the general education classroom with same age peers.

It is important to define three other key terms within the study. Included are cooperating teacher, student teacher and least restrictive environment. Cooperating teachers play a critical role as the student teacher's model and mentor and have a great influence over the student teacher's learning experience. Student teachers are typically enrolled in a college-supervised instructional/field experience at a college/university as an undergraduate or graduate student, typically resulting in certification. The act of student teaching requires student teachers to be paired with a cooperating teacher and classroom where they are involved in teaching lessons and helping children for a specific number of weeks. The least restrictive environment is defined as giving a student who has a disability the opportunity to be educated with peers who are non-disabled to the greatest extent appropriate.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Inclusion: Early History & Reform Efforts

In the 38 years since the passage of PL 94-142, multiple reauthorizations of the law have refined, revised, and renewed the nation's moral and pedagogical commitment providing well-planned, public, inclusive and appropriate education to all students with disabilities (Zigmond, Kloo & Volonino, 2013). As our nation's commitment to provide a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment continues, more children with disabilities are being placed and educated in general education classrooms.

"Although the mandate of least restrictive environment was written into the law in the 1970's, it has taken much longer for it to be implemented as intended in school settings," (Swain et al., 2012, p # 6). Even after the passing of PL 94-142, up until the late 1970s, individuals with disabilities were still educated in separate settings away from their same age peers and rarely encountered students without disabilities. In the 1980s, schools started to integrate students with special needs with peers that were non-disabled through the philosophy of mainstreaming. Mainstreaming allowed individuals with disabilities to participate in courses such as art, music, physical education and content area classes only when they were able to keep up with academic expectations with little or no supports in the general education classroom. Beginning in the 1990's and still today, the education field moved away from mainstreaming and finally adopted and practiced inclusion practices, educating students with disabilities to the maximum extent possible in the general education classroom (Swain et al., 2012).

It is important to acknowledge and trace the impact of educational laws, which are responsible for educating disabled students with equal educational opportunities. As previously mentioned, the goal and purpose of PL 94-142 was to assure access to public education for all

students, and enforce equal education opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, through two key principles, least restrictive environment and free appropriate education (Keogh, 2007). In 1983, the publication of A Nation at Risk focused on how to improve standards and outcomes particularly for students who were considered "at-risk" for educational failure, since large numbers of students left school lacking necessary skills to compete in a world economy (Zigmond et al., 2009). For special education teachers, this meant expanding their role to include going into the regular education classrooms and helping general educators implement individualized, cooperative and adaptive learning environments (Zigmond et al., 2009). Zigmond et al., (2009) highlighted that the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA strengthened these policies by legislating that students with exceptionalities have access to not only their non-disabled peers, but also to everything their non-disabled peers were learning, including content, materials, standards, expectations and results, through the use of reasonable adaptations and accommodations. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) further enforced inclusion policies set forth by IDEA. As mentioned in Zigmond et al., (2009), NCLB required "participation of all students in statewide accountability assessments and reporting of the results for students with disabilities with everyone else's and as a disaggregated group" and "students with disabilities were to be held responsible for the same academic content and performance standards as everyone else." IDEA's last reauthorization in 2004 reiterated the part of NCLB, which called for including students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs. The orientation of IDEA 2004 "was consistent with the growing commitment in law and public policy to full inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum," (Zigmond et al., 2009).

Review of Literature

'Attitude' in the Context of Inclusive Education

Younger (2009), Shady, Luther and Richman (2013), Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011),

Cipkin and Rizza (2003) and Avramidis and Norwich (2010) have all shown that positive

attitudes towards inclusion are necessary for both student success and inclusion success.

However, in order to examine teacher attitudes towards inclusion, it is essential to define the

term 'attitude'. According to Boer et al., (2011), an attitude is "an individual's viewpoint or

disposition towards a particular object (a person, a thing, an idea, etc)" and is considered to have

three components: "cognitive, affective and behavioral." As cited in Boer et al., (2009), the

cognitive component consists of teachers' beliefs and knowledge about educating students with

disabilities in general education classrooms, while the affective component consists of feelings

about teaching students with special needs. Finally, the behavioral component reflects ones

behavior or predisposition to act with a child with special needs (Boer et al., 2009).

Teacher Attitudes and Inclusive Outcomes

Assessing teacher attitudes towards inclusion is important because attitude impacts

practice and the type and quality of student-teacher interactions (Cook, 2001). As noted in

Cipikin & Rizza (2003), "attitudes of educators in an inclusion classroom are the most important

aspect in creating an inclusive class" and "positive attitudes of inclusion encourage children to

strive, whereas negative attitudes limit children to meet their potential ability." Teachers who

believe that inclusion is best for students will do their part to ensure its success (Shady et al.,

2013).

The following studies examine teacher attitudes towards inclusion through the three

essential components, cognitive, affective and behavioral. Alghazo and Naggar Gaad (2004)

examined general education teacher attitudes towards the philosophy of inclusion using a questionnaire where teachers either agreed or disagreed with statements. Overall, teachers were found to hold neutral attitudes towards including students with special needs into the general education classroom.

Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) measured teacher attitudes using the 'My Thinking About Inclusion' questionnaire, which asked teachers to respond to statements regarding their beliefs about inclusive education using a Likert-type scale. Results indicated that teachers held a neutral attitude toward inclusion practices, but a positive attitude towards the philosophy of inclusion. Batsiou, Bebetsos, Panteli, Antoniou (2008) assessed teacher attitudes towards special needs children in general education classrooms using a questionnaire which measured seven variables: experience, attitudes, subjective norms, self-identity, attitude strength, knowledge, information and intention on a 7 point scale. Results indicated that overall teachers held neutral attitudes towards inclusion practices.

Bussing, Gary, Leon, Garvan and Reid (2002) investigated teachers feeling towards inclusion through confidence levels using a Likert-type scale. Results indicated that teachers were either not confident or very confident in teaching students with ADHD, due to a high standard deviation. The findings of Cook et al., (2000) assessed teacher behavior towards inclusive practices using a nomination procedure, where teachers ranked pupils who represented four attitudinal categories, attachment, concern, indifference and rejection. Results indicated that teachers nominated more students with disabilities under the 'rejection' and 'concern' category.

Although findings about teacher attitudes towards inclusion practices are mixed, it is essential to continue to investigate and research attitudes in an effort to promote the acceptance and implementation of inclusive policies. Because teachers are key and critical stakeholders in

the implementation of inclusion policies in the school setting, it is ever more important to assess

teacher attitudes towards inclusive practices.

Factors Affecting Teacher Attitude Toward Inclusion

Although there are numerous factors affecting inclusion success, three major themes were

expressed repeatedly though studies teacher experience/preparation, collaborative and supportive

school environment and type/severity of a child's disability. The first step towards changing

teacher attitudes towards inclusion is acknowledging and interpreting these specific factors that

teachers view as barriers towards inclusion implementation. These variables impacting teacher

attitudes can serve as a foundation to develop interventions to change attitudes (Boer, Pijl, Post

and Minnaert, 2012).

The first major factor influencing teacher attitudes towards inclusion was teacher

knowledge/ preparation. This category consists of any type of teacher collegiate programs,

training, professional development meetings, experiences and workshops about inclusion, which

the teacher has received. Shady et al., (2013) acknowledges "while inclusion can be extremely

beneficial, many students are placed with teachers who have little or no training in inclusive

practices" and "it is critical that staff have an understanding of, and support for, the initiative" (p.

2). As mentioned in Shady et al., (2013), the results of Pindiprolu, Peterson and Bergloff

(2007) revealed that teachers identified teaching strategies as one of their top three

developmental needs when working with students with disabilities. "Often, general education

teachers are required to take very few special education courses while in college, and even in

today's teacher preparation programs, many of the special education classes offered are

introductory in nature and provide little in the way of instructional strategies" (Shady et al.,

2013). According to Fuchs (2009/2010), teachers who participated ranked lack of pre-service

preparation, particularly in areas such as differentiating instruction, making accommodations in the classroom and working with special education support staff as one of the main reasons they find it difficult to work in inclusive settings (Shady et al., 2013). Although teacher programs cannot always train teachers for every situation that may occur, professional development training can be extremely beneficial since a lack of in-depth training greatly diminishes teachers' effectiveness in the classroom (Shady et al., 2003). Shady et al., (2013) states that a lack of knowledge and professional development can increase teacher feelings of frustration in their abilities to teach in inclusive settings.

The findings of Olsen (2003) revealed that teachers felt unprepared teaching students with special needs, and needed training in specific areas such as classroom management skills and meeting the academic needs of special education students. The study conducted by Boer et al., (2011) revealed that "teachers with experience in inclusive education hold more positive attitudes than those with less experience." Cook (2001) showed that teachers with greater inclusive teaching experiences nominated more students with disabilities in the concern category, when compared to teachers with less inclusive teaching experiences. Teachers who are in inclusive programs claim that these programs improve their knowledge level, as well as their personal and professional experiences. Leatherman (2007) states that interactions with students shape how a teacher sees his/her classroom, therefore "if a teacher has positive experiences and interactions with a child who has a disability then he/she may see that classroom as a positive inclusive experience." The study of Leatherman (2007) revealed that teachers need positive experiences to foster successful inclusive classrooms. Lastly, the findings of Gokdere (2012) showed that individuals who received education regarding special education were not only aware of the importance of their attitude and behaviors toward special education, but they also had

more positive attitudes and behaviors towards special needs compared to teachers having less

knowledge about special education. Overall, the above research shows that not only the

frequency or amount of knowledge, preparation and experience is important but the quality of

these preparations and experience plays a key role as well needed for teachers to successfully

embrace and implement inclusion practices. Because negative teacher attitudes are related to

inadequate education and experiences with the special needs population, one key aspect to

removing these negative attitudes is revamping teacher preparation programs to better educate

students with both the knowledge and experiences needed to create positive attitudes towards

inclusive practices.

     The second major theme referenced throughout literature as an important factor affecting

the success of inclusion was collaboration and support from other teachers, therapists and the

administrative staff. Leatherman (2007) interviewed eight early childhood teachers who

responded to open-ended questions about their experiences teaching children with special needs

in inclusive settings. After an interview analysis, results indicated that collaboration with and

support from administrators, peers and therapists were essential themes for successful inclusive

classrooms. Although the teacher plays an active role in addressing and adhering to each child's

individual needs, the teacher may need specialized strategies to further help children with special

needs participate in the inclusive classroom (Leatherman, 2007). In order to make these

accommodations, the teacher will need to be supported and collaborate with other adults, such as

speech language therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists and special education

teachers who can make the inclusive classroom more successful (Leatherman, 2007).

     Odom, Buysse and Soukakou (2011) highlight a quarter century of research perspectives

on inclusion. Two critical outcomes mentioned for successful inclusion are collaboration and

adequate supports. Seven key features of collaboration that were associated with successful

inclusion are joint participation in planning, shared philosophies, shared ownership/responsibility

for all children, communication, professional roles, stability of relationships and administrative

support. Examples of collaborative relationships may involve coaching, mentoring and providing

guidance and feedback in which specialized professionals (special education teacher, speech and

language pathologist, physical therapist and occupational therapist) aid the teacher (Odom et al.,

2011). Along with specialized professionals, administration needs to "commit resources for

professional development, ongoing coaching, and collaboration, and time for communication and

planning" because these supports will ensure that teachers are ready to educate a wide range of

children's disabilities (Odom et al., 2011).

Korkmaz (2011) interviewed 66 elementary teachers using a questionnaire, which

consisted of eight questions concerning their opinions and experiences about the implementation

of inclusive education in their classrooms. While teachers had a positive attitude towards

inclusion philosophy and its psychological foundation, teachers expressed multiple difficulties

implementing inclusion in the classroom. Results indicated that one major obstacle hindering

inclusion success is the lack of support, help and resources from administrative staff. The

majority of teachers stated that administrators "focus on official paper works because they are

responsible to complete official requirements" and "do not care what is going on in inclusive

classrooms in terms of educational activities." According to this study, teachers believed that

administrators should help teachers create classrooms that meet the needs of all children.

Teachers also expressed the need for teachers to collaborate about student needs, "some of the

teachers in this study stated that teachers cooperate with each other and shared their experiences

among them to enhance students' achievement" while "some teachers thought that they are responsible for their own classroom and they had to take care of their own students."

Hernandez (2013) reviewed literature regarding collaboration with reference to students with special needs and states that professional collaboration is a beneficial tool for helping teacher and other professionals serve this population since the wide variety of professional disciplines working together is tied to the long-term success of students with special needs. Snell and Janney (2005) defined collaboration as "positive interdependence that exists among team members who agree to pool and partition their resources and rewards and to operate from a foundation of shared values" (Hernandez, 2013). Although Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) does not necessarily define collaboration, it asks state governments and their departments of education to "promote improved collaboration" among teachers. Through a review of the above literature, it is evident that not only are there legislative mandates for collaboration, but these efforts to increase support and collaboration among teachers and administration are in the best interest of the needs of the students. This review of research supports the idea that when teachers, therapists and administration not only collaborate to create intervention strategies and plan, deliver and assess student work together, but also support each other's decisions, student achievement is further maximized.

The remaining element teachers view as a factor effecting successful inclusion was the type/severity of the student's disability. Research has shown that teacher attitudes towards inclusion are affected by the type and severity of the child's disability (Boer et al., 2011). Cook (2001) measured this concept by having seventy inclusive classroom teachers nominate students according to prompts corresponding with attitudes of attachment, concern, indifference and rejection. Students were either in the hidden or mild disability group, consisting of specific

learning disability, behavior disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or in the obvious or severe disability group consisting of mental retardation, hearing impairment, orthopedic handicap, multiple handicaps, autism, visual impairment or other health impairments. Results indicated that students who had obvious or severe disabilities were less likely to be rejected, but also received a smaller number of nomination prompts for attachment, concern and indifference when compared to students with mild or hidden disabilities.

While Cook (2001) revealed that teachers were more likely to reject students with learning disabilities, behavioral disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, the findings of McCray & McHatton (2011) showed that pre-service teachers were more leery of including students with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities in their classroom. Findings also revealed that most pre-service teachers agreed that students with learning disabilities, hearing impairments and health impairments could be taught in the general education setting.

Similar to Cook (2001), Cook, Cameron and Tankersley (2007) investigated teacher attitudes towards including students by having teachers use a nomination procedure corresponding to the areas of attachment, concern, indifference and rejection. Cook et al., (2007) compared these attitudinal ratings of students with disabilities to students without disabilities. Results showed that although teachers had a higher concern for students with disabilities, this group also received significantly higher ratings in rejection, indifference and significantly lower attachment scores. These results help show that although teachers are concerned with students with disabilities, they hold far more negative attitudes towards this population, as shown by higher rejection and indifference scores and lower attachment scores.

Cassady (2011) reported that research shows teachers have expressed concerns about having students with autism or emotional behavioral disorders in the general education classroom because of the children's lack of social skills and behavioral outbursts. Twenty-five general education teachers were surveyed regarding their willingness to include a student with autism and a student with an emotional behavior disorder in their classroom to determine if there was a significant difference in their attitudes towards the disabilities. Results concluded that the type and characteristics of the disability of the two disabilities influenced teachers' willingness to have those populations in their classrooms. Overall, participants were more open to having a student with autism in the inclusive setting rather than a child with an emotional behavioral disorder. Moreover, teachers felt more confident implementing IEPs, collaborating with other teachers and therapists to create appropriate modifications and adapting lessons for students with autism than for students with emotional behavioral disorders. Although studies suggest that teachers perceive different types of disabilities as less or more favorable in the inclusive setting, it is certain that despite the type of disability, teachers do have doubts about teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Other Related Literature and Overview of Studies of Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion

Olsen (2003) examined how both general education teachers and special education teachers view inclusion practices. The survey consisted of 19 Likert scale questions and a comment question. The survey was created independently by the researcher, and therefore was not tested for validity or reliability measures. Results indicated amongst other possible things that special education teachers have a significantly more positive attitude towards inclusion than general education teachers, confirming the idea that general education teachers need additional

training and services in order to prepare and feel confident teaching students with disabilities in

their classroom.

Gokdere (2012) aimed to study factors that contribute to problems encountered with

inclusion by developing an assessment, which measured attitude and concern of 112 pre-service

and 68 in-service elementary teachers. The data collection tool was designed to consist of four

parts, demographic features of participants, and three scales, the Attitudes toward Inclusive

Education Scale (ATIES), the Interactions with Disabled Person's Scale (IDP) and Concerns

about Inclusive Education Scale (CIES). Findings revealed a significant difference between in-

service teachers and pre-service teachers attitudes toward inclusion and their interactions with

students with special needs. Results concluded that these differences are related to both

experience and preparation levels of the individual in working with children with special needs.

Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, Saumell (1996) examined teacher perceptions of

inclusion using focus group interviews. Teachers included were 26 special education teachers, 25

general education teachers and 15 teachers of the gifted. Focus group interviews were chosen

hoping that individuals would be more willing to voice their true perceptions, questions, opinions

and feelings within a group involved in discussing a common issue. Focus groups would also

give teachers the opportunity to learn from hearing the views of others and respond to others'

idea. Along with the focus group interviews, data such as sex, highest degree held, ethnicity and

years of teaching experience were recorded. There were 10 different focus groups with an

average of 7.4 teachers in each group with the average focus group lasting 60 minutes. Questions

used for the focus group are as follows: (1) Tell me what you know about inclusion, (2) What

factors do you see as possible facilitators or barriers to implementing an inclusion model?, (3)

What do you see as an ideal model for inclusion?, and (4) What questions should researchers be

asking when examining the effects of inclusion models? Because there were no differences within subgroups, findings were reported as a whole. After analysis, findings yielded nine major categories: understanding inclusion, teachers' feelings about inclusion, lashing out at decision makers, barriers to the success of inclusion, ingredients for successful inclusion, needs of all students, preparing teachers to work in inclusive schools, perceived parental concerns and benefits of inclusion. Overall, results indicated that the majority of teachers had strong, negative feelings towards inclusion and felt that decision makers were out of touch with classroom realities.

Downing and Hardin (2007) examined teacher attitudes toward an inclusive education program by interviewing 23 teachers using open-ended and semi-structured questions. Three questions asked were (1) Is the student/child successful or not and how do you know? (2) What is a high quality education for students with moderate-severe disabilities? and (3) What are your hopes as a result of the student (child) being in an inclusive classroom? Results highlighted the benefits of inclusive education for all students and specific components that needed to be in place to ensure a quality education. Themes included academic and social success for all, benefits for non-disabled peers, special needs students have exposure to everything and high expectations and individual curricular and instructional support.

It is important to state that although most studies focus on assessing teacher attitudes towards inclusion, these studies fail to actually utilize their findings to improve inclusion attitudes by either testing or devising methods that may bridge attitude gaps that exist toward inclusion. Two studies, which have specifically used their assessments to implement a possible change in teacher attitudes towards inclusion, are Shady et al., (2013) and McCray and McHatton (2011).

Shady et al., (2013) measured teacher attitudes toward and perceptions of inclusive

education programs using two surveys. One survey was given prior to the beginning of the

school year to determine teacher attitudes and needs regarding inclusion practices, while the

second survey was given at the end of the school year. The initial survey was similar to the

survey used by York, Tunifor and Orcutt (1992). It consisted of questions based on a five-point

Likert scale as well as open-ended response questions, which asked participants to expound upon

their personal understanding of inclusion and to give suggestions for how to effectively make

time to communicate and collaborate with one another. In an effort to create positive attitudes

towards inclusion, the researchers used the survey findings to develop professional development

training was created based on the identified needs. The professional development training

included workshops, training sessions, which emphasized the benefits of inclusion,

characteristics of what inclusive practices entail, different instructional methods, and various co-

teaching methods. Teachers were also given the opportunity to have in-classroom experiential

learning opportunities, which involved discussions with staff members on what they felt was and

was not working within their inclusive classrooms. Also, each grade level met to discuss which

strategies were and were not working and in which areas they felt they needed more support and

information. The second survey, given at the end of the school year, measured the effectiveness

of the training and documented further professional needs related to successful inclusive

practices. Results indicated that a greater number of the teachers did specify on the post-

inclusion survey that they now have the training and resources to successfully implement

inclusion, yet teachers are still hesitant to proceed with inclusive programming.

The study of McCray and McHatton (2011) assessed teacher attitudes towards inclusion

of students with different types of disabilities using a 22 Likert-type items with a scale range of

1-5, strongly disagree to strongly agree. All items addressed perceptions of inclusion such as, "I believe most students with disabilities (regardless of the level of their disability) can be educated in the general education classroom". With these results, researchers implemented a two-credit hour course in the Southeastern United States designed to include activities and assignments on specific disabilities, legal requirements under NCLB and IDEA and specific strategies for providing appropriate instruction in inclusive classrooms. Students then completed open-ended questionnaires about their attitudes towards inclusion. Findings indicated that after the course participants were more positive toward including students with disabilities in their classroom, but were less inclined to include students with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities in their classroom.

Overall, it is apparent that many varied attitudes towards inclusion exist since its introduction. According to the review of research, teachers hold a more negative attitude towards inclusion mainly because of implementation issues. It appears that teachers hold a more positive attitude toward the theoretical framework of inclusion, but a negative attitude toward the delivery and execution of inclusion principles. It also appears that schools may interpret and practice inclusion practices at different levels, however, whichever approach is taken, it seems that appropriate training, support, collaboration and type/severity of the disability are important themes affecting successful inclusion practices (Olsen, 2003).

Chapter 3: Methods

Participants

Recruitment of participants was conducted at a Liberal Arts College in Staten Island, NY. The selection of student teachers from this liberal arts institution was done due to the researcher's access, as a current graduate student, to an undergraduate dual certification teacher preparation program. The student teachers were selected based on the reputation of the college of educating teachers to receive dual certification in general and special education.

All 10 student teachers were recruited by email and able to participate. All participants were female and ages ranged from 22 to 29 years old. Nine out of 10 participants had prior experiences working with students with special needs prior to student teaching, including observing special education classes and working with students with disabilities at summer camps and after school programs. Six participants were placed in a general education, 2 in an ICT setting, a classroom model consisting of general education and special education, with 1 general education teacher and 1 special education teacher in the room, and 2 in a self-contained setting. Four of the student teachers were placed at three different local schools in Staten Island. Student teachers were placed in grades 1st through 5th, 1 in 1st grade, 3 in 2nd grade, 2 in 3rd grade, 2 in 4th grade and 1 in 5th grade.

Design

Study procedures were approved by the Human Experimental Review Board, HERB committee at Wagner College. Using a quantitative and qualitative approach to collect and analyze data, this study sought to identify the cooperating teachers' attitudes toward inclusionary practices and the impact their attitudes had on student teachers' views on inclusion. In addition,

this study outlined areas needed for additional support to bridge any gaps related to attitudes and

self-efficacy of cooperating teachers and student teachers in teacher preparation programs.

Materials

The materials used for this study were an introduction letter, consent form,

demographical survey and inclusionary survey. The introduction letter, developed by the

researcher, described the purpose of the study and how the student teachers would be involved in

it. The letter explained in detail what the purpose of the study was and how the participants'

answers would be utilized. It explained what was being measured and tested, and reassured the

participants this was not harming them in anyway. It was explained that no personal information

would be revealed, but their answers would be recorded and analyzed based on responses given.

Letter of recruitment can be found in Appendix A.

The informed consent was created by the researcher in order to re-introduce participants

to the purpose of the study, while also providing information about any risks (See Appendix B

for informed consent form). The researcher developed a demographic survey to collect

information regarding the age, gender, current student teaching placement of student teachers,

and prior experiences with students with special needs (Appendix C).

Based on an extensive literature review, the researcher also developed a survey to gather

information related to student teachers' perceptions regarding their cooperating teachers'

attitudes towards inclusion (Appendix D). In addition, this survey had questions related to the

impact cooperating teachers' attitudes toward inclusion had on student teachers' own attitudes.

The survey was adapted by the researcher from Bandura (1997) and consisted of 32 Likert-type

items with a scale ranging from 1-5, strongly disagree to strongly agree. There were also 11

open-ended questions on the survey, allowing participants to better express their perceptions and

beliefs regarding their cooperating teachers' attitude towards inclusion. Lastly, the survey

provided space for the participant to add any additional comments. Item numbers 8, 9, 12, 13 and

14 were adapted from Korkmaz (2011) while item numbers 16, 17, 18, 25 were adapted from

Swain et al. (2012). Item numbers 27 and 28 were adapted from McCray & McHatton (2011).

The survey assessed the three major and consistent themes affecting teacher attitude

toward inclusion. Item numbers 1, 7, 10, 15, 23, 24, 25, 32 and open ended questions 3 and 4

measured theme one, teacher experience/preparation. Item numbers 5, 12, 13, 21, 31 assessed

theme two, support and collaboration within the school building. Lastly, item number 3 and

open-ended questions 8 and 9 measured theme 3, type and severity of the student's disability.

The survey was validated and adapted based on the feedback from an expert with a doctorate in

inclusive practices in early childhood/elementary grade levels.

Procedure

The study examined student teachers' perceptions of their cooperating teachers' attitudes

towards inclusion. The first step was to contact the professor teaching the student teacher course

asking for his permission to use his class time to collect the data. Once consent was given, the

researcher e-mailed the prospective participants with an outline of the purpose and requirements

of the study. The professor then distributed and reviewed the outline with prospective

participants. The researcher was there for 30 minutes. It took approximately 5 minutes to review

the informed consent form with the participants and approximately 20 minutes for the

participants to complete the survey.

Two weeks later, the researcher went to the student teachers' seminar class during its

scheduled meeting time to administer the consent forms, demographic survey and inclusionary

survey. The consent form was given first and the researcher informed participants that all data

collection was kept confidential with the intent of obtaining honest and reflective responses. Next, participants completed the demographic and inclusionary surveys, which were stapled together. (See Appendix B for questions asked.) Participants were instructed to bring up the survey as they finished it. After all surveys were completed and handed in, the researcher collected them and left. The surveys were analyzed for themes and patterns. Participants were thanked via e-mail.

The researcher then analyzed the data to identify themes and patterns. Validity of interview questions utilized was done through the use of an expert in early childhood and inclusive education during a peer editing session. Adaptions and changes to interview questions and survey item revisions were conducted using this early childhood expert.

Chapter 4: Findings/ Results Section

The purpose of this study was to investigate student teachers' perception of their cooperating teachers' attitude toward inclusion using a survey. More specifically, this action research project used teacher perceptions from a survey to devise methods to promote inclusive attitudes and bridge inclusive attitude gaps that exist among teachers.

Using quantitative and qualitative methods, a series of thirty two questions related to inclusion perceptions and attitudes and eleven open ended questions were created in order to assess the perceptions student teachers hold about their cooperating teacher and the impact cooperating teachers have on their students teachers. This chapter begins with information about the student teachers, followed by an analysis of questions asked and a summary of overall results.

In the participating education class, student teaching seminar, all students were provided with the inclusionary survey during class instruction time. Participants consisted of 10 female student teachers ranging in age from 20 to 29 years old. Only one participant recorded having no experiences with students with special needs prior to her student teaching placement, while the other participants did. These experiences consisted of observing special education classes, having part-time jobs at camps with special needs children and baby-sitting children with special needs. Table 1 provides an example of student teachers' demographical information.

Table 1. Student Teachers background and special need experiences.

Student Teacher	Age of Participant	Cooperating School	Grade	Setting	Experience with Special Need Students
Student Teacher 1	21	P.S. 19	2nd	General Education	Yes
Student Teacher 2	29	N/A	4th	General Education	Yes
Student Teacher 3	22	P.S. 20	3rd	General Education	No

Student Teacher 4	21	P.S. 20	1st	General Education	Yes
Student Teacher 5	22	P.S. 19	4th	General Education	Yes
Student Teacher 6	20	P.S. 19	2nd	General Education	Yes
Student Teacher 7	21	P.S. 13	2nd	ICT	Yes
Student Teacher 8	21	P.S. 20	5th	ICT	Yes
Student Teacher 9	22	P.S. 13	3rd	Self-Contained	Yes
Student Teacher 10	21	P.S. 20	4th & 5th	Self-Contained	Yes

Item Analysis

The survey asked the student teachers to rate 32 items, in a Lickert scale, to indicate their

perception of their cooperating teachers attitude toward inclusion. The items related to both

positive and negative attitudes towards inclusion, with a focus on the three major themes

affecting attitudes towards inclusion, as indicated throughout the literature review, teacher

experience and preparation, support and collaboration within the school building and

type/severity of the student's disability. See Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 below for item

responses according to each educational setting.

Table 2. Student Teachers' Perceptions of Cooperating Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion – General Education Setting

Questions about Inclusion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My cooperating teacher seems more stressed when working with students with special needs.	0%	16.6%	33.3%	33.3%	16.6%
2. My cooperating teacher believes that implementing inclusionary practices is difficult.	0%	33.3%	50%	16.6%	0%
3. My cooperating teacher would rather have a student with a learning disability in her classroom rather than a student with a behavioral issue.	0%	0%	33.3%	50%	16.6%
4. My cooperating teacher views having	0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0%

students with special needs as having more work to do.					
5. My cooperating teacher feels that if more services and supports were provided for students with special needs, all students could be taught in a general education setting.	0%	16.6%	50%	33.3%	0%
6. My cooperating teacher would prefer tracking students by ability rather than inclusion.	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
7. Participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education will help my cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusion practices.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
8. My cooperating teacher believes that classrooms are so crowded that teachers do not allocate enough time for disabilities.	0%	0%	16.6%	66.7%	16.6%
9. Regular curriculum was developed for students who are non-disabled, so my cooperating teacher finds it difficult for students with disabilities to follow regular curriculum.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
10. My cooperating teacher always differentiates for struggling students.	0%	33.3%	0%	50%	16.6%
11. My cooperating teacher faces difficulties with managing an inclusive classroom.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
12. My cooperating teacher feels that school administrators are willing to help and discuss managing inclusion when he/she needs it.	0%	50%	33.3%	16.6%	0%
13. My cooperating teacher collaborates with other service providers and teachers to enhance inclusive education.	0%	50%	33.3%	16.6%	0%
14. My cooperating teacher feels that smaller class sizes would give him/her more time to focus on including students with disabilities.	0%	0%	16.6%	33.3%	50%
15. My cooperating teacher believes that college level training for special education is sufficient enough for a classroom teacher.	0%	66.6%	33.3%	0%	0%
16. My cooperating teacher believes inclusion is a generally desirable practice.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
17. My cooperating teacher supports the idea that students with disabilities should be given every opportunity to function in a general education classroom.	16.6%	0%	50%	33.3%	0%
18. My cooperating teacher finds it feasible to educate students with disabilities, students	16.6%	33.3%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%

who are gifted, and students without disabilities in the same classroom.					
19. My cooperating teacher expresses positive feelings towards the general concept of inclusion, but is less optimistic about the degree to which he/she is adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
20. My cooperating teacher believes that all students with disabilities can have their academic needs met in the general education classroom.	16.6%	50%	16.6%	16.6%	0%
21. My cooperating teacher receives sufficient administrative support regarding inclusion.	16.6%	50%	33.3%	0%	0%
22. My cooperating teacher says that students with disabilities disrupt the classroom.	16.6%	66.6%	16.6%	0%	0%
23. My cooperating teacher has the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities.	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	33.3%	16.6%
24. If my cooperating teacher had more experience/preparation with students with special needs, he/she would be more willing to have them in his/her classroom.	0%	0%	16.6%	50%	33.3%
25. I feel that my classroom teacher poses the expertise to work with students with disabilities.	16.6%	0%	16.6%	50%	16.6%
26. My cooperating teacher finds inclusion is easy in theory, but much harder to implement.	0%	0%	0%	66.7%	33.3%
27. My cooperating teacher finds the integration of general education students with special needs students beneficial to all pupils.	0%	33.3%	16.6%	50%	0%
28. My cooperating teacher reveals that students with disabilities (regardless of the level of the disability) can be educated in the regular classroom.	16.6%	0%	66.7%	16.6%	0%
29. My cooperating teacher enjoys having children with special needs in his/her classroom.	16.6%	16.6%	50%	16.6%	0%
30. My cooperating teacher covers less curriculum because of inclusion.	16.6%	16.6%	33.3%	33.3%	0%
31. My cooperating teacher collaborates with the families of students with special needs.	0%	0%	50%	33.3%	16.6%
32. My cooperating teacher effectively	0%	33.3%	16.6%	33.3%	16.6%

differentiates and adapts curriculum for special needs students.					

Item numbers 1, 7, 10, 15, 23, 24, 25 and 32 evaluated the impact of teacher knowledge/preparation on inclusionary attitudes. According to the data, student teachers in the general education setting believe that participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education and that experience/preparation with students with special needs will help their cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusionary practices. 66.6% of cooperating teachers in this setting feel that college level training in special education courses is not sufficient enough for a classroom teacher. This may be because general education teachers are only required to take one course on special education, yet are expected to educate and adapt materials for special needs learners in their classroom.

Regarding support from administration, therapists etc., 50% of cooperating teachers express that school administration are not willing to help and discuss managing inclusion practices, while 66.6% agree that they do not receive sufficient support from school administration. Lastly, the majority of cooperating teachers in the general education classroom, 67.6%, agreed or strongly agreed in having a child with a learning disability in their classroom over a child with a behavioral disability.

Overall, student teachers in the general education setting recorded higher scores on stress levels when working with students with special needs, not being able to allocate enough time for students with disabilities because of crowded classrooms and not enjoying educating students with special needs in their classroom. Cooperating teachers scored lower on ability to educate a variety of needs in the same classroom, believing that all students can be educated in the general education classroom and receiving sufficient administration support.

Table 3. Student Teachers' Perception of Cooperating Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion – Integrated Co-Teaching Setting

Questions about Inclusion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My cooperating teacher seems more stressed when working with students with special needs.	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
2. My cooperating teacher believes that implementing inclusionary practices is difficult.	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
3. My cooperating teacher would rather have a student with a learning disability in her classroom rather than a student with a behavioral issue.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
4. My cooperating teacher views having students with special needs as having more work to do.	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
5. My cooperating teacher feels that if more services and supports were provided for students with special needs, all students could be taught in a general education setting.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
6. My cooperating teacher would prefer tracking students by ability rather than inclusion.	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
7. Participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education will help my cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusion practices.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
8. My cooperating teacher believes that classrooms are so crowded that teachers do not allocate enough time for disabilities.	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
9. Regular curriculum was developed for students who are non-disabled, so my cooperating teacher finds it difficult for students with disabilities to follow regular curriculum.	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
10. My cooperating teacher always differentiates for struggling students.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
11. My cooperating teacher faces difficulties with managing an inclusive classroom.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
12. My cooperating teacher feels that school administrators are willing to help and discuss managing inclusion when he/she needs it.	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
13. My cooperating teacher collaborates with other service providers and teachers to	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%

enhance inclusive education.					
14. My cooperating teacher feels that smaller class sizes would give him/her more time to focus on including students with disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
15. My cooperating teacher believes that college level training for special education is sufficient enough for a classroom teacher.	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
16. My cooperating teacher believes inclusion is a generally desirable practice.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
17. My cooperating teacher supports the idea that students with disabilities should be given every opportunity to function in a general education classroom.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
18. My cooperating teacher finds it feasible to educate students with disabilities, students who are gifted, and students without disabilities in the same classroom.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
19. My cooperating teacher expresses positive feelings towards the general concept of inclusion, but is less optimistic about the degree to which he/she is adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
20. My cooperating teacher believes that all students with disabilities can have their academic needs met in the general education classroom.	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
21. My cooperating teacher receives sufficient administrative support regarding inclusion.	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%
22. My cooperating teacher says that students with disabilities disrupt the classroom.	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
23. My cooperating teacher has the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
24. If my cooperating teacher had more experience/preparation with students with special needs, he/she would be more willing to have them in his/her classroom.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
25. I feel that my classroom teacher poses the expertise to work with students with disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
26. My cooperating teacher finds inclusion is easy in theory, but much harder to implement.	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
27. My cooperating teacher finds the integration of general education students with	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

special needs students beneficial to all pupils.					
28. My cooperating teacher reveals that students with disabilities (regardless of the level of the disability) can be educated in the regular classroom.	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
29. My cooperating teacher enjoys having children with special needs in his/her classroom.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
30. My cooperating teacher covers less curriculum because of inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
31. My cooperating teacher collaborates with the families of students with special needs.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
32. My cooperating teacher effectively differentiates and adapts curriculum for special needs students.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

According to the data, 50% of cooperating teachers in an ICT setting believe that participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education and that experience/preparation with students with special needs will help their cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusionary practices. Also, 100% of the student teachers believe that more experience/preparation with students with special needs would allow their cooperating teacher to be more willing to have them in his/her classroom. The data seems to suggest that experience and preparation are key themes towards improving inclusion attitudes, while workshops and seminars are useful too.

Both students in an ICT setting agreed that their cooperating teacher faces difficulties managing an inclusive classroom. Also, both ICT student teachers agreed that their cooperating teacher expresses positive feelings towards the concepts of inclusion, but is less optimistic about adequately and successfully implementing inclusionary practices. Although participants feel that their cooperating teacher presents the expertise to educate students within an inclusion environment, 50% still believe workshops and seminars on inclusive education would be helpful.

It is important to note that cooperating teachers in an ICT setting, (100% either disagree or strongly disagree) feel less stressed when working with students with special needs compared to cooperating teachers in a general education setting (50% either agree or strongly agree).

Regarding support from administration, therapists etc., 50% of cooperating teachers express that school administration are willing to help and discuss managing inclusion practices, while 50% feel that they do not receive sufficient administrative support regarding inclusion. All cooperating teachers in an ICT classroom agreed that they would rather have a child with a learning disability in their classroom over a child with a behavioral disability. Lastly, 100% of student teachers in an ICT setting recorded that their cooperating teacher covers less curriculum because of inclusion. This may be because students in an ICT setting generally have more severe needs than students in a general education classroom, which may cause teachers to spend extra days teaching lessons, therefore covering less curriculum.

Overall, student teachers in the ICT education setting recorded lower stress levels when working with students with special needs, not being able to allocate enough time for students with disabilities because of crowded classrooms and not enjoying educating students with special needs in their classroom when compared to student teachers in a general education setting. Cooperating teachers scored higher on an ability to educate a variety of needs in the same classroom, believing that all students can be educated in the general education classroom and receiving sufficient administration support when compared to student teachers in a general education setting.

Table 4. Student Teachers' Perception of Cooperating Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion – Self Contained Setting

Questions about Inclusion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My cooperating teacher seems more stressed when working with students with	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%

special needs.					
2. My cooperating teacher believes that implementing inclusionary practices is difficult.	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
3. My cooperating teacher would rather have a student with a learning disability in her classroom rather than a student with a behavioral issue.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
4. My cooperating teacher views having students with special needs as having more work to do.	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
5. My cooperating teacher feels that if more services and supports were provided for students with special needs, all students could be taught in a general education setting.	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%
6. My cooperating teacher would prefer tracking students by ability rather than inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
7. Participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education will help my cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusion practices.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
8. My cooperating teacher believes that classrooms are so crowded that teachers do not allocate enough time for disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
9. Regular curriculum was developed for students who are non-disabled, so my cooperating teacher finds it difficult for students with disabilities to follow regular curriculum.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
10. My cooperating teacher always differentiates for struggling students.	0%	50%	0%	0%	50%
11. My cooperating teacher faces difficulties with managing an inclusive classroom.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
12. My cooperating teacher feels that school administrators are willing to help and discuss managing inclusion when he/she needs it.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
13. My cooperating teacher collaborates with other service providers and teachers to enhance inclusive education.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
14. My cooperating teacher feels that smaller class sizes would give him/her more time to focus on including students with disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
15. My cooperating teacher believes that college level training for special education is	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%

sufficient enough for a classroom teacher.					
16. My cooperating teacher believes inclusion is a generally desirable practice.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
17. My cooperating teacher supports the idea that students with disabilities should be given every opportunity to function in a general education classroom.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
18. My cooperating teacher finds it feasible to educate students with disabilities, students who are gifted, and students without disabilities in the same classroom.	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
19. My cooperating teacher expresses positive feelings towards the general concept of inclusion, but is less optimistic about the degree to which he/she is adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
20. My cooperating teacher believes that all students with disabilities can have their academic needs met in the general education classroom.	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
21. My cooperating teacher receives sufficient administrative support regarding inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
22. My cooperating teacher says that students with disabilities disrupt the classroom.	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
23. My cooperating teacher has the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
24. If my cooperating teacher had more experience/preparation with students with special needs, he/she would be more willing to have them in his/her classroom.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
25. I feel that my classroom teacher poses the expertise to work with students with disabilities.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
26. My cooperating teacher finds inclusion is easy in theory, but much harder to implement.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
27. My cooperating teacher finds the integration of general education students with special needs students beneficial to all pupils.	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
28. My cooperating teacher reveals that students with disabilities (regardless of the level of the disability) can be educated in the regular classroom.	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%

29. My cooperating teacher enjoys having children with special needs in his/her classroom.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
30. My cooperating teacher covers less curriculum because of inclusion.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
31. My cooperating teacher collaborates with the families of students with special needs.	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
32. My cooperating teacher effectively differentiates and adapts curriculum for special needs students.	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

According to the data, while 100% of cooperating teachers in a self contained setting believe that their cooperating teacher has the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities and present the expertise to work with students with disabilities, yet 100% of student teachers recorded that they also believe participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education and that experience/preparation with students with special needs will help their cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusionary practices.

Regarding support from administration, therapists etc., 100% of cooperating teachers express that school administrators are willing to help and discuss managing inclusion practices, and 100% feel that they do receive sufficient administrative support regarding inclusion.

All cooperating teachers in an ICT classroom agreed that they would rather have a child with a learning disability in their classroom over a child with a behavioral disability. Also, 100% of student teachers in a self-contained setting recorded that their cooperating teacher covers less curriculum because of inclusion. This may be because a self-contained setting is considered a more restrictive environment and educates students who have more severe needs than students in a general education classroom or ICT classroom, which may cause teachers to spend extra days teaching lessons, therefore getting through less curriculum.

It is important to note that both students in the self-contained setting agreed that their

cooperating teacher faces difficulties managing an inclusive classroom. Also, both student

teachers in the self-contained setting agreed that their cooperating teacher expresses positive

feelings towards the concepts of inclusion, but is less optimistic about adequately and

successfully implementing inclusionary practices.

Open-Ended Discussion Questions

Eleven focus questions were used to address the three major themes impacting teacher

attitudes towards inclusion as well as specific research objectives. The researcher felt that open-

ended questions allowed participants to feel less constrained about answering a question and at

the same time be more specific about their opinions. Table 5 provides an example of cooperating

teacher practices/belief systems. Table 6 provides an example of student teacher practices/belief

systems.

Table 5. Cooperating Teacher Practices/Belief Systems

Teacher Preparation & Experience	"Workshops on how to differentiate lessons that do not include just giving a reteach sheet of more of the same problems" "Probably useful workshops" "How to scaffold and differentiate the Ready Gen material for classrooms with a large range of levels" "Differentiation based on disabilities" "Help with selective mutes" "A professional development on inclusion practices and how to effectively manage an inclusion class" "Workshops on managing an inclusion classroom" "A PD on effective inclusion strategies and trying to reach all children of different levels in the same classroom" "How to differentiate during whole group instruction and how to teach 2 grades at once without missing any curriculum"
Support & Resources	"An extra teacher, or a smaller classroom so she could manage time for all students. Also, some more push in classes"

	• "Speakers to come in and discuss inclusion" • "Possibly having more staff available for AIS services. As of now we only have 1 person for the grade and 15 students in our class alone needing services" • "A common prep or extra meeting time with the special education teacher to fully cover every IEP" • "Laptops" • "I think another teacher or para would be most beneficial to help keep the student on task. As for resources, RTI structured materials" • "More adults in the room to help out with lessons, group work and independent work" • "Support from administration on how to tier lessons" • "A 'smart' classroom: computers for students to use and a smart board"
Type & Severity of Disability	Most difficult to manage/least willing to have in the classroom: • "Learning disabilities that delay the students work time. They do not stay with the class. They are always 3 steps behind" • "Any children whose disability is severe enough to be in a self-contained room" • "Selective mutes" • "Behavioral problems because they delay instruction." • "Behavior problems" • "Behavior disabilities" • "Autism" Least difficult to manage/most willing to have in the classroom: • "Reading problems because most of the students have a hard time reading English. Since majority of the kids need help she goes slower" • "Physical disabilities because those are easily accommodated for" • "None. She is open to all, and willing to help anyone that has or may have a disability." • "Attention problems." • "Learning Disabilities" • "ADD because she knows how to keep the students focused" • "Learning Disabilities"

Table 5 examines cooperating teacher belief practices and systems regarding the three

main themes, teacher preparation/experience, support and resources and type/severity of

disability. According to the data and answers given by the student teachers, workshops and

professional developments on how to effectively manage an inclusion class to differentiate

student activities to reach the needs of all learners are needed to implement inclusionary

practices. As stated in Table 5, the most common support and resources needed are an additional

para-professional or teacher to help keep students on task and help with lessons, group work and

independent work. Lastly, the data suggests that cooperating teachers are least willing to have

students with behavioral needs in their classrooms and are more willing to have students with

learning disabilities in their classroom.

Table 6. Student Teacher Practices/Belief Systems

Views Towards Inclusion Practices	• "I think if all teachers had 2 teachers in the classroom, inclusion is very feasible and benefits all children." • "Inclusion is important and should be implemented if the child can function well in that environment." • "I believe that inclusion is important for social, emotional and academic achievement for special needs children and general education students." • "Needed in classrooms" • "I believe every student deserves to be able to work along side their peers in a general education setting." • "I think inclusion is great with the right teachers and a great classroom environment" • "I think inclusion is a great option for most students with special needs. When implemented well, inclusion can benefit other students in the class as well as the teacher. I don't think it is the best solution for all special needs children" • "I think that inclusion is fine but putting a child in a special education classroom is more beneficial for both the teacher/child" • "Easier said than done. I've seen it implemented effectively once. I think it strongly depends on the teachers and their dynamic"
General Feelings About	• "I think teaching special needs children in the general

Educating Students with Special Needs in General Education Settings	education classroom is amazing only if the teacher understands how to differentiate her lesson for all types of learners" • "I think it is important to mainstream students as much as possible" • "I feel that it can be difficult due to the range of learning abilities but it can be done. It is quite beneficial to all students when you differentiate to their needs" • "I feel they need another teacher besides the general education teacher to meet their academic needs and accommodations." • "Nervous but prepared" • "I believe with team teaching and the right resources and amount of students it is possible" • "As long as they are getting services and are not falling behind I think it can be an effective classroom" • "It all depends on the student. Some students need to be in a more isolated environment, while other students with special needs strive in a general education setting. As a teacher, I would welcome students with special needs" • "It would be much harder for the students to learn in a general education environment" • "I believe it is beneficial to both special education and general education students, when implemented effectively"
Impact of Experience on Attitude	• "No. I like inclusion because all students learn differently, special education and even general education. You should differentiate always" • "No, because I know that I have the knowledge and skills to be successful with this population" • "Yes, my teacher is very open and accepting to ICT, and has shown me that a challenge to me will only help a child learn better, therefore the challenge shouldn't be a challenge anymore" • "No, we have many of the same thoughts." • "Yes, they make me want to have my own classroom. They care so much about each student even when it is difficult for them" • "Yes, she is a great special education teacher and I think having a special education classroom in important" • "Absolutely. If I didn't think he had the knowledge, attitude or skills, I wouldn't respect him and I wouldn't be able to learn from him. But I am"

	• "At times it is frustrating and difficult to stay positive when my co-teacher is not."

Research Objectives

This study showed how these experiences impact their own attitudes toward inclusion, as well as identifying resources needed to implement effective inclusionary practices. The following research objectives are addressed:

1) What kinds of supports do we need to bridge the gaps that exist towards attitudes about inclusion among teachers?

All 10 participants stated that smaller class size would better promote successful inclusionary practices. Seven of the 10 participants suggested the need for more adults in the classroom, whether it would be an additional teacher, para-professional or more push-in services for struggling students. Two of the 7 student teachers suggested more professional development workshops and even mentorships on the implementation of inclusion practices. The data suggests that cooperating teachers would be able to better implement inclusionary practices and meet the needs of all students with smaller class sizes, extra support from an additional adult in the classroom and professional development workshops and mentorships regarding inclusionary practices.

2) How do student teachers perceive their current cooperating teachers attitude toward inclusion?

Eight of the 10 student teachers worked with a cooperating teacher that had a positive attitude towards inclusion theories and implementation. The three participants who worked with a teacher that had a negative attitude towards inclusion were all in a general education setting. However, even though the student teachers worked with a cooperating teacher that had a

negative attitude towards inclusion practices, the student teachers still considered the practicum a positive and successful experience overall, due to other contributing factors such as making a positive impact on student lives. Overall, student teachers managed to maintain their positive attitudes towards inclusionary practices even when collaborating with a professional who had a negative attitude towards inclusionary practices.

3) What type of disability are teachers least willing to have in their classroom?

Item number 3 and open-ended questions 8 and 9 measured this research question. Item number 3 asked student teachers if their cooperating teacher would be more inclined to have a student with a learning disability in their classroom rather than a student with a behavioral issue in their classroom. 76.6 of student teachers in a general education setting either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 100% of the student teachers agreed in the ICT setting and 100% in the self-contained setting either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Based on this statement, that data suggests that cooperating teachers in all three settings, general education, ICT and self-contained are more inclined to having a student with a learning disability in their classroom rather than a student with a behavioral issue.

Open-ended questions 8 and 9 allowed participants to be more open and specific about this research question. Table 5 shows that one cooperating teacher was least willing to have severe learning disabilities, another selective mutes and one for Autism. Overwhelmingly, three student teachers responded that their cooperating teacher was least willing to have behavior issues in the classroom, one participant stating because they [students with behavioral disabilities] delay instruction. Overall, the data suggests that cooperating teachers are least willing to have students with behavioral disabilities in their classroom.

4) What views do student teachers hold about inclusion?

Open-ended questions one and two both assessed student teachers views regarding inclusion. See Table 6 for specific answers. Overall, all 9 responders held positive views towards inclusion practices, however 5 of the 9 responders reported that certain supports must be in place in order for inclusion to be a successful practice. All 5 student teachers stressed the importance of having two teachers in the classroom that work well together in order for inclusion practices to be considered effective.

The second open-ended questions addressed general feelings and beliefs about educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Overall, all students hold positive views about educating students with special needs. Four student teachers reported beliefs that special education students deserve to be educated as much as possible with typically developing peers. However, student teachers once again addressed that although they have positive attitudes towards educating students with special needs, necessary supports and resources, differentiation of learning activities and the right number of students all impact their positive view about educating students with special needs.

5) How can we be better prepared to work with teachers who have a negative attitude toward implementing inclusive practices?

As seen in Table 7 below, the data suggests that if a student teacher was working with another teacher who had a negative attitude towards inclusion practices and implementation, they would try to persevere through the negativity and focus on the positive, such as helping the students. Four out of seven student teachers suggested taking a course on being prepared to deal with these types of teachers.

Table 7. Suggestions About Working with Teachers Who Have A Negative Attitude Towards Inclusion Practices

Suggestions About Working with Teachers Who Have A Negative Attitude Towards Inclusion Practices	• "Teach student teachers strategies on how to stay positive even when working with someone who is negative." • "Try to have a positive outlook and not factor in the cooperating teachers point of view." • "By being prepared as much as we can, by working with students with special needs and being willing to step in and help with those students." • "I don't know if there is a way. My approach would be to spread my positive light on the situation and be as affective as possible. Hopefully, it rubs off on the other teacher." • "To not let the negative attitude affect their views towards implementing inclusive practices." • "An education class for student teachers on working with all types of teachers." • "Taking a course on preparing us in the art of making suggestions to professionals without being perceived as pompous."

Although this study mainly examined cooperating teacher attitudes from the student teachers' eyes, there were several variables of interest. These areas of interest included student teacher practices/belief systems, factors/themes that affect teacher attitudes towards inclusion and what supports are needed to bridge the gaps that exist towards attitudes about inclusion among teachers. A main focus during this process was whether there was a growth in both native and English oral language. Seeing an increase in parental knowledge about early language and literacy development was the most beneficial factor. It showed that the student teachers can persist through negative inclusion experiences and still hold positive attitudes towards inclusion.

While collecting the data, a lot of useful information was learned about how student teachers view their cooperating teachers' attitude and how this experience impacts their attitudes, as well as what supports are needed to bridge attitudes that exist towards inclusion. The data

helped distinguish their intake and understanding on the questions asked from the surveys. With the help of Dr. Fitzgerald's permission and class, it was feasible to collect data and analyze the meaning of it all. Each student teacher responded with answers that reflected their current student teaching experience.

The findings and results of this study presented recurring themes and common variances that were described from all the student teachers. There were times when some student teachers gave answers that were different than others. These answers were based on their opinion from their student teaching experience. The findings and results will help reveal the perceptions of cooperating teachers, effectiveness of the student teaching experience and what supports are needed to increase inclusion acceptance. It will determine if there were any implications and limitations and it will provide specific details that will help understand the conclusions.

Chapter 5
Discussion/Implications

This study examined how 10 student teachers at Wagner College perceive their

cooperating teachers' attitude towards inclusion and how these experiences influence them. All

10 participants feel the inclusive classroom is the optimal environment for children with and

without disabilities despite any negativity from their current placement. Each of the six themes

identified were supported by the student teachers through the inclusionary survey. The themes

presented are (a) inclusion is a great placement for the education of students with special needs

(b) positive experiences foster success as do negative experiences (c) the need for experience,

training and workshops (d) support from administration, peers and therapists, (f) setting

placement, and (g) discrepancy between inclusion theory and inclusion implementation.

The first theme presented that the student teachers feel positive experiences foster success

as do negative experiences. Whether student teachers worked with a cooperating teacher who

had a negative attitude towards inclusion or positive attitude towards inclusion, student teachers

still kept their positive attitude towards inclusion. Most student teachers attributed this positive

attitude to their inclusion undergraduate preparation program, which provided them with the

necessary knowledge and skills to educate students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. In the

open-ended questions, student teachers expressed that positive experiences influence them to

have positive attitudes towards inclusion implementation. Those who worked with a cooperating

teacher that had a negative attitude towards inclusion were still able to overcome the negativity

because they enjoy the inclusion model and know that they have the knowledge, skills and

experience needed to work with a population of special needs learners. In the open-ended

questions, student teachers expressed that positive experiences influence them to have positive

attitudes towards inclusion. On the other hand, those who worked with a cooperating teacher that

had negative experiences were still able to retain and apply their positive attitudes towards

inclusion because the student teachers relied on their intrinsic feelings and knowledge from their

college courses and experience to implement effective inclusionary practices.

In their open-ended questions, all 10 student teachers expressed positive attitudes towards

inclusion methodology and inclusion practices. The student teachers feel that inclusion is the

optimal environment for students with special needs, when teachers can collaborate and work

together to effectively implement the model to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. In

addition, the student teachers expressed specific factors that would further enhance and promote

inclusionary practices. Of these include smaller class sizes, support from administration, an

additional teacher or para-professional available for student services and/or support, workshops

specifically regarding how to differentiate lessons for a variety of learners, effective inclusive

practices and strategies and how to manage an inclusive classroom.

The third theme expressed that teachers need experience, training and workshops to be

and feel prepared to educate students with special needs. While 7 out of 10 student teachers felt

that their cooperating teacher possessed the expertise to work with students with disabilities, all

cooperating teachers feel that their cooperating teacher would benefit from experiences working

with students with special needs and training/ workshops regarding inclusion and experiences

with inclusive classrooms. Shady et al., (2013) acknowledged that while inclusion can be very

beneficial for students, many students are placed with teachers who have little to no training in

inclusive practices, which is critical to support the initiative. Leatherman (2007) also found that

teachers express more positive attitudes and feelings of confidence in the inclusive setting when

provided with direct training and experience to work with students with special needs. It is

important to state that although professional development cannot prepare teachers for every

situation, a lack of in-depth training can greatly diminish the teachers' effectiveness of inclusive

practices in the classroom (Shady et al., 2013).

Fourth, the data suggests that there is a necessary need for school support from

administration, peers and therapists. Research by Odom et al., (2011) confirmed that educators

are in need of collaboration and adequate supports from administration including coaching,

mentoring and providing guidance and feedback in which specialized professionals (special

education teacher, speech and language pathologist, physical therapist and occupational

therapist) aid the teacher. Through open-ended questions, participants expressed a desire for

support from administration and other professionals as an essential piece in delivering successful

inclusionary practices. However, 8 out of 10 student teachers perceive that their current

placement is not providing necessary support regarding inclusion practices and managing an

inclusive classroom. As referenced in Hernandez (2013), collaboration with administration and

therapists is a beneficial tool to serve this population and promote effective inclusion practices.

Fifth, the setting of whether a student teacher was in general education, ICT or self-

contained impacted cooperating teachers attitudes towards inclusion. Overall, cooperating

teachers in a general education setting scored higher on being more stressed when working with

special needs students when compared to cooperating teachers in ICT and self-contained.

Student teachers placed with a cooperating teacher in a general education setting overall reported

lesser enjoyment of having students with special needs in his/her classroom and less likely to like

inclusion methodology. In addition, the data suggests that student teachers in a general education

setting reported a higher need/desire for workshops and seminars on inclusive education,

administrative support and experience/preparation with learners who have special needs. Boer et

al., (2011) revealed that teachers with inclusion education held more positive attitudes than those

with less experience. General education teachers are only now required to take one course on special education, yet are expected to educate students with disabilities in their classroom. It is possible that since general education teachers are often given the least amount of education and experience of working in the inclusive environment they do not feel as ready, confident and prepared to educate these students.

Lastly, there is a definitive discrepancy that exists between attitudes towards inclusion methodology and teacher attitudes towards implementing inclusion practices. Research by Cook et al., (2007) revealed that teachers have expressed positive feelings toward the general concept of inclusion, but have been less optimistic about the degree to which they are adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusionary practices. The current study suggests that 7 out of 10 cooperating teachers believe inclusion is a generally desirable practice and 9 out of 10 cooperating teachers believe inclusion is easier in theory but much harder to implement. Furthermore, 8 out of 10 cooperating teachers expressed positive feelings towards inclusion concepts but were less optimistic feelings about the degree that he/she is able to successfully implement inclusion practices. Overall, the data suggests that although majority of cooperating teachers hold positive views towards inclusion methodology, they find inclusion more difficult to implement and are less optimistic about their ability to implement the model successfully. Future research should aim to study which factors further contribute to the cause within this discrepancy, attitudes towards inclusion methodology and implementation of inclusion practices.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

One limitation of the current study is that it only focused on the perceived attitudes of the cooperating teachers of Wagner College Fall 2014 student teachers. Since all of the participants were student teaching at only three specific schools, P.S. 13, P.S. 19 and P.S. 20, these results

cannot be generalized for any other population. Therefore, the results should be seen as evidence of this specific group of student teachers' perceptions of their inclusive classrooms. A second limitation is that the participants took the survey individually; no other measures of their inclusive classroom were considered for this study. A third limitation is that the student teachers' stories could have been expanded and more detailed if additional follow-up questions had been given. The last limitation is the sample size and not focusing on the range of disabilities often found in classrooms that are inclusive. Because there were only 10 student teachers in a childhood setting, the sample size was limited.

Future research should address the impact professional development for cooperating teachers working with student teachers could have on addressing knowledge, attitudes, and self efficacy related to inclusion. In addition, future studies should address the impact ongoing support and mentorship, such as the one provided in the student teacher seminar, could have on attitudes of student teachers with a variety of placement settings during student teaching seminars. The impact of student teachers' gender could also provide valuable information on ways cooperating teachers may or may not influence efficacy beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion.

Additional research is also needed to investigate the inclusive classroom and the resources needed for success. Furthermore, aside from teachers, perceptions of administrators, therapists, parents and children should be studied to explore how they perceive inclusive education and how they understand their impact on inclusive education (Leatherman, 2007). By hearing and understanding all stories of adults and children involved in inclusion practices, researchers obtain a more detailed picture of the factors contribute to the attitudes that exist

towards inclusion practices and how to alter these attitudes to create more positive attitudes and experiences regarding inclusionary practices.

Conclusion

This current study evaluated student teachers' perception of their cooperating teachers' attitude toward inclusion and how it impacted them as a professional while trying to discover barriers that create negative attitudes towards inclusion practices among teachers. Views of teachers are supported by Vygotsky's social constructivist theory that states that we construct our world as a result of the social experiences we have had (Leatherman, 2007). Therefore, each student teacher has her own unique perception of the world based on interactions. The words presented in this research are the student teachers' view of their cooperating teachers' view towards inclusion, and the common themes supporting those views; they all express positive attitudes towards inclusion methodology and inclusion practices, they all feel positive experiences foster success as do negative experiences, the need for experience, training and workshops to be and feel prepared to educate students with special needs and support from school administration regarding inclusionary practices. When it comes to factors that have influenced their perceptions, two key areas are their experiences with inclusionary practices, or their student teaching practicum and the undergraduate inclusive education they are receiving at Wagner College. On the other hand, student teachers perceive that their cooperating teachers are competent enough to educate students within the inclusive classroom but still require additional experience, training and assistance/ support from school administration. Despite the attitude of their cooperating teacher, overall these student teachers feel that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to make a major contribution to the children in inclusive classrooms.

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Appendix A

Letter of Recruitment:

Katie Kilgannon   Katie.kilgannon@wagner.edu

Statement of the Problem

    Despite federal mandates to educate students with disabilities in the general education setting, teachers continue to have mixed feelings towards their ability to implement inclusive practices (Swain et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to evaluate student teachers perception of their cooperating teachers attitude toward inclusion using a survey. More specifically, this action research project used teacher perceptions from a survey and discussion group to devise methods to promote inclusive attitudes and bridge inclusive attitude gaps that exist among teachers.

Why Student Teachers?
1. It is imperative to educate pre-service teachers about the laws and attitudes that exist towards inclusion.
2. It is easier to create positive attitudes of pre-service teachers regarding inclusion than it is to change existing in-service teacher attitudes about inclusion.
3. By looking through the lens of the student teacher, this study serves as a catalyst for a discussion about inclusion attitudes and beliefs between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher.
4. If the study reveals that many of Wagner's student teachers are being paired with uncooperative teachers who hold negative attitudes towards inclusionary practices, we will have to better work with schools to create an appropriate pairing, since experience heavily impacts attitude and practice.
5. A cooperating teacher may feel reluctant to share his/her views about inclusion.

Why Is Attitude So Important?
Assessing teacher attitudes towards inclusion is important because attitude impacts practice and the type and quality of student-teacher interactions.

Factors Affecting Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion

    After a thorough review of research, three major and consistent themes affecting teacher attitude toward inclusion have been reported, teacher experience and preparation, support and collaboration within the school building and type/severity of the student's disability.

Research Objectives

    Studies have shown that a variety of attitudes exist among teachers towards inclusion, including positive, neutral and negative attitudes, as well as contributing factors to these attitudes. It is essential to measure attitudes, but with the intention to further use these attitudes to fix the problem at hand. This study first assessed student teachers perspective of their cooperating teachers attitude toward inclusion using a survey and second, devised possible ways to bridge inclusive attitude gaps that exist among teachers through discussion groups. The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. What kinds of supports do we need to bridge the gaps that exist towards attitudes about inclusion among teachers?
2. How do student teachers perceive their current cooperating teachers attitude toward inclusion?
3. What type of disability are teachers least willing to have in their classroom?
4. What views do student teachers hold about inclusion?
5. How can we be better prepared to work with teachers who have a negative attitude toward implementing inclusive practices?

What I need you to do in the upcoming weeks:
A) Have discussions with your teachers about inclusion, and if they do or don't like having special needs children in their class & why they do or don't
B) What type of disability is your teacher more willing/less willing to have in their classroom? (Emotionally disturbed, intellectually disabled, learning disability, ADHD, ADD, etc...)
C) What would make them more inclined to have special needs children in their class? (types of supports)
D) Overall, I want you to focus on how your cooperating teacher acts/behaves while working with special needs children.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research: Adults

As part of my master's degree requirements at Wagner College, I am conducting research on teacher attitudes towards inclusion in order to learn how to bridge the attitude gaps that exist towards inclusion. You are invited to participate in this research project, and this document will provide you with information that will help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Your participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary.

For this study, I will be using an "action research" model, where participants are co-learners with me around an issue of practice. During the course of the project, I will ask you to complete a demographical survey and a second survey based on your perception of your cooperating teachers attitudes towards inclusion. If you were to participate, I would ask you to fill out a survey that should take no longer than twenty minutes.
All information you provide during the project will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name. My final thesis will also be cleared of any possible identifying information in order to ensure your confidentiality.

The project does not carry any foreseeable risks. If for any reason you felt uncomfortable, you could leave study at any time with no penalty, and any information you may have provided would be destroyed.

If you have any questions concerning this study please feel free to contact me at Katie.kilgannon@wagner.edu or Dr. Gonzalez at katia.gonzalez@wagner.edu. Thank you for considering being part of a study related to my research for a master's degree in Education at Wagner College.

Please sign below to indicate your understanding of the project and your consent to participate. I have provided two copies so that you may keep a duplicate for your records.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date   NAME, Investigator

Appendix C

Demographical Survey

Name: _____

Please circle your current placement: General Education   ICT   Self-Contained

School you are student teaching at: _____

Grade of current placement: _____

Age: _____

Gender: Male or Female

Do you have any prior experiences working with special needs children?

Appendix D

Inclusionary Survey

Name: _____

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of your perception of your cooperating teachers attitude toward inclusion. Please indicate your opinions about each of the statements below by circling the appropriate number. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name. (Survey adapted from Bandura)

Definitions:
Inclusion: the integration and education of students with special needs into a general education setting for nearly all of the day, or at least more than half of the day
Students with special needs: students that require assistance due to physical, mental, behavioral, or medical disabilities or delays

1. My cooperating teacher seems more stressed when working with students with special needs.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. My cooperating teacher believes that implementing inclusionary practices is difficult.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. My cooperating teacher would rather have a student with a learning disability in her classroom rather than a student with a behavioral issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. My cooperating teacher views having students with special needs as having more work to do.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. My cooperating teacher feels that if more services and supports were provided for students with special needs, all students could be taught in a general education setting.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. My cooperating teacher would prefer tracking students by ability rather than inclusion.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. Participating in workshops and seminars on inclusive education will help my cooperating teacher accept and successfully implement inclusion practices.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. My cooperating teacher believes that classrooms are so crowded that teachers do not allocate enough time for disabilities.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. Regular curriculum was developed for non-disabled students, so my cooperating teacher finds it difficult for students with disabilities to follow regular curriculum.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. My cooperating teacher always differentiates for struggling students.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

11. My cooperating teacher faces difficulties with managing an inclusive classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. My cooperating teacher feels that school administrators are willing to help and discuss managing inclusion when he/she needs it.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. My cooperating teacher collaborates with other service providers and teachers to enhance inclusive education.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. My cooperating teacher feels that smaller class sizes would give him/her more time to focus on including students with disabilities.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. My cooperating teacher believes that college level training for special education is sufficient enough for a classroom teacher.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. My cooperating teacher believes inclusion is a generally desirable practice.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

17. My cooperating teacher supports the idea that students with disabilities should be given every opportunity to function in a general education classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

18. My cooperating teacher finds it feasible to educate students with disabilities, students who are gifted, and students without disabilities in the same classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

19. My cooperating teacher expresses positive feelings towards the general concept of inclusion, but is less optimistic about the degree to which he/she is adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusion.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

20. My cooperating teacher believes that all students with disabilities can have their academic needs met in the general education classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

21. My cooperating teacher receives sufficient administrative support regarding inclusion.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

22. My cooperating teacher says that students with disabilities disrupt the classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

23. My cooperating teacher has the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

24. If my cooperating teacher had more experience/preparation with students with special needs, he/she would be more willing to have them in his/her classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

25. I feel that my classroom teacher poses the expertise to work with students with disabilities.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

26. My cooperating teacher finds inclusion is easy in theory, but much harder to implement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

27. My cooperating teacher finds the integration of general education students with special needs students beneficial to all pupils.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

28. My cooperating teacher reveals that students with disabilities (regardless of the level of the disability) can be educated in the regular classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

29. My cooperating teacher enjoys having children with special needs in his/her classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

30. My cooperating teacher covers less curriculum because of inclusion.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

31. My cooperating teacher collaborates with the families of students with special needs.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

32. My cooperating teacher effectively differentiates and adapts curriculum for special needs students.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Open-Ended Questions:
1. What are your views about inclusion?

2. How do you feel about educating children with special needs in the general education classroom setting?

3. What type of professional development would your cooperating teacher find most useful/helpful in trying to implement inclusionary practices?

4. What types of resources would your cooperating teacher find most useful/helpful in trying to implement in inclusionary practices?

5. How can student teachers be better prepared to work with teachers who have a negative attitude toward implementing inclusive practices?

6. How do you think we can better promote inclusion practices? (ex- smaller class size)

7. Do you find that you school's philosophy does or does not promote inclusionary practices? Please explain.

8. What types of disabilities does your cooperating teacher find most difficult/least willing to have in her classroom?

9. What types of disabilities does your cooperating teacher find least difficult/more willing to have in her classroom? Please explain.

10. Why do you think teachers may or may not have negative attitudes towards having special education student's in their classroom? Please explain.

11. Lastly, does your perception of your cooperating teachers knowledge, attitude and skills towards inclusion impact you? Please explain.

Any additional comments:

Appendix E: Signature Page

Wagner College
Division of Graduate Studies
Master's Thesis

Author: Katie E. Kilgannon

Title of thesis: Teacher Attitudes Towards Inclusion In Early Childhood Classroom Settings.

Degree: MSED in Early Childhood Education

Date of Graduation: May 10, 2014

Thesis Review Committee:

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Katia Gonzalez _____.   Date_____.

Reader: Rhoda Frumkin _____._   Date _____.

Reader: Ann Gazzard _____.   Date _____.

Wagner College

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Document Identification

Student Name: Katie E. Kilgannon

Thesis Title: Teacher Attitudes Towards Inclusion In Early Childhood Classroom Settings

Department: Education

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Signed _Katie E. Kilgannon_   Date _12/19/14_