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Introduction

This literature review will explore inclusion by comparing social development in elementary aged children in both inclusive and self-contained classrooms. Throughout the paper the terms inclusion and self-contained will be used. For the purpose of this particular review, inclusive classrooms imply that there are both students with and students without disabilities receiving instruction in the same general education setting in natural proportion. Self-contained classrooms imply that the classroom has only students with identified disabilities receiving instruction.

This research document will review literature from the past ten years in order to provide synthesized information about social development in inclusive and self-contained settings. The literature has been condensed and summarized within three distinct headings within this literature review. The paper begins with a review of descriptions pertaining to inclusive practice and then examines specific perspectives on inclusion from parents, teachers, and students. I conclude by summarizing information relevant to the effects of inclusion on student performance.

Review of Related Literature

Descriptions of Inclusive Practice

Inclusive practice has many different topics that need to be addressed in order to understand the basic philosophies encompassing inclusion. This specific section will review the history of inclusion, followed by factors impacting inclusion which will contain school culture and attitude, teacher training and attitude, and concluding with physical and instructional barriers.

History of Inclusion

Special education appears to be a field of natural progression (Itkonen, 2007). In other words, change is always occurring as the field continues to strengthen existing mandates and students with disabilities are being educated within the general education setting to a higher extent (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). The inclusion movement, however, extends from a lengthy period of time in which students with disabilities were not valued as members of society and had to advocate for acceptance from society (Itkonen, 2007).

Federal legislation emerging from influential court cases regarding special education arose in 1975 with the approval of PL 94-142 (Leafstedt, Itkonen, Arner-Costello, Hardy, Korenstein, Medina, Murray, & Regester, 2007). Itkonen (2007) suggests that in 1975, students with disabilities relied on this legislation to gain access to public education. There has since been a shift in the focus of special education from gaining access to an education towards educational outcomes based on performance. This shift seems to have been influenced by the increase in standards based reform and accountability movements in the general education classrooms (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

In 1990, PL 94-142 was amended to become the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which has since been reauthorized in 1997 and 2004 (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, 2004). The reauthorization of the legislation helped to strengthen the existing mandates to create purposeful and meaningful educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Bruns & Mogharreban, 2007). The latest reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 sought for students with special needs to be educated with their nondisabled peers in the same classroom setting (Idol, 2006). An effect of these strengthened mandates is a significant increase in the number of students with special needs being educated within the general

education classroom as opposed to a segregated or self-contained classroom (Bruns & Mogharreban, 2007).

Over the past ten years there has been an increase in the number of students receiving services within the general education classroom (Leafstedt et al, 2007). As of 2002-2003, according to VESID (2008), the U.S. Department of Education asserts that 96% of students with special needs were receiving at least some of their instruction within the general education setting. However, only 48.2% of students with special needs were receiving education in general education classrooms for 80% or more of the school day. These statistics show that 47.8 % of students were still receiving instruction in separate settings for at least part of the school day. Also, there was still 4% of the national population with special needs that were receiving their instruction in separate educational settings for the full school day (VESID, 2008). These statistics show that change is still necessary in school districts across the country as there is still a large amount of students that are not fully included in schools.

Although IDEA requires that individuals with special needs receive the most appropriate instruction in the least restrictive environment (Itkonen, 2007) many supporters of inclusion cite other reasons for the benefits of this movement besides legal mandates. Pivik, McComas, and LaFlamme (2002) cited inclusion as a method in which to promote equality for all individuals. Holahan and Costenbader (2000) and Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001) note that it is unethical to separate students because of difference in ability because it is not representative of society. Understanding inclusion from a moral or philosophical complex propels the movement from mandated legislation to ethical beliefs about the treatment and acceptance of diverse individuals.

Factors Impacting Inclusion

The following three sections will address specific factors that have impacted inclusion over the past ten years. School culture and attitude, teacher training and attitude, and physical and instructional barriers are specific categories of interest in identifying strengths and challenges to inclusive education.

School Culture and Attitude

Acceptance of student individuality is essential to a quality inclusive program because inclusion is a philosophy that is designed to include a shared belief system and sense of shared ownership among the participants (Pivik, et al., 2002). Therefore it is critical that a school district has a shared belief system about inclusion and that everyone involved accepts and values the districts beliefs to provide effective and meaningful inclusive services for students with special needs (Baker & Donnelly, 2001).

Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, and Forgan (1998) agree with these qualities and also suggest that responsible inclusion puts student needs first in any educational placement decisions. A unified school district that focuses on the needs of individual students offers increased opportunities to create trusting and understanding relationships between the family and the school district and thus ultimately aims at providing a productive educational experience for the student (Baker & Donnelly, 2001).

A positive school climate often relies on the principal to create the shared belief system regarding inclusion (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Baker and Donnelly (2001) also cite the principal as being an essential motivator in the successful implementation of a quality social environment. Idol (2006) discovered similar results in that elementary and secondary teachers rely on administration to establish and maintain the positive school atmosphere they work in.

Supportive principals provided encouragement and knowledge about inclusion to staff members unfamiliar with the concept. Effective principals were identified as effectively being able to establish a balance between instruction and administration responsibilities (Baker & Donnelly, 2001; Idol, 2006). Kluth, Biklen, English-Sand, and Smukler (2007) reported complimentary research indicating that administrative support and leadership was either the largest obstacle or best support to the development and success of inclusive schooling.

The way in which administrators think about inclusion may impact the students' educational experience. Researchers (Yssel, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff, & Swart, 2007) found a difference between administrative beliefs about inclusion in South Africa and students in America. Americans connected inclusion with politics, i.e. what can help to raise our test scores? In contrast, administrators in South Africa believed inclusion was an education philosophy to appreciate diverse individuals. The definition of inclusion should be created at a school-based level to ensure that the individuals involved have a sense of ownership and understand encompassing this educational philosophy (Klinger, et al., 1998).

Teacher Training and Attitude

This section will focus on the impact of teacher training and teacher attitude on inclusive practices. Further on in this literature review will be a section on teacher perspectives about inclusion which will focus on teachers' beliefs about the practicality of inclusion. Both sections are important and substantial as teacher attitude and teacher beliefs are two separate factors impacting the success of inclusion in general education classrooms.

Although placement in an inclusive classroom may offer more opportunities for students with special needs to socially and emotionally develop among his or her peers (Wiener and Tardif, 2004), many general education teachers feel unprepared and unskilled in working with

students with special needs in the general education classroom (Rheams & Bain, 2005; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Bruns and Mogharreban (2007) identified three topics of professional development that teachers felt were lacking in schools. The topics were appropriately handling behavioral issues, effective communication strategies, and how to work with and correctly place students with disabilities into effective classrooms. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) did not identify specific strategies but concluded that the severity of the disability was an indicator for amount of professional development required.

Professional development training must be available to all teachers working within a school district to ensure continuity among students educational programs (Klinger, et al., 1998). Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that only 29% of general education teachers studied felt that they had received adequate training in topics relating to inclusion. Bruns and Mogharreban (2007) found similar results with less than 25% of pre-school teachers feeling successful in working with students with special needs.

Teacher attitudes toward inclusion have also been identified as factors that can impact inclusion (Idol, 2006; Rheams & Bain, 2005; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teacher attitude has been correlated to teacher confidence in their ability to meet the academic and social needs of all students in their classroom (Rheams & Bain, 2005). Teachers that embrace inclusion and believe in their ability to teach all students in the general education classroom report higher degrees of feeling successful in terms of meeting their students' academic and social goals (Klingner, et al., 1998).

Physical and Instructional Barriers

In an inclusive environment all students should have access to their education in the home school district. The experience for students with physical disabilities is however often

impacted by the schools inability to provide accessible access to and within the districts buildings (Pivik, et al., 2002). Curtin and Clarke (2005) concluded that students with physical disabilities had the most difficulty being included in physical education, attending class field trips and participating in extra-curricular activities. As Curtin and Clarke (2005) focused on inclusion outside of the school building, Pivik, McCommas, and LaFlamme (2002) identified a variety of physical barriers, such as inaccessible bathrooms, lockers and water fountains, heavy doors and awkward passageways that impacted the educational opportunities for students with physical disabilities within the school building itself.

One major instructional barrier encompassing inclusion is the amount of time involved for general education teachers (Idol, 2006). General education teachers fear that inclusion is associated with an increase demand on teachers' time (Salend & Duhaney, 1999) and may impact their ability to meet the needs of all students. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) determined that only 28% of general education teachers felt that they had enough time for planning instruction and consultation with special education teachers. Teachers reported that inclusion programs requires additional planning time and therefore extra time should be allotted for collaboration between the general and special education teachers (Klingner, et al., 1998)

Perspectives on Inclusion

Parent Perspectives on Inclusion

The field of special education has had a history of parent advocacy which has resulted in positive changes for students with special needs (Leafstedt et al. 2007). The demands insisted by parent advocacy have been a major driving force towards the inclusion of students with special needs into general education classrooms (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Parents expect

unconditional acceptance from a school district ensuring a welcoming and positive attitude to meet the needs of any child in the least restrictive environment (Yssel, et al., 2007).

Parents' desire for their child to be a respected member of the neighborhood community starts with being accepted and included in the school community (Yssel, et al., 2007). Palmer et al. (2001) also found that parents supported inclusion because of the close connection the family was able to have with the students' multidisciplinary team. Parents whose children was placed in a separate facility, had to drive on average at least thirty minutes to their child's placement and therefore did not feel as respected members of the child's' educational team.

Kluth et al. (2007) studied parents who identified several reasons for deciding to relocate their children to better meet their rights as a student in a general education classroom. The range of obstacles included educational segregation, inappropriate curricula and lack of appropriate supports and required services in self-contained classrooms, and social rejection by peers and faculty members. Palmer et al. (2001) found similar results while interviewing parents about inclusion. Parents identified support for inclusion because of higher expectations placed on the student, an opportunity to practice and improve on social skills, and because inclusion was beneficial to all students within the classroom.

Yssel et al. (2007) found that one concern parents reported about having their child included in the general education setting was their child's inability to use the appropriate coping skills in difficult situations. Palmer, Fuller, Arora and Nelson (2001) found similar results in regards to the overwhelming stimulation that may occur in an inclusive classroom. Parents believed that their child would be unable to benefit from the instruction or social opportunities presented in the inclusion classroom because their child did not exhibit the same skills as the peers in the classroom. Parents further identified that they felt it was more appropriate for their

child to be around other children with similar disabilities so that they can feel more accepted and less isolated.

Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger, and Alkin (1999) found that parent's comfort level surrounding inclusion depended on the disability of their child. Parents of students with Down syndrome favored inclusion because they believed their child had a social personality and needed exposure to age-appropriate peers for interaction purposes, while parents of students with Autism favored push-in, pull-out services because they feared their child would become over stimulated in a large unstructured classroom and not excel in the general education setting. Palmer et al. (2001) discovered that parents of students with severe and multiple disabilities didn't appreciate inclusion because they felt their child's individual needs preceded the benefit of any instructional or social opportunities in an inclusive room.

Teacher Perceptions: Practicalities of Inclusion

Teacher training and attitude were synthesized in an earlier section encompassing factors impacting inclusion. Training and attitude were highlighted as two factors that impact the philosophy of inclusion. This particular section will highlight teacher perceptions about inclusion while focusing on the individual practicalities of inclusion in general education classrooms.

With the addition of students with special needs into general education settings, teachers' confidence levels have decreased because of increased pressure to attain success in their classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teachers, however, have been known to believe that all students should be educated within their home district on a continuum of service plan between the special education and general education classrooms (Idol, 2006). Klingner et al. (1998) claim that providing general and special educators with a specific time for collaboration may assist in increasing teachers' confidence and awareness levels surrounding inclusion.

Successful inclusion placements need to have successful collaboration among educators as well as between families and faculty of the school (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Trust must be respected by everyone involved with the ultimate goal of providing the best opportunity for a child to make the most gains, both academically and socially (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). Rheams and Bain (2005) agree that trust and collaboration are two concepts that are essential to a successful inclusion program, but also determined one fear that general education teachers had towards inclusion was that they would lack the appropriate classroom space to meet the needs of all students.

Teachers fear that students with special needs would display inappropriate behaviors in the general education classroom and therefore would take control of the teachers' time and require changes to the classroom routine and schedule (Rheams & Bain, 2005). Idol (2006) addresses classroom management by suggesting school districts implement a school wide behavior plan to ensure all students have the ability to generalize the plan in all school environments. A school wide behavior plan would ultimately generalize the rules and responsibilities the students are expected to follow in any classroom thus ideally limiting the amount of extra time teachers would have to spend on inappropriate behaviors.

Discrepancy among teachers' perceptions on inclusion has been identified as a major practicality towards inclusion (Idol, 2006). Although a majority of teachers agree with the concept of inclusion, only a minor percentage of teachers are willing to implement inclusive practices and strategies within their classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teacher willingness was most directly affected by the intensity of inclusion (i.e. part day versus full day) and the severity of the disability category. Rheams and Bain (2005) compliment Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) with findings encompassing the needs of teachers to be receptive to the

principles and philosophy of inclusion as well as the demands that it may have on their classroom.

Student Perceptions on Inclusion

Many advocates for inclusive programs maintain that inclusion is a philosophy that benefits all students in the general classroom (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Ideally all students are receiving valuable academic and social experiences that will hopefully impact their education in a positive way (Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999). An increase in teachers and staff supporting inclusion within the classroom will ideally assist all students, many who often struggle but do not qualify for special education services (Palmer, et al., 2001). Vaughn & Klingner (1998) provide complimentary research citing that students without disabilities experienced a positive effect from inclusion with the increase in support provided within the classroom. Students appreciated having more than one teacher to answer questions and valued the instructional qualities of two teaching approaches.

Klingner et al. (1998) studied students diagnosed with learning disabilities (LD) and determined that students with LD learned better in a pull-out classroom, such as a resource room, however the students cited the inclusive classroom as more helpful in making and keeping friends. Vaughn and Klingner (1998) found similar results in that the most identified reason for preferring inclusion was the opportunity to socialize and the increased opportunity encompassing overall social benefits. Tapasak & Walther-Thomas (1999) found similar results after studying the effectiveness of a first-year inclusion program. Students identified positive school experiences within the newly formed inclusive rooms because there was on-going interaction among a variety of peers as well as appropriate peer modeling and increased expectations for all students within the inclusive classroom.

Students' perception of their educational setting is ultimately a new area of study for current research. There isn't one setting that has been unanimously identified as the preference for students with disabilities (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). Kasari et al. (1999) determined that student age was an important factor for both parents and students value in inclusive education. Parents with children of primary age favored inclusion because of the social benefits, while students, and their parents, in high school favored push-in and pull-out services. Curtin and Clarke (2005) found similar results while studying students with physical disabilities. In primary school, students with disabilities found it easy to make friends and enjoyed inclusive settings, however students in secondary schools favored being mainstreamed (i.e. placed part time in self-contained rooms and part time in an inclusive room) because they admitted they struggled to make long-lasting friendships in inclusive settings.

It is essential that students learn to advocate for themselves and provide insight into which program they feel is the appropriate model for their education (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). A continuum of services should be incorporated into a student's educational program to ensure the best academic and social success for each individual student (Klingner, et al., 1998). In other words, this balanced approach in identifying the most appropriate setting for a student's educational experience should not be based on disability, but should be based on student need and personal goals the student, family and multidisciplinary team have identified together (Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

Social Development

Why Social Development Matters

Researchers maintain that social development needs to be a fundamental component to any childhood curriculum. Unfortunately there is a lack of emphasis on early social development

during the elementary years in school in which it appears to be the most crucial for the students (Baker & Donnelly, 2001; Katz & Galbraith, 2006). Baker and Donnelly (2001) report that academic goals are often valued more than social goals, even though they also concluded that interaction among people may be the most important ingredient in education. Katz and Galbraith's (2006) conclusions parallel observations made by Baker and Donnelly (2001) in that social interaction among children is crucial to the development of life-long communicative skills that will assist in their ability to comply with societal expectations and be accepted as a valued member of a community.

Katz and Galbraith (2006) maintain that an emphasis on social skills is imperative in early childhood development because positive interactions between adults and children will positively impact the child's ability to negotiate and express themselves in the future. Increasing a student's ability to communicate effectively can also help primary-aged students to create a sense of belonging and acceptance from their peers (Pivik, McCommas, & LaFlamme, 2002; Salend & Duhaney, 1999) Students who interact in a social environment may establish positive attitudes, values and essential foundational skills for their future development. Holahan and Costenbader (2000) claim that young children have yet to form negative stereotypes about other individuals, therefore by creating inclusive environments, young children can experience acceptance and diversity as an expected component to their daily lives. Vaughn and Klingner (1998) discovered opposing results while interviewing middle school students with learning disabilities. Some students with disabilities favored a pull-out method of instruction because they felt this method was less embarrassing and therefore the students received less teasing from other non-disabled peers.

Lu (2000) provides evidence to further support the benefits between social development and inclusive environments for young children. She concluded that learning vocabulary in elementary school is not only accomplished through formal instruction, but through interaction among children. Having the opportunity to express their needs through natural situations increases the opportunity for students to use the information on a continual basis. Odom, Li, Sandall, Zercher, Marquart, and Brown (2006) compliment Lu (2000) in their study of preschool children. Along with increased vocabulary development, inclusion in the primary grades increases opportunity for age appropriate modeling of cognitive communication.

To develop appropriate conversational skills children must have access to active interaction with other people, ideally peers of their own age (Miller, Lane, & Wehby, 2005). Lu (2000) declares that children need to have the opportunity to learn how to negotiate, take turns and make relevant contributions to conversation among their peers. These opportunities are certainly heightened in an inclusive setting as opposed to a self-contained classroom with a decrease in opportunities for interaction among a variety of individuals. Wilson, Pianta, and Stuhlman (2007) found results that support Lu's (2000) claims while studying first grade students. The researchers added that teachers' responsiveness, support and sensitivity were essential in predicting social development among first grade students. First graders who were exposed to a positive, supportive environment fulfilled with proactive classroom management and effective feedback showed higher social competence than those students placed in lower-quality classrooms.

Miller et al. (2005) claim that social development has a substantial impact on the academic development of young students. Poor social development is commonly cited as a cause of academic failure for many students, especially those students with special needs (Wilson, et

al., 2007; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Pivik, et al., 2002). These claims are crucial for the development of the least restrictive environment for a student because they provide insight into the importance of both social and academic developments and how the combination of the two can provide a beneficial education for all students at the elementary level.

Social Development across Specific Disability Categories

The impact of inclusion has been correlated with the type of disability a student may have (Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Panacek & Dunlap, 2003; Vaughn & Klingner, 1998; Wiener & Tardiff, 2004). Wiener and Tardiff (2004) examined the relationship between students with learning disabilities in a variety of classroom settings. In all aspects of social and emotional functioning the students placed in the inclusive environment fared better than the students placed in resource rooms or self-contained classrooms. The students in the inclusive setting claimed to have better companions, less problematic behavior and the students were overall less lonely and more optimistic about their abilities as a student. Vaughn and Klingner (1998) found contrasting results to Wiener and Tardiff (2004) in that students with learning disabilities preferred pull-out methods of instruction when compared to that of inclusive settings because they felt that they learned more and focused better in smaller settings.

Fisher & Meyer (2002) also found similar results to Wiener and Tardiff (2004) when comparing social development and competence in students placed in either inclusive or self-contained classrooms. Students with varying disabilities which included moderate to profound mental retardation, autism, sensory impairments, and/or other multiple disabilities, in the inclusive environment made significant gains in initiating contacts with other peers as well as learning to appropriately handle difficult or negative situations. Salend and Duhaney (1999) support these results by claiming that students placed in an inclusive environment have the

opportunity to observe and become involved in active problem solving steps surrounding difficult situations. In a self-contained classroom, many problems are often solved immediately with the assistance of an adult without granting the child the opportunity to work out an issue independently or without immediate assistance (Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

Panacek and Dunlap (2003) studied students with emotional and behavioral disorders and identified that students placed in self-contained classrooms had limited opportunities to engage with their peers in the general education setting. Unlike the students cited by Vaughn and Klingner (1998), the students studied by Panacek and Dunlap (2003) had limited social networks and limited access to the general school activities. Once the students were removed from the general education setting, they were no longer associated as members of the overall school community. Instead these students school days were dominated by special educators and other adults associated only to the field of special education. These students whom were placed in the self-contained classroom had a decreased amount of opportunities for enriched social interaction, which ironically is a skill they are lacking by the title of their disability.

Why Inclusion Supports Social Development

Baker and Donnelly (2001) stress the importance of quality social experiences for students with disabilities. Research (Odom, et al., 2006; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Vaughn & Klingner, 1998; Wilson, et al., 2007) shows that students with disabilities generally have fewer friends than students without disabilities, socialize less than their peers, and are more likely to be rejected or victimized and have more unstable relationship between adults and peers. To ensure that school is a positive learning experience for students with disabilities, Baker and Donnelly (2001) suggest specific issues that need to be addressed in any school district. These issues involve perceptions

of disability, family support, and school impacts such as culture, professionalism and environment.

In regards to social development and competence, an inclusive setting provides an increase in opportunities for students with special needs to interact with all students (Curtin & Clarke, 2005). This interaction has the opportunity to lead to more social contacts and richer friendships (Panacek & Dunlap, 2003). Pivik et al. (2002) highlight another benefit to inclusion by stating that all individuals involved will be able to experience positive results and learn from the social experiences that occur within the general education setting. A further benefit to inclusion, suggested by Katz and Galbraith (2006), is an increased ability to use appropriate social skills thus providing appropriate modeling and practice for all students as they continue to learn the unwritten rules of social development as young children.

Inclusion focuses on the child as a whole. A general education classroom provides more than an opportunity to learn academic skills for all children. Being incorporated into a classroom community connects the social, emotional, physical and social ecology of any child (Katz & Galbraith, 2006). A self-contained environment in which students are often excluded from an interactive community would not meet all these needs of an elementary child with a disability because it prevents interaction that is essential to the social development of an individual (Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

Research has stated that it is imperative to encourage social relationships early in life in order to establish an open-mind and appreciation for diversity in young children (Katz & Galbraith, 2006; Odom, et al., 2006). Odom et al. (2006) also claim that social rejection at a young age by peers can be correlated as a strong predictor for peer outcomes in adulthood, both in regard to academic and social competence abilities. Students removed from a general

education classroom and placed in a self-contained class are often stigmatized and associated with being different and not as able as those peers left in the classroom (Curtin & Clarke, 2005). Without an opportunity to interact with the general education class, students removed are, in a sense, being rejected from the mandated right to be placed in the least restrictive environment possible.

This review of current literature synthesized ten years of research encompassing inclusive education across the United States. The history of inclusion identified the importance of legal mandates in effect to creating the least restrictive environment for children with special needs. School culture, teacher training and physical and instructional barriers were addressed as three substantial categories that impact the success of an inclusive program. Inclusion is a philosophy created through a combination of student, teacher, and parent perspectives. Ultimately it is these perspectives that also help in identifying the characteristics that are associated with a successful inclusive program. The final section explored the importance of social development in elementary school children as well as a synthesis of why inclusion supports social development in children. These three unique sections linked together identify the current views on inclusive and the impact inclusion has on the socialization of children across the United States.

Methodology

Researcher Stance

As a special education teacher in a small school district, I believe that social development is essential to the overall development of a young child. I believe that a child's educational experience is based on both social and academic characteristics and that all children need to develop appropriate skills in both categories in order to be successful both in the classroom setting and in the real world environment. As a teacher in a self-contained room, I fear that my

students are not being provided with adequate opportunities to learn and practice appropriate social skills. These social skills are essential my students overall development, and yet without appropriate modeling and practice opportunities, I struggle with how to incorporate these crucial skills into a small self-contained classroom. I used these personal experiences in designing my research proposal comparing social development in elementary children in self-contained and inclusion classrooms.

Design

I chose to use surveys to collect data on my research proposal because I felt this design allowed me to explore social development among a variety of professionals within one school setting. I was able to create a simple survey (see appendix A) that could be used as a tool to understand thoughts of professionals in a confidential and respectful manner.

Data Collection

After creating the survey, I handed out the surveys to faculty and staff at my particular elementary school, which is in a rural community in Livingston County, New York. The survey had a cover letter attached explaining the goal of the survey and the explicitly stated the directions for completing the survey. Once a participant had finished a survey there was a drop-off box in the main office that the participant could place the survey to ensure confidentiality was maintained. I collected the surveys from the box every day at the end of school during the two week data collection period. At the end of the two weeks, I removed the box from the office and in total had received 11 surveys from faculty and staff.

Participants

Seven of the eleven participants were regular general education teachers, two were special education teachers, one was a special education teachers' assistant, and one was a college

practicum student seeking a degree in childhood and special education. The participants' years as an educational professional ranged from none (college student) to 34 years.

Data Analysis

After collecting the eleven surveys I analyzed data in an interpretative approach (reference). My goal was to gain a better understanding of how current educational professionals felt about inclusion and self-contained classrooms in respect to social development of students with special needs. Through the analyzing process I reviewed one question at a time and looked for similarities and differences within the answers provided. I created a chart document for each specific question so that I could compare and contrast the responses from the various individuals. I used these charts and the information I collected as I compared the data with the research I had found on social development in classroom settings.

Findings

To report my findings I will report each question and then provide my analysis beneath.

Do you think that students with special needs attain more social development in a self-contained setting or an inclusive setting? Please list reasons supporting your opinion.

Nine of the eleven participants felt inclusion was the more appropriate setting for social development. One participant claimed that it depended on the individual child and another felt that self-contained classrooms were more appropriate for developing personal social skills, but both placements could be beneficial if the student already had appropriate skills developed.

A variety of reasons were provided in support of inclusion promoting successful social development. The most frequently cited reason was that an inclusive classroom offers more opportunity for social interaction among age appropriate peers. This reason was cited by 10 of the 11 participants. Other reasons provided included feeling acceptance for who the student is, less adults to rely on than in the self-contained classroom and learn and practice appropriate behaviors with modeling.

What benefits and challenges does a self-contained classroom offer to a student with special needs?

The most frequently identified benefit to a self-contained classroom was the opportunity to have more individualized attention and instruction (cited 8 times). Four participants cited having the chance to address behaviors as they happen in hopes to teach appropriate behaviors quickly and without affecting the whole group. Overall, the benefits provided aimed at increasing academic development and not social development.

The challenges provided the impact that self-contained classrooms have on social development. Participants addressed the feelings of isolation and being different that students

may attribute to their removal from the general education classroom. Seven participants recognized that there would be limited, if any, appropriate peer models in a self-contained classroom and therefore there are a lack of opportunities to improve social skill development. A couple participants acknowledged that students who learn how to behave in an isolated situation may not be able to generalize the behaviors or skills to multiple, more stimulating environments. Finally, one participant noted that one on one instruction doesn't allow for group dynamics to develop.

What benefits and challenges toward social development does an inclusive classroom offer to a student with special needs?

The most frequently cited benefit for inclusion based on social skill development was having the opportunity to observe modeling of proper behavior and the increase in a variety of role models within the classroom. The second most frequent reason to support inclusion was the increased opportunity to socialize with others. Raising awareness of disability to all children was also noted as a benefit to inclusion, which is critical to the acceptance of individuality within an inclusive environment.

The challenges toward inclusion for students with special needs included a variety of concerns such as more children would lead to larger class sizes and less attention to be given to all students, as well as less time to teach specific social skills because of curriculum demands. A majority of the participants felt that the student with special needs would be easily frustrated in an inclusive classroom because they would not be able to keep up or complete what everyone else in the class was doing. This, the participants claimed, may lead to the student feeling like they don't fit in as a part of the class.

Which disability category do you think would be hardest to include?

Nine participants noted that they felt students with emotional/behavioral disorders would be hardest to include because this specific category of disability would negatively affect the whole class and no one would be able to learn, the student would need proper and effective support from too many professionals, outburst from the child would disrupt the learning of all students, and the lack of training for classrooms teachers impacts their ability to effectively teach the student.

One participant noted that inclusion needs to be based on the needs of an individual child and not the disability that the child has been labeled with. Two participants identified Autism as being difficult to include because of the broad range of needs encompassing the disability as well as an increased need for more direct and focused social skill development with guided opportunities to practice.

Discussion

Eighty-two percent of the participants surveyed identified inclusion as the educational placement that would best suit the social development skills of students with special needs. Although the participants identified a belief in inclusion, this particular school district has four self-contained classrooms, which is a high number with the school having less than 500 students in the entire district. There seems to be some contrasting between the teachers' beliefs, and actions of inclusive education. This research compliments research by Idol (2006) claiming that current educational professionals believe that inclusion is the placement of choice for developing social and academic skills of students with special needs. The discrepancy that is occurring in research is between believing in inclusion and accepting inclusion in a personal classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

A majority of the participants, in this study, identified students with emotional and behavioral disorders as they hardest to include out of the nine disability categories. Published research has also identified this population of students as difficult to include (Panacek & Dunlap, 2003). This is an unfortunate situation because students with emotional and behavioral disorders, by the nature of their disability, often lack the social skills and understanding of how to control their impulses in a stimulating experience. It seems that the participants fear including students with emotional and behavioral disorders because of the negative impact it may have on the rest of the students. The issue that then arises is that can it be justified to exclude a student for having one specific label, and including the other eight categories within a classroom? With an increase in professional development and training specially created around working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, potentially there may be an increase in the number of students with this disability being included in school districts and not in separated settings.

An interesting finding from the current study noted that participants favored academic benefits when citing benefits to a self-contained classroom. Also, the major challenge the participants felt towards self-contained classroom was the limited social interaction with age-appropriate peers. This directly correlates to the nine out of eleven teachers who favored inclusion for social development. The issue then becomes how to make inclusion successful and real to current teachers in the field. Teachers realize the importance that inclusion has on the successful social development in young children, and yet inclusion is not widely accepted because of the overlying fears that teachers cited such as lack of time, lack of resources, increase in inappropriate behavior and lack of training for working with students with special needs.

Limitations

This study was limited by the small sample of surveys that were returned to me, which may have impacted the data that was collected and analyzed. A greater participant sample may have granted more data to compare and analyze in determining supporting reasons and challenges to social development in inclusive or self-contained settings. Also because the surveys were only collected from one school in a rural community, the results can not be generalized across a variety of school settings.

Teacher perspectives were the only perspectives identified through the completion of the surveys. This limits the comparisons that I can make with current published research. Parent and student perspectives would provide more data to compare with current research in the field.

Implications for Future Research

This study only gives a small glimpse into social development opportunities in both inclusion and self-contained classrooms for students with special needs. The study does document a need for an increase in training about inclusion and the philosophy it entails. It would be interesting to follow current teachers through an inclusion training program to identify the real fears they have during the training process. Current studies only focus on what teachers fear about inclusion as a theory and not fears they have while being an active participant in the practice.

Future research focusing on parents attitudes toward inclusion based on the quality of experience is an interesting parallel to this current study. Experience may be the underlying factor that impacts student achievement; however it is a topic not studied in detail among primary aged students. If experience in a particular classroom impacts the parents' perspective

on inclusion, how does research provide data to prove this concept and ultimately make changes in the special education field?

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Appendix A
Participant Survey
Capstone Survey Questions

Current Position: _____

Previous Educational Positions: _____

Years as an Educational Professional: _____

Please answer these questions based on your current and previous experience as a classroom teacher or administrator:

Do you think that students with special needs attain more social development in a self-contained setting or an inclusive setting? _____

Please list reasons supporting your opinion:

What benefits and challenges towards social development does a self-contained classroom offer to a student with special needs?

Benefits	Challenges

What benefits and challenges towards social development does an inclusive classroom offer to a student with special needs?

Benefits	Challenges

Which disability category do you think would be hardest to include and why? _____