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Citizenship in the Inclusive Environment

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Ralph Wilson Jr. School of Education

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies used by educators to initiate equal opportunity for students with disabilities in the social environment known as the inclusive setting. This study also showed how children develop an understanding of what it means to have citizenship in the classroom, and how this stance is reached through the aid of peers and teachers. To be a citizen in the classroom is defined by Mara Sapon-Shevin as a naturalized individual who is entitled to the rights and privileges as any other student (2003). Having these rights and privileges encourages any student to comfortably learn in supportive environment. The citizenship learned in the classroom will encourage students to be leaders in their community with a voice.

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Citizenship in the Inclusive Environment

Introduction

“Inclusion is not only about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice. Inclusion demands that we ask, what kind of a world do we want to create and how should we educate students for that world? What kinds of skills and commitments do people need to thrive in a diverse society?” (Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p.25)

The development and justification of the inclusive setting has been debated since the trial *Brown versus the Board on Education* in 1954. It was here that our nation declared separate but equal education is not constitutional. Following this proposition was the *Education for All Children Act* (1986), *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990), and most recently the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002). Present teachers are still focused on many questions when it comes to developing an inclusive environment that satisfies all educational laws. If students with special needs were to enter the general education setting what would the student body learn? How would the environment as a whole change? How would the teacher organize students? How would the teacher have students interact with one another?

Today most educators embrace these laws and debates in their teaching philosophies proclaiming their stance is the same as those educational advocates who have been fighting for decades to preserve the rights of students with disabilities. Those philosophies will help answer some of the common concerns educators have when teaching in an inclusive setting for the first time. The goal of our educational system should be to not only have students with special needs

be part of the general educational setting but be a citizen of the classroom. The result of this commitment might be that all students learn more than reading, writing, arithmetic, science, and social studies. All children could develop a better understanding of what it means to be a citizen. In theory, the development of an inclusive environment has changed the teaching philosophy so all students have a better understanding of what it means to be a model citizen. The problem that is put before teachers today is if the strategies used to encourage citizenship amongst students are effective or not.

Literature Review

Least Restricted Environment

“When IDEA was first promulgated in 1975, schools generally interpreted the law to mean that they should mainstream students with mild disabilities into classes where these students could keep up with other learners, supposedly with minimal support and few or no modifications to either curriculum or instruction. In the early 1980’s, the interpretation of least restrictive environment evolved to include the concept of integrating students with more intensive needs into regular classrooms. The interpretation evolved into the approach now known as inclusion: the principle and practice of considering general education as the placement of first choice for all learners” (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p.19).

The least restricted environment encourages freedom in the education of students with learning disabilities. This freedom will evolve into more social interaction with peers and drive students with disabilities to express themselves freely. The classroom should serve as a setting for constant celebration that recognizes the gifts and skills of individual students instead of

weaknesses. In order to reach this success teachers and the classroom setting must have certain characteristics.

Inclusion Works Outside the Classroom

Before inclusion was established in a school environment its success was displayed in other learning opportunities such as extracurricular and community recreation activities. Including students with moderate and severe disabilities in extracurricular activities gives them opportunity to practice and extend their academic skills. “Research has found that recreation, leisure, and extracurricular involvement are essential for developing friendships, increasing the likelihood of community integration and post school success, along with improving the overall quality of life” (Kleinert, Miracle & Sheppard-Jones 2007, p. 33). It is in these particular environments that students learn critical skills they need to participate in school or at least make the school experience easier. Such extracurricular community activities include scouts and Four-H clubs, park and recreation teams, church or faith-based groups, and one-on-one mentoring programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters. All these programs develop a child’s role in society itself outside the classroom, giving the child self worth. This view of self worth in the eyes of the child will then be brought to the classroom as self-esteem, the necessary tool to motivate students to try new experiences. Student recognition on how he or she is part of society can lead to permanent ownership and involvement of a smaller part of society, the classroom.

Today educators accept the knowledge that extracurricular activities increase social skills and self-esteem as research that will be applied only when specific academic standards are reached. Only when academic goals are met, students with disabilities have an opportunity to benefit from learning that extracurricular activities provide. This is the reason why students with

disabilities are rarely found participating in activities outside of school. “Planned opportunities and recreation/leisure instructors comment that students with such disabilities have few if any chances to participate, and this lack of engagement may well carry over into adulthood” (Kleinert, 2007, p.2). In fear of academic failure, students with special needs are focusing solely on school, which becomes an all consuming job. Some students even attend school all twelve months of the year to maintain an average standing in the New York State curriculum. The time for recreational activities does not exist, causing students to miss out on learning social skills and teamwork that will be more useful in the working society than the knowledge of the density formula learned in an Earth Science classroom. Even though it is a parental choice, students with special needs are naturally being separated from their peers because of this academic stress.

“Separate class and school placements for students with disabilities and school placements decreases opportunities for inclusive extracurricular activities” (Kleinert, 2007,p.2). This train of thought is unconstitutional according to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

“Special education and related services and supplementary aids and services are used a) to advance opportunity toward attaining the annual goals, and b) to be involved in and make progress to the general education curriculum in accordance with sub clause and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)

The government recognizes the need for the skills learned in extracurricular activities and is ensuring that students with disabilities not only are involved in them but are given services to encourage that students play an equal role in activities. Most educators focus their attention on

Part A of the documented law that discusses the annual goals students with special needs work on in the classroom. Part B is usually ignored because of the failure to complete educational goals. In reality Parts A and B deserve equal attention to develop a well rounded student that has equal opportunity to learn to be a member of society (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The denial of extracurricular activities in a school setting can have an effect on academic performance due to the need of social skills to communicate thoughts and understanding of content. A survey indicated that general educators have an increasing comfort level in working with students with significant intellectual disabilities, because of the support of extracurricular activities all students attend during flex time (Kleinert, 2007). If extracurricular activities increases, the student with disabilities social confidence and the teachers' support, then these activities are essential if students with all disabilities are to become full members of their school communities, and gain all the benefits that their schools and communities have to offer.

“Inclusive activities reported to be successful by teachers are social activities related to school with peers. These activities include sports, drama clubs, service groups and school-sponsored social events like dances and class trips” (Kleinert, 2007). The success of these activities need to be studied by educators, so that they can incorporate the characteristics of inclusive social events into the academic environment, so social skills such as team work and communication can be practiced daily. The steps needed to make this transition successful include extracurricular activities as part of class requirements, involving parents in class projects, and collaborating with other classroom teachers (Kleinert, 2007). Professional development is essential to create a classroom environment that is similar to that of extracurricular and recreational activities.

Definition of an Inclusive Setting

“In the inclusive school, all students are educated in general education programs.

Inclusion is when a student with special learning and/or behavioral needs is educated full time in the general education program. Essentially, inclusion means that the student with special needs is attending the general school program, enrolled in age-appropriate classes one hundred percent of the school day” (Idol, 2006, p.77). The organization, compassion, and resourcefulness of each individual teacher in the school will determine the success of this particular school. Changing teaching practice effectively requires a high degree of initiative and responsibility from the teacher. This includes theorizing about how best to meet the needs of the students individually and collectively, as well as focusing on the diversity of the students as a challenge that can successfully be met, instead of an overwhelming experience (Weiner 2003). Not only does the diversity of the students need to be studied, it needs to be celebrated amongst students to ensure a welcoming environment where all students feel comfortable learning.

Resources Needed for Successful Inclusion

A study conducted through West Chester University explored what practicing general education teachers need in order to successfully teach students with disabilities. The result of this study indicated that teachers want to further their own education about disabilities and receive more information about the children they are working with who have disabilities. One teacher commented: “When a child with special needs is placed in my class, I would like to be offered training specific to that child” (Karnens, 2003, p.21). Other comments also indicated that an understanding of the child’s disability label would perhaps facilitate an understanding of methods to meet the child’s needs (Karnens, 2003, p.22). This knowledge will lead to developmentally appropriate instruction and realistic objectives that students with disabilities can meet. Additional planning is needed to develop a daily routine where different levels of learning

can take place in the same classroom. This routine will also include a balance between the extra attention that students with learning disabilities need and the attention focused on the rest of the class. Successful inclusion also needs the involvement of both the general education students and students with disabilities in the same activities.

Teachers in this study also commented that extra support from administration is needed to discuss problems, suggestions, and ideas that either work or flop in the inclusion setting. This involves more observations by administration and a positive relationship with all teaching staff.

This desire for extra information, educational conferences, and support from administration is not surprising. Current teacher candidates are learning about the defining characteristics of the thirteen disabilities outlined in IDEA, methods/models for delivering appropriate curriculum for all students, and the construction of an inclusive learning environment in undergraduate and graduate courses. Soon the study of special education will be mandatory for all college students studying to be educators. Present teachers do not have this training and according to this study these teachers understand that they need the training to be successful at their job. Administration cannot place an uneducated teacher into an inclusive setting and expect results worthy of meeting the needs for all students with disabilities. The discouragement that develops from the uneducated teacher rubs off on the students in the classroom, creating an unsupportive environment for those students who are misunderstood. If the education is not supported by the administration the teacher needs to take on the responsibility to learn for the sake of his or her students.

Inclusion: An Important Choice

Effective learning in an inclusive setting is a choice made by the classroom teacher. The attitude of the educator can create conditions that either put students at risk of failing or help

them learn well. Depending on the teacher's attitude the learning environment can change. Teachers who teach students with behavioral disabilities have reported a natural fear toward including these students in the general education setting in a recent study out of the Elizabeth Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities in New Jersey. "Out of 14 teachers, 10 expressed having initial apprehensions about including students with behavioral disabilities because they themselves have limited direct experience or training with students with such needs" (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006, p.167). Teachers that look at teaching in an inclusion classroom as a new experience should co-teach with a teacher who has more experience. Each child that has a behavioral disability is different and the best way to gain experience is through the hands-on experience the classroom can provide. A teaching seminar or training session cannot provide the same training that a student can. This is why most teachers become better at their job with experience.

According to Howard M. Weiner's (2003) research a classroom teacher's attitude can affect the inclusive setting on three levels.

"In level one schools, teachers assume little responsibility for ensuring that all students learn well, and their efforts focus on securing specialists to work with slow or challenging learners. In this level the learning environment ignores individual differences but tries to keep students together. In level two schools, some teachers take responsibility to ensure that all students learn; these teachers use informal and standardized testing to guide instruction and to establish grouping and standards benchmarking for each student. Level three schools are dynamic, responsive, engaging, and dedicated to ensuring that all students succeed. Educators view low student

achievement as a challenge to improve the delivery of services, not an excuse to give up on students” (p. 15).

The incentive to change a teacher’s focus and educational vision is believed to be a process the administration is responsible for. This change is an independent decision in the mind of every teacher. The administration can only be inspiring and helpful to teachers making the choice if inclusion is to be successful or not in their classroom. Teachers in each of these levels could have all the recourses needed to be successful inclusion educators, but still fail at the attempt. The personal choice to interact with students with disabilities on a personal level, not just an academic level, is an indicator of a successful learning environment. Therefore, attitude or the simple choice to be involved in the life of students with disabilities is a factor that contributes to the student’s success in the classroom and how the student is valued in society. After considering the internal choice that all inclusion educators face, teachers move on to tackle the next issue, designing a differentiated curriculum.

“In self-contained special education settings students with emotional/behavioral disorders and/or learning disabilities need skills in the areas of organization, self-management, social skills, and learning strategies. The challenge in educating exceptional students in heterogeneous general education classrooms is how to provide instruction in the nontraditional focus on academic instruction. The procedures to accomplish this are already present in the infusion of multiple subjects into curriculum activities” (Williams & Reisberg, 2003, p.205).

The setup of the inclusive environment offers students with disabilities instruction that is modeled multiple times. During daily lesson plans, students are grouped at random so that after

directions are given and modeled by instructors the ability of individual students to carry out lesson objectives becomes a group effort. Teachers encourage students to be responsible for one another. If one student has completed an assignment, he or she is now assigned to help a neighbor finish theirs, if there are signs of struggle. This lesson outline creates a foundation for teaching the social behavior, to be responsible for others.

In our working society a company's success of a product or service is dependent on the ideas and marketing of all the workers. If one individual falls behind, the success of the company as a whole is in jeopardy. The thought that our classroom is any different from a company is unrealistic. The falling behind of students with disabilities will affect our society later on in the form of the nation's educational gap. The idea of group responsibility is discouraged by our internal instinct to compete with one another to show individual gifts and abilities.

The Williams and Reisberg (2003) instructional model provides teachers with the format where students are pulling together for the sake of learning a skill or concept but are still being assessed independently. The instructional model consists of five steps: advance organizer, model, guided performance, independent performance, and generalization. The teacher is involved in the advance organizer where the rationale or an explanation of the target skill is given meaning in real life. The instructor then models the skill or provides an example of what the skill looks like. Guided performance encourages the students to attempt the skill under the supervision of the teacher. During independent performance students are to practice the skill with a group of students, perfecting the skill and reteaching each other. Lastly, generalization is the portion of instruction where students are assessed or asked to perform the skill independently or with a

different group. Group work is a great way for students to learn together and practice social skills, assuming that students get along and are respectful toward one another. The consequences of them not acting this way are traumatic in an inclusive setting.

The Social Struggle

Some people involved in the education process think that inclusion does not work; students with special needs should be in a special school with others like them for social protection (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). Bullying amongst students is a common problem teachers have in the classroom. Students who display a difference from the majority are usually picked on or left out of some social activities. This behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable for future citizens of a global community and should not be ignored by teachers. Educators need to reflect on the question: Do we believe that students in this classroom are welcoming and accepting of all forms of diversity or is it just students with disabilities that are picked on? (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). Schools that move students away from peers because of their disabilities are not teaching acceptance of diversity instead they are teaching intolerance and that their bullying behavior is rightfully accepted by our society.

“Inclusive classrooms can teach us important lessons that go far beyond individual students and specific settings and help us create the inclusive, democratic society that we envision for our students and society” (Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p.26). Inclusive classrooms can help us challenge practices of exclusion. Many teachers hesitate to initiate such discussions because they fear making issues of exclusion worse. Teachers sometimes feel unprepared or untrained to lead discussions like this, however waiting until everyone feels secure is a failure to educate the difference between right and wrong.

Discussions about teasing and bullying have to be handled delicately. First, teachers should tell students what they observe in the classroom is harassment on the basis of race/sexual orientation/physical appearance/disability, our school has zero tolerance for that and so does our nation's constitution (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). Second, conversations need to take place in the learning environment with the entire class, not just the students who are involved in bullying situations. Student's names should not be involved in any whole group discussion of a particular situation that happened in the class. This will lead to discomfort and students will not want to be involved in a conversation that attacks the student body. Teachers at the elementary level use books discussing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors during social interaction. After reading the book teachers encourage students to discuss the feelings of the characters and if they themselves ever felt this way. "By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for us all" (Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p.28).

Forming Relationships and Defining Roles in the Classroom

Forming relationships amongst students deserves the teacher's attention, especially while students are forming their place in the classroom. First, teachers need to view their classroom as a unit that will work together cooperatively. This is not to be confused with having the same expectations for all students. The individual goals, gifts, and skills that each student brings to the classroom creates this unit, without one student the unit will collapse. Teachers can initiate the creation of the unit at the beginning of the year by focusing on the students instead of curriculum. Teachers should involve students in fun ice breaker activities where students will be able to socialize and meet other students in the class. During this time students can make connections that will last throughout the year.

“An inclusive educator focuses on identifying and capitalizing on individual students’ interests and strengths, but making inclusive education work requires something more: it takes both systems-level support and classroom-level strategies” (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p.19). System-level support involves visionary leadership, redefined roles of adults, and the collaboration of all students and staff.

The issue in this type of collaboration is time. Administration is reworking daily schedules to follow block scheduling, giving students more time in one class that they have every other day. Even at the elementary level, students are spending more time on one particular activity so lessons can be completed in school instead of taken home. This new schedule also allows students and teachers lunch blocks at the same time so students can see teachers for extra help and teachers can collaborate on lessons and give each other support. This new schedule allows educators to focus time on building relationships with students and staff that will be supporting during the education experience.

As students with disabilities enter the general education setting, the roles of teachers change. This could be confusing considering there is usually more than one adult in the classroom. “Educators must relinquish traditional roles, drop distinct professional labels, and redistribute their job functions across the system. Collaboration and shared responsibility for educating all of a community’s children and youth is the job for every single educator” (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p.21).

Classroom-level strategies consist of social and cooperative learning. “General education theories and practices that effectively support inclusion are: multiple intelligences or constructivist learning, teaching practices that generate a relevant meaning toward subject matter, and differentiated instruction” (Villa & Thousand 2003, p.21). Role playing and making

a connection between the knowledge in the classroom and life experiences will give a student the mind-set to think about how the knowledge he or she maintains affects the well being of society instead of affecting the individual student. This train of thought will encourage future citizens to have respect for humanity along with preserving constitutional rights.

It Takes a Citizen to Make a Citizen

Inclusion of students who are deaf/hard- of- hearing in public schools is one of the more controversial topics in the education field, especially when thinking about the term social community. The term “community” implies a sense of belongingness and personal relatedness, as discussed before in relationship to the definition of citizenship. This inclusion process was observed in several of the local Rochester area schools. The educators in these settings experienced two stages in the inclusion process, being a visitor, and membership.

“Visitors, or students with disabilities, typically enter the classroom without the knowledge of what has occurred previously. As a result, they may interpret the current situation and behave or interact inappropriately” (Antia, Stinson, & Gaustrad, 2002, p.214). This visitor’s stage occurs when students are just entering a new setting. During the first couple months, students with hearing disabilities often misinterpret some communication or behavioral cues that come with this new environment. For example, transitions within the classroom, such as moving from the desk to the hallway, go unnoticed by students who do not hear or understand directions. This is not an act of disobedience; it is an act of miscommunication. To stop such behavior teachers need to bridge this communication gap by using a visual cue to move around the room, or assign a buddy to aid the student with hearing difficulties to move around the room.

During this visiting time students are learning the classroom procedures, how to properly communicate with teachers and students, and how each student's individual gifts and talents are going to benefit the learning process of the classroom. This learning can take place in two ways. The student can learn this independently by observing how students react to his or her behavior, or students and teachers in the classroom can model or talk about the appropriate behavior with the student. Students with hearing disabilities who learn through observation only will take a long time to reach the membership stage without the help of others. Inclusion educators who struggle in their classroom have students who are still going through this stage and will continue to go through it until communication problems are fixed.

"Membership generally implies full-time rather than part-time participation in the classroom, but we, in contrast to some, do not believe that full time placement is synonymous with inclusion, nor is full-time placement in the regular classroom a sufficient condition for membership" (Antia, 2002, p.218). In the visitors stage students are not part of the classroom yet. They are like players sitting on the sideline ready to play the game. Once students become a member of the classroom, or take the field, the learning, or outcome of the game changes. Membership does not mean that all students have mastered the social skills and understandings of classroom. Membership means that students have enough skills or aide to participate.

Conclusion

By 2003 more than half of students with disabilities spend eighty percent or more of their day in general education classrooms, compared to the twenty-five percent of students in 1985 (Villa & Thousand 2003).

Our society is moving toward the protection of social justice in education. Social justice demands the equal opportunity for all students no matter what abilities or disabilities. To ensure

the progression of this educational goal, teachers need to make the choice that an inclusion setting will be successful in involving students with disabilities. This involvement includes a social connection with peers, the opportunity to learn leadership, and working on age appropriate group activities inspired by the New York State Learning Standards. Along with this choice comes the full responsibility of every single educator to teach any child in the school to become a model citizen. Successful implementation requires commitment, creative thinking and effective classroom strategies on the teacher's part. Administration also has the responsibility to maintain resources and information teachers need to teach students with special needs in the general education setting.

Citizenship is something learned and valued at a young age so it is treasured and used effectively to secure the interests of humanity. As educators, we need to model what it means to be supportive and respectful of others to encourage our students to do the same. It takes a citizen to teach citizenship.

Methodology

Researcher's Stance

Upon working for the Compassion School District as a substitute, I believed that all elementary teachers understood the social goals of the inclusion classroom and what it means to create an environment with equal social opportunity. I also knew that the school district in which I was a substitute did not demonstrate this knowledge at all times. Teacher planning, classroom organization, and student behavior showed me that some teachers understood the true definition of inclusion and how to design a classroom that exhibits this knowledge.

Secondly, I began this study with a strong belief that all children with disabilities have the right to participate fully in a least restrictive environment or general education setting. I

value teaching that celebrates diversity in ability, not disability, and models appropriate behavior that is acceptable for future citizens of a global community (Sapon-Shevin 2003). My personal assumption is that the foundation of teacher's social environment in the classroom is dependent on the philosophies and exposure these individuals had during their own learning experience.

Setting

The Compassion School District currently has four elementary schools that work with students in grades kindergarten to fifth grade. There are about two thousand elementary students that attend these four public schools. According to the New York State District Information page, the student gender breakdown is almost equal at 48.6 percent female and 51.4 percent male and also has a student to teacher ratio of thirteen to one (School Tree, 2009).

District Information also stated that one in nine students in the Compassion School District is labeled with a disability. This is equivalent to about two hundred students (School Tree, 2009). A majority of these students have documented learning disabilities and/or are speech and language impaired. This school district is known for its improving standardized achievement test scores in math, science, and reading according to district information (School Tree, 2009).

Each of these four elementary schools has their own speech and language therapist, literacy resource center, math resource center, and social worker. Two school psychologists travel between the four schools.

Participants

Over the course of this study I communicated with ten different general education teachers by mail and sometimes by phone. When looking for teachers to participate in this study,

I wanted the insight of educators that know students the best. Most of the time these teachers are the general educators because they spend the most time with children teaching a variety of subjects, organizing homeroom, and transporting them to different places in the building. I selected at random fifteen general education teachers that had different levels of experience teaching at the elementary level. Seven of these teachers taught primary grades, first grade to third grade. Eight teachers taught intermediate grades, fourth grade and fifth grade. Seven of these teachers had more than five years teaching experience with the Compassion School District. Eight of these teachers had five years or less teaching experience with the Compassion School District.

Ten, out of the fifteen teachers invited to participate in this study, chose to respond with a completed survey. Six of these teachers have special education degrees at the elementary level, however this survey is limited as to knowing who is dually certified in special education. Seven of these teachers have a general education degree with an additional degree in one of the following areas: English as a Second Language K-12, Communications, and Math Science Technology Integration.

The ten general education teachers participating in this study stated that they are currently working with students with disabilities in their classrooms. A majority of these students are diagnosed with learning disabilities and or speech and language impairments. Three of these teachers work with students who are autistic or diagnosed with attention-deficit and or hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). One teacher reported working with students who are emotionally disturbed.

Six of these teachers said that he or she has worked in a general education setting before without any students who were diagnosed with a disability. Four teachers reported only teaching in a fully inclusive environment.

Design and Procedures:

I chose a survey approach to retrieve information. This approach allowed me to collect information from many different teaching perspectives without manipulating the school environment or distorting exact quotes that are difficult to document in interviews. I based my study on what experts in education call the essential supports needed to successfully include students with disabilities (Lohrmann & Bambara 2006). When developing my survey I wanted to focus on how teachers develop the social atmosphere in their classroom and what expectations or responsibilities students have in this atmosphere. This survey also asked teachers about their personal definition of inclusive education, the types of disabilities he or she works with on a daily basis, what degrees they earned, and what years they graduated from college (Appendix A).

Trustworthiness for this study was promoted in two ways. First, I spent time discussing my survey and study with each elementary principal in the Compassion School District, located in upstate New York. Four principals agreed to randomly disperse my survey to general educational teachers who have students with disabilities included in the classroom. Secondly, I expected teachers to take the appropriate amount of time to complete the survey and return it in a timely manner with each survey. Along with each survey I included a letter explaining the study and my professional experience with the school as a substitute (Appendix B). Following

the letter was an attached Informed Consent Form that breaks each part of the study down into more detail (Appendix C). This form also explains the rights of research participants and how I would be protecting the confidentiality and privacy of anyone in the study through pseudonyms. Participants were given instructions to read over the information about the study and reflect on the survey questions. After two to three days of observing his or her own teaching and reflecting on the survey questions, participants were to complete the survey and return it through mail.

After receiving the surveys I organized and consolidated data into plot charts (Appendix D). Those participants that answered questions using similar language and thought were considered as having the same answer to the question.

Findings/Results

As previously stated, data was collected and organized by questions into chart form (Appendix D). Out of the fifteen questionnaires distributed, ten were returned in a timely fashion. All ten participants stated that they are currently working in a general education setting that includes students with disabilities. Eighty percent of these teachers report working with students that have learning disabilities.

Question Number One:

The first question of the survey asked participants to think about his or her personal definition of the word “inclusion” and how it could relate to citizenship or membership in the classroom. All ten respondents discussed that inclusive settings are general education settings that include students with disabilities. The range on how much students participate in this environment is dependent on the participant’s definition of the word “inclusion”.

According to the data collected, three participants understand inclusion to be an environment where students with disabilities are a part of the instruction instead of being involved in it completely. One teacher wrote, “If a student with disabilities is in an inclusive environment then he or she participates in part of daily instruction.” Another teacher stated, “When a student with disabilities is in an inclusion classroom he or she is able to make successful gains alongside general education peers.”

The remaining seven teachers understand inclusion to be an environment where students with disabilities are least restrictive and are able to fully participate in activities that provide equal opportunity for all students. One teacher expressed the importance of having a supportive learning environment for all students; “In an inclusive setting all students are accepted for their differences and have a sense of responsibility when it comes to helping students feel like they belong in the classroom.”

Question Number Two:

The next question provides participants with the opportunity to discuss how the teachers organize their classrooms. Teachers are asked to talk about where students sit or how they are organized into groups. The majority of participants mentioned placing their students in groups of four to five. There was a variety of responses as to where the students with disabilities sit in the classroom. This is shown in Table I:

Table I

Responses	Raw Tally	Total
Sit in front or close proximity to aid or teacher. (monitoring of understanding or help with organization)	XXX	3
Put where least distracted	XXX	3
Placed by personality/responsible student and natural leader in each group	X	1
Student with disabilities are placed next to strong role models	XX	2
Places by instructional level	XX	2
Frequently change groups at random	XXX	3
Placed next to friends	X	1
All students with disabilities are placed at one table	X	1

According to the data collected, three participants are in support of grouping students with disabilities at random around the room. Other teachers shared that placing students with disabilities in the classroom is dependent on the disability itself instead of their abilities. For example, one participant wrote: “I place students with learning disabilities next to the most responsive students who are natural leaders, this way the student who has the most difficulty will be sitting next to a role model student. Some students with disabilities are more responsive to instruction if they are sitting next students they are comfortable with, which is why I am also in support of placing students with disabilities next to their friends.”

Question Number Three:

The third question discusses how students are encouraged to interact with each other in the classroom and how students with disabilities socialize with other students. According to statistics, students at this age are the most accepting of everyone. However, students with

disabilities have difficulty making age appropriate connections or initiating conversations with others because social skills are not fully developed at this age.

Four participants stated that students in the elementary age begin to form cliques, some are same gender groups, but all students are still flexible when working with others. One teacher comments; “There are some social groups in the school where students with disabilities stick together. These students seem quiet or have unique personalities that do not mesh well with other students. To prevent a student from being singled out in a classroom I draw attention to that child in a positive way. Talking about the student’s interests with other classmates or assigning him or her as a special helper for the week gives the outcast student the opportunity to talk to peers, or encourages other students in the classroom to talk to him or her.”

Question Number Four:

The fourth and final question asks teachers about the responsibilities of students in the classroom and how students with disabilities match up to these expectations. Statistics from the survey state that the majority of teachers today assign students jobs around the classroom. Everyone in the class has a chance to apply and have the job for a week. According to participants, these jobs consist of running errands around the building, cleaning desk tops, filing papers, organizing the classroom library, and cleaning computers. One participant commented; “All students need to feel empowered at a young age, having classroom jobs is one way to fill that need to have responsibility other than following classroom rules.”

Students with disabilities have the same need to feel empowered as general education students. Two teachers wrote; “Students with disabilities are held accountable for all the same rules as general education students. Behavior plans and other modifications are designed to encourage students to follow the same procedures.”

Discussion

As predicted, the participation of teachers in the Compassion School District proved there is still a natural segregation of students with disabilities in some inclusion classrooms. Other inclusion classrooms have proven to be a role model for teachers just beginning to include students with disabilities in the general education setting. In these classrooms all students have equal opportunity in both academics and social activity. Both of these learning experiences intertwine to create the citizenship all people value today in our country.

Looking at the Definition of Inclusion:

As discussed before effective learning in an inclusive setting is a choice made by the classroom teacher. The attitude of the teacher can create conditions that either put students at the risk of failing or encourage them to succeed. A teacher's attitude toward the inclusive setting can be displayed in his or her definition of the word "inclusion."

One participant wrote; "Students with disabilities are able to be successful and make gains alongside general education peers." In this situation I can see that this teachers encourages students with disabilities to learn in the same environment as the general education population however, the word use of "alongside" indicated that students with disabilities are not receiving the services or support needed to make the same educational gains as their peers. This teacher is naturally segregating students based on learning outcomes or expectations.

Another participant defines inclusion; "Inclusion is an educational environment where students who are labeled with a disability work with their general education peers. In this environment special education teachers push-in or push-out during academic times." In these settings teachers still have the idea that students with disabilities should be educated in another setting. The only difference is the walls of the room are invisible.

The key to inclusion is defined by this participant's response; "Students with special needs are put into general education settings. They attend all classes, participate fully in all activities and have equal opportunities when compared to general education students." Such expectations should be supported by the school as a whole instead of just in one classroom. In order for this environment to be supportive of this definition, modifications need to include additional planning to develop a detailed daily routine or attach methods of delivery such as hands on in addition to auditory or visual. This teacher is dynamic, responsive, engaging, and dedicated to ensuring that all students succeed. He or she views low student achievement as a challenge to improve the delivery of services, instead of making it seem like someone else's problem.

Organizing Students to Learn Social Skills:

The physical placement of students in the classroom can encourage or discourage social interaction amongst students. According to the teachers who participated in this study, it is common for educators to place students with disabilities in groups based on ability, or they are segregated in other ways. Some students with special needs sit in front of the classroom so they can focus for a longer period of time. Some students sit in close proximity to the classroom aid so he or she can monitor the understanding of curriculum or help with organization. Other participants choose to place students at random around the room based on personality.

Research has proven that the setup of the inclusive environment offers students with disabilities instruction that is modeled multiple times. During daily lesson plans, students are grouped at random so that after directions are given and modeled by instructors the ability of individual students to carry out lesson objectives becomes a group effort. Teachers encourage students to be responsible for one another (Williams & Reisberg 2003). Teachers that segregate

students with disabilities from general education peers are discouraging this learning process from taking place and also discouraging social interaction altogether.

To successfully differentiate learning, teachers and aids need to be more mobile in the classroom. Students with disabilities belong amongst all students in the classroom to gain every educational and social advantage. Aids and teachers should observe students with disabilities in a natural setting and intervene when needed.

What are Student Responsibilities:

Inclusion is when a student with special learning and/or behavioral needs is educated full time in the general education program. Essentially, inclusion means that the student with special needs is attending the general school program, enrolled in age-appropriate classes one hundred percent of the school day” (Idol, 2006, p.77). Lorna Idol discusses in great detail how all students are included in both social and academic activities (2006). Being involved in all activities gives students with disabilities the same responsibilities as general education students. According to the findings in the Compassion School District, students with disabilities are held accountable for all the same rules. Behavior plans are set in place to help students with disabilities to follow the same procedures. In these same classrooms students are held responsible for daily routine duties such as line leaders, handing out papers, cleaning desks, or filing papers. Social experiences, or the starting point to a child’s self esteem is obtained when all students are ssharing these responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study discusses how to maintain citizenship in an inclusion classroom. Citizenship refers to the full social and academic involvement of a student with disabilities in a general

education classroom. Citizenship is valued in the elementary level for several reasons. First, a student with a disability that is fully included in the social class activities, develops appropriate communication skills at a faster rate than if he or she was in a segregated learning environment from peers (Kleinert, 2007). Secondly, when a student with disabilities is involved in general education setting he or she is supported by peers, participating in classroom and extracurricular activities, and becomes an independent citizen that can bring positive personality traits to capitalize on the school's and classroom's educational atmosphere. With amplified communication skills and the added support of all students and staff, students with disabilities are well on their way to obtaining academic success and enjoy doing so.

This study of the inclusive environment and its affects on social interaction should be extended to the secondary learning environment. In the elementary school inclusion teaches students how to successfully communicate with all students so that social skills are learned and mastered at a young age. All students in a successful inclusive environment have equal opportunity in academics and extra curricular activities. As young students move into middle school and high school the dynamics of the school day change. Students are more independent and are involved in classes instead of classrooms. A student is placed in classes based on his or her interests and ability. How are the characteristics of an inclusive setting maintained from the elementary classroom to the secondary classrooms? Is the segregation of students based on ability more apparent in secondary schools? Are all students offered equal opportunity? This is the next set of questions educators need to explore.

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Appendix A

Grade or Content Area you are teaching: _____

Certification: _____

Year Graduated from College:

Bachelors: _____ Masters: _____

College Training (What are your degree(s) in?):

What types of disabilities are you working with?

What is your personal definition of the word “inclusion” in today’s teaching society? How would your definition of the word “inclusion” relate to citizenship or membership in the classroom?

As the teacher, how do you organize students in your classroom and why? Where do they sit during individual and group work? Where do the students with disabilities sit and why?

How do students interact with each other in classroom? Do you notice cliques forming amongst students? How do students with disabilities socialize with other students in the class?

What are the responsibilities of the students in the classroom? (ex. classroom rules or jobs) How do students with disabilities match up to these expectations?

Have you taught in a mainstream classroom before teaching in an inclusion classroom? If so how has your teaching changed?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. The information you have supplied will be very helpful to writing my capstone paper about citizenship in the classroom.

Katie Girvin

Appendix B

Educators of Compassion Elementary School
53 Compassion Rd.
Rochester, N.Y. 12345

Dear Teachers:

My name is Katie Girvin and I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I am receiving my Master's degree in Special Education Grades 1-6, and will be graduating in the spring of 2009.

A part of the Masters requirement is completing a capstone paper. The topic of my capstone is citizenship in the inclusive environment. I have been subbing in the district for some time now and have had the pleasure of working in some of the classrooms in your school. I am interested in learning more about the inclusive settings through your individual experiences.

If you could take ten minutes of your time to fill out a survey about your classroom it would be a great contribution to my research. Enclosed is a returned envelope with my address on it, a copy of the survey, and two copies of St. John Fishers Informed Consent Form. If you are interested in participating in this survey please sign and date one of the Informed Consent Forms and keep a copy for yourself. Please include the survey and form in the envelope addressed to myself.

Thank you for your time. The information you provided me will be very helpful in completing my capstone project.

Sincerely,

Katie Girvin

Appendix C

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Citizenship in the Inclusive Environment

Name of researcher: Katie Girvin

Faculty Supervisor: Susan Schultz **Phone for further information:** (585) 385-7296

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this Capstone Project is to investigate the characteristics and best practices of teachers working in an inclusive setting that contains students with disabilities. This paper also discusses how children develop an understanding of what it means to have citizenship in the classroom and how this stance is reached through the aid of peers and educators. The citizenship learned in the classroom will encourage students to be leaders in their community.

Place of study: Compassion School District
2009

Length of participation: January through April

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:

Your name and the name of the school district will not be used in the Capstone paper. Pseudonyms will be used instead.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant)

Signature

Date

Print name (Investigator)

Signature

Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

Appendix D

Survey Results Tallied

Certification and Degrees:

Certification	Raw Tally	Total
Pre Kindergarten and Kindergarten through Sixth Grade Elementary Education	XXXX	4
Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade Special Education	XXXX	4
Special Education Concentration in Learning Disabilities	X	1
English as a Second Language Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade	XX	2
Childhood Education	XXXX	4
Education	XX	2
Students with Disabilities first through sixth grade	XX	2
Communication	X	1
English	X	1
Math Science Technology Integration	X	1

What are the different types of disabilities in your classroom?

Disability	Raw Tally	Total
AD/HD or ADHD	XXXX	4
Learning Disabilities	XXXXXXXX	8

Speech and Language Impaired	XXXXXXX	6
Other Health Impaired	XXX	3
Autism	XXX	3
Emotionally Disturbed	X	1

What is your personal definition of the word “inclusion”? How would your definition of the word “inclusion” relate to citizenship or membership in the classroom?

Responses	Raw Tally	Total
Part of daily instruction (part or full day)	X	1
Full participation and opportunities	X	1
Students with special needs put into general education setting, attend all classes	X	1
Accepted for differences/help students feel like they belong total citizenship and membership in classroom	XX	2
Least restrictive setting	XX	2
Are able to be successful and make gains alongside general education peers	XX	2
Labeled students in the general education setting working with Special education teachers push-in, push-out extra support during academic times	X	1
Modifications with general education or help from an aid	X	1

How do you organize students in your classroom? Where do students with disabilities sit and why?

Responses	Raw Tally	Total
Sit in front or close proximity to aid or teacher. (monitoring of understanding or help with organization)	XXX	3
Put where least distracted	XXX	3
Placed by personality/responsible student and natural leader in each group	X	1
Student with disabilities are placed next to strong role models	XX	2
Groups of four to five	XXXXXXX	6
Places by instructional level	XX	2
Frequently change groups at random	XXX	3
Placed next to friends	X	1
All students with disabilities are placed at one table	X	1

How do students interact with each other in the classroom? How so students with disabilities socialize?

Responses	Raw Tally	Total
Quiet, may need lessons on how to initiate conversations and keep them going (few friends)	XX	2
Stay in same gender groups	X	1
In social groups students with disabilities stick together	X	1

Everyone is accepting of everyone else	XXXX	4
Difficult making age appropriate connections	X	1
Form cliques with friends from years before	XX	2
Based on levels of intelligences or social academic needs	X	1
Those students with unique personalities seemed removed.	X	1
Some cliques are formed in higher grades, but all students are flexible when working with others	X	1

What are the responsibilities of the students in the classroom? How do students with disabilities match up to these expectations?

Responses	Raw Tally	Total
Students run errands in the building and file papers at the end of the day.	XX	2
All students need to feel empowered	X	1
General rules followed by all students, flexibility depending on the students needs	XX	2
Students organize the library and computers	X	1
Jobs rotate, everyone has a chance to apply for jobs	XXXXXXX	6
Students are held accountable for all the same rules. Behavior plans help students with disabilities to follow the same procedures.	XX	2
All students need reminders not just those with disabilities	X	1
Students are responsible for a clean desk.	X	1

Have you taught in a general education setting before teaching in an inclusive setting?

Yes	Total	No	Total
XXXXXXX	6	XXXX	4

If yes, how has your teaching changed?

Responses	Raw Tally	Total
Changes with the needs of student and time allotted for activities.	X	1
Planning differentiated lessons is the greatest change. Develop new strategies every year.	XX	2
Co-planning Co-teaching	XX	2
Feel like my responsibilities have increased along with stress	X	1