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A STUDY OF SELF-ESTEEM IN LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS
ACROSS PLACEMENTS

by
Constance Occhetti

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Constance Occhetti

A STUDY OF SELF-ESTEEM IN LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS ACROSS PLACEMENTS

1998

Dr. Roberta Dihoff
School Psychology

This study set out to offer support for inclusion by analyzing learning disabled students in an inclusive environment and their pull-out program counterparts. The analysis focused on an examination of student self-esteem, a variable central to student success. A hypothesis stating that learning disabled students who were served in an inclusive environment will achieve higher scores of self-esteem than learning disabled students who were served in a traditional pull-out program was proposed. This hypothesis was based on previous research on the practice of inclusion, which showed positive effects for learning disabled students. The practice of inclusion has been supported throughout the literature as a viable option for learning disabled students, due to the positive effects it brought students socially, motivationally and academically. This study used the total self-esteem score and the Intellectual and School Status subtest score from the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* to examine student self-esteem. Twenty-seven learning disabled students who were served in either an inclusive classroom

or a pull-out program were sampled. In contrast to the current literature, this study did not find significant differences in the self-esteem of students in an inclusive classroom and those in a pull-out program.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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1998

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This study hypothesized that learning disabled students who were served in an inclusive environment would achieve higher scores of self-esteem than learning disabled students who were served in a traditional pull-out program. Although this study attempted to offer support for inclusive programming through significant results, no significant differences were found.

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Chapter One: The Problem

Need

The concept of inclusive educational programming is one of the most controversial topics in education today. Inclusion supporters stress that the only way to adequately serve special education students is to keep all students in one flexible classroom. Opponents contend that the regular classroom can not meet individual needs and inclusion is consequently detrimental to special needs students.

The inclusion debate left schools unsure of how to handle the issue in a way that will satisfy everyone. However, inclusion has become a popular placement option so an investigation of its satisfaction, or lack thereof, became necessary. For the purpose of this study, satisfaction was based upon the success of learning disabled students in inclusion programs compared to that of students in pull-out programs. From a student's point of view, success of placement is determined by her feelings of self worth in each educational placement setting. Based on that assumption, this study focused on learning disabled students' self-esteem. Success had been examined in relation to achievement, but a complete investigation of self-esteem was not available. A careful assessment of self-esteem in an inclusion program and in a pull-out program was expected to offer evidence

to support the concept of inclusion.

The majority of available literature focused on the comparison of inclusion students to their non-learning disabled peers (Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, Baker, Jenkins, and Couthino, 1995; McLeskey and Waldron, 1995; Banerji & Daily, 1995). This type of an analysis inevitably showed that the students with learning disabilities made unacceptable academic gains, dooming inclusion to fail. However, a comparison of learning disabled to non-learning disabled students was not an equitable match. Although the learning disabled students were being served in the regular classroom, their academic skills were not equal to their peers, nor did inclusion supporters claim them to be. A number of variables beside academic ability, such as socialization and peer relations, were anticipated to impact a learning disabled student's self-esteem, so low academic ability (in comparison to her peers) did not preclude low self esteem. The most effective analysis, a comparison of learning disabled students in an inclusion setting to learning disabled students in a separate pull-out setting, has not been popular among researchers. Consequently, there was a significant disparity in inclusion research. Baker, Wang, and Walberg noted, in their 1994 study of inclusion, a significant lack of research comparing learning disabled students' success across placements. Baker, Wang and Walberg (1994) specifically called for more meta-analyses to generate accurate findings. Cipani (1995) in a detailed section on necessary future research, also called for investigations, highlighting the need to study learner outcomes in inclusive environments. McLeskey and Waldron (1995) followed suit and noted the lack of analyses examining the difference between learning disabled students in inclusive classrooms and learning disabled students in separate, special education classes. The number of studies calling for future research of learner outcomes across placement options showed the need for further research of this

topic. Although inclusion has been examined very thoroughly theoretically, it still needed research to support it as an adequate placement option.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to offer support for inclusion by analyzing learning disabled students in an inclusive environment and their pull-out program counterparts. This analysis occurred and support was expected to be found through a detailed examination of self-esteem, a variable central to student success. Self-esteem was sampled in an inclusion setting and in a resource room setting and consequently compared. Students who were classified or identified but served in the regular classroom setting served as the inclusion sample. Students who were classified or identified and served in a resource room served as the pull-out program sample. Measures of self-esteem were collected and compared to show which setting best promoted student success. Simply put, inclusion is a good idea in the sense it gives learning disabled students the opportunity to function in a regular school setting with their peers (Chase, 1995), however it still needed solid support in the form of research.

Hypothesis

Students who are served in an inclusive education model will achieve higher scores on measures of self esteem achievement than students who are served in a pull-out program.

History

The Equal Educational Opportunity Act for All Handicapped Children (Public

Law 94-142) gave special needs children the right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Cauley, Linder and McMillan, 1996). Education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) has been interpreted in many ways. In most cases, this federal law required public schools to implement inclusive practices.

Full inclusion brought all children, regardless of disability or skill level, into the regular classroom where all students learned together. It occurred when a child with a disability learned in a general education classroom alongside her age mates with all of the necessary supports (Van Dyke, Stallings and Colley, 1995). This approach was based on the belief that people work in inclusive communities with people of different races, religions, aspirations and disabilities (Wilson, 1997). A fully inclusive environment assumes that when individuals are excluded, the ultimate cost was more than the original effort to include them would have been (Wilson, 1997). It operated from the view that all student challenges led to gains in cognitive and social development (Wilson, 1997).

Since full inclusion was not the most effective model for all students, a modified approach has been adopted by many schools as fulfillment of P.L. 94-142's mandate for LRE. In a modified approach, all students who would be best served in the regular classroom are included. To insure that student needs were met, the placement decision was made by a committee consisting of a representative of the school administration, a diagnostician and a special education teacher, who combined make up the Child Study Team (Kolstad, Wilkinson and Briggs, 1997). Each student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which states where she would be best served, including the regular classroom with support or in a pull-out program.

The Council for Exceptional Children (SpecialNET, 1995) stated “....special education is a means of enlarging the capacity of the system to serve the education needs

of all children.” They also found that special education classes, although indispensable, were inappropriate for some children. The National Academy of Sciences prompted early research on inclusion and found the classification and placement of children in special education to be ineffective and discriminatory (Baker et al., 1994). Various other educators and researchers have found that if educational reform is truly aimed at creating the best product, then the benefit of all students must be considered, this notion in and of itself is inclusive.

Three fundamental arguments underlie the inclusion movement. The first was that inclusion has a legal base (Cauley et al., 1996; Van Dyke et al., 1995; O’Neil, 1994). The 1959 landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which found that separate is inherently not equal, has served as a catalyst for breaking down barriers to inclusion. In a more recent 1993 case, *Oberti v. Clementon*, the federal court upheld the right of children with disabilities to be educated in regular classrooms with their non-disabled peers (Baker et al., 1994). Further, this decision placed the burden of proof on school districts that continue to remove special education students from regular education classrooms (Baker et al., 1994). This shift meant school districts needed to demonstrate a segregated special education placement was the best educational approach for the individual when making placement decisions. Legally, the bottom line of a proponent’s inclusion argument was that PL 94-142 gave each child the opportunity to obtain an education in the least restrictive environment possible, which led proponents to assume that the regular education classroom to be the first placement option (Van Dyke et al., 1995; NEA Today, 1995). Consequently, special education law shifted the focus of inclusion battles to civil rights - or the lack thereof - for special education students educated in a separate environment.

The second argument for inclusion rested on the results of research of best practices, which is covered exhaustively in chapter two.

Thirdly, but perhaps most importantly, a strong moral and ethical argument has been made stating that inclusion is the best option for students (Van Dyke et al., 1995). Segregation of classified students, which highlighted differences, created bias (Van Dyke et al., 1995). Inclusion drew from the belief that all people work in inclusive communities with people of different races, religions, aspirations and disabilities (Wilson, 1997). As a reflection of the communities they served, schools needed to incorporate all students, including those with disabilities. Schools were called to teach children how to make the most of whoever they were working with (Wilson, 1997).

Inclusion supporters found it difficult to believe that they were called to defend the practice instead of opponents being made to defend exclusion (O'Neil, 1994). Sapon-Shevin, an inclusionist, stated, "There is very little evidence that children need segregated settings....we know that the world is an inclusive community [with] people who vary not only in terms of disabilities...." (O'Neil, 1994, p. 7). It was important for children to have the opportunity to learn and grow in schools that were representative of their communities and the world. This assumption alone implied the importance of an inclusive environment (O'Neil, 1994).

Groups, such as the Delphi Investigation, have predicted that after the year 2000 the belief that people with disabilities have a right to participate in an inclusive environment will prevail (Putnam, Markovichick, Johnson and Johnson 1996). Additionally, there will be a consensus that the goal of full integration of people who are "learning disabled" into the regular education classroom was appropriate (Putnam et al., 1996). Forward thinking theorists have concluded that the regular education classroom

will be seen as the LRE for all students, regardless of disability, and education will come to look at the time of segregating learning disabled students with the same embarrassment as when race determined placement (Putnam et al., 1996).

Inclusion was seen by many as a natural course of action and logical outcome of the LRE mandate. Proponents agreed that all special needs children did better academically and socially when exposed to higher performing students (Wilmore, 1995). Full inclusion seeks to abandon the two-tiered special/regular education model (Haring, McCormick and Haring, 1994) and develop one unified approach to education that will span all levels of learners. By definition, inclusion referred to placement of learning disabled students in regular classrooms, however, to be truly successful, inclusion was called to go beyond placement (Sancore, 1996). Inclusion needed to be accompanied by genuine commitment to the growth and development of all students (Sancore, 1996).

Conceptually, inclusion was based on the premise that children of exceptional abilities and backgrounds benefit both academically and socially in a learning environment where they were served alongside normally achieving students, as opposed to being segregated from them. Inclusion was driven by the philosophy that the diverse needs of all learners could be accommodated within the regular education curriculum. In a very broad sense, inclusion represented the philosophy that promoted the participation of special needs students in all aspects of school and community life (Banerji and Daily, 1995). It believed that all children learned best in regular classrooms with flexible organizational and instructional patterns (Yatvin, 1995). Inclusion contended that the regular classroom could modify its one-size-fits-all method of instruction and evolve into a flexible structure where some children were limited and others gifted and all had a range of working levels, personal needs and learning styles (Yatvin, 1995). Finally, inclusion

supported individual difference which was essential to forward thinking education programs.

Theory

Maslow

Maslow's theory (1943) of human motivation presented a hierarchy of needs, ranging from physiological (the most basic) to self-actualization (the most complex). According to Maslow (1943), as each need was satisfied, a newer, more complex need emerged. Maslow (1943) explained motivation as a process of satisfying or dominating these needs or desires. The Esteem Needs come fourth in the hierarchical order and are expressed as the need or desire for a stable, firmly based, high evaluation of oneself, for self-respect, or self-esteem and for the esteem of others. Firmly based self-esteem requires a sound basis in actual capacity, achievement and respect from others. Satisfaction of the self-esteem need led to feelings of confidence, worth, strength capability and adequacy or being useful in the world. Thwarting of these needs produced feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness. Socialization with one's peers was central to the acquisition of the self-esteem need. Therefore, motivation was tied to inclusion in that an inclusive environment allowed each student to be accepted by age mates. It gave learning disabled students the opportunity to become involved in social relationships with other students they would have been cut off from traditionally. This allowed students to gain a sense of belonging which is necessary to a healthy concept. Being cut off from age mates in the traditional separate system created division and reduced the chance of socialization and belonging, which led to a lesser chance of firmly-based self-esteem than students in an inclusive environment.

Bandura

The self-efficacy portion of Bandura's social cognitive theory on self-regulation and motivation in academic settings acted as theory supporting the inclusion movement (Pajares, 1996). As Bandura noted, self-esteem motivates people to perform better. Therefore, if being included in a classroom with one's peers positively impacted self-esteem, then inclusion led to increased student self-esteem, which would simultaneously motivate increased performance. In a circular relationship, increased self-esteem positively impacts performance and high-efficacy positively impacts effort, persistence and resilience (Pajares, 1996). Specifically, research has shown that strengthened self-efficacy expectations lead to better management of physical and mental disabilities as well as decreased depression and increased confidence, desirable behavior and academic achievement (Ryckman, 1997).

Bandura's social-cognitive theory also notes the important role experience played in defining behavior (Ryckman, 1997). He found that rewarded behavior tended to be internally reinforced and consequently repeated (Ryckman, 1997). As a result, children learned to match the behavior of successful models (Ryckman, 1997). Learning disabled students in a separate setting would be denied the successful models seen in their age mates in the regular classroom. Included learning disabled students would be taught alongside their peers, being exposed to positive models, and could thus imitate the successful students' behaviors.

Definitions

Achievement - a quantifiable measure of success. In this study achievement is based on student grades.

Inclusion - a educational concept and placement based on P.L. 94-142 mandate that all children are given the right to be taught in the least restrictive environment. All children, regardless of skill level or physical disability, are served in the same classroom with necessary support.

Pull-Out Program - the traditional special education system, consisting of a separate setting geared to special education students' specific abilities

Resource Room - a class composed entirely of exceptional children who therefore do not participate in regular academic programs with normally achieving peers, in this study students in the resource room serve as the pull-out program sample.

Self-Esteem - a student's feelings of self worth or self concept; a desired goal of many special education programs is high self-esteem. In this study self-esteem is determined by student scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Esteem Confidence Scale.

Assumptions

This examination of self-esteem of learning disabled students assumed that student placement would significantly effect student self-esteem. Further, it continued that student placement would impact student's self-esteem to such an extent that it would practically define a student's view of herself. This study postulated that a student's self-esteem is significantly tied to peer relations. It assumed that the effects of peer relations (or lack there of) would so effect a student's self esteem that they would overshadow the positive effects of small class size and the consequent increased number of interactions with teachers.

This study further assumed that the resource room would negatively impact a

student's self esteem, due to a variety of feelings, such as isolation and separation from her peers. It also assumed that placement in an inclusive environment would positively impact a student's self-esteem, due to a variety of experiences, such as increased acceptance by and involvement with her peers.

Limitations

The largest limitation of this study was the small sample size. In an effort to maintain similar experiences and program design, students from only one school were used, which led to a drastically reduced sample size. Due to these restrictions, the population size was small, and then further reduced by lack of parental response.

Another equally significant limitation of the study was that no variables beyond placement were related to self esteem. Although a student spends a significant amount of time in school, a number of other factors that might impact her self-esteem exist. For example, the positive effects of parental support may have mediated the negative effects of student placement. Therefore neglecting to examine a subject's relationships and interactions across her varied positions, was another limitation to this study.

Finally, the most significant limitation was the classroom environment itself. The resource room tended to stress the importance of self-esteem and self-concept, while the regular classroom focused more on academics. The increased push toward positive self-esteem in the resource room may have in fact mediated the effects of being separated from one's peers. If this was the case, the self-esteem of resource room students would have been significantly higher than that of their inclusive counterparts.

Overview

Chapter one has been a presentation of the need for and purpose of this study examining the effects of student placement makes on a learning disabled student's self esteem. In chapter two, the literature will be reviewed. This chapter will give a description of factors that effect a learning disabled student's self esteem and the basis for the inclusive model serving as a successful placement option. In chapter three, the design of the study will be explained, including a detailed description of the procedure used throughout the study. In chapter four, the data and results will be presented. Chapter five will serve as a summary, stating the positive and negative aspects of the study, and offering future research options.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

Self-esteem is one important determinant of success in any educational program. This concept is especially significant to a learning disabled student. The presence and volume of self-esteem is effected by all aspects of a student's school experience. For a learning disabled student, self-esteem is especially related to her placement, be it in a separate pull-out program or in an inclusive regular classroom. The following chapter will give an extensive evaluation of the current literature on learning disabled students' success and its impact on their self-esteem.

Core Concepts

All students, including students with learning disabilities, have a need to learn more about the world around them and to attain a knowledge about the main content areas. Vaidya (1997) found Mathematics and Language Arts to be some such important content areas that the established special education system has traditionally watered down. An inclusive environment would make that inconsistency impossible. If both sets of students were served in the same classroom it would be virtually impossible to give

one set a less complete lesson.

Although the idea of including students and holding them to the higher standards of the regular education program might seem impossible, Brasher, Goldman and Sapp (1997) found just the opposite to be true. In a comparison of learning disabled students' mathematics achievement in resource rooms and inclusion settings, Brasher et al. (1997) found that all students gained, showing no significant difference in scores. The similarity in scores shows that inclusion is as effective as a pull-out program academically. However, motivationally and socially an inclusive environment has more to offer.

Students are more likely to enjoy a class where they are surrounded by their peers in an inclusive environment as compared to a separate class. Fulk and Smith (1995) found that separated from their peers, learning disabled students know that they are not receiving the same lesson as their peers which prompts dissatisfaction. Students who are satisfied are more apt to be confident in themselves and their ability. Koosterman and Cougan (1994) found students who enjoyed school were more confident in their ability than their unmotivated peers.

Practically, the low achiever is assisted in an inclusive environment through peer work. Joshi (1995) found that if the learning disabled student did not attend or failed to understand the purpose of specific steps, one of the most effective interventions is to have the low achiever work with a knowledgeable person, in this case a peer. Joshi (1995) continued that when these special efforts are made, these children will learn more and make inroads to peer relationships, beginning a circle of success.

Woodward and Baxter (1997) found that although the current National Standards push for higher academic goals, they are feasible for learning disabled students when given the proper support. Some special educators suggest that the higher standards are ill

suiting to low-achieving, learning disabled students and the inclusion movement all together. Yet, Woodward and Baxter (1997) found most students succeeded in meeting high standards in an inclusive mathematics classroom. Brasher et al.'s (1997) findings agreed, stating that learning disabled students can learn in an inclusive environment as well as in a pull-out program. However, an inclusive environment offers more in terms of motivation, peer relations and personal choice for learning disabled students than a separate, pull-out program.

Environment

All regular education students attend school 10 months of every year anticipating that they will be educated in the same manner and receive the same treatment as their peers. Learning disabled students covet this equal treatment. Fulk and Smith (1995) surveyed both regular and learning disabled students' perceptions regarding acceptability of teachers (1) adapting difficulty of work and (2) differentiating rules and rewards to meet the diverse needs of students with learning and behavior problems. Fulk and Smith (1995) found through their examination that all students responded positively to the idea of teachers accommodating student needs but opposed some students getting more difficult work and behavior problems being handled differently for different students. This analysis of both learning disabled and regular education students shows that all students want equal treatment. Theoretically, students may support teachers accommodating student needs, however, these accommodated for students do not want to be treated differently. Fulk and Smith's 1995 analysis showed that students do not want to use different books, have different homework assignments or tests than their peers. If a student has negative beliefs about being treated differently than her peers, this different

treatment will impact her self-esteem negatively. Conversely, if a student wants to be the same as her peers and is treated as such, she will be comfortable and feel successful, which will impact her self-esteem positively. Brooks (1994) found that students do not display low self-esteem in situations where they are successful and confident. Therefore, if a student is in an environment she feels comfortable in and does not resent, she will not exhibit low self-esteem.

Behavior

Brooks (1994) defined self-esteem as driven by the feelings and thoughts an individual has about her competence and worth, ability to make a difference, confront challenges, and learn from success and failure. He expanded on the reciprocal process of self-esteem and behavior, specifying that self-esteem guides and motivates actions, which in turn effect self-esteem (Brooks, 1994). Specifically, Brooks (1994) correlated low self-esteem with copying behavior that is counterproductive, such as quitting, avoiding cheating, clowning, bullying, denying or making excuses.

Dunlap, DePerczel, Clarke, Wilson, Wright, White and Gomez (1994) found that learning disabled students want an element of control. Choice making conditions were found to increase task engagement and reduce disruptive behavior. Dunlap et al. found in their 1994 study that if a learning disabled student is allowed to participate in an environment she chooses to be in - the regular classroom - she will perform better there. Foster-Johnson, Ferro and Dunlap (1994) established that preferred activities are associated with reduced levels of problem behavior and increased levels of desirable behavior. Therefore, if a student's positive behavior increases then the negativity of the situation will decrease, leading to a more positive environment which would foster

heightened levels of student self-esteem.

In the more structured and stressful environment of a regular classroom, the effects of higher demands can be lessened by social comments. Kennedy (1994) found that teacher and student interaction effected student behavior positively. Wetzel (1994) found perceived support from teachers and peers related positively to social goal pursuit. If social relationships and comments positively effect student behavior then it gives one reason to believe they would also effect student perceptions, in this case self-esteem. Thus, if students are offered equal treatment, an element of control and positive interactions, positive behavior seems to increase, as does self-esteem.

Achievement

A number of researchers have confirmed the existence of a consistent relationship between self-concept and academic ability (Marsh and Yeung, 1997; Hamachek, 1995; Brooks, 1994). Hamachek (1995) definitively established that students' achievement levels are related to their perceptions of themselves as learners. Marsh and Yeung (1997) furthered this correlation and concluded that, when a student's self-perception changes so does her performance as a consequence of their relationship. Hamachek (1995) concluded that, how a student feels about her abilities, for better or for worse, affects her academic performance. This relationship supports the theory that an environment, which improves a student's academic achievement, will also improve her self-concept.

Mahony (1997) disputed the negative reports of high failure rates for included learning disabled students stating that raw statistics do not adequately examine the impact of inclusion on student achievement. Yatvin (1995) also balked at success being reduced to any one specific item, preferring that it be correlated with a number of assumptions,

including class structure and support, which many negative inclusion studies do not fully explore. Yatvin (1995) specified that in order for inclusion to meet student needs, the structure must be flexible. In an inclusion classroom there are different skill levels, requirements and needs to be addressed with adequate support or all children will fail. Yatvin (1995) concluded that rather than viewing inclusion as a stumbling block or a concerted effort to “dumb down” today’s classrooms, inclusion should be seen as a challenge to enhance the quality of all education, thus enhancing learning for all students.

In a mixed ability group, lower ability students receive the greatest benefit (Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers and d’Apollonia, 1996). Including a learning disabled student in a regular education classroom would offer the more adept students as a resource, which would aid in student learning. Simmons, Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes and Hodge (1995) found that peer tutoring was shown to have a positive effect on learning disabled students’ achievement. Where teaching and peer tutoring were combined for learning disabled students in an integrated class score significantly increased (Simmons et al., 1995).

Socialization

Putnam et al. (1996) found cooperative learning to be the most promising method of instruction for encouraging positive interactions between regular education and special education students. They supported their belief with the results of over 100 studies, which demonstrated positive findings about cooperative learning. Putnam and et al.’s (1996) study results indicate that cooperative learning in regular classes that include special education is an effective method of fostering peer relations.

Hendrix (1996) echoed Putnam et al.’s support for cooperative learning, claiming

specifically that it allows students to interact and undergo investigative experiences with group members. Additionally, Hendrix (1996) found that cooperative learning increases student achievement, creates positive attitudes toward learning, enhances self-esteem and improves race relations. Cooperative learning is an effective method of fostering social relationships through an inclusive classroom environment.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem impacts student learning. Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs (1995) found high self-esteem to be associated with optimism and reduced anxiety, which are conducive to satisfaction with one's environment. Galbraith (1994) found that better learning can be effected if educators increase learners' self-esteem and decrease apprehension. Galbraith (1994) found that encouraging students to be proud of their accomplishments, achievements and productivity fosters calculated risk-taking and is conducive to developing self-esteem.

Clever, Bear and Juvonen (1992) and Heyman (1990) found learning disabled students to have lower self-esteem and to describe themselves as less able than their non disabled peers. These lower self evaluations are related to a number of variables including, peer interaction, perceived competency and integration of disability.

Heyman (1990) confirmed that environments of acceptance raise self-esteem while environments of failure lower it. Brooks (1994) constructed that students may display low self-esteem in situations in which they do not feel competent. Learning disabled student ratings of school achievement were lower than those of their non-disabled peers, however ratings of extra curricular activities were similar (Johnson and Tracy, 1994). If a student finds the only difference between himself and his peers is scholastic achievement

then his self-esteem in other areas will not be effected. Students who discount the importance of academic success will also maintain high self-esteem regardless of disability (Clever et al., 1992).

Social interactions effect self-esteem. Boivin and Hymel (1997) found social self-perceptions to be partially rooted in reality, meaning that students who are actively excluded and rejected are aware and affected by it. They continued that peer rejection leads to negative self-perceptions (Boivin and Hymel, 1997). It is easily inferred that learning disabled students who are kept from their peers in separate classrooms - permanently rejected- will have more negative self-perceptions than learning disabled students included with their peers. Clever et al (1992) found these self-perceptions to affect a learning disabled student's motivation and academic self-concept.

Adult education, like special education, can be associate with requiring information for tackling real life situations. Bonnett (1995) found that self esteem in GED students to greatly effect academics. Bonnet (1995) found that students with high self esteem began to help each other, rather than remain isolated, and to continue in higher education. These findings support the assumption that students with higher self-esteem would achieve more and enjoy school more.

Inclusion and Student Success

Special education for students with learning disabilities has had a relatively short, albeit controversial, history. Since the early 1990s, the traditional special education system has been under fire. This traditional special education model was built of separate special and regular education curricula, including separate classes. Although well intentioned, the separate system did not result in improved learning for learning disabled

students (Baker et al., 1994). In fact, Baker et al (1994) found considerable evidence suggests that the segregation of learning disabled students was actually detrimental to their academic performance and social adjustment.

Inclusion seemed the next logical step for special education. Vaidya (1997) defines inclusion as integrating students who have special needs - be it gifted and talented or special education - with other students in regular education. This type of accepting environment begins a student's understanding of individual differences and how to understand them. Banerji and Dailey (1995) and Yatvin (1995) found that inclusion allows a student to develop a sense of community with his or her peers, which is a precondition for learning.

Various faulty assumptions plague the literature about inclusion. Yatvin (1995) noted one of the most popular misconceptions is the belief that students in pull-out programs receive a greater amount of instruction than students in the regular classroom. She described another as the fear that regular education teachers cannot teach to mixed groups which require modification (Yatvin, 1995). Yatvin (1995) found both presumptions to be incorrect. Yatvin (1995) specified that pull-out programs are frequently crowded with students at varied skill levels, different personalities and anxieties about the classes they left behind, all of which make individual instruction unlikely. She continued that the focus of many separate special education classes is on skill-building which leads to lack of continuity, theme or interest. Today's classroom requires an educator who can blend various competency levels and learning styles, therefore, a belief that a regular education teacher could not meet the needs of special students is false. Pull-out programs impose academic discontinuity, social anxiety and low status on learning disabled students that could be eliminated with inclusion (Yatvin,

1995).

Baker et al (1994) compared special needs students educated in regular classes and others in special classes, and found that the inclusion students performed better academically and socially than their pull-out program counterparts. In the 1980s and early 1990s three separate meta-analyses studies, done by Baker and his colleagues (noted in Baker et al., 1994) addressing the most effective setting issue, demonstrated small-to-moderate beneficial effects on academic and social outcomes by inclusion students. Baker et al (1994) found that although the estimated effects vary, they have rarely shown negative effects for inclusion.

In an investigation of the success of inclusion in elementary programs, McLeskey and Waldron (1995) found students with learning disabilities educated in inclusive settings to make gains at least as great, if not significantly greater than, those made by learning disabled students in pull-out programs. They further speculated that students who are successful in inclusion settings are likely to be successful in pull-out programs as well and students who are not successful in inclusion settings would not be successful in pull-out programs (McLesky and Waldron, 1995). However, inclusion settings offer students more than academics. Yatvin (1995) expounded that in an inclusion classroom a learning disabled student has the opportunity to socialize with same age peers and receive support that he or she would ordinarily do without.

In a collaborative middle school project, Kolstad et al. (1997) found all learning disabled students served in the regular classroom to out-scored their learning disabled non-inclusion peers on all sections of the state literacy and basic skills tests. Incidentally, Kolstad et al. (1997) also noticed that the non-learning disabled students in the inclusion classroom scored better than their non-learning disabled peers in the traditional general

education classes. As Kolstad et al. (1997) additionally found, all program participants taught in the inclusive environment scored higher than the students in the traditional classes on measures of self-esteem and self-concept. Kolstad et al. (1997) considered their study to be statistical proof that increased academic achievement occurred as a result of an inclusion program.

Banerji and Dailey (1995) also found the inclusion model to be at least as effective as the separate, pull-out program model, from an academic setting and more in keeping with the concept of least restrictive environment. Their results showed that learning disabled students educated in an inclusive environment developed at a pace comparable to that of their non disabled peers (Banerji and Dailey, 1995). Banerji and Dailey's (1995) student surveys found that learning disabled students preferred not to draw attention to their learning problems and would rather receive help from a classroom teacher than a specialist. In an inclusive environment, students have the opportunity to not be separated, calling attention to their disabilities, and to be included and treated like any other student.

Summary

Self-esteem is one determinant of the success of an educational program. Inclusion is beneficial to learning disabled students in many areas, this one specifically. A student's positive behavior increases and negative behavior decreases if he or she perceives choice and privilege in placement. Thus, placing a learning disabled student in the preferred inclusive environment should increase positive behavior and decrease negative behavior. A student's behavior frequently has an effect on treatment and acceptance, both of which impact self esteem. A student's self-esteem and self-perception increase if he or she is in

an environment of acceptance, rather than in a separate classroom away from her peers. Consequently, an inclusive environment would improve self-esteem. A student's academic achievement is tied to her self-concept, so being taught in the same room as her peers - not down the hall attending perceived watered down lessons - would be beneficial to a student's self-concept and academic achievement, which continuously effect each other.

Although separate, pull-out programs have been the traditional model for special education they have not proved to be as successful as anticipated. These programs have failed to meet their goal of educating learning disabled students better than any alternative program. Learning disabled students in inclusive environments have proved to be at least as successful as their pull-out program counterparts. Due to the success of inclusion programs and the opportunity they offer for student success, as seen in self-esteem and peer relations, inclusion should become the standard and not the exception.

Chapter Three: Design of the Study

Sample

This study, comparing the self-esteem of learning disabled students in an inclusive environment to that of learning disabled students in a resource room environment, drew from the pool of learning disabled and basic skills students in one central Mid-Atlantic elementary/middle school. The school district is comprised of a primarily middle to high middle economic class and has a District Factor Grouping (DFG) rating of F and G. The middle school itself is moderately sized, on average 81 students in each grade. The total sample size was 27, with a breakdown of 13 males and 14 females sampled from grades four through, and including, eight.

Although there are more than 30 characteristics that can be related to the definition of learning disabled according to the federal guidelines (Kolstad et al., 1997), the students in this study had relatively equal academic ability; all were either involved in, or had the abilities to at a later date be considered for, the inclusion program. The inclusion group consisted of 6 males and 9 females, the total being 15 students. The students in the inclusion group were either classified learning disabled students or identified basic skills students educated in the regular classroom. Learning disabled classified students have

been tested by the Child Study Team and were found to achieve at a lower rate than their ability would suggest they should. Basic skills students have been identified through California Achievement Test scores, teacher recommendations, report card grades, assessments and guidance recommendations. These basic skills students may or may not be classified at some point. Basic skills students, like inclusion learning disabled students, are served in the regular classroom with in-class support. Both of these conditions, learning disabled and basic skills, yield a functioning at a different pace than their regular education peers and call for in-class support. The resource room group consisted of 7 males and 4 females, the total being 11 students. The students in the resource room group were educated in a small group setting (sometimes numbers as low as two students) aside from their regular education peers, but had the potential to be moved into the regular classroom at some point.

Measures

Each student was individually administered the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* by the same experimenter at the student's home school. The test took from 10 to 25 minutes to administer (depending on the number of student questions) so the students were given no break during the administration. The *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* is a reputable test. The two scales most applicable in this case were the total score and the intellectual and school status. The total score is considered to be one of the most reliable measures for the *Piers-Harris* (Scoring Manual, p. 37). The Intellectual and School Status (INT) cluster scale reflects the child's self-assessment of his or her abilities with respect to intellectual and academic tasks, as well as general satisfaction with school (Scoring Manual, p. 38). The reliability of this cluster scale is

averaged to be 60% (Scoring Manual, p. 39).

The *Piers-Harris* is typically used by the Child Study Team (CST) on students from this district during periods of review, which demonstrates its effectiveness on this population. The *Piers-Harris* was standardized on 1,183 public school children, grades 4 through 12 (Scoring Manual, p. 37). The ages of the students students in this study fell well within those of the population used to define the standardization sample for the test (ages 8 - 18, grades 4 -12). The *Piers-Harris* was easily applied to this sample and its results can be viewed as highly reliable and valid.

Testable Hypothesis

This study hypothesized that learning disabled students who are served in an inclusive environment will achieve higher scores on the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* than students who are served in a resource (separate) classroom. This study set out find enough support for this hypothesis as to reject the null hypothesis with 95 percent confidence. The null hypothesis states that there is no difference in the self esteem of learning disabled students served in an inclusive program in the regular classroom compared to those served in a resource room.

Design

In order to best compare the self esteem scores, a on tailed t-test was applied to the data from each group. Placement served as the independent variable, designating group one as the sample served in the inclusion setting and group two as the sample served in the resource room. The dependent variable was self esteem score as seen in the results of the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale*.

Procedure

The first step in this study was to find the total number of desirable candidates and gain written parental consent so that each student could participate. The parents of each student involved in this project were informed of what would be required of their child and what the purpose of the study was. Each parent was required to give written consent because no student in the study is over age 18. No students were shown the consent forms or given any type of discussion about the project (as a suggestion by the school) so that they would not feel singled out or separated from their peers, which would have confounded the results.

After written consent was obtained, each student was individually administered the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale*, by the same examiner, in a time that did not conflict with classes. Each student was given the same limited instructions which were listed in the test manual and asked to answer each question to the best of her ability, reminding that there were no right or wrong answers. All first responses were taken unless unusable and only then did the experimenter follow-up with more probing questions.

As each student was administered the test, all score sheets were coded by group number (1 for inclusion and 2 for resource room), age and sex of the student. After the students were administered the test, their scores were compiled according to either inclusion group or resource room group.

Summary

The focus of this study was to examine the self esteem of learning disabled students in an inclusive environment and the self esteem of learning disabled students in a

separate (resource room) environment. The hypothesis stated that students who are served in an inclusive education model will achieve higher scores on measures of self esteem than students who are served in a pull-out program (resource room). The independent variable was placement, group one being educated in the regular classroom alongside their non-learning disabled peers and group two being educated in a separate resource room program designed for learning disabled students. The dependent variable was the self esteem scores of the two groups.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Results

Introduction

This study aimed to examine the effects of an inclusive environment on student self-esteem. In order to best examine the impact of inclusion, self-esteem of learning disabled students served in an inclusive environment was compared to that of learning disabled students served in a separate (resource room) environment.

Hypothesis

This study hypothesized that learning disabled students who are served in an inclusive environment will achieve higher scores on the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* (specifically the total score and the Intellectual and School Status cluster score) than students served in a resource room (separate classroom). This study set out to find enough support for this hypothesis as to reject the null hypothesis with 95 percent confidence. The null stated that there was no difference between the self-esteem of learning disabled students served in an inclusive program in the regular classroom and those served in a separate pull-out program (resource room).

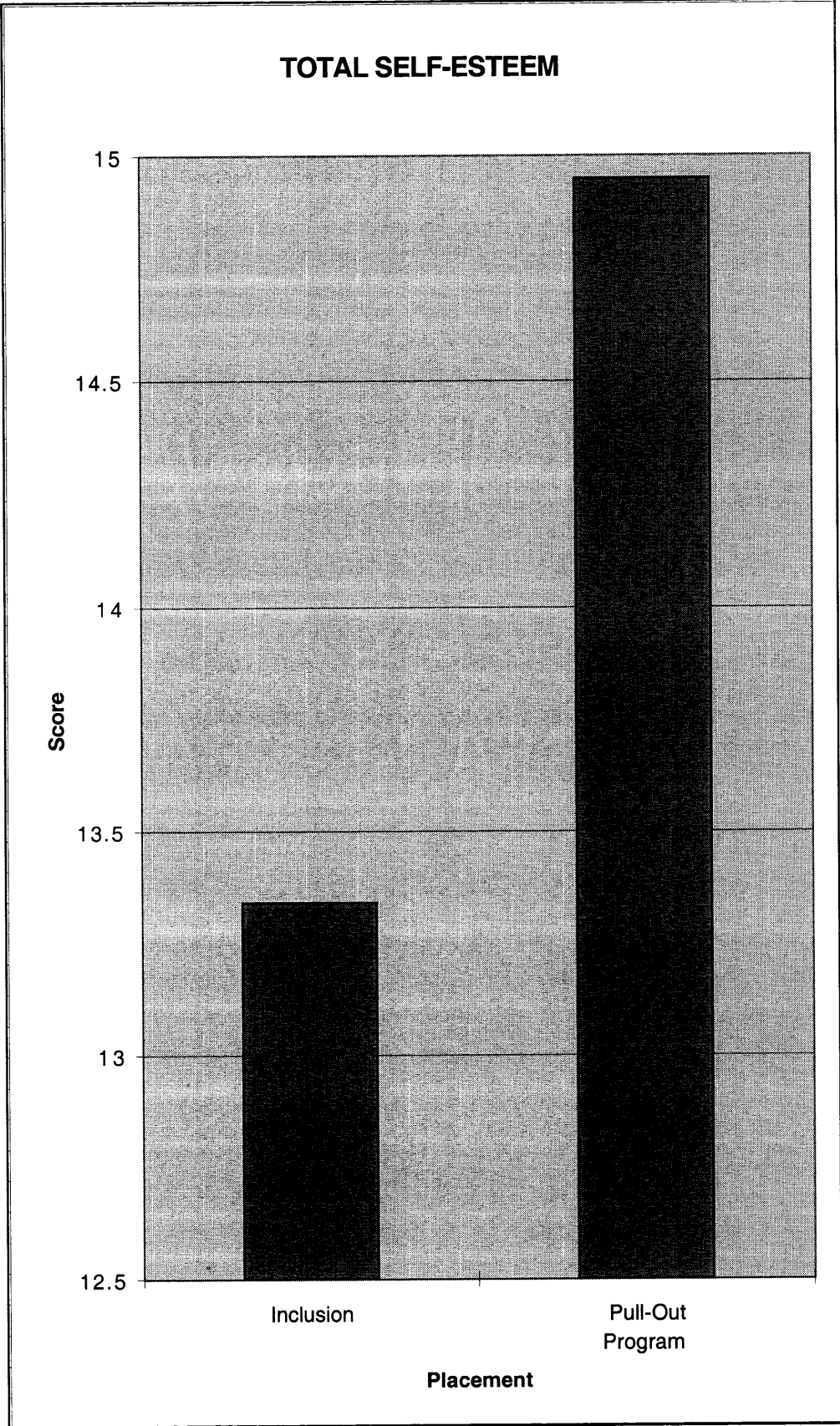
Interpretation of Results

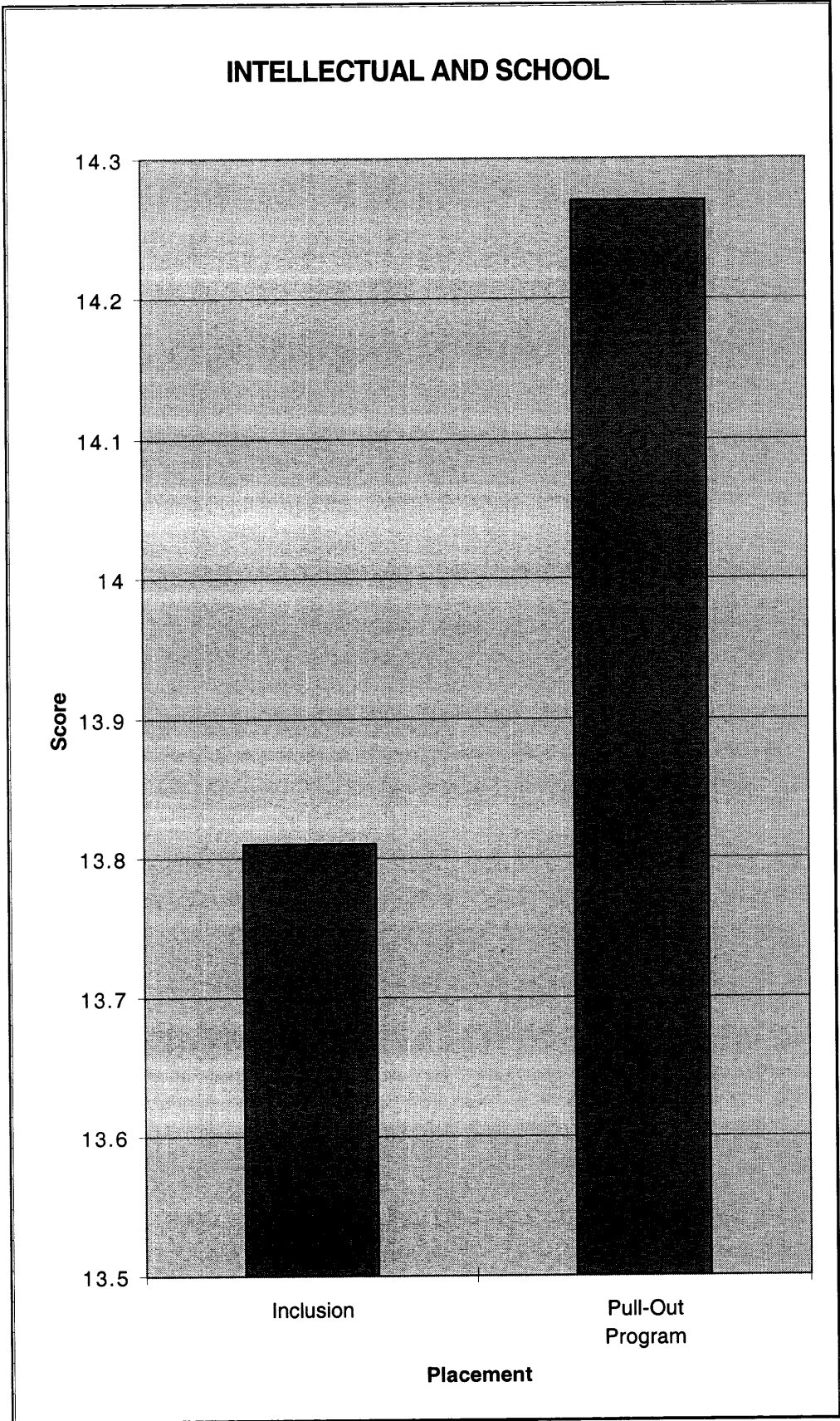
This study failed to reject the null hypothesis. Using the Mann-Whitney Test,

total score self-esteem yielded a U of .610 and Intellectual and School Status yielded a U of .904. In both instances the means were very similar. The resource room group had a mean rank of 14.95 and a mean of 59.27, the inclusion group had a mean rank of 13.34 and a mean of 56.31 for total self-esteem. These scores show the similar nature of the two groups total self-esteem scores. Since the scores were so similar, the difference needed to reject the null was not achieved. The resource room had a mean rank of 14.27 and a mean of 12.82, the inclusion group had a mean rank of 13.81 and a mean of 12.06 for Intellectual and School Status. The means of the inclusion group and the resource room group scores of total self-esteem both fell within the average range (using t-scores provided in the Scoring Manual). The means of both the inclusion group and the resource room group scores of Intellectual and School Status also fell within the average range (again using t-scores). These similarities further illustrate the lack of difference between the two populations. Therefore, an examination of the data shows that for this population there was not a significant difference between the two groups as to warrant rejecting the null hypothesis.

Statement of Significance

Statistical analysis of the data, using the Mann-Whitney non-parametric test revealed that there was no significant difference between the inclusion group and the resource room (pull-out program) group. This lack of a difference in self-reported self-esteem between the two groups did not support the hypothesis that learning disabled students served in an inclusive environment would achieve higher scores of self-esteem than their resource room peers.





Summary

This study aimed to find higher self-esteem in learning disabled students served in the regular classroom in an inclusive environment as compared to learning disabled students served in a separate pull-out program. The measures of self-esteem were student scores on the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale*, specifically the total score and the Intellectual and School Status sub scale. However, the statistical examination of the two groups showed that there was no significant difference between the self-esteem of the two groups. In fact the scores were remarkably similar. The resource room group had a mean rank of 14.95 and a mean of 59.27, the inclusion group had a mean rank of 13.34 and a mean of 56.31 for total self-esteem. The resource room had a mean rank of 14.27 and a mean of 12.82, the inclusion group had a mean rank of 13.81 and a mean of 12.06 for Intellectual and School Status.

TOTAL SELF-ESTEEM		
	Inclusion	Pull-Out Program
Mean Rank	13.34	14.95
Mean	56.31	59.27
INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS		
	Inclusion	Pull-Out Program
Mean Rank	13.81	14.27
Mean	12.06	12.82

Table 4.3

The mean scores of the inclusion group and the resource room group of total self-esteem

and Intellectual and School Status both fell within the average range (using t-scores provided in the Scoring Manual). Using the Mann-Whitney Test, total score self-esteem significance yielded a U of .610 and Intellectual and School Status significance yielded a U of .904. Overall, this study did not support the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between the inclusion group's and resource room group's self-esteem.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

Summary

This study set out to offer support for inclusion by analyzing learning disabled students in an inclusive environment and their pull-out program counterparts. The analysis focused on an examination of student self-esteem, a variable central to student success. A hypothesis stating that learning disabled students who were served in an inclusive environment will achieve higher scores of self-esteem than learning disabled students who were served in a traditional pull-out program was proposed. This hypothesis was based on previous research on the practice of inclusion which showed positive effects an inclusive had on learning disabled students. The practice of inclusion has been supported throughout the literature as a viable option for learning disabled students, due to its position as the least restrictive environment and the positive effects it brought students socially, motivationally and academically. However, this study did not find significant differences in the self-esteem of students in an inclusive classroom and those in a pull-out program.

This study used the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* on 27 students, grades four through, and including, eight. The inclusion group consisted of 15 students,

six male and nine female, and the resource room group consisted of 11 students, seven male and four female.

All of the students attended the same school and were administered the test by the same individual. This study used the total self-esteem score and the Intellectual and School Status subtest score. The findings did show a significant difference between the inclusion students' self-esteem and the pull-out program students' self-esteem.

Conclusions

- For total self-esteem, the mean rank of the inclusion group was 13.34. The mean rank of the pull-out program group was 14.95.
- For Intellectual and School Status, the mean rank of the inclusion group was 13.81. The mean rank of the pull-out program was 14.27.

Discussion

Kolstad et al. (1997) found in their study that all participants in the inclusion program scored higher than the students in the traditional program on measures of self-esteem and self-concept. Baker et al. (1994) found considerable evidence to suggest that the segregation of learning disabled students was actually detrimental to their social adjustment. Although these studies and the majority of the literature examined suggested that there should have been a significant difference between the self-esteem of an inclusion sample and a pull-out program sample, this study did not achieve statistically significant findings. This study found that the two groups were extraordinarily similar in contrast to the research done in the literature, which showed significant differences in the students educated in inclusive environments and those educated in the traditional, pull-out

programs. Even though the small sample size in this particular study may have been the greatest factor in the findings, the results raise questions.

Specifically, Special Education programs tend to focus a great deal of energy on promoting self-esteem where the regular classroom does not. Since self-esteem is a major part of the separate Special Education classroom, it does not seem surprising that students educated in the separate classroom would have achieved higher levels of self-esteem than those not privy to this treatment in the regular classroom.

Also, since a student's self esteem would most likely be effected negatively by frequent shortcomings and failures, an inclusive environment may have deleterious effects that outweigh the positive social aspects. Due to the fact that most learning-disabled students are not on the same level as their peers in the regular classroom, they may develop feelings of inadequacy and, consequently, lower self-esteem when faced with this discrepancy in ability. However, if a student was surrounded by others on her level, she might not feel incapable or poorly about herself.

Implications for Future Research

This study, in contrast to the majority of the available literature, did not find a significant difference between the inclusion sample's self esteem and that of the pull-out program. These findings suggest a need for further research in the area of student placement and self-esteem. This investigation was searching for support for the practice of inclusion and found none. The next logical step is to attempt a more detailed investigation, possibly pulling in other variables (such as behavior and academic achievement), and examine a larger sample. Increased size in and of itself will most likely bring about different results.

Another variable to examine would be age. In grades four through eight, students do not exhibit the same depth of desire to be like one's peers as students in high school. Students who are still young enough to mind being different from other students, as long as they have the support of the teacher, may have different feelings as they age.

There are a number ways to redesign a study of this type that could bring about different results, and possibly support the practice of inclusion. Future research should seek to utilize these options, such as increased sample size, student age and increased number of variables, as to best examine the practice of inclusion and its effect on student self-esteem.

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